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A SENTIMENTAL FREAK SHOW: A DISABILITY STUDIES' READING OF KELLER'S 'THE STORY OF MY LIFE'

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ABSTRACT

The representation of Disability in literature is a ubiquitous phenomenon. The literatures across cultures exploit the idea of disability and disabled characters. However, this representation is often symbolic, metaphorical, as well as reductionist, which does not account for the lived reality of the embodied experience of disability. And hence, these representations continue to maintain the stereotypical views of disability which results in the dehumanizing, marginalization of persons with disability. To counter this reductionist representation of disability, the disability studies scholars and activists are coming up with the idea of a disability culture which values the first hand experiences of disability by giving voice to the persons with disability. The disability autobiography is one of the crucial aspects of disability culture which imparts agency and the voice to the disabled person, thereby, challenging the unidimensional literary representation of disability. The disability autobiography/disability memoir is in fact the story of Some Body. Halen Keller is popularly celebrated as the icon of fortitude and strength in the face of adversity. Despite her political radicalism, she still remains the miracle poster-child who in spite of her disability manages to graduate and remains *a celebrity throughout her life. In this paper I will attempt to show that Keller's 'the Story of My Life (1903)' despite being a story of a disability experience, continues to be the narrative of overcoming, thereby, sentimentalizing and keeping in place the poster-child image. Apart from being a Some Body memoir, it is also a somebody memoir. I will further argue that the general tone of the memoir is that of gratitude. I will further problematize the idea of agency and voice by arguing that Keller's memoir is actually a collaborative memoir written by Keller and her teacher together.*

KEYWORDS

disability autobiography, disability culture, some-body memoir, narrative of overcoming, poster-child, sentimentalization of disability

RESEARCH PAPER

The representation of disability in literature is a ubiquitous phenomenon. The literatures across cultures exploit the idea of disability and disabled characters. Despite this the disabled characters are invariably represented as abnormal humans or as entirely alien to the day to day human affairs. As Mitchel and Snyder observe "to represent disability is to engage oneself in an encounter with that which is believed to be off the map of recognizable human experiences." The disability narratives in this manner are supposed as the mediators connecting the unknown disabled world with that of the so called normal world, thereby rendering disability as an occasion for a narrative. The disabilities of the characters are often seen as the foundational elements of their character formation, thereby, attributing the undesirable qualities to the disabled characters (Mitchell and Snyder, 2000, pp. 5-6).

This kind of literary representation of disability predominates across cultures. However, this representation is often symbolic, metaphorical, as well as reductionist, which does not account for the lived reality of the embodied experience of disability. In the opinion of Mitchel and Snyder "Disability pervades literary narrative, first, as stock feature of characterization and, second, as an opportunistic metaphorical device" (Mitchell and Snyder, 2000, p. 47). They further note that on the one hand stories depend on the potency of disability as symbolic characteristic; on the other hand, they fail to engage with disability in its entirety of lived reality.
As Rosemarie Garland Thomson comments the disabled body is constructed as the embodiment of corporeal insufficiency and deviance, thereby, becoming the repository of social anxieties with regards to the critical issues of vulnerability control and identity. She defines disability as, "a representation, a cultural interpretation of physical transformation or configuration, and a comparison of bodies that structures social relations and institutions. Disability, then, is the attribution of corporeal deviance – not so much a property of bodies as a product of cultural rules about what bodies should be or do" (Thomson, 1997, p.6). Defined in this manner the idea of disability is dislodged from dominant discourses of deficiency, deviance, and abnormality; and gains acceptance as an aspect of human diversity. The interdisciplinary field of disability studies engages with the idea of disability in order to not only expose, but also explain the denigration of disability and disabled people. The field identifies people with disability as a distinct identity category, thereby, legitimating the hitherto dehumanized human beings (Thomson, 2005, p. 1558). It also insists on acknowledging the full personhood of the disabled person. The literary disability studies exposes the dehumanizing and marginalizing description of disabled characters.

In the words of Thomson, “Literary conventions even further mediate experience that the wider cultural matrix, including literature itself, has already informed. If we accept the convention that fiction has some mimetic relation to life, we grant it power to further shape our perceptions of the world, especially regarding situations about which we have little direct knowledge. Because disability is so strongly stigmatized and is countered by so few mitigating narratives, the literary traffic in metaphors often misrepresents or flattens the experience real people have of their own or others’ disability” (Thomson, 1997, p.10).

