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**The Journey from Madness to Womanhood**  
**In Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar***

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Civizations**

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## **Dedication**

First of all, I thank ALLAH who gave me patience and strength to do this thesis.

I dedicate this modest work to my life, my hope, to my dearest mother, Nabila, and my beloved father, Allawa. I also dedicate it to my beautiful sister, Asma, and my brother, Alladin, and his wife, Chanez. I thank everyone who gave me advice, help, and encouragement. I dedicate my thesis to my dear friends and relatives, Dounia and her daughter, Assinat, to Wiem, Rania, Boutheina, Douaa, Meriem, Nadia, Sahar, Hanen, Amani, Taiba, Kawther, Hasna, Sabrin, Mehdiya, and Zayneb, and I wish them all the best.

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## **Abstract**

This study aims to explore the journey of American women from madness to achieve womanhood. The study analyzes Sylvia Plath's novel, *The Bell Jar* (1963), which is published under the pseudonym, Victoria Lucas. This thesis depends on two literary theories which are feminism and psychoanalysis. It sheds light on female madness, seeing it as a cultural construction more than as a physical malady. On the other hand, the work aims to explain the ways women fight and manage to overcome their madness. One of these ways, the thesis assumes, is writing which help them spread their ideas worldwide. Indeed, writing proves to be a valuable strategy to overcome madness and to fight patriarchy. Through writing, females succeed in fighting the rigid patriarchal structure and in changing the wrong status quo.

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الملخص

Résumé

## **Introduction**

American literature refers to a variety of literary works that are produced in the United States of America and written in the English language. American literature of the twentieth century is very rich because it notices a huge development and emergence of many movements. This creativity and productivity touch all the literary genres like prose, poetry, and drama.

Twentieth century American literature notices the development of so many literary theories like feminism and psychoanalysis. Indeed, so many twentieth century writers shed light on patriarchy and female oppression as an attempt to correct the ills of an unjust society. Women are suffering from oppression and abuse lead them to depression, madness and different mental illnesses. Some of them do not accept these living conditions and start thinking about many suggestions and solutions that decrease, minimize or solve women problems. The psychoanalytical approach goes hand in hand with the feminist one while analyzing feminist texts.

A major aim of feminist scholars is to regain women lost voices and to realize the political and social equality between the two sexes. The main theme addressed by feminist writers is the search for identity, freedom, and individualism. They want to put an end to male violence and domination. As a result, women become more confident and stronger to face patriarchy and to reclaim their rights. Feminism plays a major role in transmitting the female voice to the whole world through their works. For some feminists, marriage hinders their success and ambition and, this is why, they reject it.

In mid 1950s, American women lived bad and difficult situations which cause their mental breakdowns. Female madness became an overall situation and this period of time saw an increased number of attempted suicides. Trying to find a solution to sick women, psychiatrists worked hard to find quick and successful drugs. There are a lot of writers and

novelists who discuss this issue of madness in their works and one of them is Sylvia Plath, the famous American novelist and poet in her novel *The Bell Jar* (1963).

*The Bell Jar* portrays the story of Esther Greenwood who narrates her miserable sufferance and the oppression she experiences every day; she is abused by her family members, closest friends and the entire environment in general. Plath, among other female writers like Virginia Woolf, Doris Lessing, and Simone De Beauvoir, well describes the effects of male domination on females in the story.

The aim of this study is to describe the oppression and madness the protagonist, Esther Greenwood experiences. Plath well explores how females become mad and examines several ways psychiatrists follow to treat people. She also attempts to find whether psychiatrists deal with mad people and their difficult mental situations in a good way. Plath's central character is Esther Greenwood and, in her, she projects her own story and misery. In addition, she sheds light on Esther as different from the other female characters in the story; she has some different principles in her life like rejecting marriage and using writing as a tool to solve her illness and to put an end to all the lived conditions in the American society.

The purpose of this study is to describe female sufferance and to explain the journey of women from madness to womanhood and to analyze feminism in relation to the major problems of females in America. This study aims to show the effect of patriarchy on females; patriarchy leads to female confusion and they have a lot of fears; there is no unity and everything is fragmented.

The choice of dealing with this topic is highly motivated by the fact that all other researches about *The Bell Jar* approach the novel either from a psychoanalytical perspective or a feminist one. Some researchers discuss madness and study the psychology of Esther Greenwood from a psychoanalytical zone while others center their study on the oppression Esther experiences in a patriarchal society and apply a feminist approach. Few researchers



make the link between the two theories visible. This work tries to combine the two literary theories, feminism and psychoanalysis, to study Esther's character. The work shows that madness is not a physical condition but, rather, a cultural one. In other words, women become mad because of patriarchy and the unjust status quo not because of a physical problem.

This research studies *The Bell Jar* from a feminist and a psychoanalytical perspective to explore women real lives. The thesis contains a general introduction that informs the reader about what he or she is going to find in this study, followed by a three chapter structure, and a general conclusion. The first chapter is theoretical and includes an overview of madness in American literature. It discusses the emergence and development of madness over history, madness in feminism, and madness in psychoanalysis. These studies are linked with illustrations from major works of famous authors, writers and critics. The second chapter explores the suffering of female characters in *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath. This chapter discusses in detail women problems and struggles under patriarchy. The third chapter is about the female journey to achieve womanhood at the end of the novel and women maturity and awareness in *The Bell Jar*. In addition, it highlights several strategies used to solve female problems and to reach womanhood.

## **Chapter One: An Overview of Madness in American Literature in the Twentieth Century**

This chapter discusses the issue of madness in American literature. It defines madness and traces its appearance and development in literature referring to some works by American writers. It sheds light on madness as it is discussed in literature and in relation to two literary theories that highly focus on this issue. These theories are feminism and psychoanalysis. An attempt is made to highlight the theoretical framework and to shed light on some key concepts and how they are approached by some novelists.

Delving into the theories of feminism and psychoanalysis, it becomes clear that the issue of madness is really controversial. It sees a great progress in the twentieth century with notable feminist and psychoanalytic works. On the one hand, American novelists and feminists deal with female issues. They explore female problems and the major causes of female madness and its consequences on females' lives. Some of these researchers are Sylvia Plath, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Marge Piercy, Charlotte Bunch, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Mary Wollstonecraft to mention but a few. One cannot discuss madness in the twentieth century without referring to some famous and influential works. These works include Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963), Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1915), Mary Wollstonecraft's work *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) and Elaine Showalter's work *The Female Malady* (1987).

On the other hand, American psychoanalysts give a well covered picture of women's real lives, sufferance, and desires by analyzing their situations and trying to find suitable solutions for madness. Since women, in the last century, dreamt to have equal chances with men and to make a change in American patriarchal society, they gave the issue a huge scholarship. Some of the American psychoanalysts and novelists who discuss madness in

their works are: F. Scott Fitzgerald and his wife Zelda's book *Sometimes Madness Is Wisdom* (2001), Sigmund Freud's book *The Psychology of Everyday Life* (1901) and *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905).

## **1. Madness in Literature**

The term "madness" is the colloquial used to describe insanity: the fragmented and chaotic state of the mind of the person who becomes detached from reality (Evans 1). Casey B, et al make a research in order to explore human mental illnesses. Their study focuses mainly on how people may negatively be influenced by their environments and their beliefs which cause their mental insanity. It is suggested that a major solution for people suffering from psychological inconsistencies is to share their personal experiences and stories with others. By doing so, they can overcome their problems (Casey B et al. 89).

### **1.1. History and Development of Madness**

Krause A Jennifer highly appreciates the work of Michel Foucault *Madness and Civilization* (1961) because, according to her, it covers the development of madness from the Middle Ages to the modern period (1). Krause takes Foucault's study of madness and its history as a starting point in doing her research since it is a well organized work which describes how madness is reflected in many fields like literature, culture, and history (Krause 1-2). Michel Foucault states in his book *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* that "Madness is the absolute break with the work of art" (273). First, in the middle ages, the definition of madness varied from one place to another. In Europe, for example, it was difficult to find one universal definition of madness; Europe, at that time, was composed of different kingdoms with different cultural traditions and norms. Therefore, acceptable things as a treatment for mad persons in one place may be rejected in other places. For instance, the treatment of mad persons had various ways: they are cured either by using medicals, or spirituals. Catholic people, for example, used spirituals in the church because

they strongly believed that mad patients are controlled by devils (Elkin 1-2). Any person who did an abnormal behavior was seen by others as a mad person and he/she could not know or control his behavior. The mad person was treated either by drugs or spirituals (Elkin 1-2).

Foucault states that the key for understanding the meaning of madness in the medieval period is to focus on abandonment; the madman is abandoned by society. In this respect, Michel Foucault gives the example of the leper that was forsaken (qtd. in Krause 3). Instead of helping the lepers and curing them, Foucault argues, people and churches choose to ignore and reject them. Foucault confirms in his book *Madness and Civilization* that: "Leprosy disappeared, the leper vanished, or almost, from memory; these structures remained ... Poor vagabonds, criminals, and 'deranged minds' would take the part played by the leper, and we shall see what salvation was expected from this exclusion, for them and for those who excluded them as well" (7). The quote well illustrates the fact that the madman was ignored and excluded in his society to be treated and to live normally like the others. Foucault confirms that although leprosy is deserted centuries ago, the horrible way people dealt with lepers was considered as a crime towards humanity till nowadays (qtd. in Krause 3).

In the Renaissance, madness was present everywhere and was mingled with every experience by its images or its dangers and it becomes a thing to look at: no longer a monster inside oneself, but an animal with strange mechanisms, a bestiality from which man had long since been suppressed (Foucault 66). Therefore, insanity spread and things changed because it touched everything in society. There were portrayals of tragic ends of mad people who were different because they were the ones who know dark hidden facts in society (Rodrigo). Shakespeare's plays were the best examples of these portrayals; in *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, Shakespeare portrays madness. Shakespeare connects the mad person with problems and wisdom and how the mad person behaves differently from the others. This leads him to a tragic end at the end of the play. This is, certainly, the case of Ophelia in his play *Hamlet*. So,

madness is a major emphasis in arts and literature and it symbolizes weakness and is related to self consciousness (Rodrigo).

After that, in the seventeenth century, people's awareness about madness increased and society gave a great interest to mad persons and encouraged people to be more sociable and kind with this category (Rodrigo). The madman was treated in institutions of confinement; he was socially excluded to another place which is "confinement" in order to learn and to practice good behaviors and disciplines, instead of treating him medically (Rodrigo).

However, in the eighteenth century, the vision of madness changed and researchers found that it is unfair to treat the mad people by separating them from others as if they are animals (Rodrigo). In the nineteenth century, there is a shift to a scientific study that solves the problem by treating people medically since madness is a mental illness. All in all, the vision of madness and the way of treating the mad patients totally changed and developed from one century to another because mad people are abnormal people who should be treated as mentally sick (Rodrigo).

Moving to the nineteenth and twentieth century that saw a progress of madness in literature in both America and England, madness was seen as a mental breakdown that must be treated scientifically in asylums (Rodrigo). In this era; madness was considered as a medical and a social problem because people's consciousness about madness grows. As a result, they want to help mad patients to get rid of madness. Also, major literary works in the nineteenth century showed another side of describing madness in relation to imagination ("Madness in Nineteenth-Century").

