

Fashioning the Self: Reinvention as Depicted in Jennifer Down's "Bodies of Light"

Membentuk Diri: Penemuan Diri Kembali sebagaimana tergambar "Bodies of Light". Karya Jennifer Down

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Informasi artikel: Naskah diterima: 6 Maret; Disetujui: 18 Maret;

Abstrak Studi ini telah mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor kunci yang berkontribusi terhadap tema-tema yang dieksplorasi dalam novel pemenang penghargaan Jennifer Down, *Bodies of Light*. Buku ini mendapat banyak kritik sastra karena penggambarannya tentang perbudakan manusia, kerentanan, dan perbedaan sosial, menjadikan tema-tema ini sebagai fokus utama studi. Dengan menyelidiki tema dan atribusi yang mendasari novel tersebut, analisis ini telah memberikan wawasan berharga terhadap cerita tersebut. Khususnya, penelitian ini menyoroti dinamika kekuatan antara karakter laki-laki, dan perjuangan protagonis melawan rasa sakit, trauma emosional, dan kepedihan. Lebih lanjut, penelitian sebelumnya telah menyoroti hubungan antara eksplorasi krisis eksistensial dalam novel dan identitas.

Kata Kunci: Human Bondage, Investasi Emosional, Kerentanan, Duka Masa Kecil, Ketidakstabilan Emosi.

Abstract: *This study has identified the key factors that contribute to the themes explored in Jennifer Down's award-winning novel, Bodies of Light. The book has received literary criticism for its portrayal of human bondage, vulnerability, and social distinction, making these themes the primary focus of the study. By delving into the underlying themes and attributions within the novel, this analysis has provided valuable insights into the story. Notably, the study has shed light on the power dynamics between male characters, and the protagonist's struggle with pain, emotional trauma, and poignancy. Furthermore, previous research has highlighted the connections between the novel's exploration of existential crisis and identity.*

Keywords: *Human Bondage, Emotional Investment, Vulnerability, Childhood Grief, Emotional Instability.*

Introduction

"Bodies of Light" by Jennifer Down is considered one of the most promising current novels from 2021, which has won the Miles Franklin Literary Award for its critical

appraisal. The book has been accepted as a remarkable piece of empathic writing resembling *Jane Eyre* in terms of the concept of human bondage. Therefore, a critical analysis of the novel can be done to understand its vitality in winning

such a renowned award. Different themes and concepts of the novel will also be discussed throughout the context of the study. The themes explored in this project have reflected the protagonist's life, which Down has focused on demonstrating.

The study aims to analyze various concepts and themes of *Bodies of Light* by Jennifer Down to understand its contribution to literature. The objectives of the study have been mentioned below. First, to analyze the notion of human bondage in the *Bodies of Light* for having a literary criticism. Second, to discuss the concept of emotional investment by the protagonist in the *Bodies of Light*. Third, to critically develop insights on the vulnerability of the protagonist through a discussion on the *Bodies of Light*. Fourth, to mention the simplistic approach of the *Bodies of Light* that has contributed to the success of the novel.

Methodology

The study has addressed a secondary research approach for analyzing the major themes in the project. Secondary information helps collect appropriate data for gaining different perspectives in the study. According to Saunders *et al.*, (2015, 297), existing contributions in the research field can be known with the help of a secondary data collection method. Moreover, deficiencies in the

existing data can be found, contributing generously within the context of the current study. In this case, the existing studies have helped in identifying the major themes, which have been incorporated within the existing discussion of the *Bodies of Light*.

On another note, limited opportunities for data collection can be avoided within the notion of the study. Secondary studies can bring comparative information that helps search on a larger scale. As stated by Kumar (2018, 1), the accessibility of the research can be increased with the appropriate knowledge of the secondary study. In this case, various experts have been gained by implementing secondary resources. Furthermore, the insights from the existing resources are beneficial for conducting the entire study. As a result, the research quality can be expanded that contribute generously within the research scope.

