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RE-READING SYLVIA PLATH THROUGH *THE BELL JAR*

Esin KUMLU

Danışman
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ABSTRACT

Doctoral Thesis

Re-Reading Sylvia Plath through *The Bell Jar*

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Although the name Sylvia Plath has always been associated with schizophrenia, madness, trauma and ambiguity, and although her works have been read in the light of these key words, which form the kernel of the Plath myth, reading *The Bell Jar* with an objective mind supplies a completely different picture. In relation to this, analyzing *The Bell Jar* through psychoanalytic and feminist literary criticism reveal the fact that Sylvia Plath not only managed to create an organic form of writing, which encapsulates her poems, short stories and journals, all of which turn back to *The Bell Jar*, but also built her powerful political discourse upon *The Bell Jar*, which was not a pot boiler, but a reflector of the sociology of Cold War America. Therefore through dividing the novel into three parts as, Hell, Purgatory and Paradise, the protagonist Esther Greenwood reveals the hidden traumas of the Cold War by creating a psychic landscape, including various Virgil's, guides, which is a form of simulacra as opposed to the one created by the dominant patriarchal ideology. At the end of her story, thanks to the play of language, Esther achieves the preservation of her true self through killing the false selves which are postulated by Cold War America. As a result, Esther's story reveals the fact that Plath's entire works must be read as literary works that are part of the sociology of twentieth century America and literature, not fantasies.

Key Words: Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*, Cold War Ideology, Unconscious mind, Female Psyche.

ÖZET

Doktora Tezi

Sylvia Plath'in *Sırça Fanus* Üzerinden Yeniden Okunması

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Eserleri ve kimliği adeta bir fantezi ve mite dönüştürülen Amerikan şair ve yazar Sylvia Plath, edebiyat dünyası tarafından "deli dahi" olarak damgalanmıştır. Dolayısı ile Sylvia Plath ismi şizofreni, delilik, travma ve belirsizilik ile özdeşleşmektedir ve sadece yaşamı değil eserleri de "Plath miti'nin" anahtar kelimeleri olarak adlandırılabilinecek bu kavramlar üzerinden okunmaktadır. Oysa *Sırça Fanus'un* objektif bir lens aracılığı ile okunması okuyucuyu tamamiyle farklı bir tablo ile karşılaştırmaktadır. Psikanalitik ve feminist eleştiri üzerinden okunana *Sırça Fanus*, Plath'in sadece kısa öykülerini, şiirlerini ve günlüklerini kapsayan organik yazma biçimini ve bu biçimin *Sırça Fanus* merkezli yapısını değil aynı zamanda Plath'in romanı üzerinden kurduğu ve böylece tüm eserlerine yaymayı başardığı güçlü politik söylemini açığa çıkarmaktadır. Bu bağlamda incelendiğinde eserin olay örgüsü 'Cehennem,' 'Araf' ve 'Cennet' olarak üçe bölündüğünde, ana karakter Esther Greenwood'un Soğuk Savaş döneminin açığa çıkarılamayan tarihsel travmalarını okuyucuya yansıttığı görülmektedir. Esther, Cehennem ve Cennet arası geçen metaforik yolculuğunda kendisine eşlik eden rehberleri ile zihinsel bir alan yaratarak, sosyal yaşama egemen olan patriarkal söylemin önerdiği simulacraya karşı farklı bir yanılsama sunmaktadır. Sonuç olarak hikâyesinin sonunda Esther dil oyunları yardımı ile öz kimliğini korumayı başarmakta ve Soğuk Savaş ideolojisinin dayattığı sahte kimlikleri yok etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sylvia Plath, *Sırça Fanus*, Soğuk Savaş İdeolojisi, Bilinçaltı, Kadın Zihinzel alanı.

RE-READING SYLVIA PLATH THROUGH *THE BELL JAR*

PART III

PURGATORY: ENTERING THE SANCTUARY OF THE CULTURAL LOGOS

PART IV

PARADISE: ESTHER'S DIAGNOSIS FOR THE AMERICAN CULTURE

ABBREVIATIONS

A **:** Sylvia Plath. *Ariel*: *The Restored Edition*. (New York: Harper Perennial, 2004).

BJ **:** Sylvia Plath. *The Bell Jar*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

Col **:** Sylvia Plath. *The Colossus and other poems by Sylvia Plath* (New York: Vintage, 1968).

CP **:** Sylvia Plath. *The Collected Poems*. Ed. Ted Hughes (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008).

CW **:** Sylvia Plath. *Crossing the Water* (New York, Haper & Row, 1971).

J **:** Sylvia Plath. *The Unabridged journals of Sylvia Plath*, ed. Karen Kukil (New York: Anchor Books, 2000).

JP **:** Sylvia Plath. *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams. Short Stories, Prose, and Diary Excerpts* (New York, Harper Perennial, 2000).

LH **:** Sylvia Plath. *Letters Home*, ed. Aurelia Plath (New York: Harper and Row, 1975).

WT **:** Sylvia Plath. *Winter Trees* (New York: Harper&Row, 1972).

…the reality is relative, depending on what lens you look through. Each person, banging into the facts, neutral, impersonal in themselves (like the Death of someone)- interprets, alters, becomes obsessed with personal biases or attitudes, transmuting the objective reality into something quite personal….

Sylvia Plath, *The Unabridged Journals.*

INTRODUCTION

Sylvia Plath is one of the few authors who have been posthumously awarded the Pulitzer Prize. Plath's exceptionalism is not limited with that, when twentieth-century literary history is examined, it becomes patent that no writer has created such an enormous impact as Sylvia Plath. Furthermore, no writer or poet has been as misunderstood as in the case of Plath. In addition, no writer or poet has been labeled often as "schizophrenic" or "mad" by scholars or researchers who do not have the slightest education in psychology or psychopathology (Stevenson, 1989; Butscher 1976; Alvarez 1972; Paterno, 1971). Therefore, the works written on Plath, or the studies that have been made on Plath must be carefully read in order to purify the interpretation of her works from falsehood. In relation to that Plath's works must be read solely as literary works that are part of the twentieth century literature, not fantasies. Therefore, the myths that have been created concerning Plath or the readings that start from the death of Plath are not only the false lights of literary critics but also of the ideology that has been misunderstandings imposed on a woman intellectual who tried to *create* in Cold War America. As a result, although the

literary critics have tended to create many Plath's, including the psychotic, the divorced, the dead, the mad, the divided, and the schizoid, as a matter of fact there is only one Sylvia Plath, who crystallizes not only the traumas of her generation but also an organic form of writing that "censors, transforms, and endlessly rewrites [herself]"(Rose, "Haunting" 104) as a response to the ideology of her age.

In relation to the age she lived in, the interpretation of Plath and her works are naturally related with not only Cold War America, but also the nuclear age that had its own ideology that gave shape to an entire generation. In relation to that, Simone de Beauvoir in her introduction to *The Second Sex* argues that, "humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being"(16). Beauvoir's argument successfully suits the case of Plath, a literal case, which has been turned into a pathological one.[1] As a result, almost all of the early works on Plath, including the biographies and criticism of the poems and the prose, have attempted to recreate a story, a myth, which has turned into an industry that focuses on a Sylvia Plath, who has been defined in terms of the dead father or the lost husband. Therefore, absence, as a key word of interpreting Plath, has postulated the transformation of a genius into a "mad woman in the attic"[2] who has become solely associated with the "image of an Oedipal victim"(Rose, "Haunting" 13). Hence, the intention of re-creating different stories of Plath resulted in a birth of "a myth"(Rose, "Haunting", 11).

[1] As Judith Kroll argues, "There is a similar danger of missing the meaning of her poetry in regarding her themes and imagery as illustrations of pathological symptoms, as if what is of significance in her poetry were reducible to the presentation of a case history"(Kroll 5).

[2] *Mad Woman in the Attic* is the work of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. The term has become famous especially among feminist scholars. For further reading see *Mad Woman in the Attic. The Women Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination*. (New Haven: Yale Up, 2000).

The Plath myth has contributed nothing to the interpretation of the works of Plath, as each work, which is part of the myth, starts with the suicide of Plath and ends with the psychotic nature of a schizoid poet. As Judith Kroll endorses,

> Most readers of contemporary poetry in the English-speaking world are by now acquainted with the life and work of Sylvia Plath. But the particular renown she has posthumously won is not the success she intended and deserves. The reading of her work has been entangled in a fascination with her suicide and the broken marriage which preceded it, and such misreading is as widespread among her admirers as among her detectors; as literature. In these terms, the fact, for example, that she killed herself is irrelevant to the consideration of the meaning of her work; as literature, her poems would mean what they do even if she had not attempted suicide.(1)

In relation, most of the biographies and studies on Plath do not achieve the postulation of a new vision in understanding her literary works. That is the reason why Tim Kendall in the preface of his work on Plath asks:

> Why does the world need yet another book on Sylvia Plath? Here is a writer who has attracted more attention, and from a broader readership, than any other post-war English-language poet. Plath has become an industry. Yet her popularity has not always helped to enhance our understanding of her work.(preface)

Kendall's claims on the works on Plath is quite right, as dozens of biographies and literary criticism studies have appeared only as a repetition of either the previous ones or a counter attack against the Plath industry. Therefore, new insights into the Plath criticism have been achieved by very few works. However, before focusing on these works, the reader must focus reading on the story of Plath in terms of purifying oneself from the misunderstandings postulated by the literary critics.

The complexity of deciphering the true Sylvia Plath can be exemplified by Héléne Cixous's binary opposition in *Sorties*. Cixous first asks "Where is she"(91). The question is quite significant for the Plath reader, as among the diverse roles that have been created for her, one needs to understand where Sylvia Plath is. It can be

asserted that Plath and her voice are absent in most of the critical studies. The next step that defines Plath's case is the oppositions of Cixious's "Activity/Passivity, Sun/Moon, Culture/Nature, Day/Night"(91).[3] It can be claimed that Sylvia Plath has been identified with passivity, as she did not create as a result of her creative ability, but from her ability to take inspiration from her "madness." Furthermore, she is the moon, "the dark lady of the literati," possessing nature that is suitable for destruction. In addition, Cixous's oppositions "Father/Mother, Head/Heart, Intelligible/Sensitive, Logos/Pathos"(91) can be easily adopted into the case of Plath as she is the mad mother, who had always acted through her senses, which signifies the heart, thus deserves not the side of Logos but Pathos. At this point it is crucial to ask how the reader can destroy Sylvia Plath as a modern Edna Pontéllier[4] and how one can find the answer to why Sylvia Plath was turned into a fantasy. In order to deconstruct the portrayal of Sylvia Plath as a modern Edna Pontéllier first the problem of constructing a biographical truth of Plath must be resolved, and the only way to achieve this is by focusing on the life-story of Plath.

Like Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams, Sylvia Plath was the child of the effects of the Second World War, the Cold War, the atomic age, and the fear of nuclear power which left an imprint upon her literary works that nothing could erase. Her father was Otto Plath who had a career in entomology and his field was bees.[5] He graduated form Harvard at the age of forty-three. After his graduation, he began

[3] Both Plath's and Cixous' fathers died when they were very children, and both had a keen interest in language. Like Plath's mother and father, Cixous's mother spoke German too.

[4] Edna Pontéllier is the protagonist of Kate Chopin's masterpiece *The Awakening*. At the end of the novel, Edna commits suicide and the novel has always been interpreted through suicide. The significant point is the fact that Both Chopin's and Plath's novels were banned from libraries in America as a result of their sexual discourses that were ahead of their time. For further reading see Kate Chopin. *The Awakening and Selected Short Stories of Kate Chopin* (New York: Signet, 1976).

[5] In most of the late poems of Plath "bees" are the central figures that signify various meanings. In her "Ariel" poems "the Bee Sequence" is the most popular one.

teaching at Boston University where he would meet his future wife Aurelia Schober, who was a student. While working on her master's degree, she met Otto. By that time, she was twenty-one years old that means her husband was four years younger than her father. Aurelia was a child of a Roman Catholic family who were immigrants from Vienna. Throughout the First World War years, having a German background in her blood was obviously meant hard times. However, for Aurelia, the hard times seemed to end with her marriage to Otto in 1932. Her husband's role as a fatherly figure at the beginning of her marriage was later darkened by Otto's outside hobbies. However, thanks to the birth of Sylvia, who was an attractive child, the dark days ended.

This happy family atmosphere coupled with Sylvia's artistic creativity and admirable intelligence, first showed its benefits after she had entered Winthrop public school in 1938. She immediately became the star of the school. Her intelligence and her straight "A's" astonished her teachers. As a model for her friends, little Sylvia began to indicate that her achievements in school were just the beginning. In addition to her success in education, Sylvia enthusiastically focused on the integral part of her cultural dynamics.[6] Without a doubt the rise of Hitler and the impacts of the World Wars triggered Sylvia to reach a certain form of consciousness about not only the politics of her culture, but also the history of world politics. Especially, during that time Sylvia observed the difficulties of having a Germanic background through her father and mother, and this observation would later appear as the association of Jewish identity with definitions of pain and anxiety. However,

[6]She followed the radio series "The Shadow" and "Superman" that were quite popular at that time. The Shadow and Superman would later appear as short stories in *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*.

Sylvia, Warren, her brother, and Aurelia were unaware of the fact that the air of anxiety in the Plath home would be deeply intensified by the death of Otto Plath.

On November 5, 1940, Otto Plath died. Aurelia did not take her children to Otto's funeral, assuming that their father's death would place deep psychological marks on them. However, not attending to her father's funeral caused a much more dangerous psychological scar for Sylvia[7] as she never achieved a total belief in the death of her father, and throughout her life she would accuse her mother of deception. Although Aurelia thought that the most difficult task of her new life was to face an economic crisis with two little children, as Otto Plath had rejected a life insurance while he was alive, the most difficult task was the impossibility of a future happiness. Aurelia told Warren that his father had died: She describes the episode in *Letters Home* that "Warren sat up, hugged me tightly, crying out, "Oh, Mummy, I'm so glad *you* are young and healthy! Then I faced the more difficult task, telling Sylvia, who was already reading in her bed. She looked at me sternly for a moment, then said woodenly, "I'll never speak to God again!"(LH 25). After Sylvia returned from school, she gave a paper to her mother, to sign, having written on it: "I PROMISE NEVER TO MARRY AGAIN. Signed:————"(LH 25) to sign. What is quite significant is the detail Mrs. Plath supplies about the same day. She states "I signed at once, hugged her and gave her a glass of milk with some cookies. She pushed a kitchen chair against the one I was sitting on, sighed as if relieved and,

[7] The name Sylvia derived from the herb "salvia" that is also the adjective of "sylvan." When Otto Plath's studies are taken into consideration, the name Sylvia probably had its roots in his scientific training.

leaning against my arm, ate and drank with relish"(LH 25).[8]After Otto's death, Aurelia decided to leave Winthrop for Wellesley.[9]

Sylvia's high-school life in Wellesley was also composed of straight "A's" as a model of a student who had a bright intelligence. While taking piano and violin lessons she became a member of the high-school orchestra. Her artistic capacity was not limited to music, she was also quite successful in her watercolor lessons. Her astonishing success at high-school would become the signifier of a much brighter success story at Smith College, which would have great impact upon the life of Sylvia Plath. As a matter of fact, her entrance to Smith College would change her entire life.

