

Marginalized Visibility: Exploring Magical Realism and Social Injustice in *If You Could See the Sun*

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Abstract

This study examines the theme of invisibility in Ann Liang's novel *If You Could See the Sun*, focusing on protagonist Alice's struggle against marginalization. Set in the elite environment of Airington, a prestigious school in Beijing, Alice contends with significant socioeconomic disparities between herself and her affluent classmates. The novel employs the device of magical realism, particularly through Alice's unique ability to become invisible, to explore themes of invisibility and marginalization. This seemingly fantastical power serves as a metaphor for Alice's feelings of being unseen and undervalued in a world dominated by privilege. By analysing Alice's initial use of her invisibility for financial gain and her subsequent journey towards self-acceptance and empowerment, this study aims to enlighten the complex relationship between her marginalized status and her transformation. *If You Could See the Sun* not only depicts the personal growth of a young girl but also offers a commentary on the social and psychological impacts of marginalization, enriched by the novel's adept use of magical realism.

Keywords: magical realism, marginalization, Ann Liang, invisibility, social injustice

ÖTEKİLEŞTİRİLMİŞ GÖRÜNÜRLÜK: EĞER BENİ GÖREBİLSEYDİNİZ'DE BÜYÜLÜ GERÇEKÇİLİK VE SOSYAL ADALETSİZLİĞİN İNCELENMESİ

Öz

Bu çalışma, Ann Liang'ın *Eğer Beni Görebilseydiniz* adlı romanındaki görünmezlik temasını, romanın baş kişisi Alice'in ötekileştirmeye karşı verdiği mücadeleye odaklanarak incelemektedir. Pekin'de prestijli bir okul olan Airington'un elit ortamında geçen romanda Alice, kendisi ve varlıklı sınıf arkadaşları arasındaki önemli sosyoekonomik eşitsizliklerle mücadele etmektedir. Ann Liang'ın bu romanında, görünmezlik ve ötekileştirme temaları ele alınırken büyümlü gerçekçilik, özellikle de Alice'in görünmez olma yeteneğinden istifade edilir. Görünüşte fantastik olan bu güç, Alice'in ayrıcalıklarının hakim olduğu bir dünyada görülmeme ve değer görmeme duyguları için bir metafor işlevi görmektedir. Bu çalışma, Alice'in başlangıçta görünmezliğini maddi kazanç için kullanmasını ve ardından kendini olduğu gibi kabul etme ve güçlenme yolunda yaptığı ilerlemesini analiz ederek, ötekileştirilmiş statüsü ile yaşadığı dönüşümler arasındaki karmaşık ilişkiyi gözler önüne sermeyi amaç edinmektedir. *Eğer Beni Görebilseydiniz* sadece genç bir kızın yaşadığı kişisel gelişimi anlatmakla kalmaz, aynı zamanda romanda büyümlü gerçekçiliğin ustaca kullanılmasıyla zenginleşen, ötekileştirmenin sosyal ve psikolojik etkileri üzerine de kapsamlı bir yorum sunar.

Anahtar sözcükler: büyümlü gerçekçilik, ötekileştirme, Ann Liang, görünmezlik, sosyal adaletsizlik

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INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on Alice's invisibility in Ann Liang's *If You Could See the Sun* to explore her struggle against marginalization. Set in the elite environment of Airington, a prestigious school in Beijing, Alice struggles against the strong socioeconomic disparities between herself and her wealthy classmates. The novel employs the device of magical realism, particularly through Alice's unique ability to become invisible, to emphasize themes of invisibility and marginalization. Power of invisibility, while seemingly a fantastical element, serves as a metaphor for Alice's feelings of being unseen and undervalued in a world dominated by privilege. By examining Alice's initial use of her invisibility for financial gain and her subsequent journey towards self-acceptance and empowerment, this study aims to highlight the intricate relationship between her marginalized status and her transformative path. Ultimately, *If You Could See the Sun* not only portrays the personal growth of a young girl but also provides a broader commentary on the social and psychological impacts of marginalization, enriched by the novel's successful use of magical realism.

Published in October 2022, *If You Could See the Sun* tells the story of Alice Sun. Alice has always felt unnoticed at her prestigious international boarding school in Beijing, where she stands out as the only scholarship student amidst China's wealthiest and most influential teenagers. However, she soon begins to turn invisible—literally. When her parents inform her that they can no longer afford her tuition, even with the scholarship, Alice devises a plan to capitalize on her unique ability by uncovering the scandalous secrets of her classmates for a fee. As the demands shift from minor scandals to serious crimes, Alice faces a moral dilemma: whether to compromise her conscience—or risk her life.

