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Swimming in the Deep Waters in Charlotte Jones's *Airswimming*: Exploring Female Madness and Female Solidarity in a Psychiatric Hospital

Charlotte Jones un Havada Yüzmek Adlı Oyununda Derin Sularda Yüzmek: Bir Akıl Hastanesinde Kadın Deliliğini ve Kadın Dayanışmasını Keşfetmek

Gamze ŞENTÜRK TATAR *

Abstract

Throughout the centuries, madness has been viewed as a historical label applied to female resistance, power and liberation. Pioneering voices in feminist thought, including Elaine Showalter, Jane M. Ussher, Phyllis Chesler, and Shoshana Felman, have explored how the concept of female madness has evolved throughout history and how it is associated with the societal norms. They have aimed at illustrating how women's experiences gain meaning within a social context. According to them, in a patriarchal society, the phenomenon of madness has often been emphasized in relation to womanhood, with this relationship being reinforced by various discourses. It has often been noted that women who challenge patriarchal ideology through their lifestyles have, at times, been labelled as mad and confined to psychiatric institutions. These institutions have been viewed as tools used by the patriarchal system to restrict women's freedoms and their personal development. During the twentieth century, when the feminist movement came to life, many feminist playwrights turned to examine and write about mental illness and mental institutions as tools of patriarchal oppression directed at women. These playwrights were primarily motivated by a desire to interrogate the social and historical dynamics that label women as mad and confine them to psychiatric hospitals. Award-winning playwright Charlotte Jones (1968-), one of the towering names of contemporary British theatre, focuses on two women confined in a psychiatric hospital, called St. Dymphna's Hospital, in her first play Airswimming (1997). Jones features women whom she perceives as 'victims of patriarchal hegemony', highlighting their experiences and difficult conditions within the psychiatric institutions to emphasize the importance of 'female solidarity' in resisting patriarchal oppression. This paper aims to explore the image of the 'mad woman' in Airswimming, specifically through the

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characters of Dora and Persephone, examining the systematic pressures they face in the psychiatric hospital and the solidarity that Jones presents as a potential response to this oppression.

Keywords: *Madness, Psychiatric Hospitals, Female Solidarity, Charlotte Jones, Airswimming.*

Öz

Yüzyıllar boyunca delilik, kadın direncine, gücüne ve özgürlüğüne dair tarihsel bir etiket olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Elaine Showalter, Jane M. Ussher, Phyllis Chesler ve Shoshana Felman gibi feminist düşüncenin öncü sesleri, kadın deliliğinin tarihsel süreçte nasıl şekillendiğini ve toplumsal normlarla nasıl ilişkilendirildiğini irdelemişler ve kadınların yaşadığı deneyimlerin toplumsal bağlamda nasıl anlam kazandığını göstermeye çalışmışlardır. Onlara göre, erkek egemen toplumda delilik olgusu, kadınlık bağlamında sıkça vurgulanmış ve bu ilişki çeşitli söylemlerle pekiştirilmiştir. Yaşam biçimleriyle ataerkil ideolojiye meydan okuyan kadınların zaman zaman deli olarak damgalanarak akıl hastanelerine kapatıldıkları sıklıkla dile getirilmiştir. Bu kurumlar, ataerkil sistem tarafından kadınların özgürlüklerini ve kişisel gelişimlerini kısıtlamak için kullanılan araçlar olarak görülmüştür. Feminist hareketin güç kazandığı yirminci yüzyılda, birçok feminist oyun yazarı, kadınlara yönelik eril baskının bir aracı olarak akıl hastalığını ve akıl hastanelerini incelemeye ve bu konu üzerine yazmaya yönelmiştir. Bu yazarların temel motivasyonu ise kadınları deli olarak etiketleyen ve akıl hastanelerine kapatan sosyal ve tarihsel dinamikleri sorgulamak olmuştur. Britanya tiyatrosunun yükselen isimlerinden biri olan ödüllü oyun yazarı Charlotte Jones (1968-), 1997 yılında yazdığı ilk oyunu Havada Yüzmek te St. Dymphna s Hospital adlı bir akıl hastanesine kapatılan iki kadına odaklanır. Jones, 'ataerkil hegemonya kurbanı' olarak akıl hastanelerini hapsedildiğini düşündüğü kadınları ve ataerkil baskıya karşı direnişte 'kadın dayanışmasının' önemini vurgulamak için onların akıl hastanelerindeki deneyimlerini ve zor yaşam koşullarını ortaya koyar. Bu makale, Havada Yüzmek oyunundaki deli kadın imgesine odaklanarak Dora ve Persephone adlı karakterler üzerinden Jones un sorunsallaştırdığı akıl hastanesinde kadınların karşılaştıkları sistematik baskıyı ve bu baskıya karşı bir çözüm olarak sunduğu kadın dayanışmasını açığa çıkarmayı amaçlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Delilik, Akıl Hastaneleri, Kadın Dayanışması, Charlotte Jones, Havada Yüzmek.*

INTRODUCTION

Female madness has long been the subject of literature, reflecting a system that characterizes women as mentally ill because of their biological and social conditions and punishes them by socially isolating them. The American author and psychotherapist Phyllis Chesler suggests that "double standards in mental health and illness continue to exist, with women often being assigned punitive labels due to their gender, race, class, or sexual orientation" (2005, p. 94). Throughout the centuries, self-motivated and individual women have been viewed as a great threat to the patriarchal ideology and have therefore needed to be kept under male control for various pretexts. These free-spirited women, who do not conform to the established order, have often been seen as subject to harsh punishment. Many have often been labelled as insane and subsequently imprisoned in the hospitals. As Jane M. Ussher states, "madness acts as a signifier which positions women as ill, as outside, as pathological, as somehow second-rate--the second sex" (1991, p. 11), and thus emphasizes its role as a tool to diminish women's value and agency by reinforcing patriarchal norms. According to Ussher, "a difficult woman of the 16th century was castigated as a witch, and the same woman in the 19th century a hysteric, in the late 20th and 21st century, she is described as 'borderline' or as having PMDD" (2013, p. 69). The strong women with the knowledge of herbal medicine, unmarried or marginalized women were portrayed as evil, seductive, or manipulative, and transformed into objects of fear in the 16th century, representing society's anxieties about female power and independence. The 16th century was marked by a significant rise in witchcraft hunting, witchcraft

accusations and trials. There was also a notable trend towards the feminization of madness at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century. In a certain sense, madness was often characterized by a "female malady" (1987, p. 3) as articulated by the American feminist literary critic and scholar Elaine Showalter. According to Showalter, "even when both men and women had similar symptoms of mental disorder, psychiatry differentiated between an English malady, associated with the intellectual and economic pressures of highly civilized men, and a female malady, associated with the sexuality and essential nature of women" (Showalter, 1987, p. 7) In this century, women's emotional and psychological struggles were often pathologized as hysteria or other mental disorders. In other respects, the 20th century, the period of the significant advances in psychiatry, began to explain the female madness on a more scientific basis, and thus, as Shoshana Felman asserts, "madness and women turn out to be the two outcasts of the establishment of readability" (1975, p. 6). Female madness in the 20th century became the interplay of societal norms, medical practices, and cultural narratives.