Smith College derived its name from Sophia Smith, who championed the idea of Christian education for women, and Smith was obviously the most prestigious woman's colleges in America. The Smith journey of Plath started thanks to Olive Higgins Prouty, an extremely wealthy woman, who was a popular novelist and the author of many highly commercial novels.[10] Mrs. Prouty was not the only gift of Smith to Plath. Her college education also gave her the opportunity to meet Robert Graham, who was an author of New York Times Book Review, and Mary Ellen Chase, a popular novelist. Apparently, her Smith College days were a great experience for Plath. She immediately began to experience as brilliant a success story

[8] On the day Sylvia Plath committed suicide she also brought milk and cookies to her children just like her mother did after Sylvia had lost her father. She might have associated her past trauma with her children who also, in a different way, lost their fathers. The common point in the case might have been Sylvia's hope to start a new life just like she did on the day she lost her father. Hence her suicide attempt can be interpreted as an act of rebirth, a new beginning, a hope for a spring just like she highlighted in the *Ariel* poems.

[9] Wellesley is an upper-middle class town, and in Plath's early works the characters mainly belong to middle-class Americas.

[10] As a scholarship student, Sylvia was entitled to write a note of thanks to the person whom endowed her scholarship. In order to write the note Plath asked the name of the person. When she learned that

as she did in high-school. Having straight "A's" was again an easy task for Sylvia due to her dedication to hard work and literature.

Although at first sight, it seems to be that her life at Smith was full of joy, it was not an easy task to be a scholarship student among the other Smith girls who were all members of the most prominent families in America. Furthermore, the general ideology imposed on the students was the belief graduation from Smith should be regarded as a prestigious advantage in society on condition that they achieved marriage with an ideal male counterpart from one of the Ivy League colleges. The 'ideal male counterpart' obviously meant a smart, handsome, rich young gentleman who was preferably a medical student. While she was at Smith, she began to spend time with the son of one of Aurelia's friends, Dick Norton. A student at Yale, this young man seemed to be the perfect male counterpart, he was a medical student, pragmatic, and his family had an academic background like Sylvia's.[11] Hence, as a man of science, he was the emblem of the idealized male figure of the age. However, the self-confident Yale boy was the most unsuitable male figure for Sylvia Plath. Her love of literature, her sensitivity and her idealism championed by spiritualism not materialism, directly separated her from the Yale boy. The young boy had tuberculosis,[12] and had to stay at a sanatorium at Saranactake in New York. In addition, Sylvia Plath's education at Smith also meant living at the center of hot debates on politics. While Plath was at Smith, McCarthyism had its peak in 1952, when Senator Joseph McCarthy visited Smith. Sylvia was one of the students who

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she was supported by Mrs. Prouty she could not imagine that Mrs. Prouty would be her life-long friend and supporter.

[11] The depiction of such an ideal husband is reflected in *The Bell Jar* through Buddy Willard who experiences the traumas of Dick Norton. For further reading on Dick Norton see *Unabridged Journals.*

[12] In *The Bell Jar* Buddy Willard has tuberculosis too.

did not applaud, but hissed at him. In addition to the worldview and literary taste that she gained at Smith, she met Marcia Brown, her school-mate, who would be her life-long friend. Through Marcia, Sylvia built the figure of a sister in her life. However, Marcia belonged to a wealthy family, and did not have to work during the summer holidays, or any other time in order to support herself. On the other hand, the case was different for Sylvia.

While studying at Smith, in order to support herself throughout the summer, she worked as a babysitter. She also had to work as a waitress as her tuition was raised and it was not covered by her endowment. Due to this financial problem she had to separate from Marcia and had to move to another dormitory, a cooperative one for scholarship students. However, the dark clouds disappeared when it was announced she would be one of the guest editors for a *Mademoiselle Magazine's* special summer issue that would focus on college life. By that time her poems had already been published in national magazines, she had already won many prizes, and her poem "Crossing the Equinox "had been accepted by the national Poetry Association. The achievements of her straight "A's," her academic success, and her published poems were crowned by a month in New York City as a guest editor, and spending June in New York City would completely alter the life of Plath. However, despite being the city of wealth and entertainment, New York City also turned out to be a paradise of conflicts.

Plath's Mademoiselle[13] journey was a fascinating experience, she would spend the whole month in a luxury hotel, she would be at the center of society and she would not have to work as a babysitter. In addition to this hopeful portrait, Sylvia also achieved publication in *Seventeen*,[14] and with this success story, she became a significant success and a figure to be admired among the students and the academic staff of Smith. As a result of her success, everyone knew Sylvia Plath. By that time she had already managed to become a Smith Girl. Even in her letters to her mother she wrote "I AM A SMITH GIRL"(LH 46) in order to reflect her joy. Sylvia's joy at Smith was completed by her New York journey. She stayed at the Barbizon[15] Hotel in New York. She was not only at the center of the cosmopolitan world, but also luxury and fashion. The twenty girls were welcomed by Betsy Blackwell, *Mademoiselle's* editor-in-chief at the Magazine's offices on Madison Avenue. Sylvia's days there obviously opened a new window to her creative life. However, at that time, her social life had also had so many difficulties that the forthcoming depression was inevitable.

Although the luxurious life of the guest editors attracted the girls, Sylvia was not one of them. Her worldview, which strictly supported the significance of spiritualism, obviously clashed with the impersonal, material and capitalistic New

[13]*Mademoiselle Magazine* is one of the most significant elements in Plath's life. *Mademoiselle Magazine* was an influential women's magazine that was first published in 1935. The magazine was known for publishing short stories of various writers including Joyce Carol Oates, Flannery O'Connor, Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, etc. Plath has won her first prize with her short story "Sunday at Mintons" and won 500$. In 1953, Plath spent a month as a guest editor at the center of the magazine in New York that inspired her to create her best-seller novel *The Bell Jar*.

[14] Like *Mademoiselle Magazine, Seventeen Magazine* is a magazine that targeted women but unlike Mademoiselle, it mainly targeted young women between the ages 12-24. It was first published in 1944, and it is still regarded as the most popular teenage magazine in America. This magazine was also significant for Plath in the sense that she achieved to publish her works in the magazine which was a highly prestigious achievement.

[15] The Barbizon Hotel is turned into the Amazon Hotel in *The Bell Jar* where the protagonist Esther Greenwood stays as a guest-editor

York.[16] In addition to this, her grandmother was acutely ill. Furthermore, financial problems and her mother's illness also caused Aurelia to become ill. Her old ulcer appeared once again and in order to support her children she rejected a costly operation. The illness of her loved ones, the impersonality of New York, and a letter which informed her that her application to Harvard Summer School's creative writing course had been rejected, affected Sylvia tremendously. In the *Letters Home* Aurelia Plath mentions that by the time Plath had returned from New York she looked quite pale and exhausted. At that time, her mother and her friends were unaware of the fact that Sylvia had already begun to read books on abnormal psychology and[17] was quite conscious about her depression. Sylvia was the first to diagnose herself. However, Aurelia thought that it was time to consult a professional. Her anxiety about Sylvia was triggered by her friend's interpretations. Sylvia's closest friend, Marcia, noticed the obvious difference between the Sylvia before New York and after New York. Her usual illuminating brightness had been replaced by a sad, depressed and exhausted face. Her sadness was of course the result of sleepless nights that jarred on her nerves more and more, and the resulting depression did not derive from Sylvia's supposedly neurotic nature, but from the tremendous social pressure she was under, and other people's expectations from her. Smith College and Aurelia both expected new honors from her. Mrs. Prouty, who economically supported Sylvia, expected more success stories, and her friends at college hoped for new brilliant achievements from their extraordinary "Golden Girl." According to

[16] Plath's experience in New York had tremendous effects upon not only in her academic and literary career, but also upon her psychological life that would later appear in *The Bell Jar*.

[17] Before Plath had committed suicide, she was also reading books on abnormal psychology. She especially preferred to read them after her husband left home for library. For further reading see *Unabridged Journals.*

Aurelia, as a result of this pressure coming from many different directions, Sylvia's situation got worse and she took her daughter to the town's psychiatrist.[18] However, Sylvia's depression got worse as a result of the treatment of the town's psychiatrist. He immediately labeled her as a 'neurotic female' rather than an individual who was under great social pressures. The result was of course a deep psychological scar on Sylvia Plath's psychology. Her Doctor's diagnosis was not a psychological one, but the reflection of the ideology of twentieth century America. According to the dominant ideology, concerning women in twentieth century America, the happy American life was destroyed by the neurotic female mind. Hence, it is not difficult to surmise that Sylvia was not even slightly improved after her private sessions,[19] and the last step was shock treatments, electrocution of the brain, at his private clinic.

The inhuman shock treatments were a popular treatment of the time, and the treatments were accompanied by psychotherapy, and in the private clinic Sylvia unfortunately faced all these indefinable traumas. As a result, the process only added new fears and traumas to Sylvia's condition. Eventually, she was labeled as a schizophrenic.[20] This diagnosis may be demonstrated as wrong in that, rather than allowing a cure, it only intensified the pressures that Sylvia felt. Finally, after the psychiatrist had prescribed sleeping pills to her daughter, Aurelia carefully kept the bottle in a box in her bedroom. However, after a quick search, it was not difficult for Sylvia to find them, and one day she took all the pills. She later wrote a note to her

[18] The psychiatrist would later appear as Dr. Gordon in *The Bell Jar*.

[19] The private sessions of the psychiatrist's of Sylvia's generation display a clear-cut example of the death of privacy in Cold War America which would be the dominant discourse of Plath's early and late work.

[20] It must be underlined that while Plath was labeled as schizophrenic by the town's hospital, her doctors at McLean mentioned that there was not a symptom of psychosis or schizophrenia. This was also highlighted by Olive Higgins Prouty in a letter to Mrs. Plath. Hence the difference between the diagnosis of private and government hospitals display how women were labeled as schizophrenic just because they lived under dramatic social pressures.

mother saying that "she had gone for a long walk and would be back tomorrow." After the incident, Aurelia called the police, unaware of the fact that her daughter was in the basement. While Sylvia's grandmother was in the basement doing laundry, she luckily heard Sylvia's moans. Miraculously Sylvia survived and did not sink into a coma. However, the case was enough to alarm Aurelia, but their financial situation was too bad to take Sylvia back to a private clinic. Mrs. Prouty, Sylvia's life-long supporter, read the news in the newspapers, and called Mrs. Plath to inform her that she wanted to take Sylvia from Boston to McLean Hospital in Belmont, which was a very expensive hospital and one of the finest in America. At McLean, Sylvia was put on insulin treatment as she indicated that she could no longer bear any further electro shock therapy. The psychological scar left by a meaningless diagnosis resulted in a dramatic increase in weight. While she was at McLean, she refused to wash her hair or dress. She preferred to leave her hair dirty and uncombed. This might have been a reaction toward or a passive resistance against, the ideology imposed on women of her generation as, like Sylvia, the female model of the age was associated with abnormal psychology, supported by the idea that women naturally inherit neurosis. Therefore, it can be assumed that the myth of Sylvia Plath the psychotic started after her journey to the asylum as she was no longer the Smith Girl who had published several works in national magazines, or Smith's Golden Girl, who had had the highest grades, but a romantic figure of her generation whose journey ended in an asylum. Therefore, Plath was turned into both the emblem of success and the emblem of suicidal women.[21]

[21] The figure of the double was also Plath's main theme of her honor's thesis at Smith College entitled "The Magic Mirror: A Study of the Double in Two of Dostoevsky Novels."

As an emblem of success and suicide, the journey of Plath was not yet over in America. As an American girl, of Plath's generation although her roots were shaped by the American education and moral system, in order to achieve a greater reputation for success, the final step in education was always England. Thanks to her successful career at Smith, Sylvia again gained a scholarship, but this time she would be a Cambridge Girl, as she earned a place at Newham College. However, the life would not be easy for her. She was no longer the romantic figure of success at Smith. No one knew who Sylvia Plath was at Cambridge, and her American manners clearly separated her from the European students. However, her devotion to literature and her optimism would be an infinite source of energy. By the time Plath came to Cambridge, she had already gained what she wanted from life; a successful academic life, many works published in significant magazines, and a new life in Britain. And yet there was one thing missing in her life; love. And this need for love would be fulfilled by the British poet Ted Hughes.

Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes met in Britain at St. Botolph's Review party. Sylvia had already heard about Hughes before they met. The two poets' immediate attraction was indispensable as both their lives were devoted to poetry, both minds were lived for creation, and both souls sought after inspiration. The meeting of their two hearts would create a strong interaction that would nourish both of them. The relationship between Hughes and Plath soon led to marriage, which was kept secret on condition that Sylvia's scholarship would be affected. The secret wedding was held at Cambridge and would create a new, but difficult story, for Sylvia Plath.

Her Cambridge life after marriage was quite different from her previous life. Ted Hughes was financially in a bad situation, as he was throughout his life until

Sylvia's death. His financial situation depended on publishing poems, which was a long and hard process, and the courses he gave at schools. As a result of their growing poverty, Sylvia had to work at Cambridge. Although Sylvia worked harder than before, their conditions got worse and the only way to return to the "happy old days" was going to America.

After Sylvia and Ted had gone to the United States, Sylvia began to work as an instructor at the college where she was once an attentive, keen student who had watched her own instructor's with great admiration. Smith did not only bring luck to Sylvia, but also to Ted. When he came to Smith, no one knew the poet Ted Hughes. The literary circle did not have the slightest idea about him. However, thanks to Sylvia's reputation at Smith, Ted became known. While Sylvia was teaching at Smith, Ted had fifteen poems published in various magazines. Especially "The Hawk in the Rain" gained success. Obviously, the period they spent in the States affected Hughes positively. On the contrary, the case was not the same for Sylvia. Although she was awarded the Bess Hopkins Prize, she was no longer happy. The problem was the fact that she could not write anymore because the pace of living where she wished to write suffocated her. Her writing block was the result of her teaching life at Smith, as she had to prepare her lessons, read exam papers and give almost all her energy to Smith. Furthermore, she had to take care of the house and the necessities of Hughes such as cooking, cleaning, and typing his work. In addition to Smith, she worked at Massachusetts General Hospital as a secretary.[22] In spite of all these difficulties, however, Smith helped her to build a political awareness of the Cold

[22] Her experience at the hospital inspired the creation of her story "Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams" and "The Daughter's of Blossom Street." She used the hospital as a perfect metaphor of the illness of her culture.

War, nuclear armament and the beginnings of much more difficult days. Although she was at home, Sylvia was quite sure that her husband would never really be happy in America. Like most of the time in her marriage, she was always the one who had to do sacrifice; she was ready for a return to England.

Plath and Hughes returned to England, and they moved into Court Green, in Devon where they had a cottage. The return to England meant not only a new life but also a new miracle; Frieda. Sylvia gave birth to Frieda soon after they had returned to England. When she left America she was pregnant, but she had not been aware of it and the birth of Frieda was a new beginning for Sylvia. This new experience helped Sylvia to create new styles in her poetry and prose.[23] However, as a result of cleaning, cooking, typing, and looking after little Frieda, writing for herself turned out to be a hopeless dream, and her writing block became a huge problem for her. Unfortunately, her responsibilities were intensified by the birth of her son, Nicholas, in 1962. At that time, Sylvia was not aware that her writing block, taking care of the children and her home would fade into insignificance because the happy family portrait would be soon destroyed by Ted's affair with another woman.