Alice's invisibility will serve as a tool to analyse the dynamics of social stratification and privilege in elite educational institutions in China. Alice's ability to become invisible symbolizes the often-overlooked struggles of marginalized individuals in spaces dominated by wealth and power. This power also serves as a metaphor for the hidden labour and emotional toll endured by those trying to navigate and succeed within such hierarchies. Turning her invisibility into money, Alice's actions lead to a deeper examination of the ethical implications of using personal advantage to survive in an unjust system.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF MAGICAL REALISM

In *If You Could See the Sun*, Alice's ability to become invisible is a magical element and it is woven into her otherwise realistic life at an elite boarding school. The narrative treats her invisibility as a given, without extensive explanations or justifications, which is a hallmark of magical realism. When the German art historian Franz Roh coined the term magical realism in 1925, he had absolutely no idea how far and over what geographical areas it would spread. As stated by Bowers "For Roh, the most important aspect of magic realist painting was that the mystery of the concrete object needed to be caught through painting realistically" (2005, p. 10). Following the publication of Angel Flores's article on magical realism in 1955, the concept gained prominence in literary criticism and was subsequently applied to authors who incorporated specific themes and techniques into their

works. Flores regards magical realism as “an amalgamation of realism and fantasy” (1955, p. 189) and explains it by referring to Kafka’s *Metamorphoses*: “The unreal happens as part of reality. The transformation of Gregor Samsa into a cockroach or bedbug [...] is not a matter of conjecture or discussion: it happened, and it was accepted by the other characters as an almost normal event” (1955, p. 191). In *If You Could See the Sun*, Alice’s invisibility is integrated into the fabric of her everyday life, much like Gregor Samsa’s transformation in Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*. Both narratives embody the essence of magical realism, where the fantastical is not questioned but accepted within the parameters of a realistic world. By presenting the extraordinary as ordinary, Liang and Kafka emphasize the relation between reality and fantasy, challenging readers to reconsider the boundaries of what is plausible.

In magical realism, as defined by Amaryll Beatrice Chanady, the fictitious world is not entirely divorced from reality (2020, p. 19). In magical-realist texts, magical elements are a natural part of the objective reality of the world depicted. They are supernatural phenomena that cannot be explained by science, but they occur in everyday life and are perceived and accepted as ordinary events that need no rational, logical or psychological explanation, let alone as dreams or hallucinations.

Some of magical realist writers are Gabriel García Márquez, Jorge Luis Borges, Toni Morrison, Salman Rushdie, Haruki Murakami and Günter Grass. However, young writers are also interested in magical realism and Ann Liang is one of them. Ann Liang is a New York Times and Indie bestselling author renowned for her critically acclaimed young adult novels *If You Could See the Sun*, *This Time It’s Real*, and *I Hope This Doesn’t Find You*. Born in Beijing, Liang spent her formative years travelling between China and Australia, ultimately acquiring an American accent. Liang, a rising figure in contemporary young adult fiction, has quickly garnered attention for her storytelling and keen insight into the adolescent experience. Liang’s multicultural background allows her to weave intricate narratives that resonate with a diverse readership. Her debut novel, *If You Could See the Sun*, exemplifies her ability to blend fantastical elements with pressing social issues, through her work, Liang not only entertains but also challenges readers to reflect on the complexities of modern adolescence, making her a significant voice in the genre.

As stated, the novel will be examined as an example of magical realism on the one hand, and on the other hand, in terms of a high school girl’s struggle against marginalisation. Marginalization, a pervasive social phenomenon, involves the systematic exclusion of individuals or groups from full participation in societal, economic, and political life. This exclusion often stems from factors such as socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, gender, or other identity markers, leading to diminished opportunities and invisibility within mainstream society. In Ann Liang’s novel *If You Could See the Sun*, the protagonist Alice Sun epitomizes the struggles faced by marginalized individuals within a privileged educational setting. In their study Causadias and Umaña-Taylor define marginalization as follows: “We define marginalization as a multidimensional, dynamic, context-dependent, and diverse web of processes, rooted in power imbalance and systematically directed toward specific groups and individuals, with probabilistic implications for development. (2018, p. 707). In the context of *If You Could See the Sun*, marginalization is depicted as a multifaceted and evolving experience for the protagonist, Alice Sun. In Causadias and Umaña-Taylor’s study the definition of

marginalization as a “multidimensional, dynamic, context-dependent, and diverse web of processes” is exemplified through Alice’s life at Airington, a prestigious school where socioeconomic disparities create a significant power imbalance. Alice’s marginalization is not limited to one aspect of her life but spans various dimensions, including social, economic, and educational realms. Her family’s financial struggles impact her ability to fit in socially and access the same opportunities as her wealthy classmates. Furthermore, Alice’s potential for personal and academic development is significantly affected by her marginalization. The financial pressures and social exclusion she faces threaten her ability to achieve her goals, reflecting marginalization’s impact on an individual’s development.

