

## QUEER AND INTERSEXUALITY THROUGH THE MEMOIR OF HERCULINE BARBIN

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### Abstract

‘Sex’, ‘Sexuality’ and ‘Gender’ are words that we use to think about our identity. However, the terms are not as simple as they are often thought to be. There are billions on the planet, each with its own unique identity, so these three terms need to have pretty flexible meanings to account for all of us. Gender and sexuality are more multidimensional than people generally realize. Gender and sexual orientation each exist along a continuum with many shades of gray. Therapy that addresses issues of gender and sexuality needs to acknowledge the wide spectrum of possible life paths, and combinations of sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions. When people refer to someone’s sex (sometimes called biological or physical sex), they are talking about that person’s identity based on their physical characteristics (e.g. having a penis, vagina, beard or breasts, etc.), genes and hormones. But being male or female is not the whole story.

Many people think of ‘male’ and ‘female’ as the only sexes, but that’s not actually true. Some people have genetic, hormonal and physical features typical of both male and female at the same time, so their biological sex is not clearly either male or female. This is called ‘intersex’. The term ‘hermaphrodite’ has fallen out of favour in recent years, and is being replaced by a newer term ‘intersex’, which refers to an individual who has undergone atypical sexual differentiation, and has external genitalia that appear to be between those of a typical female and a typical male (Morris et al., 2004). Intersex conditions can result from either atypicality in the combination of sex chromosomes an individual receives, or from some form of atypicality in the effects of organizational hormones. Michel Foucault aka Paul-Michel Foucault, a French philosopher, social theorist and historian of ideas discovered Barbin's memoirs during his research about hermaphroditism for *The History of Sexuality*.

*Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-century French Hermaphrodite* is a 1980 English-language translation (translated by Richard Mc Dougall) of Herculine Barbin’s nineteenth-century memoirs, which were originally written in French. Herculine Adélaïde Barbin (1838–1868) was a French intersex person who was determined as female at birth and raised in a convent, but was later reclassified as male by a court of law, after an affair and physical examination. Michel Foucault discovered the

memoirs in the 1970s while conducting research at the French Department of Public Hygiene. He had the journals republished as *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-century French Hermaphrodite*. In his edition, Foucault also included a set of medical reports, legal documents, and newspaper articles, as well as a short story adaptation by Oscar Panizza ; *A Scandal at the Convent*.

**Key Words:** Sexuality, Intersex, Foucault, 19<sup>th</sup> century Intersex Herculine Barbin

Embracing your uniqueness is a hard task in a world where cruelty reigns along with scoffers and sycophants. Survival is a herculean task when you tend to be different from others. Society tends to gift you the medal of ‘The Other’ when you are unique in your choice of life. No matter what we do, we will always be compared and downgraded. Unfortunately, that is a bitter truth. Same bitter experiences are to be faced by an individual whose sex is in a dilemma. Intersexuality, though rare, is an experience of terror when an individual is concerned. Juxtaposition of two sexes in a single body and living in a society where one’s gender and sexuality is strictly linked with morality is often indeed a nightmare. Herculine Barbin is one such victim of an intolerant society who made him an Unfortunate ‘hero’ of the quest for identity. Rigid social norms and lack of knowledge led to an early adieu for Barbin.

It was Michel Foucault, French literary critic who brought the unheard hero into the forefront by collecting and publishing Herculine Barbin’s memoirs which was left beside h/er corpse when s/he committed suicide. He provided a short but significant introduction to the journals he published of Herculine Barbin. The journals that Foucault claims to have found are published in this collection, along with the medical and legal documents that discuss the basis on which the designation of h/er “true” sex was decided. A satiric short story *A Scandal at the Convent* by the German writer, Oscar Panizza, is also included in the book.

Herculine Barbin also known as Alexina was born in 1838, in Saint-Jean-d’Angély, (referred to L.) in the memoir. (The places and names are not clearly specified in Barbin’s memoir) a small town in western France. H/er father died soon after, but with the help of a charitable scholarship s/he attended a girl’s boarding school (referred to S. in the memoir). H/er mother was poor, and when Barbin was old enough, s/he would join her as a sort of servant to wealthy households during the summer. S/he describes her family ambience as

I hardly knew my unfortunate father, whom a sudden death tore away before his time from the tender affection of my mother, whose gallant and courageous soul tried vainly to struggle against the terrible inroads of the poverty that threatened us. (Barbin 4)

Barbin had a pretty much love, devotion and respect towards the sisters and mothers of the convent during her boarding days at the convent of the Ursulines of Chavagnes (referred to S.). They were also too fond of h/er in return. Barbin took h/er studies seriously and was quite a brilliant student. S/he aroused the astonishment in her teachers with her rapid progress except her skills in handicrafts like rest of the girls. S/he was indeed a good reader too. Barbin always tried to find a good time in reading. Barbin had a relationship with a girl at the convent named Lea, daughter of a counselor at the royal court who shared some sort of physical weakness like Barbin. Barbin was physically weak and feeble in health. They shared passionate kisses and hugs behind the dormitories. But with the intervention of the good sisters the relationship was faded soon. Two years after h/er return to mother, Barbin came to know Lea's death.

