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**BREAKDOWN AND RECOVERY: FEMALE MADNESS IN
SYLVIA PLATH'S *THE BELL JAR* AND SUSANNA KAYSEN'S
*GIRL, INTERRUPTED***

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“Know thyself.*” Face the turbulence within.
*(Ancient Greek Aphorism)

ABSTRACT

Although thirty years separate the publications of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963) and Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted* (1993), both novels are set in post-war society in the United States, a time of great changes in the professional and intellectual roles for women. Caught in the dilemma between domesticity and a career, the protagonists of these two novels experience profound crises, which lead them to emotional imbalance and a search for self-knowledge and fulfillment. Based on feminist criticism (Phyllis Chesler, Betty Friedan, Barbara Hill Rigney, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Gayle Greene, Linda Huf among others) and on general principles of psychoanalytic theory (especially R.D. Laing and Jung), this investigation examines the conflicting forces which cause them to be considered psychologically impaired, arguing that their so-called madness is a result of a division between inner drives and external pressures at a time when gender relations were being questioned and transformed.

Keywords: Female madness, *self*, *Girl Interrupted*, *The Bell Jar*, Susanna Kaysen, Sylvia Plath.

RESUMO

Embora *Girl, Interrupted* (1993), de Susanna Kaysen, tenha sido publicado trinta anos depois de *The Bell Jar* (1963), de Sylvia Plath, ambos os romances retratam a sociedade dos Estados Unidos pós-guerra, uma época de grandes mudanças no que diz respeito aos papéis profissional e intelectual desempenhados pelas mulheres. Deparando-se com o dilema entre a vida doméstica e uma carreira, as protagonistas desses dois romances sofreram profundas crises, as quais resultaram em um desequilíbrio emocional e uma busca por autoconhecimento e autorrealização. Baseando-se na crítica feminista (Phyllis Chesler, Betty Friedan, Barbara Hill Rigney, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Gayle Greene, Linda Huf entre outros) e em princípios gerais da teoria psicanalítica (especialmente R.D. Laing e Jung), esta pesquisa examina as forças conflitantes que levaram as protagonistas a ser consideradas psicologicamente instáveis, argumentando que a chamada loucura é um resultado de uma divisão entre anseios pessoais e pressões externas em uma época que as relações de gênero estavam sendo questionadas e transformadas.

Palavras-chave: Loucura da mulher, self, Garota Interrompida, A Redoma de Vidro, Susanna Kaysen, Sylvia Plath.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The problem to be investigated concerns the commonly accepted belief that, as portrayed in literature, female madness is a gender issue. Female characters that are presented as emotionally unstable in several novels from the 1950s and 1960s indicate that this may be so, especially when their imbalance is related to a questioning of their roles in society. Because of the many, and sometimes abrupt, changes taking place as a result of the countercultural movements of mid-twentieth century, the traditional patterns of femininity – e.g. housewifery and motherhood – started to get in conflict with having a career and, consequently, led many women writers to have doubts concerning their roles in society. Should they be mothers and wives and turn their backs on a wish for something more? Or should they refuse previously established social roles and go for new roles such as that of being a writer? This dilemma is not new in literature. As Linda Huf points out in *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman* (1983), a critical analysis of autobiographical novels by women depicting the struggle to become creative artists, the problem was already present in Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall* (1855), Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *The Story of Avis* (1877), and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), among many others. But perhaps the most emblematic literary rendering of this female “divided self” can be found in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1892 short story “The Yellow Wallpaper”, which tells of a woman who is recommended “rest cure” by her doctor and her husband after childbirth, and subsequently descends into madness².

The general context in which this investigation is placed concerns the literary representations of the social conflicts faced by young women in the United States after the Second World War. At that time, for several historical reasons, women and men had imbalanced professional opportunities, including in the literary field. The critical establishment was mainly male and there were fewer women than men in college faculties and publishing houses. Before the outbreak of the “second wave” of the feminist movement, in the 1960s, women writers did not receive from the critical establishment the same recognition that

² Bomarito, Jessica and Jeffrey W. Hunter, eds. *Feminism in Literature, Vol. 5: 20th Century, Authors (A-G)*. Farmington Hills: Thomson Gale, 2005. pp.485-528.

male writers did. Furthermore, writing and publishing was often in conflict with the expected roles (re)assigned to women in the post-war period. For that reason, many women writers experienced conflict between their desire to write and the social demands imposed on them. This often resulted in emotional problems, including depression and possible suicide attempts – issues that were abundantly dealt with in the works of Sylvia Plath³, for example.

Within this broader context, the specific focus of investigation will fall on the two main female characters from the novels *The Bell Jar*⁴ by Plath and *Girl, Interrupted*⁵ by Susanna Kaysen. These two women find themselves in conflict when it comes to deciding what goals they want to pursue in life. The dichotomy “family/career” represents such a burden on the protagonists that they end up emotionally unbalanced, which results in suicide attempts and treatments in asylums. The society in which they lived, in the early 1960s, in the United States, was facing the post-war return of women to domesticity, with the focus on the home and the family, so well analyzed by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique*. In the novels by Plath and Kaysen, the female protagonists find themselves in conflict with their parents’ ambitions (representing society’s expectations) for them. Pursuing a career as a writer meant putting aside the pattern of having a family as a priority in a woman’s life, which would signify breaking the rules and being too daring.

Taking into account the context described, this investigation has as its main objective to analyze the conflicts faced by the protagonists of Plath’s *The Bell Jar* and Kaysen’s *Girl, Interrupted*, seeking to verify whether their problems could be attributed to the oppression of post-war patriarchal society. In order to achieve that, the following minor objectives will be pursued: (1) to present an overview of post-war society in the United States as depicted in the novels; (2) to situate the protagonists within their families, educational and/or work environments; (3) to identify antagonisms as represented by other characters, such as mothers, fathers, friends, neighbors, doctors, among others; (4) to verify how successfully (or not) the protagonists deal with these conflicts; (5) to interpret the resolution (or not) of the conflicts in

³ Illustration 1.

⁴ Illustrations 2 and 3.

⁵ Illustration 4.

the light of feminist analyses of the oppression of women in a patriarchal society.

As a way of achieving those objectives, this research will try to verify the following hypotheses:

- 1) The way madness is socially perceived, as it applies to this investigation, is actually a state in which people refuse to live in accordance to certain preconceived social roles and expose their authentic, private selves.
- 2) Because of the status of otherness (the second sex) historically attributed to women, female madness, defined according to my first hypothesis, may be considered a result of patriarchal oppression and, therefore, a gender issue.
- 3) Susanna Kaysen⁶ and Esther Greenwood, the two main female characters from the novels to be analyzed, faced emotional imbalance because the weight of social expectations led them to a feeling of division concerning social roles (accommodation to domesticity or rebellion through a career).

The corpus of this investigation consists of two novels. One, published in 1993, is entitled *Girl, Interrupted* and was written by Kaysen, and the other (1963) is entitled *The Bell Jar* and was written by Plath. In spite of having been published 30 years apart, both novels deal with protagonists living in the 1950s and 1960s. It is relevant to say that the topic of these novels is still nowadays an issue. Kaysen's novel tells of a young woman in her late teens whose main goal in life is to be a writer. However, she is in conflict with herself. Although she often states clearly what her greatest dream is, she lacks the ability to express her feelings and to communicate with her parents. The author introduces the facts in a way that her storyline works pretty much like a journal, leaving blanks for the reader to fill in. The chapters become pieces of a puzzle to be put together and solved along the way. Plath's plot, on the other hand, is based on her own experience of emotional instability, but the main character Esther Greenwood is fictional. She is also a young woman in her late teens, but one who comes from a humble background and, after getting a scholarship to college, wins as a prize from a fashion magazine contest a job in New York City for a month. Even though she admits her current position would be enough for any girl to be jealous of

⁶ Illustrations 5, 6 and 7.

her, she finds herself lost and unable to react to life around her, entering a period of deep questioning as to the meaning of her life.

In what concerns the procedural sequence that guided my research, it worked as follows. First, I researched about studies on madness, such as R. D. Laing's concept of the divided self, and W. E. B. Du Bois' theory of double consciousness, in order to understand it as applied to women and also as suitable to my literary analysis. Also, I reviewed João A. Frayze-Pereira's *O que é Loucura* so as to bring into discussion the common usage of the topic "madness". In addition, I read Stuart Hall and Jung aiming at understanding identity and personality. After that, I examined the novels *Girl, Interrupted* and *The Bell Jar* and identified aspects of the main female characters' behavior that can work as textual evidence for the relationship found between madness and women. Next, in order to accomplish the main objective of the research, I drew on discussions concerning gender studies carried out by Betty Friedan, Juliet Mitchell, and Barbara Hill Rigney among others. In this respect, Phyllis Chesler was especially important since she deals with the issue of female madness in a feminist context.

The dissertation is organized as follows. Chapter 2, entitled *Madness and Gender*, discusses the general concept of madness with a focus on how it has been used to refer to women. In Chapter 3, entitled *The Bell Jar*, and Chapter 4, entitled *Girl, Interrupted*, I present my analysis of the corpus. Both chapters are divided in subsections, in which I briefly talk about the authors and the novels, as well as analyze the participation of the main characters and their relationship with the protagonist and also analyze the issue of madness and the conflicts experienced by the protagonists. Finally, in the Conclusion I present the main similarities and differences between the novels.

2 MADNESS AND GENDER

In the sense it is commonly referred to, the term "crazy" is used to describe a negative state of being (Frayze-Pereira 9, 10). João A. Frayze-Pereira, a psychologist who teaches at Universidade de São Paulo, developed a research in order to try to define madness. With a philosophical and anthropologic approach, Frayze-Pereira discussed the results of his research in the book entitled *O que é loucura* (1984). His starting point was the analysis of university and pre-university students' answers to the topic of his book. According to his findings, among other affirmations, it is a belief that crazy⁷ people are a danger to society and to themselves (11). Historically, women who did not conform to social rules have often been seen as crazy. In the 1960s they were bound to be diagnosed as "bad", and recommended to be "isolated and punished" (Susanna Kaysen 15), or even as witches. They also used to be recommended by doctors to a variety of other questionable treatments such as leeches and electric shock (15), which do not seem to take into account the integrity of the patient. One diagnosis, however, could be of use here: "[t]his person is a victim of society's low tolerance for deviant behavior" (15).

For the purpose of this investigation, madness will be seen as a useful facet, because it leads the so-called crazy to a better understanding of the self. In this sense, madness will not be seen as negative and marginalized. Rather, it will be taken as "divinest sense", i.e. the emotional condition that allows someone to think outside the bubble where we all live. It is what gives us the chance to consider who we are and what is suitable to us as individuals, without bowing to what others tell us to do/be like. In the case of women, madness has been seen as common sense "as early as the sixteenth century" when "women were 'shut up' in madhouses (as well as in royal towers) by their husbands" (Allan M. Dershowitz qtd in Phyllis Chesler 93). The novels that were analyzed in this research are from the 1960s, but still nowadays the label "crazy" is used to describe people who merely behave differently from most others or, as Frayze-Pereira puts it, ⁸"[madness] is just a deviation from the norm" (28).

⁷ The words "crazy", "mad" and "insane", as well as "craziness", "madness" and "insanity", will be used interchangeably throughout this study.

⁸ "Ela é apenas afastamento da norma". My translation.

Having in mind the society in the United States in the 1960s, the adjustment to its pre-defined feminine roles caused some women to feel confused about their future lives and, because of that, they were often seen as crazy and sent to asylums. In this post-war period, women's role in society began to be questioned by women themselves. Since during the war they were forced to get jobs in order to provide for the family while the men were away at war, once war was over, men got back home and women had to return to the domestic lives. Thus, what seemed to be, at first, sort of a given – how to behave, what to do as a grownup – went into check when the war was over. According to Stuart Hall (1992), there has been a crisis with identity: what was in the past years sort of a given in terms of identity is in the modernity opening up for new models of identity to come out. What was then a model, a reference, is now in question. ⁹“[...] [T]he modern identities are being ‘decentered’, that is, dislocated or fragmented”, he argues (7, 8). Before the twentieth century crisis with identity, it was believed that the subject had a “unified identity”, but now it is believed to be fragmented. But even though it was a common belief that people had this unified identity, I wonder whether they really did because in my view the questions that have been raised after the crisis with identity have always been there, within the subjects, but only after the Second World War and the social movements that room has been open for discussion. Still, at the same time, in the 1960s, there was a need to fit in, because it was commonly accepted that people had to have a coherent identity, a stable sense of self and they had to belong. All this confusion – accepting domestic life for it was the expected thing to do or going for personal goals and facing prejudice from society – led women to experience emotional imbalance. The writer Sylvia Plath, the author of one of the novels that I will analyze, experienced these mixed emotions herself.

With such ideas in mind, I will discuss in this chapter my assumption that these women were feeling misplaced and behaving differently from what was expected from them. They wanted different things for themselves than the roles society defined, that is, being a housewife, a wife and a mother, or fulfilling what Betty Friedan called “the feminine mystique”. However, for the female protagonists in the

⁹ “[A]s identidades modernas estão sendo ‘descentradas’, isto é, deslocadas ou fragmentadas.” My translation.

novels that I am going to analyze, what they thought was their roles – what they really wanted to do – was having a career as writers. Conflicts came up because at the same time they felt like doing one specific thing, they were educated and had in their mothers and grandmothers examples of how to be something else. In Friedan's research, she found out that the women she interviewed were unhappy because they felt their lives were incomplete as housewives and mothers. They found themselves wanting more than that. In the cases of the female protagonists of the novels, they were feeling an anxiety towards the future because they already knew they did not want to be housewives and mothers. They wanted to write. But they felt insecure about the fact that they were "different" and understood it was expected from them to behave just like all other women. What they did not know then, Friedan found out later: "[the woman] doesn't have to choose between marriage and career; that was the mistaken choice of the feminine mystique." She adds: "In actual fact, it is not as difficult as the feminine mystique implies, to combine marriage and motherhood and even the kind of lifelong personal purpose that once was called 'career'. It merely takes a new life plan – in terms of one's whole life as a woman" (330). If the characters Esther and Susanna had realized all that, or had had room to experience that, perhaps they would not have gone mad. In fact, I will change the word "mad" here for "sad". Just this once.

In the meantime, conceptualizing madness is fundamental for this study. Or if not conceptualizing, it is necessary to at least attempt to put it in plausibly understandable words that will allow one to conceive it as a positive state of mind. The theoretical background researched upon supports the idea that madness in the context to be investigated should not be seen from the biological angle. Rather, the social demands seem to indicate that the oppression experienced by the female protagonists led them to emotional instability. In *The Divided Self* (1960), R. D. Laing argues that ontological insecurity leads to anxieties and that these anxieties only take place because there is occasion for them to arise (65). He developed a study on schizophrenics and put into question the claims of traditional psychiatry by arguing that social and cultural influence should be taken into account when treating emotional instability instead of only considering biological features. Thus, madness can be seen as unconscious rebellion against normativity. On what it means to be normal, Ruth Benedict (qtd in Frayze-Pereira)

defends that ¹⁰“each culture selects some of the infinite virtuositities of the human essence and proposes to its members a model of behavior: those whose reactions spontaneously match the proposed pattern are favored; those whose behavior is located outside of the arch of anthropologic possibilities privileged by society are abnormal” (24-5). And investigations lead to the hypothesis that it is not a biological feature that leads to madness. Rather, it is a feeling of oppression, a fear that people could not express themselves because they thought differently from the society in which they were living, that suffocated them to the point of making their minds stop working according to the expected behavior, so to speak.

This investigation will try to make room for discussions concerning inner feelings and the need the self has to express/experience those feelings. As I see it, respect towards the quests of the self is vital for the maintenance of one’s sanity. Or as Tillich (qtd in Friedan) puts it, “if you do not have the courage to be, you lose your own being” (399). In fact, the word “interrupted” chosen by Kaysen in the title of her novel *Girl, Interrupted* (1993), seems to describe well the condition experienced by the individual – in the process of living, one gets interrupted when they cannot be.

In the light of such conclusions, the question “what is the meaning of being a woman in the United States?” seems relevant. The answer to this question could be “prisoner” if we had in mind the legal condition of married women when the husbands held authority over their wives (Caroline Bird 16). At the time of slavery, the same question and answer could have been used about being black in a society where white people held rights over black people. Still, even after the end of slavery, black people were seen as inferior when compared to white people in America. For women, the case was being considered inferior when compared to men even after they were no longer seen as a legal property of their husbands. Even though “[w]omen were not [...] as helpless as slaves [...] they had no voice in the government” (Bird 17). Both Negroes and women shared this feeling of division in terms of identity. Women felt they had to be wives and mothers, but they also

¹⁰ “[C]ada cultura seleciona algumas das infinitas virtualidades da essência humana e propõe a seus membros modelos de conduta: aqueles cujas reações espontaneamente se aproximam mais do padrão proposto são favorecidos; aqueles cujo comportamento se situa fora do arco de possibilidades antropológicas privilegiadas pela sociedade são anormais”. My translation.

wanted to have careers, which would represent the sense of self, for they would not be doing something for the other, but for themselves. Black men were free, but they lacked references in terms of identity (Du Bois 8). Still nowadays, both situations, being a woman in a patriarchal society and being a black person in a white-ruled society, can open room to instability in terms of identity.