## **2. Madness and Feminism**

Feminist literary theory appeared to put feminism into practice through the fictional examination and literary analysis of females' works. Carlson Jennifer and Ray Raka in their article "Feminist Theory" state that feminist theory examines the inequality between the two

sexes, prescribing the normative relations between them (Carlson and Ray). Feminist theories start with the feminist movement in the last decades of the nineteenth century and extend to the mid twentieth century. Feminist theories describe the fear and oppression that women suffer from in their first appearance in a general way.

Little Julianna in her thesis “Frailty, Thy name is Woman: Depiction of Female Madness” depicts female madness and how women were solely seen as wives and mothers; they followed their masculine relatives in everything; their fathers, brothers, or husbands. They felt ignored, depressed, and passive. All these led them to a hysteria, mental disorder, depression and madness (1-2). Feminism rejects all these inconsistencies. It makes many reactions and most of them were through female writers trying to explain their sufferance in a male society by telling their main experiences. The aim was to show how men victimize and silence their voices, talents, and creativity.

Madness is considered as a global phenomenon that women suffered from and, since literature is a mirror of society, it sheds light on the issue. It was expressed in many works by feminist men and women especially in American literature. Authors like Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892), Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* (1976), Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar* (1963), Alice Thorne’s *Ideas, Images, and Real Lives* (2000). And *The Madness of Women* (2011) which is a book written by Jane M. Ussher. These authors shed light on madness and explore madness from different perspectives.

Kuryloski writes that in the above mentioned literary works, the depiction of the madwoman represents how females are resisted in patriarchal societies (3). So, these literary works provide the reader with the real images of female madness since it aggressively marginalizes them (3). The writer chooses the above collection of novels to analyze it from a feminist point of view. The selected writers; Sylvia Plath, Maxine Hong Kingston, Charlotte

Perkins Gilman, Marge Piercy, Alice Thorne, are female writers who write either about their own sufferance and mental illnesses, or they narrate the tragic stories of their female relatives like Maxine Hong Kingston in *The Woman Warrior*.

According to Matosevic, the first female writer who dominates her own story in her work portraying her madness was Charlotte Perkins Gilman (4). She talks about female mental disorder and criticizes the nineteenth century status quo in an attempt to liberate women from its ramifications (4). The nineteenth century notices a development of women's consciousness. One of the female voices that rejects silence and breaks the tradition in order to give strength to the female voice is Charlotte Perkins Gilman through her work "The Yellow Wallpaper" that was written in 1892 (Matosevic 6).

The story revolves around the narrator herself who is an unhappy married woman because she lives in a very small house in a small village. She finds herself alone and feels uncomfortable because of the atmosphere of the room that is covered with old yellow wallpaper. Her husband, John, does not trust her and does not believe she is in a difficult situation same as her brother and other family members (7). She thinks of a solution that may help her to overcome her mental illness. One solution she finds is writing. However, her husband and brother disagree and they prevent her from writing although they are educated and both of them are doctors (7). In this era, women were prevented to work either inside their homes or outside. Even though she is a writer and a mother, her husband may quickly change her point of view because she is a woman and women are known by their emotions and feelings (Matosevic 7-8). He said to her "bless her little heart" (Gilman 140) with big hug or "My darling" (Gilman 140) so that he can fool her mind and go outside. So, by using these expressions, he escapes from his wife when she tries to complain about her sickness (7-8).

Although her husband is a doctor, the way he treats her in comparison with other sick patients is different; he never feels afraid and never shows seriousness when her case is

concerned (8). He expects that there is no real or logical reason for being mentally sick because she is in a good health. So, the writer makes efforts to write and to make a clear understanding that mentally sick persons suffer alone without any help (Matosevic 8).

At last, Matosevic confirms that both Gilman and the protagonist of *The Yellow Wallpaper* want to put the wallpaper down; this literary work aims to empower the collaboration of women together so as to help each other solving their problems and to realize their aim to get their rights like men do (10). Another idea that reflects the sufferance and women's oppression in the short story is the use of anonymous protagonist; there is no name for the protagonist (10). The writer intends her protagonist to be anonymous as a symbol for the whole generation of women. Indeed, this story may happen to any woman and in any given time and place.

Another literary work that deals with women's struggles and the major difficulties they face in patriarchal societies is a memoir written by the Chinese American writer Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of Girlhood among Ghosts*, in which she explores the major causes of being mad. The novel narrates several stories and all of them are about women's sufferance and oppression from patriarchy (Shinn 13). Maxine Hong Kingston portrays females from personal and cultural stories, the Chinese and the American culture, since both cultures suffer from male domination (13).

First, Kingston writes about the miserable death of her aunt "No Name Woman"; Kingston refers to her by this name because her mother prohibits her to mention her aunt's name (Souza). They consider the story of "No Name Woman" as a family secret because Kingston's aunt is raped and, as a result, she kills herself. The people who live around her blame her and oppress her harshly. As a consequence, "No Name Woman" suffers from hard mental troubles and, this is why, she kills herself (Souza). The narrator has many gaps about the story in her mind and she tries to complete them through imagination and blaming



patriarchy. For example, the narrator thinks that her aunt was crazy and that she was raped and she could not defend herself (Shinn 15). Kingston writes: “Imagining her free with sex doesn’t fit, though. I don’t know any woman like that or man either. Unless I see her life branching into mine, she gives me no ancestral help” (Kingston 11).

Kingston writes also about the story of her aunt Moon Orchid, the sister of her mother who is a weak woman that becomes mad because of her husband’ infidelity; he leaves her alone in China and remarries again (Shinn 16). The narrator describes the difference between her mother and her aunt; her mother is well educated, she is a doctor who is audacious enough to do whatever she wants unlike her sister who fails to solve her problems (16). Moon Orchid can’t cohabit in the American society when she moves to live there; she becomes mad and died at the end because she cannot adapt herself to the American society (Shinn 16).

This point examines how feminist problems arise and develop within females’ society and culture. Moon Orchid exemplifies the weak woman who is oppressed by her husband, her weak personality leads her to be mad; she cannot get rid of her fears and mental illness, and her end was tragic on the one hand (“The Woman Warrior Summary”). On the other hand, Kingston writes and she does not give up at all like many other female writers, she wants to end such oppression, unfair norms and traditions. Using their pens is considered as the best solution.

Another famous novel is *Woman on the Edge of Time* by the famous novelist Marge Piercy which is published in 1976. The novel criticizes the modern society very well through the story of the protagonist Connie Ramos. So, all of society, culture and traditions are important themes within this novel. The novelist discusses the difference between the actual time which is the 1970s and the next two hundred years. The novel is concerned with Connie Ramos who is treated in an asylum and she travels from time to time in the future (Matosevic 21-2).

So, the story takes two places from New York City to Mattapoissett; the city that is found in the future. First of all, Connie is a woman who grows up in Mexican traditions; she finds herself in one asylum after defending her niece from Geraldo who wants to do something bad to Dolly, her niece (Matosevic 21-2). He goes to asylum and he tells them that Connie is a crazy woman. They take her to the hospital where she was tied a period of time in her bed (21-2). This well depicts how American society aggressively treats the patients ignoring their rights and needs; they do not even ask the patients about their situation, health or desire but, instead, they ask their relatives (22). The reader can easily understand the miserable life of the protagonist and the difficulties she faces in her life in general; she is jobless, she is far from her child, she suffers the death of her lover, and, needless to say, she is present in an asylum where she is badly treated (Matosevic 21-2).

In travelling to the future world, Connie is with Luciente and she finds totally different situations because, in the future world, there is no clear separation between the two sexes. She cannot differentiate a woman from a man; there are no gender roles in this society; freedom is not limited at all. Also, each woman is allowed being a single mother; no rules or prohibitions towards them (Matosevic 23). Because no one may punish these single mothers, they are a lot and everywhere. No traditional or societal limitation may affect women and mothers. Luciente likes that so much, she thinks that this is an equal, fair, and amazing society. In contrast, Connie dislikes this, she describes what she sees as “appalling”, “shocking” and “unforgivable” (qtd.in Matosevic 23). This comparison is highly significant because it points to the artificiality of gender roles and aims at correcting the ills of society as far as the case of women is concerned.

In analyzing the novel, it is important to note that the author describes freedom in Mattapoissett; first, stating that gender is not important any more for them. Second, Marge Piercy denies the role of women as mothers, she considers them as not good mothers because

they are not responsible at all, and they do not give care and importance of birth (Matosevic 24). Another point Connie considers as strange and unnatural is the phenomenon of babies who have unknown fathers. Next point is that socialism in the novel is visible; how each one does his or her work in the society. Since the two genders are equal in the matter of having the same chances in everything which makes in the same social and economic status in Mattapoissett; no poverty or richness (24). As the novel depicts, Mattapoissett is a society about which every woman is dreaming because it is a place where gender roles do not matter.

Yan states that Mirage's *Woman on the Edge of Time* is directly connected to feminist concerns and issues since it represents a case of madwoman Connie, emphasizing how the protagonist becomes mad. First of all, she is oppressed and, second, she goes to an asylum where she is treated in a bad way. Thirdly, the character finds herself alone and no one helps her (Yan 31). This explores the development of madness' sense in the character. Also, she builds a kind of link between Connie and Jackrabbit who is a fictional character of the future society, Jackrabbit is a madwoman like Connie. The writer tries to state the main differences between the two women and to focus more on madness especially in relation to women. Moreover, dealing with the role of society and how it may affect and give power to people (Yan 31).

All in all, feminism and feminists well analyze madness explaining its roots and the major causes by talking about women's personal experiences in various traditions and cultures. These societies victimize women' voices, talents, rights, and how all of these affect the inner side and the psychology of women and their suffering in tragic ways. Also, investigating the major consequences of madness of females in the nineteenth and twentieth century is a major premise of feminist writers. Feminist thinkers and novelists like Virginia Woolf, Simone De Beauvoir, Sylvia Plath, and Mary Richardson to name but a few are members in human rights and they well explore madness. The same thing is done in studies in

psychology by psychologists; they gave much care and importance to this issue by exploring it in relation to feminism.

### **3. Psychology, Madness, and Literature**

Psychoanalysis is defined by Colman as a “theory that focuses primarily on unconscious mental processes and the various defense mechanisms that people use to repress them” (8). Psychoanalysis is deeply tied with madness because it aims to solve the person’s mental disorder and illness and to let people get rid of madness and depression. Another writer who defines psychoanalysis is Kumar when he states: “psychoanalysis is a theory of personality and method of psychotherapy originated by Sigmund Freud” (11). It is related to many thoughts and attitudes of the person that are expressed in either dreams, or physical mannerism (Kumar 11).

Freud suggests that the mind has three parts which are the conscious, the unconscious and the preconscious (qtd. in Kumar 12). The first part is concerned with general perception in the mind and thoughts towards something or someone. Second, the preconscious is related to memories and previous knowledge. And the unconscious part of the mind is a sensitive one because it is related to a set of desires that are developed during childhood and biological urges that form person’s behavior (Kumar 12). Freud is quoted by Kumar as having said: “Personality has three elements and components which are: first, the “id” that is the unconscious, second the “ego” which develops in childhood, and the last one is the “superego” that comes from internalized desires retrieved from our childhood and society” (qtd.in Kumar12).