Much of Barbin's life events takes place in La Rochelle (referred to B. in the memoir) where h/er mother serves as a maid to a noble family. Barbin had a great reverence to their benefactors; Madame de R. and Monsieur de Saint-M, a bed ridden old man whom s/he refers in the book. She used to read for Monsieur de Saint-M and he loved her a lot. Two years passed and by the time Barbin reached seventeen, no signs of puberty were seen on Barbin. S/he describes her teenage days as:

My condition, although it did not present any anxieties, was no longer natural. As the days passed, the doctor who had been consulted recognized that the most promising remedies were ineffective. He had finally decided not to worry about the matter anymore but to leave everything to time. As for myself, I was not all frightened. (Barbin 19).

Barbin's job as a maid to the elder daughter of Madame de R. came to an end with her marriage. They send h/er to seek a new job as a teacher by gaining a teaching certificate. S/he successfully attained her carrier as a school mistress in Le Chateau (which s/he describes as D. in the memoir). Much of Barbin's destiny takes place in Le Chateau on the progress of h/er studies to attain the teaching certificate.

But the changes of puberty soon set h/er apart from h/er classmates. "My features had a certain hardness that one could not help noticing," s/he wrote in h/er memoir. S/he grew visible hair on h/er cheeks and her lips. She trimmed them with scissors to discourage attention and avoid "joking remarks." Ever aware of h/er differences, s/he wore long clothes to conceal hair that grew along h/er arms, and refrained from swimming with h/er friends as they frolicked on the beach.

But all these lacking feminine physical features didn't forbid Barbin from loving. H/er relationship with a girl named Thécla who was a year older than Barbin and graceful than Barbin. They were in fact called 'inseparables' in the convent. They used to kiss and share some intimate moments for which Barbin were often caught and warned by the good sisters for the sake of Thécla who was a daughter of a General having a bright promising career. Thécla is chosen by her

superiors to direct the normal school of D. and students adored her. Barbin chose to be practical by taking all these reasons regarding Théccla into consideration. S/he found diversion in reading thus forgetting h/er “strange” relationship with Théccla.

Barbin’s dilemma regarding h/er sex becomes much complicated during this time. S/he writes, “I was completely ignorant of the facts of life. I had no suspicion at all of the passions that shake mankind.” Barbin’s epoch played a significant role in propagating the fake ideal notions of sexuality and making Barbin believe that it’s all h/er fault. Barbin writes in h/er memoir;

The milieu in which I had lived, the way in which I had been brought up, had preserved me until then from a knowledge that, without any doubt, would any doubt, would have driven me to the greatest scandals, to deplorable misfortunes. What had happened was only a revelation to me, but a further torment in my life. (Barbin 33).

The age and the so called ideal society also played a vital role in stirring up the turmoil in Barbin’s mind instead of seeking the blessings of science and thus making Barbin a poor victim than a strong survivor. Even Barbin was left ignorant to science. S/he too was turned out to be a blind alley by the stigmas and taboos upheld by morality and religion. Barbin quotes in h/er memoir;

Science was unable to find an explanation for a *certain absence* and quite naturally attributed to it the kind of languor in which I was wasting away.

Science, furthermore, does not have the gift of miracles, and even less does it have the gift of prophecy... (Barbin 39).

Religion upholding the self-created notions in morality and sexuality in itself veiled the society and believers between truth and falsity. Religion was indeed a resilient barrier for accepting science as the ultimate valid truth. Alexina was pious and h/er conviction in religion thwarted h/er from accepting h/er own identity as an intersex (even s/he was unaware that s/he was an intersex till the age of twenty-one until the medical reports came).

Barbin succeeded in acquiring h/er teaching certificate with flying colours in B. (La Rochelle). Sh/e came out first among the eighteen candidates which was indeed a moment for mirth for Barbin’s mother and h/er revered benefactor, Monsieur de Saint-M. Barbin receives an invitation letter from Madam A. (Sister Marie-Augustine) to join the boarding school as Schoolmistress. Soon after s/he was appointed as Schoolmistress in L. (Saint Jean d’ Angely) at the age of nineteen. A great turn in h/er life takes place here. Madam P. (exact name of her is not mentioned in the memoir), a widow and mother to four daughters including Madam A. received Barbin with utmost happiness. Barbin meets her younger daughter and sister to Madam A., Sara, who was the director of the boarding school. It paves the way for an inextricable relationship in Barbin’s life further. Madam P. had a keen observation of Barbin especially on Barbin’s physique and health. She requested Barbin to give Sara care and affection of an elder sister. The

very first confluence between Barbin and Sara was indeed a complex one. Sara boldly kisses Barbin on their first meeting as a token of starting a new friendship between them. Barbin felt so blessed to be lucky enough to be with an excellent family who treated h/er as one of its members. Barbin describes the physical beauty of Sara in h/er memoir. Sara's sister whom Barbin delineates as grandeur in beauty. She had "extraordinarily beautiful" features. But Sara doesn't have a grandeur in beauty comparatively to her sister. Barbin describes as;

Sara's face had neither that distinction nor that grandeur. There was nothing remarkable about her to attract one's attention. Something ironical hovered ceaselessly about her lips and gave her features a certain hardness that was tempered from time to time by the prodigious sweetness of her gaze, in which was to be read the ingenuousness of an angel who is unaware of herself. Her size and stature were above average, and she was perhaps a bit too strongly built for some observers. With a bit of skill, you might have divined an impetuous, ardent nature that was to be driven to the greatest excesses by jealousy. (Barbin 44).

