

I. Existential Anxiety in Plath's *The Bell Jar*

This research explores Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* through the light of existential feminism that happened with dread of nothingness in life and anxiety in a teenager mostly with the frivolous characteristics. The term existential feminism is more concerned with the anxiety and anguish rather than merely the worries of existence. This also takes the theme of alienation and estrangement that is due the subject's own estrangement from society or being the 'other' despite having rightful existence as equal to everyone having high status in every respect. Esther has all the mentioned qualities, such as anxiety of life and her self-estrangement from everyday relation that happened due to heavy pressure from the male dominated society.

Plath's, Esther has not been deterministic on the life she has been living. When a young mind cannot resist within a certain way of life and tries to set themselves apart from the realist way of life, they are destined to suffer physically as well as psychologically. The research tries to uncover the way of life of the prominent Plath's character and tries to figure out the torment that frequently haunts. This novel has been targeted in the condition of a fictional character, however this is the undeniable assimilation of Plath's own life as well. As the story revolves around a teenager girl and her hardships in terms of understanding it, at the same time provides the losing credibility of the aforementioned character. Esther is who on the story revolves is unstable with her opposite mates that pushes her far from male lovers. Also there is the importance of learning the psychology of a girl who is having anxiety of life and searching some vague meaning into it. In this connection, drawing upon Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminism such as in *The Second Sex*. It is possible to explore the unsanctioned way of life Esther is living by putting herself apart from normal paradigm of life. Moreover, the research tries to stress upon the demand of negating

unnecessary anxiety in the life of human beings after the observation of the pain that everyone goes through with the casual chain of life.

The plot of *The Bell Jar* consists of a teenager who is a troubled girl, Esther Greenwood. Esther brings into light an important truth about depression that one does not need a chain of cataclysmic events to set off, instead everyone has a different set of triggers. Esther's mind has been conditioned to expect perfection to such an extent that she assigns greater meaning even to the slightest mishap. The slightest departure from her grand plan means that depression is on the horizon. This research asserts how an individualistic mind claims suicide as an art of dying. On the surface level, the novel appears to be the story of the mental breakdown of a depressed girl who wants to commit suicide. However, the proposed thesis focuses on Esther Greenwood's struggle for an individual identity under the society with rigid expectations of womanhood. The cost of transgressing social norms is alienation, isolation, institutionalization and a lost identity in such society. It focuses on, how Esther goes through depression and psychological trauma when she values her independence, liberation, her interests and her lifestyle opposed to the tradition.

The novel addresses the question of socially acceptable identity. The proposed research examines Esther's quest to be herself rather than what others expect her to be. She is mentally disturbed by the feeling that she does not fit into the culturally acceptable role of womanhood. She fears the loss of her inner self. Esther emphasizes her moral worth and she seems incapable of healthy relationships. The cost of transgressing the social norms drives her to the verge of suicide. Her madness is profoundly linked to her social environment. Esther opposes the external interference upon her interest. She is individualistic.

The research contends how the individualistic attitude of Esther leads her towards depression and how she exists in some mediate province of living and dying. On the one hand Esther is not sure of what to make of her life whereas on the other, the choices presented to her do not appeal her. Ambition that has driven her for years suddenly abandoned her. Thus she tries to have control over her life by ending it, committing suicide.

Sylvia Plath was born in 1932 on 27th of October in Boston, Massachusetts. Her father was an immigrant and her mother was a first generation American. Otto Plath, her father died when Plath was eight years old, and she moved with her mother, younger brother, and maternal grandparents to Wellesley, an inland suburb of Boston. Plath attended high school in Wellesley Massachusetts, and began to write poetry and short stories. She attended Smith College on a scholarship, and in 1952 won a *Mademoiselle* short story contest which allowed her to work as a guest editor. She returned home from this and later attempted suicide. She spent several months in an institution. Afterwards, she graduated from Smith and then went to Cambridge University on a Fulbright scholarship. She finished her time in Cambridge and moved to the United States. Plath started writing poetry more seriously. Her first book of poetry *The Colossus and Other Poems* was published in 1960. Like Esther, the protagonist of *The Bell Jar*, Plath was invited to serve as guest editor for a woman's magazine in New York. After returning to Wellesley for the remainder of the summer, she had a nervous breakdown and attempted suicide. The poems she wrote at this time were later published in a collection titled *Ariel* (1965). In February 1963, she gassed herself in her kitchen, ending her life at the age of thirty- one. Plath most likely wrote a first draft of *The Bell Jar* in the late 1950s. In 1961 she received a fellowship that allowed her to complete the novel, *The Bell Jar* was published in

London in January 1963 under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas. Plath chose to publish the work under a pseudonym in order to protect the people she portrayed in the novel, and because she was uncertain of the novel's literary merit. The novel appeared subsequently in England under her own name in 1966, and in America, over the objections of her mother. Plath is primarily known as a novelist, however is an outstanding poet as well.

Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* has various qualities in it. The novel has attracted numerous criticism and can be judged from multiple views; therefore the criticism depends on the reader, how s/he interprets. Different critics have analyzed the novel from the multiple perspectives which preserves the universal importance of the novel regarding the nature of protagonist and her life. The characters of the novel have been the victim of psychological distress followed by traumatic experience. Different critics have interpreted this novel from different perspectives. In this connection, Most of the literature available in libraries and online sources focus on Esther Greenwood's mental breakdown and her efforts to commit suicide. Esther has been centered upon doing academically well. She is subjected to death producing experiences though she is a brilliant, beautiful, enormously talented and successful girl. In New York, she spends much of her time observing the various life styles of the women characters around her, trying to decide what she wants to be. Madness and death plays major role in the novel. Her breakdown becomes palpably real in text because of her individualistic nature.

Nancy Schimelpfing describes Esther as a depressed and confused girl:

To the outside world it would seem that she is living a dream life: dining on sumptuous meals, hobnobbing with celebrities, and being showered with gifts, all courtesy of the magazine. Inside, however, she

is wrenched with confusion. She struggles within herself to reconcile her desires to become a writer in a world where women are expected to be perfect housewives and mother. Eventually Esther attempts a near-fatal suicide by overdosing on sleeping pills. She ends up in an asylum convinced that her case is without hope. (1)

Nancy sees Esther as the depressed and confused girl. According to her, Esther is living a life supposedly of happiness because she receives all she need, like interesting gifts and sumptuous meals. However, despite having sophisticated living that is the pursuit of everyone, Esther is still struggling to define herself between the traditional way of life and her passion about writing.

