

## Discussion of Mental Illness, Violence, and Suicide and Their Effects on the Characters in the *Cat's Eye* and *The Bell Jar*

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### Abstract

Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* and Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* can be discussed from various point of views especially gender division, alienation of women in the society and mental illnesses due to the set of rules that are being oppressed on women. Atwood argues that, in the male-dominated world of work, women are not given a place and are always reduced to the second sex, unable to have equal rights, find a job and receive equal pay in the fields they work. Furthermore, in her novel, Plath shows the alienation of Esther and how she slowly develops mental illnesses due to the specific reasons stated above. Moreover, physical and mental violence perpetrated by women against each other comes to the foreground turning the struggles into mental illnesses in both of the novels. In spite of this, Simone De Beauvoir studies and states that gender division is seen throughout the history and reduction of women to a second sex is being put together by various disciplines. Turning back to the era that the novels are based on, the characters live in a society after World War II and this paper states the effects of the time period on women's lives presenting their struggle and mental health in the 1950s and 1980s. This paper sheds light on the social life of women and their roles, how they have oppression, being reduced to the second sex and gender equality. This paper analyses the issues in terms of psychoanalytic feminism and gender equality.

### Keywords

Feminist theory  
Psychoanalytic feminism  
Gender equality  
Mental illness  
Roles of women

### **Introduction**

Each woman experiences oppression either by their community, their family, or loved ones, which results in their alienation from the society which they live in. This oppression and alienation lead to mental illnesses, and these mental illnesses can even result in suicide. There are many reasons for women in the social environments who commit suicides. These reasons can be about not only the oppression that comes from family or society but also from gender roles and the suppression these roles cause in an individual. In addition to that, the oppression that originates from the family also comes from the gender roles and norms. If a family thinks and believe that a woman's role in life is what the society expects them to be, they tend to force their daughters or wives to accept these roles and behave in a certain way. This is where women start to feel the pain and hardships in life, it starts from an early age and moves on to their adulthood and these elements cause mental stress. This mental stress later emerges as a mental illness which affects the way the people think and behave. Furthermore, women who struggle with mental illnesses are always painted as uncanny. So, this problem starts with the way gender roles and norms that are forced on women and cause them to lose their mental health. But, in the end, women are held responsible for it and are even excluded from the society according to the shared studies of mental health institutions based on women. Mental health may have many reasons such as childhood trauma, forced roles in one's own life and disregarding one's emotions and ideas. In this article, the stabilized and normalized gender roles in a society that are forced upon women and how this affects the mental health of many women, more importantly even causes them to take their own life, will be discussed through examining *Cat's Eye* and *The Bell Jar* from the characters. This article will conduct the analysis of the women in the 1950s and 1980s struggling with mental health problems and the mental health institutions in that period of time. The aim of this study is to make a research on the issue of women struggling from mental diseases and presenting the oppressing norms and values of the society and patriarchal institutions. Moreover, this study will examine and analyze the female characters and their lives in two different novels and examine the difficulties women experience in different geographical locations and statuses, how they struggle to sustain their lives, how they challenge and fight for their careers and jobs in a patriarchal system, and how male characters behave towards them, how they react to them, and the effects of all of these on the lives of female characters. In order to discuss the mental health problems seen in the characters of the two novels, the methods and analyzes developed by Freud and Jung in this field will be presented by examining the theory of Psychoanalysis. Furthermore, the conditions of the mental hospitals of the time and the treatment methods they offered will be discussed and the results will be presented by making comparisons with the events in the novels.