And hence, these representations continue to maintain the stereotypical views of disability which results in the dehumanizing, marginalization of persons with disability. To counter this reductionist representation of disability, the disability studies scholars and activists are coming up with the idea of a disability culture which values the first hand experiences of disability by giving voice to the persons with disability. The disability autobiography is one of the crucial aspects of disability culture which imparts agency and the voice to the disabled person, thereby, challenging the unidimensional literary representation of disability.

Disability memoir or disability autobiography is one such attempt to voice the first hand experiences of living in or living with bodily particularities. The disability memoir puts long objectified and silenced individuals at the subject position and imparts the perspective of the atypical person on life (Causer, 2009, chap. 2; and Linton, 1998, p.5). The authorial selves emerged out of disability memoirs assume a sense of responsibility for their own experiences, thereby, exhibiting a sense of interdependent, but autonomous individuality. The disability memoir is often referred as the Some Body memoir rather than a somebody memoir which generally is written by famous persons or celebrities. Disability memoir on the other hand is often the result of the unwarranted inquisitiveness or curiosity of random so called normal individuals. Consequently, the disability memoir is not an impulsive creation, but a carefully crafted narrative of the embodied self (Causer, 2009, chap.2).

Halen Keller is popularly celebrated as the icon of fortitude and strength in the face of adversity. Despite her political radicalism, she still remains the miracle poster-child who in spite of her disability manages to graduate and remains a celebrity throughout her life. In this paper I will attempt to show that Keller’s ‘the Story of My Life (1903)’ despite being a story of a disability experience, continues to be the narrative of overcoming, thereby, sentimentalizing and keeping in place the poster-child image. I would argue that the perpetuation of poster child image of Helen Keller is in part a conscious political choice and also partly the result of sentimentalization by the so called normal society who had been and still is curious to understand the experience shaped by particularly configured body.

Keller’s own authorial choice of projecting the mythical persona of disabled person has to be understood as a pragmatic choice i.e., a means of livelihood or as a career option. As a woman looking to support herself with a significant disability Keller had access to fewer career choices and the fact that her writings about the issues other than her disability were received at that point as second hand or mediated experiences, accusing the people around her like Annie Sullivan or John Macy to have ghost written it for her (Kleege, 2007, p. 192). This is suggestive of the skeptical social attitude towards a person with disability who was and still is supposed to be incapable of having serious opinions on the matters of social and political importance (Nielsen, 2004, p. 12).

Therefore, it is important to study Keller not only in the isolation as a person with disability, but also as Catherine J. Kudlick says in the historical context of disability (Kudlick, 2005, p. 558). The current disability studies scholars also seem reluctant to accept the legacy of

Helen Keller as an early advocate of the disabled because of her portrayal as a saint (Nielsen, 2004, pp. 11-12). Despite this Keller's autobiography is still a disability memoir not because it is written by Helen Keller who was both deaf and blind, but because it exhibits a unique subjectivity marked by her physical conditions as well as her social isolation. It is argued that the Story of My Life deviates from carving Keller as a disabled person, it is rather the story of Keller's language acquisition and also the story of overcoming the obstacles on account of physical limitations (Kleege, 2000, p. 322; 2006, p.1), To quote Keller, if they unintentionally placed obstacles in my way, I have the consolation of knowing that I overcame them all (Keller, 1903, p. 77). This triumph over adversity tone of Keller's memoir places the Story of My Life not just in the discourse of individualism, but also sentimentalizes it, thereby reinforcing the idea that disability must be overcome through personal determination and will power (Davis, 1995, pp. 4-5; Causer, 2009, chap. 3). It also is placed in the biomedical domain of individual impairment signifying the problematic body.

Keller's memoir is a memoir written by not only a disabled person, but also it should be viewed as the self-expression of a woman with disability. Consequently it becomes the memoir of southern upper class white woman's autobiography. Other than the story of her overcoming, it evolves as the story of her alternative way of accessing her surroundings and acquiring knowledge about it. As Kleege suggests, Keller redirects the readers to a heightened sense of the sensory experiences gathered through the means of the sense of taste, touch and vibrations (Kleege, 2006, p.1). Thus, Erica Fretwell calls the Story of My Life as embedded in the Kinaesthetics practice of life writing mediated by the tactile communication between self and the other (Fretwell, 2013, p. 566). Keller's Autobiography i.e., "the Story of My Life", thus becomes intensely somatic, thereby blurring the boundaries between the self and the other. This explains, according to Fretwell, the three part structure of Keller's story i.e., Keller's own account of her life through the Story of My Life and her letters, Sullivan's reports on Keller's education; and also John Macy's account of how Keller really was (Fretwell, 2013, p. 565).