A critical analysis of the current study can be done within the scope of the research process by adopting a secondary method. Additionally, it can be proven to be a cost-effective strategy for collecting and analysing data constructively. As per the views of Kothari (2017, 5), different stages of data collection have been acknowledged in this case which can contribute more positively to the study. Therefore, these are advantageous for the research

projects, and it has also generated important information in this study.

with thoughts without attribution to the real-life world. Hence, she has been seen to be attached to objects

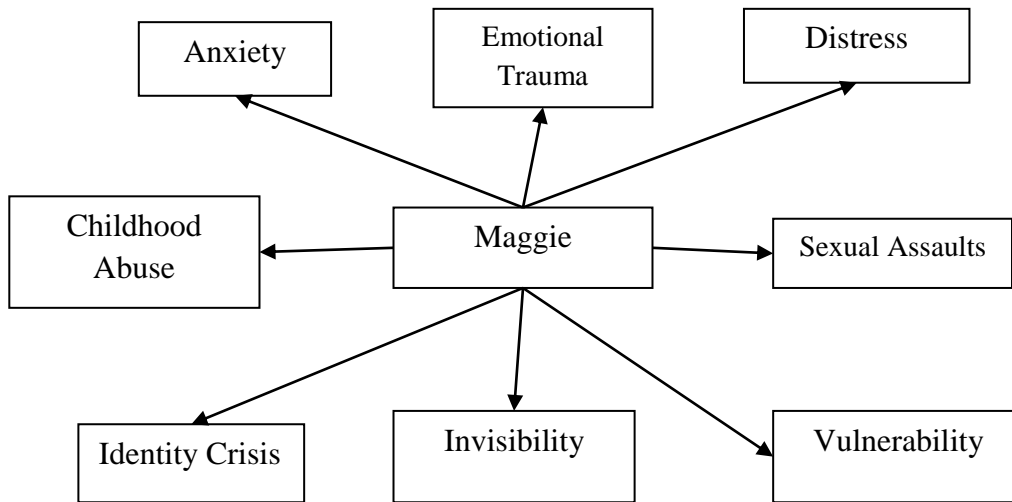


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework (Source: Influenced by Motha, 2019)

Figure 1 shows the significant characteristics of Maggie’s life, which have been derived from the coursework of the study.

Literature Review

Human Bondage

Human bondage is regarded as the concept that examines the lack of freedom for human beings in a critical situation. The vulnerability of such a position in human life can be discussed with the acceptance of this context. “*Bodies of Light*” has incorporated this theme within the main character of the story, Maggie (Eteng *et al.*, 2021, 101549). The character has been institutionalized

and human beings that seem trustworthy. A profound sentiment has also been observed in her that has caused indefinite pain and distress for the character. The image of Maggie can be created through her experiences throughout her life, and justifications have been seen to be somehow attached to them.

The judgment of the associated characters has been seen to bother the character of Maggie, and some tensions are growing around her. The concept of human bondage has been predominant in the human orientation of the character and the rule of childhood, which is trust. According to Musikawong, Sudarat,

and Panida (2021, 171), children should trust the associated elders as the trait of judgment must be built up properly in them. However, Maggie has lost her trust in her elders as a constant shield of lies exists in her life. The novel has been proven to be a life narrative for a female character continuously forced by the social system, creating bondage for her. The bondage of the character is further seen in her life at the care home after her father goes to jail due to drug addiction.

In this case, Vygotsky's Socio-cultural Theory can be mentioned as it develops ideas regarding the development of human interactions. Environmental observation can also be done with the help of this theory. Human behavioural insights' constructions can be determined from human intelligence (Rahmatirad 2020, 30). Hence, implementing this theory can be beneficial in understanding the psychological dimensions of the protagonist in this story and her association with other important characters. The fundamental role of social aspects along with cognitive development can also be acknowledged within the context of the study. The emotional sense and social process of the protagonist's life can also be described with the help of the utilization of this theory.

The notion of human bondage and social distress is further seen through her journey, where she has

been sexually harassed by one of her friends' father. The bondage comes through her lack of description power of the incident, as she was still a child. As per the view of Jones (2020, 1), there are different languages for expressing human feelings, and the children hold alluded references to show their experiences. Maggie, in this case, has demonstrated her suffering through her difficulty conducting some natural human processes. She has also mentioned some bruises on some of her body parts after the sexual assault.

It has also been repeated in the care home by another character, Terrence, the tennis coach. The euphemism of Maggie shows the power that human nature uses through the power and authority they hold in an organization and violates ethics. Some people constantly misuse their power and leave people traumatized for the rest of their lives (Ahmmed 2020, 27). The novel shows the bondage when Terrence continues talking to Maggie during the assault and tainting her by talking about her father. Domestic security was there in Maggie as she had a healthy relationship with her father. Therefore, the humiliation for the character demonstrates the human bondage that can be fatal for the lives of a child going through such suffering.