For KintanAndanari, Esther is a struggling teenager, who tries to be victorious in her attempt to reject the society and its members. Her negation includes her boyfriend and the difficult to deal with boss.

...the milestones that mark Esther's mental breakdown for they appear nothing close to catastrophic – these include her boyfriend's torrid affair with a waitress, her boss' suggestion to learn other languages in order to 'not be so run-of-the-mill' and (shock and horror!) a rejection letter from Harvard's summer school – this is precisely how *The Bell Jar* triumphs. Providing unrestricted access to her fragmented psyche, the narration suffocates us as she doesn't once divert her thoughts from depression. (2)

Andanari, rises Esther to the victory over male's rejection. She also shows more radical meaning in Esther's life as the character is able to reject her boyfriends and avoids to be a part of them. Though depressed and suffocated, she still considers *The Bell Jar* as more obvious triumph in contemporary world.

When Esther considers suicide, she looks into the mirror and manages to see herself as a completely separate person from herself and from the world. Being trapped inside the "bell jar", the symbol used to explain the strange feeling of alienation is precisely what stops her from functioning on a human level (at one point she even refuses to wash herself). Hence *The Bell Jar* is stunning portrayal of a particular time in a person's life and a brave attempt for James Topham.

Similarly, for Rosi Smith, *The Bell Jar* as a whole is a representation of distorted identity of American in the cold war era. Esther does not only represent the particular troubled teenage girls, but all Americans in general.

More recent readings, such as Pat MacPherson's *Reflecting on the Bell Jar* (Which assesses Esther's breakdown against the background of Cold War, Paranoia) Show growing awareness that specific socio-political conditions are inextricable from ester's personal search for a viable image of herself and are, as such, more compelling. (2)

Rossi makes a reading of *The Bell Jar* through MacPherson's concept of reflection on the book. So through the character of Esther it explores the struggle of middle class American who directly experienced the Cold War and indirectly became victim of the consequences of it.

Last here in the review list but not the least, Richard D. McNay studies Plath's *The Bell Jar* with the problem of critical response. McNay especially talks about the criticism of Plath's life through this extract.

"Come on, give us a smile."

I sad on the pink velvet loveseat in Jay Cee's Office, holding a paper rose and facing the magazine photographer I didn't want my pictures taken because I was going to cry. I didn't know why I was

going to cry, but I knew that if anybody spoke to me or looked at me too closely the tears would fly out of my eyes and the sobs would fly out of my throat and I'd cry for a week

“Show us how happy it makes you to write a poem.”

McNay generally corresponds these as the facts of Plath's life. Often reading this, everything might differ in reader's perspective. However, this particularly becomes different in individual perspective, this does not indicate the normal nature of critical response in *The Bell Jar*.

Going through these critics' views, many of them have raised the issues of difficulties with a depressed and confused girl and a girl who is having difficulties of amalgamation of two different world of human life, i.e. the world of reality and the world of confusion. But we do not find any of them scrutinizing the factors that cause difficulty in search for identity for one's own self, yet she is in the search for the anxiety and its nature. The critics have approached the text in many ways, some of the critics point out the issue of depression and others talk about coming of age problem. So in relation to the reviews of these critics this text can be analyzed where the lost identity is the main priority to be established by relying upon female existence and most importantly oneself. So, this research tries to study about nature of human beings and the critical phase of their existence in psychology when they cannot cope up the society and tend to suicide. This project work especially works on the trying to formulate the identity through negation of traditional bonds between same sexes as well. Moreover, this is generally related to theory of existential feminism by Simone de Beauvoir and her *The Second Sex*. Simone de Beauvoir, in her classic, *The Second Sex*, laid the foundation for a feminist analysis of sex and gender. Her famous assertion emphasizes the social character of womanhood as distinct from biological

femaleness. She says:

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in the society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between female and eunuch, which describes as feminine. (301)

To make it clear, Beauvoir views that it is the constructed tendency of the patriarchy to call female as a woman. It is not the inherent quality of the females as such but it is social construct that makes them as a woman.

Simone de Beauvoir is a woman who brought moral revolution in the realm of female world. Beauviour prioritizes the existence of being than the part of being as in woman form. In a sense, it is the existence that matters most than that of essence. So woman initially was born as a being but later society changed her as the other form rather than being. Males only became human beings, but females only became females. If females tried to live a life of a human beings she becomes the matter of criticism saying she imitates the males. More to this, Beauviour identifies this criticism as the fundamental to oppress women that keeps women in male's domination as long as they want. So here, Beauviour asserted that women are capable of replacing males in every sector, hence living a life of her original existence as a human being. Beauviour also claims, a woman can take responsibility for oneself and the world where everyone is for their own freedom.

As Beauviour publishes, the book, *The Second Sex*, she takes a stand on defining every aspect of woman. Beauviour is simply not satisfied with definition of woman sex in terms of biological realities and some sort of eternal feminine.

If her functioning as a female is not enough to define woman, if we decline also to explain her through “the eternal feminine,” and if nevertheless we admit, provisionally, that women do exist, then we must face the question: what is a woman? . . . The fact that I ask it is in itself significant. A man would never get the notion of writing a book on the peculiar situation of the human male. But if I wish to define myself, I must first of all say, “I am a woman”; on this truth must be based all further discussion. (14)

This quotation, from the introductory part of Beauvoir’s huge scheme of placing woman in parallel to her male counterpart is to define woman as sex and gender in every respect. She first points out the inadequacy of defining woman either by her biological operations or by some broad understanding of the “eternal feminine (14).” Beauvoir progress in defining the existence of woman into greater details, however, initially she makes her backing up a question, “What is a woman. (13)”. This question actually is her pursuant of, do women even exist? She admits they do, but practically in a temporary form in this extremely dominating patriarchal word. This becomes significant as Beauvoir further moves into her claim of woman is not only the reduced form of existence. Beauvoir develops her argument, she will make the radical suggestion that “woman” does not in fact exist, as an immense category and that men and women alike should always be defined primarily as humans. Throughout history, woman has been denied this privilege. The latter part of this quotation introduces de Beauvoir’s personal motivation for writing this book. When looking back on her life, she finds that she cannot define herself without “first of all” defining herself as a woman. Her effort to find out what it means to be a woman, then, is also an effort to make sense of her experience on earth.