The nightmare began when Sylvia found a letter from Assia Wevill, both her and Ted's friend, who had visited their home many times. Then, Sylvia heard her voice on the phone, when she phoned the Hughes's house to talk with Ted, even though Assia[24] tried to imitate the voice of a man. For Sylvia, the tragic situation was intensified after the phone incident. This time, she was sure that the affair was a serious one, and her marriage was in serious crisis. The famous bonfire occurred on

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[23] After the birth of Frieda, The Saxton foundation awarded Plath full grant and they asked her to finish her novel that would be *The Bell Jar*.

the same day in which she burned Hughes' notes, books and poems in addition to the *Falcon Yard*, a complete novel Plath had written as a tribute to her husband. At that time, Aurelia, who had come to Britain to visit her daughter and grandchildren was at home. However, the news of the separation came only after she had returned to America. Although Sylvia wanted a legal separation, Hughes did little to support her wishes. His visits and his attitude towards their marriage gave temporary hope to Sylvia, but Hughes had already begun a serious affair with Assia. After the separation, although Sylvia went to Ireland for a fresh beginning, Ted went there with her, not in order to rescue their marriage but to lessen the crisis. Soon after arriving in Ireland, all of a sudden he returned to London to meet Assia. Sylvia eventually returned to London, but her life would never be the same. The responsibility of caring for the children, during the coldest year of London since 1940's, their financial problems, coupled with Ted's irresponsible attitude and his betrayal resulted in a serious depression. The only positive contribution of the separation to Sylvia Plath was the miraculous return of her creativity. During these hard days, she wrote approximately half of a new novel, to become the sequel to *The Bell Jar*, stories in *Johnny Panic* and various essays. The creative process was not the result of the pain engendered by Hughes, but the revival of her artistic capacity due to her fresh beginning. Although Sylvia Plath succeeded in building a new life, this time good fortune was not with her. If everything had gone in the way she hoped, she would be alive now. As A. Alvarez, the editor of the *Observer* and a popular critic, who met Plath before she died, insists in this comment, "I am

[24] In most of the early studies on Plath, writers used nicknames, such as Olga to hide the name of Assia.

convinced by what I know of the facts that this time she did not intend to die"("Savage" 35).

Although Plath's story is not exceptional but exemplary, her story would be turned in to a myth, an exceptional fairy tale mired in gossip, lies and the defamation of the literary significance of her works. In the end, it would be unable to prevent the appearance of the Plath industry that aimed at re-creating her stories again and again.

In relation, Part I, entitled *The Mona Lisa Smile of Sylvia Plath: Destroying the Distorted Picture of Reality* focuses on the 'Plath myth' that has tried to reinvent the life story of Plath and undermine for her works. In relation to that, Part I counters the conventional claims concerning Sylvia Plath and her work that have naturally intermingled with the theory that her work were mainly built upon the life-story of Plath encompassing not only despair, trauma, and schizophrenia, but also happiness, achievement, and power. As Jacqueline Rose underlines,

> Sylvia Plath, haunts our [American] culture. She is — for many — a shadowy figure whose presence draws on and compels. What she may be asking for is never clear, although it seems highly unlikely that she is asking for what she gets. Execrated and idolized, Plath hovers between the furthest poles of positive and negative appraisal; she hovers in the space of what is most extreme, most violent, about appraisal, valuation, about moral and literary assessment as such.("Haunting" 1)

In summery, Part I encapsulates studies on Plath that are crucial to decipher the Plath myth that has followed the interpretation of the works of Plath like a shadow. Hence, this part focuses on the most prominent and paradoxical issues about Sylvia Plath, her life, and the creation process involved in her work. Part I also encompasses the

death of Sylvia Plath, conventionally interpreted as a tragic suicide of a schizophrenic woman, which is the starting point of almost all of the Plath studies. Therefore the analysis of key readings on Plath tries to highlight how the ending of her story has been fabricated by her family, her critics and scholars. Finally, Part I, analyzes the organic form of writing of Sylvia Plath that has been ignored by most of the Plath scholars. Although Plath achieved and maintained a unique and evolving style both in her poetry and prose, under the name of "confessional," this unique style, that marked twentieth century literature so deeply, has been read under the misleading light of Plath's biography retold by different Plath scholars. As a response to that, the final section of Part I focuses on a deep analysis of Plath's entire work, including her unabridged journals, highlighting the organic writing of Sylvia Plath that underlines and binds together all her work, as opposed to Plath studies that claim *Ariel* is the only work of Plath worth reading, in order to disprove the discourse of Plath as psychotic woman whose only achievement is *Ariel*. As a response to the discourses that label Plath and her works, except *Ariel*, as "a poet's casebook." This study puts *The Bell Jar* at the center of the reading process, the final section focuses primarily on how she built an organic form of writing and also how it has been attempted by the establishment by some literary critics to remove all political connections from her entire body of work.

Part II, entitled *Hell: Understanding the American Simulacra*, situates not only *The Bell Jar*, the signifier of the organic bond among Plath's entire works within the Cold War social and political milieu, but also Sylvia Plath as an intellectual who put politics at the center of her text. In relation, a close reading of the first part of the novel, entitled 'Hell,' through the lens of psychoanalytic and

historic process analyzes the historical context of *The Bell Jar* and how the novel crystallizes the political, social, and psychological traumas of Cold War America. In relation, this part also focuses on 'Hell' in Esther Greenwood's psychic journey, which continues with 'Purgatory' and ends with 'Paradise,' in relation with a Lacanian reading of the "Mirror Stage" in which Esther confronts with the historical, social, and psychological traumas of her culture through her "Virgil's," who acts as a guide to help Esther face the realities of her generation. The correlations between the political discourses of *The Bell Jar* that emphasize a social focus of an entire generation, and the poems, journals, and short stories of Sylvia Plath are deeply analyzed. Part II focuses on the unique symbols and metaphors of Cold War America that can be associated with hell. This part also encapsulates the unique techniques that are created by the protagonist of the novel, in order to purify herself from the dominant ideology of her generation.

Part III, *Purgatory: Overcoming Silence through Art*, in which Esther passes to 'Purgatory' explores Esther's story as a female character who manages to preserve her true self and kills her false self through her miraculous psychological techniques. In Purgatory, as Esther fully enters the borders of her culture, she is in the "symbolic stage" where she gains the strength to observe and criticize her culture much more dramatically than she did in Hell. While focusing on the psychological traumas of the Cold War generation, Part III deeply analyzes the social castration of the female body and psyche in Cold War America through labeling her mad. Focusing on Esther's story highlights how Sylvia Plath achieves a portrayal of the psychological and social traumas of an entire generation through her poems, journals, and short stories, which all highlight intertextuality in her works, all of which turn back to *The*

Bell Jar. Therefore, the discourse of madness, asylum as a perfect metaphor of the Cold War America, and intellectual entrapment serve as perfect examples of how *The Bell Jar* is the story of an entire generation but not solely the story of Plath.

The fourth and the final part, entitled *Paradise: Esther's Diagnosis for American Culture*, examines the final stage of Esther's psychic journey in which she succeeds in reaching Paradise. The novel, which starts with the Rosenberg Trial, comes full circle in Paradise, where Esther purifies her true-self from the ideology of Cold War America. This part mainly focuses on Esther's responses to the restrictions of Cold War America refuting the restrictions and Virgil's she has met so far, in order to make the story come to full circle. In Paradise, Esther objectively reflects the ending of her story that encompasses both fear and happiness in Cold War America. The final part analyzes how the Rosenberg Trial serves as an emblem of the trauma of an entire generation, just like Esther. Therefore, Plath's evocation of the Rosenberg Trial acts as a vehicle for approaching Cold War ideology and the trauma it creates for the individual, both male and female. Focusing primarily on "the asylum" as a simulacra designed for individuals who have the capacity to criticize the dominant ideology, becomes one of the main arguments of this part. The last part, therefore, examines the final section of Esther's psychic journey in which she confidently criticizes and rebels against the restrictions of Cold War ideology. Thus, Part IV underlines the fact that, for Plath, Esther Greenwood's story is an act of rebellion that aims at releasing all the restrictions imposed on the female body and psyche.

While each part and section focuses on unique elements of *The Bell Jar* and Plath's specific poems and short stories, their overall themes repeatedly intersect and

ultimately demonstrate that *The Bell Jar* is a key text in understanding not only the dominant voice of politics and sociology in Plath's entire works, but also Plath's organic form of writing which, rather than distinguishing *Ariel* from her other work, displays the indispensable bond among her entire works, which all connect back to *The Bell Jar*.

PART I

THE MONA LISA SMILE OF SYLVIA PLATH: DESTROYING THE DISTORTED PICTURE OF REALITY

The best teacher is experience and not through someone's distorted point of view.

Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*.

1.1. THE IDEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF THE MONA LISA SMILE

Da Vinci's famous painting "Mona Lisa" is one of the best works that highlights the "case" of Sylvia Plath. The word "case" must be used while defining Plath as a *female* intellectual, who has been the subject of hundreds of works from various scholars and researchers around the world. It can be assumed that the word "case" has become naturally intermingled with the name Sylvia Plath as the interpretation of her works as being mainly built upon the life-story of Plath herself which has been defined as a "case" encompassing not only despair, trauma, sorrow, powerlessness and schizophrenia but also happiness, achievement and power. Therefore the name Sylvia Plath has become the symbol of both positive and negative contributions to literature. As Jacqueline Rose endorses,

> Sylvia Plath, haunts our culture. She is ― for many ― a shadowy figure whose presence draws on and compels. What she may be asking for is never clear, although it seems highly unlikely that she is asking for what she gets. Execrated and idolized, Plath hovers between the furthest poles of positive and negative appraisal; she hovers in the space of what is most extreme, most violent, about appraisal, valuation, about moral and literary assessment as such.("Haunting 1")[25]

[25] Rose's work is the first-book length study that questions the Plath myth. It is one of the most significant studies on Plath that underlines how Plath and her works have been shunned from political interpretation.

However, it has been ignored that the two opposite poles formulated for Plath are also the key poles of human life: the smile and the tears.

It can be asserted that Plath takes her strength not from her so-called tragic life transformed into literary works, but from her creative and intellectual power that had the strength to transform that life into marvelous literary works. As a result of this magical power, she achieved the creation of the voices of *The Bell Jar*, the *Arie*l, the *Colossus*, Sivvy,[26] the journals, the letters, *Winter Trees* all of which signify the *cultural* and *social facts* of their generation. "It has often been remarked that commentary on Plath tends to split into two antagonistic camps. There are those who pathologise Plath, freely diagnose her as schizophrenic or psychotic, read her writings as symptom or warning, something we should both admire and avoid"(Rose, "Haunting" 3) and it is at this point the Mona Lisa Smile starts to show. It is evident that the hot debates on Plath, about her life and works illustrate either a deep pessimism, or an admirable optimism, which are the sources of this smile, have always remained unanswered. The social context of this enigmatic smile has always been left missing, because the Plath industry is so mired in the biography and the relation between her life and her works, they have unconsciously missed the frame, the ideological context of that smile.

First of all, it should be mentioned that, Sylvia Plath has turned into a poet and a writer who has become a member of the "myth and Symbol school" in American studies. When one thinks about 1960's American studies, the motive was

[26] Sivvy" is the nickname of Sylvia Plath among her family members. She used that name especially at the end of her letters to her mother and brother.

creating "a usable past."[27] That kind of action implicitly resulted from the idea that America could be the winner of the Cold War on condition that it could achieve the building of a socially strong nation. Throughout the Cold War years, a socially strong nation meant having the strongest family ties and the finest technological products to support that social life. One of the best examples of this is the famous Kitchen Debate between Khrushchev and Nixon. The two leaders are contesting each other over the technological products of their countries. Therefore, the ideology of Cold War politics focused on the 'home' and the 'family,' supported by the highest and finest social standards.[28] However, it is evident that technology was not enough to create the ideal nation. A cultural history that was missing in American nation was needed. Unlike the European nations, especially the mother country, the United States lacked a rich cultural and historical past. The only way to solve this problem was by creating cultural icons that helped the building of a historically and socially strong nation. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that the works of the Cold War years mainly highlighted American nation's attempt to rewrite the story of their culture and the case of Sylvia Plath has a strong parallelism with this attitude of the Cold War years, as she is just like the Virgin land upon which different stories has been written again and again and again by different people. In relation, Henry Nash Smith's study, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*, which appeared as a product of the Cold War years, illustrates the parallelism between Plath and the idea of the Virgin Land, the American West, and the struggle to turn it into a 'myth,' a

[27] During that period in American culture, through creating myths and cultural symbols, American nation tried to build a past which would have the power to cope European history. For further reading see Bruce Kuklick. *Myth and Symbol in American Studies.*(*American Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 4. (Oct., 1972), pp. 435-450.

[28] For further reading see Elaine Tyler May. *Homeward Bound. American Families in the Cold War Era.* (Basic Books, 1999).

'symbol.'[29] As Smith asserts, "… a whole generation of historians took over this hypothesis [Frederick Jackson Turner's "The Significance of the frontier in American History] and rewrote American history in terms of it … [which is] the most familiar interpretation of American past"(3-4). Just like the American West, Plath was turned into "a myth … a fantasy"(Rose, "Haunting" 5). In addition to Nash Smith, Leo Marx's work, which was published one year after Plath's death, *The Machine in the Garden. Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* also has a strong parallelism with the Plath 'myth.' In his work, Marx argues that "[t]he pastoral ideal has been used to define the meaning of America, ever since the age of discovery and it has not yet lost its hold upon the native imagination"(3). The situation is the same for some Plath scholars. They found a 'Virgin Land,' an un-inscribed territory, a tabula rasa upon which they wrote different stories. Hence, just like Marx quotes Thoreau's phrase that the American nation "constructed a fate, an Atropos,"(qtd. in Marx 354) a fate was also constructed for Plath. As Susan Van Dyne disputes,

> Because the poems and novel that have made Plath's name came to almost all her readers as posthumous events, her work has inevitably been read through the irrevocable, ineradicable and finally enigmatic fact of Plath's suicide. The challenge for her biographers has been to puzzle out the relationship not merely of her life to her art, but of her art to her death.("Biography" 3)

She continues that, "the credibility of the figure of Plath as psychotic, wounded, devious, narcissistic or death-driven does not lie with the objectivity of the witnesses the biographer draws upon, but comes from the multiple sites within culture that give shape and meaning to women's experience *as* story"("Biography"16). Van Dyne's final sentence is quite significant in the sense that the culture that gives shape to

[29] Even the title of the book includes the words 'myth' and 'symbol.' In the case of Plath, the word 'myth' has been used by her scholars to define her literary status in America.

Plath is also the one that gives shape to the 'Virgin Land,' the frontier. In relation to the 'Virgin Land,' Marx also highlights another myth which is famously juxtaposed with the 'Virgin' in Henry Adams's work: "The Dynamo and the Virgin." Marx comments on the issue.

> The Education of Henry Adams is one of the most American of books. Adams uses the opposition between the Virgin and the Dynamo to figure an all-embracing conflict: a clash between past and present, unity and diversity, love and power. In this Manichean fashion he marshals all conceivable values. On one side he lines up heaven, beauty, religion, reproduction, on the other: hell, utility, science, and production.(347)

In relation to Marx's comments on the juxtaposition between the pastoral ideal, the Virgin, and the Dynamo that signifies the production, it becomes clear that through creating a conflicting case, Sylvia Plath was also turned into a myth. She both encapsulates the story of the Virgin Land as an oedipal victim upon which anything can be inscribed, and the Dynamo, that derives its power from the story of the absent husband and the lost father which empowers her works. The point is the fact that, without the Dynamo, the male absence, Plath is absent, as she cannot be Virgin without the assistance of patriarchal discourse. It is evident that Marx's interpretation of the Virgin and the Dynamo is also the story behind the Plath myth. First the Plath myth is mainly based upon the clash between her real past and the attempt to create a usable past that aims at recreating a story for the present time. Second, the Plath myth encapsulates both love, her love of her husband and father, and the power that resulted from that patriarchal energy. In conclusion, it might be argued that the Plath myth was basically targeted toward re-creating a story for Plath, in order to turn it into a usable past. It can be asserted that the name Sylvia Plath has been turned into one of the cultural products and symbols of the usable past of America. As a part of

the "myth and symbol school" in American studies, Sylvia Plath naturally becomes a cultural icon labeled as "the Marilyn Monroe of the literati"(Rose, "Haunting" 29).

