

How Vladimir Luxuria explores the difficulties confronted when body and gender do not match in her collection, *'Le favole non dette'*.

Vladimir Luxuria is the most well-known activist for LGBT rights in Italy today. Her role as the first transgender member of parliament in a European country, as an MP for the Rifondazione Comunista Party, raised the Italian public's awareness of LGBT rights. The publication of a recent collection of short stories *Le Favole Non Dette* (2009) exploring the theme of transgender experience has offered insight into the inner struggles related to gender issues and physical metamorphosis.

The text which this essay will focus on is made up of five stories in which the main character struggles with cognitive and emotional dissonance due to a mismatch between body features and self identified gender. Each protagonist undergoes physical metamorphosis to achieve the correct physical expression of their gender. After exploring the extent to which the author can be identified with her created character, this essay will investigate the implied meanings of gender and metamorphosis as evidenced in the collection. The emergent theme of the fairy tale as a narrative space where everything can happen will be exposed. In addition, the essay will explore how characters cope with their gender-body opposition and their subsequent feelings of alienation, as well as the importance of parental acceptance. Finally, the implications of the short story collection in delivering a specific message of optimism regarding the social integration of transgender individuals will be presented.

Before delving into the thematic exploration of the texts, it is useful to set out the theoretical premise on which this essay is based regarding the relation between the creator and the artistic creation. The Barthesian position introduced in his essay *The Death of the Author* (1968) that the text stands alone, independent, and its author is dead, 'a rhetorical way of asserting the independence of the text and its immunity to the possibility of being unified or limited by any notion of what the author might have intended'<sup>1</sup> implies that Luxuria's authorial identity and intention is not a determining factor in interpreting her work. However, as George Landow points out in *Reconfiguring the Author*, just as hypertext functions to create links between different documents and no longer allows a text to stand alone, context for a literary work creates unavoidable links with both its reception and its production. 'The functions of reader and writer become in hypertext as well as in contemporary theory more deeply entwined with each other than ever before.'<sup>2</sup> In the case of *Le favole non dette*, the reader cannot fully interpret the text without considering its author, because the importance of the message cannot be divorced from the context of production – Italy in the new millennium – and the place of gender issues in political, social and legal arenas. Without 'resurrecting the author'<sup>3</sup> (if one believes she ever died in the first place), the social impact of the text would not be

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory*. Manchester University Press: Manchester. 2009. pg. 63.

<sup>2</sup> George Landow, *Reconfiguring the Author*

<sup>3</sup> Burke in Wilson *Foucault and the question of the author: a critical Exegesis* (The modern language review, Vol. 99 No. 2 April 2004) pg 339

recognized in the same way. In the case of *Le Favole non Dette*, one must acknowledge the presence of the author in all the stories given that she herself has lived through the real life struggle of many of the characters in her novel. It is clearly not within the genre of autobiography, as it is a collection of fairy tales; however, this analysis will demonstrate that Luxuria's reason for writing this collection was not purely for literary entertainment.

The words gender and metamorphosis, however, must be problematized in order to contextualize Luxuria's text. Different traditions of study posit different meanings for the concepts of gender and transgender. Popkewitz locates binary divisions, including divisions between male and female, in the Western tradition of thought since the Enlightenment.<sup>4</sup> This way of separating reality into categories excludes the possibility of other dimensions. It may also contribute to the difficulty of defining 'transgender'. As Blumenfeld and Breen acknowledge, definitions cover a wide range, from 'anyone who does not fit into the standards of being a traditional man or woman' to 'being able to live in a new gender'.<sup>5</sup> This latter definition implies that versatility is a defining aspect of what make a person transgender, whereas the first focuses on social definitions of man and woman where deviation is used as a measure.

If gender is linked to the social, cultural and psychological traits linked to masculine and feminine<sup>6</sup>, it can be argued that 'gender metamorphosis' is not an accurate description of the metamorphosis that takes place in most of Luxuria's stories. If gender never changes, it is only the body that mutates from male to woman or woman to man. The initial reason for the each character's struggle is the same: the mismatch between the felt self and the physical self. This undetermined sense of identity results in the marginalization of transgender people. The collection of short stories reflects the internal mental struggle and social struggle of the characters and shows that there are different ways of facing the situation, with different results.