To my mind this tripartite structure seems to have been occasioned by the unique subjectivity of Keller both, as woman and disabled person, attempting to make her own place as an author. The 19th century readers would require double or triple authentication by the people having social credibility (Klages, 1999, p. 148). As Kleege also points out as Keller's teacher Sullivan had every right to critically comment on Keller's writing as the kind of persona Keller created in her writing would also impact her own image, further as an editor John Macy may have suggested alterations in the passages here and there (Kleege, 2006, p. 95). As Couser observes that the disability memoir has to go through three critical phases of writing, editing, and publishing. Each of these three phases is critical for a disabled writer (Couser, 2009, chap. 2).

Keller's memoir, in this regard resembles the nineteenth century slave narratives comprising elaborate authenticating mechanism in the form of letters and reports. The Story of My Life, hence, reveals the hardships caused by Keller's double afflictions, yet on paper by claiming the authorship of her autobiography she succeeds in establishing the similarity of human experiences with the other non-disableds (Klages, 1999, p. 147). But her disability still remains the foundation for emergence of her authorial self. Before its publication in 1903 the life story of Helen Keller was well known to the contemporary readers through the reports of Perkins Institute for the Blind. Helen Keller was a famous figure and the chapters of the Story of My Life were being published in the Lady's magazine (Klages, 1999, p. 177). This fame of Keller also is partly the product of people's wonder and curiosity about her negotiation with the atypical body, thereby, rendering Keller's memoir as both Some Body memoir and somebody memoir (Causer, 2009, chap.1). The Story of My Life in this sense can viewed as a self-created freak show.

The Story of My Life then becomes a source of alternative knowledge. Unlike other slave narratives, Keller does not claim her authorial persona with the pronoun 'I', but rather her choice of her third person singular pronoun 'it' (Klages, 1999, p. 149). At the very outset of the Story of My Life is suggestive of her own sense of objectification as a disabled person and a woman. She writes, "It is with a kind of fear that I begin to write the history of my life. I have, as it were, a superstitious hesitation in lifting the veil that clings about my childhood like a golden mist" (Keller, 1903, p. 3). Keller's this fear of lifting the veil of her childhood also indicates a sense of her own anxiety about the pre-linguistic Keller and also its reception by the readers. This can be clearly marked as the case of internalization of stereotypes about disabled people. It's only after having established herself as a hesitant autobiographer Keller then goes on to claim her existence by giving her date of birth and family background. "I was born on June 27, 1880, in Tuscumbia, a little town of northern Alabama" (Keller, 1903, p. 3). This existential claim of subject-hood becomes essential in the autobiographies of minorities like the slaves, women and so on (Klages, 1999, p. 149).

Her existential claim not just establishes her as an authentic person with a verifiable birthdate, but also it indicates her social class, thereby, placing her in a unique subject position marked by both her femaleness and disability. While making a mention of her Swiss family lineage, she claims kinship with deaf community by pointing out that one of her Swiss family members started a school for the deaf. "One of my Swiss ancestors was the first teacher of the deaf in Zurich and wrote a book on the subject of their education—rather a singular coincidence" (Keller, 1903, p. 3). This kinship can also be seen further in the attempts to educate her she can be counted as an important link in education of the deaf and the blind as she becomes the successor of Laura Bridgman who was the first American deaf-blind woman educated by Samuel Gridley Howe (Nelson and Bruce, 2016, p. 407).