Emotional Investment

Emotional turmoil has been seen to be a recurrent theme of the *Bodies of Light*. The emotional instability has increased in Maggie with time as she has been questioned from childhood if she has ever experienced innocent love from her father. As mentioned by Williamson *et al.*, (2021, 151), children are vulnerable and can be moulded from their childhood with thoughts and beliefs they carry in later life. Therefore, Maggie realized later in her life that this thought of an unusual paternal love is a lie that has grown up in her.

The novel has shown that the emotional investment of human nature does not always return the favour. It has been demonstrated in different cases for Maggie, who has attached herself to several people and trusted them blindly. However, the emotional turmoil that she has gone through has become unspeakable, and her vulnerability has also been shown (Jones 2020, 3). On the other hand, a safe and secure childhood can also be helpful for an individual to become stoic in life. It has not been observed in the protagonist's case as she did not get comfort from anyone but only Judith.

An unstable emotional investment is also visible with the fear of the protagonist indulging with any adult. This fear has come from the unspeakable incidents that adults have continuously done to her. As suggested by Garlen (2019, 55),

people start questioning the deception and concealment of other people due to the incidents they faced in childhood. On the contrary, during their high school days, Maggie had safety with the help of Judith, her foster parent. The girl has been able to gain some comfort and emotional stability in the care and shelter of Judith. On the other hand, the toxicity had again come into the life of Maggie when she entered a relationship with a 33-year-old man named Ned at 16. It has again hurt her emotion and disappoints Judith as Maggie had the opportunity to take wise decisions for herself, yet she failed.

However, she has emotional support from Judith, who has made her believe in her potential. The award for the novel has been justified as Down has shown the entire story of Maggie through empathy. Maggie eventually understood the world's reality through her experience and the accustomed social rules. As commented by Nandwani, Pansy, and Rupali (2021, 81), emotional investment should be a matter of concern that can be a setback for the life of a human being. The voice of Maggie should be retained and heard by society along with hearing the wrongdoings that have taken place against her.

Vulnerability

The intersection of trauma has been made a recurrent theme of the *Bodies of Light*, which has become a successful novel of the present time. Grief and pain have also been shown through the story's protagonist, who has gone through emotional turmoil from the childhood days of her life. As discussed by Diaz-Sarachaga, Jose, and Daniel (2020, 438), a sense of sadness can contribute significantly to the vulnerability of a human being as the chances of being vulnerable become strong through one's experience. In this case, it can be mentioned that Down has brought the subject into light through the darkness the central character has gone through. In this way, the emphatic tale has cast light upon the vulnerable situation people suffer from, dramatically impacting their individual lives.

Down demonstrates a sense of accuracy through this creation, where she has created trust with her readers. Moreover, the author created a suitable environment that has made a more robust interconnection among the readers. Abedi *et al.*, (2019, 155) demonstrate that the author must initiate a compelling situation to connect more genuinely with the story to the readers. As a result, a familiar desperate location has been approached for Maggie so that the readers can relate to and understand the situation. Their life of Maggie has been fragile since her childhood days.

The experience and triggering factors in one's life can cast an overall impact and the outlook of people (Zolanvari *et al.*, 2019, 6822). Hence, life of Maggie has always gone toward the direction of short-term attachments and eventually with no certain future.

A distinct pain and loss have been noted to be an inseparable part of Maggie's life that has made her more fragile. Peace has found no place with her, and the author has been able to show this through the game of light and darkness. As stated by Eriksen *et al.*, (2021, 105383), the adult world and the loss can be shown with vulnerability in this relative world. Therefore, some resolutions can also be created from this that has been approached from the active participation of the notable characters in this novel. The focal point has remained on their disposition of Maggie through pointing out and describing different scenarios in her life.

An exceptional quality of situational analysis has been provided by describing the situations. In this context, it can be assessed that a transformative change can be approached through situational analysis. As per the views of Andrew (2020, 25), the situations should be resolved with the mindset of the readers, and the sufferings can be demonstrated through this. In this way, the concept of vulnerability in a human being's life has been predicted

through the character analysis of Maggie in the novel published by Jennifer Down.