Beauvoir tries adapt the oppression of other people of the world, either in the form of race, color, religion to make it comparable with the domination of females. Beauvoir in the follow excerpt of her book, identifies the problem similar to the problem of women throughout the parts of the world.

If we cast a general glance over this history, we see several conclusions that stand out from it. And this one first of all: the whole of feminine history has been man-made. Just as in America there is no Negro problem, but rather a white problem; just as anti-Semitism is not a Jewish problem, it is our problem; so the woman problem has always been a man problem. (148)

Beauvoir demonstrates this discussion of the history since the French revolution. Notion of feminity truly must be the creation of man, which they have defined as the eternal feminism. With this problem of woman, Beauvoir corresponds the problem of other races too. Here, Beauvoir claims, the problems of Jews and blacks have been created by their oppressors.

Beauvoir draws this parallel between women and other oppressed classes of society throughout the book. However, she always includes a significant caution: unlike blacks in America, Jews in Europe, or any other oppressed minority group, woman is *not* a minority. Females constitute roughly half the human population at any given period in history. Another crucial difference: woman has never lived separated from man, as Jews have been segregated from Christians and blacks from whites. Economically, woman belongs to a lower “caste”—a term de Beauvoir uses often to emphasize the institutionalized quality of female subordination. Despite her lower caste, woman has always lived alongside her master. Man requires woman to survive, and their mutual dependence makes the fact of their inequality confusing. So

Beauvoir sees woman as an inseparable half of beings for which only men cannot ever take the sole credit of becoming a human being.

Beauvoir at the concluding chapter of her project talks about the enjoyment of a woman when she is carefree and free from all the unnecessary burdens she has to take. . However there are some difficulties and Beauvoir talks about those difficulties that does not come in the equivalence

Like the carefree wretches gaily scratching at their vermin, like the merry Negroes laughing under the lash, and those joyous Tunisian Arabs burying their starved children with a smile, woman enjoys that incomparable privilege: irresponsibility. Free from troublesome burdens and cares, she obviously has 'the better part'. (677)

Women rely on men for shelter, sustenance, opinions, hobbies, conversation topics; in short, for a reason to live. Making no or very less economic contributions to their household, they spend their lives engaged in useless, repetitive activities. However suffocating and unfulfilling, however bizarrely parasitic, life as a wife or mistress is a known quantity, and many women fear departing from social norms and submitting oneself into the wilderness of liberty. It is less demanding and less exhausting to abdicate all responsibility for one's future to a man. Many women refuse the opportunities granted them; like their descents, these women will discover that the pleasure of irresponsibility is actually a curse, in love and in life. Any successful relationship between two parties grows from mutual liberty. Irresponsibility is a function of injury and incompleteness, of dependency and enslavement.

Integrating Beauvoir's theory in Esther of Sylvia Plath, we need to believe that woman's inferiority in society is a result not of natural differences but of differences in the upbringing of man and woman. Male domination is not inherent or fated but

conditioned at every stage of development. Beauvoir says that “Man learns his power (100)”. By the same remark, woman is not born passive, average, or immanent. Rather, she is socialized to believe that proper women must express these characteristics and, subtly and not subtly, she is conditioned to believe that denying her true self is the only way to achieve happiness and gain acceptance. Esther also shows all the tendencies that Beauvoir claims in her book. Esther is from the book *Sylvia Plath* and represents the author by many means. Esther rejects the tagline of otherness placed on women and even adheres to the way of life of males that comprise more individuality rather than seeking social support for her survival. Beauvoir argued that women can free themselves, through individual decisions and collective action

Esther’s life is hard due to the heavy pressure of the patriarchy. Patriarchy challenges her every footstep and hinders her life. In a sense, the bad side of patriarchy contributes in putting her life and existence into jeopardy. Life has its own route and is sustainable when the fundamentals of life are treated well. But the limitations, and discriminations makes life difficult and hence challenges the existence of self. Sometimes physically and most often psychologically. Likewise, adding the perspective of existentialism is relevant as the major character Esther in the novel struggles to exist with isolated attitude unlike the common ones. The 19 years old teenager tries different way of living, she even does an intern in a newspaper company. She tries to engage with many boyfriends one after the other, yet she is barely satisfied with anyone and tends to leave them back and move on. However, her way of life and the pursuit of her own existence opens the dark side of the over consciousness. She even has many attempts of suicide. That is done as a means of emancipation and can be assimilated to some form of existentialism. Her existential

crisis happens because Esther lives in the patriarchal society that does not let her true potentiality to be explored. Patriarchy comes in her path as the hindrances so Esther in a sense become victim of patriarchal domination. We knew Esther challenged the traditional norm being a radical person, however eventually she has to end all of them by simply finishing her life. So patriarchy is that entity that challenges any way-out that a woman wants to bring in her life and mostly jeopardizes the existence of relatively marginalized people. We will have a look at the definition of existentialism in the following paragraphs.

Existentialism believes that individuals are entirely free and must take personal responsibility for themselves. Sorrow comes out of this responsibility. It asserts that people make decisions based on what has meaning to them rather what is rational. One can wish to do or to be anything. A person can choose to act in a different way. The focus on freedom in existentialism is related to the limits of the responsibility one bears. Freedom and responsibility are interdependent. Clarification of freedom also clarifies the responsibility

The fundamental doctrine of existentialism is “existence precedes essence”. One exists only when one is conscious of their existence. Human are conscious but the animals are not conscious of their existence. Hence, this existence is prior to the essence. When one becomes conscious of one’s existence s/he shows the radical dissatisfaction with the prevailing system, norms and values of society. This dissatisfaction leads to boredom and commit suicide. Suicide is a specific phenomenon in human beings. Only who are conscious of their existence commit suicide. If one cannot win anything in their life through their choices, they feel they can do it through death. Suicide is a mode of existence in existentialism.