### **The Fairy Tale**

By choosing a fairy tale setting for her stories, Luxuria constructs a world for her readers that encourages an immediate mental flexibility. The fairy tale, which is recognized as a genre that allows animals to talk, the use of magic, moral lessons and archetypal characters, has the capacity to pull the reader into a world where what is 'real' is no longer the reference point for what is 'possible'. The fairy tale, thus, becomes a psychological tool, essential for placing the reader in a receptive state. The reader can

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<sup>4</sup> Popkewitz, T.: *Curriculum study, curriculum history, and curriculum theory: the reason of reason*.

<sup>5</sup> Blumenfeld, [Introduction to the Special Issue: Butler Matters: Judith Butler's Impact on Feminist and Queer Studies Since Gender Trouble](#) (International journal of sexuality and gender studies, 2001, Volume 6, Issue: 1) Page: 1-6,

<sup>6</sup> Linda Lindsey *Gender Roles: a sociological perspective*. Pg 4.

more easily explore the world of these stories because s/he is no longer holding them up to reality as a mirror. The world depicted is a fantastical one where anything can happen.

More specifically, Luxuria makes use of intertextual connections by basing some of her stories on existing tales that her Italian reader will be familiar with. For example, *Il Burattino che mentiva* is clearly based on Collodi's famous story of *Pinocchio*. In addition, *La Preghiera del cigno* follows the same thematic development as Hans Christian Anderson's *The Ugly Duckling*. *La Sirenetta nel Cemento* takes its inspiration from *The Little Mermaid* by Anderson as well. In *IDDU*, a magical volcano talks, relying on the tradition of natural elements guiding characters through a stage in their life, such as the more modern reference to Disney's version of Pocahontas, where the wise tree tells the young girl to follow her heart. Other stories do not rely on specific cultural references to childhood stories, but take elements that are familiar. For example, in *Il triste cantore*, we find a kingdom with a castle and court, where the king pays a visit to a poor family. In *La donna uomo*, a different but equally familiar and fantastic cultural reference is created through the reference to Pan. The Roman god of flocks encourages the main character to follow her instinct rather than fearing social norms.

According to Odajnyk, the fairy tale is meant to make the reader engage with the text, which should then lead to some realization about human experience. Because they are fairy tales, they are an interpretation of social and cultural issues, not necessarily a diagnosis. A discursive space is opened between the text and the reader to encourage the reader to explore another point of view about gender issues without external socially constructed pressures. Whatever is learnt from these stories originates in the text but is processed through the reader's own mind. The fairy tales merely suggest the social issues and the reader is at liberty to then make the link between the fantasy world and real society<sup>7</sup>.

A closer analysis of '*La preghiera del cigno*' provides an illustration of how the fairy tale connection allows the reader to draw conclusions about transgender issues. The basic framework of the story follows the Ugly Duckling tale. A group of animals, living in the woods, ostracizes a member of their society because she does not correspond to their idea of beauty. She is liberated from her suffering after her transformation into a beautiful swan. The significant addition that Luxuria makes to the story is the specification that the ugly duckling is a girl, '*una brutta anatroccola*.' This is noteworthy because the Italian reader will know the original story as '*il brutto anatroccolo*' so a specific point about the gender of the duckling is being made. When the duckling becomes a beautiful swan, the newly transformed animal sees its reflection in the water, '*era anche lui un cigno, un cigno maschio come sempre aveva sentito di essere*.'<sup>8</sup> The transformation from ugly to beautiful is also a transformation from female to male.

While reading the original Ugly Duckling story, the young reader feels compassion for

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<sup>7</sup> *Fairy Tales: Critical Theory and Archetypal interpretation*. August 28<sup>th</sup> 2009

<sup>8</sup> Vladimir Luxuria, *Le Favole Non Dette*  
Bompiani, Milano, 2009. Pg 121

the poor ugly duckling because rejection by others for something that is not within one's control is a recognizable source of suffering. Thus, when reading Luxuria's version of the story, the reader first accesses the feeling of pity, and during the transformation makes the association between the ugly duckling and a transgender. Because the initial connection with the character is based on empathy, it is easier to maintain that response despite the twist in the story. This purposeful manipulation of the original story, and the reader's expectations, helps Luxuria transmit the psychological difficulty of not being accepted. Sexual change is viewed as positive resolution.