MARGINALIZATION AND THE FUNCTION OF INVISIBILITY IN *IF YOU COULD SEE THE SUN*

The novel opens by describing Alice’s poverty and the luxurious lives in her school -Airington. Alice’s inner voice highlights the importance of the school for her when she is on the stage during an award ceremony for being one of the most successful students of the school.

In my peripheral vision, I see the school slogan, Airington is Home, printed out in giant letters on a strung-up banner. But Airington isn’t home or isn’t just a home for someone like me; Airington is a ladder. The only ladder that could lift my parents out of their dingy flat on the outskirts of Beijing, that could close the distance between me and a seven-figure salary, that could ever allow me to stand as equals with someone like Henry Li on a large polished stage like this. How the hell am I meant to climb my way to the top without it? (2022, p. 30).

Alice sees Airington not just as an educational institution but as an important tool for social mobility. The metaphor of school as a ladder summarizes Alice’s ambition and the socioeconomic pressures she experiences. The ladder symbolizes the challenges of opportunity, progress and social ascension. It conveys the idea that education at Airington is Alice’s primary means of achieving her goals. The imagery of climbing the ladder also emphasizes the precarious nature of Alice’s aspirations, implying effort, struggle, and the potential for both success and failure. This reflects the broader theme of ambition and desire for upward mobility, a common motif in literature examining class dynamics. Annette Lareau’s book *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* provides valuable insights into how socioeconomic status influences children’s educational experiences and opportunities. Lareau describes how middle-class parents engage in “concerted cultivation,” (2011, p. 2) actively fostering their children’s talents and skills through organized activities and sustained interaction with institutions like schools. In contrast, working-class and poor parents often rely on the “accomplishment of natural growth” (2011, p. 3) where children have more unstructured time and less direct intervention in their educational activities. Alice’s perception of Airington as a ladder to success can be seen as an attempt to access the benefits of concerted cultivation, seeking the resources and opportunities that her wealthier peers take for granted.

Also, the slogan “Airington is Home” indicates a warm and nurturing environment. However, Alice’s comment reveals the opposite and highlights the irony of the school’s message. For her, Airington is a means to an end rather than a comforting home. This contrast underlines the disparity

between the idealized image of the school and the harsh reality faced by students from less privileged backgrounds. Elizabeth Aries and Maynard Seider in their study try to understand how class-based aspects of identity shape the college experience, and how the college experience influences the class-based aspects of the identity of lower-income students and conclude that lower-income students often feel out of place in elite educational environments, where the majority of their peers come from more affluent backgrounds (2005, p. 420). This sense of alienation is similar to Alice's experience at Airington, where she feels that the school is not truly a home for her but rather a means to achieve her goals.

Further, these sentences open a window into Alice's motivations and internal struggles and help the readers get to know the protagonist better. Her determination to lift her family out of poverty and achieve financial success demonstrates her strong sense of duty and resilience. Alice's awareness of her social position and desire to be equal to someone like Henry Li reveals her keen awareness of social hierarchies and her drive to overcome them. Henry Li is another major character in the novel. He is the son of one of the richest men in China and in contrast to other rich students, Henry is the most successful student at the school, along with Alice. Also, the urgency and desperation in Alice's rhetorical question, "How the hell am I meant to climb my way to the top without it?", conveys her anxiety and the high stakes of the educational journey. This emotional tone adds depth to Alice's character and makes her struggle more relatable for readers. These thoughts, just before Alice discovers her invisibility, help readers understand why she chooses to use her magical power for money since she needs it for school fees.

Alice's loneliness in the school made her feel like she was invisible at school. After she literally becomes invisible her life becomes more complicated for her. When she discovers that she is invisible she would like to share it with someone she trusts but she confesses that: "I do a quick mental scan of all the people I know, and what I end up with is a harsh, painful truth: I'm friendly with everybody...but I'm friends with nobody" (2022, p. 34). These ideas powerfully capture Alice's feelings of marginalization and identity struggles in a school dominated by wealthy students. This feeling of being marginalized is intensified by the economic differences between Alice and her classmates. The other students' wealth and privilege form an unseen barrier that hinders Alice from forming genuine relationships. Being "friendly with everybody" suggests that while she is known and perhaps liked on a surface level, there is a lack of deeper, more meaningful connections just because of her lower financial status as she explains her relationship with her roommate Chanel:

When we first moved into our dorms at the start of Year Seven, part of me had hoped we'd grow to become best friends [...] But then she started asking me to go out shopping with her and her rich fuerdai friends at places like Sanlitun Village and Guomao, where the designer bags sold probably cost more than my parents' entire flat. After I turned her down the third time with some vague, stammered excuse, she simply stopped asking (2022, p. 26).