The character's vulnerability is depicted through the incidents that comprise harassment from the very beginning of her childhood. The childhood of Maggie has been traumatized, which she could not even describe due to a lack of sense of its vitality. The situations have made her gradually realize the vulgarity she has been made a victim of (Zolanvari *et al.*, 2019, 6822). Moreover, the darkness in her life in different stages has made her more vulnerable in decision-making. As a result, she could not connect herself to anyone and share her experience to get some consolation.

Simplified Notions

"*Bodies of Light*" has provided a deeper insight into the vulnerability of children that they usually suffer from due to the lack of parental guidance. The foster care of Maggie has pictured different aspects of childcare in the Australian culture. As mentioned by Luskova, Maria, and Bohus (2020, 20), a larger picture of trauma in childcare should be analyzed as it can provide a broader view of the recurrent notion of human nature. The protagonist of the story, Maggie, has experienced a series of sexual abuse, which has created a diverse impact on the traditional belief of human beings

regarding childhood days. The themes of domestic violence have also been shown through Down's writings, which have helped in understanding the diversity in specific settings.

The story encapsulates continuous suffering for the protagonist, that has been subjectified to the horrible situations that Maggie has gone through from her childhood. Furthermore, a sense of loss has always worked in her life, as nothing has proven to be stable. However, her attachment to different objects and particular people has demonstrated the side of innocence in her characteristics. Mera *et al.*, (2020, 1809) suggest that emotional awareness has been predicted through the work of Down in the *Bodies of Light*. The impressions of Maggie have been presented through underlying themes, which are promising for today's literature. Therefore, the theme of submission is made prominent through the failure of Maggie to take decisions of her own. It is made clear by her emotional dependency on other characters associated with her life, such as Ned.

The concept of public demeanour has been made visible with the expression of Maggie's father-in-law when she could not express her grief in an unrecognizable way. The alluding parts and the painstaking evidence from her life have also shown some dire situations. As Dubinin and

Kuksova (2021, 022019) commented, the notion of bureaucracy is sometimes observed through the sufferings of the female protagonists of the novels. In this context, it can be determined that villainous caricatures have expanded this view through the writing of Down in her selected books. As a result, the theme of compromise is made prominent by the female perspectives of the protagonist in this story.

Several themes have been connected with the remarkable writing and approaches of *Bodies of Light*. The major themes have been discussed and elaborated on in this study, and they have been presented through evidence from experience of Maggie. On the other hand, Down has pointed out the emotional trauma children seldom face due to the absence of their parents (Ahmmed 2020, 31). The sense of security is not present in Maggie's life, which has made her vulnerable throughout her life. However, understanding her life through different aspects has made it clear that she is not privileged to have security. It also led her to fail in her decision-making process when she had the chance to make it right.

Discussion

Distress Life Experiences of Maggie

Maggie, the protagonist led her childhood life by trying to get

attached to people who seemed to her as truthful, and she suffered a lot and became distressed, "*Bodies of Light*" is a challenging novel that depicts the character of Maggie as a tragedy and endures terrible abuses. Hence, Jennifer Down has well-portrayed female trauma in this novel to make the social people aware. As Agin-Liebes *et al.*, (2020,156) suggested, the novelist has depicted low parental care, addiction, and death which caused sufferings to the child named Maggie from childhood in the hands of men. Thus, the brutal men's power is mentioned throughout this novel, and the protagonist faces pain, poignancy, and traumatized emotional situation. Jennifer has thrown a great question to the readers through the death of Maggie's childhood as the protagonist preferred to escape from the punishment, whether Maggie can do anything or not. This portion has affected the minds of the novel's readers as the novelist has narrated the situation with intellectual tension.

The novel depicts that when Maggie was a little child, her mother died, and she had to live with her drug-addicted father. Her father loved her daughter, but still, he could not take better care of her, and her disastrous life started when her father was sent to jail. One of her father's friends had sexually assaulted her as a child, and she

could not express her pain and emotional suffering. Morley *et al.*, (2020, 1297) opined that parents play a significant role in their children's life by protecting them from the negative people of society. Hence, the sufferings of the novel's protagonist make her lose trust and faith, and the novelist has portrayed with expressive language about the brutal, realistic structure of the society. Jennifer showed that at Maggie's early age, she found the right person to settle with, and they became parents. Still, her suffering and pain did not come to an end. The aggression and male dominative power need to be expressed to make the women strong to speak their voices (Thu *et al.*, 2021,4; Pevtsova *et al.*, 2021,15). Moreover, Jennifer has given a mixed emotional effect to the readers by providing an expression of joy and love with traumatized pain.