In this sense, the following questions should also be asked: What is the self? What is identity? What is personality? In one single concept, I would conceive the three ideas to mean “what one believes to be”, what differs one from others. What differentiates one person from the other is identity, self or personality, the three being used here interchangeably. Or specifically for the purpose of this study, the three notions will be used as reference for the general idea of “sense of self”, which I identify as being singular in terms of what characterizes individuals. People may think alike, look alike. However, in the sense of preserving one’s own self, as Laing puts it, “[the other] cannot be me, and I cannot be him” (52). Thus, how is this individuality (personality? self? identity?) created? Jung in *O Desenvolvimento da Personalidade* (1910) stated that ¹¹ “[w]ithout determination, integrity and maturity there is no personality” (176). In what it concerns the development of the personality, Jung affirms that ¹² “only the most pressing need can activate [the personality]”, therefore, ¹³ “[it] needs to be motivated by coercion of internal or external happenings” (178-79). In this sense, it is possible to assume that Susanna and Esther were inspired to develop their personalities by a reality that clashed against their latent selves. As I see it, the emotional instability they experienced was probably a result of the development of their personalities under pressure. They felt an urge to experience what their real “them” was suggesting, but they felt rejection from the environment and their families.

In addition, according to Jung, when the personality is in its starting point of development, ¹⁴ “the individual, in a conscious and inevitable way, separates themselves from the big mass, which is

¹¹ “Sem determinação, inteireza e maturidade não há personalidade.” My translation. Original italics.

¹² “Só a necessidade mais premente consegue ativá-la.” My translation.

¹³ “[E]la precisa ser motivada pela coação de acontecimentos internos ou externos.” My translation.

¹⁴ “[O] indivíduo, de maneira consciente e inevitável, se separa da grande massa, que é indeterminada e inconsciente. Isto significa *isolamento* [...]” My translation.

undetermined and unconscious. That means isolation [...]” (179). Also, he stood for the belief that most people end up following patterns of behavior instead of listening to their hearts and choosing their own way of being. For him, ¹⁵“[t]he fact that the conventions somehow always flourished proves that the overwhelming majority of people does not choose their own way, but the convention; that is the reason why they do not develop themselves but follow the method, which is something collective, to the detriment of their own totality” (180). Susanna and Esther, the female protagonists of the novels to be analyzed, while experiencing those feelings, are forced to interact with a society which expects different behavior from them. They both wanted to be writers, but at the same time they are confused because they know they are supposed to perform different roles. Also, Esther Greenwood, for instance, wants to write and has good perspectives on the profession after she gets a scholarship in a prestigious magazine, but she feels like a failure because she not only feels inferior in her productions but also she believes that the only other option she would have is getting married (Plath 49). The suffocating feeling of division that Esther experiences when, for example, she talks about having to choose one fig or another (41) is because she believes she has to choose between family life and career. She does not envision that she can have both. The infant Esther and Susanna probably lacked the maturity, integrity and determination Jung spoke of when referring to children in the process of developing a personality, and thus cannot live fully the urges of their real selves.

In Friedan’s study which resulted in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), she, too, discussed the importance of fully developing the self in order to feel accomplished in life. She affirmed that there is something within the self that urges for deep and full self-realization and identified that the housewives in post-war America suffered from the trouble with identity that haunts an oppressed mind. The mind doctors who treated the unhappy housewives had the mission of helping them conform to their reality. However, Friedan believed that conforming to a reality which does not allow the individual to live their real aspirations does not do much for the patient (299). The patients who do conform to their

¹⁵ “O fato de as convenções de algum modo sempre florescerem prova que a maioria esmagadora das pessoas não escolhe seu próprio caminho, mas a convenção; por isso não se desenvolve a si mesma, mas segue o método, que é algo de coletivo, em prejuízo de sua totalidade própria.” My translation.

reality cease to experience feelings of anxiety, for, according to Rollo May (qtd in Friedan), anxiety is but a symptom which comes up in the first place due to inadequacy within their environment. According to May, “anxiety comes only with freedom” (300), i.e. when someone starts thinking for themselves, questioning their reality, the feeling of anxiety comes up. On the other hand, when they accept the norms and follow them, anxiety disappears. Anxiety can also disappear if the self respects its own inner feelings and goes after its own path. Therefore, the point is not conforming to a reality, but living the reality they inwardly desire. In this case, the ontological insecurity Laing spoke of, mentioned in the introduction, implies this need the individual has of accomplishing a sense of autonomy over the self.

In this sense, just as in terms of race for black people, it was as if they were a variation to the norm – the whites, in terms of gender, the same happened to women: they were a variation to the norm – men in a patriarchal society. This idea that I call a variation of the norm and that is used by Frayze-Pereira to define madness is supported by R. D. Laing’s concept of the divided self and W. E. B. Du Bois’ concept of double consciousness. The norm can be defined as following rules of behavior or fitting in standards within a society (Frayze-Pereira 22-5). Like Laing, Du Bois sees the mind of people who have suffered oppression from the majority group as having a division. While for Laing this division may be a result of oppression from the family (189), Du Bois sees the division in the mind of the blacks as a result of oppression suffered from the general white society in the United States (8). Thus, Laing’s concept of the divided self and Du Bois’ concept of double consciousness bond together in the sense that they both see a self that can be divided into two selves, or a “divided self”. For Du Bois, the Negroes in the United States have the need to find out who they are. They are seen by Du Bois as having two references: one as a person being born in the United States and another one as a black person (8). However, they are different only insofar as Black folks are excluded from the opportunities given to the whites in the United States. Du Bois, thus, wonders whether the blacks may suffer from a definite loss of identity or develop a divided self, for they may end up not knowing who they really are and to which group they belong.

Specifically in Laing’s *The Divided Self*, the notions of depersonalization and petrification account for the conditions in which a

person deeply fears to be overwhelmed by the influence of others. The person uses those two mechanisms to forestall this overwhelming from happening. Depersonalization can be understood as a sort of resource in which “[o]ne no longer allows oneself to be responsive to his feelings and may be prepared to regard him and treat him as though he had no feelings.” Meanwhile, Laing explains that the word petrification can have many meanings, but a general understanding would allude to an idea of being petrified, i.e. turned into stone (46). In other words, it refers to the fear one has of losing autonomy over oneself. Laing sums up by affirming that “[a]ny other is then a threat to his ‘self’ (his capacity to act autonomously) not by reason of anything he or she may do or not do specifically, but by reason of his or her very existence” (47). He affirms that “to forgo one’s autonomy becomes the means of secretly safeguarding it; to play possum, to feign death, becomes a means of preserving one’s aliveness.” The patient he was “studying” was afraid of having no self. “I am only a response to other people, I have no identity of my own” (47). The same feeling was experienced by Susanna Kaysen. She wanted to know if she was a person, if she had any bones in her hand (103). For Laing’s patient, he was only a response to other people, but why only a response? Because he did not feel he could act. He could only react. Perhaps his fear of self expression was because he did not feel his self could exist in a *different* environment. Different thoughts, different ideologies made him feel displaced. This was probably due to the fact that, from a very young age his mother did not support his “way of being” and, therefore, in the process of constructing an identity, his self was hindered by his mother, or “interrupted”, as Susanna would put it. His self could not be because he was always being oppressed by his mother. According to him, “[s]he never recognized [his] identity” (48).

The idea that we need the presence of the other in order to construct our own selves opens room for the importance of the family during the process in which individuals are constructing their identity. Esther Greenwood and Susanna Kaysen come from what can be referred to as “problematic families”. Esther’s description of her mother and their interaction led me to see Mrs. Greenwood as a villain who does not support her daughter and seems very repressive (Plath 40). Meanwhile, Kaysen constantly expressed feelings of apathy towards her parents or made clear she knew she was a disappointment to them (Kaysen 95,

155). Such evidences can suggest a bad relationship among the protagonists and their mothers and, in that way, come about as what I identify as an explanation for what originated the imbalance that those characters experience in the narratives.

Having a self that is divided can lead the female character to be either a hero or a villain. The woman can be a hero if she manages to deal with the fact that she wants different things and gets rid of the need of having to be like everybody else in order to find acceptance from the majority. However, the divided self can render her very much a villain if the woman fails to acknowledge even to herself that her heart beats in a different rhythm and ends up unconsciously blocking her emotions and going down the road of depression and, in the worst cases, suicide. This acknowledgement, however, is a challenge and depends not only on the individual but also and perhaps mostly on family support. That is why Laing blames the family for the emotional instability one may experience (qtd in Rigney 9). Therefore, the need to reproduce patterns of behavior is an indicator for the loss of the self in the case of Esther Greenwood and Susana Kaysen, who have trouble establishing personal goals and also understanding their difference. This constant call for following patterns in order to find approval works like a drug to which the self becomes addicted, and whenever it is not possible to feel approved the self goes through a phase of abstinence which limits their ability to reason and, thus, emotional imbalance is settled.

As for what Laing explains in his concept, Esther's and Susanna's suicide attempts can be seen as a defense mechanism¹⁶: they were not actually trying to die, but trying to avoid being "killed" by others in the sense that they were insecure about the mere fact of existing. Existing for them represented being overwhelmed by someone else for they had no strong sense of self. Laing affirms that in order for someone not to be overwhelmed by the influence of someone else's presence in their construction of personality, it is necessary to have a strong sense of self. "A firm sense of one's autonomous identity", he argues, "is required in order that one may be related as one human being to another. Otherwise, any and every relationship threatens the

¹⁶ Defense Mechanism is a psychoanalytic term which is "a tactic developed by the ego to protect against anxiety." This definition and more on defense mechanism can be found at psychology.about.com/od/dindex/g/defensemech.htm. Accessed on July 15, 2013.

individual with loss of identity” (44). In sum, in order not to be petrified by someone else, they unconsciously choose to petrify themselves.

Another way to approach the emotional imbalance to be dealt with in the analysis of Plath’s and Kaysen’s novels is to consider the struggle between the self and the ego. In broad psychoanalytical terms, the ego, which literally means “I”,¹⁷ is seen as the rational part of the mind that is associated to a sense of identity/individualization, based on Freud’s Theory of Psychoanalysis¹⁸. On the other hand, searching for the word “ego” in a dictionary, one will find a definition that leads to the concepts of self-esteem and self-importance¹⁹, which makes it understandable that one guided by the ego seeks recognition and approval from others. Battling with the ego, though, there is the self. For Jung, self is the “selbst”, i.e. “the central point” of someone, as he refers to in *O Eu e o Inconsciente* (1916). Jung claims that it is important to listen to “this voice” (112). Also, this “selbst” alludes to the concept of self presented by Laing. These conflicting parts of one’s individualization make room for the rise of an inner divergence, i.e. self versus ego²⁰. Therefore, a disagreement appears when it comes to what force should guide one’s choices.

For the purpose of this study, thus, the ego will be taken as a negative element, for once it prevails over the self an opportunity for conflict is created. In addition, for Jung, the repression of a real self can be harmful to one’s psychological balance. According to him, “for the benefit of an ideal image, into which the individual wants to shape, much of their humanity is sacrificed.”²¹ (32). This “ideal image” can easily be associated to the patterns of normativity that were often mentioned throughout this work. On a belief that one is supposed to wear a mask accepted within society in order to belong, their personal self is left behind. However, as Jung puts it,

¹⁷ Statt, David A. *The Concise Dictionary of Psychology*. London: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2003.

¹⁸ <http://psychology.about.com/od/historyofpsychology/a/psychodynamic.htm> Accessed on April 27, 2013.

¹⁹ <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/ego> Accessed on April 27, 2013.

²⁰ <http://freedomfightersunite.webs.com/egovself.htm> Accessed on April 27, 2013.

²¹ “Em benefício de uma imagem ideal, à qual o indivíduo aspira moldar-se, sacrifica-se muito de sua humanidade.” My translation.

[...] although the consciousness of the ego can identify with [the persona] in an exclusive way, the unconscious self, one's true individuality, is always present, making itself felt indirectly. Thus, even though the ego's consciousness initially identifies with the persona – this character which we represent before the collectivity, the unconscious self cannot be repressed to the point of extinction.²² (33)

As for Du Bois, he believed that the twentieth century had a color problem (3). Because of that, he defended that men (in a “non-gendered sense”) had a divided consciousness that he called “double consciousness” (8). With time, he began to realize that being a problem to society (the fact that they were black people) meant that the good opportunities were for the white people and not for him to pursue (8). He felt that his people shared with him the bitter wondering about the reason “[w]hy God made [them] an outcast and a stranger in [their] own house” (8). And I wonder what quality of identity someone who shared those feelings would have. Perhaps one with a divided self. Would they be able to feel mature, integrate and determined (Jung 176) in order to develop a healthy (sane?) personality? The answer is most likely to be no.

One danger of double consciousness is the risk of seeing oneself through the eyes of the other. Du Bois argues that black men in the United States could not have one true consciousness, for they would at the same time have the consciousness of the Negro and the consciousness of the whites in the United States – which could be seen in this situation as the “real Americans”. For him, “[o]ne ever feels his two-ness,— an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (8). Therefore, at the same time the Negroes are looking at themselves with the eyes of

²² “[...] embora a consciência do ego possa identificar-se com [a persona] de modo exclusivo, o si-mesmo inconsciente, a verdadeira individualidade, não deixa de estar sempre presente, fazendo-se sentir de forma indireta. Assim, apesar da consciência do ego identificar-se inicialmente com a persona – essa figura de compromisso que representamos diante da coletividade, o si-mesmo inconsciente não pode ser reprimido a ponto de extinguir-se.” My translation.

black people, they are looking at themselves with the eyes of a white man, for they carry that consciousness as well. Thus, it can be said of the Negroes that they are leaning to experiencing an emotional instability, which lies in an ongoing longing for a “self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self” (9). In doing so, Du Bois affirms, the Negro would not be willing to abolish either of his selves, for both have conditions to contribute for the society. Rather, he would be aiming at being respected and accepted as both Negro and American²³ “without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face” (9). By doing so, his self would not be threatened by the influence of others, i.e. by having a secure, confident self, the eyes of the other would not define him, but his own.

In addition to Du Bois’ concept of “double consciousness”, other similarities can be found about the conditions women and blacks are exposed to in a society. It is relevant to remember that the 1960s were a time of civil rights. In the same way as women, the black community was fighting for equal rights. Bird (1969) pointed out that women and the Negroes share many disadvantages when compared to the majority white male society in the 1960s in America. She affirms that “[b]oth had emerged from a ‘previous condition of servitude’ that had denied them the vote, schooling, jobs, apprenticeships, and equal access to unions, clubs, professional associations, professional schools, restaurants, and public places” (110). More similarities are pointed out by Bird: “[b]oth are fired before white men and hired after them. Both are arbitrarily limited to the lower-paying, least productive, less-skilled jobs and sometimes the same ones” (113). These are the conditions under which Susanna and Esther were forced to live. Although having a career was possible, the feeling of inferiority surrounded them all the time. As Laing observed, that is the type of feeling which opens room for the emotional instability the female characters went through:

²³ In his theory, Du Bois uses “American” to refer to those who are born in the United States. Since there is a well-known discussion about the use of this term, i.e. it could also be used to refer to any other person who is born in either Central America and South America, as well as other countries in North America such as Canada, I have decided not to use it every time I mention the people of the United States, but in some specific moments it seems relevant, such as this one.

Susanna and Esther not only were doing something different from what was expected from them, they were also entering a minefield with the clear notion in mind that they would be seen and treated as inferior. For Bird, the oppression felt by Negroes and women works almost as a synonym for emotional instability. She, therefore, corroborates this assumption when she states that “Negroes and women who maintain their mental health develop some kind of defense against the imputation of incompetence” (117).

These similar disadvantages suffered by the Negro and women in the United States in the 1960s clearly put them in an inferior position when compared to the majority – the white male. The patriarchal society in which both minority groups lived conceived the white male as superior. In this way, the oppression experienced by the Negro and women is nothing but natural consequence, as Bird pointed out (117).

In terms of women in a patriarchal society, Rigney stated that “that which is considered normal and desirable behavior for men is thought to be neurotic or even psychotic for women” (3). At first it was having a job, for it was common sense that women belonged in the house with the children and the housewifery (Friedan 64). Later on, when women were already in the working field, it was the unequal opportunities that they were forced to face (Bird 110). For example, achieving high positions in companies was rare for women and men bosses expected less from female workers than from male workers (Bird 116). In such a situation, it would be normal to feel inferior and try to accomplish more in the company in order to get a higher position and more recognition and respect. However, women would be seen as troublemakers, as well as the Negro would, for they both are commonly seen as workers who “take things personally” (117). The affirmation made by Rigney raises a question: can madness be considered a gender issue as a consequence of social oppression? As for Laing’s, Du Bois’, and Friedan’s claims, the answer found so far is that it is a consequence of social oppression.