Sara was raised pious by her mother. Barbin and Sara were in good terms with each other. Barbin gave a good place in h/er heart for Sara. Barbin had a special care, attention and attraction towards Sara. S/he had pretty much good vibes with Sara's presence. "Naturally good, Sara surrounded me with a thousand delicate attention that denoted a generous heart. I was her confidante and her first *girlfriend*" wrote Barbin in h/er memoir. S/he spent a very good time with Sara and her family except her visit to a priest named Abbé H, who had a curt and sharp speech that Barbin felt mocking h/er. Madame P. too treated Barbin as her own child. Both Barbin and Sara took the responsibility in handling the affairs of the school. They shared same dormitories which is hardly separated by a thin partition. They spent time chatting for hours at Sara's bed and Barbin was immensely happy and felt proud giving Sara "those little attentions that a mother gives her child". But slowly there was a shift in their relationship. In the memoir Barbin writes:

Bit by bit I got into the habit of undressing her. She had only to take out a pin without my help, and I would be almost jealous! These details will seem trivial no doubt, but they are necessary.

When I had laid her upon her bed, I would kneel beside her, my forehead brushing her own. Her eyes would soon close beneath my kisses. She had gone to sleep. I would gaze at her lovingly, unable to find the strength to tear myself away from her. I would awaken her. "Camille", she would say to me then, "I beg you, go to sleep. You will be cold, and it is late".

Finally overcome by her pleas, I would go gently away, but not before I had hugged her repeatedly against my breast. What I felt for Sara was not friendship; it was real passion.

I didn't love her. I adored her! (Barbin 48)

Madame P. witnessed their intimacy with excellent joy believing their "friendship" to be true and real. Barbin and Sara had intimate moments at night. They undressed unitedly and exchanged kisses. But one day Sara retorted violently. When the two went outside in the oak woods. Barbin kissed Sara overwhelmingly at the woods. Barbin writes;

I was violently moved! Sara noticed it. "For Heaven's sake, Camille," she said to me. "What's the matter with you? Don't you really have any confidence in your friend anymore? Aren't you the one whom I love most in the world?"

"Sara," I cried to her, "from the depths of my soul I love you as I have never loved before. But I don't know what is going on inside of me. I feel that from now on this affection cannot be enough or me! I would have to have your whole life!!! I sometimes envy the lot of the man who will be your husband". (Barbin 50).

This creates a terrible shock for Barbin from Sara's side. In fact Sara is not at all comfortable with the incident that took place on that day. She later forgives Barbin and consoles h/er but Barbin was bewildered. These incidents left Barbin in a mental agony, which was further may complicated by physical sufferings. S/he began to have excruciating physical pain. Barbin confess h/er physical pain to Sara and Sara advices h/er to visit a doctor . But Barbin obstinately refused to do so.

Sara and Barbin's relationship takes further a complicated turn. They began to share bed and some intimate moments just like before. In this point of time Barbin questions h/erself about her sexual orientation. Barbin was quite perplexed related to her sexuality every time s/he shares precious moments with Sara. The quest for true sex slowly starts to question Barbin every time s/he interacts with Sara. Barbin quotes h/er demur regarding sexuality viz.

My God! Was I guilty? And must I accuse myself here of a crime? No,no!...That fault was not mine: It was the fault of an unexampled fatality, which I could not resist!!! Hencefourth, Sara *belonged to me!!! She was mine!!!*... What,in the natural order of the things, ought to have separated us in the world had united us!!! Try to imagine, if that is possible, what our predicament was for us both! Destined to live in the perpetual intimacy of two sisters, we have now had to conceal from everybody that the terrifying secret that *bound* us to each other!!! (Barbin 51)

These lines clearly portray the question of true sex that put Barbin in a pit of sexual dilemma. Their concealed complex relationship went on for a year with no indemnity regarding their future. Barbin's quest for sexuality became much more complex especially with his intimate moments with Sara. Though no promise of future was a prospect, Barbin began to dream about having a "normal married life of h/er and Sara. Barbin confesses that s/he can only "dream" in a



world which acts as “ideal”. S/he doesn’t have “the strength to declare the world that s/he (I) was usurping a place, title, that human and divine laws forbade h/er (me)”. Being discrete s/he can only dream. There existed a huge gap “between the planning and execution of it”.

Barbin’s and Sara “complex” relationship baffled the surrounding world terribly Barbin’s mother, who labelled Barbin to be mad and even their students too had suspicions which led Barbin to be a plate of mockery. But all these psychological tortures from the public space didn’t retreat Barbin and Sara. Their bond grew vigorously. Barbin writes in h/er memoir:

Often, in the middle of classes, Sara would electrify me with a smile. I should have liked to take her in my arms, but it was necessary to restrain myself!

I did not go near her without giving her either a kiss or expressive squeeze of the hand.

Every summer evening, we used to take a stroll in the neighborhood with the students.

My friend would give me her arm. We would come to a field. Sitting on the grass at her knees, not taking my eyes off her, I lavished upon her the most tender names, the most passionate caresses... (Barbin, 53)

The roots of Barbin’s endearment to Sara ran deeper as the time passes. Still, Barbin expresses a tinge of grief. Barbin’s conscience pricks h/er whenever s/he thinks about Sara’s family who had put a valuable trust upon h/er. Barbin had a sense of betrayal towards Sara’s family. “That sweet girl, who had become my companion, my sister – I had made my *mistress!!!*” writes Barbin. Ignorance accelerated by the age, society and clergy veiled Barbin from expressing and embracing h/er sexual orientation and gender identity. May be Barbin h/erself was unaware about it. The perplexity suppressed Barbin a lot.