In addition to the studies that appeared during the Cold War years, such as Smith's and Marx's works, Alan Trachtenberg's study *Brooklyn Bridge. Fact and Symbol* intensifies the parallelism between the pictures of Sylvia Plath and the Brooklyn Bridge as cultural icons. Trachtenberg's first sentence is "Brooklyn Bridge belongs first to the eye"(3). Once one has thought about Plath, the picture is the same. One immediately envisions a woman, who belongs first to the eye. Before the quotations from her works, the reader envisions the image of Plath with her head in the oven, or the Plath with the absent husband Hughes and the picture of Assia Wevill with whom her husband betrayed Plath.[30] As a symbol, like the Brooklyn Bridge, she "was not merely a creation, but a growth,"(L. Marx 8) since her death in 1963, the debates on Plath have continued to grow more and more, and after each work she becomes a heroine of a different story. As Trachtenberg quotes from Francis Grund's work, *The Americans*,

> The Americans entered the wilderness as masters determined to subdue it; and not as children of nature, nursed and brought up in its bosom. They could not at first love what was not theirs; and when it became theirs, they had already changed its face.(qtd. in L. Marx 6)[31]

It is evident that just like Trachtenberg's allusion to the tendency of the American style, through Grund's sharp criticism, the Brooklyn Bridge, "an emblem of the eternal, providing a passage between the ideal and, the transitory sensations of history, a way to unify them"(Trachtenberg 145) acts as a perfect metaphor of the

[30] The front cover of Yahuda Koren and Eliat Negev's work on Plath, Wevill and Hughes includes the photos of all of them.
[31] For further reading see Francis Joseph Grund. *The Americans in Their Moral, Social, and Political Relations.* (Ingram Pub Services, 2007).

Plath myth that acts as a bridge between Plath and a usable past for the American literature. Like the Plath myth, the Brooklyn Bridge "does not wait to be found, but to be created. That is, it represents not an external "thing," but an internal process, an act of consciousness"(Trachtenberg 146).

It is evident that Sylvia Plath became a myth that was created by the dominant discourse of her time. The power of the myth is felt so strongly that it creates a problem. As Robin Peel underlines,

> The problem is that as new readers encounter her work there is enormous pressure on them to interpret "specific time" and place in terms of Plath's known life story, as if she were a character from some epic drama such known life story, such as *Gone With the Wind*. So much general reporting has discussed Plath's work as the interiorizing of experience dictated by the politics of personal relationships, that other possibilities have been overshadowed. This tendency has been fuelled by the succession of biographies, newspaper articles, documentaries, and films which explore her life. The Plath industry tends to distort Plath's own writing, for the endless discussion of her relationships make it difficult to locate the published work in other frames, in other contexts.("Back" 18)

At this point, it is not difficult to surmise that the myth of Plath started with her death which was turned into a romantic suicide that could be retold, re-read, and recreated again and again and again. The contradictory criticism on Plath is based upon the fact that it both encapsulates the strong emphasis on regeneration the optimism in her works and the despair and pessimism.[32] Therefore, it is not difficult to surmise that, the Plath myth mainly focuses on the story after Plath's death and the starting point of the myth is of course the theory of "the lost father" and "the absent husband."

[32] The Mona Lisa Smile can also be seen in the photos of Sylvia Plath. The works that interpret Plath as a successful creative mind use Plath's photo that was taken at the Quadigras Dance at Smith College on May 1954. In the photo Plath is being given a rose. On the other hand, works by Anne Stevenson, Edward Butscher, Connie Ann Kirk, use different photos of Plath that were taken at either on a gloomy Cambridge day or while Plath was sitting next to Hughes. The interesting point is that the photo originally includes Ted Hughes, but writers and publishers intentionally omit him. The suffocating England weather is the background of the picture and Plath seems thoughtful. In conclusion, even the photos used on the front cover of Plath works illustrate the fact that she either deserves the optimistic female figure or the pessimistic one.

Also it is equally easy to see why her works have been interpreted as the product of a psychotic woman, who took nourishment from sickness. For instance, in his 1972 review of *Winter Trees* entitled "The Cult of Plath" Webster Schott describes Plath as the "high priestess of the confessional poem, master of the poem as intimate weapon, snake lady of misery in the literature of ultimate control … "(3).He further comments,

> Sylvia Plath was a sick woman who made her art of her sickness. One or two of her poems will be read a long time but absent from her work are joy, glory, strong love, any sense of the interdependence of human relationships and the infinite alternatives of life. Some young people, having limited experience, need literature to help them feel bad, and people, having limited experience, and they will celebrate Plath for a while.(3)

Apparently, sickness is the keyword of the Plath myth that caused reading of her works under false precepts. As Karen Jackson Ford notes,

> Initially, the myth was based on the terrible precedent set by Sylvia Plath, and the tragic way in which her life and her art complete each other. Elizabeth Hardwick, who admires Plath's writing and is appalled by her story, has this to say: "She, the poet, is frighteningly there all the time. Orestes rages but Aeschylus lives to be almost seventy. Sylvia Plath, however, is both heroine and author; when the curtain goes down, it is her own dead body there on the stage, sacrificed to her plot"(Ford 109).

Therefore, it is not difficult to surmise the political discourses in her works are altered by the voice of "an Oedipal victim"(Rose, "Haunting" 13) which is intensified by the sense of victimization caused by the loss of the husband. The result of that kind of a picture is the labeling of Plath as a mad poet who took nourishment from her madness and whose works must be read in terms of madness. Therefore, it is not a surprise that one of the most well-known early biographies of Plath, by Edward Butscher, bears the title *Sylvia Plath. Method and Madness*. Throughout Butscher's work, he defines Plath in terms of madness, labeling her as a "bitch-goddess." He uses Plath's interest on *The White Goddess: a Historical Grammar of*

Poetic Myth by Robert Graves.[33] The mythological figure of the White Goddess is turned by Butscher into the bitch-goddess to define Plath. Furthermore, for short intervals, he uses the word "mask" to define Plath as a woman who always wore different masks throughout her life.[34] Therefore, Sylvia Plath is labeled as mad.[35]

First of all, one should think of the social forces that triggered madness from different sources. It is understood that madness is a term used for Plath as it has the potential to intensify heated debate on Plath's life and its reflection in her works all serving the ends of the Plath industry. That kind of an idea is supported by Elizabeth Wurtzel, who begins a chapter in her novel, *The Prozac Nation*, by quoting Plath's poem "Elm." In this chapter, she comments on the issue of madness with the following words,

> *I have studiously tried to avoid ever using the word madness to describe my condition. Now and again, the word slips out, but I hate it.* **Madness** [emphasis added] *is too glamorous a term to convey what happens to most people who are losing their minds. That word is too exciting, too literary, too interesting in its connotations, to convey the boredom, the slowness, the dreariness, the dampness of depression.*(294)

She further states that "Depression is such an uncharismatic disease, so much the opposite of the lively vibrance that one associates with madness"(295). Therefore, it

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[33] *The White Goddess: a Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* by Robert Graves is one of the most significant studies on poetry in order to understand the poetic power of Plath whom was an admirer of that book. In his work graves argues the existence of a European Deity, which is "the White Goddess of Birth, Love and Death" that is inspired and takes strength from the moon. It must be underlined that the moon, as a metaphor, was used frequently not only in Plath's poems but also in *The Bell Jar*. For further reading see The White Goddess: *a Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth*. (New York: Douglas McIntyre Ltd., 1975)

[34]The answer of Bustcher's portrayal of a socially problematic woman who wore various masks is given by R.D. Laing, whom was also read by Plath. He claims that "A man without a mask' is indeed very rare. On even doubts the possibility of such a man. Everyone in some measure wears a mask, and there are many things we do not put ourselves into fully. In 'ordinary' life it seems hardly impossible for it to be otherwise"(Laing, "Divided" 95).

[35]Cheryl Walker strictly criticizes Butscher's categorizations of Plath. She notes, "The Plath he presents moves in and out of periods of depression and stasis as her various selves—"the golden girl," "the bitch goddess," "the earth mother"—work together or deny one another's needs. He "explains" the feverish creativity of Plath's late phase as the result of liberating anger"(538). For further reading see Cheryl Walker. *Reviewed works: Sylvia Plath Method and Madness by Edward Butscher*. (Contemporary Literature, Vol. 18, 4, (Autumn, 1977), pp.538-541).

becomes evident why Butscher and many other biographers have insisted on using the word *mad* while defining the life-story of Plath. The identical tone is evidently seen in Anne Stevenson's biography *Bitter Fame. A Life of Sylvia Plath* that is one of the most polemical works on Plath. Stevenson's biography of Plath has an inner voice of Olywn Hughes, the sister of Ted Hughes, who took part in every step of the writing process. The book says nothing new on Plath, but emphasizes the narcissistic, psychotic nature of Plath that forced Hughes to fall in love with another woman. In order to justify this picture, Stevenson prefers to start her work with the famous lines of "Lady Lazarus" that refers to reading Plath in terms of death and suicide. Like Stevenson, A. Alvarez in his work, *The Savage God. A Study of Suicide* followed the same strategy. The common point of all these biographies is the fact that, while all portray the suicidal, the mad, the bitch-goddess or the psychotic Plath, none of them mention her interest in history or politics.[36] As areas of the male discourse, Sylvia Plath has been shunned from history and politics. However as Deborah Nelson insists, "Plath was a remarkably astute cultural critic"("History 21).

While most of the critics have tended to ignore the political motives of Plath's works, scholars such as Linda Wagner Martin, Anita Hell, Jo Gill, Janet Badia, Christina Britzolaskis, Deborah Nelson, Robin Peel, Elaine Tyler May, and Jacqueline Rose strictly emphasize the political voice of Plath that has been either repressed or interpreted as an excess, an impossible terrain for a female intellectual.

[36] While in his biography of Plath, Alvarez tries to portray an exceptional Plath, in *The Writers Voice*, he portrays her case as an exemplary one. He states, "Plath, of course, was by no means the first important artist to die dramatically by her own hand. Almost two hundred years before her, Thomas Chatterton committed suicide and became, as a result, a great Romantic symbol. But at least he didn't write about the act. Neither did Hemingway or Hart Crane or Randall Jarrel or even, in so many words, Virginia Woolf. To follow the logic of your art to its desolate end, as Sylvia Plath did, and thereby turn yourself into the heroine of a myth that you yourself have created was something unprecedented. It changed the nature of the game. Art, that most stringent and solitary of disciplines, suddenly came to resemble a high-risk activity, like skydiving."("Voice" 110)

However, it is an unbelievable attempt to gloss over the political consciousness of Plath and the reflection of this consciousness in her works. As Robin Peel quotes from Plath's Smith College notes,

> In the essay written in May 1952 for Religion 14 at Smith College, Plath advances what the teacher's annotation describes as "a reasonably clear and forceful statement of Humanist position." Plath summarizes her core beliefs as follows: I believe that man is born without purpose in a neutral universe…. I do not think that man has an inborn conscience or preconceived moral standards; he is really indoctrinated with the particular man-made laws and moral customs particular to his own area and environment.(42)

Alluding to the Cold War years, Plath defines the power of the social forces that were the extensions of the political ideology of the age. Another example is postulated by Linda Wagner Martin, who quotes Plath's letter to her friend written in 1950, 'People don't seem to see that this negative Anti-communist attitude is destroying all the freedom of thought we've ever had….Everything they don't agree with is Communist'"(Wagner Martin, "Biography" 59). Furthermore in her unabridged journals, it becomes clear that even at a very young age she commented on political events of her time. She writes,

> They are really going to mash the world up this time, the damn fools. When I read that description of the victims of Nagasaki I was sick: "And we saw what first looked like lizards crawling up the hill, croaking. It got lighter and we could see that it was humans, their skin burned off, and their bodies broken where they had been thrown against something." Sounds like something out of a horror story. God save us from doing that again. For the United States did that. Our guilt. My country. No, never again. And then one reads in the papers "Second bomb blast in Nevada bigger than the first!" What obsession do men have for destruction, a bomb blast in Nevada bigger than the first!" What obsession do men have for destruction and murder? Why do we electrocute men for murdering an individual and then pin a purple heart on them for mass slaughter of someone arbitrarily labeled "enemy?" Weren't the Russian communists when they helped us slap down the Germans? And now. What could we do with the Russian nation if we bombed it to bits? How could we "rule" such a mass of foreign people --- we, who don't even speak the Russian language? How could we control them under a "democratic" system, we, who even now are losing that precious commodity, free-dom of speech? … Why do we send the pride of our young men overseas

> to be massacred for three dirty miles of nothing but earth? Korea was never divided into “North” and “South.” They are one people; and our democracy is of no use to those who have not been educated into it. Freedom is of no use to those who do not know how to employ it. (J 46)

Although Plath had always been interested in politics and also used political motives frequently in her works, the critiques and comments concerning it have tried to purge politics from the name Sylvia Plath, and the result of that kind of attitude began with *The Bell Jar*.

Although even the first sentence of the novel begins with a political discourse, the protagonists comments on the electrocution of the Rosenberg’s, her novel has been labeled as a product of her psychotic nature. For instance, Domenica Paterno in her article, comments that “*The Bell Jar* is a novel of descent into madness, uniquely female in viewpoint ... and circumstances”(135). Saul Malof, in his review in New Republic adds,

> Nor can we take seriously her having referred to it as a ‘potboiler’ and therefore to be kept separate from her serious work: the oldest and most transparent of all writer’s dodges. All the evidence argues against it: as early as 1957 she had written a draft of the novel; she completed the final version on a Eugene Saxton Fund fellowship and felt toward its terms an urgent sense of commitment and obligation; the painstaking quality of the writing—but above all, its subject: her own pain and sickness, treated with literal fidelity, a journal done up as a novel, manifestly re-experienced, and not from any great distance of glowing health.(103).