The patriarchal structure, which has become increasingly powerful since the era of the goddess culture, often characterizes women by using negative adjectives such as weak, emotional, sensitive, submissive, unintelligent or incomplete to maintain control over women. These gender stereotypes can contribute to women being perceived as passive, enabling men to justify their power and status within socio-economic and cultural frameworks. As a result, women are often confined to the domestic sphere like home or left uneducated, deprived of economic independence, and hindered in their pursuit of success in public spheres. For centuries, women, defying patriarchal ideology in through their lifestyles, have often been suppressed by patriarchal authorities. Afterwards, these women, who do not conform to the established social norms, are often labelled with psychological or psychiatric disorders, which has often resulted in their confinement in psychiatric hospitals. It is often noted that "men's sadness and anger was considered to be related to situational factors –such as having a bad day– whereas sad or angry women were judged as emotional" (Barrett et all, Bliss-Moreau, 2009, p. 649). In other words, men's emotional reactions are explained by external factors while women's emotional reactions are attributed to their perceived emotional weaknesses. Men associated with logic have frequently employed this sexist discourse as a tool to manipulate women, who are perceived as being guided by their feelings, thereby reinforcing patriarchal authority.

Throughout history, men and women authors/playwrights have addressed female madness in distinctly different ways. While men authors/playwrights have frequently viewed female madness through a lens of pathology or weakness, women authors/playwrights have mostly embraced it as a means of resistance or self-expression, reflecting the complex dynamics of gender and mental health. In other words, madness in female narratives mostly "offers a social position from which women resist a masculine authority. (....) In madness, women find they are able to stake their claim to discourse" (Salkeld, 1993, p. 118). Many feminist scholars argue that madness in feminist literature functions as a subversive strategy to challenge societal and gendered norms/expectations to explore female identities beyond the confines of traditional roles. For instance, the French feminist philosopher Hélène Cixous critiques Western modes of thought, associating masculinity with rational logic and femininity with irrational emotion (1989, p. 101). In her essay "The Laugh of Medusa", Cixous suggests *women's writing* (*écriture féminine*) by emphasizing the redemptive power of female nature, women's spirituality and madness. Thus, she "resists patriarchal modes of thinking and writing, which generally require prescribed, correct methods of organization, rationalist rules of logic (…) and linear reasoning" (Tyson, 2006, pp. 100-101). She poses that women should write their selves and bodies as "the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth" (1976, p. 880). In the other respects, the renowned Bulgarian-French philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva views the literature stemming from women's experience and mind as "a means of protest against the dominant social order" (Winter, 1992, p. 13), by proposing the symbolic and the semiotic understanding of language. According to her, madness produces a language of non-reason that

critiques the supremacy of patriarchal thought and questions the uniformity of its logic within the system of meaning.

Patriarchal dominance often manifests itself in health institutions, as well as various other domains, including social, political, religious, cultural and economic institutions. According to Aayat Aziz and Kashish Goel,

> In the patriarchal system, women are subjected to subordination, submission, and oppression by men, while men maintain positions of authority and dominance over women. A patriarchal system shapes women, limiting their choices over their health and denies authority over their sexuality and bodies (2021, p. 2917).

According to Aziz and Goel, women who challenge the norms of the patriarchal order, defy traditional gender roles, or seek more control over their lives, are often stigmatised as mentally ill by the patriarchal system, and locked up in psychiatric hospitals as outcasts. As Chesler highlights, "a predominantly female population (…) has been diagnosed, psychoanalyzed, researched and hospitalized by predominantly male psychiatric population" (2005, p. 92). From Chesler's perspective, psychiatric hospitals become concrete spaces of patriarchal oppression on women. They often serve as a cage to keep women under the control and restrict their freedom. However, "madness is not, of course, exclusively a women's problem, as socially problematic behaviors that are often viewed as symptoms of madness, such as anger, violence, excessive alcohol consumption and depressive states, are experienced by both men and women" (Murdoch, 2016, p. 2). Yet, these gender-based diagnoses/stereotypes generally represent the nature of gender inequality and reinforced gender-based prejudices.

In her paper, "Psychiatry and the Feminine", Hilary Allen also emphasizes that psychiatry appears "a patriarchal institution that is fundamentally and necessarily oppressive to women" and proposes that "there is no space for a feminist intervention within it" (1986, p. 101). From Allen's perspective, psychiatric hospitals often become a place of confinement for women who challenge patriarchal norms. They are viewed as prisons of gender prejudices in terms of the form of patriarchal violence. Women, labelled as an insane, are in care of patriarchal force. Women are often mistreated in psychiatric hospitals, leading to a profound erosion of their individuality. As Chesler stresses, "women, by definition, are viewed as psychiatrically impaired-whether they accept or reject the female role-simply because they are women" (2005, p. 124). They are typically confined to psychiatric hospitals to be silenced and forced to accept patriarchal authority. As a matter of fact, Irigaray describes these places as a "place of incarceration for women" (1991, pp. 34-35). The American sociologist Erving Goffman, on the other hand, considers them as "[total] institutions (...) which function only as storage spaces for inmates" (1961, p. 74). All these scholars/thinkers suggest that these places are often prisons of women, outlawed and condemned by the patriarchy. This paper aims to examine the image of 'madwoman', the subjugated female experience and female solidarity in psychiatric hospitals, as suggested in Charlotte Jones's *Airswimming*.

1. A Story of Female Madness and Sisterhood in Charlotte Jones's *Airswimming*

> ***Dora/Dorph:*** *"My God, we've been treading water for years, haven't we? When we should have been swimming. Forgot about us for years and years. How could they have done that? That's not how it was supposed to be"* (Jones, 2004, p. 64).

Born in 1968, the British award-winning playwright Charlotte Jones begins her career as an actress and then turns to playwriting after the success of her first play, *Airswimming* (1997), premiered at the Battersea Arts Center in London. Her fourth stage play, *Humble Boy* (2002), also won both the Critics' Circle Best New Play Award and the People's Choice Best New Play Award. Her first play, *Airswimming*, described as "a comedy about despair" (Kane, 2017, line 9) by the playwright, brings her great success. Lyn Gardner asserts that "*Airswimming* was her attempt to take control of her life after years of sitting waiting for her agent to call. She joked to friends that the

women incarcerated in the asylum, hoping for news of a release, were actually Jones the actress sitting by the phone waiting for it to ring" (2001). She humorously suggests a parallel between women's hope of the salvation in the psychiatric hospital and her own waiting for an agent's call. Her successful play narrates a story of female madness and female solidarity through two women, sent to the prison of criminally ill, named St. Dymphna's Hospital[1]. According to Jones, her play, which seems to be "a story of moral imbeciles" (Akyürek, 2016, lines 20-21), expresses "the story of those who reach freedom by means of airswimming" (Akyürek, 2016, line 6). It is viewed as the story of "the power of resilience and relationship" (Dimberline, 2024). While writing this play, Jones takes her inspiration from a newspaper article about Miss Baker and Miss Kitson (Yates, 2024, lines 5-6). It originated from "a newspaper cutting announcing the 'release' of perfectly sane women from decades of incarceration in hospitals for the mentally ill, better known at the time as lunatic asylums" (*Swam Theatre*, 2024). The play is based on the real-life story of Miss Baker and Miss Kitson, who were confined to a psychiatric hospital in England in the 1920s by their parents, and who were forced to be there all through fifty years between 1922 and 1972. It should be historically noted that the 1913 Mental Deficiency Act allowed the doctors to classify their daughters whom their families referred to as 'moral imbeciles' if they had illegitimate children or failed to meet familial expectations, and conversely, the Community Care Act of 1990 enabled these women to be released and reintegrated into society, leading to the closure of many large psychiatric hospitals (Jarrett & Walmsley, 2019). The circumstances of these women in the psychiatric hospital provide a historical context for this issue. In other respects, according to Karl Levett, the play is "a small but sparkling gem that gleams with heartfelt anger, endearing comedy, and an underlying sadness" (2019, lines 6-7), because it both upsets the audience with the scenes of female madness and subjugation, while also providing hope through themes of female solidarity, feminist humor, and a hopeful ending.