Wiesenthal states that in order to find a solution to the problem of madness, there is a need of making such a link between literature and medicine. In other words, the history of madness in both fields should be studied and this is the most important thing (Wiesenthal 309). The famous work that well covered this idea is Chris Wiesenthal’s work which

emphasizes studying medical madness in technical literature; it means representing madness medically in special and practical literature (Wiesenthal 309). So, it is based on special topics; Wiesenthal connects the historians of fields, literature and medicine, in order to study insanity exploring it “topically” (Wiesenthal 309). Chris Wiesenthal gives a complete reading of Jane Austen’s *Love and Friendship* (1891), Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1891), and Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). These literary works explore the theme of isolation because of madness in literature (Wiesenthal 309).

Wiesenthal discusses the theme of fragmentation that appears in many texts in the nineteenth century as a result of the mental aberration. She deals with psychology explaining how the psychology of mad persons affects the text itself (Wiesenthal 309). In addition, she shows how madness is presented in the text, and that madness is difficult to analyze and to get rid of. This fragmentation is reflected in both form and content; in content, the psychology of the person is fragmented and, in form, there will be a gap and fragmentation within the text itself (309).

According to Wiesenthal, *Slaughterhouse\_ Five* (1969) by Kurt Vonnegut , *The heart is a lonely Hunter* by Carson Mc Cullers (1940), in addition to *The Great Gatsby* (1925) by F Scott Fitzgerald are all American novels written by American writers and they all have something in common. All the mentioned novels are characterized by fragmentation in both form and content.

So, fragmentation refers to both form and content in the mentioned literary works; taking the example of Carson Mc Cullers’ novel *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, it describes loneliness and isolation of disabled characters like John Singer who is a deaf-mute. The narrator wants to transmit a message in which she shows that disability hides truth sometimes; because even though John can’t speak or hear, he is talented; John Singer, as his name indicates, is a singer and he is dreamy. Carson Mc Cullers writes about the death of John at

the end. The whole story shows to the reader hopes and dreams of disabled people and it is written in a fragmented way. So, fragmentation does not touch themes only but is also reflected in the form of the literary work (Dodd 206-13).

Therefore, Wiesenthal's study well covers and analyses madness in literature, in addition to presenting it in literary texts of famous authors exploring the internal aspects of texts on the one hand. On the other hand, the twentieth century brings new things and new methods to treat and to solve mental problems like surgery of brains which causes a conflict between doctors (Wiesenthal 309-310).

Emir writes that psychology and literature are interested in studying the human status, problems and needs (49). Literature always describes human behavior and problems; their mental and inner side on the one hand. On the other hand, psychology searches for the main reasons and solutions to solve human problems. There is a clear explanation by Ismet Emir in 2006 concerning the relation between literature and psychology. Emir states: "Beside literature and psychology, there is no other branch of science which is engaged so much in the study of the relationship between human body and soul with its contradictions and dilemmas, making efforts to define the relationship in terms of certain rules, to know the mysterious aspects of the human soul and its subconscious areas by means of long and detailed journeys" (49). In another occasion, he states:

Today we all know that Dostoevsky is one of the most important historical persons indispensable for psychology and that his texts are used as textbooks and reference books in the psychology departments. But the same thing is done by literature and studies of literature – psychological data is used both by authors in the process of plotting the characters of their imaginary world by literature researchers in their efforts to penetrate the inner world and by the existent literary works; Sigmund Freud's and

Karl Gustav Jung's texts are recommended for reading as reference books on the Bachelor's degree level. (351)

It means that both literature and psychology complete each other since each one of them may benefit the other discipline. So, according to his research, he finds that evaluation of major literary works in relation to psychology gets the same results of analysis of the human soul (Emir 50).

Sigmund Freud has a huge knowledge of literature because he is a good reader of universal literary works (Michaud 1). In addition, he is familiar with the works of his contemporary writers. So, he has a good knowledge about the style and language in general (1). For Freud, before doing any analysis, there is a must of going step by step in asking one person to deal with his or her own story or experience for psychoanalytical overcome (2). Therefore, according to him, research shouldn't be done just like that without any basis or evidence. Freud emphasizes this rule in each stage in his research (Michaud 2).

So, Freud is interested in the two disciplines; literature and psychoanalysis, he congratulates Schnitzler in his birthday who has common interests with him (Michaud 3). For instance, both of them are Jewish, authors, and physicians in addition to the confrontation and contradiction that were faced from their society (3). Both of them were ignored and have no voice in their society despite their well thought and organized studies in American literature (Michaud 3). Freud adds that his observations to the clinical cases are like imaginary stories and novels because all of his works share clarity, patience and human needs to achieving success and overcoming the social obstacles towards these categories which need a change in their life (3).

Osgood writes an article in which she speaks about many notable American novels that dealt with mental illness and cure. She explores also the role of treating mental disorder by making medical operations, especially from the 1940s to twenty years after, when people

predict this problem differently (Osgood). Because some of them think that being mad refers to a biological damage that happens in the brain, others think that madness happens because of oppression (Osgood). So, they return all of these assumptions to psychiatry as a science to overcome it. Osgood writes also about the literary work of the very famous American writer Joanne Greenberg which is *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* (1964). Greenberg narrates her own story in the mental asylum because she suffers in her adolescence from “schizophrenia” that is a mental disorder when the person cannot separate the real life situations from the own imagination. Greenberg wants to put an end to all this sufferance and to live normally with her family (Osgood). The link psychoanalysts make between madness and oppression justify the fact that women become mad because of the oppression they experience in patriarchal societies.

Many critics and authors specialized in literature and psychoanalysis make broad researches and write about madness in relation to psychoanalysis; how authors integrate madness in psychological and psychoanalytical works. Davidoff is one of the researchers who make a broad research examining literature and psychoanalysis as an illustration of Pablo Palacio’s work (Davidoff 115). In chapter three of his thesis, he says that both of them have a common interest which is getting comprehensible answers or interpretations of psychoanalytical objects. So, the aim is to explore the relationship between the two disciplines or, in other words, is the deep reading of literature psychoanalytically (115).

According to Davidoff, literature covers psychoanalysis through narration; that is to say when the author narrates or describes a character, an object or an event, he or she portrays the psychology and the inner side of these things. In other words, when the author explains the meaning of something; he/she covers both literary and psychoanalytical roles (Davidoff 117). In chapter three of his thesis, Davidoff emphasizes the closest relation of madness and literature i.e. how to deal with madness in the text. He talks about literature and how it deals



with madness and integrates it as a theme, and how madness is emphasized and spoken about in literature. So, the author analyzes this idea about dealing with how literature studies madness; by concentrating on Shoshana Felman as one of the notable American critics in literature who states that: “Literature and madness are precisely linked by what attempts to shut them out” (qtd. in Davidoff 150). In other words, both fields have a common aim which is fighting to get rid of the societal and cultural restrictions (Felman 16).

So, examining the relation between psychoanalysis, literature and madness is a main point in Davidoff study (Davidoff 115). First of all, literature and psychoanalysis are considered as independent fields of study but they borrow from each other. In this respect, Felman states: “Literature is therefore not simply outside psychoanalysis, since it motivates and inhabits the very names of its concept, since it is the inherit reference by which psychoanalysis names its findings” (Felman 9). So, literature is the umbrella for all the fields of study and psychoanalysis takes its roots from literature (Davidoff 118).

In *Making a Room for Madness in Mental Health: The Psychoanalytic Understanding of Psychotic Communication* Marcus Evans insists on working to develop the thinking of the psychoanalytical side of mental doctors (1). Evans writes that the first thing may the mental doctor follow as a treatment to overcome the problem of madness is to investigate the mental situation of sick persons in relation to their personalities (1). There is an urgent need to develop the patients’ inner side step by step; when sick persons understand their mental problem and madness’ causes, they can put an end to this mental breakdown under professional doctors’ guidance (Evans 1).

The issue of madness in psychoanalysis touches another field of literature which is short stories. In short stories, Muriel Spark is a famous novelist and writer who investigates madness in her psychoanalytical works. In her writings, the female writer explores madness in several standards because she links fiction and religion to supernatural things (Beveridge

305). Her major works that discuss are *The prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, *The Comforters*, in addition to her famous short story "Come Along Marjorie 10" (Beveridge 305-6).

Spark discusses both the secular in addition to the supernatural by searching about psychiatrists' opinions concerning madness in addition to looking for their suggested treatment (Beveridge 305). Spark adopts mad characters, and she shows how the psychoanalysts and mental doctors succeed in overcoming madness. She was an intelligent and a good observer because she was attracted by strange things in her childhood and, later, she notices that her husband is abnormal and he has mental problems (Beveridge 305). Spark suffers from a nervous fall down because of her usage of "Dexedrine".

Muriel Spark inserts many mad characters in her novels and short stories as in her short story "Come Along Marjorie 10". Spark talks about Marjorie Pettigrew and narrates her mad experience because of her difference in comparison with the others. Gloria narrates the story that is similar to Marjorie by explaining how she is silent all the time and how she was treated in mental asylums (Beveridge 306). Gloria states that Marjorie Pettigrew's silence causes her a lack of communication with others and she felt ignored and forsaken all the time. Gloria thinks that Miss Pettigrew fears the others; she observes her all the time to confirm that the girl she observes has mental problems (306). This is the reason behind her daily observation to Miss Pettigrew. She confirms that the girl has mental problems and she suffers in silence (306).

Muriel Spark analyzes madness in many ways through her literary works. She wants to talk about madness in a fantastic way linking it to spiritual and imaginary things that humans really suffer from (Beveridge 312). Also, she searches all the time about the reality and the nature of people; she wants to answer these questions: How do other people live? What problems do people suffer from? She blames Freud and the psychoanalytical researchers, researches and theories in general, stating that they hide some truths (Beveridge

312). However, she confirms, at last, that God is the one who really knows the human mind and nature in a precise and detailed manner and he is the one who has all the answers and secrets (312).

All in all, madness is related to feminism, psychoanalysis, and literature. Feminists see madness as a cultural construction; women become mad because of the unjust culture. Women keep struggling to reach freedom and, after their attempts fail, they become mad. Even if they are not physically mad, society considers them so because they do inappropriate things. Madness is also highly related to literature since writers are committed to talk about problems facing women. Psychoanalysts also well examine the issue of madness because they consider it as their duty to solve the problems of mad people. So, the three disciplines, psychoanalysis, feminism, and literature, are interrelated.

## **Chapter Two: Women Amidst Patriarchy: Inferiority, Confusion, and Madness of Female Characters**

Major American writers, thinkers, and novelists agree that women were really oppressed, and they shed light on this oppression. Women, throughout history, lived in misery and their situation in general was very horrible because they lived in patriarchal societies where man is the predominant in all the domains. Women experienced oppression with all its forms: mental, psychological, physical, and sexual. Oppression entails fear, anxiety, and sense of inferiority for women.

The American writer, Sylvia Plath, in her famous novel, *The Bell Jar*, sheds light on female oppression and suffering. She explores female sufferance through her characters and well articulates this theme with that of madness because both themes go hand in hand with one another. Plath explains women's struggles, fears and their impotence in rebelling against society as an attempt to change their miserable situations. The only solution women find is writing; a strategy which gives voice to silent females who could not speak a word. The majority of female writers do not use their real names in their works; they use pen names like Mary Ann Evans and Sylvia Plath and others write anonymously like Jane Austen.