Like Paterno, Malof interprets *The Bell Jar* as a poet’s casebook that derives its power from Plath’s sickness, and the journals as insignificant documents, that simply that sickness. The most significant point is the reality that the negative attributes to *The Bell Jar* have been used to try to draw a clear distinction between *Ariel* and *The Bell Jar*. While *Ariel* has been defined as a great success, *The Bell Jar* has been defined as an apprentice work. It must be remembered however, that Plath wrote the

Ariel poems[37] after she had separated from Hughes. Therefore, the power of the *Ariel* poems has became associated with the patriarchal voice, the power of the male that Plath looked for. On the contrary, *The Bell Jar*, *the Colossus*, *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*, *Winter Trees* or the Journals (that ended before the separation) have been regarded as unnecessary works that must be clearly separated from *Ariel*. An example of that is the publisher's note in the 1972 version of the *Winter Trees*. It writes, "This last collection of Sylvia Plath's poems is contemporary with the Ariel poems brilliant, breath-taking poems that were written in the last months of her life, when she was at the height of her genius."(WT). Interestingly, Plath had written hundreds of letters, thousand's of pages of journals, many short stories, novels, and many poems before she wrote the *Ariel* poems. The big difference is that the *Ariel* poems were created in a time when Hughes was absent in Plath's life. This difference might have triggered the publisher to define Plath's genius as working at its highest capacity. The Plath myth obviously takes its power from the *Ariel* poems, the reflection of a schizophrenic creative capacity resulting from the absence of the husband and a return of the lost father. Even Plath's daughter, Frieda Hughes, in the restored edition of *Ariel* agrees, "I saw how she used her separation from my father to define all her other pain and how she put her emotions to work, each one a string to her instrument, being made to sing for her"(A12). However, if previous commentators have tried to define Plath's genius in terms of the power of the separation from Hughes, how can one explain the creative capacities of *The Bell Jar*, *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*, and *The Colossus* and *The Unabridged Journals*, which are all the forerunners of the *Ariel* poems? If the success and the

[37]Melody Zajdel emphasizes that "*The Bell Jar*, just as *The Colossus* stands as a necessary apprenticeship to the final poems of *Ariel*"(246).

organic bond among the works before *Ariel* are ignored, how can one understand the significance of these works that highlight the inner motives of the *Ariel* poems? The main point is the fact that, by exploiting the creation time line of the poems, the Plath industry mainly attempts to postulate a deeper crisis that include a betrayed, mad, psychotic woman who created solely as a result of her traumatic marriage. On the other hand, the success of *Ariel*, which was "…sold in unprecedented numbers, more than a half-million copies, and turned out to be one of the all-time-best-selling volumes of poetry"(Alexander 343-344) was not the result of the inspiration she derived from Hughes who "had by then published his first book—in part thanks to Plath's already honored professionalism"(Moses, "Voice" 89). It is apparent that, the power of Plath as a woman has been so mired in Hughes that the problematic of the biography in Plath's studies became a milestone for Plath readers.[38]

1.1.2 The Problematic of Biography in Plath Studies

While the biographies on Plath that define her life in terms of madness are numerous and works on Plath that objectively postulate new perspectives on the interpretation of her works are fewer, such as Linda Wagner Martin's biography of Plath, *Sylvia Plath. A Biography* objectively tells the story of Plath in terms of feminism. In doing so, she takes Plath and her works to a different terrain instead of madness. Hence her study offers a new insight to Plath scholars and readers. The result is not limited only to that, while creating a feminist point of view in defining

[38] The significant works on Plath, such as Jacqueline Rose's, Anita Hell's and Jo Gill's works start with the identical first chapters that focus on the problematic of biography in Plath studies that mainly try to construct subjective biographical truths for her.

Plath, Martin naturally takes Plath into politics that helped give shape to the lives of the women in Cold War America. This positive step is followed by various critical studies, especially Robin Peel's *Writing Back. Sylvia Plath and Cold War Politics*, and Judith Kroll's *Chapters in a Mythology* in which she comments that Plath "has a vision which is complete, self-contained, and whole, a vision of a mythic totality, which such poets as Lowell and Sexton do not have"(Kroll 3). In addition to Kroll, Jacqueline Rose, in *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*, severely criticizes Ted and Olywn Hughes and other members of the Plath industry who have tried to distort the literary significance of Plath's work through their critique. In addition, as editors, Anita Hell and Go Gill, through their works on Plath including essays from various scholars, reflect a Sylvia Plath whose political and social tone are impossible to ignore in spite of the attempts to gloss over the female regeneration, political motives and powerful social allusions which are an integral part of Plath studies.

In Plath studies, the starting point can never simply be the criticism of the works of Plath, but biased quartet composed of Ted and Olywn Hughes, Aurelia Plath and Assia Wevill. The point is being her political voice again remains absent in their commentary. Furthermore, even Plath herself is absent. This kind of absence of the female voice resulted in the danger of reading her works solely from a little picture that cannot postulate new interpretations or fields of inquiry Plath also highlights the problem of reading her works during her interview with Peter Orr. After Orr asks her, whether her poems tend to come out of books or from her life, she responds, "I believe it [her poems] should be *relevant* to the larger things, the bigger things such as Hiroshima and Dachau and so on"(169-70). As mentioned by Plath,

her works have the power to reflect larger things as opposed to the limited space allotted to her by the biased quartet.

The protagonist of the quartet is apparently, Ted Hughes, who tried to create a portrayal of Plath in relation to suicide, madness, and a psychotic nature. The first indications of this influence arise in the unabridged journals of Sylvia Plath. Although many critics and Hughes himself claim that he always took part in the creative process of Plath, Sylvia Plath writes in her journal, indicating her works, "DO NOT SHOW ANY TO TED"(J 467). The capitalization also illustrates the alarming rate of Ted's dangerous influence at home while Plath was writing her works. The most significant point is the fact that Ted Hughes insisted that Plath wrote *The Bell Jar* in 1960, however, as stated by Saul Malof in his review in *New Republic*

> Nor can we take seriously her having referred to it as a 'potboiler' and therefore to be kept separate from her serious work: the oldest and most transparent of all writer's dodges. All the evidence argues against it: as early as 1957 she had written a draft of the novel; she completed the final version on a Eugene Saxton Fund fellowship…(103)

In addition to *The Bell Jar*, Melody Zajdel states, "Hughes indicates that Plath 'launched herself into *The Bell Jar* in 1960.' But at least four stories [some of the Johnny Panic stories] mentioned above written between 1954 and 1959, deal with some of the same material"(246).

In addition, the destructive attitude of Hughes towards Plath's work is most commonly seen during the publication process of Ariel, As Karen Jackson Ford emphasizes, "Ted's version of Ariel was crucial to understand Plath and her works.

Influential in defining Plath, he deleted eleven of the poems she had included and replaced them with nine of his own selections"(164). Apparently, Hughes tried to turn *Ariel* into a diary of a suicide and madness. In addition to Ford, Tracy Brain comments on the Ariel poems, she claims that,

> Hughes omitted some of the poems Plath included in her Ariel typescript ... and inserted others that she did not...Perhaps most infamously, he changed the sequence of the poems in the typescript. In so doing, he helped to shape the still-prevalent idea that *Ariel* was the poetic confession of a suicidal depressive, rather than the narrative of a female regeneration and emergence that Marjorie Perloff argues Plath intended. (Brain 17)[39]

The change in the sequence of the poems caused the first interpretation of *Ariel* as a diary of suicide. However, Plath had started Ariel with the word "love" and ended it with the word 'spring' that signifies the rebirth in the *Ariel* poems, although attempts were later made to alter them to "death" and "suicide." Unfortunately, Hughes's cruel attempts are not limited to *Ariel*. Ted Hughes's introduction to *Johnny Panic* clearly suits the title "panic" as even the first sentence is enough to understand the tragedy of Plath's works whose protagonist is Hughes. He states,

> She started several novels, but only one sizeable fragment—"Stone Boy with a Dolphin"— survives from anything before *The Bell Jar*. After *The Bell Jar* she wrote some 130 pages of another novel, provisionally titled *Double Exposure*. That manuscript disappeared somewhere around 1970.(JP 1)

He later notes "Nevertheless, her stories are much more interesting than she thought. They seem livelier now, in some ways than they did when she wrote them"(JP 5). The first critical point, is what happened to *Double Exposure* that was to be the sequel to *The Bell Jar*? Second, was Hughes a professional literary critic at the time he wrote the introduction to Plath's works defining her stories, which gained popularity after her suicide, as uninteresting? Apparently, the destruction of *Double*

[39] For further reading see Marjorie Perloff, *The Two Ariels: The (Re)making of the Sylvia Plath Canon*. (American Poetry Review, November-December 1984, 10-18).

Exposure, the destroyed journals, and the re-ordering of Ariel are enough evidence to understand that, Ted Hughes is the protagonist of the Plath myth that took its strength from the "psychotic mad woman" scenario. The most evident example of this are Anne Stevenson and Paul Alexander's biographies which include the identical sentence and claim that "Edge was possibly the last poem Sylvia Plath wrote"(Stevenson 300). According to Stevenson, it is Plath's "own dead body there on the stage" and in "Edge" Plath is "both heroine and author"(Stevenson 298). Furthermore Ronald Haymann intensifies the debates about the "Edge" and points out that Plath writes "Balloons" which is "a reluctant farewell to the children" and "Edge" on the same day displays that "she had been intending to kill her children when she killed herself"(Haymann 193). Susan Basnett's illuminating comment on the dilemma is quite significant. She highlights the fact which some of the Plath scholars have tried to ignore namely that, "the woman who wrote the 'Edge' also wrote the beautiful 'Balloons' on the same day ....Two such different poems"(Basnett 146). Basnett's emphasis on reading Plath from various points of views is quite important as Plath is not only the women who wrote the pessimistic 'Edge' but also the one who wrote the optimistic "Balloons" on the same day. That is the reason why Tracy Brain endorses,

> The conclusion that these difficulties lead me to is this: reading Plath doesn't mean reading her only once. When editing and interpreting Plath's texts, and trying to establish any sort of Plath "canon," there is a way of reading that comes back to the poem or story or novel again and again, experimenting with different versions and orders and connections. Reading Plath involves a long-term relationship with her work and its multiple, indeterminate versions.("Unstable" 35)[40]

[40] In relation with Tracy Brain's comments, it can be assumed that Plath's writing style is close to palimpsest writing. Palimpsest is a manuscript on which more than one text can be written, it is also a canvas that can be reused. In relation, through palimpsest writing, Plath used the outline of *The Bell Jar* as a palimpsest, as a canvas that can be reused, on which she created many works. Through focusing on palimpsest writing, reading Plath's works in terms of intra-textuality gains significance.

Brain's comment is right in the sense that reading Plath and her works once seems inadequate, while reading her more than once will mean understanding her work from a larger perspective. As Plath claims,

> …the reality is relative, depending on what lens you look through. Each person, banging into the facts, neutral, impersonal in themselves (like the Death of someone)- interprets, alters, becomes obsessed with personal biases or attitudes, transmuting the objective reality into something quite personal (like the death of My father = tears, sorrow, weeping, dolorous tints…).(J 121)

1.2. NOT THE ENDING BUT THE BEGINNING: THE CRITICAL CHAIN OF THE PLATH MYTH

Apparently, the separation of Plath and Hughes was used as a weapon against Plath by Ted Hughes. He insistently tried to portray a Plath who died because of her psychotic nature. As Plath had attempted to commit suicide more than once before she met Hughes, he tried to recreate a story, a fate, for Plath to promote his innocence. Therefore, the interpretation of the ending of Plath's story, which has been regarded as the starting point, always refers to the suicidal mad poet who wrecked her own marriage with her unbearable character. While Hughes supported this picture, various sources portrayed a different one. If reading the ending of Plath's story is so important, how will the reader find a way to free herself from the subjective writings and comments on the ending? Apparently, the only way to do is to understand the critical chain of the Plath myth: the story behind Ted Hughes and Assia Wevill.

For the Plath reader, the first critical chain of the Plath myth is hidden in the story of Ted Hughes and Assia Wevill. It must be underlined that the ending of the

story of Plath which has been labeled as a great tragedy, is the result of her madness, but stems from the cruel scenario she found herself in. One of the most significant works that justify this is Yahuda Koren's and Eliat Negev's study, *Lover of Unreason. Asssia Wevill, Sylvia Plath's Rival and Ted Hughes Doomed Love*. After the publication of the work, the ending of Plath' story gains a completely different meaning that also gives clear cut examples of how her work was destroyed and re-created, and evidently, the famous phone incident was the beginning of the story.

On July 1962, Aurelia Plath came to England to visit her daughter and grandchildren. On the ninth of July, after Sylvia and her mother had returned from Exeter where they had been shopping, the telephone rang and the voice on the phone would destroy the happiness of Sylvia Plath forever.[41] After Sylvia answered the phone, she realized that the speaker had been a woman who had altered her voice and imitated the voice of a man who had wanted to talk to Ted. This was enough for Sylvia to recognize that this time the situation was serious and her husband's affair completely destroyed the respect she had for him up to that time. She later went to their bedroom and found a letter from Assia. She took Hughes's book, notes, poems and letters, including a completed novel she had written for Hughes and was going to dedicate to him, and she burnt all of them in the backyard.[42] Although this was the day Sylvia decided to end her marriage, she acted as if nothing were wrong until Aurelia had left England. However, before Aurelia left England, she had already

[41] "Words Heard, by Accident, Over the Phone" was written two days after the incident. The critical point lies in the fact that most of the Plath scholars immediately associate the poem with Assia Wevill who is the central theme of the poem. In relation to that they interpret the sentence "now the room is ahiss" as word play of the name Assia. However, the poem might have intended to say something completely different such as the destruction of her privacy, which was the main theme of the Cold War years, as her marriage and her private life were shared by a third person. For further reading on the poem see *Collected Poems*.

[42] This famous bonfire was witnessed by one of Plath's friends who approved the existence of such a novel.

learned of Ted's infidelity so it was not a surprise for her to learn of her daughter's decision for a legal separation. Aurelia was not the only one who learned the affair, Assia's husband David also learned of his wife, and he sent a note to Ted saying, "If you come near my wife again, I'll kill you"(Koren and Negev 99).

While the situation was quite difficult for David, it was much more difficult for Plath, who was betrayed by her husband, left alone with her little children and facing also the betrayal of Assia, whom, as a friend of Sylvia had been accommodated many times at their home. Unfortunately, this was not the end. "Because Ted was moving repeatedly from one friend to another and intentionally not leaving any forwarding addresses, Sylvia rarely knew his whereabouts in London. His friends were evasive and reluctant to help when she telephoned"(Koren and Negev 101). As a result, after the separation, Sylvia went to Ireland with the children and Ted also accompanied them. Then all of a sudden, he left Ireland and told Sylvia that he would go to London. However, Ted left for Spain instead to meet Assia, tragically at the place where he had honeymooned with Sylvia.

> Hughes's telegram to Sylvia was a ruse intended to lead her to believe that he was still in Ireland and a London friend, who in turn posted it to Sylvia a few days later. The envelope bore no return address and from the vague contents of the "numb, utterly dumb letter" Plath could not figure out where he was, what he was doing, or when was he coming home. Deserted in the big house in North Tawton with two children and with her nerves increasingly on edge, Plath's apprehensions intensified.(Koren and Negev 106)

Ted's irresponsible attitude was the precursor of the alarming rate of the destruction of Plath's works and notes, which is also evident from her calendar. Koren and Negev claim that,

> The first ten days of October are quite significant as Sylvia spent more than a week together with Ted who would end their marriage in a cruel way. "In a puzzling coincidence, the page for that first week of October, like that for the second week of September, is also missing from Plath's calendar (which

> notations that Plath may have jotted down in frustration or anger on that page are lost,) her letters to her family and friends speak frankly of a "ghastly week."(106)

Furthermore they claim that,

> …For a long time, he told her, he had been looking for a chance to free himself from her. He said that he could get hordes of gorgeous women, and that she was "a hag." Sylvia thought that he and Assia wished her dead, knowing that she had already attempted suicide before; her death would be convenient to Ted, who could sell Court Green and live with the children elsewhere.(Koren and Negev 106).

Unfortunately, for a woman like Plath, who had the intellectual power to foresee future, it was not difficult to surmise what would happen, and unfortunately, she was completely right.[43]

After Sylvia's death, Ted began to live at Sylvia's house, with Assia, as the rent had already been paid. The disgusting behavior of Ted was complemented by Assia's. She read Plath's journals and her last novel, composed of 130 pages. She immediately wanted Ted to destroy both the last journals and the novel as "Assia easily identified David and herself as the Goof-Hoppers, and was disgusted not only by her portrayal as an" icy, barren woman," but also by David's character as "detestable and contemptible" "(Koren and Negev 117). During that time in order to prevent Aurelia Plath from taking her grandchildren to the United States, "his family and Sylvia's friends sent Mrs. Plath censored and favorable reports on life in Fitzroy Road…"(Koren and Negev 119). As a result, Assia's pregnancy and her existence at Sylvia's home, of her presence Sylvia's bed, and her involvement in Hughes's destruction of Sylvia's last journals and her novel were kept secret from Aurelia.