Due to the fairy tale setting, the conclusion that a sexual metamorphosis can be made and celebrated can be reached. The shift in the forest animals' attitude is so drastic that the reader is carried into the story and therefore understands the feeling of exaltation at the beauty of the swan: 'Gli altri animali si congratulavano e quasi lo imbarazzavano dai complimenti.' This contrasts to the initial exclamations, which were the complete opposite: 'Guarda che figlia strana... niente in contrario, per carità pero menomale che una disgrazia tale non é capitata a noi.'<sup>9</sup> Despite the fact that the duck is an animal and humans cannot usually compare themselves to what animals do, the fairy tale allows animals to be taken as examples. Thus one can say, if the animal in the story changes and its peers admire him for it, then why couldn't humans be as socially evolved, which is the intended moral of the story. It is quite clear that if we accept a duck changing sex *and* phenotype, we can a less dramatic change in humans.

Todorov, in 'La letteratura fantastica' offers an explanation as to why Luxuria would use the fairy tale to make her point. The insertion of the mystical within the real makes the reader question whether there is a possibility that the happenings are real or whether they are just imaginary. Todorov asks whether there actually is a possibility for fantastical literature to have a social impact and whether the reader will see the message as real or just fictional. He cites Alvaro, the main character in Cazotte's 'Il diavolo innamorato' who asks 'dov'è il possibile? E dove l'impossibile?' Luxuria relies on the reader's answer to this question to make her point. As the Russian philosopher Soloviov states 'Nel vero fantastico si conserva sempre la possibilità esteriore e formale di una spiegazione semplice dei fenomeni.'<sup>10</sup> Luxuria allows the reader to hesitate between a story which is completely fantastical, and a story with a suggested message. She uses the blurry limit between real and fantastic to make the reader understand that although the setting is fantastical, the emotions are real. For this reason, the author cannot be disconnected from the text. If the reader were to ignore who the author was, the hesitation the reader would feel would not lead to the same conclusion as it does when keeping in mind who Luxuria is and her position in the struggle to improve the social acceptance of transgenders in Italy.

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<sup>9</sup> Vladimir Luxuria, Le Favole Non Dette Bompiani, Milano, 2009. Pg 112, 113

<sup>10</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, La letteratura Fantastica, Garzanti, 2000 Italia. Pg 27, 28

## Body and Soul

In many examples of sexual transformation in literature, where the physical body is transformed, the original mental characteristics of the male or female remain the same. When Tiresias in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is physically transformed from male to female, he is unhappy as his mind is still male. In gender positivism terms, he suffers in a female body because his 'gender' is still male. The eponymous Orlando in Wolf's well-known novel becomes a woman after he lives a full life as a man. He wakes up one day as a woman and must live the rest of her life with all the social pressures of being a woman. Initially, she continues to compare her life with her former life as a male, but because she has centuries to grow accustomed to her new sex, she eventually accepts her physical reality.

In today's world, when an individual chooses to change gender, either permanently or temporarily, society becomes extremely judgmental, which can represent a grueling existence for the sexually metamorphosed person. The difficulty lies less in the phase of adjusting to a new physical state, as most trans-gender people have always identified themselves internally according to the gender that they finally become. The challenges lie in the way the external world reacts. In the opinion of one LGBT activist interviewed in the context of this research<sup>11</sup>, the reason behind this negative judgment often lies in the assumption that the reason a person changes sex organs or wants to appear to be of the opposite sex is purely for reasons related to the sexual act: that is, for example, a homosexual man turns into a woman because he prefers having intercourse with men as a woman.

This line of reasoning is not supported by a close reading of the *Favole non dette* collection. In fact, Luxuria works against this preconception by completely excluding references to sexual intercourse from her texts to focus strictly on the mental and emotional level. The only reference to sexual activity in the entire collection occurs in *'La sirenetta nel cemento,'* where the main character has to sell her body to survive. The experiences she goes through in relation to this are all negative. She suffers hate crimes and struggles to find the meaning of this hate. 'Gli uomini che avrebbe incrociato sul suo cammino la avrebbero cercato vivendo la passione per poco tempo e vergognandosi di averlo fatto per il resto della vita.'<sup>12</sup> The exclusion of any positive portrayals of sexual intercourse or intimacy in the stories is very important as it focuses the reader on the existential struggles of the characters in the face of external resistance.

