



Walls of Silence: Spatial Memory and Captivity in Dot Hutchison's *The Butterfly Garden*

LP. Hannish¹ & Dr. J. Chitta²

¹Ph.D. Research Scholar (Reg Number: 2421316021002), Department of English and Centre for Research
Scott Christian College (A), Nagercoil

Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu

²Research Supervisor & Associate Professor, Department of English and Centre for Research
Scott Christian College (A), Nagercoil

Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu



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Abstract

Dot Hutchison's *The Butterfly Garden* portrays society's indifference to the silence and disappearance of vulnerable girls who are neglected. Hutchison highlights silence not only as emptiness and absence of speech rather presents it as a control exerted over the lives of girls held captive within the garden by Gardener. The title of the paper implies the entrapment of young girls within the closed space and through their life dual nature of silence is analyzed within the closed space. The Garden recollects the power imposed by the Gardener to oversee the voice, memory and survival of victims in a captive space. Gardeners' orchestration of silence enforces submission and curtails freedom. Furthermore, silence becomes a tool of oppression which shapes identity of the victims with the confined space forcefully and erases resistance. The design of the garden itself serves as an architecture of oppression which aestheticizes violence. Trauma is not only presented through fragmented memories but also in the form of physical imprint within the Garden. The survivors reclaim their freedom through the silence which serves as a form of power within the Garden. By interweaving spatial theory, trauma theory and subaltern studies the article argues Hutchinson's portrayal of silence as a weapon of power, a wound of trauma and a fragile form of resistance to overcome captivity.

Keywords: silence, space, resistance, power, violence

Silence is a term associated with multiple contexts, especially in Literature it signifies the power or oppression, trauma or the process of healing, resistance or compliance. It also represents pause or a break in in a momentum to reorganize one's thoughts to proceed further in their choice. Dot Hutchison's novel *The Butterfly Garden* accentuates captivity, simply a psychological upheaval but also an experience spatially constructed. The novel is set in New York and further revolves around the place referred as the Garden; with its deceptive beauty it becomes a Centre stage where it serves as an active medium of domination where architectural

design, silence and beauty serve as methods of control. Hutchison's novel focuses on the harrowing experiences of teenage girls not less than sixteen years are kidnapped by Geoffrey MacIntosh, the perpetrator referred to as the Gardener. The abducted girls are held in a place referred as Garden as captive victims. The Garden is artificially altered estate of MacIntosh which is designed to keep anyone or anybody to cut off from the world outside. Moreover, the place was under strict surveillance by the Gardener to exalt his control over the victims. Those abducted victims were forced to undergo torments physically and mentally. Hutchison characterizes



the physical and psychological abuse undergone by the victims in the Garden to reinforce the idea of oppression shown by the Gardener. The novel further demonstrates how spatial design, silence and trauma coincide as a power of oppression and brutality of Gardener, yet within this structure, survivors carve their resistance through silence which reconfigures memory and space as testimonies of survival. As the famous quote of Thomas Carlyle, "Silence is more eloquent than words" likewise the way of showing their passive resistance towards the oppression also lies within the silence which showcases the unyielding will to overcome any drastic situations in life. It is showcased throughout the novel through the life of protagonist Maya whose fake identity is Inara Morrisey in the novel. Her real name is revealed at the end of the novel as Samira Grantaire.

This article, revolves around four central themes: Spatial Design and Power, Silence as Structural Violence, Trauma, Memory and Spatial Imprint and Resistance within Spatial oppression. Further it draws upon insights from both trauma studies and spatial theory to analyze how architecture, silence, and memory converge to shape the survivor's life experiences. Scholars of spatial theories such as Michael Foucault and Henry Lefebvre emphasizes space is not unbiased rather it is manipulated to sustain authority. The Gardener is a brutal character who hides behind his wealth and influence in this novel showcases his good side towards the outside world and when he comes within the personal space of garden his alter ego which craves for power creeps up on the victims. The Gardener's Assertion of his power over the victims can be seen through the following lines,

"we had a concert in the Garden. Desmond brought in better speakers and set them up on the cliff, and just for the evening, the Gardener gave us all bright colors and treats, and fuck, it was pathetic how happy we were that evening. We were still captives, we still had death sitting on our shoulders and counting down to our twenty-first birthdays, but that night was magical anyway. Everyone laughed and danced and sang, no matter how badly, and the Gardener and Desmond danced with us."

