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**Female Solidarity and the Rewriting of Women's Roles in
Amy Silver's Romantic Comedies**

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Abstract: This paper examines Silver's four romantic comedies, namely, *Confessions of a Reluctant Recessionista*, *All I Want for Christmas*, *One Minute to Midnight*, and *The Reunion*, focusing on how she reworks the genre's conventions. Silver does not see romantic partnership as the key to a woman's fulfillment, but instead emphasizes friendship among women as the true source of support, resistance, and self-definition. This study traces how Silver's heroines respond to the pressures of marriage, motherhood, career and reputation, drawing on Simone de Beauvoir's concept of the Other, Judith Butler's perspective that gender is a repeated performance, Nivedita Menon's argument that the personal is political, and Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze. Their friendships do not just provide comfort, but they also reframe shame, share the practical burden of hardship, and challenge the judgmental gaze that patriarchal structures place on women's choices. The study argues that such a redefinition of the happy ending exists on a spectrum, ranging from a heroine who reaches her romantic union on her own terms, to a heroine who opts for independence and friendship instead.

Keywords: *Female Solidarity, Romantic Comedy, The Other, Gender Performativity, Personal is Political, Male Gaze*

1. Introduction

When reading about women writers, one encounters a long history of resistance to printing their names on book covers. For instance, according to Claire Tomalins, Jane Austen chose to advertise her novel *Sense and Sensibility* anonymously as a "New Novel by a Lady", which was a common convention used by early female writers to avoid being scrutinized by the public (218). Equally, as Gilbert and Gubar observe, Bronte sisters changed their female names to male ones, namely Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell, in an attempt to hide "their troublesome femaleness" and to earn a literary credibility within a masculine world (65). According to Elaine Showalter, the male pseudonym, the instrument that was used to receive serious treatment of the critics, to escape the righteous indignation of their own kin during the nineteenth century was the highest level of pretense that women had to do to fit into male-dominated literary world (48).

The pressure on women to avoid publishing under their own names was so deep-rooted in the literary culture. As Gilbert and Gubar point out that authorship itself is gendered, with the pen becoming in effect a tool of men and as such something alien to a woman. Citing Anne Finch, they illustrate how a woman's attempt to write is perceived as an intrusion into the rights of men (3). Such taboos shed light on why Charlotte Bronte earlier confessed that she and her sisters "had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice" (Showalter 49). This exclusion which is present from earliest times through the Victorian era, is captured in Robert Southey's dismissive response when Charlotte Bronte asked him for feedback on her poetry:

Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure she will have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation. To those duties you have not yet been called, and when you are you will be less eager for celebrity. (qtd. in Nagi 5)

However, Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex*, suggests that some women turn to literature as a way of articulating experiences shaped by marginalization in a masculine world, where they do not "grasp it in its universal guise, but through a particular vision" (836). Hence, comes the need for women to, in Beauvoir's words, "seek salvation in literature" (836), and to have a voice of their own, as well as to see the world from their own angles.

This tradition of writing from the margin identifies a modern figure, namely Paula Hawkins who is best known for her psychological thrillers. As a novelist, she began her career writing romantic comedies under the pen name Amy Silver. She wrote four romantic comedies before she became

well-known for her bestselling thriller *The Girl on the Train* (2015). These novels are: *Confessions of a Reluctant Recessionista* (2009), *All I Want for Christmas* (2010), *One Minute to Midnight* (2011), and *The Reunion* (2013). However, readers at first glance would question the genre of these novels, for they include a subversive core. Even Hawkins herself admitted this, stating that as she wrote these comedies, they "kept getting darker and darker", with "more and more tragedy in them" (Clark). This darkness serves a purpose beyond plot. It opens a narrative space for alternative representations of women, where the "happily ever after" is not found in a prince, but in solidarity among women.

This paper argues that Amy Silver's novels rework the romantic comedy genre. They suggest a shift in narrative focus toward themes of female connection. In other words, instead of seeking a male partner, the women in these novels look for female solidarity as a primary source of resistance, strength, and identity. In comparison with the "mysterious, romanticized, or passive figures" that Elaine Showalter recognized in male-authored literature (6), Silver's female characters appear struggling with real pressures related to societal expectations, and domestic responsibilities. Most importantly, these women have to deal with the pressing question "Still no kids then?" (Silver, *One Minute to Midnight* 126). Their journey echoes what Beauvoir calls the fundamental drama of womanhood: the conflict "between the fundamental claim of every subject. . . and the demands of a situation that constitutes her as inessential" (37).

In these novels, Silver does not portray the female characters navigating this conflict alone. Instead, her heroines often turn to "tiny closed circle[s]" (Silver, *The Reunion* 304) of female friendship as a source of emotional support and validation. This portrayal of female solidarity carries broader social and political implications. This resonates with Menon's argument that everyday domestic experiences are shaped by broader political structures, and that the "private sphere of the home, the family, is as much a site of politics as the 'public' sphere of the state" (35). The women in these novels share secrets, defend each other's choices, and become aware that "happily ever after" does not have to mean a romantic partner. It can be a friend who provides support in times of crisis.