This case of gender inequalities in relation to work, which carries the idea that women’s world was domestic (reproduction) in opposition to public (production), also affected the intellectual work of women. Especially relevant for the present investigation is the issue of being or becoming a writer as a possible reason that led the protagonists

to experience emotional imbalance. Many critics and creative writers of the 1960's and 70's recognized a deep sense of uneasiness in mid-twentieth-century women writers. Tillie Olsen (1971), for example, worried about what it was that has the power to stop the creative process, speaking of "the unnatural thwarting of what struggles to come into being, but cannot" (6). According to her, writers had trouble finding time to write because they usually had other duties. Thus, in order to write, these artists needed to give up all the rest. But how can one give up a job when there is the need to work in order to sustain the self (13)? Olsen claims that when there is no possibility of dedicating the self completely to the art of writing, "the results are atrophy; unfinished work; minor effort and accomplishment; silences" (13). As in the case of women writers specifically, Olsen attributes the lack of time to their responsibilities with their houses – children and husbands – which does very well stand for "work". "In the last century", she argues, "of the women whose achievements endure for us in one way or another, nearly all never married [...] or married late in their thirties". And those who got married young had servants (16). This condition, then, can be seen as a barrier to women's artistic productions. And, according to Olsen, for one specific reason: "women are traditionally trained to place others' needs first, to feel these needs as their own" (17). Such an affirmation is strongly reinforced by Friedan's interviewees when they say that they are more than their husbands' wives and children's moms. They knew their selves needed more. However, social oppression and lack of time, due to house chores, blocked their step forward into creation.

A similar explanation, in terms of possible reasons for the silences of women, can be found in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, where they wonder about what being a woman writer really means in a patriarchal society. In this sense, the silences in the writing of women will be seen here as directly connected with the fact that authorship has pretty much been taken as a male practice. For Gilbert and Gubar literature is a social practice and, as such, cannot be divorced from gender arrangements. They inquire about what it means for women to express themselves within a predominantly male tradition.

However personal it may be, art is a social process and writers are naturally influenced by the works of artists that came before them. Based on what Harold Bloom calls "the anxiety of influence", a fear that

haunts artists in their process of writing, Gilbert and Gubar develop the concept of “anxiety of authorship” for women writers. According to them, for Bloom, in an analogy with the Freudian Oedipal Complex, “a man can only become a poet by somehow invalidating his poetic father” (47). Gilbert and Gubar argue, however, that such an understanding cannot be applied to a woman writer, for she has no female models to follow (47). Instead of the feeling defined by Bloom, then, Gilbert and Gubar suggest the so-called “anxiety of authorship”, which can be understood as “a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a ‘precursor’ the act of writing will isolate or destroy her” (49). She feels torn between accepting the (passive, domestic) female role socially assigned to her and venturing into a creative (active, public) role which is typically male.

Taking into account this belief that women are oppressed for they do not have the same opportunities as men do, Rigney tries to support in *Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel* (1978) that some feminists such as Kate Millett and Simone de Beauvoir have trouble with psychoanalysis because of Freud’s studies, for they always pointed to women as naturally mad by naming mental illnesses as, for example, Hysteria, i.e. the emotional instability associated by Freud to the uterus, which comes from the Greek ὑστέρα "*hystera*" = uterus²⁴. However, she supports Juliet Mitchell’s claim that psychoanalysis “is not a recommendation *for* a patriarchal society, but an analysis *of* one” (qtd in Rigney 6, italics hers). In this sense, she goes on arguing that female madness can indeed be a result of social oppression (7) and what Freud did was merely describe the process through which the society was going. That is why she uses Laing’s views on the influence of society and culture on one’s sanity – or lack of it – to support her positioning: the need to fit in forces one to behave in an undesired way. And going against the urges of the self may result in emotional instability. The madness socially taken as a negative condition is, in Laing’s terms, a superior sanity (qtd in Rigney 8), for it happens when one achieves a level of consciousness that allows them to question the conditions of the environment in which they are inserted. And in doing so, they get the chance to develop their own identity without having to

²⁴ According to *The Concise Dictionary of Psychology* (2003), hysteria comes “[f]rom the Greek word for ‘womb’ because it was originally thought that the emotional disturbances it described were exclusively female and caused by disorders of the womb [...] (67).”

follow patterns of behavior with which they do not agree (Rigney 7, 8). However, I wonder whether Susanna's and Esther's behaviors would not have been seen as symptoms of madness if inserted in a different context, for according to Michel Foucault (1954, qtd in Frayze-Pereira),²⁵ “[mental] illness can only be real and validated within a culture that recognizes it as such” (23). Frayze-Pereira adds:²⁶ “if it is the society that effectively defines the norms of thinking and behaving, that which is considered normal in society A can be considered pathologic in society B and vice-versa” (24). According to him,²⁷ “each society creates from the disease a profile that is designed through the set of human possibilities emphasized or repressed culturally” (27). That is how people are seen and how they feel. It is this feeling of not belonging that leads to the extreme sadness and confusion experienced by those eventually diagnosed as crazy.

Specifically in the case of women, Chesler points out that female patients have for long outnumbered male patients in psychological treatments (94). She observes that in her time people “were taught to view women as somehow naturally mentally ill” (1). An explanation for such a condition may be that men are, in general, allowed a larger variety of behaviors than are women. “It can be argued”, she suggests,

that psychiatric hospitalization or labeling relates to what society considers unacceptable behavior. Thus, since women are allowed fewer total behaviors and are more strictly confined to their role-sphere than men are, women, more than men, will commit more behaviors that are seen as ill or unacceptable. (99)

Also, she criticizes the way “madwomen” have been treated and suggests changes in their treatment. According to Chesler, in

²⁵ “[A] doença só tem realidade e valor de doença mental no interior de uma cultura que a reconhece como tal”. My translation.

²⁶ “[S]e é a sociedade que efetivamente define as normas de pensamento e de comportamento, o que é normal na sociedade A poderá ser considerado patológico na sociedade B e vice-versa”. My translation.

²⁷ “[C]ada sociedade forma da doença um perfil que se desenha através do conjunto das possibilidades humanas enfatizadas ou reprimidas culturalmente”. My translation.

asylums, “female patients were routinely beaten, deprived of sleep, food, exercise, sunlight, and all contact with the outside world, and were sometimes even murdered”. She mentions Plath as an example of women who have been mistreated by professionals and lacked family support when experiencing emotional breakdown (5). For a change in their treatment, Chesler suggests that the emotional problems that patients go through should not be generalized. She envisions that “[i]t is important to know what type of clinical treatment these psychiatric patients receive; how many clinicians there are, the theories on which the clinicians draw, and how these psychiatrists and psychologists view their patients” (117).

In this way, Chesler (1972) ratifies the connection identified by Rigney between madness and patriarchal society when it comes to gendering madness in a feminist context. Also, Chesler supports the view that madness should not be seen as a negative condition, an abnormal state of being. In this sense, I wonder: why does madness have to be conceived pejoratively? In this investigation it has been interpreted as a good feature, for it allows the achievement of a higher level of consciousness where people no longer accept what is not in accordance with what they really live within themselves, or the previously mentioned “superior sanity” Laing talks about. This superior sanity is in the end “a stage in the evolution of a conscious, truly sane person” (Rigney 8). In addition, another issue that comes to mind concerns the reason why individuals must accept a reality that does not appeal to them. Unconsciously, in every society, what is considered normal is to follow your neighbors, coworkers, friends or ancestors’ line of achievements. When you, opposed to that, demonstrate discomfort towards what you see around you, you are seen as crazy, a definition used to refer to those who do not belong, alluding to a negative thing.

According to Chesler, “madness – as a label or reality – is not conceived of as divine, prophetic, or useful. It is perceived as (and often further shaped into) a shameful and menacing disease, from whose spiteful and exhausting eloquence society must be protected” (95). The madness I have been referring to is what gives us the chance to be ourselves, to be an individual. I reinforce here my belief that there are no two individuals exactly alike in the world. Each of us is unique and, therefore, should not be satisfied with what others tell us to do/be like. According to the definition of “mad” found in the Oxford English

Dictionary, one should be characterized with such an adjective when “having a mind that does not work normally”. Meanwhile, “normal” is defined as “typical, usual or ordinary”. By such definitions, it is possible to conclude that the word “mad” is to be used when defining someone who does not do whatever is common or expected, which, summing up, in a society, means that everybody is supposed to behave in a (same) appropriate way, otherwise, they will be labeled “mad”. Chesler, like Laing, sees emotional instability as a result of social oppression. She strongly affirms that most women in asylums are not crazy and adds that “what we call madness can also be caused or exacerbated by injustice and cruelty within the family and society” (27).

In the last chapter of *Women and Madness*, Chesler raises thirteen questions suggesting reflection on the female condition in terms of humiliation, such as that of receiving labels like “insane”, as well as in general disadvantages. In order to conclude this chapter, I will try to answer one of these questions, which is divided into two: “Who will our goddess and heroines be? [...] How can we learn to celebrate – not just tolerate – our differences?” (350). Specifically to the first question, I would answer: whoever inspires us to live whatever it is that we have within ourselves. However, both questions can be answered with the same and few words: respect your inner self, your “central point” or “selbst” that Jung talks about, which will be the source for your identity/personality formation. No one can define what is right for us but ourselves. Whoever you look up to can only inspire you rather than ultimately define who you are. Although the weight of seeking for approval in whatever we do is always lurking around, the hard job of deciding what is suitable and convenient to our own well being is no one else’s but ours. In respecting ourselves, we will naturally bring about respect from others and, thus, mutually, respect one another.

As already mentioned, the female protagonists of *The Bell Jar* and *Girl, Interrupted* experience emotional imbalance. In addition to analyzing the emotional state in which those women are, the main focus of the next two chapters, I will also discuss their relationship with the other characters – male and female. Many analyses of *The Bell Jar* have been carried out and it would be difficult to cover everything; therefore, I will rely on the most relevant ones to my topic. Opposite to what I had in mind, however, it was not possible to find an equally large variety of

analyses of *Girl, Interrupted*. Finally, I am going to present a brief overview of the lives of the authors.

3 *THE BELL JAR*

3.1 Author & Novel

Sylvia Plath wrote the novel *The Bell Jar* inspired by her own emotional breakdown. She did so also as an attempt to move on after she apparently recovered from it. As it is well known, she did not recover and the novel was published firstly in London, in January 1963, about 10 years after the events took place, under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas²⁸, one month before she committed suicide. This novel has been taken as a semi-biographical work, for Plath herself stated that by writing it she was trying to get rid of her past²⁹. It may seem unnecessary to discuss Plath in detail, for her accomplishments, especially after her death, speak for themselves. Some say this novelist and poetess gained notoriety because of her suicide. However, her art, especially her poems, point to different beliefs. In fact, her *Collected Poems*³⁰ received a Pulitzer Prize in 1982.

The Bell Jar has been adapted to the screen once in a 1979 far-from-blockbuster production³¹ directed by Larry Pearce and starred by Marilyn Hassett in the role of Esther Greenwood³². Rumor has it there is another adaptation to be released, to be starred by Julia Stiles in the role of Esther. However, there is no detailed information on the project.

In the following sections, I will analyze the protagonist's interaction with the other characters as well as the central theme of this study, i.e., female madness.

²⁸ Ames, Lois. "Sylvia Plath: A Bibliographical Note" [1971]. *The Bell Jar*. New York: Bantam, 1981. p.203.

²⁹ Greene, Gayle. *Changing the Story: Feminist Fiction and the Tradition*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991. p.149.

³⁰ Wagner-Martin, Linda. *Sylvia Plath: a literary life*. [1999] Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. p. 146.

³¹ Illustration 8.

³² <http://www.allmovie.com/movie/the-bell-jar-v4741>. Accessed on March 4, 2013.

3.2 Characters and Relationship with Protagonist

The narrative starts with a gloomy protagonist who is in New York City during the summer of 1953 benefiting from the one-month internship she wins as a prize in a magazine writers' contest. Although this prize seems to be every girl's dream, Esther cannot really connect with the joys it brings for she cannot stop thinking about the Rosenbergs (3), the couple of spies who were convicted of conspiracy and executed in the electric chair that summer³³. Throughout the narrative, she comes across many characters both in New York City and back home in the suburbs of Boston. My aim here, thus, is to capture the main aspects of the relationship she establishes with the most significant characters in the way it can relate to the topic of this thesis, that is, madness. Randomly organized, I am going to start with Doreen.

Doreen, Esther's closest friend during her time in NYC, was more like the other girls who had won the contest, a type of girl who, according to Esther's rationale, represented the opposite of what she was, that is, 1) "[...] with wealthy parents [...]" – something Esther did not have; 2) "[...] all going to posh secretarial schools like Katy Gibbs [...]" – something she was not doing; 3) "[...] had just graduate from places like Katy Gibbs and were secretaries to executives and simply hanging around in New York waiting to get married to some career man or other" (4) – things she did not do nor want, respectively. Precisely because the girls were everything she was not, Esther experienced a bittersweet feeling: at the same time they got her somewhat upset because she was so different from them, in a way she wanted to be like them because being like them represented fulfillment – she would, by being like those girls, belong. She felt misplaced around them. They made Esther sick and jealous (4), but for some reason, Doreen turned out to become her everyday buddy. Although she is pointed out by Esther herself as her trouble (4), it becomes clear in many moments that Doreen represents what she is not but wishes that she could be. By being like Doreen, Esther would fit in. Therefore, Doreen could be taken as Esther's alter ego³⁴ or *doppelgänger*, word created by Jean Paul Richier

³³ <http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/history/famous-cases/the-atom-spy-case>. Accessed on August 12, 2012

³⁴ According to the *Concise Dictionary of Psychology*, alter ego is "[a] literary term, meaning 'the other I, for a person who seems to exemplify another version of oneself'" (5).

(Tymms 29), which, in Ralph Tymms' (1949) perspective can be understood as "a visual projection of [...] moral abstractions: the better, and the worse, self" (28). A carefree girl who is more interested in having fun than in taking advantage of her working experience in New York, Doreen is Esther's companion for the nights out, someone who triggers in Esther a naughtier side of herself, another possible double of her fragmented self, as pointed out by Huf (133): Elly Higginbottom, from Chicago. Elly is the name that Esther, who is from Boston, uses when she goes out with Doreen, a name which, according to Esther herself, allows her to feel "safer" for, as she puts it, "[she] didn't want anything [she] said or did that night to be associated with [her] and [her] real name and coming from Boston" (9). And why Chicago? Because "it seemed the sort of place where unconventional, mixed-up people would come from. [...] In Chicago, people would take [her] for who [she] was" (76). Under the persona of Elly, Esther can show off traits of personality most likely to be a part of her own personality that she was afraid to show "in the daylight". In addition, it could be that Doreen herself did not really exist. Perhaps, she could be seen as nothing but a projection of Esther's idealized self – the self that she believes that could fit the atmosphere of which she is part: the cool and easygoing girl who would have a "mouth set in a sort of perpetual sneer" (4), someone who would be "wonderfully funny" and "whisper witty sarcastic remarks" about celebrities' talks during a conference (5). In a moment of the narrative, it is as if Esther can almost portrait Doreen as a part of her – "Everything she said was like a secret voice speaking straight out of my own bones" (6) – or maybe as someone with whom she could be infatuated. Either way, at times, it seems as though Esther not only is aware of what is going on with herself in terms of confused identity, but also finds this amusing. One night, Doreen knocks on Esther's bedroom door after a night out. She is brought by the night maid. When recalling this event, Esther's final observation makes her awareness of this confusion very clear: "'Elly, Elly, Elly,' the first voice mumbled, while the other voice went on hissing, 'Miss Greenwood, Miss Greenwood, Miss Greenwood,' as if I had a split personality or something" (13). Whether Esther does have a split personality or not, it seems as though she and Elly are somehow entwined in her mind.