Especially, as this research bases upon Beauvoir's arguments, the various facets of existence and feminism with different themes, of anxiety and anguish and alienation and estrangement tending towards the crisis of life. They try to evolve the fact that the pain and injury of unspeakable can lead life into the realm of even more pain through transmitting the event and stories of the sufferer. The research undergoes with the analysis of existential feminism and it's themes in a female character. The major objective of the research is to demonstrate vicious effects example suicide, that fall upon character while going through completely different way of life.

The research is based on the authentic cites. Another authentic and helpful guideline for this research is library based. Guidance from the lecturers and professors is taken as the supportive tool. In addition to it the texts on the notion of gender masculinity and existentialism are taken as the tools in making the application of the novel from the viewpoint of very testimony .The extracts are taken to prove the hypothesis.

The tentative chapter division and allocation of the time of thesis is as follows. The first chapter provides the bird eye view and the discussion of the methodology of existential reading and identity crisis. The second chapter is the application of tools as well as testimony and the analysis of the novel from the viewpoint of how psychological crisis leads into suicide in a character's life by maintaining herself far away from society and its norms. The last chapter concludes the research.

II. Esther's Existential Struggle in Plath's *The Bell Jar*.

In the novel *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath, there is a character named Esther, on whose story this research circles around to find out how she manages to negate every relations and tries to live a lonely life and that's all for emancipation. In a sense it is a rebellion or the establishment of woman as a being so that she can have freedom like males. In this, Esther wants to change the usual trend of life to get emancipation from the unnecessary hindrances she receives from the patriarchal society and then diverts the usual way of life into new being. As Esther moves into her own way of life, she faces lots of challenges and eventually isolates herself from all the relations. She does not want to limit herself solely as a traditional woman and immerses herself into the realm of abnormal life. Yet, the problems and hindrances adversely take away her freedom and give her a lot of psychological pressure. This way, she becomes ill, psychologically frustrated and eventually finds shade in suicide for her satisfaction. This happens when a person falls in the severe depression which the fallible nature of subversion is accountable of. Depression is a condition where a person feels disinterested, discouraged, sad, hopeless, or unmotivated in life in general. Major depression interferes with the daily activities like inability to work, study, eat and sleep. People in major depression may feel that life is not worth living and attempt to end their lives. It occurs during or after the death of a loved one, a breakup/divorce, medical illness, great loss or any other life events. In the novel, Esther Greenwood involves with the same symptoms. She also attempts to end her life.

Esther has lost her father but never cried for her father's death. Her father died in hospital and she was not allowed to the funeral being a child. Hence, her father's death always seemed unreal to her. Losing one's father is a great loss for a 9 years old child. Maybe the death of her father had lead her towards depression from her early

childhood. She might have been suffocated with the loss of father those whole years and not even mourning for his death.

I thought it odd all the time my father had been buried in this graveyard, none of us had ever visited him. My mother hadn't let us come to his funeral because we were only children then, and he died in hospital, so the graveyard had always seemed unreal to me. I had a great yearning, lately, to pay my father back for all the years of neglect, and start tending his grave. I had always been my father's favourite, and it seemed fitting I should take on a mourning my mother had never bothered with. (159)

Esther Greenwood is in a relationship with a medical student Buddy Willard. She adored him a lot but someday she suddenly realizes that he is a hypocrite and leaves him. Buddy made her feel sexier and experienced than him as in the things like hugging and kissing and petting, but he has only been pretending to be so innocent.

As things gets to uncover, Esther is terribly shocked when she comes to know that her boyfriend had already slept with a waitress, whereas Esther is saving herself to get married to a virgin.

I almost fell over. From the first night Buddy Willard kissed me and said I must go out with a lot of boys, he made me feel I was much more sexy and experienced than he was and that everything he did like hugging and kissing and petting was simply what I made feel like doing out of the blue, he couldn't help it and didn't know how it came about. (66)... What I could not stand was Buddy's pretending I was so sexy and he was so pure, when all the time he'd been having an affair

with that tarty waitress and must have felt like laughing in my face.(67)

Then she decides her children will not have hypocrite father like Buddy. Esther Greenwood is a scholarship girl. She is supposed to be the envy of thousands of other college girls. But she is not satisfied herself. She was not as excited as other girls were. She felt empty and moving dully. Typical girls waiting to marry some “career man” bored her as hell. When she saw them on the sun-roof yawning and painting their nails and trying to keep up their tans, she felt sick of them. Where her friend Doreen made fun of Jay Cee, her boss in New York Esther likes her. She was ugly but only her intelligence matter to Esther.

Jay Cee was my boss, and I liked her a lot, in spite of what Doreen said. She wasn't one of the fashion magazine gushers with fake eyelashes and giddy jewelry. Jay Cee had brains, so her plug-ugly looks didn't seem to matter. She read a couple of languages and knew all the quality writers in the business. (5)

Esther herself feels that studying, reading and writing and working like mad was what she wanted to do and that seemed true to her. She did everything well and got all “A” till the college. She always thought of getting some big scholarship to graduate school or a grant to study all over Europe and thought to be a professor and write books of poems or be an editor of some sort.

During the course of her college life, Esther applies for a summer course with famous writer where one is accepted after reading the manuscripts sent by the student. She is rejected. This becomes very important turning point for Esther because she has no options ahead. She describes:

‘I think I should tell you right away’, she said, and I could see bad news in the set of her neck, ‘you didn’t make that writing course’. The air punched out of my stomach. All through June the writing course had stretched before me like a brought, safe bridge over the dull gulf of the summer. Now I saw it totter and dissolve and a body in a white blouse and green skirt Plummer into gap. Then my mouth shaped itself sourly. I had expected it. I slunk down on the middle of my spine, my nose level with the rim of the window, and watched the houses of outer Boston glide by. As the houses grew more familiar, I slunk still lower. I felt it was very important not to be recognized. (110)

After getting rejected for the course Esther cannot decide whether to write thesis, or junk whole honors program and be an ordinary English major or start working as a typist or waitress.

As things did not go very well with her in writing art, she even gives a thought to the shorthand course, frequently suggested by her mother. But she could stand none of these things. She starts writing a novel but cannot continue as she has no experience of love or a baby or seeing anybody die.

