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Their'' Dilemma: Transcending the he/she conflict in the poetry of H. Melt's "There Are Trans People Here"

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Abstract

People confuse or link gender and sexual orientation but they are, in fact, two separate things. Gender is who you are. It is the internal feelings of being a man, woman, or something outside of this traditional, binary understanding. Someone who is transgender does not feel that who they are on the inside matches their assigned gender on the outside. Gender identity refers to a person's understanding of their gender; that is, the gender with which they identify. Transgender is the term used to describe someone who identifies with a gender that is different from their biological sex. While people are born with male or female chromosomes, this does not necessarily dictate gender. Though they are commonly misunderstood, gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. Many obstacles may lead to distress, including a lack of acceptance within society, direct or indirect experiences with discrimination, or assault. These experiences may lead many transgender people to suffer with anxiety, depression or related disorders at higher rates than non transgender persons. For these individuals, the significant problem is finding affordable resources, such as counseling, hormone therapy, medical procedures and the social support necessary to freely express their gender identity and minimize discrimination. Generally most of the trans literature focusses on the pain, discrimination and the violence trans people experience. But here is a poet, H.Melt, who expresses his feelings in all together different way. What is really exceptional or unique about their poetry is that they create their own world and gives a reason to all of their transgender friends to smile with them. In fact, through the present paper I just want to salute H. Melt for their positivity and a power to face all the absurdities of life with great strength and courage.

Keywords: Trans, universe, people, culture, discrimination, imaginary, world, Care, depression, psychology

Introduction

"There Are Trans People Here" is a book that straddles the lines between past, present and future, looking back in order to imagine what is new, and in the imagining, makes it possible, brings the future to us in a way that is touchable, right there, alive and under our fingertips (Fatimah Asghar). H. Melt is a poet, artist & educator whose work celebrates trans people, history and culture. They are the author of *The Plural*, *The Blurring* and editor of *Subject to Change: Trans Poetry & Conversation*. They themselves have declared that writing this kind of poetry is rather a challenge because till now mostly they have read the poetry written by trans people as their expression of sorrow and pain due to the unacceptable attitude of the society or social system. They support the outburst of their trans friends very strongly because they have suffered a lot and written a lot about those bitter experiences of life. But by writing "There are Trans People Here" they try to create a world of sheer joy for the trans people, might be hypothetical or imaginative but at least these poems can create an atmosphere of joy and pleasure for them. In the afterword of the present book, they remember one of their experiences when they picked up Nan Goldin's photography book *The Other Side*. In the introduction it was written that 'the pictures in this book are not of people suffering gender dysphoria but rather expressing gender euphoria.' At that time it was very difficult for them to understand the real substance of the term "Gender Euphoria" or was it possible in any way or not? But gradually they read some other significant trans poetry like, *To Survive on This Shore*" by Jess T. Dugan and Vanessa Fabbre. After being inspired by the lives of these great trans people, they realize that what is really important at that stage of their lives not to mourn on the condition of themselves but to create something

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substantial to motivate the other people like them who have lost all hopes and aspirations. And from here H.Melt has decided to write poetry which could bring out a kind of smile on the face of other trans people. They themselves say that just after realizing the crude realities of their lives, their future was no longer imaginable. And finally this self-realization opened up so many possibilities in their poetry because their focus expanded beyond surviving their day-to-day lives. They started dreaming and created a different world through poetry not only for themselves but also for their all trans friends. They present his present collection of poems “ There Are Trans People Here” as something which is very much connected to their experiences and so to their heart.