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Each woman has oppression either by society, their family, or their loved ones, so they are alienated from society. These oppressions and alienation lead to mental illnesses, and even as far as suicide. Women try to have a place in society through education, having a profession, and, making discoveries in the fields of science, medication, and so many other disciplines. They try to raise and hear their voice in every way they can. However, especially after the two

World War, it is observed that patriarchy tries to push women back to their domestic roles and place, eliminating women in the work field. In this article, through the characters of Elaine and Esther, an analysis will be made to show what women go through in their personal lives, and which norms and rules they are subjected to. At the end of both novels, Elaine and Esther experience mental illness and afterwards the two women have changes in their lives with the realizations they have gotten from what they have gone through. By analysing the *Cat's Eye* and *The Bell Jar*, reasons and problems that lead to mental illnesses and suicide will be discovered, the effects of it on the characters will be observed.

Psychoanalytic Feminism is generally concerned with the concepts of women's oppression rooted in early childhood, family relations, and traumas that are experienced within the youth and the teenage age. It is also based on Freud and his theories, especially the oedipal stage theory, and primarily French and American psychoanalytic feminists' developmental works. This theory also suggests that gender is based on individual psychosexual development and not on biology, which is also stated by one de Beauvoir. From early childhood stages to adulthood, humans develop their gender, based on experiences, the environment they live in, and the society in which they are brought up. They start to identify themselves and move towards the gender they are opposed to. All these effects psychosexual development from early childhood and humans start to understand and recognize their gender and embrace the roles that they are given. Because of this, women automatically find themselves under the order of patriarchy and start to experience inequalities between both genders. Relationship traumas and language that are produced under patriarchy as a force of masculinity are rejected and female writers are trying to raise their voices by rejecting this patriarchal language. Psychoanalytic feminists also address social, political, economic, racial, and cultural issues affecting the development of female and male genders. Moreover, psychoanalytic feminism examines women's otherness to men and the consequences and effects of all these subjects on women. Nancy Chodorow, a psychoanalytic feminist, makes a conclusion about this division in her words:

"... when we are interested in questions of gender and sexuality – even when our questions are in the first instance social, political or economic – there is no easy line between psyche and society... the social organization of gender is built right into our heads and divides the world into females and males; our being sexed and gendered is built right into social organization. They are only given meaning from one another. (Lorraine, 2017, p.168).

Freud's studies and hypotheses of femininity, female sexuality, and women's role in society provided grounds for psychoanalysis and feminists to work in the same field. Freud suggests that when a woman experiences a very bad childhood trauma this later turns out as "Hysteria", which is a mental disease by thinking too much about a memory or traumatic event according to the journal of psychoanalysis. Theorists before Freud accepted Hippocrates's notion of the female body and inclined the symptoms of hysteria to the female body. Hippocrates described hysteria as "women experiencing stress and anxiety" and in the Middle Ages, this mental illness was associated with sin and witchcraft. Furthermore, Hippocrates stated that: "The womb is the origin of all diseases." (Scull, 2009, p.13), and with his statement, women were seen as sinful, and diseased, and hysteria was associated with the female body. This was not changed until more observations and research were made on hysteria, its symptoms, and its effects on the human body. Freud remains to be one of the prior psychoanalysts for the development of hysteria theory and psychoanalysis. Freud worked on

hysteria for many years along with other scholars and theorists alongside and they made many observations on the patients they have clinically examined and cured. According to research, Freud indicated hysteria as a psychological disorder and he argued that the origin of hysteria is sexual, which means that the repressed sexual desires from childhood until late adulthood are the symptoms of hysteria. (Tasca et al., 2012). Along with this, Freud argued that hysteria can be treated with only psychological treatments and techniques and medication is not effective with hysteria treatment in the psychoanalysis journal. In this field, French neurologist Jean Martian Charcot made studies, research, and observations on the patients and came up with the conclusion that hysteria is not only seen in women but is seen in men too and men can be diagnosed with hysteria. Unlike Freud, Charcot argues that: "hysteria is a disorder of the nerves system." (Scull, 2009, p.105) and its symptoms originated from the mind. With these explanations and studies, the false acceptance of hysteria being an illness of the female body is heaved and the true origin of hysteria is known. Traumatic events, childhood traumas, oppressions, and domestic roles that are expected from women push the individuals to mental illnesses and even as far as committing suicide. These reduced roles to the second sex break the self-confidence of women, they are obliged to think that they are bad in every area of life with the social oppression of society and the roles that are expected from them. With these, they start to question themselves, their femininity, and their life which Simone de Beauvoir suggests as; "One is not born but becomes a woman" (Mussett, 2019, pp. 51-56). Beauvoir makes this statement because she argues that, a woman is not born fully shaped but is shaped throughout her life by her family's upbringing, by the roles of the society that are summoned upon her, her culture and ethnicity, her profession, her experiences, everything in her life shapes her from the early childhood stage until her death. This idea can be seen in John Berger's book; *Ways of Seeing*, as women being "surveyed" and being "surveyors".