"*Bodies of Light*" is Jennifer's heartbreaking, compelling, narrative, and extraordinary novel. As commented by Romero *et al.*, (2020, 6975), a complete female protagonist has been shown in the story who can endure pain, and unkind human activities have been sharply expressed. The narration of Maggie's life and the horrible situation she faced while coming across different persons in three other countries has been depicted uncompromisingly and mesmerizingly. On the contrary, Mikkonen *et al.*, (2020, 2245) mentioned that the darkness of

moments in Maggie's life rendered her complex character sketched by the novelist. Thus, the novelist has depicted the character of Maggie with remarkable assuredness and depth regarding how a woman feels when she loses her dignity in society.

Attempts of Maggie to Reinvent Herself

The novelist has beautifully and passionately depicted the quest for love through Maggie's character and how she tries to purify her emotions. As illustrated by Bruning *et al.*, (2020,749), constant sexual assault received by any woman can make her psychologically unstable. Hence, Maggie desires to live a better lifestyle, but her pain endurance capability makes her emotionally intense. Maggie said, "I built a temple of us in my mind." this depicted that after her sufferings, she preferred to escape from the real world and live a life of hope and love. On the contrary, Huebener *et al.*, (2021,97) stated that people, after prolonged suffering, desire to reinvent life to obtain happiness. Thus, the novelist has clearly expressed human bondage and the reactions and emotional conditions through Maggie's character. This novel has focused on attachment theory to narrate the desires, hopes, love, and longing for relationships. The book has especially portrayed struggles with life, thrill, abuse,

emotional conflicts, and social challenges.

The role of society, cultures, harassment of the care system, and terrible situations of children without parental care have been narrated magnificently in this novel. As Franck *et al.*, (2019, 1044) mention, parentless children suffer from the impact of negative social culture, and the persons prefer to escape from a desolated lifestyle. Thus, Maggie's enigmatic life has made her distressed mentally. However, she seeks hope and enlightenment to reinvent her own life. On the contrary, (Dunlap *et al.*, 2020, 14) opined that human vulnerability allows people to respond to hazardous events. Hence, the novelist has significantly portrayed Maggie's character to show that she wanted to illuminate her mind after receiving several cases of abuse during her childhood. The use of attachment theory has been effective in this novel in defining the characters' psychological, social interactions, and behavioural approaches. The negative effect of social culture has been expressed through Maggie as she got no parental love and care from her childhood, lacks mental development and only seeks relationships from outsiders.

The novelist has fantastically explained Maggie's romantic fantasies to gain readers' attention in the literature. Clayton *et al.*, (2020,

358) commented that human desires are uncontrollable and their behaviour changes from one specific moment to another based on their fantasies. Hence, control system theory has been highlighted in this novel to understand the changing behavioural approaches of Maggie and her actions related to the events she faced during her childhood. On the contrary, Levi-Keren *et al.*, (2022, 238) mentioned that people prefer to build social bonding to lead their lives through attachments, beliefs, dedication, and involvement in social activities. Thus, Jennifer has wonderfully narrated deep, traumatized events that make her readers emotionally sympathetic to her protagonist, Maggie. Affection bonding helps individuals to become socially, mentally, and physically positive in their attitudes to respond to different situations. In addition, the subconscious minds of persons have been adequate to build them emotionally stable, and the novelist has deeply portrayed the traumatized condition of Maggie.

Social Domination

The social domination effect has been portrayed in this novel to show the real world. Maggie has no option or person to explain the poignant situation that makes her feel distressed. Hence, the bondage of women is depicted through her character, which has made Jennifer's

novel significant. As opined by Stanley *et al.*, (2019, 49), individual violate social norms that make other persons suffer, and infancy with pain make persons mentally unstable. Hence, people live in a fantasy world to release pain and suffering. Thereby, many people become victims of hostile persons by trusting them. In this novel, Maggie, when starts to grow up, she begins to lose faith in people after constant sexual assault. This novel portrayed disrespect and the breaking of ethics to show the real dark world. On the contrary, Varholick *et al.*, (2019,11) stated that positive culture can be violated through criminal activities against women and harassment. Hence, Maggie's childish nature has been utilized by negative people to dominate her social values and disrespect her dignity.

