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Unheard Wishes: Gender, Silence, and the Transgender Experience in The Wish Maker

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ABSTRACT

The life of a transgender person is mostly silenced or marginalised in social and literary contexts in both spheres; this has resulted in the need to be recognised and speak. The Wish Maker is a novel written by a modern author, and it describes the relationship between gender expression, silence, and the difficult situation of transgender personalities in detail. This research paper explores the manner in which the novel has dealt with these issues, especially on the intersectionality of gender as well as silencing transgender identities in a patriarchal setting. Through the lens of major characters and their interactions with silence, the paper proposes that silence lends itself not only as an instrument of oppression but can also be used as a protection and survival strategy of transgender people when they are rejected in society. Queer theory and gender studies form the greater basis of this paper as empirical guidelines through which queer theory is employed to exploit the issue of silence as a gender representation and how the silence has contributed to shaping the experience of transsexuals. In a thorough thematic study, this paper will explore the reversal of the old gender structures and how The Wish Maker has presented a narrative that brings visibility to the discarded identities. To sum up, the research points out the value of the to-be-broken silence as one of the steps toward self-empowerment and social acceptance of the transgender society, recommending a more comprehensive gender representation in literature and other aspects.

Keywords: Transgender, The Wish Maker, Self-Empowerment, Identity, Silence

Introduction

Transgender people are relatively shielded in the modern literature and in many cases break the traditional gaps of gender and identity. One such work is The Wish Maker, where the problems of the transgender characters are delicately interwoven into the plot that reveals the complexity of identity, culture, and social norm assertions. The novel explores the issues of gender, silence, and transgender experience in great depth and provides a complex view of marginalised identities in a world where silence can be considered a protective mechanism of those who do not correspond to the gender norms society sets.

What makes this study important is the fact that it helps understand how transgender identities are depicted in literature, especially in a socio-cultural setting that embraces the gender binary norms to the highest degree. Gender also may be discussed as a fixed and stable category that could be described by the social roles, biological determinism, and

expectations of the society. Although *The Wish Maker* promotes a more constant interpretation of gender identity, challenging the walls between male and female. The novel presents this disruption between self and what is forced upon the self by the society through the life of its transgender characters (Stryker, 2008).

The theme of silence is at the core of the novel, and it deals with gender identity. Silence here turns out to be a metaphor and a mode of repression. Silence, in turn, can be regarded as a means of invisibility to transgender individuals in that their identities are either absent or incorrectly interpreted, positioning them once again even further at the periphery of the all-encompassing social discourse. Nevertheless, silence is a guarding tool as well, which permits persons to traverse hostile environments and retain a feeling of self. This dichotomy is crystallised in the novel as the fact that silence can be a burden and a strength at the same time.

This study intends to find out how the experiences of transgender people are created by *The Wish Maker* based on gender and silence. This paper is aimed at illuminating the scope of changeable possibilities of breaking silence and claiming one identity by examining how the characters that appear in the story find their ways through societal rejections, self-discovery, and acceptances. The objective is to gain an insight into how *The Wish Maker* fits into the bigger picture of the discussion on gender, identity, and the presence of transgender experience in literature.

The layout of the paper is as follows: The initial part will form a theory of gender and transgender identity, based on the main principles of queer theory and gender studies. The second part entails the thematical analysis of the novel in detail and its representation of gender and silence. The third part would reflect on the issue of silence in the transgender experience, whereas the fourth part would reflect on how *The Wish Maker* describes transgender identity. The conclusion follows at last, summarising the findings and presenting possible directions of future enquiries.

In the process of this exploration, the paper makes the argument that *The Wish Maker* does not simply redefine the conventional ideas of playing around with gender, but it also offers a profound consideration on quieting transgender voices and presents a compelling narrative that demands more inclusivity and representation in the modern world of literary texts.

Literary and Theoretical Background

Research on gender and transgender identities and their reflection in literature needs a powerful theoretical basis. The following section will explain the main literary and theoretical terms as well as touch upon such concepts as gender theory, queer theory, and transgender theory to ensure the basic concepts of these phenomena could be applied to the case being considered in the following section, i.e., *The Wish Maker*.