The short story *'La sirenetta nel cemento'* shows the extent to which the incompatibility between body and soul causes suffering, and the lengths one will go to to try and align the two. The main character of the story was born a hermaphrodite. Luxuria uses the

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<sup>11</sup> Lucy Strickland, Interview held at UCL, London, March 2012

<sup>12</sup> Vladimir Luxuria, *Le Favole Non Dette* Bompiani, Milano, 2009. Pg 42

reference to a mermaid to emphasize the undefined sexual nature of the character. As a mermaid is both woman and fish, but also neither entirely, Manuelito/Ofelia is physically both male and female, but neither entirely. 'Quel torace piatto senza nessuna protuberanza di seno almeno accennato, e quel piccolo pene che si nascondeva stringendo le gambe davanti allo specchio.'<sup>13</sup> Her body belies her self identification as entirely female, so she renames herself Ofelia once she moves away from her home and her undefined gender to brave the world as a woman. The story focuses more on her personal struggle to become the woman she feels herself to be, rather than on a love story: 'Manuelito decise di essere quella donna che premeva dentro per uscire fuori, e decise di esserlo a tempo pieno. Manuelito diventó Ofelia.'<sup>14</sup>

Although the story does follow the plot of the original tale to some extent: Ofelia saves a man's life and falls in love with him and he is eternally grateful. Her death at the end of the story occurs because she has lost her love, and is broken-hearted, but she allows herself to drown because she has at least resolved her body-soul conflict. The greatest struggle for Ofelia is to become a real woman, in both body and soul. Her goal is to no longer be shunned because she is half and half and feels inadequate. Luxuria shows the extent to which the male body makes Ofelia feel inadequate. This feeling hinders her from defending herself against gangs, hinders her from declaring her love and stops her from getting a job which does not require her to sell her body. This acceptance of physical abuse underlines her lack of self-esteem. The feeling of inadequacy culminates when she feels so lost in a body that is not representative of her soul that she feels the need to go through the 'fnochirurgia alle corde vocali e la condroplastica per eliminare il pomo d'Adamo'<sup>15</sup> simultaneously. The point to this extreme behavior is to underline how difficult it is to feel part of the world if one cannot even feel one person with body and soul.

The short story ends with Ofelias' death. She is finally a woman and although her heart is broken because her loved one is married, she feels that she can finally leave the world which has treated her so harshly, because she will leave it as a woman, and thus her greatest struggle in life will come to an end. Ofelia states 'Sono pronta a tutto, non mi interessa dei rischi che corro, potrei anche morire sotto i ferri, ma moriró donna!'<sup>16</sup> She thus drowns herself, just like the love-sick Ophelia in *Hamlet* and the author Virginia Woolf, joining her image with two strong women in literature deemed mad by society.

In '*Il triste cantore*', the main character, a small boy with a wonderful voice, is abducted from his family and castrated in order for his voice to remain childish and angelic. This story serves as an interesting contrast as in this case, external forces destroy the protagonist's male identity. He remains a male in his soul, but his body does not allow him to express his gender. The violence of the operation, and the imagery used to portray his continued suffering underline the difficulty of living in a body that betrays the inner self. The contrast between the social acceptance and the turmoil of the protagonist

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<sup>13</sup> ibid pg 38

<sup>14</sup> ibid pg 47

<sup>15</sup> ibid pg 67

<sup>16</sup> ibid pg 67

highlights the rift external expectations and internal realities.

L'operazione riuscì benissimo, la voce del ragazzo non avrebbe subito nessuna modifica. La ferita si rimarginò, ma ce n'era un'altra che non avrebbe mai smesso di sanguinare: la violenza sul suo corpo, essersi svegliato stordito per scoprire che era stato amputato, sapere che non avrebbe potuto avere più né una donna né figli.<sup>17</sup>

The continuous pain of knowing that his body would stop him from having a wife or children of his own is presented as portraying the same kind of pain that someone with a body that does not express the need of the mind may have. Nothing can soothe the internal pain of this character: 'Le urla di consenso e gli applausi erano balsamo di pochi minuti sulle ferite del suo cuore.'<sup>18</sup> The use of the image of an ointment on a wound serves to remind the reader that the psychological pain stems from a physical pain. No amount of social pressure to accept oneself will placate the suffering if there is not a harmony between the physical and the psychological.