Exposition

There Are Trans People Here is an ode to trans joy, resilience and communal care. The entire collection can be categorized as a trans utopian manifesto for a world that “let us to be beautiful / on our own terms”. Here H. Melt celebrates the blooming of trans identities and experiences in a landscape often hostile to trans survival. The poems in this collection give the reader a sense that all the pain and suffering the world inflicts on trans people are something that can be overcome, transformed, and understood. They state here that ‘though our lives are far harder than they should be, we still find ways of living into the world we wish to inhabit, building new possibilities while still mourning those who will not get to be there to celebrate with us.’ There are total 31 poems here which can be called the true representation of the expectations and the imaginative world of trans community. By offering such titles to some of their poems like “On My Way to Liberation”, “Dysphoria Is Not My Name”, “City of Trans Liberation”, “Every Day Is A Trans Day” and “Trans Day Of Revenge”, they challenge the dominant institutions of oppression and demand structural change and reconstruction of the world. In poems with the titles like “On Trans Street,” “Camp Trans,” “Trans Museum,” “Trans Temple,” and “City of Trans Liberation,” H. Melt brings trans joy into the real world through dreams and imagination. At the very outset with the very first poem, There Are Trans People Here, H. Melt does an announcement and claims that they are as normal creation of the God as the other people are. Further they state that as different people live in this universe, in the same manner, they are different from the so called normal people. When they use the sentences like this “ so many trans people are here” and “we are as real as anyone else”, its clear that they claim to be not at all different and inferior to the so called real human beings. In fact, they blame the CIS community to humiliate and torture them unnecessarily. In the second poem” On My Way To Liberation” H. Melt finds the dressing as a path to be liberated from the lifelong mental prison of a sense of being incomplete. The word ‘Liberation’ used in this poem as a direct attack on the imperialistic mentality of the CIS community. In some of their next poems like” All The Missing Sweetness’, ‘Dysphoria Is Not My Name’ and ‘Trans Care’ they very emphatically represent the emotions of the people of the Trans World. Special mention is here of H. Melt’s poem “If You Are Over Cis People’ in which they try to convince all the trans people to create their own world. This particular poem is so significant in its own manner. They make a direct appeal here to all their trans

friends that they too have the rights to live in this world. The poem starts with a very strong emotional appeal “Don’t kill yourself. Make trans friends.” Its not just an appeal that we find in these words; in fact, these words have so vast meaning and presenting a crude reality of trans world where most of them finish their lives in the very early age due to not getting the required support from their family members and friends.

Its really heart breaking to find what they express in some of their other poems like ‘AT THE DREAM JOB’ and ‘ode to TERFs’. It can be said without any sense of doubt that how clearly they reveal the hypocrisy of the society and the people. Truly speaking, in these lines, ‘Where I am a joke, a trans person working at a feminist bookstore’ they take their problem at a next level where they are not secure even among the females, those who represent themselves as as oppressive object in the society. It would be quite unfair if this particular poem “Trans LIT” would not get special mention here. This is not just a poem or few lines on a piece of paper, actually it’s the outburst of an honest human being when they say “trans literature is bullshit unless it is written by trans people”. H. Melt has a clear point of view here and appropriate opinion too that only experienced people can better express their feelings. According to them, other people can only narrate their stories and so the others can enjoy their narration but the real sensibility cannot be found in those narratives. Therefore, Melt appeals to all the trans friends to come out of their dark caves and to talk to the world with their true stories and that also with confidence and courage. They feel the need of an amendment to have trans literature by the trans people everywhere, in every library, in every class rooms and above all, in every backpacks. They don’t forget to mention here that some of the trans people are in the prison due to their writings. They come in support of the right of each and every trans person and ready to fight for this cause to help and motivate all his trans people. H. Melt wants to provide freedom to all trans people, freedom not from their lives but from their cage, from their humiliations, from their persecutions. And so, when they write the poem “city of Trans liberation”, they create their own UTOPIA where everyone will be treated equally, no one will have to prove the identity. These two lines are highly poignant and heart-rending when they envisage a world “Where Every Body Has a Body They believe In”, “Where We Are Taught To Love Instead Of Kill Ourselves” And Finally When They Say ‘Where There Are No Borders Between Who We Were And Who We Are Becoming”. In this UTOPIA there will be trans street where everyone will accept everyone with their true congruence. H. Melt sketches a very graphic and crystalline picture of their UTOPIA in some of their poems with the titles like “On Trans street”, “At Trans House”, “Camp Trans” and “Trans Museum”. All these poems are highly sensible and meaningful representing the true colour of our world of discrimination, damnation and tormentation. In the final section of this book of poems H. Melt declares the feeling of revenge against all the sufferings and adversities. They make a very clear statement that every day should be a trans day in the poem entitled “Every Day Is A Trans Day” where they visualize a very normal routine of life with the family members without facing any difference or discrimination on the name of sex or gender. What is really ironical here that in all of their poems, they do not expect or ask for any kind of commiseration or sympathy

