

Retreating Vulnerability and Queerness of Disabled Women in Anne Finger's *Call Me Ahab*

Mohana Priya A

Research Scholar (Ph.D.) Full-Time

PG and Research Department of English

Nehru Memorial College (Autonomous), Puthanampatti

Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu

Abstract

People still view disabled women and members of LGBTQ communities as outcasts, and their multiple oppressed statuses deeply shape their lives. For such people, these different combinations of gender, sexuality, and disability make them vulnerable. Another area that retraced the suffering of these people is the regression of feminism in disability studies and queer theory. However, disabled women and the LGBTQ+ community are placed on the darker side. Therefore, this article intends to discuss how literary tales incorporate periods of weakness to their benefit. Yet, the revival of marginalized people's lives was mostly based on narrative and power. This research examines the multifaceted relationship between their impairment and a variety of contexts—aggression, medical care disparities, public attitudes, and barriers. It uses a thematic and textual analysis of *Call Me Ahab* by disabled American activist and writer Anne Finger. Therefore, to look at how society and the public look at the plight of the gay crips in tales, Finger uses two leading legendary women of the twentieth century—Frida Kahlo and Helen Keller. Similarly, the paper gives a depiction of the social existence of Frida and Helena, whom the writer sees as people who partly apply power in the construction of their social realities.

Keywords: Discrimination, Disabled women, Power of Resilience, Vulnerability, Freedom.

Introduction

Literature has been a powerful determinant of how society perceives or treats subordinate groups, including the LGBTQIA+ minority and those with disabilities. Moreover, current literature has improved in offering a positive representation of the homosexual and the disabled. The negative impacts have reduced for the people of LGBT and the disabled as they participate in society. Novel, scholarly works such as literature, disability, and lesbian-gay bisexual trans intersecting queer questioning and aspiring all contribute to present a picture of how stigma, identity, and social equal rights reform can be a complicated ball game. This paper is devoted to the analysis of the background of disability studies, sexual liberalism, and queer of color critique of Finger's *Call Me Ahab*. This paper considers the changed lives of disabled persons and lesbians, the development of Finger's troping, and how disability analysis has increased our ability to understand these tales. In *Call Me Ahab* Finger criticizes the gay physical and mental intellectual desire of the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo. In this brief narrative, Finger describes her childhood as a mere figment of others's imaginations with real-life artifacts. In this sense, reflective, she tells the family, about the problem of social unfairness, and an important understanding of the past.

Indeed, Finger's artwork reveals the untoward circumstances that poor people experience in the physical realm. A social model of disability would make people change their attitude toward persons with disabilities. Kaleigh Trace's works have this aspect because disability and sexuality have numerous resources from activists and theorists in disability and queer theory like Margaret Campbell, Shuttleworth, and Linda Mona. That is why queerness and sensitivity narrow the chances of the participation of LGBT persons and their status as social pariahs. These are authors such as Mara Pieri, Christopher A. Riddle, Erving Goffman, Meredith Joan Wiggins, and Carrie Sandhal who focus on queerness and vulnerability. More specifically, this paper aims to evaluate how Finger's *Call Me Ahab* accentuates the homosexual and disabled, oppressed, and suffering female characters, as well as their inspiring resistance towards postcolonial and neocolonial oppression based on their sexual and disability performativity.

Review of Literature

Finger's literary works explore vulnerability and queer issues and attempt to explain the nexus between disability and queerness. The concept of vulnerability is embraced as a sign of power and unacceptance as a sign of oppression. Nonetheless, Finger's painful words impacted writers and theorists; striving to further acknowledge her role in the construction of disability, sexuality, and queer theorizations. Finger (1992) writes "the source of our deeper oppression; it is also often the source of our deepest pain" (9). It would be reasonable to assume that before people campaigned for sexual and relationship equality, those with disability campaigned to gain access to society. Audacities that Finger's agonized comments provoked a flow of authors and thinkers to push further. There are many scholarly analyses of Finger's work that consider different aspects of her impact on disability, sexual orientation as well as queer culture, and this literature review discusses them all.

According to Finger's report *Queering the Crip, Crippling the Queer*, provoking questions were about disabilities and queerness in painting at Schwules Museum under the title "Homosexuality". Finger observed the wall text quotes by Lennard Davis. He draws attention to this statue, which is evident but nearly never acknowledged. Davis, a disability studies theory expert, points out "the irony of the Venus de Milo statue, the most beautiful female statue in the world, the legs of which are missing" (Finger, *Queering the Crip* 1). Davis underscores the relevance of the statue to disability studies by pointing to both its perfect size and shape, and its impaired condition. As it has been mentioned before, Sandahl notes that crip/queer might be the most socially privileged group that can reveal how the two categories intersect, where they are similar, and where they find differences. However, She pointed out that "crip, queer, solo autobiographical performance artists who self-identify as both crip and queer in their performances give us instead an embodied text" (Sandahl 25).