### **1. Biography of the Author**

Harold Bloom is a very famous American literary critic and a university professor who makes a comprehensive analysis of Sylvia Plath's major works. In his study, he writes a perfect biography and life story of Sylvia Plath who is well known by her collection of poems like *The Colossus* and *Ariel* and her amazing novel *The Bell Jar* in which she describes female sufferance in a male dominated society that stands as a barrier preventing them from living in peace without any oppression.

Sylvia Plath was born in a scholarly family; her parents were well educated and her mother Aurelia speaks more than one language (Bloom 11). Plath's mother meets Otto who is

Plath's father in the University of Boston in the United States of America, and they married in 1932. Sylvia was born in the same year in October. Four years later, they move to live in Massachusetts in a fantastic place called Winthrop. Mr. Otto suffers from diabetes and cancer which cause his death years after. Her mother becomes a university teacher after the death of her husband (Bloom 11).

In 1953, Plath dreamed to attend writing courses during summer but she was not accepted because she fails to get high marks like her classmates, this caused her a big depression at a young age. Her depression led her to take sleeping pills for few days far from her family; she spent days alone in a cellar. In 1954, she made great efforts to get a good average in order to gain a scholarship to Newham in the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom; this scholarship helped her to be more active and sociable in interacting with others. Two years after, she meets and marries Ted Hughes who loves her so much; he is interested in writing poems (Bloom 12).

After her graduation, she returned back to America with her husband to become a teacher in the same university where she studied. In 1960, Plath gave birth to a baby girl and, after a short period of time, she published her first poem's collection entitled *The Colossus* (1960) and *Other Poems* which is an overnight success in America. After that, Plath started working on an interesting novel which is *The Bell Jar* (1963) under the name of Victoria Lucas. In August 1962, Plath and her husband decided separation and divorce; she tried to kill herself by using her car, but she failed. Ted Hughes leaves her alone and she decides moving to London where she meets her best poet who is William Butler. During this time, Plath's interest is writing poems as she told her mother: "I'm writing the best poems of my life" (qtd. in Bloom 12). Her writing collection achieves a big success in London because she writes with big love and she adores poetry (Bloom 12- 3).

In 1963, Plath tries to renew her emotions and desires into her female characters in

*The Bell Jar*. Plath is disappointed because of the slowly reception and publication of her perfect poems. Adding to that, she finds herself alone after the failure of her marriage and with a big responsibility of her two children. The worst thing is that she was still taking sleeping pills. Once, as an attempt to end her life, she ignites the oven of her house to smell its gas (Bloom 13). Before doing that, she writes a remark that contains the number of a doctor if her relatives could not awake her. She desperately engages in the act of killing herself but, inside, she wishes that she will be rescued by her children or the children's nurse. Unfortunately, she died and no one can save her. After her death, both her mother and Ted Hughes, her ex husband, work on publishing her works posthumously like *Ariel* (Bloom 13).

## **2. Brief Summary of the Novel**

*The Bell Jar* is considered as an autobiographical novel because it reflects Plath's personality and life in general (Chandran 411). For instance, the novel explores how Sylvia Plath suffers from many problems and interruptions in her life like her father's death that causes her weakness and failure. The psychoanalytical reading of the novel explores several close points in parallel between Plath and her protagonist who is Greenwood Esther. For example, both the novelist and her protagonist make an attempt to suicide and, after that, they were exposed to psychotherapy as a medical treatment to their psychological struggles (Chandran 411).

*The Bell Jar* chronicles the story of Greenwood Esther, a lucky girl who wins in a competition of writing and becomes an editorial assistant among other girls in New York City. Doreen is her roommate; she is very nice and brave at the same time. Esther likes her so much and she says: "Doreen singled me out right away. She made me feel I was that much sharper than the others, and she really was wonderfully funny. She used to sit next to me at the conference table, and when the visiting celebrities were talking she whispers witty sarcastic remarks to me under her breath" (Plath 4). One night, all the girls are invited to a

party and they go to pub accompanied with Lenny Shepherd. Esther returns back with a friend to Lenny but she quits them after unlike Doreen who stays with Lenny (McClure 4).

Day after, Jay Cee who is the boss of the girls attacks Esther and blames her for being indecisive because she has no idea about what she wants to do in the future as if she has no goals (4). Since Doreen is with Lenny, Esther decides to watch a film with a girl named Betsy. However, she does not finish the movie because she does not feel well; she returns to the hotel to find that all the other girls are sick because of the food they ate in the morning together (McClure 4).

After that, Esther peruses a story that reminds her with an old boyfriend called Buddy who shocks her because he always behaves as innocent towards her but he betrays her later on; his doings are different from his sayings. Next, he is diagnosed with tuberculosis that is defined by American Theoretic Society as “Tuberculosis is disease which can be transformed from one sick person to another through breathing or coughing that contains bacteria. Tuberculosis affects the lungs or any part of the body, and it is considered as a major health problem in the whole world” (American Thoracic Society 7-8). Esther goes to the hospital and visits Buddy once and he offers to marry her but she refuses (McClure 4- 5).

Esther receives a call, the caller is a man called Constantin who invites her to have lunch together. It turns out that Constantin takes her number from Buddy’s mother when she talks about her. Esther accepts the invitation and is thinking to have a sexual intercourse with him. She says: “I thought if only I had a keen, sharply bone structure to my face or could discuss politics shrewdly or was a famous writer Constantin might find me interesting enough to sleep with me” (Plath 44). However, it was a surprise he does not show interest in her. Esther feels so sad, and she cries a lot and Doreen decides to take her to Lenny. In their way to Lenny, they find a man named Marco who wants to enforce himself on Esther, but she pushes him aggressively (McClure 5).

Esther returns home, and she first tells Buddy that their relation is still not clear. And, later, she feels oppressed and depressed; she stops writing and sleeping. Esther's mother advises her to study handcraft but she did not accept; Esther prefers taking a drug that helps her to sleep. Next, she visits a psychiatrist who does not take her difficult situation seriously; the doctor decides to solve her problem by "shock therapy" which is known also as "shock treatment used for mental illness by artificial induction of coma or convulsions through using drugs or electric current" (Webster); this is the suggested solution of the psychiatrist (McClure 5).

Esther refuses this treatment, and her situation becomes worse. Miss Greenwood says to the doctor "'that's crazy' I was growing involved in spite of myself. 'That's not even human...'" (Plath 104). She adds: "I went straight home and wrote that doctor a letter. I wrote him beautiful letter about how a man like that had no business setting himself up to help sick people..." (Plath 104). Esther's psychological struggles let her think about various ways to commit suicide (McClure 5).

Esther's situation makes her mad, and her madness leads her to behave in an aggressive way; she consciously breaks things like the mirror she breaks in the hospital (McClure 4). Miss Greenwood meets a smart doctor named Nolan who discovers that Esther behaves in a violent way because she dislikes meeting her mother or relatives. Due to the good treatment of Dr. Nolan, Esther's situation becomes better, and she accepts doing the shock therapy. She tells the doctor that she wants to have sex with someone, and she tells her that she did it once but was not satisfied; she had a bad intercourse that causes her going to a hospital (McClure 4). Later, she is informed that Joan who is Esther's friend is dead in the forest. At the end of the novel, Buddy goes to the hospital to take Esther and finds her with some doctors whom he met when Esther was treated (McClure 5).



### **3. Patriarchy in *The Bell Jar***

Major American literary works of the twentieth century are known by examining patriarchy's causes and effects on women. In other words, they shed light on female suffering; their lives are characterized by oppression, depression and disappointment. As a reaction, some of them refuse silence and propose solutions to overcome their problems. Sylvia Plath is one of these women who well explore female struggles in a male dominated society.

The famous author well describes how society affects the lives of women, personality, and attitude because sometimes society and traditions victimize female talents and hobbies instead of giving them a chance to flourish. Like the case of Esther Greenwood who wants to be a writer, but she could not because of society and because she is a woman; patriarchy becomes a barrier against her future and success. The illegal societal norms kill a lot of women's hopes and dreams.

The famous poet and novelist Sylvia Plath well explores how men oppress females either directly or indirectly through exploring Esther's struggles and difficulties in the American society. American society makes harms directly on women by oppressing them mentally, physically, and even sexually; sexual harm is predominant in the novel. Indirect oppression includes imposing unfair traditions and values on women to limit their freedom and desires ("The Bell Jar-Esther" 1-6). Esther is an example who is affected a lot by men in her life like Macro, Buddy and other male characters ("The Bell Jar- Esther" 1-6). Sylvia Plath sheds light on different kinds of oppression like verbal oppression, sexual oppression, and psychological oppression.

#### **3.1. Verbal Oppression against Women**

Verbal oppression is undoubtedly one of the oppressions done towards women and hurt them in different ways. In analyzing *The Bell Jar* and in addition to the abuses that were done toward women, it is needed to speak about Macro who appears at the beginning of the

novel as an influential character in the story. Macro insults Esther and calls her bad names and words which harshly affect her and cause her mental breakdown. Among the names Macro uses to address Esther is “slut” (Plath 57), a word which deeply affects and hurts her (“The Bell Jar- Esther” 1-6).

Macro abuses Esther directly by the sexual discrimination and indirectly by showing carelessness towards her emotions and feelings, this causes her depression because Macro does not respect her or give her a chance to know, to love, and to be loved in return (“The Bell Jar- Esther” 1-4). Another example of verbal oppression in the novel is when Macro tells Esther “Your dress is black and the dirt is black as well” (Plath 57). This shows that Macro is not polite and he does not care about Esther, and he just wants to have sexual relationship with her.

### **3.2. Sexual Violence**

Another kind of oppression which is discussed in *The Bell jar* is the sexual violence done against women. Sylvia Plath makes it clear that men are a source of threat to women throughout the course of the novel. Describing the hotel Esther attends, Plath writes: “This Hotel “the Amazon” was for women only, and they were mostly girls my age with wealthy parents who wanted to be sure their daughters would be living where men couldn’t get at them and deceive them” (Plath 4). The passage clearly emphasizes that female safety is achieved only far from males. Indeed, many male characters in the novel are described as aggressive (“The Bell Jar- Esther” 1-6). Macro, for example, does not only insult Esther but also sexually harasses her; Macro wants to rape Esther directly in their first meeting. Esther states that: “Macro weighted me to the earth. “Slut!” I gouged at his leg with the sharp heel of my shoe. He hunted; fumbling for the hurt. Then I fisted my fingers together and smashed them as his nose. It was like hitting the steel plate of a battleship. Macro sat up. I began cry” (Plath 58).

Macro informs Esther that he loves one of the girls of his relatives, but he cannot marry her because she wants to be a sister in the church. He clarifies “I am in love with my cousin” and he adds “She’s my first cousin. She’s going to be a nun” (Plath 57). He adds that his cousin knows that he loves her, but he does not care. And Macro does not respect his cousin’s decision and he says “I paused. The obstacle seemed unreal to me” (Plath 57).

At many intervals in the story, Esther expresses her wish to have sex with some male characters in the novel. She is also so eager to lose her virginity and to become like the other women (“The Bell Jar-Esther” 1-6”). When she first meets Constantin, Esther is eager to sleep with him and she thinks what criteria may Constantin like in a woman (Plath 44). Another male character to whom Esther is attracted is Irwin and she also has her sexual fantasy towards him and dreams of sexual intercourses with him (“The Bell Jar- Esther” 1-6).

