

Research on Children in Sexual Minorities—A Case Study of Julie Anne Peters' *Luna*

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Abstract. When it comes to sexual minorities that defy gender expectations, people tend to focus on adults. Children of a gender minority are deliberately ignored or denied as a group due to ignorance, unknowingness, and deliberate rejection. The same situation is reflected in the field of young adult literature. However, *Luna* is a pioneering work concerning transgender children of sexual minorities in young adult literature. This paper first explains the concept of sexual minorities, then introduces the book *Luna* through an analysis of the main roles to discuss the significance and value of the issues of sexual-minority children presented by the book. This paper should serve as a tool for drawing public attention to the existence of sexual-minority children in the world.

1 Introduction

The DSM-III removed homosexuality from its pathology category in 1980, but added a new category "gender identity confusion in early childhood". Therefore, it was at the cost of pathologizing gay adolescents that adults gained freedom of choice in sexual orientation. In most countries, even though transgender children have a stable gender identity, they are only viewed as deviants or as a "tendency" that can be corrected or adjusted. Accordingly, society sees sexual minority children as psychologically ill, reinforcing the justification for their treatment. Transgender children are facing a whole hostile social situation instead of a mental illness. Connell is a renowned academic, and also a transgender person. Her speech at the conference indicates the following: Is the problem with transgender people a confusion of gender identity? No, it's our gender situation. Young adult literature rarely mentions multiple genders or describes sexual minority children. In terms of translation works, there are very few transgender works, except for autobiographical novels, there is only one *Luna*. Choosing *Luna* as the research text is not only deal with transgender issues, but also challenges gender stereotypes, and breaks down patriarchal thinking. Although *Luna* is a fictional novel, it contains a lot of reality.

2 The concept of sexual minority

The term LGBT refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender. It is difficult to measure minorities in a standard or instrumental way. As long as you identify yourself as a part of LGBT, you are a member of LGBT.

Intersex people who have intersex sexual characteristics are also LGBT members. To avoid ambiguous references, this study uses the phrase "sexual minority" rather than "gay" or "homosexuality" to emphasize their non-mainstream and atypical gender characteristics.

The sexual-minority children in the text discussed are transgender and can be roughly divided into transsexual (TS), transvestite (TV), cross-dressing/crossdresser, CD for short), etc. The sexual-minority children in *Luna* belong to TS. In the field of psychology and medicine, it is called Gender Identity Disorder. They usually desire to undergo sex reassignment surgery. Most of the time, they are not satisfied with the appearance of their disguise or cross-section, but desire to have a body that is consistent with their psychological identity. People with gender identity disorders often discover that their biological sex is different from their psychological gender in adolescence or earlier.

3 The plight of sexual-minority children

On December 15, 2011, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights released the first human rights report on homosexuality and transgender people. The report pointed out that discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity is widespread around the world. Homosexuality is still considered a crime in 76 countries, and at least 5 of them have the highest penalty for homosexuality punishable by death. In addition, sexual-minority people also face discrimination or unfair treatment in employment, health insurance, education, family and many other aspects. The predicament

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encountered by gender minorities is often not self-identification. For them, this is all natural in the process of growing up, and they gradually realize that they are different from society's presuppositions about gender so that fall into the predicament. Children are regarded as the early continuous stage of an individual's life. Therefore, when children show behaviors that do not conform to their gender preferences, they are easily corrected by adults or ridiculed by their peers. When people say to cry little boys, "Boys have to be brave, don't cry." and "Girls are beautiful in skirts." It is a way of putting pressure on sexual-minority children. Broadly speaking, over-exaggeration and over-emphasis on gender differences and gender temperament are all sexism. People always take the gendered traits displayed by sexual-minority children as a tendency and assume they will get better as they grow up, so they try their best to avoid sexual minority issues. As if these issues would disappear by refusing to acknowledge their existence. Yet, there is a long way for traditional society to go from the process of recognition to full acceptance of different gender identities.

According to a survey conducted by Dr. Hu Haiguo in 1989, one in three thousand people in China knew from an early age that their gender identity did not correspond to their physical characteristics, but they are afraid of revealing themselves due to various social factors. So it is not that transgender children do not exist, but they are not recognized. In other words, people refuse to understand them.