from the people of CIS community, they just long for a normal attitude towards them. This feeling of condemnation and damnation has taken a shape of vengeance in some of their last poems where they call it “Trans Day of Revenge”. This particular poem condemns the entire world and it is so thought-provoking in its meaning. Here Melt talks about taking revenge from the people of CIS community but in a very different way where no one will kill anyone but all trans people will live their lives happily and with all their rights everywhere. Their plea to the world is “To Live and Let Live”.

Conclusion

The present collection of poems named “There are trans people here” can be categorized as a tribute to all trans people who have seen the worst adversities and discrimination in their lives. H. Melt truly represents their feelings but, of course, not in the conventional way as the earlier trans people have done. There is a glimpse of positivity, of endurance, of credence and of stimulation in each and every word used by them. In the present scenario, the rights of trans people are protected by a range of international and regional mechanism. Yet this is also a crude reality that policies and practices targeting transgender people, including complex procedures for changing identification documents, strip transgender people of their rights and limit access to justice. Although there are few examples of human rights progress for trans people, much of this change is isolated, non-systematic and insufficient. Trans people continue to live in extremely hostile context. What is required is change and progress at scale. Literature too can play a constructive role to bring a pragmatic change in the lives of the trans people. Write ups on trans people and issues continue to be needed on the topics of focus thus far, such as psychological and identity-related distress. Scholarship is also needed to address important topics that have been understudied, including self-harm and suicide, positive functioning and mental health promoting factors, developmental issues across the life span, school and workplace experiences, and the training and competencies of health care providers to ensure affirmative and effective services for trans people. Further it can be said that research, practice, training, and advocacy must challenge monolithic perceptions of trans people and their experiences by considering developmental issues across the life span into older adulthood, positive functioning and protective mechanisms, intersections of sociodemographic statuses associated with privilege and oppression, and the full array of life experiences that affect trans people such as school and work.

Finally, in this context, these words must be quoted. “These poems meld individual resilience with collective resistance to illuminate the everyday beauty of trans lives in refusing the lure of conditional inclusion to instead challenge dominant institutions of oppression, demand structural change and remake the world” (Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore). “The declarative premise of this collection, that there are trans people here-in the bookstore, in history, on the bus, ‘next to you’, wherever you are-should not need to be said. Yet in the CIS imagination, trans life is so often understood as figural, as less than fully here. Given this, H. Melt’s matter of fact, precise, cartographic poems perform necessary care work for the trans people and places they

attend to and yearn toward. Deeply grounded in the plain, bountiful fact of trans worlds-and insisting on our worlds to come-this book offers all who need it a map to a world ‘forever in bloom’(Cameron Awkward-Rich). In the words of Levi Todd who themselves are a trans gender, ‘Reading H. Melt’s poetry collection, *There Are Trans People Here* is like walking through a city you love (sometimes begrudgingly) and being able to see its past, present, and future all at once. Today there might be transphobic landlords, but one day there will be a Trans House. Today there might be doctors and medical institutions that don’t provide meaningful care, but right now there are trans and queer people loving on each other. You also cannot read this book without reflecting on how much care and support H. Melt has provided for countless queer and trans people and poets (myself included) in Chicago and beyond. This collection is more than a collection of poems, it is a manifesto of how to survive and imagine a more just future that we are already building’. In the end, H. Melt feels quite contented about their own efforts to bring a metamorphic contribution in the life of trans people with the help of their writings. In one of their interviews taken by Levi Todd they mention, ‘There was a time when literally sending any sort of queer material through the mail could get you arrested. It brings me a little bit of joy to be able to decorate the outside of a package with messages of support and love, and abolition. I was filling out some holiday cards for Black & Pink, for folks who are on the inside of prisons and jails. I’ve just been figuring out given the restrictions and limitations placed on us during this time, what are ways that I still can connect with people and send them a message of support. That gives me a lot, a lot of pleasure and joy’.

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