Ah, well! I appeal here to the judgement of my readers in time to come. I appeal to that feeling that is lodged in the heart of every son of Adam. Was I guilty, criminal, because a gross mistake had assigned me a place in the world that should not have been mine? (Barbin 54)

“The world” Barbin describes was his age, which was masked by prejudices and unnecessary strict notions of religion. That world made Barbin believing to be “criminal” and guilty of h/erself. That world made Barbin to curse h/erself than loving h/erself. The “ideal” world imbued with the colours with of “morality” was traumatic to Barbin.

Religion inflamed the turmoil with portions of morality. Barbin who was pious and solely steadfast to the church and God, had to vex the utmost cerebral trauma from the part of the clergy. Barbin’s decision to divulge to the church to the revered priest Abbé H. turned out to be a dread for h/er. Barbin deeply trusted that the church would indeed offer a comforting and soothing hand for h/er

“unnatural” behavior but proved contradictory. It was a vindictive horror experience that Barbin had to cope with in h/er entire life. S/he portrays h/er worst experience from Abbé H. as:

Instead of words of peace, he heaped scorn and insults upon me! There was nothing in that man but dryness of heart! Pardon fell grudgingly from those lips that had been made to stream forth the inexhaustible gifts of Christian charity, that very great charity whose source is the soul of the One who reveals the Gospel to us, raising the sinful and repentant woman from the dust! (Barbin 55).

The flag hoisters of peace showed red signal to Barbin. Barbin was shattered when h/er expectations of comfort from the divine side turned out to be a horror. S/he was put in vain. S/he went there profoundly humbled and left with an embittered heart, “completely resolved to break with such a guide, whose unspeakable moral code was at best fit to estrange a weak and ignorant person from goodness”. (Barbin 55).

The attitude by Abbé H happened to be an exception among its members when the glory of the Catholic Church is taken into account, says Barbin in h/er memoir. The horrific incident left an indelible mark in Barbin’s mind and forced to retreat h/erself from Abbé H which surprised Madame P. and others. In fact to h/er further surprise, Sara did the same showing her ardent support and reciprocating Barbin’s adoration. Barbin and Sara’s relationship was criticized further with unfavorable comments, and Madame P. was warned by the “ideal” society for the ‘sake of decency and morality’ since the students witnessed Barbin kissing Sara too often. Both became an object of serious scrutiny on the part of the children. Madame P. was seriously struck by the incidents revealed by the students. She was disturbed by hearing all these. Conscious about their family’s reputation, Madame P. summoned her daughter Sara instead of Barbin and advised her to be more reserved in the future in her relations with “Mademoiselle Camille”. “You are very fond of each other, and for my part I am very happy that you are; but there are properties that must be observed, even among *girls*” says Madame P. to her daughter Sara. Biased notions of Gender are being described here. The era too contributed for the creation of such biased versions of sex, sexuality and gender. Even though Madame P. advised Sara, she had a blind trust upon them and never observed with scorn and scrutiny like the rest.

Apart from Barbin, we can see another silent victim of sexuality. It is none other than Sara. Readers may have had a thought that Sara is a radical open minded person who accepts Barbin’s reality. But pondering deep into Sara’s sexuality with special reference to present queer analysis, Sara proves to be another victim of suppressed sexual identity by the ideal notions of morality nurtured by the cardinal dominion church and society. Barbin’s enunciates only just h/er own personal experiences in the memoir. S/he merely portraits Sara as a third person. Sara’s feelings and emotions are concealed in the memoir. We can find no piece of word from Sara’s side expressing her griefs, her emotions and



passions. All the parts of Sara in the memoir are being presented as the views of Barbin. Sara remains a mute victim in the memoir. She is indeed an archetype of several other silent sufferers of ignorance and morality who are being forced to live in a concealed sexuality fearing the abuse and isolation from the society. Readers can imagine the afflictions and laments of several unheard voices who helplessly fell into the turmoil heated by the society during nineteenth century France.

Barbin and Sara continued as lovers, though, albeit more discreetly. What signaled their end was the fateful doctor's appointment. Barbin left for B. (La Rochelle) to her mother and her noble benefactor Monsieur de Saint-M. Barbin was in discomfort when s/he was in B. Before leaving to L. (Saint d'Angély) Barbin received a letter from her former teacher of D. (Le Chateau) for a function there. Barbin left for D. H/er distress grew further and Barbin was desperately in need of divine meditation. S/he decided to unburden herself to the saint she met there and await his judgement. After hearing the confession, he consoled Barbin and requested h/er to leave and come after two days. After two days, the advice that the abbé gave h/er was shocking for Barbin. It marked another turn in Barbin's life. Abbé says:

I shall not tell you, what you know as well as I do, that is to say, you are here and now entitled to call yourself a man in society. Certainly you are, but how will you obtain the legal right to do so? At the price of the greatest scandals, perhaps. However, you cannot keep your present position, which is so full of danger. And so, the advice am I giving you is this: withdraw from the world and become a nun; but be very careful not to repeat the confession that you have made to me, for a convent of women would not admit you. This is the only course that I have to propose to you, and believe me, accept it. (Barbin 62)