I decided I would put off the novel until I had gone to Europe and had a lover and that I would never learn a word of shorthand. If I never learned shorthand I would never have to use it. I thought I would spent the summer reading *Finnegans Wake* and writing my thesis...Then plan after plan started leaping through my head, like a family of scatty rabbits. (118)

Esther is disturbed with the whole things happening in her life. She takes stronger sleeping pills but they are not working with her. She can’t sleep, read, write, eat and everything people did seemed too silly for her. She visits a psychiatrist, Doctor

Gordon. He recommends her a shock-treatment. This makes Esther feel more terrible. She is more traumatized.

These mishaps lead Esther to an angst and despair. No constructive measures are possible to hold back the fear in angst. It creates inherent insecurity in her about the consequences of her actions. Esther is a scholarship girl but she is rejected for a summer school. She feels that she has nothing back to fall on and nothing to rely on. She makes decisions based on what has meaning to her rather than what is rational. This brings Esther to a mediate province of living and dying.

The novel actually disguises the mental illness of Esther by the inward mysterious forces. The silence depressed me. It wasn't the silence of silence. It was my own silence. (17) This is a particularly intense excerpt about Esther's going into suicidal depression. For a girl who spends her life working with words as a magazine intern and as a literature major, silence is devastating.

External factors such as the frivolous behavior Esther might have is taken lightly rather the insanity is attributed with a powerful force that has natural occurrences.

The woman's stomach stuck up so high I couldn't see her face or the upper part of her body at all. She seemed to have nothing but an enormous spider-fat stomach and two little ugly spindly legs propped in the high stirrups and all the time the baby was being born she never stopped making this unhuman whooping noise. (61)

While society celebrates motherhood, Esther views maternity as something disgusting and unhuman. The woman she witnesses in the delivery room is reduced to a horrible spider.

Also there are some obvious things that make Esther's illness worst. She comes from a poor family of a single mother. Mother usually don't understand her. Father is long dead in her childhood.

I had a great yearning, lately, to pay my father back for all the years of neglect, and start tending his grave. I had always been my father's favorite, and it seemed fitting I should take on a mourning my mother had never bothered with. I thought that if my father hadn't died, he would have taught me all about insects, which was his specialty at the university. He would also have taught me German and Greek and Latin, which he knew, and perhaps I would be a Lutheran. (159)

The place of Esther's father in her life isn't really explored in the novel because he died when she was so young. But it's interesting that she decides to mourn his death right before she attempts suicide. Is it because she wishes she had a strong male figure in her life, an intellectual mentor, even a protector? Does she think her life would have been any better if he had been alive? But the mother who is with her in the present time is quite understanding. "I knew you'd decide to be all right again." (140)

In contrast to Dr. Nolan, Esther's mother doesn't seem to understand that Esther's mental illness is just that – an illness, not a moral failing. Depression isn't something that Esther can "decide" away. It's no wonder that Esther only gets worse in her mother's care: on top of depression,

Esther has to deal with her mother's implication that Esther is somehow guilty of being depressed. Esther hates her mother intensively. As we can see below.

"That was a silly thing for her to do," I said to Doctor Nolan.

Doctor Nolan nodded. She seemed to know what I meant. "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." (195)

Dr. Nolan here lets Esther express her feelings about her mother honestly. Just getting the chance to express her feelings has therapeutic value for Esther. In the past, she's been so worried about what others think of her that she hasn't really had the chance to be honest with herself. She, makes a wish about her mother, since she isn't satisfied with her rude behavior.

I wish I had a mother like Jay Cee. Then I'd know what to do. My own mother wasn't much help [...] She was always on to me to learn shorthand after college, so I'd have a practical skill as well as a college degree. "Even the apostles were tentmakers," she'd say. "They had to live, just the way we do." (36)

Esther embraces Jay Cee as a possible mother figure because, unlike her own mother, Jay Cee is a successful professional who has made a life out of writing. Instead of trying to get Esther to learn shorthand, as Mrs. Greenwood does, Jay Cee tries to prepare Esther for a career in journalism by encouraging her to learn new languages.

In this way this story of Esther revolves from hating mother and negating every women. It's like the beginning of change in a teenage girl who is going to be matured soon. In the course of time, she experiences some milestones of life time. Sometimes as responsible women and sometime as a sexual partner. Esther actually becomes aware that her one phase of life is coming to an end and another is beginning. This way she continually distances herself even from other women.

This hotel – the Amazon – was for women only, and they were mostly girls my age with wealthy parents [...] and they were all going to posh secretarial schools like Katy Gibbs, where they had to wear hats and

stockings and gloves to class, or they had just graduated from places like Katy Gibbs and were secretaries to executives and junior executives and simply hanging around in New York waiting to get married to some career man or other. (4)

Esther self-consciously distances herself from the other women staying at the Amazon, which is a rather ironic name for a residence designed to keep virginal young women safe from lascivious men. Her rejection of the secretarial career path is one of the reasons she can't stand her mother, who teaches shorthand, a necessary skill at the time for secretaries. Esther made a different understanding of women within herself. She thinks like women are the drug type of invention to men.

I thought it sounded just like the sort of drug a man would invent [...] she would go straight home and start another baby, because the drug would make her forget how bad the pain had been, when all the time, in some secret part of her, that long, blind, door less and windowless corridor of pain was waiting to open up and shut her in again. (62)

Esther sees something insidious about the fact that women are knocked out before giving birth. By losing consciousness, women are denied knowledge of one of the most critical experiences in their lives. Anesthesia seems to be part of a larger social trend to get women to literally lose their minds.

Esther's journey does not go smoothly. She moves into negativity and the negation of her own abilities. In a sense, it is the journey towards madness. A psychologically disrupt journey that might have the evil outcome in life. Here she suffers a breakdown from life and psychology of madness disrupts her coming of age.

I saw my life branching out before me like the green fig tree in the story. From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful

future beckoned and winked [...] I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig tree, starving to death, just because I couldn't make up my mind which of the figs I would choose. (73)

One aspect of Esther's depression is that she feels paralyzed, unable to act. The fig tree here represents all of the possibilities for action that she just can't gather up her efforts to pursue.