About Irwin, Esther says: “I decided to practice my new, normal personality on this man who, in the course of my hesitations, told me his name was Irwin and that he was a very well-paid professor of mathematics, so I said, ‘All right,’ and, matching my stride to Irwin’s” (Plath 118). Esther dreams to lose her virginity; she wants to have a sexual relationship with him although she knows that he has a lover. She adds: “It was only after seeing Irwin’s study that I decided to seduce him. Irwin lived a murky, comfortable basement apartment in one of the rundown streets of outer Cambridge and drove me there...” (Plath 119). When Esther makes love with him, she gets a hard hemorrhage; it means that he was sexually violent with her, so she is obliged to be treated in the hospital. So, Irwin has no feeling towards Esther, he just accepts her quest of sleeping with him. Moreover, he does not care about her feeling or health and suggests meeting with her again with all selfishness; his suggestion comes out of impulse and desire not out of love (“The Bell Jar-Esther” 1-6). It is important to note that Esther’s eagerness for sex has only one interpretation; she limits her view of males to sex and it is the only relation she can have with a man.

### 3.3. Psychological Oppression

The author of *The Bell Jar* examines the life story of Mrs. Esther Greenwood who wants to realize her dream of being a well known writer in America. When she goes to the interschool in New York City, Esther finds another world and her friends in the same school have different dreams; they just want to find a man or a husband. This exemplifies and illustrates the rigid patriarchal culture they are living in (Meyer 1).

Girls are initiated to domestic life and motherhood and any other ambitions on the female part are culminated and dismissed as inappropriate. Esther does not agree with the other girls because she really knows that she has a great aim to achieve more than to live a normal and simple life. In order to stand for her dream, Esther has to make magic efforts and to battle with her family and society (Meyer 1). All of these difficulties in confronting the surroundings and relatives are so hard; this makes her sad and mad, the only solution to get rid of her mental breakdown is the electroshock therapy so as to escape from the psychological oppression that she suffers from (Meyer 1). Society with its rigid structure psychologically oppresses women and victimizes them.

The story of male patriarchal society and its oppression and carelessness towards women continues in *The Bell Jar* with Esther, and this time with a psychiatrist named Dr. Gordon. When Esther goes to the hospital in order to get rid of her mental illness, she meets Dr. Gordon. The psychiatrist plays the same role like other males in the novel because he represents carelessness. Also, he does not give importance to Esther's situation and he suggests a harsh treatment directly without concentration on the mental and psychological state of the patient (DeWaard 4). He wants just more money because he works in a private hospital. Esther says "When the money was used up, I would be moved to a state of hospital, with hundreds of people like me, in a big cage in the basement" (Plath 84). So, Dr. Gordon could not achieve good results in Esther's mental difficult situation which makes Esther's

psychology worse (DeWaard 4). Dr. Gordon represents the intellectuals of society and though he belongs to this prestigious category, he is like other males; selfish, arrogant, and careless especially when it comes to women.

Buddy Willard is the first male who broke Esther's heart by his betrayal to her when he confesses to Esther that he makes a sexual relationship with a waitress; at this moment, Esther is shocked because she never expects this from Buddy (McClure 5). Esther decides to put an end to their relation forever but Buddy wants her to stay with him; he asks her for marriage but she refuses (McClure 5).

Esther, at first, dreams like any other girl in the world to achieve fame in her life but, later on, she was shocked by the other girls' way of thinking and way of life because they just dream to find a husband to marry. She tries to resist the American society and to change the domestic norms and traditions but she faces many struggles that hinder her success. Buddy's betrayal shocks Esther because he is a hypocrite and she does not expect that from him. As a consequence, Esther loses confidence in men for the rest of her life and rejects marrying and making a family like any other girl in her age. Plath refers to the hypocrisy of Buddy Willard at many intervals in the novel. She writes:

Of course, I didn't know he [Buddy Willard] was a hypocrite at first. I thought he was the most wonderful boy I'd never seen. I'd adored him from a distance for five years before he even looked at me, and then there was a beautiful time when I still adored him and he started looking at me, and then just as he was looking at me more and more I discovered quite by accident what an awful hypocrite he was, and now he wanted me to marry him and I his guts. (Plath 28)

Esther meets Buddy Willard when he was in scholarship too, and she says "Buddy kissed me again in front of the house steps, and the next fall, when his scholarship to medical school came through. I went there to see him instead of the Yale and it was there I found out

how he had fooled me all those years and what a hypocrite he was” (Plath 33). The expression “fooled me all those years” shows how good he is in pretending things; he is able to make Esther believe what he is saying.

The psychological oppression which Esther experiences is inflicted by society’s norms and values, males, and relatives. She is psychologically oppressed even by those close relatives like her mother who criticizes her harshly in every occasion (Meyer1). Esther’s mother well plays the role of an instrument to maintain society’s norms and values putting her daughter’s wishes to become a writer aside. Another close person who is psychologically violent with Esther is her boss. The boss criticizes her and sees her as indecisive and with no goals (Mcclure 4). Throughout the course of the novel, no one stays with Esther or encourages her to be a famous writer, a profession which necessitates large and huge encouragement. These bad relations disappoint her, cause her breakdowns, and, finally, led her to commit suicide (Meyer 1).

The patriarchal society in which Esther lives affects her so much and hinders her success. Each time Esther decides to put pen to paper, she finds her decision cut by something. The males whom she meets all exploit her in one way or another. She finds no help and encouragement from society and the surrounding males. This affects her badly and leads to her mental disorder and breakdowns. Indeed, she thinks to commit suicide and, throughout the course of the novel, she suffers from identity confusion.

#### **4. Female Identity Confusion**

Female characters and female issues are the main thing to discuss in *The Bell Jar*. Plath well explains and describes her own problems and desires in the protagonist character of the novel, Greenwood Esther. In the last century, female writers and novelists like Sylvia Plath publish their works under pseudonyms; they cannot talk about their lives, difficulties and sufferance in a direct way (Chandran 411). Therefore, the solution is to transform hidden

messages through their writing by giving a voice to the main female characters. Female characters, in their novels, are representatives of authors themselves. The main female character in *The Bell Jar* is Esther Greenwood who best exemplifies Plath's autobiographical portrait; the story narrates how Esther becomes mad and how she wants to solve her daily problems (Chandran 411).

The development of the character within the novel and how he or she forgets things or events in childhood is considered as a problematic issue. From the psychoanalytical perspective, Esther has double attitudes towards her father; she dislikes him but, at the same time, accepts his orders. Her unstable relationship with her father can be considered the cause of being abnormal and a strange woman who is totally different from the others. Miss Greenwood reacts and responds to sexuality in ambiguous ways (Chandran 214). This can be illustrated by a close analysis of the relationship between Esther and Buddy Willard.

Although Esther stops her relation with Willard, she goes to visit him many times (McClure 31); she is fragile and weak to confront her feeling and desires. Esther cannot stop her relation with Mr. Willard at all although he betrays her and this betrayal makes her so sad and leads her to madness. So Willard's betrayal to Esther creates a feeling of confusion in her relation with men because she does not know what she wants exactly, or whom she likes (McClure 31). She constantly meets Buddy, but she refuses to marry him. She states: "And although everybody still thought I would marry him... I knew I would never marry him if he were the last man on earth. Buddy Willard was a hypocrite" (Plath 28). It is clear that Esther is suffering from identity confusion.

#### **4.1. Reasons for Identity Confusion**

##### **4.1.1. Unstable Relationship with Family and Friends**

The instability in Esther's character and her inner troubles are caused by both her mother and Jaycee who critic her harshly in her life. Esther's relationship with her friends

always makes her oppressed and disappointed because she is unconfident and indecisive (McClure 6). For instance, when Esther is in the office of Jaycee and they will take a photograph, Esther behaves abnormally and she says: “I didn’t want my picture taken because I was going to cry. I didn’t know why I was going to cry, but I knew that if anybody spoke to me or looked at me too closely the tears would fly of my eyes...” (Plath 53). In addition, Esther suffers from a big confusion and contradiction in her sexual relation with men. She wants to kill herself but she is treated by shock therapy later on. The story ends by her hopes of getting rid of insanity and living in peace (McClure 6).

Next main female character in *The Bell Jar* is Esther’s mother who plays an important role in her daughter’s life in the novel. Esther’s mother loves her daughter so much, but she always disappoints her (Chandran 412). Esther’s mother blames her daughter and she sees her as irresponsible in her life because she has no goals or hopes in the future. Her mother never lets her free to do what she wants. Likely, she does not accept that Esther has psychological struggles and that she must be treated by a psychiatrist. Esther’s mother behaves coldly with her daughter because she thinks that her daughter exaggerates and she believes that breaking societal norms from a girl is forbidden. The mother lives in an imaginary world and she believes in contradicted attitudes. The mother herself experiences identity confusion and her behavior is contradictory at many times. She refuses to see Esther when she was in the asylum because of the doctor’s decision and she has no money to pay (Chandran 412 -3).

#### **4.1.2. Adolescence as a Period of Discomfort**

Like Esther, Joan suffers so much in a young age; she also attends an asylum and makes many attempts to suicide. Joan symbolizes weakness; she is not a strong girl, she just follows the others specially the leader Jaycee unlike Esther who dislikes him (McClure7). Anyone may change her opinion easily; Joan enters the asylum because she pretends all the time that she commits suicide. Esther and Joan’s relationship is limited just because they are



from the same editorial internship. At the end of the story, Joan kills herself in the forest, and her suicide helps Esther discovering the life value (Mcclure 7).

Both of Joan and Esther suffer from madness because they are young and adolescents. It is during adolescence that girls suffer from confusion; they are in between their own ambitions: success and selfhood and society's norms which say that women should only be mothers nothing more. Joan is a weak girl who can easily be influenced by anyone; her weakness leads her to become mad and to attempt suicide many times. She goes to be treated in an asylum, but she fails to overcome her madness, and she kills herself at the end of the novel. Joan's death shows Esther that killing oneself is considered as a big loss for the person (Mcclure 7).

#### **4.1.3. The Unjust Status Quo**

Esther senses a wide gap between society's perspectives and her real experiences in life; this is the main cause of her insanity. People agree that Esther and girls around her age should be confident, active, and hopeful and she cannot meet society's expectations because of her lack of self confidence. Esther thinks that she cannot express her darkness or madness, she feels uncourageous to think and solve her weaknesses and all these dark points in her personality push her to fail, to suffer and to suicide. Esther confirms that New York City is a fantastic and fashionable world, but she does not feel it in reality; all these amazing things are not pleasant for her and she feels that everything portrays violence. For instance, although she wants a sexual relationship, she distrusts men, and her opinion towards them is meaningless because she does not know what she wants exactly (Chandran 412).

Female confusion is highly caused by the society's status quo and its unjust norms against women. It is not surprising to find girls struggling to forge their own strong identities amidst patriarchy. Society teaches girls, from when they are young, to be mothers and to respect the ideology of "separate spheres"; this ideology divides place according to gender. In

other words, women should occupy the domestic sphere of the house and shouldn't transgress it while males should occupy the public sphere. At the same time, women are seen as inferior, weak, and stupid as opposed to the other category of males who are superior, strong, and intelligent. This gives women a false assumption about themselves and they act according to that assumption about themselves. This is, certainly, the case of Esther Greenwood in *The Bell Jar*. Esther internalizes the idea that she is weak and, this is why, she is unable to impose her ideas, hopes, and dreams.