Her silence in her childhood has been portrayed emotionally since she has been unable to express her painful feelings. Her mother died during her childhood, and she has no one in her family to share her thoughts and ideas. Her father being drug addicted, cannot hold her hands tightly to educate her about social culture and the hostile social environment. Morley *et al.*, (2020, 1297) suggest that life becomes valueless and worthless when it falls on cruel hands and innocence gets damaged and distressed. Hence, Maggie's life is expressed as tragic, and Maggie's voice depicts the pain

and anxiety of women victims in society.

On the contrary, Holt *et al.*, (2020, 19) stated that illegal behaviour becomes a habit in many individuals when their criminal actions get no punishment. Thus, this novel has made many women mentally and physically strong enough to raise their voices to get secure and protected lifestyles. The novelist has portrayed the unfortunate situation of Maggie from her childhood and not getting scope to cherish her life with hope, love, and happiness.

Social dominance theory has been evoked from this novel in several situations when Maggie has been deprived of social security. Male dominating power has been depicted through her sexual assault that emotionally hurts the dignity of women readers highly. Many critics have compared this novel to "David Copperfield" due to the tragic narration of the situations the protagonist has gone through. Hence, this novel is significant, as the novelist has clearly expressed human bondage and the reactions and emotional conditions through Maggie's character. This novel mainly focuses on longing for emotional and love attachments and receiving abuse. Through the character of Maggie, the novelist narrates her innermost desires, hope, care, and building perfect loving relationships.

Mind Conflict

The character of Maggie is shown as travelling through mind conflict to have a fruitful life. As opined by Cheng *et al.*, (2020, 238), internal dispute arises when the person experiences the opposite situation as per expectations and suffers significantly in their livelihood. Hence, Maggie's kind conflict has been raised due to her disastrous experiences from her childhood. On the contrary, Franck *et al.*, (2019, 1044) suggested that people longed to build relationships to enjoy dependency and commitment. Thus, Maggie desired to create a connection to make her unbearable life bearable. In this novel, Terrence is depicted as a solid male dominion who sexually assaulted Maggie when she was nine and has asserted psychological power over Maggie. This reaction made Maggie stay silent and hopeless, and she preferred to overcome these terrible events in the care system. Her mother's death and her father's arrest made her desolate since she has been deprived of parental security, love, and care for which she longed throughout the novel.

The novelist has used stylist, flourishing, and well-mannered language to narrate the tragic story of her character, Maggie. The social norms formed in individuals' minds through family background, values,

beliefs, and parental care (Goswami *et al.*, 2021, 22). Thus, Maggie has not been able to get better social treatment in the care system, which leads her to receive horrible events. Jennifer has portrayed the unfortunate situation of Maggie from her childhood and not getting scope to cherish her life with hope, love, and happiness. Maggie's life has been expressed as tragic, and Maggie's voice depicts the pain and anxiety of women victims in society. The brutal men's power is mentioned throughout this novel, and the protagonist faces pain, poignancy, and traumatized emotional situation. The brutality increases mind conflict and psychologically destabilizes people (Bake *et al.*, 2019,22). Hence, this novel has evoked domination to encourage the victimized women to raise their voices to fight for their own rights.

In addition, the sufferings of the novel's protagonist make her lose trust and faith, and the novelist has portrayed with expressive language about the brutal, realistic structure of the society. The humiliation, which Maggie has received, has been emotionally evoked to get the attention of more female readers for making them mentally strong and eradicating mind conflicts. As opined by Ayoub *et al.*, (2021, 467), many humans invest emotionally attached to people but do not receive the same favour from those people. Hence, this situation causes mind conflict, and

they cannot control their behaviour and attitudes. The novelist has well portrayed the toxicity of the relationship that Maggie suffered and continued to suffer from inner conflicts. The sense of losing trust in people has been well-narrated through the character of Maggie, and this has caused mind conflict as she has been deprived of social dignity and loving relationships.

Critical Analysis of the Identity and Invisibility of Maggie

The concept of identity crisis is visible from the childhood days of Maggie, which has negatively impacted her lifestyle. The narrative of her life has made the readers think about the social system that has repeatedly hurt her. As mentioned by Motha (2019, 495), different discussion genres have been amalgamating in the narration of Maggie in Jennifer Down's *Bodies of Light*. In this context, it can be assessed that the geo-temporal context of the novel has shown that the childhood episodes of Maggie have led her life in a negative direction. The sexual assaults in her life in the care home have left her with unimaginable trauma that she later understood with time and experience.