This paper examines how Silver's romantic comedies engage feminist literary conventions of gender, agency, and friendship, as her female characters turn solidarity into a means of living on their own terms. This study treats Silver's romantic comedies as significant texts in their own right, rather than merely as a precursor to Hawkins' later thrillers. Through this lens, Silver's romantic comedies are not portrayed as escapist fantasy, but as tools that reflect a realistic and empowering vision of women who together rewrite the stories of their own lives.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Simone de Beauvoir and Her Concept of "Woman as Other"

Simone de Beauvoir's perspectives mentioned in her book *The Second Sex* offer a framework through which the female characters of Amy Silver can be examined and understood. One of her most important ideas is that, "Humanity is male"(26), indicating that in patriarchal society, "man" is treated as the default human being. To her, it is the "man who defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself" either as mother, wife, or daughter. Unlike the woman who is regarded as the "Other", the man, in her own words, "is the Subject; he is the Absolute" (26). Beauvoir describes this as a "woman's drama [which] lies in this conflict between the fundamental claim of every subject, which always posits itself as essential, and the demands of a situation that constitutes her as inessential" (37). In *The Reunion*, Jen says, "I didn't write down anything that I wanted for myself. Conor and Jen want this, Conor and Jen will do that. . . ." (Silver 142), realizing that she has lost her own desires and voice while doing a supporting role in the life of Conor. This echoes Beauvoir's observation that "the tie that binds her to her oppressors is unlike any other" (28). The complexity of family relationships comes from the fact that it is not simply a fight with an enemy, but rather a complex bond which is hard to break free. A case in point is found in Silver's *One Minute to Midnight*, where female characters are pressured with questions like, "Still no kids then? . . . Best get on with that, hadn't you?" (126).

Silver's romantic comedies portray female characters trying to create their own spaces; they resist the idea of being the "Other". These women look at their friendships as something essential. The reason for why women have historically been treated as the "Other" can be understood from Beauvoir's perspective that "women. . . do not use 'we'; men say 'women', and women adopt this word to refer to themselves; but they do not posit themselves authentically as Subjects" (28). However, Silver appears to create in her fiction some female characters who subvert this view; they stand together in the face of the pressure imposed on them. They form their own "we", which is rooted in mutual care and support. Their bond seems to reflect the novels' emphasis on friendship as something that must be valued and protected.

In short, Beauvoir's insights can show how women like Silver's heroines not only embark a journey full of struggles to become the "Subjects" of their own lives, but also fight a battle to stop being the "Other". Her female characters depict that this difficult fight necessitates solidarity among women, and makes it more powerful.

2.2 Laura Mulvey: Theorist of the Male Gaze and Visual Objectification

Laura Mulvey's gaze theory provides a useful means for analyzing the dynamics of looking and being looked at concerning in Silver's romantic comedies, as she posits that in a patriarchal society, the gaze is divided between the active, domineering male and the passive, subordinated female. In this respect, she writes, pleasure in looking has been divided into active/male and passive/female in a world arranged according to sexual imbalance. It is shaped by the male gaze which projects its phantasy on the figure of a woman, which in turn presents her in a fashioned and dressed way to satisfy this phantasy (808). Women are thus positioned as objects of erotic and visual pleasure, what Mulvey terms "to-be-looked-at-ness" (809). Some of Silver's female characters appear to serve as role models of women under the pressure of the male gaze on a daily basis. This tendency is evident in the conversation between Alex and Nicole in Silver's *One Minute to Midnight*: where Alex tells her friend Nicole, I told him [Aidan] you were shagging an investment banker with a big dig. . . Well, you had one-night stand with that investment banker and I remember you telling me. . . (154). Such language employed by women indicates the way they are more often reduced to a state of objectification, victims of sexual gossiping and judgment.

But when one reads Silver through the lens of Mulvey, her heroines seem to have a force of solidarity in opposition to this objectifying, patriarchal gaze. Some of her female characters develop friendship that leads to the space that portrays them as subjects instead of objects. This brings to mind what Mulvey terms a new language of desire, which emerges from leaving the past behind without rejecting it, transcending outworn and oppressive forms, and daring to break with normal pleasurable expectations (805). Through this lens, Silver's romantic comedies appear to function not by destroying pleasures of this genre, but by redirecting them, making female solidarity rather than romantic resolution the site where desire finds its new language.

Finally, the analysis of Silver's heroines with reference to Mulvey suggests a gradual shift in how happiness is imagined beyond romantic partnership: That is, how they come to the realization that happily ever after does not necessarily imply a husband. It may refer to laughter, wine, and friendship. It stands as a challenge to the patriarchal story. This reflects a narrative movement from the women as objects of the gaze to the women as the subjects who define their own desires. By this, they construct their fulfilment not in being gazed at, but in a sense of solidarity between them.