When in '*La preghiera del cigno*' the main character is undergoing metamorphosis, the description of the change is conveyed with such intensity that it suggests what a human feels when undergoing a similar metamorphosis. The feelings expressed in this story are comparable to feelings of satisfaction, exhilaration and intensity. 'Pregava sentendo scorrere dentro di se cascate di lacrime purificanti, un amore universale che la illuminava, le faceva capire le ragioni per cui le avevano fatto così male.'<sup>19</sup> The change is almost baptismal, with references to purifying tears and universal love. This resolution contrasts intensely with the suffering of other characters in the series of stories. The main problem the characters have to face is defined by Davide Tolu, another Italian transgender writer, in his book *Il viaggio di Arnold*. 'Il suo corpo andava nella direzione opposta alla sua mente'<sup>20</sup> Luxuria's use of this quote as an epigraph to the *La preghiera del cigno* presents the struggle faced by herself and her characters.

## **Alienation**

Clearly, the themes of inadequacy and alienation from society are directly correlated with the different characters' gender and body differences. If social alienation is understood as the state of being marginalized and excluded from positive social interactions, this type of alienation in Luxuria's work results from a perceived conflict between the character's gender and body, which does not enter into existing possible definitions of gender. In addition, the character then internalizes the lack of recognition of their mixed gender state in the external world, and both external and psychological pressures result in the impossibility of being wholly accepted, by others and by the self, if metamorphosis is not successfully completed.

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<sup>17</sup> ibid pg 96

<sup>18</sup> ibid pg 97

<sup>19</sup> ibid pg 119

<sup>20</sup> ibid pg 105

Alienation begins as a result of rejection by society. However, Luxuria offers a positive possible outcome to her readers: alienation is not infinite, there are accepting people. In 2010, she commented on her public website about a Brazilian transgender's suicide saying:

magari scoprirà che il killer è la solitudine di persone che non hanno nulla da perdere e che soprattutto in situazioni di pericolo o di disperazione sentono attorno solo ostilità sociale o indifferenza.<sup>21</sup>

The alienation from society often starts within the microcosm of the family, where gender expectations begin. The narrator from the short story 'IDDU' states the social expectations for boys and girls, which the main character Davide realizes does not correspond to who he is. His father becomes the character identified as rejecting any gender ambiguity in his son. He does not accept Davide's feminine pastimes of singing and playing with dolls 'Quello era il mondo in cui avrebbe dovuto vivere, un mondo dove i maschietti si devono comportare da maschietti, imprecare guardando una partita di calcio in televisione e non cantare all'unisono con una finta donna di plastica.'<sup>22</sup> When the father and the family friends find Davide wearing a dress and earrings, hiding in his room, they banish him from the family, the first and basic unit of society: '[...] la porta della stanzetta sfondata, il vestito strappatogli di dosso, Davide sbattuto fuori dalla porta di casa con un calcio a mischiare lacrime e saliva sulla polvere a faccia in giù.'<sup>23</sup>

The repulsion some people feel when faced with individuals who do not conform to the general rule of genders is illustrated with the broken door, the ripped dress and the physical violence. Not conforming to a view of children where females like to play with dolls and sing and males watch sports and like women is frightening and embarrassing and thus must be eradicated from society. All of the short stories show the repulsion society has at the initial thought of someone who is either a transvestite, a hermaphrodite or transgender. What becomes striking is that although the stories are written as fairy tales, where a volcano may speak to a character and help them with their struggles, the stories are based on the real life experiences of Luxuria's friends. 'Riporto in modo favolistico la storia di un ragazzo, un mio amico siciliano che adesso vive a Roma e si esibisce come drag queen [...]'<sup>24</sup> This connection increases the emotional impact of her writing. The socially engaged point of needing to accept people for who they are is understood. Knowing that people are mistreated in the ways illustrated in the stories in Italy, and elsewhere, makes her plea for acceptance even more urgent.