## **5. Anxiety**

Maina, Mauri and Rossi define anxiety as “a state of being sad and feeling stress and disruptive mood, anxious person feels empty and fear all the time” (Maina et al. 236). In *The Bell Jar*, anxiety can be noticed in the character analysis of the novel especially in the protagonist Esther. She suffers from a lot of fears such as anxiety of writing, anxiety of sexuality, and anxiety of death. In fact, the reasons of being anxious differ from one person to another, and the degree of anxiety danger differs from one to another. Because some of anxious people can solve their problems bit by bit while others need the help of either relatives or specialists.

Esther's anxiety appears first in the beginning of the novel when she goes to New York City because she searches fame in writing, but she fears that she does not realize her dream because she is not confident of her capacities and she suffers from different troubles. Esther dreams also to be a well known poet, but, instead, she gets disappointed quickly when Buddy says “a poem is a piece of dust” (Plath 30); Esther cannot even answer him or defend her point of view. She says “My trouble was I took everything Buddy Willard told me as the honest-to-God truth” (Plath 30). Her silence refers to many things: her fears from her parents, family and her sense of identity since she follows her parents in everything; in the way of life, the way they think, their norms, traditions...etc (Zhang).

Second, she feels loneliness because she cannot find someone who may understand her thoughts, way of thinking or her problems. Esther lives in a battle in her search of her own identity to live in peace in order to solve her mental illnesses and to find her own self. Esther's main interest is to overcome her anxiety and troubles of writing because for sure she will feel better if she will be a successful poet and writer. *The Bell Jar* shows many aspects of American female writers because anxiety does not come only from the oppression of the American society and its unfair nature of sex and gender, but also from the failed proficiency that affects her feeling and psychology (Zhang).

Esther suffers from hard mental disorder and low self esteem which affect her life, she does not show interests in normal activities that a person may do in his/her daily life (Chandran 413). For instance, going to the cinema or playing with other girls since she is adolescent and still young. Esther does a long list that contains set of tasks and activities that she will never be able to do like dancing or singing (Chandran 413). Esther's interpretation of this way of thinking refers to her low self esteem and confidence. So, she is an unbalanced character in the story. In fact, Esther's anxiety disorder causes her failing in many things such as: speaking German language, reading or writing other languages like Chinese language, also Esther fails to enjoy riding a horse (Chandran 413). Plath confirms by writing that "I am climbing to my freedom, freedom from fear, freedom from marrying the wrong person, like Buddy Willard, just because of sex, freedom from the Florence Crittenden homes where all the poor girls go who should have been fitted out like me, because what they did, they would do anyway, regardless..." (Plath 117).

Moving to another kind of anxiety Esther suffers from which is anxiety of death; that happens with Esther's friend Joan who committed suicide. First, both of Esther and Joan go to mental asylums to treat their mental breakdown, but Joan escapes from the asylum, and her psychiatrist starts searching for her and they cannot find her (Mcclure 30). No one sees Joan

and no one can find her, and Esther can't realize where Joan is. After a short period of time, one of the doctors informs Esther that they find Joan dead and that she kills herself (McClure 30). Esther is depressed since she loses her friend and she says: "I couldn't help myself" (Plath 126). Esther cannot be strong; and Dr. Nolan tries to convince her that she is not responsible for the death because many psychiatrists fail to convince their patients convincing them not to commit suicide (McClure 30).

## **6. Madness in the Novel**

The depiction of female madness in *The Bell Jar* is very clear. Madness can be interpreted and seen through the suffering and lack of confidence of American women in a male dominated society. Esther moves from bad to worse; her first experience to get her identity she goes through bad experience in her society that causes her being confused then, this confusion intensifies to become an anxiety. Anxiety, in its turn, grows and grows till it reaches its top which is madness.

Confusion as defined by the famous dictionary of Merriam Webster is "a state of mental uncertainty", and madness is defined as "a mental illness that makes the human experience mental disorder, generally influenced by their environments and cultural norms" (Casey 89). Confusion and madness seem very clear in the novel from the beginning, when Esther goes to New York City for the editorial internship, and she says: "I did not know what I was doing in New York. I'm stupid enough about executions. The idea of being electrocuted makes me sick, and that's all there was to read about in the papers—goggle eyed headlines staring up at me on every street corner and at the fusty..." (Plath 1- 2). The passage clearly shows that Esther is paranoid and that she feels uneasy people watching her with their "goggle eye". Esther feels uncomfortable and confused because she really does not know what she wants to do and if her decisions are suitable and beneficial for her or not (McClure 31). The following quote explains Esther's emptiness and her senselessness and aimlessness:

Only I was not steering anything, not even myself. I just bumped from my hotel to work and to parties and from parties to my hotel and back to work like a numb trolley bus. I guess I should have been excited the way most of other girls were, but I could not get myself to react. I felt very still and very empty, the way my eye of a tornado must feel, moving dully along in the middle of the surroundings hullabaloo. (Plath 3)

Esther's boss Mrs. Jaycee confuses her so much when she criticizes her harshly in front of the other girls in the hotel concerning her hopes, desires, and plans. She feels uncertainty being qualified and competent in writing. In fact, Jaycee's criticism affects her feeling and emotions in a very bad way. Esther starts thinking about suggested and suitable solutions that make her succeed in her writings and to realize one dream which for sure will enhance her psychology, and develop a sense of trust and confidence within her (McClure 31).

Among all the discussed characters, Esther feels comfortable with only one character who is Dr Nolan, a smart and successful psychiatrist. Dr. Nolan works in a private asylum where Esther treats her mental illness. Dr. Nolan is intelligent; the doctor behaves in a perfect manner with Esther and this gives her the opportunity to enter Esther's life, problems and secrets. Dr Nolan treats Esther by shock therapy that benefits her situation rapidly (McClure 9). In one way or another, Dr. Nolan helps Esther to overcome her madness and confusion.

The first description provided by Esther about Dr. Nolan is: "When I enrolled in the main building of the hospital, a slim young woman had come and introduced herself: "My name is Doctor Nolan. I am to be Esther's doctor" (Plath 98) and she adds: "I was surprised to have a woman. I didn't think they had woman psychiatrists. This woman was a cross between Myrna Loy and my mother. She wore a white blouse and a full skirt gathered at the waist by a wide leather belt, and stylish, crescent-shaped spectacles" (Plath 98). After a period of time, and thanks to Dr. Nolan's good attitudes, Esther knows and loves her doctor. As a

consequence, Esther accepts the electroshock therapy as a treatment and she says that “I curled up in the far corner of the alcove with the blanket over my head. It wasn’t the shock treatment that struck me as much as the bare-faced treachery of Doctor Nolan. I liked Doctor Nolan, I loved her, I had given her my trust on a platter and told her everything, and she had promised faithfully to warm me ahead of time if ever I had to have another shock treatment” (Plath 111).

Esther’s madness is clearly caused by her surroundings and friends who disappoint her. She receives no encouragement from the surrounding members who deceive her. Dr Nolan is the only one who provides care and good treatment for Esther. Thanks to Dr. Nolan, Esther accepts the treatment and overcomes her madness. The patriarchal culture also deceives Esther so much and causes her madness.

Sylvia Plath is one of the influential female writers who do their best to give voice to American authors and women in general by blaming males speaking about their passive and negative roles in women’s lives. Plath transforms a well covered message through her novel *The Bell Jar* about American females’ sufferance, struggles and oppression are made by males in the last century. She centralizes her problems, desires and hopes through her protagonist Esther Greenwood. Plath writes about other female characters like Doreen, Joan, her mother and Dr. Nolan that are different from the protagonist to show the different points of view of women, because each one of them has different attitudes and dreams.

### **Chapter Three: From Madness to Womanhood: Overcoming Patriarchy and Confusion**

After circumscribing female suffering and impotence in *The Bell Jar*, it is important to note that female characters in some ways rebel, struggle, and reject patriarchy and its rigid forms. This chapter attempts to answer many questions and to analyze solutions provided by the American novelist, Sylvia Plath. These questions are: Do women get rid of their madness? Who are these women exactly that realize success? How do females achieve womanhood? Did they solve their mental illnesses? How? What is the suggested key to overcome madness and to reach stability in *The Bell Jar*?

This chapter discusses female awareness and maturity; how they overcome madness and their journey into womanhood. It sheds light on superiority and social identity of females in the twentieth century in addition to challenging the American patriarchal society. Major female writers refuse turning a blind eye and keeping silent about what is happening in their societies. They do their best to transform a full cohesive and comprehensive message to the world to express their sufferance and illnesses. Although their capacities are limited, their desires, dreams and hopes are greater than their psychological problems.

Sylvia Plath succeeds in depicting female depression and oppression and encouraging females to take a step towards freedom. Plath's message is well transmitted through Esther Greenwood whose existence in the novel is surrounded by many obstacles. Through Esther, Plath makes it clear that society hinders female success and freedom. But, Plath provides solutions to this misery and shows that women are strong and can have a successful journey toward womanhood; they just need to keep attaching with their desires and wonderful dreams till the end.

#### **1. Female Maturity and Awareness in *The Bell Jar***

Major American literary works of the last century shed light on feminist issues; they portray female suffering and abuses in a male patriarchal society. Men predominate in everything; they have full supremacy to do what they want and to rule their houses with iron

hands. These grand patriarchs decide women's obligations and limitations and practice their violence daily. Women, on the other hand, have no right to protest; they have to maintain male orders silently. Any woman who complains is seen as abnormal and disrespectful because she does not conform to the criteria of womanhood.

Feminist scholars and novelists feel committed to unveil harsh realities of women and to correct the ills inflicted by patriarchy. The elite announce a battle in their society to make a radical change and to get their rights same as males. The instrument used is their pens. They believe that "the pen is mightier than the sword" and choose it as a weapon. Since women are denied access to authorship, some female writers use pen name like Sylvia Plath who publishes her famous novel, *The Bell Jar*, under the pen name "Victoria Lucas" instead of using Sylvia Plath (Chandran 411).

After the 1950s, awareness and maturity seemed very clear between women so as to help themselves to get rid of depression, madness, and different psychological illnesses that are inflicted upon them by society. Reclaiming their own rights is the first step followed by female solidarity and showing care about female concerns, problems and dreams.

## **2. *The Bell Jar* as a Bildungsroman**

Wagner writes that *The Bell Jar* is considered a bildungsroman because it centers on the psychological and inner progress that touches Esther's life experiences chronologically (Wagner 55). In other words, it follows the mental and psychological state of Esther from a state when she was childish, immature, and inexperienced to a state when she becomes mature, experienced, and wise. Wagner explains that Plath talks about the protagonist of the novel more than the other female characters about whom she speaks in a fragmented way (Wagner 55-68). Plath deals with the other female characters just to link them with Esther Greenwood to show their effect on the development and maturity of the protagonist. Also, the author of *The Bell Jar* highlights that sometimes when someone changes the place where he



or she lives, the psychology of the person will be greatly affected. Like what happens to Esther at the beginning of the novel when she goes to New York (Wagner 55-68). Because she faces a difficulty to adapt to this new place, and to deal with new people since she finds a totally different atmosphere (Chandran 114). In this sense, Plath writes:

It was a queer, sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs, and I didn't know what I was doing in New York. I'm stupid about executions. The idea of being electrocuted makes me sick, and that's all there was to read about in the papers—goggle-eyed headlines staring up at me on every street corner and at the fusty, peanuts-smelling mouth of every subway. It had nothing to do with me, but I couldn't help wondering what it would be like, being burned alive all along your nerves. I taught it must be the worst thing in the world. (Plath 2-3)

Esther Greenwood was living with her mother in New England, and she clarifies: "I'm so jealous I can't speak. Nineteen years, and I hadn't been out of New England except for this trip to New York" (Plath 4). After that, she wins position of writing with other girls in summer, Esther moves to New York City in order to work as an editorial internship (McClure 4). Esther Greenwood thinks that she will find fashionable world in New York City that will make her happy, but she finds the opposite because she finds that sadness, violence of patriarchy, and women abuse prevail (Chandran 412).