When you are born as a woman, you are born into a male space. From early childhood, a woman must watch herself, her actions, and her words because she is always the one being "surveyed". Even she has to survey herself from the male gaze to see how she will be treated from the perspective of the society. Eventually, this always lasts because women are the ones who are always being surveyed since old age.

"Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of women in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus, she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight." (Berger, 2018, p.47).

Research about women struggling with mental health in the 1950s and 1980s was examined and studied. Early asylum buildings, before the 19th century, were similar to prisons or cages, they were dark and were not depicted positively in the earlier times. All of the asylum buildings were surrounded by fences for the patients to not get away and, the patients lived in cold, dark cells isolated to not harm anyone or be in relation with the other patients. Furthermore, it is concluded that the first mental institutions used chains and physical control on the patients to manage them. It can be seen and stated that; patients were treated worse like prisoners or criminals at that time. Doctors and the administrators of the asylums saw patients as a threat to them, to society, and to the other patients in the asylum. Because of seeing them as a threat, the patients were kept in cold, dark cells alone and chained. Most of the patients in the asylum were ill or dead because of the bad conditions they were living in. 19th century had gone through a big improvement in the understanding of mental illnesses, and new

asylums were being built. Until the 19th century, only the lower and middle-class patients were treated in the asylums because the asylums were seen as horrible places to be cured, the patients were treated very badly, and most of them were seen as bad people from the societal structure such as criminals, thieves, lunatic people. The upper class and aristocrats were treated at home or in private asylums. Women patients in the asylums were the most-watched patients and, especially lower- and middle-class women patients were to be proper for their improvement of health conditions. They were more than male patients in the asylums and had mind diseases according to the others. In England, many women patients were put into the asylum for such basic reasons: as their father or husband demanded it, depression after the loss of a loved one, using abusive language, and so on. Women did not have any voice over the law or the doctors in the asylums and they got treatments for these basic reasons which are not depicted as illnesses in this modern time psychology. According to the Women and Hysteria In The History of Mental Health article, some of the diagnoses of the women in the asylum were: insane by religious matters, insane by domestic troubles, insane by abortion, insane by the loss of property, insane by mental excitement, insane by overwork, and domestic trouble. With the symptoms and diagnosis, it is clearly understood that women were treated and labelled as insane and mad women, and this was accepted by society. The Women's Health Movement emerged in the 1960s and 1970s and their main goal was: "a demand for improved health care for all women and an end to sexism in the health system" (Biography: Elizabeth Blackwell, n.d.). In the U.S. Public Health Service in 1983, The Task Force on Women's Health Issues was formally established and The Task Force made recommendations on women's health issues and man's health issues. The first formal policy for women being in the clinical area was made in 1986 by the National Institutes of Health. In the 1980s and 1990s, types of research on women's health issues and their conditions were hugely studied and observed, and women working in the clinics were hugely supported and with women working in the clinics and the patriarchal field of work was achieved. There were no female doctors until 1851, and the first woman doctor to be permitted was Elizabeth Blackwell. Elizabeth Blackwell strived for her medical degree and got over all of the barriers that were set by society. After gaining her medical degree and working in a few hospitals, Blackwell first opened a small clinic to treat poor women and after with her sister and colleague, she opened New York Infirmary for Women and Children in 1857. One of its goals was to give a place for women physicians in the clinical and medical field. Later on, in 1868, she opened a medical college in New York and helped to found the National Health Society. Blackwell made great contributions to the medical and clinical field and she opened the way for women to participate in this field and study medicine.