The picture of what society would like to do with people they are uneasy about is perfectly portrayed in the first story *Donna-Uomo*, where the sexually undetermined character is used as an act in the circus. For society, her existence is either that of an

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.leggo.it/archivio.php?id=65790> 6<sup>th</sup> June 2010, 10: 35

<sup>22</sup> Vladimir Luxuria, *Le Favole Non Dette* Bompiani, Milano, 2009. Pg 130

<sup>23</sup> *ibid* pg 140/141

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.livesicilia.it/2009/05/22/le-favole-scomode-di-luxuria/> 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2009



object of derision or a runt of society. The story is especially successful in portraying the problem of alienation by making everyone reject the Donna-uomo, except for the main character, a small girl with special talents to see what creatures feel. She thus looks past the strange exterior of the Donna-uomo and sees straight into her soul to find pain and desolation for being treated as an animal rather than a human being:

Alzó il braccio tremante e dopo qualche esitazione sfioró quella bambina. Quasi svenne quando senti per la prima volta in vita sua la stretta di una mano, scoprí in un attimo quanto calore puo trasmettere un contatto umano, le aveva versato balsamo sulle antiche ferita dell'anima.<sup>25</sup>

The child is shown as someone who has not yet been inculcated into social categories. It is noteworthy that the reference to an ointment on a wound is repeated here, as in *Il Triste Cantore*. Caring or accepting feelings towards the main character are portrayed as physical relief. The unaccepted physical manifestations of alienation, such as clothing, earrings, castration, or a beard cause emotional wounds. The alienated character is created to show how society's revulsion makes these characters, and therefore real human beings, feel.

I mostri come me sono destinati a non desiderare, non chiedere. Dobbiamo ubbidire e soffrire in silenzio. Sono condannata per sempre a essere imprigionata in un corpo che non mi rappresenta, schiavizzata da gente che non mi comprende.<sup>26</sup>

These are clearly ideas that the disapproving society has inserted into the characters mind. The problem is that there is an obvious link between real current events and the statements made by the Donna-uomo. The nameless character focuses the reader on society's reaction rather than determining whether the character has a female or male or androgynous name. The person is unidentified, and therefore mistreated as sub-human rather than another type of human.

## Family

In a world where rejection is the norm, the family is the one social entity where a person or character could feel safe. The one exemption to Luxuria's general trend of lack of acceptance is through the role of the mother. In *IDDU, La preghiera del cigno*, as well as in *Il Burattino che mentiva* the mother has the role of being the accepting caring and understanding person in the transgender person's life. In *Il Burattino che mentiva*, the equivalent of the 'Fata Turchina' is a vision of a wonderful woman who leads the child to understand that whatever he feels is acceptable and lovable not repulsive. The vision he has is explained in the conclusion of the short story when the reader actually understands that the vision he has is that of his dead mother who has been his moral support throughout his whole struggle ' [...] era sua madre quella donna misteriosa che

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<sup>25</sup> Vladimir Luxuria, *Le Favole Non Dette*  
Bompiani, Milano, 2009. Pg 28

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*, pg 27

l'aveva salvata da tutti i pericoli e indicato la via giusta [...]’<sup>27</sup>In *IDDU*, the father and the whole town reject the boy but the mother realizes that her son was the daughter she had always wanted. The mother’s figure is present in order to support the child. As in the case of the Fata Turchina, the character is not developed in depth, but is there to show that if a person is interested in understanding or in having compassion for their child’s struggle, then they will most likely also be able to accept their child in whatever shape or form they feel best in. The mothers are there as support for the children who are struggling. The emotional bond that connects mother and child begins when the child is still an asexual being in the womb, its gender unknown, but its acceptance guaranteed. In *IDDU* the mother takes part in a ritual to discover the sex of the child:

‘ricordò il movimento circolare della collana d’oro con l’immagine della Madonna quando voleva sapere in anticipo il sesso del nascituro, e se la collana faceva cerchi, come si era verificato con lei, allora si sarebbe trattato di una femminuccia.’<sup>28</sup>

This desire to know the child’s gender becomes a key for the mother to know her child. In fact, the mother in the story only regains her sight, after losing it in her desperate hunt for her missing male child, when she finds her as a female. ‘La vista le é tornata e la prima persona che rivede é la figlia Fuxia, avvolta dalla luce sul palco, la vede come la aveva finora vista dentro [...]’<sup>29</sup> She is able to see her child again, because she sees the person she was inside, not the external manifestation of a male only. Her sex is not important because what matters is her freedom of expression.