[43] Ted told Lucas Myers that "he and Sylvia would probably have been "reunited in two weeks" (Koren and Negev 116). In order to purge himself from the accusations, Ted told that lie. However, before Plath's death, Ted knew that Assia was pregnant and a return to Plath was completely out of the question.

Eventually, Ted destroyed both the novel and the last part of the journals, including some pages of her calendar.[44]

However, Assia was unaware of the fact that Hughes would also become her nemesis too. The unpublished correspondence between Aurelia Plath and Assia Wevill proves that "Assia complained to Aurelia Plath that Ted was brutalizing her, with "frequent mentions of emotional and physical abuse, some of it, I seem to recollect, sexual." Larschan [Richard Larschan did a televised interview with Mrs. Plath] read in Sylvia's letters similar complaints about Ted's brutality, and he was struck "by the two women's anguished tone""(Koren and Negev182-183). After giving birth to Shura, her daughter by Hughes, she understood that there was no future for her with Ted. Before her death, Assia wrote a letter to her friend in an alarming tone speaking of Hughes's irresponsible attitude towards his child. She wrote "…I couldn't leave little Shura by herself. She's too old to be adopted"(Koren and Negev 205). It is apparent that Assia had already decided to commit suicide, and she was afraid of leaving Shura behind. However, her anxieties were not exaggerations, as

> Fay Weldon recalls a visit with her husband to Assia's flat on Clapham Common; Ted gave Shura wine to drink, and she danced and danced until she dropped into sleep. "It was very sadistic on his part, and I'm sure he would not have dared to do the same to Frieda. But after all, Shura was the illegitimate child, the daughter of the mistress," Weldon says"(Koren and Negev 213).

Koren and Negev's work is illuminating because although their main focus is upon Assia Wevill, they also highlight the hidden facts of how Plath's works were

[44] It is evident that *The Bell Jar* was not a pot boiler for Plath as she wrote the sequel of the novel.

destroyed and how her apprehensions were intensified by Ted's actions leading her to search for a fresh beginning, a rebirth that was not a real suicide attempt.[45]

In addition to Koren and Negev's work, A. Alvarez's *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide* postulates new perspectives for the Plath reader. In his work, A. Alvarez strictly claims ""I am convinced by what I know of the facts that this time she did not intend to die"(Savage 35). Alvarez tells the story of Plath with a great many details that the previous works had not included. He clearly underlines the fact that, this time Plath organized everything in order to survive.

The au pair girl was ill, the weather was some of the coldest in the history of London, she had to cope with depression, loneliness, her sinuses, her responsibility for the children, who were also severely affected by the cold, and her desire to write, although that was prevented by all the previous listed factors, but despite this she wanted to be successful and happy more than at any other time. Before the night she committed suicide, "she knocked on the door of the elderly painter who lived below her, asking to borrow some stamps. But she lingered in the doorway, drawing out the conversation until he told her that he got up well before nine in the morning. Then she said good night and went back upstairs"(Savage 35). As A. Alvarez reports,

> The Australian girl arrived punctually at nine o'clock. She rang and knocked for a long time but could get no answer, so she went off to search for a telephone booth in order to phone the agency and make sure she had the right address. Sylvia's name, incidentally, was not on either of the doorbells. Had everything been normal, the neighbor below would have been up by then;

[45] Nilgün Marmara, whom was a Turkish poet, also mentions that Sylvia Plath's interpretation of suicide can be interpreted as a form of protecting the self, which is a kind of mourning for freedom and love, therefore a search for a happy life. Interestingly, Nilgün Marmara, just like Sylvia Plath, had to cope the restrictions of her cultural surrounding and the traumas of her marriage. During her graduation form Bosporus University, Department of Western Languages, she wrote her thesis on Sylvia Plath. She was affected by the style and life of Plath so much that she committed suicide too. For further reading see Nilgün Marmara. *Sylvia Plath'in şairliğinin intiharı bağlamında analizi*. (Cağaloğlu: Everest, 2005).

> even if he had overslept, the girl's knocking should have aroused him. But as it happened, the neighbor was very deaf and slept without his hearing aid. More important, his bedroom was immediately below Sylvia's kitchen. The gas seeped down and knocked him out cold. So he slept on through all the noise. (Savage 37)

Alvarez informs that when both the au pair girl and the neighbors achieved entrance Sylvia Plath's flat;

> She was still warm. She had left a note saying "Please call Dr. ____" and giving his telephone number. But it was too late. Had everything worked out as it should-had the gas not drugged the man downstairs, preventing him from opening the front door to the au pair girl-there is little doubt she would have been saved. *I think she wanted to be; why else leave her doctor's telephone number*?"[emphasis added] (Savage 38).

The most significant point in his work is his vigorous claim that "there were the children: she was too passionate a mother to want to lose them or them to lose her"(Savage 38). Alvarez describes the suicide attempt of Plath as "a cry for help"(Savage 38). After giving a detailed description of Plath, he highlights the fact that,

> This is just one example. According to the official statistics, there would have been at least ninety-nine other suicides in Great Britain the week Sylvia died. Another twenty-five to fifty people would also have taken their own lives in the same period without ever making the official lists. In the United States the figures would have been four times greater.(Savage 42)

Therefore, while Alvarez is the one who writes, "When she walked in front of me down the hall passage and up the stairs to her apartment- her apartment-she had the top two floors of the house- her hair gave off a strong smell, sharp as an animal's"(Savage 31), he is also the one who highlights the fact that Plath's ending is not a tragic one. She might have called for a regeneration, a rebirth, a female transformation and a new beginning just like she did in the *Ariel* poems that ends with the word "spring" in her poem "Wintering." The only tragedy is that fortune was not with her this time, although she did hope for a miracle much more than

anything. Apparently, Alvarez's and Koren and Negev's works are quite significant, as they help the reader to understand the artificial nature of the Plath myth.

The final chain of the Plath myth is the relationship between Aurelia and Ted and Olywn Hughes. However, this time the protagonist is Aurelia Plath. Through Plath's depiction of the so-called cruel mother in *The Bell Jar*, Esther, the protagonist, declares that she hates her mother and *The Bell Jar* immediately added a new element to the myth. Plath was not only the psychotic woman who had problems both with her husband and her sister-in-law but also a woman at odds with the most intimate person in her life, her mother. Although the publication of the novel was an advantage for Ted, as he had the chance of justifying to himself and others that Sylvia who even hated her own mother was to blame.[46] And even though it was to be disastrous for Aurelia who, would be publicized as a cruel mother, Ted was determined to publish the book,

> An unpublished letter that Hughes wrote to Mrs. Plath seven years after Sylvia Plath's death offers a possible answer. The letter is in the Plath archive in the Lilly Library, at Indiana University at Bloomington – a huge repository of letters by Plath and to her, as well as family correspondence written after her death. (Mrs. Plath sold this collection to the Lilly in 1977). In the letter, dated March 24, 1970, Hughes tells Mrs. Plath of a house that he wants to buy on the North Coast of Devon – "an unbelievably beautiful place" –for which, however, he hasn't the money. He doesn't want to sell a house he bought recently in Yorkshire ("a first class investment"), nor does he want ("for sentimental as they say reasons") to sell Court Green, which he moved back into with the children after Plath's death (and where he lives now, with his second wife, Carol). "Therefore," he tells Mrs. Plath, "I am trying to cash all my other assets and one that comes up is *The Bell Jar*." He asks Mrs. Plath how she would "feel about U.S. publication of this now," adding that in a few years the book will "hardly be saleable," a mere "curiosity for students."(Malcolm 39-40)

[46] The underlying reason was of course the reality that Ted needed money and the publication would be his survivor.

While time refuted Hughes, as Sylvia's novel would become a best-seller, still widely read, time proved that Sylvia was right. Ted wanted to sell Court Green and the only way to achieve this was the publication of *The Bell Jar*. As the copyright laws were in the hands of Ted, Aurelia could not do anything. As a reaction to his publication of *The Bell Jar*, Aurelia published *Letters Home* that included Plath's letters to her mother up until her death. Unfortunately, in the introduction of the *Letters Home* Aurelia already killed her daughter once again, as she begins with the implication that she decided to publish her daughter's letters as a counter attack against *Ariel* and *The Bell Jar*. The main aim of Aurelia was to proclaim that in reality her daughter had loved her a lot and that they had had a positive relationship with each other. Aurelia Plath begins the introduction with the following statement "In answer to the avalanche of inquiries that has descended upon me ever since the publication of Sylvia's poems in *Ariel* and her novel *The Bell Jar*, I am releasing a section of her intimate correspondence with her family from the time she entered Smith College"(LH 3). It is apparent that Mrs. Plath preferred to ignore the privacy of her daughter's correspondence solely to vindicate herself. However, the critical reader immediately recognizes the voice of Plath throughout her correspondences. Whereas Mrs. Plath chose to flaunt the privacy of her daughter to justify herself, her daughter while writing the letters, preferred to play down her unhappy and gloomy times and replace them with positive ones so as not to sadden her mother. That is the big difference between the two. Like Ted and Olywn Hughes, and the members of the Plath industry, Aurelia tried to recreate a story for her daughter.

As stated before, although the polemic of the mother is the last chain in the Plath myth, it is not the least. Plath has been portrayed as an ungrateful daughter who

represented Aurelia as a cruel mother in *The Bell Jar*. However, Plath scholars and readers have failed to recognize that Plath's dramatic contrast between the negative portrayals of the mother in *The Bell Jar* and the positive one in the *Letters Home* signify completely different things. The different tone of Plath should not be interpreted as being two-faced. What Plath scholars and readers have failed to recognize is the fact that, "we think back through our mothers if we are women. It is useless to go to the great men writers for help, however much one may go to them for pleasure"[47](Woolf lix). Therefore, it was natural for Plath to turn to her mother, as the mother was the emblem of the social pressures Sylvia felt upon her. Furthermore, it is evident that the relationship between her mother is problematic for both sides as Plath writes in her journals, "One reason I could keep up such a satisfactory letter-relationship with her while in England was we could both verbalize our desired image of ourselves in relation to each other …"(J 449). It becomes clear that, not only Sylvia but also Aurelia wished for a desired image of themselves. In lights of this the aggressive portrayal of the mother in The Bell Jar must be read not in terms of Sylvia's hate towards her mother, but as a rebellion against the social norms that are represented through the abstract symbol of the mother.

It is apparent that while Hughes and Aurelia were trying to construct a biographical pseudo truth for Plath, they not only constructed different stories for Plath, but also invaded the privacy of the person whom had thought that her husband and her mother were the most intimate individuals in her life. Similarly, the death of privacy that was the key ideology of the Cold War America was also the key term for

[47] This essay is based upon two papers read to the Arts Society at Newnham and the Odtaa at Girton in October 1928. The papers were too long to be read in full, and have since been altered and expanded.

Plath's life after death. One of the best examples of that is the publication of the journals of Plath.

Just like he did before, Hughes omitted the parts he wanted to gloss over and organized the journal just as he did with his version of his Ariel version. He destroyed the last parts of Plath's journals, starting from the day she learned of the affair, in order to preserve the privacy of his family and to prevent her children from reading them. However, Hughes's decisive actions force the Plath reader to ask, "… if he was so keen to preserve his privacy why did he sanction the publication of *Letters Home* and *The Journals* at all?"(Malcolm 39). The answer to the question is also an example of one fact in life; reality cannot be erased. The best example of this is hidden in the *Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath* that was edited by Karen Kukil and published in 2000. The alarming tone of the publisher's note indicates the fact that, up until that time the attempt to recreate many Plath's is at the center of Plath studies: "The goal of this new edition of Sylvia Plath‘s journals is to present a complete and historically accurate text"(J preface ix). The publisher's note is impressive in the sense that it summarizes the crisis behind the entire story of Sylvia Plath: "These journals contain Sylvia Plath's opinions and not those of the publisher"(J 3). The publisher's note tries to prevent any kind of ambiguity, as the unabridged journals were the first unameliorated voice of Plath. As the publisher's note underlines, "Readers should keep in mind the colloquial meanings of words appropriate to the time period of the journals. For example, Plath used the word 'queer' to denote an eccentric or suspicious person, according to her annotated dictionary, and not a homosexual"(J 3). Obviously the unabridged journals of Plath

were intended to purify all the misconceptions and misreading on Plath had fostered so far.

Although some Plath scholars believe that the publication of the journals mean the final destruction of the privacy of Plath, the journals are illuminating not only because they give the answers to Plath readers from Sylvia Plath herself, but because they reflect Plath's mastery as a journalist. Plath is shown not only as the brilliant poet, but also as the novelist, the short story writer and the journalist. In conclusion, the Plath myth is composed of various chains resemble a Georgian knot. However, as opposed to the attempted reconstructing of many Plath's, the scholars and readers who objectively read Plath always find the true voice, the inner meaning of her works that are beyond biography. Carol Rumens's comment on Plath is a fine example of that, she writes,

> When, in my early twenties, I first read Sylvia Plath's late poems, I knew almost nothing of her biography….I managed to divine that the writer probably had two small children, as I did. A great poet who was a mother and had two children! This was biography enough to set the seal on my… apprenticeship.(53)

1.3. UNDERSTANDING THE ORGANIC WRITING OF SYLVIA PLATH THROUGH *THE BELL JAR*

Apparently, the Plath myth, which is a production of Plath industry, was intended to create a picture of Plath framing a sick, mad woman who prepared for herself a tragic ending. However, the borders of this frame were not limited to that alone. The Plath industry's main attack against Sylvia Plath is not defining her works

in terms of psychopathology, but in the attempt to take politics out of her works.[48] Exemplified by the attempt to divide her works into two antagonistic camps; the invaluable works written before the *Ariel* poems, and *Ariel*, whose main motives are psychosis, destruction, anger and fear that inspire critics to reshape the psychotic Plath again and again. However, deciphering Sylvia Plath's life and the *Ariel* poems is not the only way to understand the structure of her work. Instead, the works written before the *Ariel* poems were the seeds of her successful *Ariel* poems. Therefore, ignoring Plath's work before *Ariel* is the worst way to approach her works, because the kernel of the creative process of Plath's works is hidden in *The Bell Jar*, which was Plath's grand project, the achievement, the work that she wanted most in her life. Therefore, although;

> Critics have tended to take Plath's poetry out of the politics, but as Jacqueline Rose's feared, they have also "taken the politics out of the poems." The battle with the "Other" that is enacted in the later poems is seen primarily as a gender or personal battle, ignoring the political legacy of Cold War McCarthyism, in which the enemy is internalized, and the Other is within America as well as outside. The Rosenberg's execution, with which *The Bell Jar* opens, is merely the most obvious metaphor for the process in which public events work on the private imagination.(Peel, "Political" 40)

In relation, if one wants to decipher the writing process of Plath and the political motives of her works, one must take into account *The Bell Jar*.