4 About the Author, the Translator and Luna

4.1 About the Author

In 1952, Julie Anne Peters was born in New York City and moved to Colorado at the age of five. She describes herself as a new native of Colorado. Peters has worked as a French teacher, a programmer, a research analyst, and a systems engineer before beginning her writing career. She realized after a long time that computer science wasn't her field. Therefore, she began to write about young people and also children's books. An editor suggested that Peters write a romance featuring lesbians, and then her work gained attention. Her books on sexual minorities have won numerous awards. Ding Fan, the translator of *Luna*, is well known in China. Since the author and translator belong to the sexual minority, they may have a greater understanding of the sexual minorities. By publishing this book, readers will be able to witness the needs, wishes, and shocks of people who are sexually monitored and be forced to face them head-on.

4.2 About the Translator

The translator, Ding Fan, is a well-known translator in China. Ding Fan mentioned in *Luna* that social discrimination is so heavy that we cannot see the existence of these transgender people. When Ding Fan inadvertently mentioned to Tang Feng that he wanted to translate the

book, Tang Feng offered to collaborate on the translation. Ding fan has pronounced his tendency of transgender before the completion of the book. He said to sexual-minority people, "As long as you are alive there is hope. Always believe in yourself and believe in life. You can do it!" It is somewhat reflective of the transgender situation and emphasizes the importance of breaking the silence. Perhaps because the author and translator are members of the sexual-minority group, they are more in touch with the sexual minority when writing and translating. By observing how they are perceived by the people around them and how they affect those around them, this work becomes more vivid and more realistic. In addition, perhaps because of their own related experiences, they are willing to write and translate about children of sexual minorities. This book is to record sexual-minority people's needs, wishes, and shocks and make readers face up to them.

4.3 About Luna

In 2004, Julie Anne Peters published *Luna*, a young adult novel. *Luna* tells a story from the point of view of a cisgender girl Regan. In the story, she finds her own identity while hiding the fact that she has a transgender brother named Luna who identifies as a girl. A novel like this can benefit both cisgenders and transgenders in understanding their struggles. She records the reactions of herself and others to Liam coming out, which include fear, panic, annoyance, and friendliness, while also reflecting on Liam's pain and struggle as a sexual minority child. In the daytime, Luna presents as Liam, a senior boy who appears to be an average person. Luna, however, can be herself at night: a girl called La Marie. She later changes her name to Luna, which means "moon", reflecting the fact that she could only be seen by moonlight.

5 Key Characters and Journey of the Heart

A novel's characters are one of its strongest features, and this chapter highlights Regan and Liam, two of its key characters.

5.1 Liam/Luna—— a Butterfly Captive in the Chrysalis

In this book *LUNA*, Liam, the main character, is a biological male who desires to be a girl. Liam is a sexual minority child with three names: "Liam" when he is dressed as a man; "Lia Marie" when he identifies as female and dresses as her true self; and "Luna", when he wants to be like a woman. As a boy, Liam wears long sleeves even in the summer because he "hates body hair" and shaves all the hair from his arms, legs, and everywhere else. When Liam was 15 years old, he tried to kill himself by swallowing pills but fortunately, Regan found him in time and broke into his room to save him. Liam cries to Regan that he was a mistake for being "Liam". In the moonlight, Luna is comfortable and at ease. In public, Liam is nervous,

uncomfortable, and fearful. In the book, the author divides Liam's life into three stages, each of which starts with a triggering event.

During Stage 1, the young Liam had a strong and clear physical identity and he cannot accept his penis and attempted to destroy it. The moment Liam realized his first disguise had been discovered, he yelled in terror and begged Regan not to tell anyone about it. Liam was so engrossed in dancing and singing that he didn't even notice when the music stopped and everyone turned around to look at her. He seemed to do something wrong and left as fast as he could. "Liam's eyes cut to me. To my fiery face. "S-sorry," he stammers. "Sorry, Re." He stumbles toward the stairs." [4] He is so miserable and pitiful when he wants to be Lia Marie but everyone disgusts him.