The identity crisis has been made visible in the life of Maggie as she could not share her traumatized experiences with her parents or

elders. Her father has gone to jail due to drug addiction after her mother's death, which snatched her identity in the first place. As suggested by Jennings (2019, 1), the references to sexual assaults are not always understood by children that can leave a grim impact on their lives. It has precisely taken place in the protagonist's life as she was unable to express her feelings and the unthinkable incidents that have taken place in the care home. The authoritative position of the coach responsible for her assault has demonstrated the societal norm that does not even leave a child.

The knowingness and childish naiveté of Maggie's childhood days have later impacted her relationship with other men in her life as well. The recollection of her relationship with her father has also been made insecure by that coach during the time of the assaults. Sims (2019, 22) commented that children are prone to be moulded by society as their minds and way of thinking can be shaped by their associates. Hence, her identity as Maggie has been jeopardized by her personal experience and the misguidance of Terrance, the coach in the care home. Consequently, Maggie has started internalizing her feelings which have become dangerous for her to create her own identity.

However, the story unfolds with Maggie and the guidance of Mrs. Judith, who has only loved her

as a foster parent. The story shows that the lady is supremely sensible and has provided a sense of certainty for Maggie. As Ferro *et al.*, (2022, 14) discussed, children, are required to feel safe and secure as it can make them vulnerable later in their lives. It has precisely been seen for Maggie as Judith has expressed her disappointment after knowing about the toxic relationship with Ned. Her decision-making ability has also suffered, and her experiences have influenced them.

Critical Evaluation of Maggie's Relationship with the Light of Her Body

The life choices of Maggie are understandable through her experiences from the beginning of the story. The darkness in her life has led her toward unpleasant experiences developing her personality. As elaborated by Leslie (2021, 100), the nature of human beings is complex, and the negative impacts should not be indulged in their life choices. However, Maggie has been unable to take any positive decisions in her life due to the unwanted experiences that she has gone through. Moreover, she has not had any significant opportunity to make decisions for herself.

Young women and their dependency on men have always been a concern in a different society. The patriarchal culture in most

communities has also snatched the concept of women's empowerment. As demonstrated by Tekin *et al.*, (2023, 188), women's empowerment comes from the positive and effective self-decisions of females. In this way, the protagonist has also been shown to be influenced by the male characters in her life who have contributed nothing but trauma to her. These have caused darkness in her life, which was severely damaged by her own decisions. On the contrary, Mrs. Judith, her foster parent, has worked as a light in Maggie's life and supported her.

The experience of sadness in Maggie's life has generated utter disappointment in her as she was told against his father repeatedly for having a good relationship with him. The reasoning is understandable, as no one is to be blamed in this case of a mishap. According to Soysal *et al.*, (2019, 863), the light and darkness within people's lives are core components responsible for shaping an individual's life. It has been seen to take place in the life of Maggie, and her decision-making has also been influenced by it. Contrarily, Vom Lehn (2019, 305) argued that vulnerable human beings always try to find comfort through their thought process. Such is seen with Maggie as she considers the weakness of Ned during their intercourse and the end of it. This has guided her to find some light and the pretension that she also holds some power.

In this case, Down's empathy in this novel shows that it is only a concept that can minimize the influence of darkness. Maggie has started understanding the world compassionately, and her life has begun moving toward the light. As stated by Wufong *et al.*, (2019, 15), the gracelessness of human nature to see the world the way it is can harm their decisions. As a result, Maggie has understood the part of her faults and how Ned has treated her. However, the comfort of Judith is the only thing that has helped her shape her life the way it should have been.

The Interconnection between Light and Darkness in the Life of Maggie

The concept of light and darkness is visible in the narration of Maggie's life, which has left an imprint of the interconnection between these two concepts. The number of setbacks in her life has caused severe damage that she repents for. As per Argentiero *et al.*, (2021, 106602) view, the light in an individual's life comes from enjoyment in small moments. Maggie has also gone through such situations as her voice has not been filled with self-pity. Furthermore, she has eventually understood how the world works, which has refined her decisions to an extent. The social ailment has been understood by her, which has helped enlighten her in specific moments.