When analyzing the theme of alienation and misrecognition in the *Cat's Eye*, Elaine's family's attitude towards her problems and profession is one of the biggest problems seen in the novel. Elaine's parents are professionals and intelligent individuals. They raise Elaine genderless until they settle in their new home, and Elaine struggles with the idea of gender and femininity. Elaine's mother has a personality that disagrees with the social norms and thoughts of society. She doesn't stay in the depicted women's domestic place and instead, she likes to be in the nature where it is her space and there are no norms or oppressions of the patriarchy, it can clearly be stated that she is not fit into the ideal women's role and she's an outsider. Moreover, the mother doesn't believe in a religious institution like her husband and was forced to go to church by her parents when she was young. When analyzing both of the parents, it is presented that they don't fit into the stereotypes of society and gender roles. They

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believe it is important to have knowledge rather than to believe in the institutions that are made and formed by society. Elaine's mother is too reckless that she knows of Cordelia's bullying but never intends to do something because she doesn't know what to do. She leaves Elaine with her traumatic experience alone and never tries to better her condition or help Elaine, but, she only tells Elaine that she doesn't have to play with Cordelia and her other friends. Grownup Elaine states this terrible experience and her mother not doing anything with the quote:

"What would I have done if I had been my mother? She must have realized what was happening to me, or that something was. Even toward the beginning, she must have noted my silences, my bitten fingers, the dark scabs on my lips where I'd pulled off patches of the skin. If it were happening now, to a child of my own, I would know what to do. But then? There were fewer choices, and a great deal less was said." (Atwood, 1989, p.162).

Both of the parents don't appreciate Elaine's ideas about the future. Elaine wants to be a painter and she becomes a successful one, but, achieves her goal without the support of her family. Elaine is always alone and she accepts the bullying of her friends because of this loneliness. After experiencing the mental illness she continues with her life.

Esther's mother's oppression and attitude towards her is one of the examples of misrecognition in the novel *The Bell Jar*. Esther is a successful girl at the beginning of the novel, but after her New York scholarship experience, she cannot find a job there, so she turns back home. For a while, she sends applications everywhere to have a job and applies for another scholarship but she is not accepted. After finishing school, she doesn't know what to do with her life and this gets Esther into a more depressing mood. Her mother wants Esther to be an ideal woman of society, and live up to society's expectations, forcing her to get married, but Esther doesn't want this and rejects this idea and the traditional system. Moreover, in the novel, Esther does not talk about her mother, Mrs. Greenwood, very much. They both love each other but the only problem is that their ideas and ambitions conflict and clash. Mrs. Greenwood encourages Esther to write and proceed in her profession, but she also tries to teach Esther to find a job easily which she is concerned with Esther's ambitions. She wants Esther to get married and be an "ideal woman" in society but Esther also worries that domestic roles will get in her way and she could not fulfill her ambitions and do what she desires for her profession, being a poet or a professor. Mrs. Greenwood is characterized as a very strong woman in the novel. Plath doesn't show the readers the scene of her crying even when her husband dies. Furthermore, when Esther attempts suicide and is taken to the hospital, Mrs. Greenwood does everything for Esther to get good medical treatment and supports Esther along with her treatment. In one of Esther and Doctor Nolan's therapies, Esther states that: "'I hate her,' I said, and waited for the blow to fall. But Doctor Nolan only smiled at me as if something had pleased her very, very much and said, 'I suppose you do.'" (Plath, 1981, p.210). Esther partly blames her mother for the position she is in, but it is clearly shown in the novel that Esther feels guilty for putting her mother through all these problems or bad experiences. Here, as it is understood from Doctor Nolan's impression, Plath represents this blame as an important breakthrough for Esther, because she is starting to share her thoughts and what she has gone through about her suicide attempt psychologically.