There is, however, another character that can stand out as Esther's double: Joan, as pointed out by Rigney (125) as well. At first,

when Esther meets her at the asylum, she seems to be an old acquaintance of Esther's. Joan tries to kill herself, too, which is what she ends up doing (137). For that reason, she represents the accomplishment of Esther's deepest intentions: suicide. Also, just like Esther, Joan had dated Buddy Willard before going to the asylum. Joan's sexuality, however, is open for a romantic interest to be developed towards Esther as well, but coldly and emphatically, Esther rejects Joan's attempt to make a move: to an "I like you" declared by Joan, Esther responds "[t]hat's tough, Joan, [...] [b]ecause I don't like you. You make me puke, if you want to know" (128), revealing at the same time a narcissistic³⁵ and self loathing trace of her divided self: narcissistic because if Joan is seen as her alter ego, this infatuation would mean that Esther is actually in love with herself; and self loathing for this self makes her puke. When they meet at the asylum, Esther finds out that there has been news about her disappearance because Joan holds clippings on this news. In fact, at many moments, Esther seems to be talking about herself when she mentions Joan (126-27). But it is when Esther confesses that she empathizes with Joan that it becomes clearer how much affection she actually holds for her inmate:

I looked at Joan. In spite of the creepy feeling, and in spite of my old, ingrained dislike, Joan fascinated me. It was like observing a Martian, or a particularly warty toad. Her thoughts were not my thoughts, nor her feelings my feelings, but we were close enough so that her thoughts and feelings seemed a wry, black image of my own. Sometimes I wondered if I had made Joan up. Other times I wondered if she would continue to pop in at every crisis of my life to remind me of what I had been, and what I had been through, and carry on her own separate but similar crisis under my nose. (127)

³⁵ According to *The Concise Dictionary of Psychology*, the term narcissism comes "[f]rom the Greek myth of Narcissus who fell in love with his own reflection. Excessive self-love in whatever form, characterised by a preoccupation with oneself (one's SELF) to the exclusion of others [...]" (89).

With so much in common and, at the same time, an emphatic refusal to Joan's clear-cut seduction attempt, I wonder, then, if Joan could be considered an alter ego of Esther's as well. Both Doreen and Joan seem to represent sides of Esther's fragmented self of which she is not proud. While Doreen stands out as a representation of what Esther wishes she could be or behave like in the presence of men, for example, Joan seems to be a depiction of Esther's deeply and unconsciously hidden inner fears and sorrows, for she comes around as someone who, just like her, "couldn't keep a boy like Buddy Willard" (125) and was like "the beaming double of [her] old self, specially designed to follow and torment [her]" (119). Still, Esther seems to resist the recognition that she and Joan share affinities until she admits that "[f]or the first time it occurred to [her] Joan and [she] might have something in common" – when Joan tells her that she tried to kill herself by cutting her wrists (116).

And yet, even though it seems like Esther is connected with Doreen and Joan on a level of idealization, which places them in a position of doppelgangers or alter egos, I see another character in the narrative as connecting with Esther's real self – the one she could not truly embrace in life: her boss at the New York job, Jay Cee. However, Jay Cee does not fit the model of a lady for she is neither feminine nor subservient. Such a condition could come out as the reason why Esther did not pursue a career: by being like Jay Cee, which would be the opposite of what the other girls were, she would not fit the profile of a (normal? perfect? sane?) woman – attractive, with an average job, doll-like etc. Although Esther "liked her a lot" (5) and saw her as an intelligent woman, Jay Cee is constantly picked on by the girls, especially Doreen. By hanging out with Jay Cee and expressing admiration for her, thus, Esther would probably be picked on by the girls as well, which would represent a threat to her insecure self. As pointed out by Laing (44), a strong sense of self would be necessary for someone to act and look differently and not to suffer because of the prejudice it brings. Esther, for that reason, does not develop her potentials. In this sense, Jay Cee can be identified as a representation of what Esther could have been: an intelligent, successful woman in the literary field, although different from most other women for her feminine skills were not her most outstanding features.

In fact, although female characters with such features are not common in this novel, there is also the presence of the famous novelist Philomena Guinea, who pays for Esther's treatment at the private hospital to which she is transferred. Philomena is a writer who, in the peak of her career, goes through some personal conflicts herself and ends up in an institution. When she finds out about Esther's condition, she contacts Esther's mother and enquires whether it can be related to a heart break, but when Mrs. Greenwood affirms it is actually related to Esther's writing, Mrs. Guinea flies from the Bahamas to Boston in order to support Esther and pay for her treatment at the asylum (107). Clearly, the reason why she decides to help Esther is that she had to face the dilemma with which female writers were often faced, that is, career versus family life – without realizing that it is possible to choose both, possible nowadays, but a more daring and/or ground-breaking decision in the 1950s. As a matter of fact, in another moment in the narrative, when Esther was talking to a former college mate who was a poet, it is possible to find evidence that that had to be a decision to be made. Esther envisioned having a family, but I wonder whether she in fact wanted that or maybe if it was only because that was a common practice in the 1950s. If having a family was part of normativity, then how could a woman escape that future? Since Esther had ambitions about having a career as a writer, she felt that she needed to give up on family life, an issue that is discussed by Friedan (1963), as she criticizes the position of women in the United States in the 1950s. As mentioned in chapter 2, she pointed out that choosing between a career and a family was not necessary. A woman could have both, but that would demand a new life plan from her. Still, in the time Plath's novel takes place, that possibility was not clear yet. Such a claim becomes intelligible through the following passage: "And when I had told the poet I might well get married and have a pack of children someday, she stared at me in horror. 'But what about your career?' she cried" (128) – a remark pointed out by Esther's boyfriend Buddy as well (47). In what follows, Esther wonders about the reason why she "attract[s] these weird old women". The answer is simple: it is because she is like them. But as I see it, they are not weird. They just chose not to follow the pattern, that is, give up on the writing career in order to have a family. And which is more: that is what kept them sane. Philomena Guinea did get married and got to be famous as a writer. Esther also gets intrigued by the reason why these

women wanted to “adopt” her, which is also clear to me: they wanted to adopt Esther because they had been there. They had suffered from the confusions Esther is suffering and had, at some point, to make the decision. Perhaps when they went through that, there was no one there to help them overcome the hardships of young life decisions. Therefore, they were doing for Esther what they wish someone could have done for them. Esther could not see it that way. But, in fact, Jay Cee and Mrs. Guinea are the characters that represent the fulfillment of a potential that Esther would have developed as well if she had followed her desire to be a writer.

Jay Cee and Philomena may have been seen as mad or “weird”, as Esther pointed out. However, making use of Laing’s terminology, they actually achieved “a superior sanity”, for they questioned the so-called rules of behavior within a society and acted according to their hearts. Esther is about to get there, too, for she questions what is going on around her a lot. Despite that, she does not succeed in achieving this superior sanity, because she stills feels the need to belong. Therefore, after her breakdown, she ends up walking out on the quests of her self and becomes a mother, downgrading to second in priority her writing dream. It is relevant to highlight here the occurrence of such an experience with women writers. Many artists went through emotional imbalance, such as Philomena Guinea and Esther Greenwood in the novel, and other fictional characters such as Barbara Raskin’s Coco of *Loose Ends* (1973) and Erica Jong’s Isadora of *Fear of Flying* (1973), in addition to writers Adrienne Rich, Virginia Woolf, and Sylvia Plath herself. The reason that so many women writers were being sent to asylums is an issue that has received some critical attention. According to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s theory, women writers suffered from what they called “the anxiety of authorship”, a concept reviewed in the second chapter of this thesis. But adding to that, there is the feeling of division, for women unconsciously assumed they were supposed to choose between family and career. Finally, I would reckon that both the anxiety and the divided self were the crib of these women’s emotional confusion and it was as though only through writing they could keep themselves sane, for there was something to be said, to be expressed, and locking this voice inside would occasion them to “lose their minds”.

And it is when Esther gets back home from her time in New York that all of her fears and abominations reach the surface. Back in the suburbs of Boston for the summer, one of the most annoying things she has to deal with was the sound of Dodo Conway's baby carriage (67-8). Although she is not a major character in the novel, Dodo represents what Esther believes to be the fate from which she could not run away, although she claimed she would ("I'm never going to get married" 52, "[c]hildren made me sick" 67). She eventually faces the fate of having children (4), though, but there is something I would personally add about this feeling about children making her sick that applies directly to this investigation: children represented the reproduction, rather than the production mentioned in Chapter 2. Therefore, children were not exactly the type of seed Esther was interested in planting. She seemed to have the urge of leaving a mark in the world. Not with a child, though, but with her feelings expressed in poems and narratives. The Catholic Dodo (67), loved by everybody, left the regular mark a woman was supposed to leave for her society in the 1950s – six of them, actually, and a seventh on the way (67). Esther ends up doing the same, however, she does not make it clear for the reader about how it happens, for she does not go through the episodes of her life comprehended before and after the summer of 1963 thoroughly.

Finally, two other female characters that play a significant role in Esther's story are the Kansas-girl Betsy and her roommate-to-be Jody: the former, a friend with whom Esther should hang out with for Betsy was the one Esther really resembled at heart (14); and the latter, someone who is part of Esther's definite moment before truly descending into her breakdown (68). As a role model, and therefore part of Esther's schizophrenic identity, "Pollyanna Cowgirl" Betsy (6) always acted according to what she really felt in her heart, something Esther found hard to do. The conflict ego versus self, discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis, could be taken as an explanation³⁶. At the same time Esther believed to be sweet like Betsy (self), she was inclined to act cool and wild like Doreen (ego). Yet, the sweetness in Betsy could represent a docility so characteristic of obedient and submissive, subservient wives, therefore, not resembling Esther's heart, but her idealized, well-behaved other, the one who would be accepted by her

36 pp 24, 25.

society. All in all, Betsy was a kind, innocent girl who, for several times, tries to get closer to Esther and make friends with her. As a matter of fact, for someone who feels so miserable, it seems that Esther has many friends willing to help her out of that misery. Jody is another one of these friends, her old friend who is a student at Cambridge. Esther is planning to live with her if she gets to be approved on the writing course. Since she does not, she decides not to go to Cambridge, even though her friend tells her to go anyway and take another course – which she has the money to afford. However, she firmly declines her friend's offer by stating a solid “[f]ine. Ask her” (68) to Joddy's mentioning that another girl is interested in moving in the case someone decides not to go. In addition, she not only has in her friend's invitation the chance to go away for the summer, but also in the letter she receives from the summer school offering her an opportunity to take another course – she would only have to call the Admissions Office that same morning in order to inform them about her choice. She does call, but to reject the offer (68). This set of converging events defines everything else for her: if she had decided to go to Cambridge to take another course, she might not have fallen into depression. Staying home in the suburbs doing nothing was the thing that was unbearable for her. With so much in mind to put into practice, idleness assumes the position of an unbearable burden. Thus, the unavoidable consequence is her trek towards the closer-than-ever suicide attempt.

Although definitely not a role model for Esther, another important character in her life deserves some consideration for being representative of the men in her life: her ex-boyfriend Buddy Willard, the medical student who is dumped by Esther for having had an affair with a “slutty waitress” (40), can be taken as an illustration of her difficulty in getting involved with someone. Esther seems to find it hard to open up to someone else, either man or woman, perhaps due to trust issues she has developed since early age. Even before Willard confesses having cheated on her with the waitress, she demonstrates having trouble in lowering her guard, such as when she admits her fear of losing control and showing off her real inner emotions. An example of such a fear can be found in the beginning of chapter thirteen: “Being with Jody and Mark and Cal was beginning to weigh on my nerves, like a dull wooden block on the strings of a piano. I was afraid that at any moment my control would snap [...]” (91). Too much control is at one

extreme. At the other, complete loss of control. Since Esther finds herself at one of the extremes, constantly under the need to keep things under control, she is haunted by the ghost of reaching the other extreme, always on the verge of losing it all. It is as though in her mind there is not a chance of finding balance: she has to choose between career and family life, between being always in control only and allowing herself to loosen up and make some mistakes. It has to be either kill the self or live oppressed. Those possibilities occur on an unconscious level. If she could have achieved the consciousness of those concerns, perhaps through therapy, there might have been a chance of finding answers to her inquiries. Although she does see Dr. Nolan for some time and says that she “[...] liked Dr. Nolan, [she] loved her, [she] had given her [her] trust on a platter and told her everything” (123), it seems that throughout the narrative Esther has one thing out of her control, and that is the capacity to trust people. These trust issues made it a challenge for her to face the problems that she identifies, a challenge that she could not overcome.

Perhaps Esther could have rebuilt her faith in people and also in marriage if she had found in Buddy someone that she believed to be trustworthy. But that did not happen. She already had trust issues and her disappointment with him is way beyond reestablishing. The idea that Esther has of marriage is that she would have to take care of babies and serve a husband at all times (42-7, 129), a pattern in the 1950s – at least according to the examples she had, as in her neighbor Dodo Conway, for example. Esther could not glimpse a married life in any other way, which led her to state that she would never get married (52). Perhaps she could have had something else with Buddy if she could see that she could rely on him somehow. However, the ultimate episode in their love story about the woman with whom he had an affair (who supposedly seduced him) and to whom he lost his virginity (39, 40) ended that possibility. Esther expressed a mixture of disappointment and anger provoked by this behavior of her boyfriend. She called him a hypocrite (35) for he implied naivety in his manners, but acted otherwise. She confesses: “Actually, it wasn’t the idea of Buddy sleeping with somebody that bothered me. [...] What I couldn’t stand was Buddy’s pretending I was so sexy and he was so pure, when all the time he’d been having an affair with that tarty waitress and must have felt like laughing in my face” (40). What a big disappointment indeed it must

have been for someone who had been infatuated with a boy for a “five- or six-year period” (52) before they started dating. After being let down by the death of her father, the first man who was supposed to protect her, the young man with whom she gets involved, a representative of someone who, in the 1950s, was socially seen as supposed to substitute a father by being the next one to protect the woman under the role of a husband, the one who demonstrated and actually expressed he wanted to have something serious with her (“How would you like to be Mrs. Willard?” 51), lets her down again by not fulfilling her expectations. This experience with Buddy could well enough be taken as a reason for something to “freeze up” (40) in her because she had trusted and been disappointed.

3.3 Madness and Conflicts

In this section I will analyze the aspects of Esther’s emotional imbalance that are somehow related to the main hypothesis I had for this research: that the female protagonist is suffocated by her patriarchal society and is, then, led to experiencing imbalance. I will also analyze other aspects that I have found to be relevant.

Throughout the narrative, Esther focuses primarily on the negative aspects of her unsatisfying living condition and little on possible solutions for such conditions. Sometimes she identifies a conflict, but does not succeed in analyzing it through a different angle. For Gayle Greene (1991), in *The Bell Jar*, “Plath interweaves memories of the past [...] with episodes set in the present [...], but she does not use this structure to bring the past into vitalizing relation with the present, to explore the connections that might allow change” (67). Although she feels uncomfortable about some aspects of her life, she spends most of her time hung up on the negative elements of that reality. She is usually suspicious and paranoid about what is going on around her. Especially when it comes to other people’s thoughts about her and her behavior, she usually assumes that these thoughts and opinions are negative, mainly judgmental. Therefore, she constantly sounds paranoid, which can be observed several times along the novel. For example, when Esther decides to start making friends (110), she approaches a woman, later on named Miss Norris, and says hi. The woman does not reply. Esther affirms: “I felt hurt. I thought maybe Valerie or somebody

had told [Miss Norris] when she first came in how stupid I was.” A bit after that, Miss Norris leaves the room very quietly, and Esther believes this is so because “she might be trying to get rid of [her] in a subtle way” (111). Then again when she was in session with Doctor Nolan, she anticipates her doctor’s possible intentions: “I had a dim notion that Doctor Nolan was allowing me a certain number of days and then she should say just what Doctor Gordon had said: ‘I’m sorry, you don’t seem to have improved, I think you’d better have some shock treatment...’ ” (117). It is as though Esther is always hoping for the worst. At the clinic, when discussing over visitors, she again expresses a bitter negativity: “I hated these visits, because I kept feeling the visitors measuring my fat and stringy hair against what I had been and what they wanted me to be, and I knew they went away utterly confounded” (118). One of the top examples for Esther’s paranoid perception of things is rendered in relation to her two “protectors”, Dr. Nolan and Mrs. Guinea, when she has the feeling that Doctor Nolan and Mrs. Guinea would end up giving up on her (121-22). She believes that she is helpless. This negative view of her world is clearly a sign of the depression that has been upon her since her arrival in New York City for the internship or even before that – perhaps since her father died. It was as though Esther had an open wound, for she was not able to say good-bye to her father because he died in the hospital when she was a child and her mother did not let her go to his funeral (96). At one moment when she does go visit her father’s gravestone, she finds herself “crying so hard” that it then occurs to her that she “had never cried for [her] father’s death” (97).