Rachel Michels's *Re-Imagined Identity* is an elaborate concept of history, disability in the culture representing the social sense, family history, individual history, and physical and social history of the impaired body. Michel pointed out that 'Finger, a disabled woman, employs her definition of past to reconstruct the accounts of personhood and social belonging'. They illustrate how a regenerative interpretation of the past makes it possible to regenerate a person's present and future identification, proving the subjective bend of cultural and individual histories that constitute the social mind (Michels iv). Finger's not only to inform and raise consciousness but also to open up new ways for our encounters with disability narratives to stimulate our creative imagination. Meredith Joan Wiggins (2013)

deals with the modification steps to explore the role of sexuality, queerness, or crip thoughts among disabled people with the help of Finger's words. Wiggins pointed out that Finger focused on the "exclusion of disabled people through deepest suffering and oppression in sexuality and queer/crip" (Wiggins 4). This paper will address this issue of vulnerability, and queerness and explore disabled women in greater depth in Finger's *Call Me Ahab*. This research shows that people with disabilities face individual barriers to disability and sexual issues in an attempt to overcome environmental and social abuse. Hand-painted portrayed such features of Keller's persona as well as Frida Kahlo. Thus, shared and disabled women are presented as important in constructing their subjectivity within the discursive fields of disability/eroticism. In the paper, Finger analyzes how being queer is internalized and vulnerable in two cases of Helen and Frida. The focus is again on role swaps and the frustration that people experience when dealing with discrimination and marginalization. Finally, both Helen and Frida demonstrate that the readiness to open up is one of the human emotions that the characters use to build up strength.

Methodology

The paper adopts a method known as textual analysis. Finger's *Call Me Ahab* explores many themes: identity and disability in relationships. This methodology provides an organized method of looking at Helen and Frida's character and provides means to explain important concepts and tools of the narratorial strategy employed by Finger. She uses strategies, themes, and subjects that show people with a disability positively. Secondly, it examines how Finger employs creative storytelling in a fictitious portrayal to progress the character to respond to the artistic representation of sexuality and disability and queer and vulnerable disability.

Finger's Role in Sexuality and Disability

Finger's perspective on sexuality issues, she writes "Sexuality is often the source of our deepest oppression; it also often the source of our deepest pain. It is easier for us to talk about and formulate strategies of discrimination in employment, education, and housing than talk about our exclusion from sexuality and reproduction" (Finger, Past Due 3). The above-declared statement has been used in many research works for more than 30 years. A pioneer work to examine and triage disabled women out of marriage and childbearing was Finger's (1992) *Forbidden Fruit*. It is one of the cruelest and most widespread biases. However, This paper brings out the denigration of the sexual and reproductive rights of the disabled while at the same time discussing the consequences of marriage and starting a family. Finger is an interesting case in the life of a paraplegic spotted DeVonna Cervantes who faced discriminative treatment on grounds of her sexual orientation. It also brings out the perversion of the women's movement to issues of disability and the abortionists' rights movement which used problems of "defective fetuses and women's troubles" (Finger "Forbidden Fruit" 9). Disregarding to sexual and reproductive rights of disabled people is what Finger takes his time to point out is important in general. Adams, Reiss, and Serlin's *Keywords* highlighted the concept of sexuality by McRuer. He is longest contribution to this area of study spans 20 years and his major contributions to disability studies especially concerning the issue of sexuality and disability McRuer stated that, "Sexuality does indeed remain, two decades later, a "source of oppression" for disabled people, but it has also become a profoundly productive site for invention, experimentation, and transformation" (McRuer 170). Newly, McRuer and Mollow's *Sex and Disability* observed Finger's sexuality

as “our need for more than rights, and for cultural justice” (McRuer and Mollow 2). These shows that sexuality represents our basic rights and cultural judgement of disabled people. Thus, analyzing society, Finger also challenges ideas that most of the time are taken to be universal and raises concern over the rights of those with disability concerning their sexualities.