2.3 Judith Butler: Architect of Gender Performativity and the Regulatory Frame

Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* provides a framework for understanding solidarity in Silver's novels. Butler argues that gender is neither innate nor natural, but produced through repeated social performances. This perspective Silver's protagonists to be seen as collectively supporting or subverting patriarch principles.

Butler argues that gender is produced through the repeated stylization of the body. This series of repeated actions, enforced within a rigid regulatory regime, congeals over time to create the appearance of a fixed or natural identity (43-44). This highlights her main argument that gender is a form of ongoing impersonation, which with time creates the illusion of what she has called a stable and natural gender identity. She uses the phrase "regulatory frame" to refer to the system of social rules and expectations that govern the male and female behavior.

These possibilities are manifested in friendships of some of the female characters of Silver as they create emotional safety and support spaces, where connection is described as effortless; Nicole describes this ease when reflecting on her friendship with Alex despite Alex's betrayal, saying "'it's strange how easy it is to be with her, after all this time, after everything'" (Silver, *One Minute to Midnight* 293). Taking the case of these women from the perspective of Butler, these women engage in everyday practices that may subtly challenge established gender norms, where women foreground forgiveness, and loyalty instead of conforming to expectations that women should become rivals competing over a man.

She further mentions that women experience significant social pressure concerning playing many roles of being a reliable wife, mother, and business person that places them in contradictory and unrealistic roles. These roles conflict because they require women to meet different and often incompatible expectations at the same time. On this basis, Butler proposes that political groups and alliances might have to acknowledge their internal contradiction and continue to act despite them (19-20). In this regard, politics is not compelled to act effectively with an ideally unified or stable identity. Therefore, by reading Silver's heroines according to Butler's framework, they appear as a collective subject that combines not by the same goal but by collective struggles.

2.4 Nivedita Menon: Critic of the Family as Political Apparatus and Advocate of "the Personal is Political"

Nivedita Menon's *Seeing Like a Feminist* (2012) is also effective with regard to interpreting the social pressure that women in the novels of Amy Silver experience because it allows people to understand that the very private and deep world of the family is in fact a highly political institution that requires to preserve certain social order.

Regarding the function of a family, Menon notes that it is their role to give birth to men and women who do not rock the boat, but instead satisfy their parents expectations, uphold social status, and serve as a form of security in old age (46). An example of this is illustrated in Silver's *Confessions of a Reluctant Recessionista*, where Jude tells her friend and roommate Cassie who loses her job and is dumped by her boyfriend: "You should think about moving home just at least until you get yourself sorted out. But Cassie replies: "'No!' I cried. 'Anything but that! I can not, I can not move home, Jude. I would become mad'" (82) which reveals that to women going back to the natal family is a form of regression to those subordinate roles Menon identifies.

Through Menon's framework, female friendships in Silver's fiction function as resistance rather than mere comfort, establishing spaces where women can support one another outside male-dominated family structures. Following Menon's argument that traditional romantic ideals serve patriarchy (7), female solidarity can be understood as a form of political power. Instead of reinforcing conventional romance, this solidarity values friendship, shared resilience and emotional care. In so doing, it presents an alternative kind of love story: one that centers women's bonds rather than relationships defined by men.

3. Methodology

This paper uses a qualitative literary analysis to study the ways in which Amy Silver's romantic comedies create different forms of female identity and female solidarity. The study examines the power relations of the lives of the characters through the lens of the theoretical frameworks of Simone de Beauvoir, Laura Mulvey, Judith Butler and Nivedita Menon, which serve as interpretive frameworks.

The basic approach of this paper is a thematic analysis. The most crucial passages in the texts involving female resistance and solidarity are located. Patterns such as negotiating female roles, and support circles against patriarchal expectations are analyzed to determine how the narratives of the novels center on these themes.

The data for this study are drawn directly from Amy Silver's four romantic comedies, namely *Confessions of a Reluctant Recessionista* (2009), *All I Want for Christmas* (2010), *One Minute to Midnight* (2011) and *The Reunion* (2013). A close reading method is used, focusing on: first, the dialogue between female characters that reveal solidarity, mentorship, and support, second, internal monologues that display women as people who are challenged by societal expectations, their own desires, as well as identity, and finally, the analysis also focuses on some narrative moments where the main heroines of Silver confront the patriarchal judgment, or construct their own forms of happiness.

4. Analysis

Traditionally, the romantic novels have followed a familiar pattern of conventions to demonstrate the emotional life of women, particularly in relation to love, courtship, conflict and eventual reconciliation. According to Showalter, a significant number of heroines in the 19th century are coupled with heroes who are harsh or emotionally distant: an aspect endowed to heroines by the critics as nearly indispensable to the romantic plot (117). According to Gilbert and Gubar, romance was perceived as the genre with low status, yet it was becoming increasingly popular among women, both as readers and writers, which made it closely associated with femininity (131-32).