I believe that her focus on negativity lies on her feeling of inadequacy when compared to what is considered normal by those around her. When it comes to her life as a student, one could say she was very talented and successful. But even though Esther has had some success in college, she feels her abilities had “fizzled to nothing” (3) by the time she was in New York. Perhaps being in a city as huge as New York made her feel small, inferior. Right from the start, on the first page of her narrative, Esther says that she understands that the situation she was experiencing was good enough to make most girls feel envy for she was “supposed to be having the time of [her] life” (3). She is not, though. And I believe she is not having the time of her life because she has different aspirations. What she understands as success is not what she is living. She has everything an ordinary girl could ask for, but she

is not happy. She won prizes before she got the internship in New York and she certainly did so because she is talented, but she cannot see that. What stands out for her is her feeling of being displaced and that somehow she was just not deserving of the benefits she was having, which can be exemplified in the following passage:

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 and a prize there and ends up steering New York like her own private car. Only I wasn't 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 trolleybus. I guess I should have been excited the way most of the other girls were, but I couldn't get myself to react. I felt very still and very empty, the way the eye of a tornado must feel, moving dully along in the middle of the surrounding hullabaloo. (3- 4)

Her negativity is also clear after she tries to commit suicide by hanging herself with her mom's bathrobe silk cord – which she tells of in the middle of her swimming-to-the-rock-with-Cal suicide attempt (92). She fantasizes about how her family and friends would react in case she turned herself in to an asylum. She wonders whether they would forget her. It is strange she does not mention her relationship with her family much, but for her fears of being forgotten, I assume she does not feel loved by them. Such an assumption can be explained by the following passage:

I wondered, after the hanging fiasco, if I shouldn't just give it up and turn myself over to the doctors, and then I remembered Doctor Gordon and his private shock machine. Once I was locked up they could use that on me all the time. And I thought of how my mother and brother and friends would visit me, day after day, hoping I would be better. Then their visits would slacken off, and they would give up hope. They would grow old. They would forget me. They would be

poor, too. They would want me to have the best of care at first, so they would sink all their money in a private hospital like Doctor Gordon's. Finally, when the money was used up, I would be moved to a state hospital, with hundreds of people like me, in a big cage in the basement. The more hopeless you were, the further away they hid you. (92-3)

Her confusion and feeling of hopelessness is so intense that it is possible to find a contradiction in those words in terms of feeling loved: if they would want the best for her, the best hospital, it means they care about her. Still, Esther believes her own brother and mother would eventually forget her. Also, she assumes that she would stay at the asylum for a very long time, for she predicts her family will grow old while she is there. This may be perhaps because she sees her case as hopeless, according to what she has read in the "abnormal-psychology books" (92). Whether in the books or by general social judgment, what Esther could perceive is that society wants to hide those who do not belong, those who are a shame to their principles and rules and acceptable patterns of behavior. Apparently, Esther herself is an example of someone who misbehaves and is punished with isolation and Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT), the psychiatric treatment made known in 1938 by Italian neuropsychiatrists Ugo Cerletti and Lucio Bini³⁷.

This treatment, a procedure carried out by the application of electrodes in anesthetized patients, mostly women for they are the ones who are diagnosed with depression more commonly than men are³⁸, right after its first round, helps Esther achieve the first, long-sought feeling of positivity and weightlessness in the narrative. She unburdens: "I felt surprisingly at peace. The bell jar hung, suspended, a few feet above my head. I was open to the circulating air" (125). This feeling that she had been prevented from air may be a metaphor for her lack of freedom in following her heart into doing what she wants to do. She understands that she is supposed to look and behave like "what they wanted [her] to be" (118), being the "they" in the matter here any representative of social expectations, perhaps. She feels pressured to

³⁷ http://media.wiley.com/assets/138/93/UK_Tasman_Chap92.pdf. Accessed on February 3, 2013.

³⁸ http://media.wiley.com/assets/138/93/UK_Tasman_Chap92.pdf. Accessed on February 3, 2013.

please what she assumes it is their expectations, succumbing to the need for the approval of others. Her insecurity about having to be what others expect her to be like is what makes her angry and sad and confused. Her mother, according to her, is her biggest problem. At times, it is as though Esther feels guilty. She bursts out: “My mother was the worst. She never scolded me, but she kept begging me, with a sorrowful look, to tell her what she had done wrong” (118). A little after that, she tells Doctor Nolan that she hates her mother, to what Doctor Nolan replies: “I suppose you do” (119). An idea that comes to mind is that Esther hates her mother because her mother is a good woman. And she cannot be a good woman – or at least not the “type of good” expected from society, which, needless to say, includes her mother.

Although it could be taken as a contradiction, however, I would claim that Esther was, in some sort, a spoiled girl. Not because she was actually spoiled by her mother or anyone else, but because she was, in a way, spoiled by her life accomplishments: she achieves pretty much everything she wants to achieve, intellectually speaking. And when she does not, with the summer writing course (65), she cannot take it and descends into depression. It seems as though such accomplishments are so natural that she gets bored for not needing to fight for her dreams. Since studying is natural for her, professional achievements come her way as a natural consequence as well. The thing she lacks – money, for example – would come eventually for she was bound to lead a successful life as a writer. On the other hand, she is not at all successful in terms of belonging, for she is gifted in an aspect that is not of much value in the world where she is living. In this world, things of value are related to general futilities (boys, expensive clothes and parties – by the time she is in New York City) and (in the future) family life. In most cases, girls her age are not interested in leading a successful career as a writer – or any other career, although they are there with her in the New York program. In order to fit in, then, Esther feels she has to do what the other girls are doing, but that does not satisfy her – she gets bored by that. The fact that she does not foresee her inner needs leads her into copying the lives of others, which would not get her to feel satisfied since their needs are different from hers.

All that pressure is caused by this feeling of inadequacy. Such a feeling haunts Esther and leads her to conceive the world as a negative place, which gives way to a severe depression. Her nervous collapse

approaches when she faces insomnia, which, along with weight loss, is considered a common symptom in depressive patients³⁹. She affirms: “[...] I must be just about the only person who had stayed awake for a solid month” (91). At that time, she perhaps was the only person. However, it is common sense that sleep deprivation can lead to a variety of disturbances in one’s health. In fact, according to Michael J. Breus (2004), “[s]ome researchers suggest that sleep deprivation should be recognized with the same seriousness that has been associated with the societal impact of alcohol.”⁴⁰ Other moments of the narrative also present evidence that indicates depressive behavior, such as when Esther gets back home and affirms how unmotivated she feels about getting up: “I couldn’t see the point of getting up. I had nothing to look forward to” (67). Another evidence is when she uses the metaphor of telephone poles, suggesting an imminent suicide: “I saw the years of my life spaced along a road in the form of telephone poles, threaded together by wires. I counted one, two, three... nineteen telephone poles, and then the wires dangled into space, and try as I would, I couldn’t see a single pole beyond the nineteenth” (70). Ultimately, her depression is made clear by her weight loss and lack of interest in dealing with everyday hygiene habits:

I was still wearing Betsy's white blouse and dirndl skirt. They dropped a bit now, as I hadn't washed them in my three weeks at home. The sweaty cotton gave off a sour but friendly smell. I hadn't washed my hair for three weeks, either. I hadn't slept for seven nights. My mother told me I must have slept, it was impossible not to sleep in all that time, but if I slept, it was with my eyes wide open, for I had followed the green, luminous course of the second hand and the minute hand and the hour hand of the bedside clock through their circles and semi-circles, every night for seven nights, without missing a second, or a minute, or an hour. The reason why I hadn't washed my clothes or my hair was because it seemed so silly. (73)

³⁹ <http://depression.about.com/od/diagnosis/tp/depsymptoms.htm>. Accessed on February 3, 2013. And <http://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/depression/symptoms>. Accessed on February 3, 2013.

⁴⁰ <http://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/features/important-sleep-habits>. Accessed on January 26, 2013.

Besides her negativity and consequent depression, it is also interesting to observe how Esther experiences status and wealth. She seems to be overwhelmed by the amount and quality of food and clothes that she has around her. For example, before Esther goes to NY, she had never been to a proper restaurant, but when she is there, she orders “the richest, most expensive dishes and ordered a string of them” (15). From a plain and sparse every day, she reaches variety and quantity galore. Perhaps she is confused (“I knew there was something wrong with me that summer”, 3) because she does not feel her real life can allude to her present reality. Therefore, she does not feel she belongs within riches and, thus, experiences feelings of love and hate about all she is living. Perhaps it could be that at the same time she enjoys those things because she somehow has aspired them, she hates them because they make her feel different from others. This could also be related to how she experiences abundance, for when she talks about her grandparents, she mentions that her grandmother was really stingy and used to refer to how much things cost (16). As for caviar, she speaks of it in a sort of obsessed way (16). She says she has a passionate taste for caviar, but I wonder whether she actually has a passionate taste about what caviar represents – richness. I feel in her speech that she has this need of constantly pretending she is something she is not and I claim that the reason why she acts like that is because she has the need to belong, to be accepted by others. Ahead on the same page, she talks about acting like she knows how to do things in order to get respect from people and get them to worship her somehow:

I’d discovered, after a lot of extreme apprehension about spoons to use, that if you do something incorrect at table with a certain arrogance, as if you knew perfectly well you were doing it properly, you can get away with it and nobody will think you are bad-mannered or poorly brought up. They will think you are original and very witty. (16)

She says she learned that from a poet with whom she once had lunch. On that occasion, he ate his salad with his fingers. I believe he may have done that because people who are sure of themselves do not care about rules and about how one’s been brought up. But with her it is different. She rationalizes about the situation and intentionally acts in the way she

describes because she wants to avoid twisted looks, as though they are saying “poor girl who does not know how to behave at table.” She is afraid of what people would think if they knew she did not know what to do at table. She is ashamed of being poor and simple.

One of the main topics of this novel, and the one mostly connected to the strongest hypothesis that led to this study, however, is the feeling of division that Esther experiences in terms of future aspirations. Most of Esther’s energy is put into studying. All her future plans include studying and working in the writing field. Personal life does not seem to be a priority for her. Perhaps all she could plan for her life is related to work because she does not want to stop and think about her personal life. I believe this is so because the personal lives of women in the 1950s, as reported by authors such as Friedan (1963), included getting married and having children and Esther makes it very clear (16) that she does not intend to get married – ever. These dubious future aspirations are present in moments such as when she talks about the potential father of her children: “[...] [I] never wanted to see Buddy again as I did not want to give my children a hypocrite for a father” (68). Although she states previously – when talking about Dodo Conway – that children made her sick (67), she mentions them as a certain future. It is as if it would be inconceivable at that time to have a marriage without children – or no marriage at all. However, so that she would not have to deal with that, she focuses on working/studying plans. Her focus on career as well as on the accomplishments as a student are often mentioned as an escape from the other option that she has. She describes her professional qualifications on page 19 – all she did while she was in college – plus her future plans as a writer and a professor. Her boss Jay Cee confronts her about how she feels about that internship, whether she likes it or not, and she says she does like it, but Jay Cee thinks that she should work harder in order to really profit from that experience. I believe a brilliant student like her is having trouble focusing on her work because, perhaps for the first time, she has the money and the chance to enjoy other things (when related to working and studying) and, thus, gets too dazzled by New York City and the adventurous life she can lead there. This confusion may imply that, even though Esther has career plans, she cannot really decide on what she wants for her life. She has only had those plans because they contributed to her escape from the other probable option she would have in the

suburbs of Boston, that is, an ordinary family life. But in the end, when it comes to questioning the self as to being a writer, all she has is doubt.

4 *GIRL, INTERRUPTED*

4.1 Author and novel

Like Esther Greenwood, Susanna Kaysen, the protagonist of this novel, also goes through an emotional breakdown in her late teens and attempts suicide. The consequence is the same as well: she is advised by a (male) psychiatrist to spend some resting time at an asylum. This novel, made famous by its homonymous movie⁴¹ starring Winona Ryder, Angelina Jolie and Whoopi Goldberg, presents Susanna's story: a girl in the late teens who dreams about being a writer is sent to an asylum after she attempts suicide. The events take place in the late 1960s – 1967 to be exact, but the novel was published in 1993 only, six years before the movie was released, after Kaysen legally fought for the right to have access to her case records from the time she spent at the asylum⁴². As for the title of the novel, it was inspired by the painting *Girl Interrupted In Her Music*⁴³, by Johannes Vermeer. For Kaysen, the title of the painting⁴⁴ alludes to her own feelings or, as she puts it, “as my life had been, interrupted in the music of being seventeen, as her life had been snatched and fixed on canvas [...]” (167).

Not as well-known and respected as Plath, Kaysen, however, offers in her diary-like novel a very honest and trustworthy report of her days at the mental institution and experience of emotional breakdown. Although Plath's novel is much richer in details in terms of customs and traditions of the United States in the sixties, Kaysen's narrative allowed me, as a reader and researcher, to connect with the depiction of her emotions in a deeper sense. This might be so because *The Bell Jar* is a fictional work supposedly based on Plath's life, whereas *Girl, Interrupted* is assumedly an autobiographical work. By reading personal registers such as those commonly found in a diary, readers are led to believe the testimonial of the author, even though it may not be truly

⁴¹ Illustration 9.

⁴² Kaysen, Susanna. *Girl, Interrupted*. New York: Turtle Bay Books, 1993. p.150

⁴³ http://www.essentialvermeer.com/catalogue/girl_interrupted_in_her_music.html. Accessed on March 2, 2013.

⁴⁴ Illustration 10.

honest in the end. Still, Kaysen's novel as a whole seems more reliable in terms of emotional fidelity than Plath's.

The following sections present an analysis of the main characters of the novel, and of the theme "female madness" in the narrative.

4.2 Characters and Relationship with Protagonist

The protagonist's interaction with the other characters of the novel takes place mainly at the mental institution in which she is hospitalized. The characters do not play significant roles in this novel, opposite to Plath's. Susanna's focus is really on herself, so her memories of the other characters appear as part of the description of her time at the asylum rather than as participants. By the end of the novel, the reader has an idea of what happens with some of the characters after their time at the asylum is over. Susanna's interaction with some of the characters, in general, is not of major relevance to the topic of this study, though. Therefore, I have decided to look closely at the few ones with whom she bonds more deeply in a sense that can be significant to the objectives of this analysis. It is relevant to mention, though, that most of the characters, who are briefly introduced and informed to be diagnosed with schizophrenia, are not fully developed as to allow for their diagnoses to function as data, so to speak. Since this novel is autobiographical, it is illustrated with real documents from Kaysen's admission to the hospital, including her Case Record Folder⁴⁵. According to it, her diagnosis is Borderline Personality Disorder⁴⁶.

The one character that stands out is Lisa, someone with whom Susanna Kaysen interacts often and who, thus, relates with her in terms of intimacy and leadership. But even though they are close, Lisa is cruel, not only to Susanna, but also to the other girls in their ward. Such cruelty is a pattern of her personality disorder: at the same time that she amuses the ward mates with daring comments, she hurts those around

⁴⁵ Illustration 11.

⁴⁶ In the novel, from page 147 to page 149, Susanna presents the definition of her illness according to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in order to make it clear for herself. More on the disorder can be found at <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/borderline-personality-disorder/what-is-borderline-personality-disorder.shtml>. Accessed on April 13, 2013.

her by picking on their deepest, unscarred wounds. She is the first Lisa, the one that when compared to the other Lisa – Lisa Cody – would be referred to as “the real Lisa, who remained simply Lisa, like a queen” (58). She is described as being “funny”, someone who “kept [the inmates’] spirits up” (20). Diagnosed with Antisocial Personality Disorder⁴⁷ (21), Lisa is proud of being a sociopath and, according to Susanna, considers herself special for being the only sociopath at the asylum, until Lisa Cody comes along (59). She and Susanna meet again once after they are discharged from the asylum (162-64). According to Susanna, Lisa still looks the same and, by the description of their brief conversation, expresses herself/behaves similarly to the reckless way she did at the asylum, even though she now has a fatherless child. At times, it seems as though Susanna admires Lisa, and it could be because Lisa does not express concern about what others think of her, even though she seems to act recklessly because she aims at shocking in order to feel she gets the attention of others. Still, she has the courage to say things that Susanna wishes that she could say as well, but that she does not because she, somehow, subjugates herself to the opinion of others⁴⁸.

This fearless Lisa that is admired not only by Susanna but also by the other girls in the ward is weakened only by the presence of one person: the other Lisa, Lisa Cody. Lisa Cody is also a sociopath who acts as recklessly as Lisa and attracts as much attention as well. The problem is that Lisa, the real one, likes to reign alone and considers herself special for being the only sociopath in the ward (59), so when Lisa Cody is also diagnosed as sociopath, the real Lisa manages to preserve her title: she starts competing with Lisa Cody about who has led the junkiest life. Even though Lisa Cody is defeated in this competition, she does not feel defeated – or feel that Lisa wants to dissolve their friendship. Therefore, since Lisa Cody does not get a clue, Lisa, the Queen, sets her up on a mischief at the hospital. Perhaps that need that Lisa has to put out Lisa Cody’s flame among the girls in the ward is nothing but a defense mechanism: she feels threatened by Lisa

⁴⁷ http://bipolar.about.com/od/glossarys/g/gl_sociopath.htm. Accessed on March 10, 2013.

⁴⁸ For example, when Susanna decides that she will stop telling people about the fact that she has been admitted to an asylum once because of how people react to that fact (125), she is, somehow, avoiding confrontation, or, as she puts it, “[she]’d learned not to discuss [her] doubts” (166). Since she is in a position which contraries the position of others, she chooses not to explain herself.