The play, also staged by Jest Theatre in Türkiye in 2015, allows the audience to witness fifty-year captivity of two women, who are accused of being immoral madwomen. It vividly depicts these women's pain, excitement, disappointment, and their dreams in the basement where they clean. Their names are Dora Kidson and Persephone Baker in accordance with the references to real-life individuals; however, they also create their alter egos, addressing each other as Dorph and Porph. Their alter egos are their imaginary identities produced by their fantasies. According to Simon Saltzman, "their alter egos unwittingly become for them a last-ditch, life-supporting escape mechanism, just like the coordinated pretend swimming they do together" (2013, line 44). They also provide them with strength, solace, and hope for salvation within the four walls of the psychiatric hospital, allowing them to escape the harsh realities of their confinement and enduring their circumstances. These two women, who had once felt a greater distance between them, have become friends, united by their shared experience of patriarchal oppression and their common fate. According to Wolfgang Geissler,

> *Airswimming* tells how these two women share a room and a life together, each supporting the other when needed. At first, the stalwart Dora must encourage the vulnerable Persephone, who is under the impression that she is only there to convalesce. However, as the years go on, Dora begins to despair, and Persephone must comfort her. To survive their endless incarceration, Dora and Persephone adopt alter egos, Dorph and Porph, who regularly enact fantasies. Porph takes on the personification of Doris Day, while Dorph celebrates triumphant historical women, often in the guise of a man (2023, lines 34-39).

[1] The story of St. Dymphna's Hospital is based on the myth of Dymphna, who lived in the 7th century and was killed by her father. According to the legend, Dymphna's father, a king who was extremely devoted to his wife, lost his sanity after her death. Driven by his disturbed mind, he decided to marry Dymphna, who had a striking resemblance to her mother. In fear of this fate, Dymphna fled the palace; however, her father relentlessly pursued her. Ultimately, he found her and martyred her in a fit of madness and despair. Following this tragic event, Dymphna was canonized as a saint and she became the patron saint of the mentally ill (Dresvina, 2003, pp. 83-84).

As Geissler highlights, the play tells the story of two 'madwomen', struggling to survive in a small room, but it remains uncertain whether they are truly mad. In the beginning, Dora, marked by a strong, decisive and bold nature, consistently supports the fragile woman Persephone during her desperate moments. Persephone fully imitates Doris Day with her wig, while Dora, disguised as a man, tells the stories of the victorious historical women such as Jeanne d'Arc, using military metaphors to embody their strength and courage. Jeanne d'Arc is an icon for Dora because of her embodiment of courage and defiance against oppressive forces. According to Chesler,

> Although, like all Kore-Maidens, she serves as a source of male renewal, she does so through her military victories and her subsequent political and sexual persecution. Her identity, as such, is a crucial one for women. Although she is doomed (and women might identify with her on this ground alone), she is also physically and spiritually bold; she is a leader of men; she does not become a mother. (...) As such, she begins to step completely outside the realm of patriarchal culture. For this, she is killed in her own lifetime—and sometimes re-experienced by those women who are mad enough to wish to 'step outside' culture also (2005, p. 67).

Jeanne d'Arc is viewed as a heroine who challenges the patriarchal norms of her time and struggles for agency and empowerment. Dora admires Jeanne's ability to stand firm in her beliefs despite the overwhelming persecution she faced, within the confines of a psychiatric hospital, seeing her as a symbol of resilience and strength. These two women oppose the gendered norms. Persephone illegally gives a birth to an illegitimate child from a married man in an unlawful way and is punished by her father. Similarly, Dora relishes the moments of her liberation through her masculine mannerisms; however, she is ultimately punished.

The play is set in the well-known St. Dymphna's Hospital, where women who are deemed to have committed sexual offenses are labelled as insane and hospitalized. They get together for an hour every day to clean the bathtub and stairs, tell some stories, and airswim within the synchronized mimes, which means "a lifeline as the two bond" (Kane, 2017, line 32). In the play, through a non-linear narration, the audience witnesses a repetitive relationship between Persephone and Dora, which accordingly "begins to melt time and space" (Yates, 2024, line 20). It is also impossible to determine whether these women are truly insane or if they are still confined at this psychiatric hospital. According to Simon Saltzman, "the play's dramatic device to have time lose its purpose and meaning enables us to see Dora and Persephone obliged to forfeit their previous lives, indeed, their personalities in order to exist in a new world created out of their collective imagining" (Saltzman, 2013, lines 39-40). These two women transform themselves into their idealized personas in their imaginative worlds throughout the temporal transitions in each scene, turning the story of female madness and the subjugation of women into one "about two women, slowly coming to the realization that they will never be rescued, and so they rescue each other" (Finnegan Bungeroth, 2013, lines 104-105). This realization highlights the themes of solidarity and resilience against the established oppression, emphasizing the strength of friendship in their fight for agency.

The play begins with the first meeting of Dora and Persephone in this psychiatric hospital. Initially, they do not like each other at first, and they are completely strangers. Persephone seems to look down upon her, and thusly, even humiliating her by describing her as "unhinged, cigar smoking, monomaniac transsexual" (Jones, 2004, p. 57). However, they begin to develop a friendship as they recognize their need for each other. During the first encounter, Dora introduces herself and this psychiatric institution to Persephone, who is unaware of why she has come to St. Dymphna's Hospital:

> **Dora:** For the Criminally Insane, yes. St Dymphna's -there she is. (*She gestures towards picture.*) I am Dora Kitson and we are now on polishing duty. The year is, correct me if I'm wrong, which incidentally. In ever am, 1924. All present and correct. I've been here since

> 1922. Yes, stationed here July 4th –American Independence Day– funny that (Jones, 2004, p. 9).

Dora greets Persephone, remarking that the hospital is a place for criminals and mentally ill people. She stresses that Persephone, confused by her sudden change in circumstances, now finds herself in St. Dymphna's Hospital in the year 1924. According to Megan Finnegan Bungeroth, "within the first two minutes, Dora establishes the world into which Persephone has been thrust, although the newcomer refuses to accept it" (2013, lines 41-42). Dora also ironically mentions that she has been there since 1922, coinciding with the anniversary of America's declaration of independence. This highlights her sense of humor and illustrates the paradox of freedom. While a nation celebrates its liberation, an individual woman finds herself suppressed and oppressed by the patriarchal system, losing her physical freedom.

Rabia Sarısoy suggests that madness "as a label ascribed by society is a weapon to discipline women or a veil to cover the fears of a society related to the presence of subversive female individuals" (2021, p. 2). She implies that female madness raises as a mechanism of control over women, reflecting male fears about female empowerment. According to her, this notion highlights how the social system often pathologizes women's behaviours that deviate from traditional gender norms, using the label of madness to suppress female voices. Noel Hunter also asserts that "psychiatry was a potential tool to keep them in check to draw attention to the pathologization of women's reactions" (2019, p. 148). According to him, psychiatric hospitals are used as a patriarchal tool to undermine women's autonomy and reinforce existing gendered power dynamics. These hospitals are seen as spaces where women are isolated and cut off from their links with the society. While Chesler acknowledges these aspects, she believes that the women who are hospitalized or labelled as mentally ill, are heroic rebels, fighting against the limitations imposed by traditional notions of femininity (2005, p. 66). As a matter of fact, both Dora and Persephone may be seen as free-spirited and resilient women, who abandon traditionally gendered behavioural norms, and challenge the power structures that seek to maintain control over them. Through these attitudes, they seem to be a threat to the ideology and these women need to be controlled by their families. Although they are viewed as heroic figures in their liberated attitudes, they are, in one sense, "victims of society's rigid gender norms" (Yates, 2024, line 11), because they are confined to St. Dymphna's Hospital to be disciplined and be prevented from disrupting the strict dynamism. These two women, subjected to the oppression of the patriarchal system and victimized by this system, as Jones stresses, tell their stories of confinement in their own words. They are alienated from the rest of the society within their isolation. The following dialogue provides the audience with the information of Persephone's reasons for her confinement in the psychiatric hospital:

> **Persephone/Porph:** There's been a terrible mistake.
> **Dora/Dorph:** Very probably. There are always mistakes. But they are seldom rectified.
> **Persephone/Porph:** I must contact my father.
> **Dora/Dorph:** No contact with outside world, I'm afraid. But I'm thrilled you're here. I've waited two years for you.
> **Persephone/Porph:** You don't understand. I must get a message through to my father. I absolutely must. I have to speak to someone in authority. Can you call them for me?
> **Dora/Dorph:** It won't do you any good. It's better not to make a fuss. I've tried it and I know. Damn nearly court-marshalled I was.
> **Dora/Dorph:** Your father brought you here?
> **Persephone/Porph:** Well, Daddy called the Doctor, you see. I was just at home. In the nursery. Minding my own business. And this doctor came. A nasty, nasty man. He asked me all sorts of impossible questions. I couldn't answer them. I'm rotten with questions, you see. I'm not very bright, Daddy says. And I just couldn't answer them, try as I might. And then they restrained me, you see. I was jolly upset. All the questions you see. Mind you, I

> put up a fight. Oh yes I did. And Daddy called me a witch. He called me a witch. Then he brought me here. To convalesce, he said. It all happened so quickly you see (Jones, 2004, p. 11).

In this dialogue, the audience witnesses Persephone's current trauma and the weight of the pressure over her shoulders. In her madness narrative, Persephone is victimized by her father because of her illegal baby from a married man, Reginald. In relation to this issue, as Chesler highlights, the twentieth century saw a time when pregnant and unmarried women were often psychiatrically pathologized and forcibly separated from their newborns. In the early 1970s in the UK, women had been confined in psychiatric institutions for fifty years due to having illegitimate children. Additionally, she notes that sexually active teenagers in Ireland had been sent to nunneries for the rest of their lives, where they were kept under the control of abusive nuns and to engage in hard labor as punishment for their sexual transgressions (2005, p. 167). Analogously, Persephone dramatically seeks help from his father, who has imprisoned her in this psychiatric hospital. She wishes to call her father, insisting that her confinement in this psychiatric hospital is a great mistake. Dora attempts to convince Persephone that her efforts are futile by recalling her own past attempts, suggesting that they were in vain. Dora also underscores that this place does not allow any communication or contact with anybody from the outside world, because it is a site of isolation and captivity. It is "a place of misery where inmates were locked up and left to the mercy of their keepers" (*Science Museum*, 2018). Dora, however, says that a new person in this psychiatric hospital means a friend or companion to her, and thusly, summing up the relentless nature of unfreedom in psychiatric hospital while Persephone is suffering from her current condition in desperation. Persephone also becomes "an embarrassment to her upper-crust family" (Yates, 2024, lines 11-12) because of this birth out of wedlock. In the fifth scene, she accidentally finds out the doctor's diagnosis on her. In doctor's notes, she is labelled as "a moral imbecile" (Jones, 2004, p. 27), which shakes her self-confidence and her sense of identity. At that point, doctor of this psychiatric hospital emerges as "an agent of normal society, who can formally and professionally apply the label of 'mad' to the patient" (Murdoch, 2016, p. 63). Persephone faces this reality with greater bitterness, feeling herself both worthless and helpless.

From Jones's perspective, Dora's narrative of madness serves as another illustration of the oppression experienced by women. On Persephone's question in the third scene, Dora also reveals why she is locked up in St. Dymphna's Hospital:

> **Dora/Dorph:** Why are you here?
> *Silence.*
> It's hard at first, I know. But you have to keep focused. Like Joan of Arc. Incarceration didn't get her down. She took it like a man. Refused to wear frocks. Had a short crop. They thought it was deviancy. I try to be deviant whenever I can. Vive la deviance (Jones, 2004, p. 18).

With her strong personality and her boldness, Dora has also found herself in St. Dymphna Hospital because she breaks the gender roles and threatens the system through her masculine mannerisms. As Carol Rosegg underlines, she is a "tomboy with a taste for cigars and military history" (2013, line 13). Dora is also accused of being a witch and bastard by the authority. She, feeling sorry for the loss of her three brothers in the Great War, likes telling the military stories and behaving like a soldier. It offers Chesler's assertation that men typically enjoy a broader range of acceptable behaviours compared to women, who are more rigidly confined to their roles (2005, p. 75). In other respects, Dora also plans to escape over the years of her imprisonment. Dora's non-conformist behaviour in her life further supports Chesler's idea that women, who reject gendered roles, are perceived as threatening by society, which is why they are often hospitalized and labelled with psychiatric terms such as schizophrenia, lesbianism, or promiscuity (2005, p. 87). Dora is also labelled as a deviant person because of her choices and masculine mannerisms. Her captivity in St. Dymphna's Hospital is not easy for Dora; however, she strives to remain strong and plans to escape

from her captivity in this psychiatric hospital. By following Jeanne d'Arc's endurance and struggle, who bravely resisted despite all her captivity and ignored social norms, Dora resists against the hegemony. Chesler marks that conformity to the "'feminine' role was the measure of female mental health and psychiatric progress" (2005, p. 73). Jones asserts that both women challenge the definitions of femininity set by the system and were sent to this psychiatric hospital to conform to these predetermined expectations of femininity.

At all points ranging from their lifestyles to their social status, these two women are exactly different from each other; however, they are united by a shared destiny. Both are viewed as the victims of the patriarchal system, even though they come from different backgrounds. According to Anita Gates,

> Persephone, the newcomer, is a delicate, confused creature who believes she is being released any day now, to make her society debut at the Dorchester in London. Dora is literate, articulate and often acid tongued, with an obsession for women who have cross-dressed their way into military battle (2013, lines 41-49).

Dora is characterized by her strength, boldness, self-confidence, belief and hope until the twelfth scene, as compared to Persephone, who is pretentious, hopeless, vulnerable, and hysterical. In their relationship, Dora is always realist, eccentric, careful, and hopeful whereas Persephone is delusional, anxious, fearful and helpless. As the story progresses, the dynamic structure shifts with their changing roles and moods. Orla O'Sullivan highlights the cultural and perspective differences between them as follows:

> *Airswimming* focuses on the coping mechanisms two completely opposite types of women use to rise up when dragged down to the emotional deep. (…) Dora is a repressed, dry-witted, intelligent lesbian, probably lower middle class. Persephone is a flighty, upper-crust beautiful blonde with wit to match the stereotype. Her heroine later on is Doris Day; Dora's is Joan of Arc, together with a whole succession of women who went into battle (2013, lines 20-22).

As noted in this quote, Persephone, who comes from high-class background, is obsessed with the famous American singer and actress Doris Day, while Dora, from lower middle-class background, is captivated by the brave women of history such as Joan of Arc and Maria Bochkareva. Besides, Dora mostly calms desperate Persephone and tries to protect her spirit. O'Sullivan asserts that the play revolves around the story of the unity and friendship of two women with their contrasting personalities against the facts of life in a patriarchal society. Despite their differences, they manage to come together in solidarity around their shared experiences.