Chanel's invitations to high-end shopping trips with her rich "fuerdai" (second-generation wealthy) friends at luxury locations like Sanlitun Village and Guomao highlight the stark economic disparities between Alice and her peers. These activities are financially inaccessible to Alice, emphasizing the gap between their worlds. This economic divide creates an "invisible barrier" that

prevents Alice from participating in the social activities that bond with her peers, thereby exacerbating her sense of marginalization. In her study, Lareau states that: (Middle class) peers are never denied participation in an activity because of its cost. [...] In both white and Black working-class and poor homes the opposite is true. Financial matters are discussed openly and nearly constantly, and children are well aware of what their parents can or cannot afford to spend money on" (2011, p. 59). Alice's exclusion from Chanel's high-end shopping trips mirrors the economic stratification that Lareau describes, where financial constraints shape a child's social interactions and opportunities. Just as Alice's awareness of her family's financial limitations influences her decisions and deepens her social isolation, Lareau's analysis highlights how economic disparities create tangible and intangible barriers woven into the fabric of everyday life.

Lareau explains that since economic concerns are openly discussed in the households, children of working-class and poor families are acutely aware of their financial limitations. These children often face social exclusion because they cannot afford to participate in certain activities that are accessible to their wealthier peers. This dynamic is evident in Alice's experience at Airington. Alice's roommate, coming from a wealthy background, invites Alice to join her and her wealthy friends for shopping trips to high-end areas where the cost of goods is exorbitant. This invitation, although seemingly friendly, highlights the economic gap between Alice and her peers. Alice's inability to participate in these activities due to financial constraints forces her to repeatedly decline the invitations. Her vague and stammered excuses reflect her awareness of her economic limitations and her discomfort in openly discussing them. After turning down these invitations several times, Alice's roommate stops asking, which indicates a subtle but significant social exclusion based on economic disparity. Alice's experience exemplifies Lareau's observation that participation in social activities is often dictated by economic capability, and those who cannot afford to join are effectively marginalized. Thus, Lareau's insights into how financial constraints impact social interactions provide a clear framework for understanding Alice's marginalization at Airington. Her economic background not only isolates her socially but also deprives her of the opportunity to form meaningful connections, reinforcing the divide between her and her wealthier classmates.

Alice goes to Henry's room after some thought about who to share her invisibility with. She sits next to him and calls out. Alice is shocked by Henry's calm reaction to this extraordinary situation. The interaction begins with Henry's calm response to an extraordinary event, showing one of the key elements of magical realism: the coexistence of the mundane and the magical. Henry's reaction, described as a "severe understatement," contrasts sharply with the gravity of the situation, highlighting how the characters perceive and respond to the magical elements interwoven into their reality:

Then, unbelievably, his usual mask of calm falls back into place.

"How...strange," he says after a long silence.

I roll my eyes at this severe understatement, then remember that of course, he can't see me.

Great. Now I can't even spite him properly.

"It's more than strange," I say aloud. "It should be—I mean, this should be impossible."

(2022, p. 37)

Here Alice's frustration with Henry's calmness and her emphasis on the impossibility of the situation reflects the tension between accepting and questioning the magical elements. Her internal conflict "I roll my eyes...he can't see me" adds a layer of humour and irony, typical of magical realism, where characters often navigate the absurd with a mix of disbelief and acceptance. Alice's statement, "It should be—I mean, this should be impossible," directly addresses the tension between the rational and the magical. Her struggle to articulate the impossibility reflects the genre's tendency to undermine the ordinary with the extraordinary. The dialogue captures the essence of magical realism by presenting the impossible as a part of everyday life, challenging the characters and readers' understanding of what is real. In *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, Zamora and Faris explore how magical realism integrates the supernatural into the everyday, presenting it as an accepted and normalized aspect of reality. They examine several magical realist texts and conclude that: "the supernatural is not a simple or obvious matter, but it is an ordinary matter, an everyday occurrence — admitted, accepted, and integrated into the rationality and materiality of literary realism. Magic is no longer quixotic madness, but normative and normalizing" (3). In this dialogue, Henry's reaction to Alice's invisibility exemplifies the integration of the supernatural into the everyday. His calm response, "How...strange," suggests that he sees Alice's invisibility not as an impossible anomaly, but as something that, while unusual, can be accepted and integrated into their reality. This aligns with Zamora and Faris's assertion that in magical realism, the supernatural is admitted and accepted as part of the rational world.