Cody, i.e., she fears that she might lose her status among their inmates and ward staff and, thus, attacks in order to prevent being attacked – or losing power and recognition. Lisa Cody, on the other hand, finds in Lisa and the girls, as well as in the hospital, a sense of belonging and attempts to be included in the group, but she chooses to be closest to the leader, and that is what breaks her. Since she is excluded by Lisa (61), she ends up running away from the hospital never to return again – and later to be found by Lisa in one of her runaways and revealed to be a “real junkie now” (62).

When it comes to Lisa specifically, one aspect of her description in the novel is worth considering in a deeper sense. Susanna says Lisa does not sleep (22), like Esther Greenwood in her days of deep depression pre-suicide attempt. But whereas Esther still feels she should cope with the norm and act according to what was expected from her, Lisa is completely disconnected with the norm and has lost connection with reality, living in her own way/world. Unlike Plath’s protagonist, she “would never hang herself” according to Susanna (21). Deprivation from sleep, then, should not be seen as equally responsible for their madness. The point is the need for attention the ego lacks: Lisa’s does not, but Esther’s does. I believe Susanna says that Lisa would never hang herself, for Lisa already has the attention that she seeks by acting wild, running away from the asylum and coming back because she has nowhere else to go, and picking on everyone and speaking her mind. In fact, Lisa would often run away from the asylum and eventually come back. Susanna says that it is because Lisa would not go far on foot and without any money (20), but Lisa herself admits that she always comes back because there she would be taken care of (22). Her parents do not get in touch with her (21), so there, at the asylum, she is like a celebrity. She receives all the attention that she seeks in order to feel appreciated – an egoic need. Differently, Esther is nothing but a blur among friends and family, for she does not get the attention she needs/believes she deserves. Therefore, by attempting suicide she would get people to notice her – an unreasoning decision.

When it comes to male characters, other than Susanna’s doctor, the one who advised her to get some rest at the asylum, there is another one that stands out: Jim Watson. To be precise, it is not he exactly who stands out, but the situation in which he takes part. He visits Susanna at the asylum and offers her a chance to run away (26). She

refuses that offer, though, because in the hospital she can be with people and situations with which she identifies, whereas in the outside she would have to deal with people who think differently and undergo situations and experiences that could make her feel oppressed. In Jim's proposition of running away a job suggestion is included: they would run away to England and she would become a governess (27), what would mean running away from a supposedly bad life in order to get into another bad life. That is, either way, she would be tangled with a reality she would not really want. Thus, she decides to stay. When Jim leaves and Susanna comes back in, she sees Lisa, says hi and claims to feel glad to see that Lisa is still there. It is as though she is already feeling too comfortable with her inmates. Perhaps the asylum feels like home. It takes on that role in her life.

Indeed, Susanna meets some girls at the asylum with whom she becomes such good friends that it is almost like family. Georgina is one of those girls. She is Susanna's roommate, diagnosed with schizophrenia (59), and they continue with their friendship even after they are discharged from the hospital (160). She and Susanna are considered the healthiest (23). As for Georgina specifically, she is seen as calm, but her peaceful behavior is put into question with the caramel episode, for example, when Susanna accidentally burns her hand with the hot caramel that they are cooking, but she does not make a sound (30). Perhaps she has dealt with some kind of pain in an apathetic way and that is how she responds to inner or outer pain: sort of catatonically. She seems to have developed an ability to act as though everything is fine. And she has gotten so much into character that she no longer knows how to react to things that would most commonly bother – her or anyone else: a state of never-ending numbness. However, when Susanna asks if what happens to Alice Calais, a “timid” and sort of apathetic “new nut” (110) at the asylum who, someday, unexpectedly, explodes like a volcano and is sent to maximum security (112), could happen to them as well, she tells Susanna not to let that happen (115). By saying so, she implies that one should keep everything under control. Otherwise, they may totally lose it. Georgina, in a way, seems to understand her own behavior and foresee what the other extreme would be like. She is probably implying that that is what she is doing: keeping her emotions under control.

4.3 Madness and Conflicts

The emotional imbalance that led Susanna Kaysen to McLean Hospital⁴⁹ when she was in her late teens is brought to the reader by Kaysen herself as a testimonial that is rich in details when it comes to medical aspects. On the other hand, the author-protagonist has a hard time in finding out what occasioned her to get to the emotional condition that made it unbearable for her to keep on living amongst society and burst out as a suicide attempt. Kaysen does, though, have a glimmer about her unstable emotional state and delusional condition as, for example, when she compares the world of the so-called “normal” with what she calls “parallel universe” (5). There are many types of parallel universes, according to her: “worlds of the insane, the criminal, the crippled, the dying, perhaps of the dead as well” (5). It is when she adds that “[t]hese worlds exist alongside this world and resemble it, but are not in it” (5) that one can assume how she feels: abnormal and, hence, excluded from “this world” (5) – the real one. But even though her confusion prevails at times, at others, she goes on a deep analysis of her suicide episode, rendering the reasons that led her to McLean perceivable.

Some important issues are raised in the chapter entitled “Elementary Topography”, in which Kaysen approaches her “insanity” through a critical and, hence, detailed point of view. It seems as though she can understand that she sees the world in a different way, for she identifies that her perception of what surrounds her has changed. She does not know for sure which, but she feels that either she or everybody else is confused about reality. Yet, it is the perception that something is wrong that intrigues her and, at the same time, protects her (41). A punctual example of that confusion comes in her analysis of her neurosis with patterns and people’s faces:

I was having a problem with patterns. Oriental rugs, tile floors, printed curtains, things like that. Supermarkets were especially bad, because of the long, hypnotic checkerboard aisles. When I looked at these things, I saw other things within them. That sounds as though I was hallucinating,

⁴⁹ Illustration 12.

and I wasn't. I knew I was looking at a floor or a curtain. But all patterns seemed to contain potential representations, which in a dizzying array would flicker briefly to life. That could be ... a forest, a flock of birds, my second-grade class picture. Well, it wasn't--it was a rug, or whatever it was, but my glimpses of the other things it might be were exhausting. Reality was getting too dense.

Something also was happening to my perceptions of people. When I looked at someone's face, I often did not maintain an unbroken connection to the concept of a face. Once you start parsing a face, it's a peculiar item: squishy, pointy, with lots of air vents and wet spots. This was the reverse of my problem with patterns. Instead of seeing too much meaning, I didn't see any meaning. (40-1)

Since “[r]eality was getting too dense” (41), her unconscious resource to keep her own inner self secure – and I would add “sane” – is to create a parallel world of meanings to the patterns. And since people are all the same and the ones who are different are misfits, she cannot see any meaning in the characteristics of the face of a person. Therefore, for her, it could be that people were losing identity: if they are all the same, a face could not really mean anything. As for the patterns, they would come up as a representation of the indecisions with which she has been confronted in life. According to her, the black and white of the ice cream parlor represents “Yes, No, This, That, Up Down, Day, Night – all the indecisions and opposites that were bad enough in life without having them spelled for you on the floor” (52). As she puts it, this anxiety about the patterns metaphorically alludes to her yearnings. What she did not know then is that she is actually rebelling against a world that classifies everything into dichotomies. In the 1950s, the notion of post modern plurality was not yet discussed and accepted, but some people were already experiencing that notion and Susanna is one of these people. In the end, Kaysen’s speculation about whether insanity could be just a matter of “dropping the act” (41) makes sense within the context of this study. That is, insane is the label applied to the ones who do not follow the rules; therefore, people are but wearing masks, but

without these masks they would all undergo their own judgments rather than feel unconsciously forced to follow the rules in order to be. In this way, all those who decided to act in accordance with their personal judgment would be considered insane as well. Or perhaps the rules would eventually fade away and labels such as insane would become history.

As a matter of fact, there is a moment in the narrative, when Susanna is talking to her doctor at the appointment that anticipates her going to McLean Hospital, in which it seems as though she is following an internalized rule. At this moment, she does not exactly dialogue with her doctor. She does not argue against his claims. Rather, she just listens and nods: he asks twice if she is picking her pimple and before a third time she nods because “[h]e was going to keep talking about it until [she] agreed with him, so [she] nodded” (7). This could mean that she is so used to not expressing herself that she unconsciously conceives it as irrelevant to disagree. Or it could also mean that confrontation is a problem for her, so it comes out as not disagreeing and just nodding along with the interlocutor. In addition, she perhaps would not be willing to look further towards her deepest concerns. Either way, it is most likely that in order to avoid confrontation and to get people to end a speech, she would agree even if what she really wants is to disagree.

This difficulty in expressing her real intentions even if it means to deal with confrontation overwhelms Susanna in a broader sense. It renders her tired and unwilling to face the situation as a whole. Such feelings result in apathy, for she is sad and confused to a point she becomes inert – an easy prey for the doctor, who “after only fifteen minutes” (39) concludes that Susanna needs a rest and gets to convince her of that (7). He could have tried to lead her to an understanding of what that need for rest meant. However, instead of that, the doctor does not show her that spending some time at the hospital would be good for her. By her memories, it is as though he forces her by speaking emphatically to her that she has to go to the hospital no later than that day, the day of her first appointment. He says that he has a bed for her, to what she replies that she would go to the hospital not that day (a Tuesday) but on Friday. He determines: “No. You go now” (8). She still tries to reason with him that she has to go to a lunch date, and he says: “Forget it. [...] You aren’t going to lunch. You’re going to the hospital” (8). She gives up and concludes by saying that he looks “triumphant” (8)

after that moment. Still, her admission to the asylum represents a form of preventive medicine: in order to protect her from the mean world in which she has been surviving (40), she is put away. And since he looks triumphant, she is, hence, defeated. But perhaps she is not aware of what underlies this meeting with her doctor. In such a situation, she is dealing with an issue of power: between herself and her doctor, this power is uneven. That is most likely the reason why she avoids confronting him and speaking her mind about whether she should go to the asylum or not. But in the end, her going to the hospital would indeed mean getting some rest, a rest from her struggle with her current condition. Perhaps she feels that going to the hospital would mean solving this crisis, at least temporarily. For some time, she would not have to worry about dealing with getting things worked out. When she affirms that “[she] was glad to be riding in a taxi instead of having to wait for the train” (9), it implies that she allows herself to relax for a while and indulge in a bit of comfort. At that moment, in that taxi instead of in a train, she is somehow being taken care of – that is why she does not resist being taken to McLean. She is tired of fighting on her own against these suffocating norms that make it impossible for her to be herself without dealing with prejudice. This rest from her struggle to find balance comes in handy after all. Being at the asylum represents an escape from her torments, that is, the indecision about future plans, for since she is seen as crazy at the institution, it is possible for her to act any way she wants without worrying about how she should behave, which is a must in the outside. Being at the hospital ultimately represents being away from the things that drove Susanna and the inmate girls crazy. Therefore, being there is, in a way, good for them. They could stay away from the people with whom they did not want to get in touch by refusing phone calls and visits, for example (94). “In a strange way we were free” (94), Susanna declares. They are imprisoned, but free from the things they dislike. In this sense, being insane can indeed be seen as a resource to avoid dealing with unpleasant and unwanted dilemmas, as pointed out by Laing⁵⁰. It is an escape.

A particular incident during Susanna’s time at McLean, however, leads to an understanding that her profound emotional wounds would come to speak louder than her conscious mind. Although she

⁵⁰ Chapter 2.

eventually makes progress from her initial state of instability after she finds a (female) therapist in whom she can trust, or especially because of that, she experiences a delusional episode that goes in accordance with the idea that she really feels comfortable and secure at the asylum or that could actually show that she needs to stay there because she is actually disturbed. She hallucinates about her hand and the possibility of not having any bones in it (102). Susanna keeps asking her inmates whether she does or does not have any bones in her hand. She only calms down after a nurse medicates her with Thorazine⁵¹. Unsettled, at one point, she even bites her hand in order to let some blood out, so that she would somehow confirm that it was real, a behavior similar what self-harming patients who cut themselves pursue in addition to letting the pain out along with the blood. Also, self-injuring releases endorphins, causing the patient to feel better after doing that⁵². This hallucination experienced by Susanna occurs when her therapist is away. Therefore, what she really feels is insecurity because of her doctor's absence, which is mentioned in her medical report (105)⁵³. There is a reference to depersonalization there, which is recognized by Laing as a symptom of schizophrenia⁵⁴. It is also relevant to point out that her medical report brings some information on Susanna's claims that she and her parents have a troubled relationship that lacks communication, which goes in accordance with Laing's studies on the divided self⁵⁵. Susanna ends the chapter by saying that now that she acted completely crazy she would no longer leave the hospital, and for that reason she considered herself safe. By being a crazy young lady who believes that there are not any bones in her hands, she would have to stay there and have people watching over her, i.e., something that she lacks outside the walls of the asylum.

Other than this delusional incident, Susanna goes through other awkward moments. She experiences an intense feeling of anxiety during a procedure at the dentist's to get her wisdom tooth removed (107). Such a procedure could be reason for anxiety for most. With

⁵¹ Medicine used as an antidepressive. Information on this medicine can be found at http://bipolar.about.com/od/thorazine/Thorazine_Chlorpromazine.htm. Accessed on March 23, 2013.

⁵² <http://depression.about.com/cs/selfinjury/a/selfinjury.htm>. Accessed on March 23, 2013.

⁵³ Illustration 13.

⁵⁴ Chapter 2.

⁵⁵ Chapter 2.

Susanna, however, the greatest concern is about how long it took the dentist to remove her tooth. She keeps asking him and Valerie, the nurse, about how long the procedure took, but did not get an answer from either of them. By the end of the chapter, she says she needs to know how long it took because it was her time that was lost and she started crying because Valerie did not tell her. What hastily comes to mind is: was it really knowing about how much time she had spent at the dentist's chair that bothered her or was it how much time of her life she was wasting at the asylum what really makes her uncomfortable and anxious? It is most likely to be the latter: she feels her life is passing her by and she is not really enjoying it.

This "lost time" to which she refers ends up being helpful after all. By being at the institution, Susanna gets the chance to look closer into her life and go over the questions that have bothered her for long, as her family issue, for example. As mentioned shortly before this, her medical records contain information about her claims on the difficult relationship she led with her family before getting to McLean. She does not mention anything about how things work out for them after she leaves the hospital, though. Still, Susanna confirms Laing's view⁵⁶ that the families are pointed as the reason patients get to asylums. But then again, while they are the ones who are put in asylums and labeled crazy, the whole family can be actually crazy, according to Susanna (95). It is as if there is a major rule to be followed: the ones who keep on pretending everything is fine the longest are considered the sane ones. Being upset and expressing discomfort towards the so-called normality is an instant diagnosis: there is something wrong with the person (mostly a *her*, in the context under study). And even after she is released from the institution, she is stigmatized as crazy for having spent time at an asylum. She wonders about what it is that gives the craziness away: "What were we, that they could know us so quickly and so well?" (124), she speculates after an interview for a job she does not get. She assumes it is because her address is of a mental institution. And it probably is. In this way, Susanna sees that she does not fit in society, not because she is not good enough or because she is crazy – *crazy* as society sees it. Her journey through the quests of her self allows her to understand that "[her] chronic feelings of emptiness and boredom came from the fact

⁵⁶ Chapter 2.

that [she] was living a life based on [her] incapacities, which were numerous” (154). She understands that such a fact is not meant to be seen negatively, though. Unlike Esther, she is clearly aware of the reality that surrounds her: “I saw myself, quite correctly, as unfit for the educational and social systems” (155). Still, she demonstrates difficulty in understanding why her own features cannot be of any use for her parents and teachers: “They did not put much value on my capacities”, she declares, “which were admittedly few, but genuine” (155). In the end, Susanna gets to know her own self and, unintentionally, sums up what occasioned her emotional instability in the beginning of the last chapter of her memoir: “My family had a lot of characteristics – achievements, ambitions, talents, expectations – that all seemed to be recessive in me” (165). Susanna courageously faces the fact that she is different, but different should not be taken as inferior. Rather, it should be recognized as such and respected – by both society and the individual herself, but especially by the latter.

More of Susanna’s understanding on what her emotional condition involves is present in the novel. On its final pages, she engages in a discussion about the difference between brain and what she calls “mind, character, soul” (137). Her technical perception that there is a difference in the neurological and the emotional parts that comprise one’s behavior makes it possible for her to review not only her own condition but also what, in the end, guides one’s line of thought and, hence, decisions. Susanna is, in a way, criticizing the fact that the doctors tend to treat mental illnesses with chemicals rather than therapy (142). This criticism suggests that doctors act in the way that is more advantageous for them. At first, it was difficult to treat these emotional illnesses. Now, however, there are the antipsychotics that solve problems at hand. In sum, her point is: crazy people are emotionally sick, but their brains get the treatment through chemicals. She wonders:

If the biochemists were able to demonstrate the physical workings of neuroses (phobias, or difficulties getting pleasure from life), if they could pinpoint the chemicals and impulses and interbrain conversations and information exchanges that constitute these feelings, would the psychoanalysts pack up their ids and egos and retire from the field?