Regarding the romantic comedies of Amy Silver, they might seem to be light-minded on the surface, but underneath their well-trodden genre standard conventions lie profound structural commentary of the way the lives of women are structured, pressurized and policed by the demands of patriarchal expectations. Although her plots contain romantic conflict, clumsy confessions, and emotional denouements at the end, as the conventions required in romantic fiction, Silver appears to use these elements of plot to challenge the social constructs that limit women. Instead of the classical searching of the right man, she chooses another way; she creates women who find their strength, understanding, and identity in other women.

This paper argues that Silver employs romantic comedy not to promote heterosexual fantasy but to redefine the genre with the focus on female solidarity, which turns into the emotional, political, and narrative center of all four novels. Based on the notion of woman as the "Other" by Simone de Beauvoir, gender performativity by Judith Butler, and the problem of family as a disciplinary apparatus by Nivedita Menon, as well as the theory of the male gaze by Laura Mulvey, this study demonstrates that Silver approaches the genre internally. Her female characters resist patriarchal scripts, negotiate new standards of selfhood, and end up building new models of happily ever after based not on romance but mutual care, friendship, and female-defined independence.

4.1 Negotiating Female Roles in Social and Familial Contexts

The heroines of Silver do not enter into their stories dreaming of romance; instead, they are put into the arena of systematic pressure. Her female characters throughout the four novels are systematically reminded that their value would depend on effective performance of the four archetypal roles, namely the responsible worker, the supportive girlfriend, the dutiful wife, and the well-behaved daughter.

4.1.1 Tensions Between Societal Expectations and Personal Aspirations

This first pressure is one that can be used as an example of the role of the family as an institution policing sexuality and enforcing conformity to the larger social order, as noted by Menon (4). This pressure is so great that Nicole in *One Minute to Midnight* reflects on the expectations of her mother-in-law, saying, "Failure to have [breakfast] on the table will be regarded by my mother-in-law as a dereliction of my wifely duties" (Silver 3). The appeal to the wifely responsibilities indicates how household work is lowered into a scale of morality of a woman. In other words, a woman's worth is morally measured by the domestic labor she does. The question of Nicole, "does one more really matter?" (3) indicates how perceptively she had realized the futility of this assigned position. By this moment, Silver, reveals the emotional suffocation inherent in domestic expectations. That is, no matter how well or how poorly Nicole does, there is a threat of criticism. The observation here reflects de Beauvoir's argument that women are often positioned as secondary subjects in a world defined by men (26), as the character's value appears tied to external expectations rather than personal agency. The work of Nicole is inherent but her worth is optional, often assessed in terms of external evaluations. Her slow realization of disappointment is what describes the point where, as de Beauvoir suggests, the woman realizes the restriction she is faced with and starts the search of subjectivity (28-30).

Similarly, in *The Reunion*, Jen can see that her whole future is being planned on her boyfriend Conor and she notes: "I didn't write down anything that I wanted for myself. Conor and Jen want this, Conor and Jen will do that. . . ." (Silver 142). The merging here and the start with the man's name depicts a failure of identity, a very precise process where, as de Beauvoir puts it, a woman becomes the "Other", defined in relational terms (26). The self-recognition of Jen is, thus, **subversive. That is to say, she rediscovers an independent "I".**

4.1.2 Internal Struggle and Self-Discovery

Once Silver's heroines realize the external forces that define their life, they enter a state of deep inner struggle. Their journey toward self-discovery is not an easy or inspirational path, but a chaotic and puzzled road filled with the contradictory emotional twists and turns. This experience of emotional conflict is an illustration of how Judith Butler claims that gender roles are not inherent through identity but are rather instituted through repetition, thus making them regulatory fiction as soon as a woman starts to challenge them (179). This instability is reflected in the uncertainty that Cassie shows in the *Confessions of a reluctant Recessionista*. Once her job is lost, she is advised by her friend Jude to take the situation as a chance to reinvent herself: "This could be a blessing in disguise, Cassie. It might be the ideal opportunity to move into a field which really inspires you ... What does really inspire you?", where Cassie replies: "I have

never had a career plan" (Silver 61). The fact that Cassie has never had a career plan is not a weakness of hers but it is rather an eye opener. She faces the emptiness caused when the external indicators of success, namely career and relationship fail. Butler would suggest that Cassie is wrestling with the issue that her former identity was the effect of a regulatory practice (42), and not an inner truth (174). At this point of confusion, Cassie starts to recreate a self that is truly her own.

In the novel, *One Minute to Midnight*, the problem of Nicole can be related to professional insecurity. When talking about her husband Dom, she notes, "Witnessing the steady, hard-won, well-deserved progression of his career from strength to strength only serves to highlight the painful decline of my own" (Silver 41). The success of her partner is reflected as her deficiency. Instead of causing it to be understood as jealousy, Silver positions it as a structural imbalance: the careers of men are allowed to flourish and the careers of women are more often cut short, devalued or overshadowed. This aligns with Menon's argument that patriarchal family forms implicitly place the aspirations of women as secondary (13-14). Therefore, the frustration which Nicole experiences is not an individual failure, but rather, a political situation.