Hellen Keller is one of the famous historical figures when discussing the topic of disability, and their works and existence helped to impose a different view on the world. Finger most likely employs Helen’s writing to demonstrate how problematic it can be for a person with a disability to negotiate everyday culturally defined sexual scripts. Hanna Musiol’s *Feminist Thought* agreed with Finger’s Helen and Frida is a funny, provocative, and imaginative short story that touches the issue of sexual and physical oppression. Musiol writes,

This story shatters conventional representations of women with disabilities and challenges the audience with common prejudices of disabled bodies, normative beauty, and sexuality. Disability is a complex subject and causes different layers of oppression in society. While most material accessibility issues have progressed politically and in society, more abstract issues of representation and assumptions are still apparent in society. “Helen and Frida” certainly offers critical thinking on the subject of women and disability while also using the forms of the short story to do so creatively and playfully (Musiol 42).

Understanding Helen’s codeswitching also provides relevant degrees of freedom as a deafblind person to address how a person’s identity affects their disability. Finger can draw information from Helen’s struggle against discrimination against the disabled and her work on demystifying myths about disabled people’s potential and dreams. As a rejection of the dominant notions that everyone with a disability lives an easy and fulfilling life, suffering turns Helen’s words and actions into a counter-narrative that shows that disabled people have diverse lives. One of these is the Mexico-born artist Frida Kahlo, whose vivid self-portraits shocked the world and who lived and worked through sexualities and disabilities. Frida had some health issues, first, when several years old she was involved in a grave bus accident and she had poliomyelitis, which resulted in her physical disability. They influenced the content of the art that she produced most of which focused on issues concerning survival, pain, and compliance. The finger may analyze how Kahlo painted her body and disability to challenge stereotypical thinking of a beautiful woman’s body and the way she compensated for the disability. Kahlo was destroying the stereotype that disabled people should be embarrassed about their talents or should consider it fit to hide them in whatever way they could offer themselves as sex objects. Finger writes, “A man or women of steel, a body impervious to disease, never facing those deaths of the old physical self that are a sort of skin-shedding” (Finger, *Past Due* 43). It will also prove how Finger’s account and ideas encapsulate all facets of biology and body physiologies. Moreover, Musiol examines the social status of the abnormal and people with odd-some or handicapped bodies. He represents Helen and Frida’s life in a cheerful and colorful tone which denies stereotyped notions of crippled bodies and personalities. More incredibly, this story negates a pernicious stereotype that if one today has a ‘sexualized’ body, one is not a cripple (41).

Additionally, it is an exchange between the two artists: Helen and Frida about interpreting the oppressions of disability and sexuality, the story of Helen and Frida is both

daring, exotic, and funny. Traditional pictures of people with impairments offer our bodies by themselves. We turn our backs to the camera and are posing. Finger writes,

In conventional photographs of disabled people, our bodies are posed alone. We stare into the camera, our bodies immobilized, our “defects” displayed. Whatever the story of our life was, it is over. The narrative has happened. Our bodies are ruins. The viewer no more asks what will happen next than the traveler gazing at the Parthenon or the Colosseum wonders about its future, other than to hope it will remain forever unchanged (Finger, “Writing Disabled Lives: Beyond the Singular” 611).

This demonstrates how disabled people are recorded and standing straight face to the camera, motionless, our “flaws” or disabilities bleakly exposed. No matter what the plot of our life, it is now history! In this paper, Finger notes that since most people are familiar with handicapped persons being portrayed in another post discussed on the ASC Queer Theory blog (2010) about Helen and Frida in the narrative. Finger gives new life to two iconic American women: Frida who can say that she is angry at being a crippled woman, and Helen who can investigate her sexuality. The data gathered from the blog post, “Through the script, Anne gives Helen chances to explore her sexuality, while Frida is allowed to talk about the pain that she feels as a disabled woman. Finger attempts to accomplish what the writers of history have failed to do; Finger gives the disabled women a chance to tell their own story, in their bodies” (Helen and Frida). Thus, Finger focusing on disabled women’s stories and concerns responds to the issue of the connection between the adoption of gender roles and societal perception of disability. This is because according to her a society will always open a wider area for a group of people with able-bodied bodies than for the disabled. According to Tobin Siebers’s article *Disability as Masquerade*, he explored the ability “to pass or not to pass” (Siebers 2). But do these two accounts of disability embody what is considered by most as hiding one’s identity? Finger, in his concept for *Call Me Ahab*, acknowledges white mainstream while pointing out that disabled people of color receive even worse treatment than others.