According to Chesler, "madness and asylums generally function as mirror images of the female experience, and as penalties for being female as well as desiring or daring not to be" (2005, p. 60). From Chesler's perspective, being labelled as 'mad' or 'insane' or imprisoned in psychiatric hospitals refers to the biggest blow to women's freedom. It may mean ignoring the existence of women on earth, and it may be a basic sign of inequality between men and women. Sarısoy also confirms this thought by asserting that "mental hospitals were not just places to treat mad individuals. Also, they were (used) as a means of patriarchy and power struggle between man and woman" (2021, p. 23). As both Chesler and Sarısoy highlight, psychiatric hospitals seem to be the spheres of gender-based power struggles. They frequently legalize patriarchal domination by maintaining its world order and oppressing free women. Similarly, in the sixth scene, their patriarchal captivity in this psychiatric hospital is compared with the mythical figure Persephone's fate in the myth of Persephone that can be read as a source of "the fact that men consider women just material objects which can easily be manipulated and misused" (Uğurel Özdemiz, 2023, p. 207). Because of her beauty, Persephone is kidnapped by Hades, God of the Underground. She becomes a victim of abduction or rape by Hades. In this man-oriented myth, Persephone doesn't have the right to make a choice on her life or the right to express herself freely. According to Chesler, "Persephone, like her

mother, is denied uniqueness, individuality, and cultural potency. Neither Demeter nor Persephone is allowed to become a 'heroine': one represents the earth, the other represents a return to earth. Their single fate symbolizes the inevitable, endless breaking of each individual woman on the wheel of culturally devalued biological reproduction" (2005, p. 232). Chesler underlines that both Demeter and Persephone are often confined to predefined roles and reduced to their biological functions such as reproduction. The system limits their agency around rigid gender roles by establishing the cycle of oppression over them. Both Dora and Persephone are regarded as the victims of the patriarchal hegemony like these mythical figures. They are also sent to this psychiatric hospital voluntarily and they have no right to change this ill fortune (Jones, 2024, pp. 34-35). They are forced to live under the power of the system and endure its oppressions. However, their alter-egos and dreams keep them from committing suicide. As Porph, Persephone wears a Doris Day wig, sings this actress's songs and constantly praises her. In one sense, she employs "Doris Day's own mask of cheery wholesomeness to get her through the darkest times in her life" (Finnegan Bungeroth, 2013, lines 73-74). On the other hand, as Dorph, Dora uses military escapism and the stories of the victories by historical women. This dialogue in the second scene exemplifies their opposing sides by highlighting the emotional balance between them:

> **Dorph:** You really are a terrible worrier, Porph. The worst case scenario doesn't always happen. You mustn't torment yourself. You're here with mean nothing and nobody else matters.
> **Porph:** Thank you Dorph. You help me get through things. I didn't think you could but you do (Jones, 2004, p. 15).

Dora always offers hope to Persephone during her moments of pain. Reminding Persephone that there is no real reason for their presence in this psychiatric hospital, Dora encourages both herself and Persephone to resist the oppression they face. Dora consistently highlights the significance of agency and solidarity in the oppressive order, because their strong resistance is the most efficacious reaction against the oppression on them.

Sisterhood, introduced by the American feminist Robin Morgan in her 1970 publication "Sisterhood is Powerful", is one of the strongest weapons in women's fight and resistance to the patriarchal system. Morgan highlights that sisterhood is powerful (1970), global (1984), and forever (2007). She refers to a profound female bond that transcends cultural and geographical boundaries, by believing the transformative power of sisterhood as a catalyst for social change. As Clenora Hudson-Weems asserts, sisterhood is "a reciprocal (bond) (…) in which each gives and receives equally (…) demonstrating a tremendous sense of responsibility for each other" (2004, p. 65). According to Sally J. Scholz, this bond is "an ocean of unity among all women, that is, that all women are sisters. Sisterhood is found on shared experiences of oppression. Woman might bond over shared anxieties, sufferings and trials" (2011, p. 74). It may be a notion of unity or solidarity among all women as the victims of the oppressive authority. It may be a female bonding by sharing experiences of male violence and oppression. The greatest strength that keeps these two women alive in their captivity is this female bonding. Their sisterhood can save them from being confined by mental chains. These two women, supporting each other both mentally and physically, are bound by the bond of sisterhood. From this viewpoint, the audience witnesses "the story of two women who find their only solace and hope is in one another" (Orel, 2013, line 93). It is the story of friendship that provides emotional support and resilience against the system while cultivating a sense of hope for the future. It is the story of "a growing intense dependence on each other and eventually becoming each other's rock" (Beake, 2021, lines 8-9). It is a driving force for individual and collective liberation. It indicates how a strong bond of sisterhood can bring a sense of liberation to women. For instance, in the seventh scene, Persephone shares her despair and helplessness along with her inner pain and worries about the future, with Dora who psychologically supports her as her companion:

> **Persephone/Porph:** No, you're bloody not. Oh, what have I ever done to deserve you? I don't think I can bear this much longer. Never say never, Mummy always said. But don't

> you see that here you can always say never. I'll never see Reggie again, never kiss him and hold him. I'll never see my family, never come out, never get married, never wear fine dresses, never buy hats. The weight of it all is killing me. I'll never dance again, for God's sake. I'll never dance. And I'm such a fine dancer. The best, Reggie said. I can't bear it. Never to get up and dance. Simply dance. The only certainty in my life is you. An unhinged cigar-smoking monomaniac transsexual. I must have done something really terrible. Beyond terrible (Jones, 2004, p. 57).

In this dialogue, Persephone points out that she longs for her life in the outside world and believes that she will never see her lover Reginald and her family again. She yearns for the chance to get married, wear nice clothes, and buy a hat. While she grapples with feelings of guilt and despair amidst of her painful and seemingly meaningless existence in the psychiatric hospital, her only passion remains dancing. Although Dora does not know how to dance, she offers to dance with Persephone to lift her spirits. Their shared activity of dancing becomes one of the most cherished moments of their female solidarity. Dora's heartfelt offer to dance with Persephone establishes the transformative power of the sisterhood.

Such a moment also arises in the eighth scene where Persephone utters her despair and hopelessness again. In this powerful moment of female solidarity, Dora takes action to help Persephone find hope. She listens empathetically to Persephone's feelings, providing a safe space for her to express her fears and anxieties:

> **Porph:** Sometimes I feel like nothing good will ever happen. It'll always be the same or worse.
> **Dorph:** Nothing is either good or bad but thinking makes it so.
> **Dorph:** You never know what's round the corner. Your life is full of golden opportunity. Anything could happen.
> **Porph:** I don't know. It's like I lost something really good along the way and I can't remember now what it was (Jones, 2004, p. 44).

In her hopelessness, Persephone believes that nothing will be good in the future and this current situation will either remain the same or worsen. On the contrary, Dora, referring to Elizabethan playwright William Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* (1623), stresses that whether something is perceived as good or bad is completely the matter of personal perspective. Dora offers her to have a new perspective on their circumstances. Through this reference, Dora not only proves her intellectual depth but also supports Persephone as a great experience of sisterhood, while putting forward the idea that life is full of opportunities despite all its uncertainties.

The most therapeutic moments in their lives occur when Persephone and Dora sing and dance together freely. Their funny moments allow them to momentarily escape from the harsh realities of life in St. Dymphna's Hospital, drawing them into an unending and boundless world created by their imagination and fantasies. In these shared moments, they transcend their struggles against the system, by finding solace, connection, and sisterhood. According to Charlotte Jones,

> The dance and song elements are crucial to the sense of joy that the play can bring in performance. Dora and Persephone find each other and remain essentially free even though they are incarcerated because of the pleasure and solace they find in each other's company. Dora and Persephone manage to save each other and transform into their alter egos Dora and Persephone in order to survive (Jones, 2020, lines 43-49).