The struggle of Maggie from her childhood and the gradual process of her overcoming the immense trauma have worked as significant concepts in this work by Jennifer Down. In this case, it can be mentioned that the seriousness of childhood trauma is seen as the primary reason behind the darkness in the decisions for the rest of the life. Therefore, the protagonist has been observed to be transforming through the decisions that have interwoven for her. However, as Marangoni *et al.*, (2022, 5346) argued, the traumatized incidents in people's lives should be seen as knowledge about life. How Maggie's life has unfolded has left her with several experiences that have assisted her in evolving with the situations. As a result, she has created a wonderful image out of her life that genuinely inspires in the story's context.

The gravitation of Maggie's life has been seen to be distress with the decisions that have made her life miserable. The catatonic episodes in her life have been observed that have created a significant impact on her life and oriented decisions. As mentioned by Maggi *et al.*, (2020, 694), the power of human beings falls into the decision-making processes and their effectiveness in their respective lives. Therefore, the outline of her life shows the downfall that devastated her. In this way, the struggles of her life have made it unspeakable that have produced

light in her life to an extent. The rapid changes in her life have also shown the respective features which have contributed generously to her life.

The concepts of light and darkness are further shown in this novel as the sentimental factors of Maggie's life have generated a mixture. Different stages of the growing stages in Maggie's life have sincerely demonstrated how she has coped with the situations. As suggested by Maggi *et al.*, (2020, 5618), the potential of women should be recognized as it can produce significant life choices and methods to overcome difficult situations. Hence, the rapid experiences and knowledge from them have taught the protagonist about life and have been able to change her outlook on life.

The Concept of Existential Crisis in the Life of Maggie

An existential crisis can decentralize the morals and values of a human beings. The opportunity to create a meaningful purpose and work accordingly is negative in this context. As Gitlin *et al.*, (2020, 5) described, an existential crisis can make people frequently wonder about their inherent purpose in life. Moreover, the question of existence can also come into the mind of the human being through the concept of existential crisis. In this case, it has

been noted that the sense of meaningless is the crucial feature of this notion that is visible in Maggie's life. *Bodies of Light* have shown the existence of its protagonist as it is regarded as an internal crisis. The critical dimension of her life has gradually taught her about the importance of her life's meaning.

This concept has been shown as the childhood of the leading character has made several impacts and made her process them for a long time. In this way, she has started questioning the deeper feelings that have generated this crisis in her life. As demonstrated by Valaskivi (2019, 309), existential anxiety casts a negative effect on an individual's life as it makes an individual question everything associated with them. On another note, emotional pain is considered one of the critical factors of the existential crisis present in Maggie's life from her childhood. The sense of uncertainty has always been there that has made her question her identity. It has worked in the form of a crisis that has made her insecure throughout the story.

On the other hand, the emotional torment that Maggie has faced has demonstrated the distress and meaninglessness that has caused angst in her. However, Maggie has uncovered the meaning of her life by understanding the methods to overcome such scenarios. As elaborated by Wangchuk (2021, 8), isolation is a significant element of

existentialism that can lead an individual toward emptiness. Moreover, Maggie has gone through a tough time and eventually has made herself free from all the ties and knots of her past experiences. In this way, the existential crisis in her life has gradually gone, which has provided meaning to her existence.

It has provided the different senses of darkness followed by light in Maggie, and her life's purpose has been found. She has also understood the misconceptions she held about her father throughout her life. According to Morrow (2021, 41), the living condition of a human being can be changed with the help of retrospection and evaluating one's life. The roles and responsibilities can be the measurement of purpose one takes to untie the issues in their life. Consequently, the combination of light and darkness has been made visible within her capacity for self-awareness.

Conclusion

The study has discussed the importance of critical evaluation for representing the key components of a novel. Jennifer Down has chosen and

written *Bodies of Light*, showing several insights into the story's protagonist. Different twists and terms of Maggie's life have been discussed during the execution of the study. As a result, the emotional, psychological, and other aspects of her life have been depicted within the context of the study. The theme for critical evaluation consists of individual identity, trauma, and dark memories of her life. As a result, the unfathomable losses in the protagonist's life have helped depict the thematic analysis.

The childhood trauma of Maggie has created a negative impact on her life and her decisions. It has significantly influenced her relationships with other associates, which have been elaborated on during the project context. The senses of loss and wrong judgments have also been seen to impact her life which has been made the prominent themes of this study. Moreover, Maggie has been observed to have trust issues due to her experiences from childhood. The thrilling ropes in her life have created a sense of insecurity, and the abuses for her have turned her into the way she becomes at the end of the story.

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