4.1.3 Balancing Love, Career, and Independence

The hypocrisy that women can face in the process of bargaining between love and career is a potential theme that can be found in Silver's fiction. The tension is hardly displayed as dramatic; more likely it is interwoven in the everyday decision-making and conversation. In *The Reunion*, as an example, Jen hides a professional possibility to her lover and would-be boyfriend, Dan: "Jen had not told him that the firm she worked for in Paris had been in touch... She could stay here, with Dan" (Silver 332). Her hesitation reflects her fear of participating in contaminating the relationship which Menon connects to the "sexual division of labour": an assumption where women are taught to regard their professional ambitions secondary to domestic and relational responsibilities (14). However, Silver does not want to present ambition as a pure concept. Cassie in *Confessions* also refutes the idea that success based on an unhealthy work environment is to be desired: Cassie says, "They have to work seventy-hour weeks in what is sometimes an unbearable environment – the stories you hear about misogyny and bullying in the City [sic] are fairly accurate" (Silver 24). Cassie's rejection to measure her worth by how many hours she works can be read, in Butler's terms, as a subversive variation on the repeated performance of being a "fit worker" (185), which represents a deviation from the norm that begins to expose it as constructed rather than natural. She wants rather a space with which she can be in agreement with herself.

4.1.4 Social and Familial Pressures Regulating Women's Choices

Silver goes on showing how the psychological weight of living up to patriarchy, in most instances, may turn out to be deep but hidden. Bea in *All I Want for Christmas* experiences the pressure of her mother to get into a relationship when she is not emotionally ready: "If I'm not already in a relationship she tries ever so unsubtly to push me into the arms of whatever male might be on hand" (Silver 69). As Beauvoir documents in her historical survey, the Pauline tradition declared that 'the woman of the man': that woman was created for man and not the reverse (133), and it is this theological legacy that, Beauvoir argues, shaped the socialization of girls to see their 'final role in relationship to a man. Bea's irritation, thus, serves as a minor resistance that sheds light on the generational divide between women who had been conditioned to find validation in men, and women who are now pursuing different paths.

Equally, intrusive issues about motherhood are also applied to Nicole in *One Minute to Midnight*. Her father's question "'Still no kids then?'" (Silver 126) represents a kind of a casual yet socially loaded questioning which seems indicative of what Menon calls the so-called mandatory heterosexual family: a set up where reproduction is expected and regulated (4-5). Nicole's reply "I laugh nervously. "No, not yet" (Silver 126), expresses the uncomfortable situation she experiences, and therefore reveals how these normative expectations treat a woman's body as a site to be occupied, which diminishes her bodily autonomy.

4.1.5 Reclaiming Agency Through Self-Definition and Boundary Setting

Silver in her fiction leads her heroines to rebuild their identity in response to social pressures. However, this transformation is not depicted as a clear success, but as a hesitant and imperfect process, which reflects the notion that identity is never complete. Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990) suggests this when she explains that identity is constantly being acted out and continually reconstituted (20-22). In *The Reunion*, Jen's voice reflects a reclaimed authorship, particularly when she says: "'My entire life since then has been defined by two things, by a mistake and by an accident. I believe that it's time that changed, that I start doing the defining for myself'" (Silver 292). This brings to mind the argument of Beauvoir that women must refuse the role of immanent object and project herself toward transcendence: toward a free, self-defining existence (37, 862). Even Nicole, in *One Minute to Midnight*, also shows a different understanding of her feelings. It is not rebellion when she chooses not to celebrate her in-laws' traditions, as she says to her husband Dom, "'I just wanted to tell you that no matter how much I love you, no matter how good you are to me or how well you treat me I will never, ever go to the fucking golf club for New Year's Eve'" (Silver 10), but it is a breach of the so-called regulatory practice in Butler's sense (41). This suggests that it is not compulsion but comfort and desire that drives her activity.

These events indicate that Silver's heroines are often portrayed as developing independence from male rescue narratives. Simply put, her heroines are often depicted as figures who do not need men to save them; instead, they free themselves from male-centered rescue stories that portray them in weak or dependent roles. The resistance on their part does not occur in isolation. This is where Silver's novels turn to a larger thesis. That is, women are not rediscovering their identity through single action, but by way of collective action. This takes one to the second major part.

4.2 Support Networks Against Patriarchal Expectations

Female solidarity in Silver's novels appears not as a superficial background motif, but it is the machinery that promotes women's change. Her heroines, as they initially see the restrictions, they are subject to as a result of the patriarchal structures, do not look outward to male saviors but sideways, to the women around their own. This is shown in the lateral distribution of emotional force which challenges Mulvey's concept of the male gaze where women become visual and social objects of control (808-809). Silver turns this structure upside down by creating female gazes: how women look, understand and rehabilitate each other. Their friendships turn into safe havens where they redefine themselves and struggle to come up with other meanings of happiness.