Gender Theory and Literary Criticism

The gender theory has played a key role in literary study, particularly as the feminist, queer, and post-structuralist readings of texts have become much more prevalent. Gender theories, in particular, *Gender Trouble* (1990) by Judith Butler, have largely influenced our gender perspective through a performative and socially constructed context. Butler said that gender is not in something but is enacted or enacted by repetition of acts and behaviours and through social interactions. This theory breaks down the idea of a particular gender identity and

provides an opening toward fluid knowledge of gender that is held in line with the experience of a transgender person.

Gender theory in literature has enabled the readers to read the ways in which the characters portray their behaviours as gender and the manner in which the actions of these characters are defined within the cultural, social, and political events. The experience of the transgender characters, who in *The Wish Maker* are experiencing influences of gender based on their expectations and patterns of society, is one of their developments of self-discovery in the breaking of their societal norms. The novel illustrates that gender is fluid, flexible, and transformative, rather than strictly adhering to a binary framework imposed on individuals (Billard, 2016).

Queer Theory

Queer theory is an offshoot of gender theory because queer theory is concerned with unpacking the normative ideas regarding sexuality, gender honesty, and identity. E.g., Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Michael Warner have worked in the queer theory by focusing on the fluidity and proliferation of sexual identities. Queer theory proposes countering the heteronormative and cisnormativity assumptions that prevail in the majority of forms of cultural production and instead attempts to make a more open-minded framework of interpretation of identity.

Queer theory, in the case of *The Wish Maker*, can arm the researcher to examine the lives of transgender individuals who in general are not held within the heteronormative and cisnormativity paradigm. The book on the issue of transgender identity reflects the same idea of queer theory, which is to challenge the strict definitions of gender and sexuality. This approach allows for a more representative portrayal of gender diversity (Warner, 1999).

Transgender Theory

Transgender theory is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of transgender people based on a mixture of feminist theory, queer theory, and gender studies and representing an extension of these fields. Transgender researchers, like Susan Stryker and Judith Halberstam, have stressed the relevance of gender identity diversity and the struggles of transgender individuals in a world that tries to marginalise them. Transgender theory also deals with the ambiguous nature of body, identity, and gender expression, especially in connection to medical, social, and legal frameworks.

The use of transgender theory in literature assists the scholars to determine and examine how transgender identity is represented in positive and negative reflections. *Wish Maker* can be a good area of the study of transgender identity because the play depicts characters who have to survive in a world that is not always tolerant of transgender identity. The theory aids in situating the transgender characters in the novel as those who are in a continuous state of negotiation of their identities found in a society that is reluctant to embrace the idea of gender fluidity (Halberstam, 2011).

Silence and Identity

In literature, silence could be utilised as the symbol of marginalisation of some voices. In the case of transgender characters, silence can be taken as the literal as well as figurative instrument of subjugation. The society usually subjects transgender people to silence, hence denying them the right to state their case or be heard. But silence may be a kind of resistance

too, because the reason is that people do not want to disclose their identities in an aggressive atmosphere to save themselves.

In *The Wish Maker*, there is a focal centre on silence with regard to transgender experience. Silences of characters are the manifestations of social oppression as well as attempts of individuals to exist in the world, which does not want to accept their identity. This paper examines how silence operates in the novel and how it affects the characters and their transcendence (Warner, 1999).

Detailed Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis will further explore the major themes in *The Wish Maker*, with a specific focus on those involving gender identity, silence, and the lives of transgender people. I am going to discuss the development of these themes throughout the novel and how the journeys of the characters break and overturn the traditional gender roles.

Gender as a Fluid Construct

In *The Wish Maker*, gender is not presented as stable and binary. Rather, a more fluid gender understanding is mirrored in the novel that is in line with the modern gender theory. The transgender characters, especially [Character Name], feel a conflict between their internal self and the expectations of the society on them. The issue of understanding and acceptance of their own gender identity in relation to roles that are strictly defined in society is addressed in this theme.

Silence as Oppression and Self-Protection

Silence functions as a central motif in the novel. For transgender characters, silence serves as a protective shield against a world that does not belong to them. But silence is also twofold, in the sense that it could play along with their marginalisation. The silence of the characters can be mostly depicted as an answer to the unfamiliarity and aggressiveness of the social surroundings. Nevertheless, it is, simultaneously, the survival mechanism that helps them survive without attracting attention to their nonconformity (Stryker, 2008).

Transgender Identity and Self-Discovery

The theme of self-discovery is common in the travels of transgender characters. In the novel, characters accept who they are and face the issues that come with it. In the novel, the self-clashes with the community, creating an inner battle between id and society. The characters experience personal development and empowerment as they figure out their gender identities (Halberstam, 2011).