Their fantasies allow them to break free from the confines of the psychiatric hospital, enabling them to enjoy a sense of the freedom and explore new possibilities beyond the strict authority. These moments may be the ones when they can truly be themselves, despite their physical confinement. Persephone, who assumes herself as Doris Day, also feel relaxed by singing songs. It seems that Day's song *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, sung by Persephone in the second scene, ironically makes a sense of summing up their uncertain future in this psychiatric hospital to the audience:

When I was just a little girl
I asked my mother what will I be
Will I be pretty, will I be rich
Here's what she said to me
Que sera sera –
Whatever will be will be
The future's not ours to see
Que sera sera (Jones, 2004, pp. 15-16).

This song is about a little girl's questions about her future, like 'Will I be pretty?' or 'Will I be rich?'. Her mother responds that the future is uncertain and should be accepted as it comes. Ironically, the uncertainty of the future also arises in the lives of Persephone and Dora. In this grim condition, Dora tries to maintain her belief and hope, reminding her that "It's better if we keep ourselves to ourselves" (Jones, 2004, p. 17). In other respects, Dora will lose her own hope after the eleventh scene, and Persephone will become a new source of hope for her, showing a renewed sense of possibility. This experience of the companionship among these women illustrates the transformative power of sisterhood in healing and self-preservation.

Besides singing and dancing, 'swimming through the air' is another of the most therapeutic moments in their lives. According to Rosegg, "the two women practice 'airswimming', synchronized swimming through the air instead of in a pool, in dancelike moves that show all the life, yearning and beauty they maintain throughout their thwarted lives" (2013, lines 61-63). They flawlessly show that physical captivity is no obstacle to the freedom of the mind. The act of swimming through the air is like "a coping mechanism for the women" (Richter, 2017, line 32). Therefore, they maintain their hopes and themselves by keeping their dreams alive. This metaphor in the play's title also refers to "a metaphor for their surreal journey through the decades" (Yates, 2024, lines 25-26). It can express their detachment from the real world, their longing for freedom and their desire to live outside the social norms. Jones alleges that the play "expressed perfectly to (her) the emancipation that the two women find in each other in a world where they are denied the simple act of coming up for air -and yet still they swim!" (Jones, 2017, lines 18-20). It can also represent their efforts for liberation through imagination in a world where they are physically restricted and pressured. In the eighth scene, Dora presents their strong bond by saying "You and me are the number one Great British synchronised airswimming team" (Jones, 2004, p. 43), promising Persephone a shared sense of friendship, solidarity, and support.

As Yeliz Biber Vangölü argues, "authorities across centuries have employed sets of ideas suitable for their ages in order to fully exercise their power, to follow self-interest, or to win battles. That means there has always been a claim on the human bodymind as well as on the pieces of earth" (2021, p. 67). In this regard, manifestation and institutionalization of patriarchal dominance over women are formed by a set of ideas, including social structures, practices and cultural norms. While patriarchy attempts to control women physically and mentally through the sexist discourses that reinforce its power, it effectively invades their bodymind. On the other hand, by labeling them as 'mad', imprisoning their bodies in the darkness of psychiatric hospitals, and reshaping their minds according to societal norms, this invasion manifests in different ways for women. The psychiatric hospital where Dora and Persephone are confined because of their lifestyles has become the embodiment of this invasion. However, their fantasy world serves as a symbol of their radical resistance to this invasion, both physically and mentally.

According to Tingting Qi, sisterhood refers to a strong bond "beyond the kinship bond between female siblings and extended to the supportive ties between women across differences" (2010, p. 328). It refers to the supportive connections among women from diverse backgrounds. Similarly, Dora and Persephone come from different classes and cultures; however, they share a common bond through their struggles. As the American feminist scholar and theorist bell hooks highlights that "sexist ideology teaches women that to be female is to be a victim" (1986, p. 128), Dora and

Persephone realize this fact through their bitter experiences. Despite this misfortune, these two women manage to cultivate a deep sisterly bond, empowering each other by sharing their dreams and fears. Dora always gives Persephone hope until the eleventh scene. Whenever Persephone feels despair and helpless, Dora becomes a remedy for her hopelessness. For example, in the ninth scene, Persephone, overwhelmed by the pain of having her child taken away, expresses her anger about her long-term captivity:

> **Persephone/Porph:** What year is it now, Dora?
> **Dora/Dorph:** 1926.
> **Persephone/Porph:** Oh God. I've been here long enough now haven't I? How much longer will it be, Dora?
> **Dora/Dorph:** I don't know.
> Persephone/Porph: Please tell me how much longer.
> **Dora/Dorph:** The Great War lasted for four years.
> **Persephone/Porph:** Four years! What's great about that? But what about the Thirty Years War, how long was that?
> **Dora/Dorph:** It was longer.
> **Persephone/Porph:** Yes! And what about the Hundred Years War? What about that? That went on for ever, didn't it?
> **Dora/Dorph:** Yes, yes it did (Jones, 2004, pp. 50-51).

Persephone asks Dora how long she has been in the hospital. In a sense, Persephone seems to lose her sense of time in this quest, as "the fluid timeline flows between the harsh linear world of the hospital and a world of their imagination" (Holt et all, 2023, lines 10-11). By referring to the long years of the Great War and the Thirty Years' War, they draw attention to their long-term imprisonment. In this case, Dora calms her, showing the depth of their friendship and sisterhood. In their continuing speech, their sisterhood functions as a means of "renewing and mending each other" (Rammutla, 2005, p. 153) and "a nurturant, supportive feeling of attachment and loyalty" (Dill, 1983, p. 132):

> **Dora/Dorph:** There's no telling when it will stop. We have to put it out of our minds. We have to keep fighting. We're in this campaign together now. And we have to keep fighting.
> **Persephone/Porph:** Oh, Dora, let's not think about it any more.
> **Dora/Dorph:** No, we'll start again tomorrow. Each day is a new day.
> **Persephone/Porph:** Thank you, Dora. You're so strong. I was wrong about you. And about Reginald. I'd rather be in your regiment. I don't know what I'd do without this hour every day. Polishing. Ah well. Chin up. Good night, Dora (Jones, 2004, pp. 50-51).

In that moment, Dora attempts to raise their hopes again and strengthen their solidarity in their struggles for life by emphasizing that each day is a new beginning, and that one must find renewed hope with each new day. Until the eleventh scene, Dora always supports and uplifts Persephone during her darkest moments. However, after this critical scene, the dynamics between these two women begin to change and they exchange their roles after the eleventh scene. Persephone becomes more childlike whereas Dora fades into despair (Yates, 2024, lines 28-29). In the meantime, Persephone starts to speak more quickly, struggling to clearly control her memories. Dora also begins to lose her link with time and life, and she is no longer strong or hopeful. Henceforth, Dora embarks on reflecting her anger about their long-term captivity and runs out of hope. At this very time, Persephone turns into someone who uplifts Dora's hopes as a matter of sisterhood:

> **Dora/Dorph:** Bravado, Persephone. Truth is I'm a coward. Always have been. That's why I fit in here. With all the other lost souls.
> **Persephone/Porph:** We're just tired. There's only so much polishing a person can do. It has got easier, Dora.
> **Dora/Dorph:** Not for me.

> **Persephone/Porph:** I'll help you. You've always helped me in the past. It's my turn now.
> (…)
> **Persephone/Porph:** Shh. Shush now, you rest. It's your turn to rest (Jones, 2004, pp. 57-58).