Alice, who cannot make close friends at school because of her low income and whose family wants her to leave school next year because they cannot afford to pay the school instalments, is aware that she is stigmatised as poor in her life and that this stigma makes her 'other', even though she is not explicitly told this. In this sense, she decides to use her sudden invisibility to earn money. She sets up a mobile application named 'Beijing Ghost' with Henry's support and starts to collect requests for money from there. Alice's thoughts and her plans on this subject are as follows:

But right now, my wants are bigger than my fears. [...] With the profit I make, I could stay here at Airington and complete my IBs instead of taking the gaokao or moving across the world, pay the 250,000 RMB needed for my school fees, maybe even my college tuition, and give all the extra money to my parents, to Aunt. I could treat Baba and Mama to a real feast, at a proper Peking duck restaurant where they carve the meat right in front of us, buy Mama expensive hand creams and lotions to undo the damage from all that scrubbing and soaking around in disinfectants at the hospital, get her and Baba a car so they never have to squeeze into the subway at peak hour again...(2022, p. 59).

The expression "my wants are bigger than my fears" reveals Alice's desperation and ambition. Her willingness to pursue a risky plan shows how marginalization can drive individuals to take bold actions in hopes of improving their circumstances. This ambition is rooted in a desire not just for personal advancement, but for alleviating her family's hardships. Her plans to help her parents highlight the burden she feels to lift her family out of poverty. Alice's detailed plans for how she would use the money reflect her acute awareness of her family's financial struggles. The specificity of her desires—paying school fees, treating her parents to a feast, buying a car—illustrates the tangible impacts of socioeconomic marginalization on her and her family's daily lives. Her reference

to the 250,000 RMB needed for school fees indicate the economic barriers she faces in accessing education, a key factor in her sense of marginalization at Airington. The contrast between Alice's current life and the life she envisions with financial success emphasizes her marginalized status. The idea of treating her parents to a "real feast" and buying "expensive hand creams" for her mother contrasts sharply with their current financial constraints. This contrast highlights the gap between Alice's reality and the wealthier environment of Airington, where such luxuries are likely taken for granted by her peers. Alice's contemplation of her future—staying at Airington versus taking the gaokao or moving across the world—reflects her struggle with identity and belonging. The financial barriers she faces at Airington show her marginalization within a privileged environment. Her plans are not just about financial security but also about securing a place where she feels she belongs, further emphasizing the connection between economic status and social inclusion.

Alice's thoughts provide a vivid depiction of her sense of marginalization and the contrast between her socioeconomic background and the affluent environment she finds herself in. Her first job through the mobile app is to find out whether a student's father is cheating on her mother. Alice goes to a shopping mall where rich people hang out to follow the man. The contrast she experiences there is expressed as follows: "It's a completely different world from the tiny supermarkets that always stink of raw fish and the rundown shops near my parents' flat [...] I can't help feeling like a dog who's wandered into wolf territory" (2022, p. 69). The comparison between the "tiny supermarkets that always stink of raw fish" near her parents' flat and the presumably upscale environment she is currently in highlights the significant economic disparities she experiences. This contrast emphasizes her marginalized status, as she comes from a lower socioeconomic background and now navigates a world of wealth and privilege.

Alice's expression of feeling "like a dog who's wandered into wolf territory" powerfully conveys her sense of marginalization and vulnerability. The imagery of a dog among wolves suggests that she feels out of place, threatened, and inferior in this new environment. Also, the imagery of a "dog" versus "wolves" implies a hierarchy where she sees herself as less powerful and more vulnerable compared to those around her. This sense of not belonging is a common experience for individuals who are marginalized, as they often feel out of place and unwelcome in spaces dominated by those with more power and privilege. The metaphor of a dog in wolf territory also suggests themes of survival and adaptation. Alice's awareness of her marginalized position implies a need to be cautious and strategic to navigate this new environment successfully. This aspect of her thoughts reflects the broader experience of marginalized individuals who must often develop resilience and adaptability to survive in spaces where they feel unwelcome or threatened. According to Beverley Skeggs in *Formations of Class & Gender: Becoming Respectable*, respectability is seen as the property of the affluent, those who are valued and legitimized by society. She explains that "Respectability would not be something to desire, to prove and to achieve, if it had not been seen to be a property of 'others', those who were valued and legitimated" (1997, p. 1). When Alice's feeling highlights her outsider status in a world where respectability is inherent to the wealthy patrons. The respectability embodied by the mall's patrons is a marker of their socio-economic status and legitimacy, which Alice feels she lacks. Based on Skeggs's analysis it is seen that respectability is

associated with affluence, highlighting the systemic inequalities that shape Alice's interactions and self-perception.