The words of Abbé hit like a thunder for Barbin. S/he left D. (Le Chateau) without promising anything. S/he was pretty sure about h/erself not going to have a monastic life. Spending a few more days at B. (La Rochelle) she left for L. (Saint d'Angély) to keep h/er promise to Madame P. and Sara. Reaching there, the ladies gave a warm welcome to Barbin. Barbin lived every moment with fear of an explosion of h/er secret so is Sara. Sara too feared her mother. Two months passed with a smooth swift. S/he was irritated with Abbé H often. Barbin hated Abbé H. He too refrained from speaking to Barbin even on the slightest occasions. His narrow moral code is further visible when a student who is barely fourteen gets pregnant. It raised an outcry among Abbé H and Madame P. The girl refused to reveal the name of the culprit at first, but later reveals to be a traveling salesman. She was expelled from the school soon. The incident made Barbin to think seriously about the probable consequences of h/er intimacy with Sara. Barbin was later appointed as the head mistress of the school with the request of Sara's sister Madame A. who is leaving with her husband to the next town. But soon Barbin's

happiness was going to cease. Sometime later s/he began to suffer the excruciating pain again. With the urge of Madame P. Barbin decided to consult Doctor T. (Doctor Chesnet is the one who examines Barbin, he is referred to Doctor T. in the memoir). Barbin's big secret revealed during the physical examination. He explained the matter to Madame P., who understood absolutely nothing. Barbin joined with Sara and explained everything to her happened in the clinic. Doctor T. made some sort of stigmatized version of Barbin's case to Madame P., which made her to forbid Sara sleeping with Barbin once. She said to Sara; "As for that, I positively forbid you to do it! I have my reasons. And I shall add that if my authority is no enough, I would have recourse to another's. I am making it a matter of conscience for you". Barbin felt it as a bizarre contradiction. S/he felt that Madame P. saw a danger for her daughter with h/er. With the warnings of the doctor, Madame P.'s indifference increased and she strictly forbid Sara to share bed with h/er. The ostracizing commenced from the people whom Barbin loved and revered utmost. But still they continued to sleep together at the middle of the night after going to bed separately at night and went back to their different beds before the morning. Barbin fell in a deep dilemma thinking about h/er future. S/he describes in the memoir;

My poor mind was a chaos in which I could distinguish nothing. Confide in my mother? But it was enough to kill her! No! I could not initiate her into such a discovery!

Prolong the situation indefinitely?

If I did so, I would inevitably expose myself to the greatest misfortune! I would outrage the most inviolable, the most sacred moral principles!

And could I not be called to account later for my guilty silence, and burdened with the sorry consequences that others should have foreseen? ... (Barbin 75)

Barbin's dilemma was much more concerned with the public opinion, family and self-reputation. Barbin left L. (Saint-Jean-d'Angély) in the vacation bidding adieu to Sara with no surety of seeing her again. After arriving at B. (La Rochelle) s/he didn't confessed anything to her mother or Monsieur de Saint M.. H/er mother compelled a lot to open up. Babin asked her to wait till the next day. Barbin went to the chapel to visit Abbé for his advice. Patiently hearing h/er penitents, Abbé asked h/er to visit him the next day so that he could have a word with his doctor. In the very next morning, he advised Barbin to visit Doctor H. (referred to Doctor E. Goujon) with h/er mother. The doctor was shocked to hear Barbin's dilemma since it was his first kind of case. The doctor's reveal was absolutely appalling for the auditors. Barbin writes in h/er memoir about the doctor's reveal;

"Frankly," the good doctor said to me, "your godmother had a stroke of luck when she called you Camille. Give me your hand, *mademoiselle*; before long, I hope, we shall call you differently.

When I leave you, I will go to the bishopric. I don't know what Monseigneur will decide, but I doubt that he will permit you to return to L. There, your position is lost; it is not tolerable. What amazes me is that my colleague at L. compromised himself to the point of letting you stay there for so long, knowing what you are. As for Madame P., her naïveté cannot be explained." He then addressed a few encouraging remarks to my poor mother, whose stupefaction was at its height. "It's true that you've lost your daughter," he said to her, "but you've found a son whom you were not expecting." (Barbin 78)

A correction of an error regarding Barbin's name and gender is required now. It became a necessary to rectify the civil status of Barbin. All of a sudden, Barbin felt like surrendering to the prejudices of society. Barbin h/erself was much concerned with the narrow mindedness of so called idealistic and moralistic society.

Was it likely that society, which is so severe, so blind in its judgements, would give me credit for an impulse that might pass for honesty? Wouldn't people try to falsify it instead and treat it as if it were a crime on my part? (Barbin 79).

The entrenched minds from the society forced Barbin to believe h/erself to be guilty. Their dogmas and intolerance was nurturing a future victim. The Monseigneur gave permission to Barbin to change h/er identity. Barbin left for L. and revealed everything happened in B. to Sara who was ardently waiting for h/er. Both bid adieu each other with a deep weight in the heart knowing that both can't be together. Madame P. tried to avoid Barbin's presence at any cost in L.. She was much protective regarding her daughter. "The truth was appearing to her in its full light, and what must have been her sorrow when she thought about the consequences of her culpable trust" says Barbin in h/er memoir. Still Madame P. liked Barbin as her daughter's chosen companion. Barbin never revealed h/er romantic affection with Sara neither to Madame P. or none. "The secret of our love would have to be kept between God and myself", writes Barbin in the memoir. Barbin's Head position in the school was soon replaced and s/he was arranging her departure. Barbin went to see Monseigneur de B., which again was a horrific experience for h/er just like before. "I bitterly regretted having gone. That absurd man did not find an encouraging word to say to me about the incredible situation that had befallen me. Nothing could bend the inflexible rigor of that man. He never forgave me" says Barbin.