When interpretations of the works on Plath's poems, short stories, journals, and her novel are examined, the sharpest similarity is that all of them aim at removing politics not only from her entire work but also from her name. As a result, her works are rarely represented side by side with the word politics, nor politics associated with her name. Consequently, it is not a surprise that even *The Bell Jar*, of

[48] As stated by Robin Peel "The Plath industry tends to distort Plath's own writing, for the endless discussion of her relationships make it difficult to locate the published work in other frames, in other contexts"("Back" 18).

which the main discourse concerns the political traumas of Cold War America, has been strictly taken out of politics. The most obvious evidence of that kind of approach towards *The Bell Jar* can be seen in the reviews of the novel, and the literary criticism on both Plath and *The Bell Jar*, which immediately appeared in New York Times best-seller list. One of the best examples of that kind of attitude can be seen in A. Alvarez's work *The Writer's Voice*. He notes that while

> …everyone knows about her broken marriage and despair and suicide, but how many of the thousands who have gobbled up her intensely autobiographical novel, The Bell Jar, have ever bothered with her sardonic, unforgiving, yet curiously detached poems? Similarly, her husband Ted Hughes's Birthday Letters probably became a best-seller not because of the beauty and power of his language, but because people wanted the lowdown on his marriage to Plath.(114)

While Alvarez is right in the sense that her works have been repeatedly mired in her biography, he strictly separates *The Bell Jar* from the Ariel poems, just like other critics have done to *The Colossus*, *Crossing the Water*, *Winter Trees*, and *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*. The most tragic element is the fact that Alvarez cannot see the reality that the work he labels as intensely autobiographical, is a novel that has become an exemplary work for Plath's generation and is an intensely political novel.[49] Like Alvarez, some other critics, such as Paul West, assume that, "a glamour of fatality hangs over the name of Sylvia Plath….It is a legend that solicits our desires for a heroism of sickness that can serve as emblem of the age, and many young readers take in Sylvia Plath's vibrations of despair as if they were the soul's own oxygen"(158). The dilemma lies under the fact that while Paul West associates Plath with madness in order to take her works out of politics, he also defines Plath as

[49] Paul Alexander states that "*The Bell Jar* became so popular that, when Bantam Books brought out an initial paperback edition in April 1972— a run of 375,000 copies—it sold out that printing, plus a second and a third, in one month. In the mid-eighties, more than a decade and a half later, *The Bell Jar* paperback edition was selling some fifty thousand copies a year.(348).

an emblem of the age. If so, how can one who wrote intensely autobiographical works turn out to be an emblem of her age? If her life and her works are so distant from the cultural, political, and social facets of her age, why then, would "many young readers take in Sylvia Plath's vibrations of despair as if they were the soul's own oxygen"(West 158). It is evident that removing the name Sylvia Plath from the cultural, and social arena means taking political motives out of her works. However, although the Plath industry has defined *The Bell Jar* in terms of an apolitical form of work, even her creative process itself was intensely political, which was apparently a response to the limitations of her age.

Understanding the significance of *The Bell Jar* and deciphering the meaning of the text will also give the key to the writing style of Plath which is quite political. In parallel with the Cold War ideology that was imposed on American culture, calling for a turning back towards home that meant turning back to the family in order to protect oneself from the so-called "enemy within," Plath always seemed to write about her family and her life which signifies much larger social and political influences of her culture. She writes in her journals,

> Write about your own experience. By that experience someone else may be a bit richer some day. Read widely of others experiences in thought and action – stretch to others <u>even though it hurts and strains</u> and would be more comfortable to snuggle back in the comforting cotton-wool of blissful ignorance! …Try always, as long as you have breath in your body, to take the hard way, the Spartan way – and work, work, work to build yourself into a rich, continually evolving entity! (J 47)

Although *The Bell Jar* has always been separated from Plath's other works, as the critics have labeled it as a potboiler, the writing process of the novel illustrates the organic form of writing that Plath postulated as a counter attack against Cold War ideology, which was mainly imposed on women. She apparently wrote *The Bell Jar*,

step by step, like placing each block carefully in order to construct a tower. At the end, the basis of this metaphoric tower turns into *The Bell Jar* and all other works are built upon it. A fine example of this enigmatic strategy is hidden in the ambiguity of the creation time line of the novel.

Although Hughes insisted on claiming that Plath wrote it sometime in 1960, other sources supply thoroughly different facts. Most of the critical studies on Plath quote Louis Ames's note on *The Bell Jar*. Judith Kroll in the notes page of her work gives the quotation of Louis Ames "It is probable that Sylvia already had a version of *The Bell Jar* in her trunks when in [in 1957] she returned to the States"(Ames 287)" In addition, Aurelia Plath, in *The Letters Home*, underlines the fact that Sylvia did not share anything with her while she was drafting her novel. Last but not the least, Plath' journals indicate the fact that she did not share most of her works with Ted. All these prove that not only Ted but also Aurelia were unaware of the writing process of the novel. Therefore, trusting Hughes's claims on *The Bell Jar* that Plath wrote the novel sometime in 1960 proves impossible. In addition, the claims about *The Bell Jar* being regarded as a "potboiler" also turn out to be misguided. Furthermore, "Sylvia once described the *Bell Jar* as 'an autobiographical apprentice' work which I had to write in order to free myself from the past'(Note,' 293)"(Harris 112). The problematic point is that from the very first time that the critics have heard the voice of Plath, they have done so believing that *The Bell Jar* was an unimportant work for Plath, solely a potboiler. However, the voice they've heard is the wrong one as in her journals Plath writes "One reason I could keep up such a satisfactory letter-relationship with her while in England was we could both verbalize our desired image of ourselves in relation to each other …"(J 449). Furthermore, members of the

Plath industry, such as Anne Stevenson, always highlight the different tones of her letters and journals.[50] Therefore, how can they ignore the hollowness of Plath's defining *The Bell Jar* as a potboiler to her mother? As stated by Saul Melof,

> Nor can we take seriously her having referred to it as a 'potboiler' and therefore to be kept seperate from her serious work: the oldest and most transparent of all writer's dodges. All the evidence argues against it: as early as 1957 she had written a draft of the novel; she completed the final version on a Eugene Saxton Fund fellowship and felt toward its terms an urgent sense of commitment and obligation; the painstaking quality of the writing—but above all, its subject: her own pain and sickness, treated with literal fidelity, a journal done up as a novel, manifestly re-experienced , and not from any great distance of glowing health.(J 103).

The Bell Jar is apparently, Plath's grand project, not a pot boiler. It is not a surprise that, Plath defined her novel in terms of an attempt to free herself from the past, as she must have thought about her depiction of the socially blind mother in *The Bell Jar*, which also signifies Aurelia, just like most of the middle class mothers in Cold War America. While, it can be assumed that Plath's journals are the most trustable sources to understand Plath's desire to write not only a novel but also novels. On March 1, 1951, Plath writes to her mother,

> Imagine, one awestruck girl greeted me yesterday with, "I hear you're writing a *novel*. I think that's just wonderful!" Whereupon I felt like telling her I was my twin sister and never wrote a damn thing in my life. I've got to get to work if I'm to live up to my "reputation." At least Olive Higgins Prouty can feel I really *do* write. Seems that scholarship was rather well chosen. Hope the dear is content.(LH 67)

She always highlighted her desire to write a novel, she notes "O the desire to write a novel…"(J 375). Plath also highlights the difficult process of writing prose, she wishes, "If only I could come to the novel…"(J 474). In addition, she wants to be

[50] Anne Stevenson, in her polemical Plath study, compares and contrasts the different tones in Plath's letters to her mother and her journals. However, she does not do that comparison in order to decipher the reason of the difference, but to declare Plath as a schizoid.

original, Plath declares her strategy, which is; "Make your own style, don't copy"(276). Perhaps signaling her future intentions for *The Bell Jar* Plath writes,

> I could write a terrific novel. The tone is the problem. I'd like it to be serious, tragic, yet gay & rich & creative. I need a master, several masters. Lawrence, except in Women in love, is too bare, too journalistic in his style. Henry James too elaborate, too calm & well mannered. Joyce Cary I like. I have that fresh, brazen, colloquial voice. Or J.D. Salinger. But that needs an "I" speaker which is so limiting. Or Jack Burden. I have time. I must tell myself I have time.(J 274-5)

Apparently, *The Bell Jar* was her grand project and she wished to write it more than anything else in life. If she had viewed it simply as a potboiler, an unsuccessful attempt, she wouldn't have written another novel, which was the sequel of The *Bell Jar*. Plath wrote to her mother on March 4, 1962, "… I grind daily on the rough draft of my "novel"; I only know that it will cover nine months and be a soul-search, American-girl-in-Cambridge, European vacations, etc."(LH 305). At that time, Plath was writing *Double Exposure* that was going to be the sequel of *The Bell Jar*.[51]

Her last novel also crystallizes the writing style of Plath in a clearer manner, because she informs the reader that her novels were written step by step and the completion of all the drafts, composed of different details, eventually came to form a whole novel. Indicating her third novel, Plath writes to her mother, "… shall try to draft this terrific second [*third*] novel that I'm dying to do"(LH 473). The number 'third' is significant as her journals prove the existence of both her last novel, *Double Exposure*, which was destroyed by Hughes and Assia Wevill, and her second novel which was destroyed by Plath during the bonfire that was occurred after the phone incident. Therefore, if Plath had regarded *The Bell Jar* as a potboiler and herself as

[51] The outline of the *Double Exposure* can be seen in Plath's 1962 short story "Mothers" in which the protagonist is Esther, just like the protagonist of *The Bell Jar*. However, in parallel with Plath's drafts of her second novel, in the "Mothers" Esther is married and she is associated with marriage and motherhood which are the central themes of the *Double Exposure*.

an unsuccessful novelist, she wouldn't have written any further novels, at least one of which was the sequel to *The Bell Jar*.[52] As a result of her correspondence with her mother and her journals, it becomes evident why the ending of *The Bell Jar* gives the reader the feeling that the novel does not actually end but will continue in another novel.

It can be assumed that *The Bell Jar* is Plath's grand project, giving inspiration to her entire work. The most apparent example of that are the poems in the *Colossus* and the enigmatic voice in *The Bell Jar* and in the journals. "The Manor Garden," Two Views of a Cadaver Room," "Night Shift," "The Eye-mote," "Hard Castle Crags," "Departure," "The Colossus," "Medallion," and various other poems have direct references to *The Bell Jar* in relation to the metaphors and motives Plath uses in *The Colossus* which act like a bridge to decipher the political tone of her novel. Apparently, Plath was inspired by the draft of *The Bell Jar*, whose political motives and metaphors have a direct parallelism with *The Colossus*. After the creation of *The Colossus* the next step was *Crossing the Water*. While *The Colossus* derived its origin from *The Bell Jar*, *Crossing the Water* adds a new stepping stone to reach the *Ariel* poems. In *Crossing the Water*, "Finisterre," "Face Lift," "Insomniac," "In Plaster," "The Surgeon at 2 A.M.," "Mirror," and various other poems seem as if they are part of *The Bell Jar*, and symbols such as "silver," "moon," "clinic," "surgeon" are not only the central metaphors of Cold War America but also of *The*

[52] Plath biographers Ronald Hayman and Poul Alexander claim that Plath destroyed the sequel of *The Bell Jar*. On the other side, many Plath biographers claim that Plath destroyed a novel which would be dedicated to Hughes and the novel was about a successful marriage. The claim that the sequel of *The Bell Jar* is the last novel destroyed by Hughes, as the subject of the novel was the trauma that Plath experienced throughout her marriage. The subject seems to be easily adapted to the last pages of *The Bell Jar* because the reader knows that Esther has already married and she has a baby. However, after she leaves the asylum, the reader gets curious about what will happen to her as a married wife. It is not difficult to surmise that Esther will probably face a traumatic marriage like her entire generation, as throughout *The Bell Jar* Esther criticizes marriage as an institution.

Bell Jar. In addition to these books of poems *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams* is a significant work that not only illustrates the powerful impact of *The Bell Jar* on Plath, but also the organic form of writing. "Superman and Paula Brown's New Snowsuit"(1955), opens with a sentence that has a similar tone to *The Bell Jar*. The story opens with "The year the war began …"(JP 281).In addition, "The Wishing Box" (1956) Plath's character Agnes Higgins reminds the reader of "Elly Higginbottom" in *The Bell Jar*. "The Shadow's"(1956) character is "Mr. Greenbloom"(JP 145), whose surname resembles that of Esther Greenwood. Furthermore, in a 1962 story "Mothers" the protagonist is "Esther" just like in *The Bell Jar*. As Melody Zajdel implies,

> What is interesting to the reader in of these twenty stories is the consistency with which Plath dealt with the same materials and themes throughout her fiction. Hughes indicates that Plath 'launched herself into *The Bell Jar* in 1960.' But at least four stories mentioned above, written between 1954, and 1959, deal with some of the same material.(246).

Last but not the least, the voice of the journals has an immediate connection with Esther Greenwood, while Esther's friends and the people that compose her social milieu also have a direct parallel with Sylvia's. Especially Esther's discourse on the portrayal of women in Cold War America is supported by the discourse in the voice of the journals. Therefore, while the political symbols and motives mainly derive their sources from the draft of *The Bell Jar*, Plath's journals are also one of the most significant sources for all of them. Interestingly, *The Bell Jar* is not only takes nourishment from Plath's poems and short stories, but also gives inspiration to other works. As Rose insists "… Plath may be censored but, as we have seen, she also censors, transforms and endlessly rewrites herself"(Rose, "Haunting" 104). That is the reason why Plath mentions to her mother about a letter she wrote, while she was

at McLean. Although she never sent it to her friend, she kept it. As she informs, "I never sent this. However, I kept it as a record of how I felt about things at the time, looking back at last summer"(LH 129).[53] It is evident that, Plath kept her journals and letters so carefully because by keeping them as records, she had the chance of looking back again and again in order to build new experiences that gave inspiration to new works.

Finally, Plath's secret project, *The Bell Jar*, gave birth to various poems and short stories and the final steps were *Ariel* and *Winter Trees* in which the political motives are intensified.[54] As mentioned by Robin Peel,

> Sylvia Plath's final poetry provides similarly explicit glimpses of a Cold War and nuclear war awareness, as in "Fever 103" with its ghostly images of "tradition" and "Hiroshima ash." She learned to see America better from the global perspective offered by her later experience. But this awareness, though deliberately disguised or concealed in most of her imaginative work, had been part of her consciousness since childhood. As a twelve-year-old, Plath recorded in her diary the news of dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Five years later she coauthored a published article protesting the decision of the United States to continue research into nuclear weapons. Later she corresponded with her admirer Eddie Cohen, whose long letters expressed anxieties about international events.(Peel, "Political" 40)

The political voice of Plath is again supported by an organic form of writing as Tracy Brain underlines,

> the Ariel collection and the texts written during its composition need to be thought of as connected, as longer works, clusters and sequences composed of two or more texts, rather than as numerous individual ones ... "Morning Song" ..."Barren Women" ... "Heavy Women" ... "February 22) all operate through references to statues, museums, and paintings. Together, they form a sort of rehearsal for the radio play Plath was to write a year later, *Three Women*[55]...(Brain,"Unstable" 21).

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[53] At the beginning of *The Bell Jar* "summer" is also defined in terms of entrapment and suffocation.

[54] As Paul Alexander comments, "*Ariel* sold in unprecedented numbers, more than a half-million copies, and turned out to be one of the all-time-best-selling volumes of poetry.(343-344)

[55] Plath's representation of the female body, not only in her poems but only in novel and short stories, which is the signifier of female psychology, can also be seen in the paintings Plath did as she was at Smith. In addition to her literary career, she was also very successful at painting. After studying the Archives of Plath at Smith and Lily Library at Indiana University, Kathleen Connors states, "Pictures Plath made at Smith, however, continued to focus primarily on representations of women. Perhaps the

Among the *Ariel* poems, especially, "Thalidomide," "The Applicant," "Barren Women," "Lady Lazarus," "Tulips," "A Secret," "Elm," and "The Detective" she directly refers to the Cold War years that come to the surface as emblems of fear and anger. This time Plath's landscape is not only the United States but also Britain where she could interpret her country from a different perspective. Therefore, while *The Bell Jar*, and some stories in *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams* define the anxieties of Cold War America, the *Ariel* poems intensify the fear and anger towards the political atmosphere that caused an unstable world. As mentioned by Robin Peel, "There is fear in *The Bell Jar*, but is disguised by the wonderfully mordant humor of the narrator. In the later *Ariel* poems, there is also fear, and humor, and a rich anger"("Back" 46).