In Stage 2, as the story goes, Liam becomes increasingly brave, from being afraid to appear alone as Luna to going out on his own without caring if people point at him. Despite Liam's protests, his father insists that Liam join the baseball team. Liam cried heavily to Regan in an uncontrolled way. However, their parents have not created a tolerant environment where Liam could feel safe as his true self. In this case, Liam is determined to change. Liam started cross-dressing in public for another reason—he met Teri Lynn on the internet. After undergoing gender reassignment surgery, Teri Lynn now lived as a female, becoming a role model for Liam. In order to meet Teri Lynn offline, Liam needed to go out alone. Liam returned home in a happy mood and full of energy after meeting Teri Lynn, telling Regan that Teri Lynn's life was his dream and that he was full of hope because of Teri Lynn. He is advised to do so by his friend Teri Lynn since until now he could be Luna only at night or on the internet. This is "a space in which young people can feel more confident to be themselves, and where they can explore what it is like to be LGBT" [2].

After meeting with Teri Lynn, the third stage begins with Liam announcing coming out to close friends, schoolmates, and parents (family) in sequence. When Luna appeared at school or in front of her parents, she was able to pretend to be calm and even force herself to smile despite trembling.

Overall, in the first stage, Liam knew who he is, but he was disgusted, surprised, scared, and fearful and also hated his body. At this time, Liam didn't have enough courage to come out in public. In the second stage, he felt tortured about his father forcing him to join a baseball team. He decided to change. Through learning about the history of transgender people and the real experience of Terry Lynn's transgender surgery on the Internet, Liam was prompted to appear publicly for the first time. Liam has more and more courage to show his true self. In the third stage, Liam seems to become Luna. Slowly, she began to appear publicly as Luna, becoming more comfortable as if she had always been that way. As a final step, Luna appears confidently in front of others, even if she is afraid. Openly cross-dressing is not just about consciously letting others know who you are, but also about declaring your identity to society. Liam showed up at his family on his eighteenth birthday, perhaps as a metaphor for rebirth. Her friends and family also reveal

their true selves, whether supportive, frightened or downright cruel. It is probably that *Luna* doesn't quite have a happy ending, but undoubtedly, it is a hopeful ending. It brings hope to all the sexual-minority children.

5.2 Regan O'Neill— "I" am an ally of my "sister".

Regan is the narrator of the text. As Liam/Luna's sister, Regan has been at Liam/Luna's side since childhood. Like young girls today, she longs for a relationship and has a job as a babysitter. In contrast to Liam, who is an excellent student and a computer expert, Regan is also not popular in interpersonal communication. Due to Liam, Regan chose not to have deep friendships with anyone other than Alyson and Liam, resulting in "blank" social activities. Regan's only friend drifted away from her after seeing Liam's sudden transformation into Lia Marie, making it difficult for Regan to make friends. Regan is Liam's guardian angel, and Liam completely trusts her, relies on her.

Regan's role serves two purposes: first, she helps readers identify with "I" easily, overserving and interacting with sexual-minority children; and second, she leads readers to reflect on the legitimacy of gender stereotypes. Liam sees Regan as a guardian angel. He completely believes in her. Numerous studies have found that siblings' support has a positive effect on the courage of sexual minorities to come out. Regan shows readers her struggle, hesitations, worries, and fears as Liam's experience of coming out. Supporting roles in the first person have the advantage that she becomes many outside the text world, even more, important than the self-voice of a sexual minority. From the perspective of Regan, rather than judging, she spoke her observations, and wondered why the expectations were different. For example, Regan often gets assigned housework by her working mother. It's always Liam's instinct to help when Regan refuses, but Liam will be called back by her father and ask Regan to do it. Regan, who is the daughter of the parents, must do the housework; although both parents are employed, the mother is still responsible for it. Why are women responsible for doing the housework? Regan is confused about this. In Regan's opinion, this is sexism. Regan's series of thoughts is very meaningful, and it can provoke readers to reflect on why our gender expectations disagree with Liam's or sexual minorities.

6 Conclusion

According to researches, the author found that sexual minority issues were less discussed in young adult literature. Although the law on gender equality in education was prompted by a spate of school-based gender bullying incidents, but the existence of sexual minorities in young adult literature has become overshadowed by an invisible hand. *Luna* is a realistic juvenile novel, which means that this story may have actually happened, may have happened or may soon happen. Events and emotions are both portrayed realistically. From such a perspective, *Luna* has achieved the functions of recording, speaking up for people who are related to or caring about sexual

minority children, thus attracting readers who are willing to get to know them and care about them through reading, and then to be able to put this understanding into practice in real life.

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