Dora, who draws a strong image at the beginning of the play through her logical speeches and decisive personality, loses all her hopes with the cruel passing of the time. Dora, who feels deeply hopeless and helpless deeply, needs for Persephone's support and sisterhood. It is Persephone's turn to feed Dora's hope and support her, which reflects another striking example of their keen solidarity. These can be the most critical moments in their struggle against the oppression, where their unwavering support for each other challenges the oppressive male forces that confine them within the psychiatric hospital.

One of the most touching moments of female subjugation in Jones's play occurs during Dora's monologue in the thirteenth scene. As Persephone sleeps, Dora delivers a long and emotional speech. In her affective speech, she reveals the depths of her despair and frustration, which stem from societal expectations that weigh heavily on her. Through these expressions, she invites the audience to reflect on the broader implications of female oppression:

> **Dora/Dorph:** Persephone. I know you're asleep. I don't want to wake you. I think it's time. Lay down my arms and all that. It's time to lie down and take it like a man. I don't know what year it is, you see, Persephone. I just don't know. I thought I was inviolable to attack. As stiff an upper lip as my pater. I only wanted to wear men's clothes. Smoke a few cigars. A few shiny medals and a cricket box, you know the sort of thing. I thought we'd get out one day. Reward for years of service. We'd be handed it all on a silver platter. But the current's too strong, isn't it, old girl? My God, we've been treading water for years, haven't we? When we should have been swimming. Hades took us to the underworld, didn't he, Persephone? But Demeter and the family just forgot about us. Forgot about us for years and years. How could they have done that? That's not how it was supposed to be. We were supposed to see the Spring again, weren't we? (Jones, 2004, p. 64).

Jones suggests that Dora is subjugated by the heteronormative norms that characterize gender as a binary category of man and woman. As a woman who challenges traditional gender roles, she suffers from transgender discrimination. She is one of the "casualties of an overly rigid sex role differentiation" (Eichler, 1980, p. 82). In her work *Transsexual Empire* (1980), Janice Raymond describes "a patriarchal society, which generates norms of masculinity and femininity" (Raymond, 1980, p. 70) as the first cause of transgender. According to Raymond, the restrictive definition of the gender gives rise to transgender identities, leading them to reject their assigned sex and bodily identity in favour of another. In her emotional monologue, the audience witnesses Dora's internal conflict between her authentic self and the roles imposed upon her as well as her acceptance of female subjugation. Dora, who constantly describes herself as a soldier throughout the play, is about to give up her struggle. In her own words, Dora finds herself on the brink of giving up her weapons, stopping her fighting and surrendering. Agonizingly, she metaphorically expresses that they are captivated by Hades, forgotten by their families in this psychiatric hospital. In her monologue, she just adds her heartfelt gratitude to Persephone for her support and sisterhood despite all the difficulties.

In the fifteenth scene, Persephone also acts with the spirit of sisterhood to keep Dora alive. When Dora's despair deepens, she expresses that they are growing old and has given up. At that point, Persephone also supports her friend again by inviting her to continue their struggle as in the old days and manifests the power of female solidarity:

> **Persephone/Porph:** We can face it, Dora. We can face this. We've got the mettle. We can stare this in the face. But you mustn't leave me. You must never try this again. You're not leaving me now. Dora, I didn't ask to be put with you. But put with you I was, and you're not taking the coward's way out.
> **Dora/Dorph:** I was tired.

> **Persephone/Porph:** Being tired has nothing to do with it. Dora, you're a sergeant-major. A bloody sergeant-major. The Royal Fusiliers. In charge of. In charge of – help me out here, Dora.
> (…)
> **Persephone/Porph:** Absobloodylutely. Come on, Dora. Let's dance. (…)
> **Dora/Dorph:** I can't.
> **Persephone/Porph:** Of course you can. We're only just getting going. Let's kick up a stink. They made us mad when we were twenty, and now we're young again. Let's dance for Caesar, for Joanie and for all the bloody nuts in here. Let's dance for us, Dora. Old witchy hags that we are. Come on (Jones, 2004, pp. 71-72).

Dora runs out of her hope, worn down by the long years spent in St. Dymphna's Hospital. Though she feels tired and aged, her only chance to survive is Persephone, who is full of hope and joy of life unlike herself. Persephone reminds her that age is not a barrier to struggle and hope. Persephone tries to encourage her to fight against all these inequalities. She offers her to get over the difficulties by means of their sisterhood, by insisting her to swim through the air and to dance. This is one of the most profound moments of female bonding amid despair, proving the transformative power of solidarity.

In other respects, the audience must wait until the last scene of the play to see the liberation of these women from their long captivity. Set in the year 1972, this scene is marked by a turning point as they prepare to leave the psychiatric hospital. They have been given the option to reside separately or together in accommodations arranged by the municipality. This latest development symbolizes not only their physical freedom but also a significant shift in their lives, offering hope for a future beyond the confines of the psychiatric hospital. At that point, Dora and Persephone dream a future where they can grow potted plants, make pottery and listen to beautiful music in their new lives. Then, the two older women hold hands and continue their routine of airswimming, which holds a great opportunity for these two women by featuring their resilience and the enduring strength of their bond. Finally, Jones ends her play on an optimistic tone, encouraging the audience to reflect on feminist effort and the possibility of a new beginning through the end of their long captivity.

CONCLUSION

For the centuries, madness has been viewed as a forceful weapon by patriarchal system against self-motivated and independent women, who are often seen as a potential threat to the established order. According to Naheed Qasim and et all, "it is not a surprise that a society so absorbed with female submissiveness to the patriarchal system and with such a narrow view of proper female behavior should associate madness primarily with women" (2015, p. 234). Women, often associated with moral abnormalities, are frequently confined to the psychiatric hospitals. In societies where men have greater opportunities and privileges, psychiatric hospitals are often thought to play an important role in keeping these women under control, restricting them to subjugated positions, and maintaining traditional gender roles. These institutions are regarded as health institutions that can, at times, uphold the subservient status of women. Influenced by societal values, they may contribute to the perception of women's roles within the community. Feminist playwrights tend to focus on female madness as a gendered construct of patriarchy in their works. They generally emphasize that women's experiences of mental distress are often caused by systemic oppression that imposes rigid gender roles over women. They also suggest female bonding as a source of strength, resilience, social change and solidarity. Female madness and solidarity have also become main concerns of *Airswimming*, the first play by the award-winning British playwright Charlotte Jones. This play not only explores the image of 'the madwoman' but also manifests the power of female solidarity. The play focuses on the fifty-year imprisonment of two women, Dora Kitson and Persephone Baker in a psychiatric hospital. It is based on the true story of two women, Miss Kitson and Miss Baker, who have been abandoned in a hospital for the 'criminally insane'. The two female characters of the

play are also confined in St. Dymphna's Hospital, the psychiatric hospital of criminally insane, and forgotten by their families. These women are accused of being immoral imbeciles, and they experience a female subjugation through their confinement in a psychiatric hospital. According to Jones, their identities and individual choices are disregarded by the oppressive hegemony that restricts their liberation, making them victims of gender-based oppression. In her challenging play, Jones portrays female madness as a cultural, social and gendered construct shaped by patriarchal norms, framing psychiatric hospitals as institutionalized spaces that reinforce this construct. During their fifty years of imprisonment, these two women from completely different backgrounds reveal to the audience that the bond of sisterhood serves as a powerful mechanism of resistance against the established oppression. These two women, who initially disfavour each other, ultimately become friends against their subjugation. Their shared fate, shaped by their lifestyles, brings them to a common ground, encouraging them to find hope, strength and solidarity in their experiences. Their sisterhood empowers them to endure their fifty years of captivity by forming an imaginary world, where they create their alter-egos Dorph and Porph, allowing them to dance, sing and airswim freely. It encourages them to assert their agency, by challenging oppressive norms. In this play, Jones portrays sisterhood as a means of survival in the patriarchal world order**,** allowing to experience spiritual liberation despite physical imprisonment. Consequently, Jones's *Airswimming* manifests the patriarchal pressure on women through mental health systems and highlights how women find hope against the oppressions of the system by developing female solidarity.