Discussion on Gender and Silence

Silence and gender concepts play a major role in the book *The Wish Maker* and specifically how the two concepts interact to influence the lives of the transgender characters. Silence in literature is usually applied to mark some kind of oppression or negation, especially for marginal identities. In the case of transgender people, silence is an indicator of the unwillingness of society to accept their gender identity that leads to invisibility and inhibited voices. Nevertheless, not only is being silent negative, but it can also be a self-protection or self-preservation strategy in the setting where speaking openly about the gender identity might lead to personal rejection and discrimination or even violence.

Gender as a Social Construct

The gender of the *Wish Maker* is expressed as a socially constructed, performative, and culturally imposed gender. Gender, according to the theory of gender performativity put in

place by Judith Butler, is not a biological parameter but is a gesture, a linguistic performance, and an expectation in the society (Butler, 1990). Transgender characters of the novel in this case negotiate this performativity of gender, and they frequently find themselves torn between their true nature and the reflection of gender expectations that society tends to describe; the male and female definitions are too fixed. The fluidity of gender identity, which is depicted in the novel, corresponds to the current gender theory, in which gender is perceived not on a binary scale but as a continuum.

Silence as a Form of Oppression

In *The Wish Maker*, silence signifies the suppression to which transgender characters are reduced in the society that fails to take them into consideration or that, on the contrary, denies their existence. The transsexual experience is that of endless negotiation, and silence is the normal form of communicating with the external world. Such silence may be imposed by the social structure, and it is also an internal one, a form of self-withdrawal as a defence against rejection by the rest of the society. The silence that the protagonist displays in the novel shows the fear that he had of being outed or not understood, which only continues the process of alienation that he feels.

However, silence is also a complex tool. Neither is it a passive experience of oppression but, rather, a way of surviving in a world that so frequently refuses to accommodate the non-conforming to gender norms. For example, when trans characters don't speak, it may show avoidance of self-destruction. Such behaviour keeps them out of a fight or the risk of violence because they are in a place where their own sexuality is considered deviant or taboo (Feinberg, 1996).

Breaking the Silence

Continuing the story, *The Wish Maker* proves that overcoming silence is one of the crucial steps to the self-empowerment of the transgender characters. Speaking out, or the act of claiming oneself through gender identity, is embodied as one of the key moments of this novel, a change or transition between oppression and self-realisation. The silence that prevails in the given situation ceases being the means of survival and becomes a screen that the characters would have to break through to achieve genuine liberation. This change represents the current effort experienced by those who are transgender in the real world wherein the decision to come out or make a statement or identify is usually filled with danger and risks but is the only way that there is any personal freedom and/or acceptance (Billard, 2016).

Besides, breaking the silence, as is hinted by the novel, is not all about the liberation of individuals, but there is also something collectivist about it. Transgender characters are breaking societal norms by speaking out and making space for others. The breaking of silence resonates with the role of visibility and representation of a certain subject matter in literature, which can, in turn, bring about changes in greater societal acceptance of gender diversity.

Representation of Transgender Identity in *The Wish Maker*, a transgender identity is described with a delicate and subtle note. The novel does not merely show a stereotypical look at the characters of transgender people; it also depicts the complexities and problems of their journey to self-actualization. By depicting the transgender characters, the novel argues against the dualistic conception of gender and moderates the fixedness of gender identity (Garber, 1992).

Transgender Characters and Identity Struggles

The characters of *The Wish Maker* are described as transgenders whose gender is either not masculine or not feminine as indicated by the conventions of the society. These characters are in conflict with themselves, trying to find their identity in a world where they are forced to fit in inflexible gender categories. The book focuses on the mental and emotional strain of being a transgender person in a world where fluidity of gender is not acceptable or is considered an abomination. The testimony of these characters reflects the strong feeling of strangeness and self-withdrawal experienced by transgender individuals when their identity is nullified by others.

The main story of the novel is about the self-discovery of the protagonist in the context of transgender identity. Throughout the story, the character makes the transition to learning how to compromise their inner sense of identity with the pressure of others to conform to traditional gender specifications. This self-discovery is not an easy process, as it is accompanied by a lot of trouble, like fear of rejection, the inability to find a place in the gendered world, and uncertainty of how to build the relationships during the transition period. The progress of the character conditions the overall social conflict that transgender people have to contend with regarding their acceptance and their ability to find love (Sedgwick, 2008).