As stated before in the article, Elaine's father was a scientific researcher and they traveled most of the time until they came to settle in Toronto. Elaine was happy traveling and moving around with her family and discovering new places and helping her father with his

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research. Due to World War II, their financial condition was not very good and that was the reason they traveled most of the time until his father found a permanent job at a university in Toronto. Their house in Toronto was not furnished luxuriously and only the furniture they carried with them was in their house. Later on in the novel, Elaine's friends compared her lifestyle and house with theirs and mostly with Cordelia's and humiliated her because of the family's financial conditions, and the way she dressed. This was one of the effects of Elaine's depression and later trauma. As stated in the upper sections, Elaine was raised genderless until they settled in Toronto. When she started school, she didn't know the meaning of "girl", or how they dressed, behaved, and talked. She learned the meaning by observing the other girls and her friends in the school. Cordelia became the leader of the group Elaine and she expresses the treatment towards Elaine which is in a very harsh and bullying way. Other girls in the group cope with Cordelia because they're scared of her and they're in the same economic hierarchy as Cordelia. Cordelia mocks Elaine about her femininity, her look, her clothes, her family, and their economic position in the class hierarchy. Elaine copes with all this bullying alone. On her ninth birthday, she makes a wish which gives a clue of what she thinks about having girl friends:

"I want some friends, friends who will be girls. Girlfriends. I know that these exist, having read about them in books, but I've never had any girlfriends because I've never been in one place long enough." (Atwood, 1989, p.41).

Her wish comes true and she becomes friends with Carol, Grace, and Cordelia but unfortunately, these friendships drown her down to her trauma. After her birthday, Cordelia and the girls start bullying Elaine on everything they can find and, they find Elaine passive and think she needs a change. Especially with Cordelia's oppression and hatred towards Elaine and everything that is subjected to her, they start crossing the limits. Elaine starts to feel weak, she doesn't want to go anywhere and especially do anything with the girls, she starts passing out to stay home and not to come across more bullying from the girls. The worst and most traumatic action they perform towards Elaine is sending her to the frozen river and leaving her there to die without any help when the ice breaks and Elaine falls. At that time Elaine has a vision of the Virgin Mary telling her: "You can go home now." she says. "It will be all right. Go home." "I don't hear the words out loud, but this is what she says." (Atwood, 1989, p.202). In a sense, Virgin Mary's vision saves Elaine from death and at that instant moment, she decides to be distant from her gender throughout her life. Later on, Cordelia starts to have more problems with her family, she fails her school, and her life starts to worsen and attempts suicide. Elaine doesn't want to be like Cordelia and she states this in these words: "I'm not afraid of seeing Cordelia. I'm afraid of being Cordelia. Because, in some way, we changed places, and I've forgotten when." (Atwood, 1989, p.237), but both of the girls know that they have a side of the other in themselves and their lives. Their identities change, and they transform into another being. The past is with them but is being erased with their new identities and transformations. Elaine copes with her trauma by making art and trying to heal her inner self. This traumatic event is a big mark in Elaine's life and she suppresses this into her consciousness. Moreover, we see the effects more clearly in her paintings and when she turns to Toronto as an adult Elaine.

Similarly, Esther is not an ideal woman according to the patriarchal system. She does not represent and embrace the society she is in and because of this, she is conducted as a misfit for society. Esther's mother Mrs. Greenwood always wanted Esther to have a shorthand job under

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her hands along with her trying to be a writer. Furthermore, Mrs. Greenwood and Esther's grandma always warned Esther to stay pure for his future husband to get married because this was the role that was ideally suited for women in society. Esther states: "All I'd heard about, really, was how fine and clean Buddy was and how he was the kind of person a girl should stay fine and clean for." (Plath, 1981, p.55). The irony stated here is that society accepts every action the men do and wants women to perform their social roles such as; getting married and being ideal wives and mothers in their domestic places. The inequality between the genders and the women being regarded as the second sex is clearly stated in the novel. Another thing that Esther was uncomfortable with is serving men under the patriarchal rules with having a shorthand job and forcefully excepting their authority. In the novel Esther states this:

"My mother kept telling me nobody wanted a plain English major. But an English major who knew shorthand was something else again. Everybody would want her. She would be in demand among all the up-and-coming young men and she would transcribe letter after thrilling letter. The trouble was, I hated the idea of serving men in any way. I wanted to dictate my own thrilling letters." (Plath, 1981, pp. 61-62).

In this quote, the reader understands that her mother associates her writing with "men" and being desired by men which Esther rejects because she wants to write individually, not under the influence of patriarchy and its norms, nor to be desired by men but only create her own work. Esther's final thought on marriage was that;

"I also remembered Buddy Willard saying in a sinister, knowing way that after I had children I would feel differently, I wouldn't want to write poems anymore. So, I began to think maybe it was true that when you were married and had children it was like being brainwashed, and afterward you went about numb as a slave in some private, totalitarian state. (Plath, 1981, p.69).

In conclusion, it can be stated that she thought of marriage as a barrier to her dreams, and ambitions and mostly to her profession. Moreover, Esther thought that marriage will completely change her life and she would feel like a "slave". This is a very important concept to discuss because in the 18th and 19th centuries women had no legal rights and were forced to be under the power of the father or the husband. Their living conditions were also very similar to those of the slaves, even more, slaves had more legal rights than women. Esther does not want to be the slave of the marriage institution or the domestic roles that are been specified for women, so she rejects the idea of marriage and the ideal domestic roles. Moving on from this, after turning back from New York and finding herself in these social expectations, Esther got more depressed and this condition gets worse and ends up with her suicide attempt. After her suicide attempts, she is seen and depicted as a mad woman from society's perspective, which is to be criticized, but Esther doesn't mind this in the end. The expectations of family, loved ones, and society put a lot of weight on women's shoulders, and they start to live up to those expectations. The dreams and ambitions of women are forced to be forgotten and lost in those conditions.

In this section of the article, more information about Elaine's mental illness and how it affected her and her life will be discussed. Elaine's mental illness started with depression, with the bullying of her friends. She got more depressed and started to pass out and harm herself. From the novel, it can be stated that Elaine's trauma started when she fell into the frozen river



and no one saved her except Virgin Mary's vision. Her family knew that she was not well, they left her alone and she could not get any treatment. Later on, Elaine was a completely lonely individual when her brother was killed and her parents died. Thus, she portrayed her trauma and repressed feelings in her paintings. In her paintings, we see all the important people to Elaine and how they are represented through her emotions. "Because I can no longer control these paintings, or tell them what to mean. Whatever energy they have come out of me. I'm what's left over." (Atwood, 1989, p.415). It is seen that she transfers her feelings deep inside to her paintings and at the end, she is "what's leftover". She opens an art exhibit consisting of her paintings in Toronto and waits to face Cordelia who does not come. At the end of the novel, Elaine frees her and Cordelia from each other and releases her emotions along with the Cordelia inside of her. "It's all right, I say to her. You can go home now." (Atwood, 1989, p.443). She uses the exact words of the Virgin Mary when she saw her in the ravine. Now Elaine is Cordelia's Virgin Mary and she releases her from this traumatic, frozen pastime along with herself. Additionally, in adult Elaine, it is presented that, her communication with women and women groups is insecure and she is being the one left out in the group. This insecurity of her can be associated with her traumatic childhood experiences and, with her university life. On the other hand, when Elaine is with her girlfriend groups, she does not participate in the conversation because she does not have an interest in the topics they are talking about and they exclude Elaine. Besides the feminine insecurity, Jon and Josef both criticize Elaine's artworks and don't appreciate her work and see it as disdain. Elaine always fights for her works and does not accept patriarchal art norms. Her paintings show her inner emotions and parts of her life.