Barbin had a silent retreat on the last day from L.. Barbin bid adieu to Sara and Madame P. with tears and guilt. Madame P.'s final words staggered Barbin. S/he describes the thunderstruck moment as;

"So my dear Camille," she said to me, someday perhaps I have to call you *monsieur*! Oh, no! Tell me that won't happen!"

“That will happen, however, Madame, and in a little while, no doubt. Why don’t you ask Monseigneur de B.?”

“But really what will people say? The scandal that will result from this will inevitably fall on my house! And then!”

That was her greatest preoccupation, her nightmare. She saw her boarding school ruined, her reputation seriously hurt. Confronted by this prospect, she forgot her daughter; she did not think about what the past had been but about the future would be. (Barbin 86)

Madame P. was a crucial representative of rigid morality and fake societal dogmas. She was one among noble personalities whom Barbin admired and revered to the core. If Barbin had to face ignorance from her, we can easily guess the attitude from the side of the public. Barbin bid a teary farewell to Sara. It was all over. Barbin’s voyage as a woman ends here. S/he went back to B., where Barbin had to attend to the proceedings that related to h/er appearing in society as a member of the masculine sex.

The documents to legal procedures for the rectification of Barbin was prepared by Doctor H. (Doctor E. Goujon). It was then submitted to the presiding honorable judge of L., Monsieur de V. Barbin had to undergo a second examination to assert his masculine sex which proved to be true again. Barbin’s sex and entire female identity got changed at the age of twenty-one. She writes;

So, it was all over. According to my civil status, I was henceforth to belong to that half of the human race which is called the stronger sex. I, who had been raised until the age of twenty-one in religious houses, among shy female companions, was going to leave that whole delightful past far behind me, like Achilles, and enter the lists, armed with my weakness alone and my deep inexperience of men and things. (Barbin 89).

All of a sudden an individual is forced to embrace an entirely new identity. Barbin was deeply astonished. The public was in fact aroused by this “extraordinary event” and s/he had to face criticisms and slanders over. The scrutiny from the side of the public was intolerable for h/er.

Some people went so far to accuse my mother of having concealed my true sex in order to save me from conscription. Others saw me as a real Don Juan, saying that I had bought shame and dishonor everywhere, and had profited brazenly from my situation in order to engage secretly in love affairs with women who had been consecrated to the Lord. I knew all that, and I was not in any way upset by it. (Barbin 90).

Barbin tried hard to maintain a deaf ear to the public. S/he entirely changed h/er looks and attire and took the new name Abel Barbin. The journey from Alexina to Abel was a tough task for Barbin. The press too started to attack Barbin. Newspapers and articles started to publish Barbin’s life. It was exciting for the high society of the town. Barbin became a sensational subject of the time. His

Excellency Monseigneur de B. was always there to comfort Barbin. With the advice of Doctor H. Barbin got a fair job at the railroad with the immense support from the prefecture. Barbin's fear regarding Sara became true. Rumours circulated among the public concerning their intimacy. Sara became a victim to the pitiless judge, the society. All Barbin can do was, to watch helplessly.

After five or six weeks after h/er visit to the prefect, Barbin received the invitation to go to Paris, to present h/erself to the head of the rail road operations. Barbin bid a teary farewell to h/er mother and Monsieur de Saint-M. Barbin felt much more safe and secure in Paris than in B. Barbin had a great regret for Sara. S/he wrote letters for Sara but soon fearing her mother and their reputation s/he dared not to. Soon Barbin heard that heart wrenching news. The death of Monsieur de Saint-M.. He had a terrible attack. The incident put Barbin into deep despondency. For two years s/he continued to live in Paris. Still Barbin was in a dilemma regarding h/er existence. Barbin had to face accusations from around. Pity and fear wounded h/er like a horrific reptile. But s/he was able to withstand it with utter boldness. S/he writes;

You are to be pitied more than I, perhaps. I soar above all your innumerable miseries, partaking of the nature of the angels; for, as you have said, my place is not in your narrow sphere. You have the earth, I have boundless space. Enchained here below by the thousand bonds of your gross, material senses, your spirits cannot plunge into that limpid Ocean of infinite, where, lost for a day upon your arid shoes, my soul drinks deep. (Barbin 99).

Barbin shows a courageous response to the attitude of the society. S/he truly felt sorry not for h/er self, but for others. For Barbin, h/er long sufferings were nothing but the truth. Barbin truly desired love. H/er passions were true and wild which she was forced to keep it as forbidden. Sara's memories still haunted Barbin with its pleasant fragrance. She was the only one who believed Barbin and accepted h/er as own. Sara gave the feast of love to Barbin which s/he desired. Barbin wrote about Sara as;

In her innocent ignorance, she had dreamed of nothing beyond the incomplete joys that I revealed to her. Later, I was crushed by her forgetting me. That also brought me back to the truth of the situation, which I had forgotten for a moment. (Barbin 101)

Soon Barbin tried h/er best to forget the past and lead a life in complete isolation. Barbin tried h/er best to keep a safe distance from everyone and everything in order to save h/erself. But all h/er efforts was left in vain. Society did not miss a chance to attack h/er with their injustices and hypocritical hatreds. Still Barbin tried to take a strong stand to fight rather than surrender. "There is an abyss between them and myself, a barrier that cannot be crossed ... I defy them all". (Barbin 102) wrote Barbin in h/er memoir.

The isolation, hatred and abandonment from the side of the society towards Barbin did not witness much change during the course of time. Barbin felt entirely

helpless and pity. All s/he did was praying to God for mercy. Her strength weakened gradually. Barbin felt like society is swallowing h/er up.