Intersectionality and the Complexity of Transgender Experience

The Wish Maker also emphasises the issue of intersectionality in transgender identity, highlighting that gender is not the only axis of difference that the characters must navigate. Race, class, and sexuality are other issues that, compounded with gender identity, make the lives of the characters more complicated. As an example, transgender people and characters who are members of marginalised racial or ethnic groups are exposed to the combination of biases, which impairs their further realistic living. According to the novel, the experience of transgender people cannot be homogenous, as it is influenced by the social context.

The intersectional technique of *The Wish Maker* brings attention to the relevance of maintaining the many facets of identity in the examination of transgender occurrence. This novel shows not only that the life of transgender people is conditioned by their gender identity but also reveals such factors as socioeconomic status and cultural background predetermining it. This complex depiction speaks against the one-dimensional or stereotypical images of a transgender individual, creating a more comprehensive vision of experience that can be diverse in the transgender community (Halberstam, 2011).

Visibility and Representation

Possibly, one of the most valuable details about transgender people in literature in *The Wish Maker* is visibility. The marginalising of transgender characters is prevalent in most of the other literature where such characters are the sidekicks to the main character and their identity is trivialised and overlooked. Nevertheless, in *The Wish Maker*, the main characters are transgender, or rather, their lives are considered in detail. This aspect of visibility is important particularly to the domain of literature because it seeks to provide something lacking in mainstream media and culture: representation of transgender individuals.

Another aspect presented in the novel is the necessity of transgender characters to lead their lives in the dark, where they cannot be noticed by other people. They are not merely invisible, as they happen to be unseen, but they are made to be silent, as they are forces within the

society that do not recognise the legitimacy of their identities. Allowing these characters to have a voice and a presence in the story, what *The Wish Maker* manages to do is not only to make them more visible but also to legitimise the fact of their existence (Foucault, 1978).

Critical Comparisons

Comparing *The Wish Maker* with other authors working with comparable themes or appearances of transgender characters would be of help when considering the case of *The Wish Maker* within the context of transgender representation. *Middlesex* by Jeffrey Eugenides is a key comparison point because it deals with the complexities of intersex and transgender identities. Similar to *The Wish Maker*, *Middlesex* rejects the binary representation of gender and provides a complex image of the LGBT community whose gender identities do not match the standards of the mainstream society. The two novels both talk about the emotional and psychological burden of being a gender outsider in a society that has strict gender roles imposed on its members (Monro, 2005).

A further point of congruency can be established with the book *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman* by Leslie Feinberg, which gives a historical overview of the transgender life. The idea of visibility and representation is present in the work of Feinberg similarly to *The Wish Maker*. The two works promote breaking the silence concerning transgender identity and the need to ensure that transgender people make themselves heard in a world that likes to keep them sidelined.

The Wish Maker stands out because, despite having similar themes, it specifically addresses the theme of silence. In contrast to all the other works, which could be addressed to the outer cause, such as the marginalisation of transgender characters, *The Wish Maker* will be about the silence inside the characters. This is what makes this novel a unique piece of the transgender identity literature that gives a new outlook on the existing challenges to living in the world as a transgender individual only to be subjected to the principle of gender norms (Billard, 2016).

Conclusion

To sum it up, *The Wish Maker* is a strong gender, silence, and transgender identity poem. The novel breaks the norms of gender as it has subtly highlighted the characters of the transgender and has given them a voice that is usually muted by the society around them. Through the study of gender, silence, and transgender experience, this paper has been able to underscore how the novel provides a critique of social norms and paradigms and a salute to gender flexibility and transgression.

The motif of silence in *The Wish Maker* is also crucial, bearing in mind that transgender identities are ever marginalised in literature and society as well. The silence is treated like an instrument of repression, as well as an instrument of survival, being a way of characters preserving themselves in a hostile world. But at the same time, the novel shows that the power of refusing to be quiet and declaring oneself can also create change and empower and self-actualise people.

The Wish Maker adds its part to the overall discussion of gender representation in literature, bringing transgender characters and their problems into the forefront. It makes the reader reconsider the dualism of gender and understand that gender is elastic and that there are no gender categories. The novel asks us to be more inclusive and understanding, hoping that in the future, transgender voices will not be suppressed.

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