A small answering point in my body flew toward it. I felt my lungs inflate with the inrush of scenery – air, mountains, trees, and people. I thought, "This is what it is to be happy." I plummeted down past the zigzagers, the students, the experts, through year after year of doubleness and smiles and compromise, into my own past. (93)

While Esther is certainly mentally ill, she experiences moments of almost visionary clarity, such as the one described in this passage. It is this clarity that comes through when she makes her biting critique of the hypocrisy of modern society. Her experience suggests that her "madness" is not an either/or kind of thing, but a composite of physiological, emotional, and social factors. Simply put, both Esther and society contribute to her suicidal depression.

Be it distancing herself from other women or starting to have severe depression, Esther was aware and was trying to subvert every norms in establishment of her identity. Because she felt something was lacking in her.

Only I wasn't steering anything, not even myself. I just bumped from my hotel to work and to parties and from parties to my hotel and back to work like a numb trolleybus. I guess I should have been excited the way most of the other girls were, but I couldn't get myself to react. I

felt very still and very empty, the way the eye of a tornado must feel, moving dully along in the middle of the surrounding hullabaloo. (2)

In this extract from early passage, Esther feels that she is distanced from the hustle and bustle of New York City. Her feelings of emptiness suggest that she's lost her sense of who she is. Yet she wants to know her identity. If identity doesn't exist, it should be created because Esther was feeling something abnormal. Whether it was from the extreme depression or the awareness of crisis, she felt herself gradually decreasing.

It's like watching Paris from an express caboose heading in the opposite direction – every second the city gets smaller and smaller, only you feel it's really you getting smaller and smaller and lonelier and lonelier rushing away from all those lights and that excitement at about a million miles an hour. (15)

Here, this part of novel emphasizes the way that Esther feels invisible in the eyes of society. She sees herself not through her own eyes, but from the perspective of others, in this case Paris as part of her. In Paris, she becomes continuously small. Either Paris is bigger or she becomes smaller, but it's the implication that she doesn't fit into the society and she is pulling herself away from it constantly. She pursues her own way of life to establish her own identity.

It was so dark in the bar I could hardly make out anything except Doreen. With her white hair and white dress she was so white she looked silver. I think she must have reflected the neons over the bar. I felt myself melting into the shadows like the negative of a person I'd never seen before in my life. (9)

This above excerpt describes how Esther feels invisible in social situations. In the darkness of the bar, all eyes are on the beautiful Doreen in her gleaming white dress, and not on Esther. She could feel herself melting into the shadows like the negative of a person. She continuously felt herself shrinking into even smaller object than the dots.

Out of the air Lenny's voice boomed, "Wye oh wye did I ever leave Wyoming?" The two of them didn't even stop jitterbugging during the intervals. I felt myself shrinking to a small black dot against all those red and white rugs and that pine paneling. I felt like a hole in the ground. There is something demoralizing about watching two people get more and more crazy about each other, especially when you are the only extra person in the room. (15)

This is the fact that Doreen and Lenny act as if Esther doesn't exist leads Esther to feel that she literally doesn't exist. Esther is feeling herself as the small dot that barely exist. So Esther literally vanished in the thin air. She was having difficulty in pinning down her identity. Esther wasn't self-aware of herself.

"I don't really know," I heard myself say. I felt a deep shock, hearing myself say that, because the minute I said it, I knew it was true. It sounded true, and I recognized it, the way you recognize some nondescript person that's been hanging around your door for ages and then suddenly comes up and introduces himself as your real father and looks exactly like you, so you know he really is your father, and the person you thought all your life was your father is a sham. (30)

In this conversation with her boss, Jay Cee, Esther feels enormous pressure to pin down her identity to a definite career path, but she finds herself unable to. It is

evidenced that a lot of people have no idea what they want to do after college, so is Jay Cee being so hard on Esther. Slowly Esther feels alienated from herself. It's a psychological crackdown that she faces in different images.

The person's mouth was pale brown, with a rose-colored sore at either corner. The most startling thing about the face was its supernatural conglomeration of bright colors. I smiled. The mouth in the mirror cracked into a grin. A minute after the crash another nurse ran in. She took one look at the broken mirror, and at me, standing over the blind, white pieces, and hustled the young nurse out of the room. (168)

This example is a great example of how Esther feels alienated from her own body. It's *the* mouth, not my mouth, as if a random pair of lips just happened to be dangling in front of a mirror. As with the paragraph break where a description of what Esther is thinking when she sees herself should be. The novel shows how Esther loses herself by literally erasing her from her own self just as the paragraph break. This also seems as Esther has hard figuring out of herself just as the society doesn't recognize her.

Esther, is having multiple personalities. She sees others as her and herself into others.

I looked at Joan. In spite of the creepy feeling, and in spite of my old, ingrained dislike, Joan fascinated me. It was like observing a Martian, or a particularly warty toad. Her thoughts were not my thoughts, nor her feelings my feelings, but we were close enough so that her thoughts and feelings seemed a wry, black image of my own.

Sometimes I wondered if I had made Joan up. Other times I wondered if she would continue to pop in at every crisis of my life to remind me of what I had been, and what I had been through, and carry on her own separate but similar crisis under my nose. (210)

Even as Esther feels herself splitting up into multiple personalities, she sees herself in others' situations, like her friend Joan. This is the point of transition in the life of Esther. Esther finds herself falling into an illusion. Once she reads a story of a Jew and a woman coming together because they saw the hatching of an egg. Later Esther sees the same thing in real life. By putting herself into the imaginary situation she is making is relevant why she moved away from the life of Buddy.

It seemed to me Buddy Willard and I were like that Jewish man and that nun, although of course we weren't Jewish or Catholic but Unitarian. We had met together under our own imaginary fig tree, and what we had seen wasn't a bird coming out of an egg but a baby coming out of a woman, and then something awful happened and we went our separate ways. (52)

This is actually the reference to a story that Esther reads where a Jewish man and a Catholic nun meet under a fig tree until one day they bond over seeing a bird hatching out of an egg. The next day, the Catholic nun is replaced by another, grouchier nun. For Esther, the story helps her understand what happened when she went to visit Buddy at the medical school, where she witnessed a delivery being performed. Instead of the experience bringing her and Buddy together, the experience only confirmed her reluctance to go down the motherhood route. However, early in the relationship Esther had taken Buddy as the moral and intellectual guide. Her mother and many had injected good things about Buddy. She believed Buddy as being charming just because others said. She idolized Buddy without knowing much. This is the reason why she had trouble adjusting with Buddy, because he wasn't as clean and charming. Her idolization went wrong.