She further at length goes on to describe her childhood before her illness which deprived her of her sight and hearing. Thus, she writes "I am told that while I was still in long dresses I showed many signs of an eager, self-asserting disposition. Everything that I saw other people do I insisted upon imitating" (Keller, 1903. p. 6). It is essential for Keller to depict herself as being intelligent and a quick learner as well as assertive in order to establish her as a conqueror of all the odds. Moreover, it marks her as similar to any other child insisting on copying the elders. Her illness i.e., the acute congestion of stomach and brain takes away her sight and hearing. The description of this illness can be viewed as similar to the description of objectification by medical professionals in the current disability memoirs. While her knowledge of what happened to her in terms of medical terminology and her subsequent revelation of inability of the doctor to do anything confirms her rational selfhood, the description of her illness as "an unconsciousness of a baby infantilizes the illness itself. The doctor thought I could not live. Early one morning, however, the fever left me as suddenly and mysteriously as it had come. There was great rejoicing in the family that morning, but no one, not even the doctor, knew that I should never see or hear again" (Keller, 1903. p. 7). Despite being the most important discovery biomedicine could not predict the physical limitations that Keller was to face for the rest of her life. This medical critic also takes place once more when she became six. Her father had heard of a famous oculist who could cure Keller, however, as she mentions, "When we arrived in Baltimore, Dr. Chisholm received us kindly; but he could do nothing (Keller, 1903. p. 15).

This not only describes the inability of the medicine in identifying and curing Keller's condition, but also exposes the limitations of the biomedicine as a panacea for bodily problems. By this time Keller had realized the fact of her difference from others and a sense of frustration began to grow resulting in violent outburst and her parents were frantically looking for the ways to tame the wild child, Keller. Despite her frustration it must be observed that the pre-Sullivan Keller had a comprehensive system of communication. As she says, she had signs for every member of the family and everything that little child would need. My hands felt every object and observed every motion, and in this way I learned to know many things. Soon I felt the need of some communication with others and began to make crude signs. A shake of the head meant "No" and a nod, "Yes", a pull meant "Come" and a push, "Go". Was it bread that I wanted? Then I would imitate the acts of cutting the slices and buttering them. If I wanted my mother to make ice-cream for dinner I made the sign for working the freezer and shivered, indicating cold. My mother, moreover, succeeded in making me understand a good deal (Keller, 1903.p. 8).

According to Georgina Kleege this system is sufficient as a little child who is nothing but a tangle of desires. She further connects this sign system of Keller's to the communication system of animals, thereby suggesting a post human existence claiming kinship with other living creatures, but eventually remarks that Keller would disapprove of such comparison as she constantly reinforces her rationality in her writings. Also this kind of comparison is constantly done by the society in order to marginalize the disabled community (Kleege, 2006, pp. 5-6). Davis observes that the sign language used by the deaf children is controlled by the linguistic region (Brocas region) of the brain rather than the motor region. He further notes that the deaf children irrespective of being taught by parents can develop his or her own system of signs. So Keller's sign system seems sufficient to convey the basic demands of the child like food, attention and so on (Davis, 1995, p. 18).

Throughout the Story of My Life Keller makes extensive use of visual metaphors. This visual description, as Kleege notes, has come under a lot of criticism blaming her use of visual imagery as mediated and untrue. On this account Keller is often accused of stealing other's ideas, however, in the opinion of Kleege, her use of visual images is nothing but a way of description accessed by Keller by means of her other senses of touch, and taste (Kleege, 2000, p. 323). For instance, when she describes her home in Tuscumbia in an entirely visual way, it was completely covered with vines, climbing roses and honeysuckles. From the garden it looked like an arbor. The little porch was hidden from view by a screen of yellow roses and Southern smilax. It was the favorite haunt of hummingbirds and bees (Keller, 1903, p. 4).

In a similar way she goes on to describe the main house as it appears to a seeing eye, the Keller homestead, where the family lived, was a few steps from our little rose-bower. It was called "Ivy Green" because the house and the surrounding trees and fences were covered with beautiful English ivy. Its old-fashioned garden was the paradise of my childhood. Even in the days before my teacher came, I used to feel along the square stiff boxwood hedges, and, guided by the sense of smell, would find the first violets and lilies. There, too, after a fit of temper, I went to find comfort and to hide my hot face in the cool leaves and grass (Keller, 1903, p. 4).

These description not just serves to portray the house with beautiful similes and metaphors, but also it helps establish Keller as a part of a family subsequently a particular human society hinting at the possibility of the house and its surroundings may have been described to her either by her mother or after she learns language by Annie Sullivan. The reason for her reliance on visual imagery to describe her house to others can also be a result of the lack of availability of the language to describe her experiences of tactility, smell and taste (Kleege, 2006, p. 102).