(Butterfly 207)

The central argument is surrounding the illustration in the novel which reiterates how an architecture and Silence can embody structural violence, which leaves undeniable imprints on the survivors which also sets a space for resistance. The kidnapped girls were trapped in the garden where they are forced to wear cloths not according to their choice, made to eat food without their say in it, forced to follow certain rules against the norms in a society and objectified by getting tattooed on their bodies against their will. These incidents can be reflected through the following quote in which narrator of the story Maya shares her memories from the garden to the FBI agent during interrogation, "the slinky black dress that had become my only piece of clothing" (Butterfly 32).

The place referred as garden in Hutchison's The Butterfly Garden exhibits a misconception of a beautiful place which nurtures flora within the constructed space for the individuals who ventures inside for the inexperienced people. Intrinsically garden serves as a tool for subjugating the captive victims within an aestheticized landscapes where, manmade cliffs, artificial waterfall, glass dome, flora which tends to present a picture of a paradise on earth which in reality turns into a hell on earth for the victims within the captive space. The deceptive beauty turns space itself into a disciplinary medium. According to Michael Foucault in his theory on spatial power asserts that,

"A whole problematic then develops: that of an architecture that is no longer built simply to be seen (as with the ostentation of palaces), or to observe the external space (cf. the geometry of fortresses), but to permit an internal, articulated and detailed control - to render visible those who are inside it; in more general terms, an architecture that would operate to transform individuals" (172).

Through this Foucault addresses the role of constant surveillance and internalized submission by the perpetrator within the enclosed space rendered the captive victims helpless. Garden serves as a 'Panopticon' structure where; surveillance and control are manipulated by the Gardener and he himself remained omnipotent within the garden and he enforces power over his victims even when they



were in silence. The term 'Panopticon' was first coined by English Philosopher Jeremy Bentham in 18th century, it is a method to watch a greater number of prisoners with minimum number of guards. This context is more in correlation with the gardener's character in maintaining authority in the garden. Maya, the survivor and the narrator of the novel speaks of about the gardener's constant surveillance through camera in the following lines, "If the Gardener wanted you, he'd simply check the cameras and come find you" (Butterfly 42). Henri Lefebvre in his work The Production of space further illustrates the dynamic role of space within captivity. According to him Space is socially constructed and it can be seen through the construction of the garden which was meticulously created by the Gardener. The overall outcome of the garden is the obsession of Gardener who exhibits his power towards the kidnapped girls within the captivity. Gardener made sure to keep the authority far away by his social facade to the outside world. Gardeners studious design over garden assimilates his control in transforming captivity into a desolate aesthetic order. Space plays a major role in tying up the victims within the captivity to cut off their getaway from the garden. It can be seen through the lives undergone by the captive victims, "Solid walls come down to keep us in our rooms and out of sight" (Butterfly 11). By placing women in separate rooms, enforcing routines, creating common place and curtailing their privacy strips away their rights and further the Gardener enforces hierarchy into the structure. Thus, the space itself becomes the embodiment of violence even before the beginning of physical brutality.

The deceptive beauty of gaining freedom within the garden gives the girls a glimpse of hope as it seems to them outside world was within their reach, sunlight reaches through the glass roof of the green house to bask them. It may give a hope of getting away from the garden is feasible but the cruel reality places unreachable freedom over the top of captives in the garden. Further it creates an illusion of being in their own home. Garden normalizes oppression through its architecture. Victims are compelled to acclimatized to the garden's false beauty, significantly garden highlights how an invisible power renders the captive victims to shape their behaviours even

without being forced. Silence is enforced over them forcefully by confining them with the structured spaces which eliminates communication from the outside world. "When the maintenance comes in, the rooms become soundproof. We could scream and pound all we wanted to and no one would ever hear us" (Butterfly 190). Through the lens of surveillance Gardener enforces discipline. Thus, the role of Spatial and Power pave way for beauty to intensify violence which serves as a paradox. The garden's structure, rule and surveillance exhibit Gardener's control and power over his victims. This confined space can also be compared with the real-world prostitution centres where the woman was kidnapped from their childhood and forced to work for the mediators for money and influence it in the end leads to the destruction of their real identities in life.

Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung implies that structural violence interpolates the harm which was caused indirectly by the social system leads to in equality, oppression & exploitation. This kind of violence which has been overshadowed by the social structures and influence fails to protect the marginalized women paves way for the perpetrators like Gardener to take advantage of it and goes on capturing girls for a longer duration of time without getting captured by the authorities. Hutchison through her novel tells us about the patriarchal control and institutional neglect and enforced trauma turns silence into a weapon of dominance. Dominant power structures suppressed the marginalized voices says Gayatri Chakravarthy Spivak in her essay "Can the Subaltern's speak?". It shows a connection between the power structure shown by Gardener towards his victims. In this novel the Gardener kidnaps young girls and held them against their will inside a captive space thereby erasing their real identities and treats them as ornaments and gives them false identities, renamed them and tattooed the girls based on butterflies. As the narrator of the novel Maya reflects her captivity as a butterfly through these lines, "We were Butterflies, and our short lives would end in glass" (Butterfly 225). While reflecting through the ideas of Spivak which addresses, the erasure of marginalized voices by the dominants and the reduced voices were further rewritten or being



ignored as if they were never a life on earth. It is in relation with the life of the captured victims. Even after the intervention of government institutions the untold voices of the victims were either suppressed or filtered, it would be answered as if they were preventing further complication but in reality, they are late to the rescue. The FBI agent in charge of the case actively admitted for being late, "He doesn't know the names of most of the girls they rescued, or the ones they were far, far too late to save" (Butterfly 4). The system has failed to save those missing women especially runaways from their house. The narrator the novel Maya itself an example for a runaway girl. She suffered from her childhood days because of her parents split. It resulted in distancing herself from her parents; she was also made to stay with her grandma where she was made to groom herself. These incidents flare her up to run away from them. Most of the times runaway is associated with girls as they are easily marginalized in the society. It also coincides with Spivak's claim on dominant narratives erases the subalterns suffering. The novel portrays silence as the constructed and enforced one which overlaps with the Patriarchal domination, Institutional neglect and Trauma.

Trauma, Memory and Spatial Imprint are interwoven in the novel and it is shown through the lens of the narrator Maya, who is also one of the captive victims of the Gardener. According to the Trauma Theorist Cathy Caruth, Trauma is too overwhelming to have experience within a shorter duration of time and it is perceived through fragmented memories, disoriented speeches and behaviour. In this novel Hutchison portrays the role of memory from the perspective of the protagonist Maya. To affirm the idea of Caruth on trauma which tells us that trauma is more often about the reexperience of the traumatic incident rather being remembered one. Theorist like Foucault says, A space can be used to discipline physical body and controls the individuals. Garden addresses the role played by architecture and its manipulation towards the young girls within the captive space. The narration style of the protagonist Maya mirrors the person who has fragmented memories. Spatial Imprint renders garden as the undeniable permanent scar amidst the survivors even when they are rescued

from the garden. Trauma, Spatial Imprint, Memories are interlinked and are inseparable in continuing to shape the identities of the survived girls.

The captivated girls have interactions among them, which triggers a passive resistance against their oppression. The garden is a space specifically designed to exert a hidden power over the girls to oppress them, showing the patriarchal domination undertaken by the gardener towards them. Amidst their hardships the victims showcase their resistance in silence. According to Spivak Silence is a construct of dominance but the marginalized girls show their resistance through different means in the novel especially expresses their fragmented memories through narration. The act of narration turns into a form of resistance for reclaiming their long-lost voices within the victims. The Fragmented narration of the protagonist, Maya brings forth the lingering effect of spatial imprint of trauma. It proves resistance may or may not be loud and visible rather it exists within the sphere of remembrance itself. Throughout the novel this can be seen through the life and the experience shared by the protagonist and narrator of the novel Maya. "There wasn't a reason in the world I couldn't spend the night wandering around. Sometimes the illusion of freedom, of choice, was more painful than captivity" (Butterfly 117) this quote gives us a glimpse of Maya and her way of perceiving life around her. Through the solidarity shown by the marginalized victims especially Maya paves way for the garden to become a site of witness rather than a place of silence. Hutchison says that a resistance within the confined space is not gained through the direct confrontation with the perpetrators but through memory, identity preservation, narration. Gardener may have created the garden to systematically suppress, discipline and tame the captives but it will not erase the resistance completely.

The novel unmasks the tight knit nature of space, trauma, silence and resistance through the lives of survival victims who succumbed to artificially cultivated violence which undergoes cruelties by the Gardener. It is seen through the passive resistance of the victims themselves paved way for their revival. This paper paved way for extending Trauma Studies to Spatial analysis which brings out the role of a surrounding space playing a major part in



a traumatic event and its influence over the persons involving in it. As the literature reflects the mirror of life in a society, The Butterfly Garden also reflects the real-world captivity to be focussed especially on women who were forced into prostitution, trafficking children for the personal greed of immoral people. Silence in the garden was seen as tool of oppression; by sharing their suppressed pain the marginalized girls are transforming it into their public testimony which further breaks down the enforced silence. Rising beyond captivity, the victims convert their survival into resistance, where every breath defies the power that sought to silence them.

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