“The incessant struggle of nature against reason exhausts me more and more each day, drags me with great strides toward the tomb”. (Barbin 103). The frustration of Barbin was increasing day by day. Barbin felt that death was so easier than leading a life with hatred and isolation. The words of Barbin became more and more painful and deep during Barbin’s later life as Abel. H/er description for h/er own death is excruciating for a reader. One can easily guess the mental agony faced by Barbin. Barbin describes his death fantasy as;

I feel that in an obvious, terrible way, and how sweet, how consoling this thought is for my soul. Death is there, oblivion. There, without any doubt, the poor wretch, exiled from the world, shall at last find a homeland, brothers, friends. And there, too, shall the outlaw find a place.

When that day comes a few doctors will make a little stir around my corpse; they will shatter all the extinct mechanisms of its impulses, will draw new information from it, will analyze all the mysterious sufferings that were heaped up on a single human being. O princes of science, enlightened chemists, whose names resound throughout the world, analyze then, if that is possible, all the sorrows that have burned, devoured this heart down to its last fibers; all the scalding tears that have downed it, squeezed it dry in their savage grasp. (Barbin 103).

Readers can discover the wounds, scathing contempt, abuse, vile mockery, bitter sarcasm, that have been inflicted upon Barbin. Every right to live was refused to Barbin. Reality was crushing upon h/er. Barbin was left helpless in Paris too. Barbin lost h/er job and begged for a month to many to find a job. All h/er efforts was left in vain. Finally, s/he decided to enroll herself as a valet in one of those numerous refuges with which Paris swarms, in a placement office for servants. But they kept on making Barbin visiting them each day and received negative answer in return. Barbin was quite aware that s/he was the object of extraordinary astonishment to everybody around h/er. When all the peers of Barbin radiated with the joys of young life, h/er own face reflected a frightful truth.

After a tiring search for a job, finally Barbin was called at the placement office. They decided to give h/er a letter of introduction to a lady who was looking for a valet. It was The Countess de J. who lived townhouse in the Faubourg Saint- Honoré. She interviewed Barbin with several questions. Barbin wanted to reply that s/he had been a *lady’s maid*, but s/he retreated from telling that because s/he felt it as an outrageous remark. Barbin’s hope was again shattered with the ladies reply. Barbin writes;



“Here,” the lady said good-naturedly, “you could learn your duties in a short time; but you look weak, delicate to me, and not at all cut out for work of that sort. So I cannot take you on here.”

I was sent away.

Unfortunately, she was telling the truth. (Barbin 107)

Yet another rejection was confronted by Barbin. H/er weak and sickly appearance made her an object for scrutiny and rejection. S/he hardly had any place to stay. S/he used to stay at hospitals which Barbin believed as “where I shall end up, no doubt”. Barbin had a friendly relationship with an aristocratic lady, who husband managed a café in the town for a short period of time. She had some sort of feminine curiosity towards Barbin, hearing Barbin’s principal life events of h/er life. But Barbin never reciprocated. Barbin’s personal experiences as an intesex was worst during h/er days in Paris. Barbin illustrates with an example from h/er own personal life.

I can give an example. At the railroad office an assistant manager was talking to me about the oddity of my past. He believed quite frankly that, sought after one day as a woman by a young man, I had yielded myself to his desires and that my real sex had then been discovered. You can see how far this capacity for judging me can go and what serious consequences it can have for me, for my peace of mind. (Barbin 108)

Barbin’s life was getting much complicated than expected. Like a drizzle in the desert Barbin was admitted into a financial administration on a temporary basis where Barbin spent a few months in unclouded tranquility. S/he hoped for permanent admission, but that too was in vain. Again Barbin was left looking for a livelihood. Barbin felt despondent and s/he could declare that s/he had none to turn to. The idea of death began to crawl into the mind of Barbin. There are several references in the memoir which portrays Barbin’s thought concerning death.

I consider that everyday given to me is the last day of my life. And I do so quite naturally, without the slightest dread.

To understand such indifference in someone who is twenty-nine, it would be necessary to have seen oneself condemned, like me, to the most bitter of all torments; perpetual isolation. The idea of death, which is generally so repulsive, is ineffably sweet to my aching soul. (Barbin 109).

Ardent prayers are offered to almighty everyday by Barbin. S/he did not lose her pious nature even though s/he felt damned herself. “The devotion to death has been born” in Barbin. Barbin had no financial support and fell into depressing thoughts. Even with the prospect of being called back to work again, Barbin could hardly allow the situation to continue, for s/he had come to the point of wondering how s/he would be able to have breakfast the next day. S/he requests the readers; “May you, my readers, never know all the horror that is contained in this remark.” It’s being a humble plea. Barbin’s situation had led h/erself to a wretch which

overwhelms to the most frightful extremities. “On that day I finally came to understand suicides and to excuse them”; writes Barbin in the memoir. From h/er words one can simply imagine how much Barbin had tolerated in h/er life. All h/er life she tried to be a good human being devoted entirely to the service of others and divinity. But because of h/er sexuality she was left in isolation and pain. Barbin felt useless and considered h/erself to be “one of the mysteries which it is not for man to fathom.” H/er sense of loneliness and depression made h/er to think about her own death.

A burden to others and to myself, without any affection, without any of those prospects that at least sometimes brighten with their pure and tender rays the careworn brows of those who suffer. But no, nothing. Always abandonment, solitude, outrageous scorn. (Barbin 110).