Alice's thoughts reveal a deep longing for the normalcy and ease that her wealthier peers experience when she goes to another luxurious shopping mall for another request from the mobile app, she is again shocked by what she sees, compares her life with her classmates and thinks: "Is this how it feels? [...] To be someone like Chanel, Rainie, or Henry? To come to a place like this on any old weekday and just...have fun? Just *live*, without worrying about opportunity costs and paying out school fees?" (2022, p. 149). She yearns to "just...have fun" and "just live" without the constant anxiety about financial issues and educational costs. This longing indicates her desire to escape the pressures of her marginalized status and experience the carefree lifestyle that she observes in others. The mention of "opportunity costs" and "paying out school fees" highlights the financial burdens that dominate Alice's life. These economic pressures affect her ability to enjoy life and participate fully in the same activities as her wealthier peers. This focus on financial burdens illustrates how socioeconomic status can limit one's experiences and opportunities, leading to a sense of exclusion and marginalization. Alice's thoughts reveal the profound impact of socioeconomic marginalization on her daily life, emotional state, and aspirations. Her reflections show the significant differences between her experiences and those of her wealthier peers, highlighting the broader implications of economic inequality and the desire for a more inclusive and equitable society. Further, Alice is expressing her envy and longing for the effortless lifestyle enjoyed by her wealthy peers. She desires not just financial stability but the freedom to enjoy life without constant worries about money as stated by Andrew Sayer in his study *The Moral Significance of Class*: "The poor are not clamouring for poverty to be legitimised and valued. They want to escape or abolish their class position rather than affirm it [...] they do not merely want more material wealth, but recognition and respect" (2005, p. 53). Sayer highlights that those in poverty seek to escape their disadvantaged position and aspire to be recognized and respected in society, not just to acquire more wealth. Alice's envy of her classmates' ability to 'just live' shows her desire for a life where she is not constantly burdened by financial stress. More than just wanting money, Alice craves the respect and recognition that come with being able to participate fully and freely in social activities.

As a scholarship student in an elite environment, Alice is acutely conscious of the societal and economic divides that define her position. Her longing for wealth and respect shows her desire to escape the limitations imposed by her marginalized identity, yet her abrupt realization highlights the internal struggle between ambition and the inescapable realities of her background. One day her English teacher asks what she wants in life. She tells many things, but her first sentence is "I want to be respected. I want to be rich" (2022, p. 152). But she stops suddenly, and she is described as follows: "With a sharp jolt I feel all the way down to my bones, as if I've fallen from a great height, I remember who I am, and who I am not" (2022, p. 152). Alice's initial declaration reflects her deep-seated desire to overcome her marginalized status. Respect and wealth are seen as means to gain social validation and escape the limitations imposed by her socioeconomic background. These aspirations highlight the impact of her current struggles, where financial insecurity and social marginalization drive her to seek a future that offers stability and recognition. The abrupt change in her demeanour signifies

a moment of acute self-awareness. This physical description shows the intensity of her realization and the emotional impact it has on her. This moment of realization brings her back to the present reality of her situation, contrasting her lofty aspirations with her current marginalized status. Alice's sudden stop and the ensuing self-reflection highlight the internal conflict between her dreams and the reality of her circumstances. Her aspirations to be respected and wealthy clash with her current identity, shaped by socioeconomic limitations. This conflict is a common experience for marginalized individuals who aspire to transcend their current status but are constantly reminded of the barriers they face. Sennett and Cobb in their study claim that "the activities which keep people moving in a class society, which make them seek more money, more possessions, higher-status jobs, do not originate in a materialistic desire, or even sensuous appreciation, of things, but out of an attempt to restore a psychological deprivation that the class structure has affected in their lives" (1972, p. 171).

Sennett and Cobb argue that the pursuit of wealth and status in a class society stems from a desire to heal the psychological wounds inflicted by class structures. Alice's yearning for respect and affluence reflects this drive. Her ambitions are not merely about acquiring material possessions but about restoring her self-worth and gaining the validation denied to her by her socio-economic status. Both the novel and Sennett and Cobb's work reveal that the pursuit of higher status and wealth is fundamentally a quest to address the psychological deprivation imposed by class society. Alice's experience is a clear example of how marginalized individuals seek not just material success, but also the respect and self-worth that come with it.

Since more and more people begin to 'Beijing Ghost', Alice starts earning money by fulfilling the requests coming through it with her invisibility power and keeping her name secret. The money she saves gives her self-confidence and she makes close friends with both Henry and her roommate Chanel. She describes this change as "It's nice being noticed. Really nice" (2022, p. 102). Alice's appreciation of being noticed indicates her struggle for recognition and visibility. If being noticed feels particularly nice to Alice, it suggests that her usual reality involves being ignored or marginalized. Alice, as a marginalized individual, likely due to her socioeconomic status and possibly other factors, experiences a sense of invisibility or being overlooked. Being noticed provides Alice with a sense of validation and boosts her self-worth. For marginalized individuals, recognition from others can affirm their existence and value, countering feelings of insignificance and low self-esteem. Her emphasis on the experience being "really nice" highlights how starved she feels for such positive attention, indicating how rare and precious these moments of recognition are for her. Kuriloff and Reichert conducted a qualitative study of boys attending one elite school and based on students' expressions they concluded "the school deliberately or unconsciously privileged its wealthy students and they in turn often excluded poorer students, acted insensitively towards them, or simply failed to see them" (2003, p. 761). In elite educational environments, as Kuriloff and Reichert argue, the system is structured in a way that favours rich students. This often results in the exclusion, insensitivity, or invisibility of less privileged students. Alice's remark highlights the stark contrast between being unnoticed in a system that predominantly acknowledges the wealthy and the rare moments when she feels seen and valued. Alice's feeling of being acknowledged contrasts