Helen and Frida’s Vulnerability and Queerness

Vulnerability and Queerness are important to most disabled people who might find more attraction in a possible companion through their level of intelligence than sexual orientation. For disabled people, conversation with people and sharing thoughts are potent because they cause a distinct feeling of intimacy. In 2023, Goulden and Kattari focused on sexual orientation, and sexuality among the disability community, It does not matter whether people debate philosophy, science, politics, or literature; idea exchange leads to emotional closeness and desire. What people need to understand is the fact that being a sapiosexual does not mean having some sort of an attitude of being higher or elitist in some manner. Finger thinks “I must be a lesbian” (Finger *Call Me Ahab* 13) Therefore, Finger has read how social media portrays disabled people, which makes her scared, and her imaginary queerness of love for Finger towards Helen and Frida. On the contrary, Finger honors the difference in human intellect as well as the way people wish to showcase it. queerness attraction is omnipresent as it targets people with intense curiosity, and a strong desire to learn; it does not prevail in the elites of the school and the known occupations only. In addition, sapiosexuality defies dominant male and female roles/sexist thinking in that it promotes intelligence contrary to other conventional or conventional gender norms and practices. Finger will explore how

Helen and Frida consider sexuality and disability as psychological and cultural enticements to intellect from the standpoint of interpersonal compatibility in Helen and Frida.

The disability queer theorist, Alison Kafer, raises awareness of the role that impairments play in determining attractiveness and desire noting that, “One’s experience can create one’s desire” (Kafer 45). I think that this understanding interferes with the approaches that describe attraction as mostly focused on physical appearance because it calls attention to the multifaceted connections between body, desire, and self. Despite the methodological issues that arise when trying to map object choices onto embodied ones, Finger’s Helen and Frida are suggestive of the desires that Kafer posits for bodies. Finger writes,

I can’t yet image a world where these two might meet: the face that does not live under the reign of its reflection with the face that has spent its life looking in the mirror; the woman who turns her rapt face up toward others and the woman who exhibits her scars as talismans; the one who is only, only and the one who is everything but. I will turn the screen to snow (Finger, *Call Me Ahab* 13).

In the real life of Helen and Frida, the core notions of Finger, such as sapiosexuality and disability in body as well as mind, can be viewed. Finger points out that social hierarchy and daily realities influence people’s desires. As a disabled writer Finger was able to narrate the experiences of Helen and Frida. The imaginary narratives force Finger to direct the scene otherwise. Finger meditates analytically on how the deconstructiveness of intelligence and ability shape and define the aesthetics and desirability within the frameworks of sapiosexuality.

As for disabled margins, Helen and Frida depict the dislocation of disabled bodies in mundane activities in the specific article.

In bringing the two together in the plot, Finger provides an opportunity that disabled individuals are often denied. Helen’s denial of love stems from society’s idea of love and how it is felt. The connection that sparks the kiss between Helen and Frida is queer. Helen cannot see and eyes are the key to one’s soul. Helen cannot hear which further makes her incapable of sensing desire. Helen however can sense Frida to believe disability is possible in queer theory. If Helen could feel without seeing or hearing then the rubric for sensuality requires redefining. Thus, the general projection of our senses as sexual enhancers is false as is our projection of disabled bodies (*Helen and Frida*).

In the option of imagination dialogue between the two heroines is presented by Finger.

It is provocative behavior that goes against what history has permitted them to say and do. Through the screenplay, Frida can discuss her pain at being a crippled woman, while Finger allows Helen to explore her sexuality. By allowing the crippled women to relate their own stories to their bodies, Finger aims to do what previous historical authors have not been able to do (*Helen and Frida*).

In Finger, the author looks at the life of Helen and Frida to expound on the importance of countering the structure of ableness and the belief that all body holds intellect and desire. Thus, Finger only – without any doubt – is the writer who lets the characters get a chance to tell their own stories in their bodies, which the rest of the writers reject.

Conclusion

In *Call Me Ahab*, Finger explores the convergence of disability and queerness, emphasizing the narratives of crippled women. The plot illustrates the threats that arise from the aforementioned characters' intersecting marginality and argues that such systems of oppression are only made worse by the societal structures in place. Using fictional retellings, Finger provides a rebuttal to the normative expectations regarding disability and queerness and explains how such identity can be a site of help, resistance, and solidarity. *Call Me Ahab* smuggles gimp women into the narrative as complex characters with an ability to traverse complicated social structures, defying the existing knowledge paradigms. This compels the audience to reconsider notions of normativity, beauty, and empowerment. Last but not least, the creation makes the case for a more expansive understanding of identity that takes into account all the different types of disabled queer women, showing that kind of advocacy and activism is needed and why it is needed.

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