The abandonment and outrageous scorn instead of humility from the side of people made h/er drown in depression. From these experiences, one can simply imagine how much Barbin has suffered. Barbin never enjoyed or experienced the pleasant glories of youth like many of h/er peers. All s/he had to undergo was mental harassment. Barbin’s mother’s final days also added to h/er depression. Barbin felt powerless to bring any happiness to her. It was such a painful course of action from the part of a son, according to Barbin. Barbin considered h/erself powerless to bring more happiness to the final days of the woman whom s/he owed so much. It was the most desperate extreme for Barbin to be condemned.

Towards the end of the memoir, Barbin speaks about a disastrous resolution that the deep discouragement of those days prompted h/er to make. One fine morning, Barbin came upon with a man whom s/he known him some years before. He was the agent of an important shipping company. At first, Barbin was reluctant to have a word with him. The next day, Barbin went to pay him a visit at the central administrative offices of the company and opened up about h/er situation. He took an interest in it and gave a warm and affectionate welcome to Barbin. Barbin asked him quiet to let h/er sail on board a steamship as a waiter’s assistant. Barbin’s proposal astonished him a great deal. He also pointed out Barbin the material impossibilities that stood in the way of his carrying out Barbin’s plan. Firstly, it was the company’s policy to admit in their capacity only people who are already accustomed to sailing. But seeing Barbin’s life, he decided to help h/er by taking Barbin to the Europe expedition. He asked to find a recommendation from a deputy officer. Barbin easily obtained a recommendation letter from the deputy officials who personally came to know about Barbin. Barbin was on cloud nine. S/he went back the next day with the letter. Barbin felt that there was no backing down anymore. S/he kept all the steps a secret. Barbin did not reveal h/er plans either to h/er mother or h/er friends. Barbin planned to reveal the plans only at the moment of h/er departure, for s/he believed that they would certainly have dissuaded her from it if they had known in what status s/he was leaving. Barbin never let them know. Barbin’s departure for the United States had

a delay of one month. So s/he tried to remain in a temporary position at the job. A month passed by and the anxiety level of Barbin increased. Barbin strictly decided to live in the present than worrying about a hapless future. “Solely because I believed I had committed myself. A fine reason when serious interests are at stake, wrote Barbin.

Barbin indeed had the anxiety of abandoning people who until then had been so good to h/er. That idea was bitter and painful for h/er. Barbin thought that with a single word s/he might still have put an end to the “cruel uneasiness”, but Barbin retreated the idea believing it to be foolish. Barbin did not want to weaken her resolution. Barbin received the reply letter from the purser of the *Europe* that he was going to take Barbin on board in his ship but simply as a waiter’s assistant, since the regulations were opposed to her being employed, even at intervals, on the ship’s records. The letter was cold, significant and it plunged h/er again into indecision. Barbin braced h/erself against what s/he denounced as weakness, with h/er heart heavy and full of misgiving, s/he tremblingly pronounced h/er final word of acceptance on a Thursday, where h/er departure was set for the following Monday. Barbin wrote to h/er mother to announce the matter. The idea of the journey was already so painful for her that s/he could not go. Many tried to advice Barbin. But Barbin was left reserved to h/er well wishes. They finally let h/er own way believing that s/he had been “tempted by the lure of a favorable position”.

The memoir has a broken end. It ends like;

What strange blindness was it that made me hold on to this absurd role until the end? I would be unable to explain it to myself. Perhaps it was that for the unknown, which is so natural to man. (Barbin 115).

Foucault finally gives an outline about Barbin’s death at the end.

*In the month of February 1868, the corpse of Abel Barbin, who had committed suicide by means of a charcoal stove, was found in a room in the quarter of the Theatre de l’Odeon. He had left the manuscript of the preceeding text. (M.F.) (Barbin 115)*

Toward the end of her life, Barbin lived in solitude, occupying the dingy attic of a building in a poor arrondissement of Paris. S/he was found dead at age 30, having asphyxiated h/erself over the fumes of a charcoal stove, the victim of a social construct that saw no room for h/er. H/er memoirs were found on a table, one of the four pieces of furniture Barbin owned. H/er writing was the last word on h/er “bizarre and double existence.” The world had spurned h/er, degraded h/er, and in the end pitied h/er. Barbin’s life particularly in the nineteenth century France was tough and disheartening one. Era during Barbin’s life span is to be kept in mind when discussing Barbin’s helplessness, quest for identity and true sex. Society’s attitude towards an intersex person during such an era could be easily guessed. Barbin’s torments and hardships were intolerable during the nineteenth century France where the public were unaware about the gender identities or sexual orientation. The question of true sex plays a crucial

role when Barbin's case with special reference to the age is taken into account. Today in the present age, Intersexuality is not treated with awe and wonder since the awareness has done its best to achieve the goal. That's not the case with Herculine Barbin. Even the medical science experimented with him with wonder. Religion and Public ostracized Barbin for h/er sexuality.

The readers are often pushed into the pit of pity and despair while going through the memoir. The case was extremely rare and probably new to the medical science, society and may be to the world during that era. Intersexuality was new, confusing and ostracizing thing for them since queer subjects were not that prominent or dared to be boldly discussed during the period since religion had a deep influence.

It is a document drawn from a strange history of "the concept of true sex". It is not unique, but it is rare enough. It is the journal or rather the memoirs that were left by one of those individuals whom medicine and the law in the nineteenth century relentlessly questioned about their genuine sexual identity.

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