It is only after the arrival of Annie Sullivan, her teacher, in March 1887 that Keller actually learns the finger alphabets and subsequently the mystery of language is revealed to her. According to Keller, the gift and discovery of language transforms her from a savage to a human. She is suddenly full of regret for breaking the doll into pieces, "On entering the door I remembered the doll I had broken. I felt my way to the hearth and picked up the pieces. I tried vainly to put them together. Then my eyes filled with tears; for I realized what I had done, and for the first time I felt repentance and sorrow (Keller, 1903, p. 20). This feeling of repentance and sorrow is attributed by Keller to discovery of language after the famous scene at the Well-house where, according to Keller, the mystery of language was revealed to her, however, the first word that she learns is not the word water. In fact, as Kleege observes, the Well-house scene helps Keller clear the confusion about the container and the content. This revelation, as she further notes, was only possible if Keller had an aptitude for language or in other words she was hardwired for language because her parents were closely linked with reading and writing (Kleege, 2006, pp. 5-8). It is her mother who after reading Dickens' American notes of Laura Bridgman got an idea to educate Keller. Apart from being a captain in confederate army, her father edited a newspaper; therefore, it is not surprising that Keller was naturally inclined to not just the language, but also towards becoming a writer.

After she learned to write by arranging word on cardboards she began finding joy in composition and as a result when she was 11 she wrote a story by the name of Frost King as a birthdate present to Mr. Anagnos, director of the Perkins Institute for Blind in Boston. However, coincidentally this story appeared to be similar to a story written by a local children's writer Margaret T. Canby. Subsequently this resulted into Keller's being tried for plagiarism. This incident, however, shook Keller's idea of herself as a writer giving rise to the perpetual suspicion and skepticism about her own writings as she writes, "It was difficult to make me understand this; but when I did understand I was astonished and grieved. No child ever drank deeper of the cup of bitterness than I did. I had disgraced myself; I had brought suspicion upon those I loved best. And yet how could it possibly have happened? I racked my brain until I was weary to recall anything" (Keller, 1903, p. 52).

She later at length explains her lesson from this incident that the little children learn by imitation and also the fact that all writings are in some or the other way influenced by other's writing. Keller was 11 when this incident happened, yet the doubt about her writing remained throughout her life. Georgina Kleege expresses her utter shock and surprise by referring to the lunacy of allegations towards the child of 11. She further reads this incident in terms of the doubt of able bodied towards the disabled people. The plagiarism trial, Kleege comments, is aimed at questioning the humanity of Keller and also a way to find out how her mind works. Besides, this trial, according to Kleege, is more targeted towards Keller's teacher Annie Sullivan, instead of Keller herself. This plagiarism incident can also be helpful or can prove as explanation for the initial hesitation felt by Keller in lifting the veil of her childhood (Kleege, 2007, pp. 190-192; 2006, pp. 25-26).

Keller's mode of communication through finger alphabets and her later achievement of learning to speak run counter to the current disability advocacy movement, thereby, negating the legacy of Helen Keller as a disability activist. While the resistance to Keller's legacy by the current disability activist is justified, but it also must be observed that her tactile way of communication as she explains, I place my hand on the hand of the speaker so lightly as not to impede its movements. The position of the hand is as easy to feel as it is to see. I do not feel each letter any more than you see each letter separately when you read. This tactile communication is highly embodied in that it equates the touch with sight. This act of finger spelling also dissolves boundaries between the self and the other, thereby, rendering Keller's hand and apparently the entire body into an autobiographical body. As suggested by Fretwell not just the story of My Life, but also the story of the Story of My Life appears to be autobiographical (Fretwell, 2013, p. 566). When Keller enters college, Keller herself remarks about the mechanicalness of this fingerspelling which prevented her from acquiring knowledge because while lecture was being finger-spelt on her hand, her hand seem to be mechanically listening without grasping the lecture. As a result she subsequently realizes, despite all her efforts as well as overcoming all the obstacles, but I soon discovered that college was not quite the romantic lyceum I had imagined. Many of the dreams that had delighted my young inexperience became beautifully less and "faded in to the light of common day" (Keller, 1903, p. 80).

Keller's oralist beliefs can be seen throughout the Story of My Life. Her violent outburst as a child along with great effort she has to take while learning to speak appear in the form of the barriers broken down by Keller. She at length describes this arduous practice of her learning to speak Miss Fuller's method was this: she passed my hand lightly over her face, and let me feel the position of her tongue and lips when she made a sound. I was eager to imitate every motion and in an hour had learned six elements of speech (Keller, 1903, p. 48). As Nielsen points out both Dr. Alexander Graham Bell and Helen Keller throughout their lives opposed the sign language and promoted speech for the deaf community. Keller's learning to speak indicates her conservative and isolationistic views of disability. She learns to speak, she comments that her speech was ill received and often discouraged by her friends and family. This in turn is suggestive of the nineteenth and early twentieth century attitude towards disability. The disability rights groups were active during Keller's time, but it appears that she neither try to be a part of those groups nor did she support the cause of disability as a politicized identity (Nielsen, 2004, pp. 10-12).