Bonds writes that Sylvia Plath in her novel, *The Bell Jar*, portrays the idea between the mind and the separate mind in which she wants to show what a person wants to do and how the culture obliges him or her to act (Bonds 49-64). Esther feels a wide gap between what societies dictates on her and what her experience obliges her to do. Since Esther is a young girl, she is supposed to behave in a confident and flexible way. However, male oppression and patriarchy affect her psychology (Chandran 412).

Lauretis writes an article which is entitled “Rebirth in *The Bell Jar*” in which he discusses Esther’s journey of achieving heroism in a complex patriarchal society. Taking rebirth as an important section in the novel, he refers to Plath’s fantastic way of narrating because she explores the development of the protagonist’s consciousness (173). Plath well delivers the way Esther raises her self-confidence and determination. Sylvia’s novel confirms that the rebirth comes from the inner side of the person, and Esther’s sense of rebirth leads her to achieve heroism and freedom. After this rebirth, Esther builds herself; she motivates her inner-side. This best relies and exemplifies the psychoanalytical order of novels in the twentieth century in which the novelist expresses how the protagonist becomes a hero and brave (Lauretis 173-83).

Sylvia Plath’s novel, *The Bell Jar*, depicts how the protagonist, Esther Greenwood, changes her mind after the shock therapy (Chandran 414). Esther wants enhancing her mood by using many things so as to rebuild her soul and mind. Mrs. Greenwood starts visiting sick persons in the hospitals because she already spends a period of time there, and she really knows the psychology and the stress experienced by sick people. Esther does special visits to maternal services where she finds beautiful new born babies in order to gift their mothers’ wonderful flowers (Chandran 414). Esther changes her mind, so offering flowers to mothers who have just given birth reflects her change of thinking and her maturity (Chandran 414). Esther says that:

The flowers nodded like bright, knowledgeable children as I trundled them down the hall. I felt silly in my sage-green volunteer’s uniform, and superfluous, unlike the white-uniformed doctors and nurses, or even the brown-uniformed scrubwomen with their mops and their buckets of grimy water, who passed me without a word. If I had been getting paid, no matter how little, I could at least count this a proper job, but all I

got for a morning of pushing round magazines and candy and flowers was a free lunch. (Plath 85)

The above passage clearly shows that Esther takes beautiful flowers to the hospital and she removes the dead flowers to give them a good impression and love to live. Esther wants to show that there is always something beautiful, and there is hope since women are alive (Chandran 414). Esther dreams to be a more religious girl. In fact, sometimes Esther seems that she is not that deceived about what she wants; she assumes and plays various wrong identities and she quickly changes her identities and personalities. This means sometimes, she chooses religion; when she tells her mother that she already thinks of being a nun in the church. However, Esther's mother hesitates, and she finds the idea a strange one (Chandran 114).

At first, Esther is depicted as a childish girl who thinks to commit suicide and to kill herself in every single occasion, but later, she becomes more mature and removes suicide from her agenda, she visits a beautiful female doctor who is Dr. Nolan. At that time, Esther stops thinking about how to commit suicide, but her psychology is unstable because, she still have troubles (Chandran 414). The psychiatrist Nolan listens to Esther very well, this creates a kind of confidence in her, and she keeps her away from her family because she knows that they oppress her (Chandran 414). This was a successful step to solve her mental illness. After a short period of time, Esther feels herself good and like the other girls in her age; she starts to live a normal and simple life (Chandran 114). In this sense, it is clear that the novel is a bildungsroman because readers sense the change and development in Esther's character; she gives up her childish way of thinking and becomes more mature and responsible.

## **2.1 Female Superiority and Social Identity of Females in *The Bell Jar***

Vikman analyses both the protagonists of *The Bell Jar* and *To The Lighthouse* and says that both of them have the same goal which is to search for their identities and rights in

order to realize their freedom and womanhood. Although these protagonists “Esther” and “Lily” have the same objective to achieve, they share small differences (1). One of these differences is the protagonists’ mentality; Esther Greenwood and Lily Briscoe’s attitudes toward society and the way they will achieve womanhood. Esther likes being unattached with others because she prefers loneliness. Unlike Esther, Lily likes asking her relatives, and she takes their attitudes and criticism into consideration and, according to her, this reinforces her to get what she wants, and so she is more confident and knows what to do in comparison with Esther (7 Vikman).

Both of the feminist novelists Sylvia Plath and Virginia Woolf portray the same intended message in which they harshly criticize the oppression of male society against women. Males oppress women by the application of their unfair traditions, beliefs, norms and personal attitudes; their aim is neglecting and ignoring women’s opinions, creativity and desires (Vikman 1).

Social identity in *The Bell Jar* is not that noticeable because Esther isolates herself from the rest of the world. Unlike Lily in *To the Lighthouse* who benefits so much from her social relations, Esther spends most of her time alone. She fails to achieve female solidarity because she behaves coldly even with the closest people like her mother. Social identity, in *The Bell Jar*, can be noticed only in the relationship of Esther with both Doreen and Dr Nolan. With Doreen, Esther feels comfortable to talk about her worries. Female solidarity and social identity can also be noticed in Esther’s relation with Dr Nolan who gives care and help to Esther. If ever Esther is surrounded by more good female characters like Doreen and Dr Nolan, female solidarity will encourage her to solve her identity problem earlier in the novel.

### **3. Resisting and Challenging the Patriarchal Society in *The Bell Jar***

Resistance is a subject matter and female interest over history and from a long period of time in which women search for their identities and rights. Resistance in Plath’s novel

seems very clear at the beginning because psychologically speaking, women do not accept patriarchy, and they totally refuse to live in a confinement. Therefore, each one of them reacts in a different way to break the societal limitations and unfair traditions against American women (Kaya 64).

T.A. Maha Kadum Kareem analyses the theme of “the female vs. Society in Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*” in her thesis. She says that it is clear that *The Bell Jar* describes the oppressive American male society on the protagonist Esther Greenwood. Mrs. Greenwood dreams to be a known poet and writer; this was a difficult matter in USA in the 1950s because men are the responsible and predominant in everything. Esther does not accept that and she starts searching for a solution to establish herself in a male dominated society (133).

Esther starts challenging males in her society first when she goes to New York City and finds a strange and different world; she challenges the society by staying and trying to incorporate with others she does not escape and leave her dreams. Sylvia Plath wants to deliver a message to show women’ strength, when she writes that Esther gets an amazing chance of scholarship in which she will get prizes. Plath wants to show that New York City is considered as a starting point, Esther describes it as “... for this trip to New York. It was my first big chance...” (Plath 4), since Esther’s dreams to reach fame are related to this big city (Kareem 133).

Esther challenges even her mother because she wants her to succeed in her education and writing till she finds a suitable husband. For Esther’s mother, ambitions and desires will stop as soon as Esther becomes a good wife, cooker, and mother. Since the mother plays a major role in the patriarchal society; she plays the role in oppressing her daughter Esther, and she says: “My grandmother and my mother were such good cooks that I left everything to them. They were always trying to teach me one dish or another, but I would just look at them and say, ‘Yes, yes, I see,’” (Plath 40). So, they teach her how to cook as a preparation before

marriage, but she doesn't show interest. Esther does not agree with her mother because she dislikes marriage and to live the domestic life like any girls live. Esther's challenge and resistance is expressed through her attitudes and attempts to reinforce and to strengthen her in order to become a professor, or famous writer or a poet (Kareem 135).

#### **4. Strategies to Reach Womanhood in *The Bell Jar***

Women can not intervene or give their opinions in any sphere be it education, politics, or even their private lives because men are the predominant ones. Moreover, women suffer from racism, sexism and being under male control and supremacy. As a result, women react and they start thinking about various strategies to overcome female mental and psychological illnesses that are caused by males in the last century (Ghorfati, Medini 3).

By the emergence of feminism and feminist thinkers and writers women gain a voice. Their sufferance, misery, and the bad situation they live in become visible to the whole world. So, these feminists, through their attempts to solve female problems, want to find common and universal ideas and aims. Feminists believe that females are strong; they may succeed or work in any domain same as males exactly, women may take a higher position also and there is no need to all of these inferiority and abuses. Therefore, feminists ask for females' freedom and equality and to give them golden opportunities to discover their difference, talents and success (Ghorfati Et al 53).

##### **4.1. Opposing Marriage and Imposing Selfhood**

There are a lot of novels that talk about marriage, and how it is considered as a barrier and obstacle for women to reach their objectives in life because women become mature enough, and they prefer success instead of marriage. One of these novels is the famous novel of Toni Morrison under the title of *Sula* (1973).

Sula's story is about a black girl who is intelligent, and she tries creating and developing herself without the others' help. She has fears from the future since she is not at

least a white girl and the worst thing is that she lives in a patriarchal society. This means that she will not have any rights. As a consequence, she decides refusing the known norms and to try living her own-life (“Sula-Themes Toni Morrison”). Sula hates marriage and she refuses to marry unlike her friend Nel who wants to escape from sacrifices and experiments by marrying because Nel loses all her family and she lives lonely (“Sula-Themes Toni Morrison”).

Sula’s main purpose as a protagonist is to change her truth as a poor black girl, she wants wealth; because, African American people are suffering and they live a miserable life. She notices American bad treatment against blacks in comparison with whites. As a consequence, she totally refuses marriage and escapes her town, relatives and friends and builds a new life (Lynton 21).

In the case of Esther Greenwood in her novel *The Bell Jar* she dislikes marriage and she prefers having sex only. From time to time, she remembers what her mother says to her, Plath writes: “When Constantin asked if I would like to come up his apartment ... I smiled to myself. My mother had always told me never under any circumstances to go with a man, to man’s rooms after an evening out, it could mean only one thing” (Plath 42). Buddy’s betrayal to Esther affects her psychology so much, and she becomes a disbelieving love. She says:

It might be nice to be pure and then to marry a pure man but what if he suddenly confused he wasn’t pure after we were married, the way Buddy Willard had? I couldn’t stand the idea of a woman having to have a single pure life and a man being able to have a double life, one pure and one not. Finally, I decided that if it was so difficult to find a red-blooded intelligent man who was still pure by the time he was twenty-one I might as well forget about staying pure myself and marry somebody who wasn’t pure either. Then when he started to make my life miserable I could make his miserable as well. (Plath 43)

So, it is clear that after Buddy Willard betrays Esther, she loses her confidence in man, and she wants just to lose her virginity (McClure 5). She says to Irwin: “You know, Irwin, I think I ought to tell you, I’m virgin” (Plath 120), demanding from him to make a sexual relationship so as to lose her virginity and she does (McClure 29).