They have partially retired from the field. Depression, manic-depression, schizophrenia: All that stuff they always had trouble treating they now treat chemically. Take two Lithium and don't call me in the morning because there's nothing to say, it's innate. (142)

Doctors study the mind based on psychoanalysis, but then when they deal with a patient they just prescribe Thorazine (141). It is there, between the lines, Susanna's big yelp: we need to be heard, not doped.

Nevertheless, what stands out the most about Susanna's perceptions of her condition throughout the narrative is not the medical aspect. Susanna highlights the anxiety that she deals with because of the fact that she sees herself as different. One of these differences refers to the main topic of this study: the gender issue. At times, she suggests the imposition of men over women in the contexts that she is inserted. At others, she points out this hierarchical condition with examples from her routine at the hospital. Either way, she understands that there is something prejudicial about how women should behave when compared to men. For example, at the office she started to work after she got out of the hospital, the supervisors were all male employees and the only ones who could smoke indoors. The typists were all female employees and they could only smoke in the bathroom during the break (131). The other women at the workplace did not seem to bother, but these rules about smoking as well as the positions which men and women were supposed to fill annoy Susanna. She wonders whether her being the only woman who had trouble accepting the rules may be a mark of her madness (132). Perhaps it could be if one were to consider madness in the way this study suggests, i.e., madness is a way of seeing things different than the so-called norm – a way of unconsciously rebelling against what is not in accordance with your feelings, with what does not let you be yourself. This view of madness suits Susanna. Her future plans also seem to go against the so-called normal: for a woman, becoming a writer should not be a career plan. Rather, she should aim at becoming a dental technician: "It's a nice clean work" (133). In order to be released from the asylum, she counted on the luck of having a man proposing to her. Therefore, she would have someone to support her financially since she does not have a job and the job she intends to pursue is seen more like a hobby (133). But the marriage proposal came

in handy and Susanna is released from the hospital because, according to her, “[i]n 1968, everybody could understand a marriage proposal” (133). A woman dreaming of being a writer was not understandable, but a marriage proposal was. Unfortunately, when Susanna tells Lisa and Georgina that she got a marriage proposal, Georgina asks her if she indeed wants to marry him, she answers: “Sure”. Right away, she adds: “I wasn’t completely sure, though” (136). Then the girls ask about what Susanna thinks is going to happen after she gets married and she says: “I guess my life will stop when I get married.” However, according to her, “in the end, [she] lost him” (136). She does not seem to suffer because of that, though. She affirms that she did it on purpose because she wants to go on alone in her future. Her decision goes in accordance with her discourse, i.e., she does not want to get married in the first place and it seems to be clear that she uses this man as an opportunity of getting out of the asylum.

5 CONCLUSION

In order to conclude this study, I will now highlight the major similarities and differences identified in the analysis of the two novels, mostly concerning the female protagonists. Also, I will recall the main hypotheses of this investigation so as to verify them.

Other than the topic of the novels itself, the words that compound the titles carry a common meaning: the feeling of oppression. Both terms “the bell jar” and “girl, interrupted” imply the idea of being locked/blocked within, i.e., something inside cannot come out, which could easily be associated with the female protagonists’ potentials to be developed. As a matter of fact, one incident at a given moment in Kaysen’s narrative may serve as a metaphor for the feeling of imprisonment she experiences. As she picks on a pimple on her skin, she muses: “[i]t was yearning for release. Freeing it from its little white dome, pressing until the blood ran, I felt a sense of accomplishment: I’d done all that could be done for this pimple” (7). Freeing the pimple, then, may metaphorically allude to freeing her *self*.

However, the main similarity to be considered here is the conjecture that neither Susanna nor Esther really intends to commit suicide. Susanna even seems to confirm such a speculation: “I wasn’t a danger to society. Was I a danger to myself? The fifty aspirin – but I’ve explained them. They were metaphorical. I wanted to get rid of a certain aspect of my character. I was performing a kind of self-abortion with those aspirins. It worked for a while. Then it stopped; but I had no heart to try again” (39). In fact, after she takes the aspirins, she goes to buy some milk and faints. If she really wanted to die, she would not have gone out. It is most likely that she wants to be found. She even affirms that taking the aspirins and going onto the street works similarly to getting a gun and then putting it back in a drawer (17). Also, she not only goes onto the street but calls her boyfriend Johnny, tells him about her suicide plans and leaves the phone off the hook while she takes the pills (37). Oddly enough, in the same chapter, in one page Susanna affirms that taking the fifty aspirins was a mistake, but in the following page she affirms: “Next time [...] I [...] wouldn’t take aspirin” (37-8). She contradicts herself, expressing the confusion she is experiencing inwardly. But then again, she wonders about whether a next time would actually come around, for after she was brought back from her suicide

attempt, she “was lighter, airier than [she]’d been in years” (38). Susanna says that after her suicide attempt her perception of things changed somehow. It is as though she could see/feel the world and people in a way, but after she was brought back she felt differently (42). In addition, it may be that her suicide represents plain action, which she had been lacking. That is, before her suicide attempt, she may have been feeling so numb facing the confusion/indecision about her future life that the bare act of trying to change the scene by killing herself represented the long-lost weightless feeling over her shoulders. If she had decided to do something else, she could have achieved such a feeling as well, i.e. she could have acted out within her society, as she mentions at one point when she affirms: “People were doing the kinds of things we had fantasies of doing: taking over universities and abolishing classes; making houses out of cardboard boxes and putting them in people’s way; sticking their tongues out at policemen.” In this chapter, entitled “Nineteen Sixty-Eight”, Susanna talks of the rebellious times the United States of America was going through. Thus, perhaps, if she could have had the guts to act out, she would not have been fenced in.

Although Esther also eventually tries to commit suicide, she likewise unconsciously finds pretexts not to do so or not to have this mission accomplished. For a long time in the narrative before they actually go ahead with their “final act”, both characters undergo situations in which they overanalyze the opportunities with which they come across acting too rational about the decision.

According to Dr. Alex Lickerman, M.D.⁵⁷, there are six common reasons why people try to commit suicide and “crying out for help” is one of them. This need to call someone’s attention in order to get help seems to have taken over Susanna. She is most likely needy and, for that reason, trying to catch people’s eyes. Esther, on the other hand, keeps postponing her final act by considering if such and such a situation would compromise her success in the accomplishment of the task: 1) at first, she locks herself in the bathroom in order to cut herself with the razors, but she thinks her mom may find her too soon, so she decides to take the subway to the Deer Prison Island; 2) when she gets

⁵⁷ <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/happiness-in-world/201004/the-six-reasons-people-attempt-suicide>. Accessed on February 9, 2013.

to the island, the beach is crowded and she thinks it is stupid to have the razors but not a warm bath, as she did in her bathroom, so she considers renting a room – another excuse, postponing the act; 3) at one moment, she says “I waited, as if the sea could make my decision for me” (89): another circumstance in which she hesitates, as if she is in doubt whether she should do it or not. By the end of chapter twelve, she says: “[m]y flesh winced, in cowardice, from such a death” (89). She is scared. Although it seems that dying is the best decision, the only way out of pain, she does not want to do it at this moment. She keeps on postponing it because she wants someone to stop her, to save her. In my view, all these doubts are also connected to her insecurity and perfectionism. Just like in terms of accomplishments in life, when she cannot be because she needs the approval of others, in the case of her suicide, I believe she wants to kill herself in a way that she will not be judged, in a way that people will not say something like “oh, she could have done it another way” because it is as though she has to do the right thing – in order to be approved. She wants to do it in a smart way, so as to be admired for what she has done, or in an appropriate way, if there would ever be an appropriate way of killing oneself. Even her suicide note is written in “painstaking letters” (97). Esther depends so much on getting the approval of others that even her death has to be perfect. In a moment, she is talking to Cal about a play and asks him about how he would kill himself if he were ever to do it. He says he would use a gun. She finds another excuse for that suggestion: “I was disappointed. It was just like a man to do it with a gun. A fat chance I had of laying my hands on a gun. And even if I did, I wouldn’t have a clue as to what part of me to shoot at” (90). A bit ahead she justifies her avoidance in using a gun by saying that she has read of people who had done it and were saved by doctors. Rather than dying they, for example, just shot “an important nerve and [got] paralyzed” (90). Another textual evidence that can make it clear that she does not want to kill herself but is indeed in search of help is when she states that she considers going back to the Catholic Church and even, perhaps, becoming a nun. She envisions she would “throw [herself] at the priest’s feet and say, “O Father, help me” (95). It is as though there is always a condition to which she has to succumb to in order to kill herself. Another example can be found on page 136 when she mentions that the money that she received in her New York internship is almost over, so *when* it really ends she will “do

it” – in the following lines she says that her money is over after she buys the raincoat (97). This desire to end life is actually a desire to end the pain. And perhaps the desire to die comes because the person has already died on another level of perception – or, as Anne Simpson (2005) puts it, “a death of the spirit, of spontaneity, of genuine responsiveness to the events of one’s life” (118).

As for what Laing explains in his concept of the divided self, Esther’s and Susanna’s suicide attempts can be seen as a defense mechanism: they were not actually trying to die, but trying to avoid being “killed” by others in the sense that they were insecure about the mere fact of existing. Existing for them represented being overwhelmed by someone else for they had no strong sense of self. Laing affirms that in order for someone not to be overwhelmed by the influence of someone else’s presence in their construction of personality, it is necessary to have a strong sense of self. “A firm sense of one’s autonomous identity”, he argues, “is required in order that one may be related as one human being to another. Otherwise, any and every relationship threatens the individual with loss of identity” (44). Thus, in order not to be petrified⁵⁸ by someone else, they unconsciously choose to petrify themselves. This weak sense of self in Susanna and Esther lead them to feel that they cannot follow their own way. Rather, they are led to believe they need to reproduce patterns of behavior. Therefore, this need to reproduce patterns of behavior is an indicator of the loss of the self for them, who have trouble establishing personal goals and also understanding their difference. This constant call for following patterns in order to find approval works like a drug to which the self becomes addicted, and whenever it is not possible to feel approved the self goes through a phase of abstinence which limits their ability to reason and, thus, emotional imbalance sets in.

More can be considered by having in mind Laing’s concept of the divided self. His notion that we need the presence of the other in order to develop our own “self” opens room for the importance of the family during the process in which the individual is constructing their identity. As already mentioned in the introduction, Susanna and Esther have what could be seen as repressive parents. Such a condition can suggest a bad relationship among the protagonists and their mothers, for

⁵⁸ Chapter 2.

example, and, in that way, come about as what I identify as an explanation for what originated the imbalance that those characters experience.

There are, however, differences between the novels. One of them is the attitude towards a type of psychological treatment very common in the 1950s and 1960s, briefly mentioned in Chapter 2. In *The Bell Jar*, Esther is recommended by her doctor to get ECT (176) and in *Girl, Interrupted*, Cynthia, one of Susanna's inmates at McLean, who is diagnosed as depressed (59), is also treated with ECT (93). When it comes to their response to the treatment, though, Esther seems to get better after the shocks. Cynthia, on the other hand, does not, apparently. According to Susanna, quite the opposite: the more she gets shocks, the more she starts talking in a strange, senseless way after six months of shocks (31). I understand that this different reaction to the treatment might be because either Esther or Cynthia is misdiagnosed. While Esther feels that she can breathe again after she starts being treated with ECT, Cynthia demonstrates to be walking backwards in her process of cure. It can also be that Susanna misinterprets Cynthia's reaction or that Cynthia is treated with ECT for a longer time than she should. Esther spends a total time of about six months at the asylum. Hence, she is treated with ECT for less than that, whereas Cynthia's treatment alone is carried out for (at least) six months (31). Therefore, it could be that after a time of improvement, her recovery began to recede, but that would be speculation, for neither Susanna nor the references I used in this research mention a possibility of recession in treatment.

Another very clear difference lies in the time the protagonists spend at the asylums. Susanna was admitted on April 27, 1967 and discharged on October 4, 1968 (129). Esther was admitted in the summer of 1953 and discharged in the autumn of the same year – about six months later (208). Perhaps this difference in the time they are hospitalized meant a different chance of recovery: Susanna had more time to question and understand her *self*, whereas Esther did not get to have a good look at her own life in order to understand why she was experiencing emotional confusion. Also, Susanna is not treated with either ECT or insulin therapy⁵⁹, but Esther is with both. Such a difference in their treatment can also account for the results. By the end

⁵⁹ http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/nash/filmmore/ps_ict.html. Accessed on April 14, 2013.

of the narratives, the reader finds an Esther who is still on the tightrope wondering whether someday the bell jar would descend again (197), but a Susanna a bit more optimistic about her future. On the possibility of eventually trespassing the borderlines that separate the sane/insane world again, she states decisively: “I do not want to cross it again” (159).

Still, even though Susanna does seem more optimistic towards the future than Esther, in the final chapter of *Girl, Interrupted*, the author/protagonist Susanna Kaysen shares with the reader that about sixteen years after she is discharged from McLean Hospital, she visits New York with her new boyfriend and realizes that some ghosts from the past still haunt her somehow. At one moment, he catches her crying at the painting *Girl Interrupted at Her Music*. When he asks her what the problem is, she answers: “Don’t you see, she’s trying to get out” (167). Like the unnamed protagonist of “The Yellow Wallpaper”⁶⁰, Susanna identifies with a girl in a painting – in the case of the short story by Gilman, it was wallpaper instead. She claims that the girl in the painting wants to “get out”. However, by the final pages of the novel, the reader is well aware of the fact that who actually feels imprisoned is Susanna. She experienced this sense of enclosure during the almost two years she spent at the asylum and it appears that her emotions are still somewhat in turmoil. The episode with her boyfriend happens about ten years after she is no longer hospitalized (166); however, Susanna still reminisces the claustrophobic feeling she experienced at McLean.

Finally, other minor aspects were also observed in the narratives. 1) Susanna does not talk much about family other than when she mentions the fact that her parents’ expectations for her were different than hers (155). Esther, on the other hand, mentions her mother often and expresses how the loss of her father has affected her. However, the protagonists neither go deep in the family issue nor explore family episodes or their relationship significantly. 2) Kaysen’s novel has more details in the medical aspect. Its protagonist Susanna is more straightforward. She discusses diagnoses and raises issues concerning psychological aspects, whereas Plath focuses more on the protagonist-narrator’s feelings, rambling around the problems she attempts to approach. 3) Kaysen’s novel focuses more on the

⁶⁰ Chapter 2.

protagonist's life after the suicide attempt when she is hospitalized, whereas Plath's narrative explores the events that anticipate the emotional breakdown.

Having discussed some of the similarities and differences observed in the analysis of the novels *The Bell Jar* and *Girl, Interrupted*, mainly with the female protagonists, in this final part, I will draw on significant aspects of the findings in order to conclude this study.

Taking up the issue of madness, in terms of the concepts presented by Jung, we could say that the protagonists' emotional breakdown happened because they could not go on living in accordance with a reality that is different from their "self", thus this private self collapsed. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the oppression happens from the inside out. In order to serve the ego's appeals to be part of the world and be accepted, the self is somewhat unconsciously ignored and discharged and that is what can lead to emotional imbalance. For Jung, the loss of the contents that compose the self results in a feeling of "moral inferiority", but it is not that the world directly oppresses the individual. Rather, this feeling of moral inferiority comes from an inner conflict. Or as Jung puts it, "[t]he feeling of moral inferiority does not come from a collision with the moral law usually accepted and, in a way, arbitrary, but from a conflict with one's own self which, for reasons of psychic balance, demands that the deficit be reimbursed"⁶¹(12).

Huf's analysis of the fictional representation of women artists like Susanna and Esther follows Jung's theory. She summarizes conflicts such as those experienced by the protagonists of the novels analyzed by claiming that

[...] the artist heroine who fights for the rights of woman against the wrongs of man invariably discovers that The Enemy has outposts in her own head. She learns that she has inner foes as formidable as the outer ones. Because she has internalized society's devaluation of herself and

⁶¹ "O sentimento de inferioridade moral não provém de uma colisão com a lei moral geralmente aceita e de certo modo arbitrária, mas de um conflito com o próprio si-mesmo (Selbst) que, por razões de equilíbrio psíquico, exige que o déficit seja compensado." My translation.

her abilities, she must slay enemies within her own ranks: fear, self-doubt, guilt. (11)

This is how I see that oppression happens from the inside out: fighting the inner “fear, self-doubt, [and] guilt” is a great challenge. For Esther, for example, this challenge meant overcoming a need of the approval of others. It is not exactly her fault that she needed the approval of others. This need is unconscious, for it has been internalized. Therefore, she did not seek this approval because of pride. Rather, she did so because she could not realize that there was another way of doing things. In a way, it is like both Esther and Susanna are subjected to a schizophrenic social pull and have their “self” divided. As Rigney concludes in her analyses of Brönte’s, Woolf’s, Lessing’s and Atwood’s novels, “[e]ach novelist indicates that women in particular suffer from more or less obvious forms of schizophrenia, being constantly torn between male society’s prescriptions for female behavior, their own tendencies toward the internalization of these roles, and a nostalgia for some lost, more authentic self” (119).