The figure of the mother is there to realize the inner beauty of the characters who are otherwise shunned by society. In *La preghiera del Cigno* the mother duck is always there for her child in whatever form he is in. When the rest of the animals mock his looks the mother figure stands by her child. The *Gazzetta del Sud* review of the Luxuria’s book states clearly what she conveyed with her collection:

Un messaggio chiaro, velato a volte di risentimento, ma più spesso di orgoglio e commozione: nel ricordo di una famiglia che prima rifiuta ma poi accetta la realtà di un figlio erroneamente considerato “diverso”; nella constatazione di una mentalità che cambia – lentamente, ma cambia – anche grazie ai valori autentici della comunicazione.<sup>30</sup>

Although the families as a whole are not necessarily always open-minded, the mothers in these three stories see the inner being within their children. When the duck becomes a swan and flies away with others of his ilk his mother states:

E perché pur non essendo sua madre, io adesso lo amo come se fosse mio figlio,

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<sup>27</sup> *ibid* pg 202

<sup>28</sup> *ibid* pg 131

<sup>29</sup> *ibid* pg 163

<sup>30</sup> Francesco Bonardelli Solidarietà e amore contro pregiudizi ed emarginazione *Gazzetta del Sud*, May 23<sup>rd</sup> 2009

sangue del mio sangue, carne della mia carne, piume delle mie piume e sento il suo distacco da me come se mi stessero amputando un arto?<sup>31</sup>

The mother's protective instinct thus overcomes all judgment on behalf of society. A sense of protectiveness seen appears just as strongly in *IDDU* when the mother sees her child as she had felt him to look like when she was blind, and the ghost of the mother in the *Burattino che mentiva* who made her presence felt from beyond death, before the child himself even knew there was a problem.

The mother is the figure who is portrayed as moving from an instinctual base and accepts the child because she is already aware of the struggle. 'So molte cose su di te, anche il segreto che custodisci nel cuore,'<sup>32</sup> states Claudio's mother's ghost in *Il Burattino che mentiva*. The secret he hides is made clear to the reader with his fascination of earrings and his obsession with men being the ones who give birth. This is important because it shows the feminine instincts in him trying to make sense of the fact that he would like to give birth and thus must adapt the paradigm of life to his view of the world rather than give up his hope.

The figure of the father on the other hand is more stereotypical. In *IDDU* the father is the person who exiles his son because he catches him in a woman's clothing. Just like in *Il Burattino che mentiva*, both fathers in the two stories do not realize their sons are struggling at all and only realize that their anger is due to their child's disappearance once the fathers have done the damage of breaking the relationship. In the most tragic of stories, *La sirenetta nel Cemento*, Ofelia's parents are not present in any way, and in fact Ofelia does not have any constant positive emotional input, which in turn leads her to commit suicide. Sadly, this is quite similar to the real story of the Brazilian transgender in Rome in 2010. Given that the collection provides an unfolding increase in optimism throughout, the result of the last story, *Il Burattino che mentiva* is that the father sees the child again and given the madness he had encountered with his son's disappearance, thus welcomes anything that will make his child happier, and in Claudio's case a physical metamorphosis from male to female.

One can conclude with Castex that, 'Il fantastico [...] si caratterizza [...] per una intrusione brutale del mistero nella sfera della vita reale.'<sup>33</sup> The fantastical elements of the stories are there to allow the reader to keep an open mind when relating real social issues to the world of the fairy tales. One can identify a gradual increase in optimism and resolution as the reader moves from one story to the next. This positive movement is extremely uplifting for any reader, but especially for transgender readers who are led to believe that society can be accepting and not always oppressive. To see that Luxuria, a relatively well accepted transgender, feels reason to give hope for a real life happy ending

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<sup>31</sup> Vladimir Luxuria, *Le Favole Non Dette* Bompiani, Milano, 2009. Pg 123

<sup>32</sup> *ibid* pg 202

<sup>33</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *La letteratura Fantastica*, Garzanti, 2000 Italia. Pg 29

by finishing the last story with the father's acceptance leaves the reader conscious of the social issues, but aware that there is the possibility for social acceptance. In fact Luxuria herself states, 'Adegua la mia esteriorità alla mia interiorità' when asked about her looks and her decision to undergo a sex change. This statement, along with her collection of short stories, should encourage people with such body and soul mismatch to face the problem and stop internalizing. The most important message for the non transgender reader to have gathered from her collection is that of acceptance. No one chooses the body one is born in and it is naïve of society to alienate others just because the change transgenders are embodying are across sexes. Luxuria uses her literary creation, her social and political identity and her own personality as tools to strengthen a message of positive social action regarding transgenders' status today.

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