I didn't know what to say. My mother and my grandmother had started hinting around to me a lot lately about what a fine, clean boy Buddy Willard was, coming from such a fine, clean family, and how everybody at church thought he was a model person, so kind to his parents and to older people, as well as so athletic and so handsome and so intelligent. All I'd heard about, really, was how fine and clean Buddy was and how he was the kind of a person a girl should stay fine and clean for. So I didn't really see the harm in anything Buddy would think up to do. (64)

This quote shows the extent to which Esther idolized Buddy. She accepted what everybody said about Buddy: that he was an upstanding and chaste – "clean" – man who would want an equally "clean" woman to marry. Later, Esther is crushed when she discovers that Buddy isn't so clean after all; he's spent his summer sleeping with a waitress on Cape Cod. She's not bothered as much by the sex as she is by Buddy's hypocrisy, his pretense that he's such a "fine and clean" individual. So her trouble was, she took Buddy as everyone told her.

Here is a point worth mentioning is, Esther began to realize for a woman there is much more than to simply become her husband's great fan. For this, Esther was much more fascinated with Buddy's mother. Unlike many other, Buddy's mother also didn't give much priority of becoming a fan of her husband. Her thinking was that partner had to be only up to the mate and not more. She wants to be something else rather only to be an affectionate to her husband.

"What a man wants is a mate and what a woman wants is infinite security," and, "What a man is is an arrow into the future and what a woman is is the place the arrow shoots off from," until it made me

tired. Every time I tried to argue, Buddy would say his mother still got pleasure out of his father and wasn't that wonderful for people their age, it must mean she really knew what was what. (67)

These fine words are the sayings of Mrs. Willard, Buddy's mother and Esther's prospective mother-in-law would need Infinite security, the place the arrow shoots off from them. The idea that a woman might want to be something other than her husband's biggest fan is foreign to Mrs. Willard. Here it is clear Esther rejects Mrs. Willard's views Instead of having her future defined by long years of fawning over a husband, Esther wants to open up her horizons and explore the possibilities.

I liked looking on at other people in crucial situations. If there was a road accident or a street fight or a baby pickled in a laboratory jar for me to look at, I'd stop and look so hard I never forgot it. I certainly learned a lot of things I never would have learned otherwise this way, and even when they surprised me or made me sick I never let on, but pretended that's the way I knew things were all the time. (12)

Esther learned a lot of things from other people's crucial situations. Esther means she is a person who would stop and see those things happening or else she wouldn't have realized and understood this regardless of her pretentious claiming that she actually did. She starting to talk to herself and she no longer thinks her body as the sexual object. Here this extract also suggests that crisis situations, such as Esther's attempted suicide, are the most revealing of a person's true nature.

I thought I would swim out until I was too tired to swim back. As I paddled on, my heartbeat boomed like a dull motor in my ears. I am I am I am. That morning I had tried to hang myself. I had taken the silk cord of my mother's yellow bathrobe as soon as she left for work, and,

in the amber shade of the bedroom, fashioned it into a knot that slipped up and down on itself. It took me a long time to do this, because I was poor at knots and had no idea how to make a proper one. (152)

So, yes, Esther thinks her heart is talking to her. It's a not proper way to think about your body in true manner. But it is interesting that Esther's body is no longer something that she thinks of as a sexual object or as a baby-making machine. It's just her body, pure and simple, reduced to the most essential expression of the fact that she *is*, who she is. Now Esther's focus went to see every details of her body. Actually, Esther doesn't want to go with this body anymore. It's the mood of the suicide.

Then I saw that my body had all sorts of little tricks, such as making my hands go limp at the crucial second, which would save it, time and again, whereas if I had the whole say, I would be dead in a flash. I would simply have to ambush it with whatever sense I had left, or it would trap me in its stupid cage for fifty years without any sense at all. And when people found out my mind had gone, as they would have to, sooner or later, in spite of my mother's guarded tongue, they would persuade her to put me into an asylum where I could be cured. (153)

Here we have another instance where Esther has, well, an out-of-body experience in her own body, as if her body isn't really under her control but has a will of its own.

Her body wants to live but she does not. It is like that came from all those repressions of life. Just in the case as Freudian psychological repression of a child, it is the repression of suicide that Esther wanted since her birth. As it came into her heredity.

I unscrewed the bottle of pills and started taking them swiftly, between gulps of water, one by one by one. At first nothing happened, but as I approached the bottom of the bottle, red and blue lights began to flash

before my eyes. The bottle slid from my fingers and I lay down. The silence drew off, baring the pebbles and shells and all the tatty wreckage of my life. Then, at the rim of vision, it gathered itself, and in one sweeping tide, rushed me to sleep. (163)

This isn't the suggestion that it is all as the Freudian thinking, however, Esther's suicide scene seems very wombish since its creation. She crawls into a dark tunnel as she slipped into the bottle of pills. It is so clear to see this as her crawling back into a metaphorical birth is an after life after death. And the visionary images Esther sees suggests the contractions and water breaking during labor. It is just another way to stress the association between birth and death for Esther perhaps in after life.

Not only through suicide, Esther continued to reject marriage, even with the therapy she received from Doctor Nolan. She chooses from own right and particularly the rite of reborn not as clearly visible as the suicide attempts.

I kept shooting impatient glances at the closed boardroom door. My stocking seams were straight, my black shoes cracked, but polished, and my red wool suit flamboyant as my plans. Something old, something new. . . But I wasn't getting married. There ought, I thought, to be a ritual for being born twice -- patched, retreaded and approved for the road, I was trying to think of an appropriate one when Doctor Nolan appeared from nowhere and touched me on the shoulder. (233)

Here, Esther continues to reject marriage as the defining event in a young woman's road to maturity. She picks her own rite i.e. the rite of being reborn, significantly not through suicide, as she attempted in the depths of her depression, but through the therapy she underwent at the institution.