This “more authentic self”, in the case of Susanna and Esther, would have been the one aspiring to be a writer. In choosing to pursue a writing career, they could have found bliss. According to my understanding of the results of this research, an exemplification of what Susanna’s and Esther’s lives could have been like if they had had the courage and/or awareness to go for their deepest aspirations can be found in the movie *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003), directed by Mike Newell. In this movie, which depicts a society of the fifties, Katherine Watson, played by actress Julia Roberts, is a new female professor at a girls-only university. She is an accomplished single childless College Professor who stands for the things in which she believes, even though she comes across people who think and act differently. For her, that condition does not seem to be a problem. Her own students, on the other hand, criticize her choices. One student in particular, Elizabeth Warren, played by actress Kirsten Dunst, a perfect example of the common “swallow and follow” nonsense⁶², stands out at one point by bitterly stating about Professor Watson that “[n]o man wanted her” (around 19min). That same student, coincidentally or not, is about to get married and very

⁶² The term within quotation was used by Charolotte Perkins Gilman and can be found at http://womenshistory.about.com/od/quotes/a/c_p_gilman.htm. Accessed on April 22, 2013.

excited about that – later to be found that she and her husband have a marriage that has been broken from the start. Her bitterness may indicate, however, that she actually envies her professor – someone who is not concerned about getting married when that is all most girls care about. Still, in this same movie, another relevant female character to consider, precisely because she experiences the same doubts Esther does in *The Bell Jar*, i.e., getting married or pursuing a career, is Joan Brandwyn. Wanting something more in a time when women solely believed that their only future responsibility would be taking care of [their] husband and children⁶³ was too daring. However, she wants to be a lawyer and is admitted to Yale, but has to deal with prejudice from both her close friend Elizabeth Warren and her fiancé. Like Esther, it seems as though Joan does not see having both a career and a home as a possibility. She ends up choosing family life over career and affirms that she is happy with the decision.

Differently from the movie protagonist, the women in the novels I analyzed allowed themselves to be oppressed. Perhaps a different reading of the novels could argue that it is as though going mad is another form of resistance. Were Esther and Susanna really oppressed or actually resisting through deviant behavior? The outside world as it was, judgmental and prejudiced, with limited conventional options for women, affected their emotional stability. However, it is indispensable to highlight that there were options other than the conventional ones and their biggest ambition, i.e., being a writer, was one of these options. Unfortunately, Esther and Susanna did not realize at the time they were in their late teens that they could have chosen that option, as did Philomena Guinea, Jay Cee, Katherine Watson and many others who managed to succeed by keeping the balance identified as healthy by Jung and Laing.

Thus, regarding the first hypothesis posed in the Introduction, I see that madness is not exactly “a state in which people refuse to live in accordance to certain preconceived social roles and expose their authentic, private selves”, as stated. Rather, the disturbed behavior socially labeled as madness is a confused fragmentation of that self. As

⁶³ Around the twenty-eighth minute of the movie *Mona Lisa Smile*, Nancy Abbey, played by actress Marcia Gay Harden, tells her students of deportment, grooming and table setting class: “A few years from now, your sole responsibility will be taking care of your husband and children.”

to the second hypothesis, female madness may, indeed, be considered a gender issue if we consider that the conflict between personal aspirations and expected social roles may cause the emotional imbalance which often led women to undergo psychiatric treatment. We can then conclude, as stated in my third and final hypothesis, that Susanna and Esther faced emotional imbalance precisely because their personal goals differed from what was expected from them. For these women, writing was of major relevance for their self-accomplishment. In Plath's own words in her journals, "[t]hat's where writing comes in. It is as necessary for the survival of my haughty sanity as bread is to my flesh" (1961, qtd in Wagner-Martin 1). So it was for the protagonists of *The Bell Jar* and *Girl, Interrupted*.

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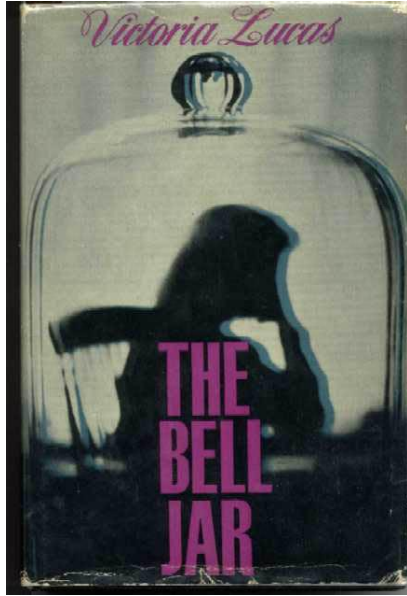
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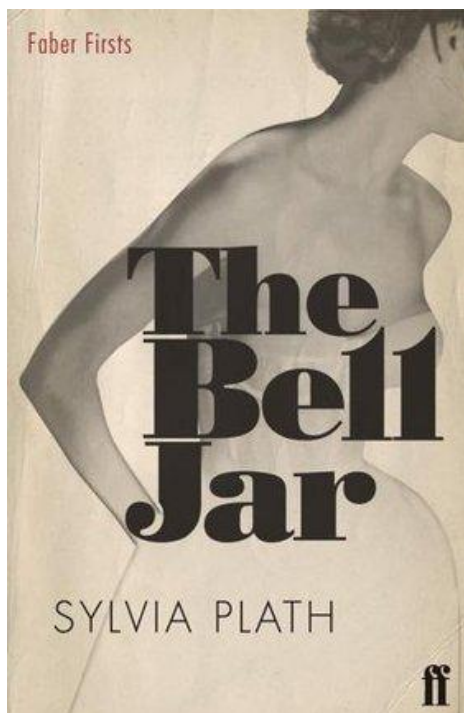
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APPENDIX – ILLUSTRATIONS

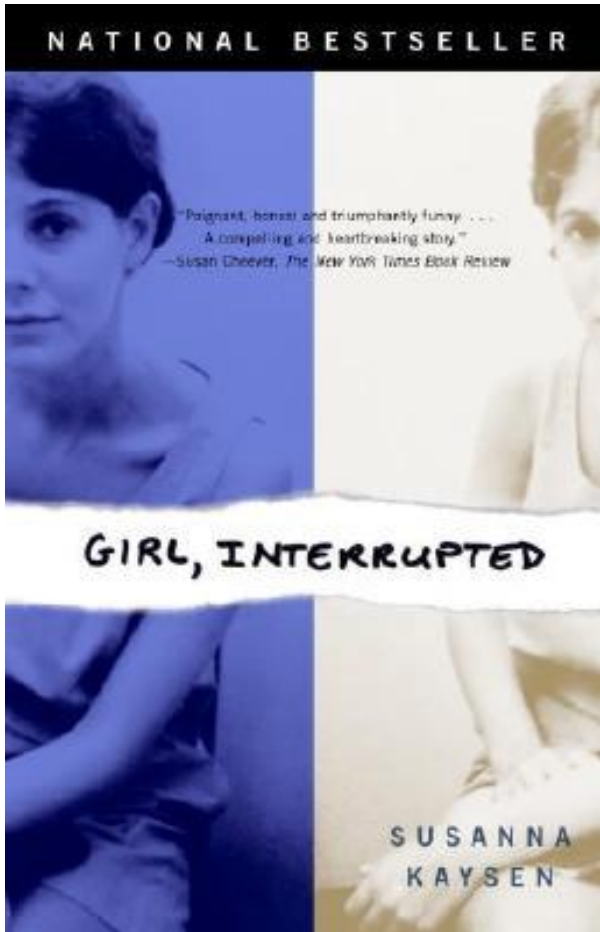
1. Sylvia Plath (no date)



2. *The Bell Jar* under the pseudonym of Victoria Lucas



3. *The Bell Jar* (cover of one of the editions)



4. *Girl, Interrupted* (book cover)



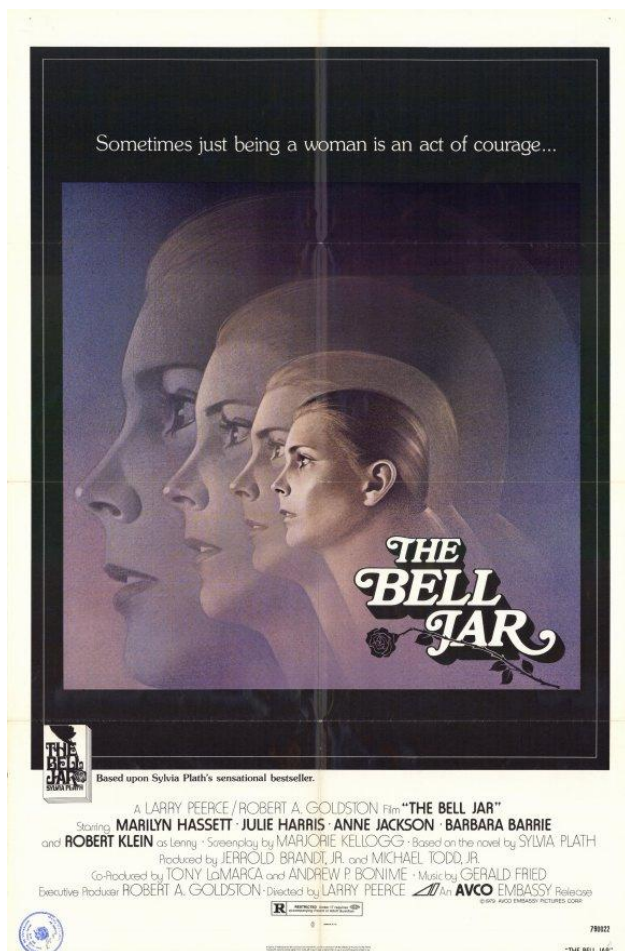
5. Susanna Kaysen (young – no date)

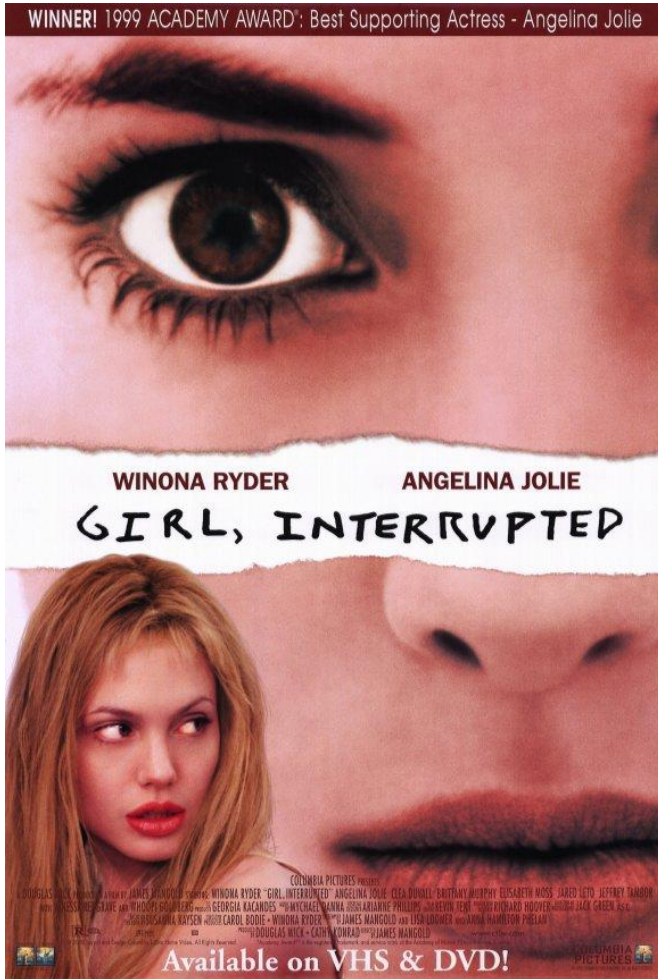


6. Susanna Kaysen (recent – no date)



7. Winona Ryder as Susanna Kaysen

8. *The Bell Jar* (movie poster)



9. *Girl, Interrupted* (movie poster)



10. Painting *Girl Interrupted in Her Music*, by Johannes Vermeer (1660 or 1661)

D. H. H. FORM #1, JAN., 1955

CASE RECORD FOLDER

1. INSTITUTION McLean Hospital		2. LAST NAME KAYSEN		FIRST NAME Susanna		MIDDLE INITIAL N.		3. REGISTER NUMBER		
4. LEGAL STATUS AT ADMISSION Voluntary		5. LOCATION FROM WHICH ADMITTED 64 Wendell Street, Cambridge, Mass.				6. DATE ADMITTED April 27, 1967				
7A. ESTABLISHED LEGAL STATUS		B. DATE		8. RECENT ADDRESS		9. SEX F.		10. COLOR W.		
11. ALIEN REG. NO.		12. TIME AT USUAL ADDRESS Since 9/66		13. USUAL ADDRESS ██████████ Lane, Princeton, N. J.		14. RELIGION Jewish		15. MARITAL ST Single		
16A. PORT OF ENTRY, IF FOREIGN BORN		B. DATE		17A. CITY OR TOWN OF BIRTH Boston		B. STATE OR COUNTRY OF BIRTH Mass.		18. BIRTH DATE 18 yrs. Nov. 11, 1948		
18A. IF NATURALIZED, PLACE		B. DATE		20A. FATHER'S NAME Carl Kaysen		B. FATHER'S BIRTH PLACE Philadelphia, Pa.		21. U.S. MILITARY SERVICE		
22. EDUCATION High School Graduate		23A. MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME Annette Neutra		B. MOTHER'S BIRTH PLACE Philadelphia, Pa.		24. SOCIAL SECURITY NO. Unknown				
25. USUAL OCCUPATION OF PATIENT None		26A. PERSON TO NOTIFY IN EMERGENCY Mr. & Mrs. Carl Kaysen				B. RELATIONSHIP Parents				
27. USUAL OCCUPATION OF FATHER (PATIENT A MINOR)		C. ADDRESS ██████████ Lane, Princeton, N. J. Bus: Princeton Inst. for Adv. Studies (Director) AC609-				D. TELEPHONE -AC609-				
28. USUAL OCCUPATION OF MOTHER (PATIENT A MINOR)		26B. PERSON TO NOTIFY IN EMERGENCY Dr. & Mrs. Sanford Gifford				B. RELATIONSHIP Friends				
30. DIAGNOSTIC IMPRESSION AT ADMISSION 1. Psychoneurotic depressive reaction. 2. Personality pattern disturbance, mixed type. R/O Undifferentiated Schizophrenia.		C. ADDRESS Cambridge, Mass.				D. TELEPHONE Un-██████████				
31A. PERSON TO NOTIFY IN EMERGENCY		C. ADDRESS				B. RELATIONSHIP D. TELEPHONE				
32. ESTABLISHED DIAGNOSES, MENTAL DISORDER Borderline Personality					33. ESTABLISHED DIAGNOSES, OTHER CONDITIONS					
B. QUALIFYING PHRASE										
34. HISTORY OF TIME ON BOOKS OF INSTITUTIONS CARING FOR MENTAL DISORDER										
A. NAME OF INSTITUTION		B. LOCATION		C. MONTH		D. YEAR		E. MONTH		F. YEAR
None										
35. HISTORY OF OTHER HOSPITALIZATION										
A. NAME OF HOSPITAL		B. LOCATION		C. YEAR		D. REASON				
Mt. Auburn Hospital		Cambridge, Mass.		1965		(Stomach pumped)				

11 Susanna's Case Record Folder



12 McLean Hospital – Administration Building

McLEAN HOSPITAL		Page.....	F-90
No. 22 201 Name KAYSEN, Susanna		SB II	
1967 Aug. 9	<u>PROGRESS NOTE</u>	<p>The patient has been doing extremely well aside from depressive reactions on the weekend, until yesterday, when she was listening to some records and suddenly felt as though she were a teenager again and began to become very frightened at the thought that she had never had a satisfactory childhood. She became fearful and agitated requiring a call from the doctor on call. She expressed her fears regarding her parents and lack of communication, the fact that she has been unable to make satisfactory decisions throughout her life to the present time, and also, that her therapist is away. She is extremely agitated today and, although not disorganized, she is going to need further support in helping her get through the time that her therapist is away. She is most extremely upset about her parents and their lack of understanding and she relates this to other people, and that they can't understand or can't be trusted. I have spoken to her at length about decision-making and responsibility and she does feel better after venting some of these feelings. However, she will also have to be somewhat supported and protected, at the present time, as she is going through a rather trying time without her therapist.</p>	
8/24/67	<u>PROGRESS NOTE:</u>	<p>The patient suffered an episode of depersonalization on Saturday for about six hours at which time she felt that she wasn't a real person, nothing but skin. She talked about venting to cut herself to see whether she would bleed to prove to herself that she was a real person. She mentioned she would like to see an X-ray of herself to see if she has any bones or anything inside. The precipitating event for this episode of depersonalization is still not clear.</p>	

13 Susanna's Medical Report