Genişletilmiş Özet

Bu çalışma, Britanyalı ödüllü oyun yazarı Charlotte Jones'un *Havada Yüzmek* adlı oyununda öne çıkan 'deli kadın' imgesini ve ataerkil sistemin baskısına karşı bir çözüm olarak ortaya koyduğu kadın dayanışmasını incelemeyi amaçlar. Bu çalışma, Jones'un ataerkil düzenin birer kurbanı olarak akıl hastanesine hapsedildiklerini ifade ettiği Dora ve Persephone adlı iki kadın üzerinden kadın dayanışmasının gücünü tartışır. Bu çalışmanın ortaya çıkmasındaki temel süreç içerisinde veri toplama, kaynak taraması, içerik analizi ve oyun inceleme yazılarının değerlendirilmesi yer alır. Yorumlama yapılırken yazarın dünya ve politik görüşleri göz önünde bulundurulmuş, oyunla ilgili inceleme yazıları dikkate alınmış ve durumları destekleyici alıntılar eklenerek bu çerçevede bir analiz sunulmuştur. Bu şekilde nesnel bir analiz sağlamayı hedefleyen bu yaklaşım, eserin daha derin bir anlayışla ele alınmasına katkı sağlarken, oyunun dinamiklerini daha iyi anlamaya yardımcı olacaktır. Elaine Showalter, Jane M. Ussher, Phyllis Chesler ve Shoshana Felman gibi bazı bilginlere ve eleştirmenlere göre, kadın deliliği tarihsel süreçte gelişen ve değişen toplumsal normların etkisiyle farklı biçimlerde ele alınmıştır. Bu perspektiften kadın deliliği on altıncı yüzyılda cadı olarak suçlanan kadınlar ve on dokuzuncu yüzyılda histerik olarak damgalanan kadınlar üzerinden değerlendirilirken yirminci yüzyıldan itibaren ise bu bakış açısı kadınları psikolojik bozukluklarla suçlamak şeklinde olmuştur. Bu bağlamda kadınların duygusal, narin ve hassas varlıklar olarak algılanmasının, ataerkil hegemonya açısından tehdit olarak görülen kadınların kolayca deli olarak damgalanmasına ve akıl hastanelerine kapatılmasına neden olduğu düşünülmüştür. Bu çerçeveden akıl hastanelerinin ataerkil otoriteyi sarsan kadınların ceza olarak kapatıldığı ve disipline edilmeye çalışıldığı alanlar olarak işlev gördüğü iddia edilmiştir. Akıl hastanelerine kapatılan kadınların, toplumsal cinsiyet, heteroseksüellik ve evlilikle ilgili normlara uymadıkları düşünüldüğünden ahlaken suçlu olarak adlandırıldıkları ifade edilmiştir. Bu noktada bu kurumlar, kadınlar üzerindeki eril baskıyı kurumsallaştıran sosyal yapılar olarak yorumlanmıştır. Bu kapalı alanlarda bulunan kadınlar, sistemin kurallarına uygun olarak cezalandırılma deneyimi yaşamışlardır. Akıl hastanelerinde kadınların bazen kötü muameleye maruz kaldığı ve sistem tarafından göz ardı edildiği durumlar söz konusu olmuştur. Ataerkil şiddetin kurbanları olarak değerlendirilen bu kadınların kapatıldıkları akıl hastaneleri, onların sessizleştirildiği ve ataerkil otoriteyi kabul etmeye zorlandığı alanlar olarak görülmüştür. Bu kurumlar, kadınların varlıklarının veya bireyselliklerinin inkâr edildiği yerler olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Britanyalı ödüllü oyun yazarı Jones un ilk oyunu olan *Havada Yüzmek* (*Airswimming*) oyunu da toplumsal cinsiyet rollerine uymadıkları için ataerkil

sistem tarafından deli olarak damgalanan ve St. Dymphna's Hospital adlı akıl hastanesine kapatılan Dora Kitson ve Persephone Baker adlı iki kadının elli yıllık tutsaklığını ele alır. Jones, Dora'yı kendini bir asker gibi gören, erkek ile özdeşleştirilen davranışlar sergileyen güçlü, özgür ruhlu ve cesur bir kadın olarak tasvir eder. Öte yandan Persephone'u evli bir erkek ile ilişkisi neticesinde istenmeyen bir çocuk dünyaya getirmiş ve ailesinin yüz karası olarak görülüp akıl hastanesine terk edilmiş hassas, kırılgan ve huysuz bir kadın olarak tasvir eder. Aileleri tarafından adeta bu akıl hastanesinde unutulan ve kendi kaderlerine terk edilen bu iki kadın, kendileri için yarattıkları Dorph ve Porph adlarındaki ikinci kişilikleriyle bu akıl hastanesinde bir kadın dayanışması ve mücadelesi örneği sergilerler. Başlangıçta birbirlerine zıt karakterler olarak tanımlansalar da Jones tarafından toplumsal cinsiyet düşüncesinin birer mağduru olarak atfedilen bu iki kadın, zamanla aralarında bir dostluk geliştirirler ve elli yıllık esaretleri boyunca birbirlerine destek olurlar. Her gün bir araya gelerek küveti ve merdivenleri temizlerken hayal güçleri sayesinde yarattıkları ikinci kişilikleriyle bu iki kadın, Jones'a göre, tutsaklıklarının hikâyesini bir dayanışma ve özgürlük hikâyesine dönüştürürler. Oyunun başında çaresiz ve umutsuz bir kadın olarak seyirci karşısına çıkan Persephone, şarkıcı ve aktris Doris Day hayranıdır ve taktığı peruğu ile onu taklit eder ve sürekli onun şarkılarını söyler. Kardeşlerini büyük savaşta kaybetmiş olan ve onlar için üzülen Dora ise kendini bir asker olarak görür ve sürekli olarak Jeanne d'Arc ve Maria Bochkareva gibi güçlü kadınların hikâyelerini anlatır. Zamanın ve onları bu akıl hastanesine mahkûm eden düzenin zorluklarına rağmen bu iki kadın, yarattıkları ikinci kişilikleriyle bulundukları hapishanenin duvarlarını aşmayı deneyimler. Hayal güçlerinin sağladığı destekle, havada yüzmeyi/süzülmeyi tadar, özgürlük arayışını simgeleyen ve onu deneyimleten anlar yaşarlar. Zaman içerisinde senkronize hareketlerle daha ritimli olarak havada süzülen bu iki kadın, önceleri akıl hastanesinde tutsak olmanın zorluklarını yaşarken, sonrasında aralarında geliştirdikleri kız kardeşlik bağı sayesinde bu durumu aşmanın yollarını bulurlar. Jones'a göre, en umutsuz anlarında birbirlerine umut olmayı başaran bu iki kadın, ataerkil düzenin dayattığı tutsaklığa karşı geliştirdikleri dayanışmayla bir direniş örneği sergilerler. Sonuç olarak, Charlotte Jones'un *Havada Yüzmek* adlı oyunu, yazarın bakış açısından ataerkil sistem için tehdit oluşturan kadınların akıl hastanelerine terk edilme ve baskı altına alınma süreçlerini ele alırken, bu kadınların en umutsuz anlarında bile kendileri için umut bulma ve aralarında kurdukları dayanışmayla ataerkil düzenin baskısına karşı durma potansiyellerini de yansıtır.

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