sharply with the typical experience of poorer students who are often excluded or overlooked, as described by Kuriloff and Reichert. The momentary recognition Alice receives offers a glimpse into what it feels like to be valued, which is a rare and cherished experience for marginalized students. Further, being noticed can be seen as a step towards social inclusion and a sense of belonging. These moments of attention can help bridge the gap between exclusion and acceptance for marginalized people. Alice's enjoyment of being noticed indicates her desire to be part of the social fabric of her environment, and to be acknowledged as a valuable and equal member of her community. Her statement can be seen as an expression of the need for recognition and the emotional and psychological effects of marginalization. It highlights how significant it can be for a marginalized individual to receive attention and acknowledgement, offering a glimpse into her internal struggles and desires for acceptance and validation. It is also ironic that she is being noticed thanks to her invisibility power.

The last request coming to the "Beijing Ghost" is the most challenging one. Alice is expected to help kidnap one of her classmates to prevent the student's father from being appointed as the CEO of one of the biggest companies in China. They offer one million yuan for this job. Alice is informed that her classmate will get no harm and will be released as soon as his father declines to be appointed as CEO. When Alice shares this new offer with Henry, first he declines it and tries to understand why Alice accepts this dangerous request. Alice's inner voice explains the reason. Alice thinks she is close to: "Earning enough money for me and my family. To feeling safe for once in my life. To never having to worry about those awful school brochures again. One million RMB. Do you have any idea what that means to me? (2022, p. 160). This situation places Alice in a moral dilemma, where her need for financial security conflicts with legal and ethical boundaries. Her willingness to consider such a drastic action reflects the severity of her economic pressures. This duality highlights the complex emotions that come with marginalization, where opportunities for improvement are fraught with significant risks and moral compromises. The promise of one million yuan is a transformative amount for Alice, who constantly grapples with financial insecurity. Her thoughts reveal how marginalized individuals may feel driven to extreme actions when traditional means of financial stability seem unattainable. The substantial sum represents not just money, but the potential to escape the cycle of poverty, to "feeling safe for once," and to alleviate the persistent worries about her education and future. According to Jannick Demanet and Mieke Van Houtte in their article "Socioeconomic Status, Economic Deprivation, and School Misconduct: An Inquiry into the Role of Academic Self-Efficacy in Four European Cities," individuals from economically deprived backgrounds are more prone to engage in deviant behaviours due to perceived goal blockage (2012, p. 3). This aligns with Alice's situation, where her socioeconomic challenges push her towards accepting an unethical job to secure financial security for herself and her family.

Alice, who is in a dilemma between her conscience and money, first helps kidnapping while she is invisible, but then changes her mind and saves her friend with the help of Henry. However, as a result of this action, she is suspended from school. When Henry comes home to see her, he is surprised by the small size of Alice's house and the poor neighbourhood she lives in. When Henry asks Alice why she used her invisibility power just for money, Alice's answer shows her inner world

as it is: “You—you and all the kids at Airington... All you have is light. Light and glory and power and the whole world laid out for you, just waiting for you to take whatever you like [...] Is it really too much to ask? For people like me to want a bit of that light for ourselves?” (2022, p. 220)

Alice’s words to Henry reveal her deep feelings of marginalization and desire for equality. This passage is rich in themes of socioeconomic disparity, privilege, and the yearning for opportunity. Alice’s statement highlights her acute awareness of the privilege enjoyed by Henry and her other wealthy classmates at Airington. She perceives them as having access to “light and glory and power”—symbols of opportunity, influence, and a promising future. This perception emphasizes the contrast between her own life and that of her privileged peers, emphasizing the social and economic divide that separates them. Alice’s desire for “a bit of that light” can be interpreted as a quest for validation and empowerment. She wants to be seen, acknowledged, and given the chance to prove her worth and capabilities. Her longing for light is not just about material wealth but also about the recognition and respect that come with it, which are often denied to marginalized individuals. By expressing her feelings to Henry, Alice attempts to bridge the gap of understanding between them. She humanizes her struggle, making it clear that her desire for a share of the “light” is a basic human aspiration for dignity, opportunity, and a better life. This moment can evoke empathy, encouraging her privileged peers to recognize the challenges faced by those less fortunate and to consider the broader implications of their own advantages. Sennett and Cobb deals with the concept of dignity and states that the burden of class in a society should be uncovered and things such as “the feeling of not getting anywhere despite one’s efforts, the feeling of vulnerability in contrasting oneself to others at a higher social level, the buried sense of inadequacy that one resents oneself for feeling” (1972, p. 58) should be eliminated from society. Alice’s frustration and yearning for a share of the privileges enjoyed by her wealthier peers reflect these hidden injuries of class. Her struggle is not just for financial equality but for the intangible sense of respect, recognition, and equal opportunity. It shows that the deeper societal issue where individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are not just deprived of material wealth but also suffer from profound psychological wounds inflicted by systemic inequality and social stratification. Sennett and Cobb argue that these feelings of inadequacy and resentment should be eliminated from society, advocating for a more equitable social structure that acknowledges and addresses these hidden injuries.