4.2.1 Female Friendship as Safe Spaces of Encouragement

In her romantic comedies, Silver builds female friendship in a form of an emotional refuge, where women are free to fall, open up or even explode without blame. These spaces are used to overcome the outside forces mentioned above and thus they become, in Menon's terms, sites where the political content of everyday life is most clearly visible: where the personal is political (35). At these times, women do not compete over the need of male confirmation but rather, they strive to help each other to carry on and have the resilience to rebuild themselves. In *Confessions of a Reluctant Recessionista*, Cassie faces one such sanctuary moment where Ali joins her to defend her against humiliation in the prospect of being ridiculed: "'Don't cry,' she said, slipping her hand into mine and squeezing it. 'Cry later. Don't cry here'" (Silver 55). On the one hand, Ali's simplicity reveals her sincerity; on the other hand, her gesture is on a political level. By covering Cassie with her hand, Ali symbolically breaks those social conditions which place women under a controlling gaze, which, adapting Mulvey's framework to the social world of Silver's romantic comedies, positions women as objects of visual and moral judgements rather than merely erotic display (808-809). It is here, in this inner, inaccessible space between them that she is allowed to break down without loss of dignity.

Besides, these friendships have a functional aspect. Jude in *Confessions* does not stop at the emotional comfort; she works out the ways of keeping her friend Cassie alive, as Cassie narrates "Jude, as ever, was full of practical advice", devising for her the "Recession Buster" (Silver 59-60), a structured plan of action to help her navigate unemployment. Through mentorship, planning, and steady help, Jude brings Cassie back into the world: one that is not rescued by a man but through women's solidarity. This dynamic reflects Butler's belief that identity is constituted through repetitive acts rather than grounded in a fixed essence (179). In this case, the repetitive female solidarity acts gradually reshape Cassie's self-perception, and restore her feeling of competence and possibility.

4.2.2 Shared Experience and Reframing Judgment

The other significant role of solidarity in Silver's novels is the redefinition of patriarchal shame. Instead of letting one another shift the blame internally, the female characters are reinventing their experiences in a socialized manner, thus piling the blame not on themselves, but directly challenging patriarchal narratives. In *The Reunion*, the situation switches as soon as Jen tells her friend Lilah that she is afraid of being judged because she had relationships with two men. However, Lilah tells her that she should see it in another way: "'You slept with two men, both of whom you had feelings for, at least one of whom, and probably both, you were in love with. It's hardly the stuff of great scandal'" (Silver 303). In a way, this idea challenges the patriarchal assertion that a woman's valuing another woman is bound to sexual purity. Lilah's framing can be read, within Menon's framework, as a political act, which is an exposure of the moral rules that govern women's sexuality as socially constructed rather than natural (35). what feels like personal reassurance is, in Menon's terms, a refusal to let the personal remain unexamined.

The same way in *Confessions*, where Cassie at first blames herself for being dumped by Dan, but this time again, her friend Ali comes to the rescue, telling her "You didn't do anything, Cassie, he's just a shit. I know that deep down you know that" (Silver 76). As Beauvoir argues, what appears to be a woman's personal fault or failure reflects not her own nature but the conditions of her oppression (741). This straightforward statement reshapes this pattern of female self-blame. Instead of viewing herself as unlovable, Cassie is advised by her friend Ali to view her experience in a different light: not her deficit but the irresponsibility of the man. The friendships among women in Silver's works oppose this internalizing tendency, and provide some other interpretation based not on guilt but rather on clarity. The language of women, which is often considered insignificant or personal, is a conscious political process. It is here in this speech that women recognize systematic injustice, make fun of restrictive patriarchal assumptions, and restore each other's self-esteem.

4.2.3 Defending Each Other Against Patriarchal Gaze

In her depiction of female characters, Silver uses female solidarity as a way not only to console each other, but also to fight against the male gaze conventions. By adapting Mulvey's argument, Silver's female characters can be seen as positioned not merely as erotic objects of the gaze (808-809), but as objects of social and moral judgments (811-812). However, Silver disrupts this gaze by giving her female characters a voice to rewrite the narrative and reclaim their own terms of self-definition. An example of this is seen in *One Minute to Midnight* where Alex employs humor and hyperbole to defend her fellow woman (Nicole): I explained to him that you were shagging an investment banker with a big dick (Silver 154). On the surface, this line appears quite innocent but at a deeper level it functions as a strategic reclamation of the narrative. Instead of letting the woman (Nichole) be labeled in a manner that makes everyone look down on her due to gossiping, her friend (Alex) distorts the situation beyond its actual significance, which results in nullifying the notion that the sexual background of women should be criminalized. In this way, she enacts what Butler defines as "gender trouble", the subversion of traditional norms women are expected to follow (44). In this context, these defensive movements are not merely gestures of love, but an essential power switch: women cease to be passive subjects whose behaviors are interpreted by other people and begin to construct their own narratives. They do not merely live under the gaze, but they rewrite it.

4.2.4 Women Helping Each Other Navigate Marriage and Tradition

Silver's novels also ensure that emotional solidarity is not enough. Her female characters support one another to negotiate material things like rent, work, pregnancy, problematic relations and some situations that are defined by patriarchal regimes. These mundane interventions found in her works embody the argument of Menon that the personal is political (35). More precisely, every practical choice a woman makes: where she lives, how she makes a living, whether she is a mother or not, is governed by gendered expectations.