Finally, came to the realization that the change could not benefit by any means. By suggesting her writing attempt just as useless, Esther supports this argument.

And of course Buddy wouldn't have any answer to that, because what I said was true. People were made of nothing so much as dust, and I couldn't see that doctoring all that dust was a bit better than writing poems people would remember and repeat to themselves when they were unhappy or sick and couldn't sleep. (53)

Here, Esther imagines her response to Buddy, who looks down on her writing aspirations as a useless hobby. The passage suggests a social function for writing, as a way of comforting people, possibly even as a form of therapy. With this claim, it can be declared that Esther's story is after all the story of Sylvia Plath herself. So Esther is the reflection of imaginary character of Plath. Here is an obvious claim made in the novel.

From another, distanced mind, I saw myself [. . .]. A feeling of tenderness filled my heart. My heroine would be myself, only in disguise. She would be called Elaine. Elaine. I counted the letters on my fingers. There were six letters in Esther, too. It seemed a lucky thing. (116)

This is where every critics and readers call this novel as the self-reflexive. The heroine of Esther's imaginary novel is herself, and that's only in disguise. So here's just as Plath's conversion to Esther, it's the attempt of female to control her own existence as a human being rather than simply the other or the subordinate being. And with the unsuccessful attempts of Esther, it is the fallible change in character of real

life of Plath. So it's the subversion in disguise like the all new spin offs of names on all of those times that Esther takes on different characteristics.

I. Struggle as the Defining Part of Female Existence

Every individual life is different and they try to live on their own style. Here, on the story where this research is based upon, the character named Esther also has a different life style, that's particularly uncommon and hence, makes Esther its victim. Esther is trying to reinstate her identity with another self-i.e. trying to establish her feminine existence as the being of the world but not just the feminine gender as the secondary aspect. For this, Esther tries to establish her own position through her own strength and tries to live such life by negating everyone that comes through her way. However, due to abnormalities in her psychic condition and severe domination from patriarchal society, it becomes harder for Esther to make an easy way for her perspective and planned way of life.

The research catches the story of Esther from the part where she finishes her internship after college and looks for a job around and outside of Boston. The research takes the stand on her suicidal attempts as the major flaw in Esther as she puts herself on another realm of life. Despite Esther's insincere attempt for suicide to overcome herself and be the part of different entity, her initial actions are full of dislike and suspicion. Such actions of hatred convinces her to alienate others, however such action adversely alienates her from the world. Here Esther blends an uneasy mixture of dislike and sympathy, distance and identification within herself. While it seems unlikable to many of her readers, Esther is seen corresponded with the life of Plath herself that convinces many readers that they were of same level and gone through similar evolution of life.

Esther is presented as the reflection of Plath's life and the various incidents that Esther faces throughout the story such as winning scholarships and her various complicated relationships with men are similar to those of Plath. Although this novel

reflects Sylvia Plath's agony and frustration in her life, it also reflects the role which the society was living in at that time has played in that frustration since it was thought society that her frustration emerges. The frustrations apex point rises up to suicide which both these real life and the fictional character share.

Finally, talking about both women, Plath and Esther, on their belief on suicide, it must be noted that suicide is an act, a definite act with very final consequences. Therefore, this act must be looked at differently from some other issues of modern freedoms, or even ideas surrounding the right to die with dignity. These are the distinctions that either Plath as a creator or Esther as a fictional creation must make for their existence. If life cannot be easily right or wrong, black or white, it can be a process of thoughtful choices that emphasize the compassionate dignity which humans are capable of. However, Esther or Plath's life choose a different life that ultimately became fallible.

Through this novel, Plath is presenting society's role and beliefs towards women at her contemporary period. Esther and Plath shared a mutual passion for writing and a desire to make it a career but according to their society such a career was constrained and thought to be irrational for a woman. It is looked at, as being an un-feminine role for a woman. Therefore, such beliefs have made the female role in society clearly undefined, thus making it impossible for women to make the right choices in life. So Esther and in real Plath chooses the life of her own, madly supports individual life and act unnaturally by negating the bond of women. However, she also does not accept the company with males, yet, her actions become more radical as they seem to be strongly negating males. So she goes into the process of altering, let us say the apart from everything else, even those who are of her same biological type. So, Esther normally breaks bond between females as well and even families. This

separation leads Esther into the life secular form husband, friends and family, which in sense becomes her more powerful decision than the physical one which makes her life a heap of crisis. But at the end, Esther never becomes successful as she cannot control what she commenced. Her final attempts of her own style of life suicide, which can be claimed as the fallible process of doing things. So in a gist, it can be concluded that, Esther's life starting from a prospective career as an intern, radical negation of males, rejection of females bonds, and the suicidal attempt for final redemption is definitely an assertion of female sex as a human being in the beginning phase and yet a crisis when her endeavor tries to cost her own life.

Works Cited

Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. New York: Cornell University, 1999.

Andanari, Kintan. "A Look into Depression: Review of *The Bell Jar*." USP

Publication 2014.

Bauer, Nancy. Simone de Beauvoir, *Philosophy and Feminism*. New York: Colombia

University press, 2001.

Beauvoir Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Trans. Ed. H. M. Parshley. London: Vintage

Press, 1997.

Joiner, Thomas. "Suicide Theory." *American Association of Suicidology*, Vol. 36(3),

June 2005.

McNay, Richard D. Master of Arts English: *Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar and the Problem of*

Critical Response. SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY, 1984.

Schimelpfening, Nancy. "*The Bell Jar*, A Classic Story of Depression",

<<https://blablawriting.com/the-american-psycho-the-bell-jar-coursework-essay>>Web. 15 Nov. 2016.

Schuster, Rebecca. "Madness and the Absent Father-Analysis of Esther's Mental

Illness in *The Bell Jar*."

Smith, Rosi. "Seeing Through the Bell Jar: Distorted Female Identity in Cold War America."

Aspeers: Emerging Voices in American Studies 1.1 (2008): 33-55.

Topham, James. "*The Bell Jar* Review." Harper Collins, 2014.