Alice’s confession in this way helps her regain the self-confidence she lost a long time ago. She has now become a person who speaks her mind more courageously. Her words to the school principal before leaving the school support this argument: “The neglected ones, the unlucky ones, the ones who want more than they’ve been given. The ones who have to crawl and scrape and fight their way up from the very bottom, who have to game a system designed for them to lose. Always the first to be punished and blamed when things go wrong. Always the last to be seen, to be saved” (2022, p. 233).

Alice’s words to the school principal are a strong critique of systemic inequality and marginalization. They reflect her deep understanding of the struggles faced by those who are disadvantaged. Her words highlight the inherent biases and inequalities in the educational and

social systems. She refers to a system “designed for them to lose,” pointing to structural disadvantages that marginalized individuals face. This critique suggests that the system is rigged against those who are less fortunate, making it difficult for them to succeed regardless of their efforts. Her description of having to “crawl and scrape and fight their way up from the very bottom” points out the immense effort required for marginalized individuals to achieve something in this system. Further, the assertion that they are “always the first to be punished and blamed when things go wrong” reflects the scapegoating and disproportionate punishment that marginalized individuals often face. Alice’s words resonate with a sense of empathy and solidarity with others who share her struggles. She speaks on behalf of “the neglected ones, the unlucky ones,” positioning herself as part of a collective facing similar challenges. This solidarity highlights the shared experiences of marginalized individuals and the need for collective action to address systemic injustices. There is a call for change in Alice’s words. By articulating the injustices faced by marginalized individuals, she urges those in power to recognize these issues and take steps to create a more equitable system.

CONCLUSION

Alice’s journey in *If You Could See the Sun* tells the deep struggles and resilience of a marginalized individual navigating a world of privilege and inequality. Initially driven by desperation to use her power of invisibility for material gain, Alice’s actions reflect the harsh realities faced by those at the bottom of the social hierarchy who are forced to resort to extreme measures to secure their basic needs. However, her self-realization and subsequent transformation add up to a powerful narrative of empowerment and self-worth. By the end of the novel, Alice has transformed from a character filled with fear and uncertainty to one who bravely challenges the systemic injustices she once felt powerless against. Her demand for recognition and justice not only highlights her personal growth but also serves as a broader commentary on the need for systemic change to uplift and support marginalized individuals. Alice’s story is a testament to the strength and resilience of the human spirit, emphasizing the importance of empathy, equality, and the pursuit of justice.

Throughout the novel, Alice’s use of her invisibility power serves as a complex response to her marginalized status at Airington, a prestigious school dominated by wealth and privilege. While her initial aim appears to be pragmatic—earning money to cover her school fees and support her family—her deeper motivations reveal a desire for acceptance and respect within the school community. The invisibility power becomes a metaphor for her struggle to be seen and acknowledged in an environment where she always feels overlooked and undervalued. However, by the end of the story, Alice’s journey of self-discovery leads to a significant transformation. She comes to accept her identity as it is, recognizing her inherent worth beyond societal validation. No longer feeling the need to hide behind the veil of invisibility, Alice makes peace with herself, embracing her unique strengths and experiences. This profound shift shows the central theme of the novel: the journey from seeking external approval to achieving self-acceptance and empowerment.

If You Could See the Sun successfully connects the narrative of a marginalized student with elements of magical realism, creating a compelling and multilayered story. Alice’s journey through

the socio-economic disparities of a wealthy school community is enriched by the fantastical element of her invisibility power, which serves as both a literal and metaphorical tool. The novel employs magical realism not just to highlight Alice's struggles, but to reveal the emotional and psychological depths of her experiences. This blend allows readers to engage with the harsh realities of marginalization while also exploring the imaginative and symbolic aspects of Alice's invisibility. The integration of these two features—social commentary and magical realism—enhances the novel's impact, making it a thought-provoking work that resonates on multiple levels. Through this synthesis, the story not only addresses the themes of identity, acceptance, and empowerment but also situates them within a rich, imaginative framework that challenges readers to reflect on the complexities of seeing and being seen in a world rife with inequities.

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