In *Confessions of a Reluctant Recessionista*, Cassie goes bankrupt after she has lost both her job and her romantic relationship. However, instead of giving up on her, her friends support her in a motherly kind of honesty, telling her, "Cass. We're not ganging up on you, but we do feel like you've got to stop all this and start concentrating on what you're going to do next" (Silver 100). The "we" in its plural sense is also significant in this context. It creates an alliance, a sense of responsibility by women to find a way out of the crisis within their circle. For this reason, it can be seen as echoing de Beauvoir's view of women's freedom, which is based on collective recognition. From this perspective, women become Subjects as groups, not as separate individuals (28). In addition, such friendships make it possible to subvert repressive family

formations. Women in *One Minute to Midnight* do not accept conventional signs of maturity and home life achievement. A case in point is Nicole who keeps on rebelling against the dictated roles of wife, mother, and housewife. When her husband Dom suggests that she should be more domestic, she declines to do so. Moreover, when he raises the topic of having children, she states that she simply does not follow that call as much as other women do (Silver 210, 279). Instead of submitting into the rigid gender frame that Butler discusses, Nicole and her group of friends continue to redefine the idea of adulthood by exploring new ways of becoming an adult. They continually reject the role of a dutiful wife, resulting in exposing the institution and naturalness of marriage and motherhood as a regulatory fiction and not a necessity (44).

In all this, Silver's novels demonstrate that female solidarity is not merely friend-making; it functions as a survival strategy that meets both the economic and emotional needs. In these novels, women help each other out in various ways related to financial support, career guidance, or emotional intervention. By doing this, they help one another to deal with the real-life problems of being women under patriarchal expectations. This aligns with Menon's argument that the personal is political (35), which means that all seemingly personal choices, be it where to live, how to make a living, or whether to pursue a career, are influenced by gendered power structures. These bonds of mutual care allow Silver's heroines to not only survive, but also to resist the isolating pressures of traditional womanhood.

4.2.5 Shared Strategies for Self-preservation

Silver's work goes beyond emotional solace or practical advice and highlights how women develop different cultural and emotional ways of living. One of the obvious examples is seen in the novel *One Minute to Midnight* where Nicole claims that she wants to make her own rules about adulthood instead of following the scripts made by her parents. She responds to her boyfriend's proposal that they live together by saying that she is considering purchasing her own place (Silver 279). This reflects not just a personal choice; it is quite a symbolic denial of the practices that have traditionally defined womanhood. Similarly, when she says that she does not experience the necessity that other women feel about motherhood (210), it is elicited that she is rejecting the societal demands that are trying to compel her life to socially prescribed life path. As Butler puts it, repeated acts of refusal can weaken gender norms, which were never grounded in an original or natural essence, revealing that such emerging practices are not natural but socially created over time (43-44). Silver's heroines rebel against the anticipated roles of wifehood, motherhood and domestic conformity and are, henceforth, reshaping ideas of womanhood based on women's own choices rather than patriarchal tradition.

The acts of self-preservation tend to come up when there is a crisis. When Cassie gives herself a homemade waxing accident as a sign of symbolic compliance with patriarchal ideals of beauty, Ali runs to save her not because she is embarrassed but because she wants to laugh and to mediate and refer her friend to healthier alternatives. This accident transforms a humiliating tragedy into solidarity.

4.3 Solidarity as a Strategy of Resistance

In Silver's fiction, female friendship shifts the emotional support to a form of resistance against patriarchy. Not only do her protagonists struggle with gendered oppression; they fight it. The bonds they create help them confront the norms imposed by patriarchy, renounce abusive relationships, and recreate the ideas of happiness according to their desires.

4.3.1 Collective Female Strength as a Counterforce to Patriarchy

Silver suggests that patriarchy exerts greater influence when women are isolated, but weakens when they come together. Such situation is evident in *Confessions of a Reluctant Recessionista*, where Cassie is on the verge of insanity after her loss of her job and being dumped by her boyfriend Dan. Her friends step in during a gathering: we are not ganging up on you; however, you should stop all this and begin to focus on what you are going to do next (Silver 100). The point of that moment highlights the way the collective "we" works. Although it seems to silence the voice of the individual (Cassie), it makes the act seem less oppressive and more empowering. The women here do not wish Cassie to break out desperation, they attempt to demonstrate to her that "we" as well can be of help. This is where the critical reflection comes, as Beauvoir argues that refusing to remain the Other, refusing to let the male-dominated world absorb one's identity entirely, demands that women find the means to assert themselves as Subjects (29-30).

Resistance is also expressed in more noticeable cases. In *One Minute to Midnight*, the narrator (Nicole) expresses an experience of domestic abuse, particularly when her father beats both her and her mother, causing her mother "a mild concussion". However, Nicole's mother does not remain passive; she says to her husband's brother (Chris), "You just make sure he is not in this house when I get back" (Silver 32). The command of Nicole's mother here is straight, unbending, and defensive. She rejects the idea that violence becomes a norm within patriarchal family life: what Menon describes as "site of violent power play and exclusion" (46). Nicole's mother creates a women-centered protection net by expelling any form of danger.