The Story of My Life is also commonly accused of promoting Keller's subjectivity in terms of the autonomous individuality i.e., post-enlightenment idea of a rational-self removed from the confines of the body. This belief which is highly upheld by Keller herself in her later writings as it frees her in a way from bodily limitation into a thinking being, at the same time, however, the Story of My Life though in a limited way may appear to be depicting the interdependent subjectivity. We get to glimpse this interdependence in the relationship between Keller and her mother. She depicts her mother as being educated and a great reader; it is she who after reading Dickens' American notes about Laura Bridgman comes up with the idea of Keller's education. It is Keller's mother who understood and succeeded Keller to understand a great deal in Keller's childhood. When talking about her mother in the Story of My Life, Keller writes, "How shall I write of my mother? She is so near to me that it almost seems indelicate to speak of her" (Keller, 1903, p. 12). This close proximity with her mother and subsequently with her teacher can be read as not just the instances of interdependence, but also it presents three women's association (i.e., Helen, her mother, Kate Killer and her teacher Annie Sullivan) as a distinct and strong femininity.

Annie Sullivan, Keller's teacher, is one of the key but the strongest influences on Keller. Keller acknowledges her to be a genius who understands the children's mind and also at the same time she understands Keller's own needs as a disabled child. While praising her method of teaching, Keller writes, I cannot explain the peculiar sympathy Miss Sullivan had with my pleasures and desires. Perhaps it was the result of long association with the blind. Added to this she had a wonderful faculty for description. She went quickly over uninteresting details, and never nagged me with questions to see if I remembered the day-before-yesterday's lesson. She introduced dry technicalities of science little by little, making every subject so real that I could not help remembering what she taught (Keller, 1903, p. 30).

Here Keller is analyzing that her teacher's extraordinary ability to understand Keller comes because of her own blindness at an earlier stage of her life. The Story of My Life consists of many such passages in praise of Annie Sullivan, Keller at length goes on to say she cannot differentiate which ones are Keller's innate thoughts and which ones have been received from Miss Sullivan. Therefore, hinting at the possibility of collaborative selfhood. It is Miss Sullivan who attends the lectures with Keller in college by spelling the lecture into her hands. It is she who is responsible not just in fulfilling her desire to attain college, but also in asserting Keller's personhood and full humanity. Yet, the scholars referred to the Story of My Life as actually the story of Annie Sullivan rather than it being Helen Keller's autobiography. But their togetherness hints at the double consciousness of the Story of My Life (Kleege, 2000, p. 322).

While talking about her teacher and herself, Keller writes that she cannot tell herself apart from her teacher, yet it may also be observed that the teacher's views about this proximity and about the double subjectivity are unclear. Keller's entire memoir, The Story of My Life, can also be read as the story of self-effacing subjectivity full of gratitude for the people who have assisted her in completing her education (Nielsen, 2004, pp. 11-12). The last chapter of the Story of My Life catalogs the names and acknowledges the contribution of the kind individuals. In this instance Keller presents herself as a charity case deserving empathic response of people not merely reading the Story of My Life, but also the people who know her (Klages, 1999, pp. 148-149). Despite coming from a landholding southern family, as Nielsen points out, Keller was throughout her education in need of money as a result the Story of My Life acquires a sense of gratitude (Nielsen, 2004, p. 12).

Like any other disability memoir, Keller's the Story of My Life attempts to establish the sameness of human experiences between the able bodied and the disabled. Keller attempts to establish her humanity by devoting a chapter on the things she enjoys. In all the things she describes, she calls literature as her utopia because in the realm of books that sameness is reinforced.

Conclusion:

Thus I have attempted here to approach the Story of My Life by Helen Keller as a disability memoir in order to reimagine Keller as a disability activist. This reading of Keller has enabled me value Keller's alternative epistemology afresh. There are instances which appear to my mind conservative and ableist, but nonetheless reading Keller from a disability perspective has a lot of potential to historicize disability.

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