#### **4.2 The Use of Writing to Reach Womanhood**

Writing is an effective tool to deliver women’s voice and to break all the restrictions. The main female concerns are talking about family, oppression, marriage, and madness and they call for female rights. Females become more and more aware about their problems and they start thinking how to be self creative women where nothing will interrupt them or prevent them from achieving womanhood.

Wendy Martin and Sharon Becker publish an article in oxford research encyclopedias in which they discuss women writings in the 20<sup>th</sup> C. The two authors state that American women start their womanhood journey by calling for several rights in the late 19<sup>th</sup> c and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. These rights are the right of voting and to work outside along with wearing what they want like men. After the arrival of different movements like socialism and the suffrage movement, women get a big chance to write creative pieces. They start exposing female problems at that time. Female writers and novelists start portraying their miserable lives like Elizabeth Robins who is an American novelist and playwright. Elizabeth Robins is known by her famous novel, *The Convert*, in (1907) that portrays female disagreement of marriage. She also supports the abortion of females which starts spreading in this era that was considered as unacceptable and illegal for the American males (Martin, Becker).

Writing to reach womanhood is considered as a major theme in Doris Lessing’s novel that is *The Golden Notebook* (1962). The entire theme, characters, and the style of narration of the novel translate the feminist aims in which it interprets the feminist perspectives. Writing cures the mental breakdown of the main character, Anna, and it explores also female



challenges to realize professional situation in the society since they live in fragmentation (Charya).

Sylvia Plath uses the common strategy of woman writing to make a radical change, to explore high achievements in society and to celebrate success. Because feminist thinkers and writers highly believe that no one can feel, transmit or well explain the woman life conditions and objectives like a woman herself.

Plath writes that her protagonist, Esther Greenwood, from the beginning of the novel, is different from the other female characters. She dreams of success and high profession in the future Esther adores writing any pieces articles, essays, or poems. She knows that it is too hard to access her aim in a patriarchal society since she already has bad experiences with men among them her father and her old ex boy friend.

Esther's main aim in the novel is to search for her identity and to achieve her aim. She needs to write and to access fame in order to put her own touch, to prove herself, and to show her capacities. Plath develops the self-creating technique in the protagonist character that aims for the self- discovery; this long journey needs a successful tool which is writing. As it is known, *The Bell Jar* is an autobiographical novel, so Plath depicts her own love and dream of writing in the main female character, Esther. Sylvia Plath wants peace and calm to escape from her mental breakdown; she thinks that writing is the best way to overcome her madness and to give the human brain a chance to liberate and build itself. Therefore, writing is considered as a rebirth of most feminist writers and novelists. Writing allows writers to blow their talents and success (Chandran 114-5).

Esther Greenwood is a young girl who dreams to go to America and to become famous. She says: "I was supposed to be having the time of my life. I was supposed to be the envy of thousands of other college girls just like me all over America who wanted nothing more than to be tripping about in those same size-seven patent leather shoes I'd bought in

Bloomington's one lunch hour with a black patent leather belt and black patent leather pocketbook to match." (Plath 3) So, Esther dreams finding a magical chance among her classmates in the university that enables her going to America where she will find a fashionable world that motivates her to realize her dream of writing.

Esther thinks that other people look at her and say: "Look what can happen in this country, they'd say. A girl lives in some out-of-the-way town for nineteen years, so poor she can't afford a magazine, and then she gets a scholarship to college and wins a prize here a prize there and ends up steering New York like her own private car" (Plath 3). It is clear that Esther is a poor girl who dreams to achieve fame in America by winning prizes of her writings and in order to become a wealthy girl by her writings.

Esther says: "There were twelve of us at the hotel." And she clarifies: "We had all won a fashion magazine contest by writing essays and stories and poems and fashion blurbs, and as prizes they gave us jobs in New York for a month, expenses paid, and piles and pills of free bonuses, like ballet tickets and passes to fashion shows and hair styling at famous expensive salon and chances to meet successful people in the field of our desire and advice about what to do with particular complexions" (Plath 3-4). This quote explains Esther's love of writing and how it offers her a prize of an editorial internship in New York City. She succeeds in writing various literary pieces like poems, short stories or essays and when she goes to New York, she wants to develop her writings by benefiting from intellectual people that she will meet.

Esther Greenwood finds a totally different world in New York because she was shocked by some names of drinks that she never hears about before. She says: "My dream was someday ordering a drink and finding out it tasted wonderful" (Plath 7). After that, Esther was exposed to verbal oppression of males like when Macro calls her "Slut !" (Plath 58). She was also exposed to sexual harassment by Irwin and she says: "I was too worried to tell him I

was still bleeding. I kept hoping every minute that it would stop” (Plath 121). So, through Plath’s novel, male oppression to women is very clear without any care or consideration to women’s feelings or emotions. This is why writing is a suitable way to unveil these sufferings and to correct the inflicted justices on women.

Although Esther faces patriarchy and male oppression, she continues writing, she says “All my life I’d told myself studying and reading and writing and working like mad was what I wanted to do, and it actually seemed to be true, I did everything well enough and got all A’s, and by the time I made it to college nobody could stop me” (Plath 18). Esther adds: “I would spend my whole time writing on some obscure themes in the works of James Joyce” (Plath 19).

Although American females suffer so much in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the educated and intellectual writers, thinkers and novelists do not accept the traditional norms, each one of them thinks about a different strategy to put an end to all bad lived conditions. They start their journey to achieve womanhood step by step asking for their rights in the social, political in addition to economic lives. These successful women share common values and objectives in life, the most common ones are rejecting marriage and the use of writing to access their voices to the whole world. Their consciousness and maturity show them the right way to realize their dreams. *The Bell Jar* examines the individual differences between women in the same age and who live the same social conditions. The novel shows also that women help each other to solve their mental illnesses. Sylvia Plath delivers a message to the world that any woman is strong and can achieve her dream, and it is a matter of choosing the suitable tool in fighting patriarchy. Plath uses writing in exploring Esther’s journey at the end of the novel like many authors of the twentieth century: Doris Lessing, Virginia Woolf and Simone De Beauvoir...

## Conclusion

Major American literary works deal with feminist issues and concerns because of female suffering and the oppression they experience. Females suffer from patriarchy and male-domination in all life-spheres; they are ignored and prevented from their rights to get a high job, to vote or to write since society sees them as inferior to males.

American females' major aim is to make their voices heard and to show their suffering to the whole world. Changing the rigid patriarchal structure is a major preoccupation of feminist writers who refuse to live a domestic life and to restrict themselves to the role of wives and mothers. The greatness of their dream gives them magic powers to face all the oppression and struggles and to get their freedom.

Sylvia Plath is one of these women who fight to make their issues known to the whole world through her writings. Plath well explains in *The Bell Jar* the sufferance of women in the twentieth century in America by imposing the unfair values and traditions on them. Plath's novel is considered as an autobiographical one in which she portrays her problems, desires and hopes in the protagonist Esther Greenwood.

Plath explains, in her novel, the dangerous degree of the oppression done against women by obliging them to serve males and to do things against their wishes. A situation which women find abusive and from which, they cannot escape. Most women think about suggested solution to escape from the miserable lived conditions, but they lapse into their loneliness until they become psychopaths; they suffer from madness and hard mental break downs. Some intelligent and lucky girls can pass this difficult situation and can solve their madness through different strategies like writing, avoiding marriage, or becoming social and interacting with others to develop one-self. Doris Lessing and Sylvia Plath apply this strategy in their novels. In *The Golden Notebook*, the protagonist Lily manages to solve her problems through interacting with others and accepting their criticism.

Plath's famous novel *The Bell Jar* analyzes Esther's search for identity in order to reach womanhood. Plath shows, from the beginning of the novel, that Esther is a different girl who has a big dream of being a famous writer. Unlike other girls in the novel who want to find a man to marry with and to have children, but Esther rejects this idea and wants to develop herself and to realize her dream without man-help.

Sylvia Plath explains in details how Esther really suffers in her life from patriarchy in America. Male perspectives are all the time the same no matter who are they and whether they are educated or not; in the course of the novel, she meets the doctor, the professor and the psychiatrist and all of them oppress her. However, she does not give up and her dream is bigger than the American illegal norms. Plath explores in her novel Esther's step by step journey to overcome her madness and to reach womanhood through the process of writing.

Plath portrays female oppression with all its forms mental, psychological, and sexual as an attempt to depict that men see women as objects of pleasure. The American novelist Sylvia Plath speaks about the central character in the novel and the journey she goes through more than anything else; she deals with other characters in a fragmented way just to support Esther's attitude in the novel.

Womanhood is partially achieved in the novel because Esther does not really solve her confusion by the end of the novel. Also, she suffers from anxiety and lack of confidence especially from writing because although she succeeds in writing and she can enter the summer internship for writing, she has big fears from writing and from success. These weak points in Esther's personality happen because of her young age and lack of experiences in life. However, comparing Esther to Plath, it becomes clear that she reaches a good and positive state because she overcomes madness. Everyone who reads *The Bell Jar* may expect that, by the end, Esther will commit suicide which is not the case. The end of the story is open, and Esther does not commit suicide as readers think. This open ended conclusion can be

interpreted as a positive note toward a better future because the last scene is Esther having a conversation with one of the psychiatrist in the asylum where she recovered few months ago.

Both the literary theories used to analyze this work, feminism and psychoanalysis, are beneficial because they help so much in analyzing Esther's Identity and state of mind. The novel centers on female concerns and issues; it traces the hardships they pass through to find oneself in a male dominated society. Different strategies are introduced to help women break the traditions and to achieve individualism in their society. Plath shows that it is not an easy task to oppose society's norms and values, but she encourages women's persistent attitudes to do so. Thanks to many novelists like Sylvia Plath, female freedom is achieved and, without ongoing attempts of nowadays feminists, feminism will lose its gains.

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## ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى البحث في كيفية التخلص من الضغوطات والظلم إلى تحقيق الذات. وتحلل هذه الدراسة رواية الناقد الزجاجة لسيلفيا بلاث عام (1963) التي نشرت تحت اسم مستعار فكتوريا لوكس. وترتكز هذه الفرضية على نظريتين أدبيتين وهما الحركة النسوية والتحليل النفسي. بطبيعة الحال، تلقي هذه الدراسة الضوء على معاناة المرأة الأمريكية من الأمراض العقلية والضغوطات النفسية التي تدفعها للعمل بجد والمثابرة للتغلب على مجتمعها الانحيازي. وكانت أفضل طريقة هي اللجوء إلى الكتابة كسلاح فعال لنشر أفكارهم وتحقيق أهدافهم وتغيير الوضع السائد آنذاك.

## Résumé

Cette étude vise à explorer le voyage des femmes américaines de la folie pour atteindre la féminité. L'étude analyse le roman de Sylvia Plath *The Bell Jar* 1963 qui est publié sous le pseudonyme Victoria Lucas. Cette thèse repose sur deux théories littéraires qui sont le féminisme et la psychanalyse. Elle éclaire la folie féminine en le voyant comme une construction culturelle plutôt que comme une maladie physique. D'autre part, le travail vise à expliquer comment les femmes luttent et réussissent à surmonter leur folie. Une de ces façons, la thèse suppose, est d'écrire qui les aide à diffuser leurs idées dans le monde entier. En effet, l'écriture s'avère une stratégie précieuse pour vaincre la folie et combattre le patriarcat. Par l'écriture, les femmes réussissent à combattre la structure patriarcale rigide et à changer le mauvais statu.