In the central part of Silver's fiction, resistance is not a single heroic act; it is imperfect, built through team work, and is embedded in what Silver calls woman-care: networks of support and protection among women. Women are gaining the sense of independent subjects, rather than a

mere "they" within male-centered narratives. As a result, Silver's fiction presents multiple perspectives rather than privileging a single authoritative voice.

4.3.2 Solidarity and the Redefinition of Love and Happy Endings

Instead of making friendships the emotional subplot, Silver makes them the emotional center of her stories rather than romantic relationships. That is to say, rather than the story being dependent on the approval of a man or some form of romantic attention, she introduces displays of tenderness and gentleness between women. A case in point can be read in *Confessions of a Reluctant Recessionista*, when Cassie bursts into tears and is worried after feeling that there is something wrong with her boyfriend Dan. She does this, and Jude, her friend and roommate, leaps in immediately. Cassie says, Jude sat down by my side and threw her arm around my shoulder and gave me comforting tones: 'It'll be OK, Cass. He'll be OK. How about we go to the Rose & Crown and have a drink? I'm buying'" (Silver 63). This scene shows that though Cassie's worry is for Dan, the resolution comes not from him or fixing his situation. It rather comes from Jude's intervention who redirects Cassie's emotional energy from male-centered anxiety toward female-centered care, which highlights that true emotional rescue lies not in romantic obligation but in friendship. Moreover, this language that Silver speaks is one of coziness, intimacy, and reassurance-type words people expect to hear when somebody is with a romantic partner, but instead, she delivers that message to other women. This situation suggests a contradiction to Mulvey's argument that "the power to subject another person to the will sadistically or to the gaze voyeuristically is turned on to the women as the object of both" (813). In so doing, Silver depicts how women in her fiction heal one another.

Silver's characters in their refined manner describe this principle in an obvious way. Cassie's mother simply states that boyfriends are temporary, but girlfriends are the ones that matter (Silver 146). This statement functions as a central idea of Silver's feminist work. It shrinks the male-focused romantic instability to a simple nuisance and lifts female solidarity as the stable and constant source of significance in the life of a woman. The advice of Cassie's mother mirrors the idea of de Beauvoir's observation that women must acknowledge their shared identity rather than define themselves through men (28-29), which demonstrates that it is female solidarity, not romantic attachment, that becomes the primary source of meaning in a woman's life.

Similarly, Silver appears to rework conventional ideas of romantic fate in ways that shift narrative emphasis toward friendship. This is clearly demonstrated at the end of *Confessions of a Reluctant Recessionista*, where Cassie is offered the kind of ending that romance genre promises: when the guy, namely Jake, Cassie has feelings for, offers her to travel with him to Africa, she rejects his proposal, telling him that they can't do the long-distance thing, "We can't, Jake – you

know we can't" (Silver 325), because of her work, her family, and her friend Ali (Silver 325). She then moves in with Ali (Silver 326). This ending reflects a direct fulfillment of the sentiment expressed earlier by Cassie's mother that Boyfriends are temporary but girlfriends are the ones who matter (Silver 146). The story does not end with a romantic rescue, but with Cassie's independence and her friendship with Ali, which is the real place of the novel's happy ending.

In this way, Silver's work mirrors Butler's larger project of opening up possibilities for gendered life outside of the rigid, exclusionary norms (viii). This is evident in Cassie's rejection of Jake's proposal, as she decides to create her future around her friendship with Ali rather than following the stereotypical romance around a rescue. For this, Silver seems to reshape the romantic comedy formula. That is, happiness is not about finding a partner, but about the women who are there for each other in times of joy and difficulty, like the relationship between Cassie and Ali. Therefore, the denouement of *Confessions* gives Cassie a future in which she doesn't have to be the object waiting to be claimed, but the subject who defines her own path. That is, she chooses companionship and independence over conformity to romantic expectation.

5. Conclusion

A closer analysis of Silver's fiction reveals how everyday practices are used to challenge the prevailing expectations placed on women. Her heroines are not beginning their journey as complete outcasts; they are confined by a social system which defines them by how well they perform as wives, daughters and girlfriends. However, Silver does not present change as a dramatic, and individualized act of rebellion. This inner confusion is not a weakness but is a starting point for moving beyond the fixed scripts they have been given.

More importantly, what makes the change in these stories is how women relate to each other. Silver does not merely depict women's friendship as comfort; she transforms it into something practical, a meaningful strategy through which characters negotiate and resist constraint. It is true that three out of the four novels do end with a romantic partnership. However, this reading reveals that the heroines get there in different ways: not through passive rescue, but through self-definition and the solidarity of other women. Future studies might extend this inquiry to other contemporary romantic comedies, where researchers can examine whether Silver's redefinition of the happy ending indicates a broader generic shift toward female-centered solidarity.

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