Finally, the discussions of Esther's trauma, what caused her to attempt suicide, how she was treated at different asylums, and how her treatment was, and which changes she has gone through the healing process will be discussed. When Esther's mental state worsens, she is seen to make several suicide attempts. Before getting treatment in the private asylum, Esther was in a different asylum which her family could afford, and it was presented that she was treated badly by the doctors and the treatments caused more traumas in Esther. At that asylum, Esther is seen performing a couple of actions that are not accepted, and these actions depict her as a lunatic in the eyes of the others. Esther's sponsor for her college scholarship moves Esther to a private asylum. Going to a new asylum and meeting her new doctor, Dr. Nolan, makes Esther comfortable and even the reader sees her making new friends. The asylum is depicted in many ways, from the medication to the trips of the patients and the mental conditions their mental conditions. Esther witnesses everything in the asylum. Her next-door patient taken to the one-level bad asylum, the suicide of one of the patients in the asylum, the doctors and the treatments, and medication. They all become a part of Esther and it is depicted as a good experience rather than a bad dream in the novel. As stated before in the article, she rejected the treatment and continued making suicide attempts at the first asylum, but it is shown that with the help of Doctor Nolan, this problem changes because Esther is seen to trust Doctor Nolan and opens herself to the treatment. The most important thing is that Esther puts Doctor Nolan in her mother's place and she explains this: "I liked Doctor Nolan, I loved her, I had given her my trust on a platter and told her everything." (Plath, 1981, p.173) Throughout the novel, Doctor Nolan is the only person Esther trusts and loves. In Freudian theory, this is explained as transferring the feelings to the psychiatrist, seeing her as a mother and starting to question her relationship with her mother, and healing the relationship. (Waugh, 2006, p.208). At the end of the novel, a council of doctors is seen to decide Esther's leave of the

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asylum. The asylum changes a lot of aspects in Esther's life. It is shown to the reader that her perspective of the past has been changed, and after all the changes Esther is depicted as more mature and grown-up. She experiences the loss of her friends and life more in a different perspective. Paradoxically, Sylvia Plath cures Esther, but she attempts suicide after her novel, unfortunately, she is not cured to live her life.

In conclusion, examining the lives of both of the characters, their experiences, what they have gone through, and what mental illnesses they have experienced, this article discusses and analyses two different women's lives from two different worlds and the reasons why they had gone through these experiences. Generally, it can be stated the basic reasons women experience mental illnesses are social expectations, the roles that are expected from women, the ideal women's idea, patriarchal ideology, and oppression. Supporting these conclusions with the research made on women struggling with mental health in the 1950s and 1980s, psychoanalytic feminism works and studies the backgrounds of the authors and their similarity with the characters. From these novels, the message of the importance of family and family support is made through Elaine's parents not supporting and caring for her and Esther's mother and her oppressions for the ideal norm. Moreover, the economic hierarchy and inequalities in human lives affect social relations and even lead to mental illnesses. Elaine was also a misfit according to society and mostly according to her friends and their family. They regarded Elaine as unknowing, a more like a boy-girl, and a middle-class person that has to do the commands of her upper-class friends. The harsh truth from the real world is stated with this hierarchy even among little girls. Looking at Esther's life, Mrs. Greenwood tried to support and give a better life to Esther, but she forgot what Esther wanted to do with her own life and pushed her a little bit to fit the expectations of society. She was a misfit in society and the conditions were even harder for Esther to put up with, which finally led to her suicide attempt. Esther's stay during her treatment in the asylum, the conditions of the patients and the asylum, and how she was like being treated as a mad woman during that time were presented in the novel. It can be stated in the discussion, both of the characters are very strong and they have continued their lives after the traumatic experiences they have gone through. The authors have encouraged women to stand up and raise their voices, to write with their names under the patriarchal system, and to cope with the problems they have with their family or friends through the characters of Elaine and Esther in novels.

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