In relation to the Ariel poems, and *Winter Trees*, there might have been parallelism between Arie*l*, *Winter Trees*, and *Double Exposure*, (Plath's final and unpublished novel) because just like the writing process of *The Bell Jar*, which triggered the creation of *Johnny Panic*, The Colossus, and *Crossing the Water*, Plath must have built her last novel side by side with the *Ariel* poems and her radio play, and other poems in *The Winter Trees*. In *The Winter Trees*, "Apprehensions," "The Courage of Shutting Up," and her radio play *Three Women*, written for the BBC, are the most obvious works that illustrate the identical voice of her previous works, and especially the one in *The Bell Jar*.[56]

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most common subject of her childhood and teen artwork, Plath's fascination with the female body is evident in all genres of her artwork, form her early diary doodles of film star glam-girls to her last dated visual piece in the archives, a 1960 collage of newspaper cuttings that places a shapely woman in a bathing suit within commodity culture and militarism of Eisenhower's America"("Mining" 72).

[56] Plath writes in her journal, "I shall write a complete fantasy life of tearful-joyful stories for women – tremulous with all varieties of emotion.(J 413) She managed to do this, as not only in *The Bell Jar*, but also in *Three Women* she reflects the portrayal of female figures from various perspectives. Koren Yahuda and Eliat Negev's work, *Lover of Unreason. Asia Wevill, Sylvia Plath's Rival and Ted*

In conclusion, it is clear that *The Bell Jar* is the kernel of Plath's creative power and also is the literary work that gave inspiration to the *Ariel* poems. It is not a surprise that the critics who have labeled Plath as a schizophrenic woman also labeled Esther Greenwood as mad. Apparently, the Plath industry have tended to associate Plath with Esther Greenwood in *The Bell Jar*, who is also read in terms of her schizophrenic voice rather than her political discourse. However,

> To label Esther as "schizophrenic" and leave it at that does not take us very far. For Sylvia Plath's focus in *The Bell Jar* is not on mental illness per se, but on the relationship of Esther's private psychosis to her larger social situation. Indeed, her dilemma seems to have a great deal to do with being a woman in a society whose guidelines for women she can neither accept nor reject.(Perloff, "Ritual" 511).

Therefore, if Esther Grenwood is also regarded as an extension of Plath in order to degrade the literary power of the work, the critics unconsciously give the greatest power to Esther as a woman. If she is Plath, it is impossible to separate her from politics as Plath, who studied both at Smith and Cambridge, one of the most prestigious institutions in the world, both as an instructor and a student at the peak of the Cold War years, and who deeply experienced the fears of the Cold War and the possibility of Nuclear War as a mother and a writer, can't have closed her eyes to the realities of her social and political milieu. It cannot be emphasized enough that she was never simply "the mad woman in the attic" but rather a master of cultural critique.

Hughes's Doomed Love highlights that her last novel, which was destroyed by Hughes and Wevill, focused on the female life. However, this time the trauma of marriage was portrayed. Therefore the journey of Esther Greenwood might have been continued in *The Double Exposure*.

PART II

HELL: UNDERSTANDING THE AMERICAN SIMULACRA

> It's so hard to forget pain, but it's even harder to remember sweetness. We have no scar to show for happiness. We learn so little from peace.
>
> Chuck Palahniuk, *Diary: A novel*.

2.1. ESTHER'S CONFRONTATION WITH THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

At first sight, *The Bell Jar* seems to signify the story of a young girl, Esther Greenwood, who comes to New York as a guest editor of a famous magazine and who later experiences a mental illness, and is even labeled as a schizophrenic, which seems closely related with Plath's personal psychological trauma, not with her culture's trauma. This picture has also been supported by some Plath critics and scholars in order to justify the claim that "although Plath claimed in a late interview to be deeply concerned with world politics, she did not have an explicitly political imagination"(Gilbert and Gubar, "Land" 297).[57] Therefore, they have given way to depoliticize *The Bell Jar*. However, as Frederick Jameson emphasizes "…there is nothing that is not social and historical –indeed that everything is "in the last analysis political"("Unconscious" 5). In relation with Jameson's crucial comment, it can be asserted that *The Bell Jar* is one of the most significant literary texts of twentieth-

[57] In their works, *No Man's Land. The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar portray the works of various women writers, and Plath is one of hem. They accuse Plath of not having any connection with politics.

century American literature, which crystallizes the political, social, and psychological traumas and *facts* of Cold War America, "[f]or Sylvia Plath's focus in *The Bell Jar* is not on mental illness per se, but on the relationship of Esther's private psychosis to her larger social situation"(Perloff, "Ritual" 511).

The Bell Jar starts with the famous depiction of Esther Grenwood, the protagonist of the novel,

> IT WAS A QUEER, sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs, and I didn't know what I was doing in New York. I'm stupid about executions. The idea of being electrocuted makes me sick, and that's all there was to read about in the papers—goggle-eyed headlines staring up at me on every street corner and at the fusty, peanut-smelling mouth of every subway. It had nothing to do with me, but I couldn't help wondering what it would like, being burned alive all along your nerves. I thought it must be the worst thing in the world. (BJ 1)[58]

The opening lines of the novel illustrates that the starting point of the novel is one of the most polemical political events of the twentieth century American history; The Rosenberg's. Therefore, as Robin Peel points out,

> Critics have tended to take Plath's poetry out of the politics, but as Jacqueline Rose's feared, they have also "taken the politics out of the poems." The battle with the "Other" that is enacted in the later poems is seen primarily as a gender or personal battle, ignoring the political legacy of Cold War McCarthyism, in which the enemy is internalized, and the Other is within America as well as outside. The Rosenberg's execution, with which *The Bell Jar* opens, is merely the most obvious metaphor for the process in which public events work on the private imagination.(Peel, "Political" 40)

The beginning of *The Bell Jar*, which encapsulates the social, psychological and therefore, political traumas of Cold War America, it also highlights the organic form of writing of Sylvia Plath, as the opening lines remind the reader of the opening lines of the *Ariel* poem "Elm". The voice of "Elm" states,

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[58] In Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Part I: Hell reminds the reader of the first sentence of The *Bell* Jar. Canto I starts with this sentence: "IN the midway of this our mortal life, I found me in a gloomy wood…."(3). It should be underlined that both Plath and Dante started their works by using capital letters.

I know the bottom, she says. I know it with my great tap root:
It is what you fear. I do not fear it: I have been there….
I am terrified by this dark thing. (A 28).

The darkness that haunts the voice of the "Elm" also creates a suffocating social space for the voice of "Wintering," the narrator says,

This is the room I have never been in.
This is the room I could never breathe in.
The black bunched in there like a bat,
No light ….(A 89).

The impossibility of light and freedom for the voice of "Wintering" is valid for the voice of "Face Lift." The voice of the poem claims, "Darkness wipes me out like chalk on a blackboard…"(CW 5). Apparently, the common black inferno of the voices in the different texts illustrates the common psychological and social trauma of the Rosenberg's. Therefore, Esther's emphasis on the idea that "It had nothing to do with [her]"(BJ 1) is a proof of how the Rosenberg trial serves as a perfect metaphor of what Esther and her generation experienced in Cold War America, because Esther states, "I kept hearing about the Rosenbergs over the radio and at the office till I couldn't get them out of my mind. It was like the first time I saw a cadaver"(BJ 1).[59] The word "cadaver" gains significance in the sense that it signifies the social castration of not only women but also men because Esther's depiction of the Rosenberg Trial reminds the reader of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg side by side as the proof of the discourse of "the enemy within" in mid-century Cold War America. In relation to that picture, the "cadaver" turns its face to "Buddy Willard"(BJ 2) who is a medical student at Yale. The significant point is that Buddy is the first character

[59] The opening lines of the novel reminds the reader of Plath's 1955 short story, "The Tongues of Stone," which starts with a similar tone: "The simple morning sun shone through the green leaves of the plants in the little sunroom…."(JP 273).

the reader meets in *The Bell Jar*. Therefore, it would be misleading to say that T*he Bell Jar* is solely the story of Esther Greenwood because,

> The first half of the novel records two separate narratives—the stories of Buddy Willard and of Esther's summer in New York City. These two stories do not mathematically equal one another. Rather they circle each other, each story expressed through imagistic mini-narratives embedded within the matrix created by the other similarly condensed story fragment.(Budick 878)

It is patent that the political discourse of Plath encapsulates the social portrayal of both women and men who lived in Cold War America because, "Behind the American myth of success that produces natural happiness is concealed the reality of the bell jar. An utter solipsism, a capacity for extreme self-laceration in failure, and even a certain demonic tincture to the will occasioned by both success and failure"(Buell 198).

The stifling bell jar[60] in the novel is reflected by New York City which is the setting of the novel, where Esther spends a month as a guest editor of one of the nation's most famous magazines. In fact New York is the signifier of the historical context that crystallizes both her metaphoric individual war and the Cold War that is reflected through the execution of the Rosenbergs. In her journals Plath also portrays the trauma of the war just like the poetic voice which Esther uses,

> Tell me. About the war." … "Where were you hurt?" you ask delicately. "I got hit in the lungs by a shell. I was in the hospital two years." "What's it like to fight? To kill someone?" (Your curiosity is aflame. Granted you can't be a man, but he can tell you how it was.) (J 41)

In addition to the journals it is evident that, just like Esther, the voices in *Johnny Panic* and some poems all signal the urgency for an answer to the question of how this poetic voice can achieve an understanding the trauma of the physical and psychological conflicts in Cold War America. The idea of the war as the core subject

[60] The bell jar is a term used in science which is used to define a cylindrical vessel used to protect fragile objects in scientific experiments in order to establish a vacuum.

of the twentieth-century America also has its reflections in the first words of Plath's 1955 short story "Superman and Paula Brown's Snowsuit" that begins with the phrase, "The year the war began …"(JP 281). Plath also ends the story with a strong criticism of the effects of the war, she says: "That was the year the war began, and the real world, and the difference"(JP 287). The war, as the perfect metaphor for the happy old days and the present chaotic atmosphere, triggers Esther to face a real world is in fact a simulacra that is designed for Esther's generation.[61] Therefore, by starting *The Bell Jar* with, and through putting the execution of the Rosenberg's at the center of her story, Esther postulates the necessity of understanding the political, ergo, the social space that she occupies. As a result the Rosenberg trial can be taken as a case, postulated by Esther, in order to display a way for the reader to find a starting point. The significant point is Esther both retells her story to the reader as she uses simple past tense, and she retells what was entrance route into the simulacra she faced in sometime in the past.

When Esther's confrontation with her historical context is examined, it becomes clear that the Rosenberg Trial is the kernel of Esther's discourse. The execution of the Rosenbergs, who were accused of being Russian spies, was the peak of McCarthyism in Cold War America. However, the communist hysteria, called the "Red Scare" during that period, dated back to 1880's increased union activities. During that period, in order to combat industrialists who joined in labor activism, the government labeled them as communist, anarchist or un-American. These anti-communist sentiments intensified after the Bolshevik Revolution which declared the victory of the Communist Party in Russia. In the United States, the picture

[61] "Simulacra" is a term created by Jean Budrillard. The term is used to define hyperreality in the post-modern world.

immediately increased the worries concerning the threat of Communism as a global enemy. As a result, the first anti-communist sentiments manifested themselves in the United States as the Red Scare.[62] While at the beginning the main target was the American Communist Party, union activities and the possible future threat of communism, after the Second World War the picture completely changed. Communism was not only regarded as a future threat, but the worst enemy of American freedom of all time. In relation, communism began to be interpreted as a Godless un-American ideology that called for the destruction of the individual for the sake of the collective. Therefore it is not difficult to surmise that the ideology of communism was diametrically opposed to the American capitalistic ideology.

As a result of the increased tension between the so-called American emphasis upon freedom and the threat of communism as a global enemy, a new term entered the American lexicon in the 1950's that intensified the fear: brainwashing. [63]

Apparently the tension gained a new momentum. It is patent that, the communist threat transformed itself into a very dangerous enemy, as it was no longer an abstract ideological threat, but a psychological war between the two super powers. As such, psychology became the key word of the era. As Allen Dulles points out,

> In the past few years we have become accustomed to hearing much about the battle for men's minds – the war of ideologies – and indeed our government has been driven by the international tension we call the 'cold war' to take the positive steps to recognize psychological warfare and to play an active role in it. I wonder, however, whether we clearly perceive the magnitude of the problem, whether we realize how sinister the battle for men's minds has

[62] "The Red Scare" derives its name from the riots which broke out in twenty five towns and cities across America. The association of the summer heat with Red, also with the Red Army, was connected to the word "scare" to intensify fear and danger. Finally, the term "Red Scare" became the most famous lexicon of mid-century America.

[63] Brainwashing had first entered the American lexicon in the 1950's as a result of the Communist hysteria. One of the Cold War experts Eugene Kinkead defines the terms as "the total psychologicalweapon by means of which…Soviet Russia firmly expects to conquer the rest of the world"(9).

> become in Soviet hands. We might call it, in its new form, 'brain warfare.'(54)

As the Communist aim was the creation of a "brain …which had no control"(Dulles 54), the Cold War became a war of ideologies that was a psychological war between the two superpowers, which was in fact the war of ideologies. The origin of the brainwashing lies in the belief that American soldiers, whom were imprisoned by the Communist Party during the Korean War, were brainwashed by Communist ideologies. Edward Hunter claims that the Communist Party aimed to impose a "conditioned-reflex"(22) system, just like in the case of Pavlov's dog, which he defines as "the insectivization of human beings"(22). Similar discourses postulated by Arendt Hannah, who mentions that the biggest threat of communism lays in its aim to create a nation "which all behave like the dog in Pavlov's experiments, which all react with perfect reliability even when going to their own death, and which do nothing but react"(586-587). In addition to the psychological and ideological war, in 1949, the Soviet Union developed their first atom bomb, signaling the nuclear arms race.

As a result of the rapid increase in interpreting communism as a big threat, anyone who rebelled against the American system began to be labeled a communist. A 1954 article in *The New York Times* states "for men who were born and grew up in this country to say things like 'There is no freedom of speech in the United States' suggests that those making such statements have had their life memories wiped out and delusions put in their place"(26). The immediate association of the so-called brainwashed soldiers with Americans who criticized the political atmosphere of their nation illustrate the ignored fact that the ideology of the Cold War America tried to create a hyperreality in order to justify its righteousness during the period of the Red

Scare, and the Rosenberg trial, which Esther places so much emphasis upon, is a perfect example of that. Although it was not proved convulsively whether or not they were Soviet spies, who leaked the secrets of American technology to the Soviet Union, they were executed in front of the world. Historian Ellen Schrecker argues that, those kind of trials helped transform "the vague and largely ideological threat of Communism into something much more concrete: real people taking real actions that seem to be part of a Moscow-led conspiracy"(120). It can be claimed that the execution of Ethel Greenglass Rosenberg and Julius Rosenberg became the symbol of McCarthyism. Therefore the execution of the Rosenbergs served as an example of how one could be inhumanly killed even without proof of one's crime. Plath also criticized her culture's political dogma during the Cold War years, in her journals she writes,

> It is amusing to wonder whether dreams would matter at all, or "freedom" or "democracy." I think not; I think there would only be the wondering what to eat and where to sleep and how to build out of the wreckage of life and mankind. Yet, while America dies like the great Roman Empire died, while the legions fail and he barbarians overrun our tender, steak, juicy, butter, creamy million-dollar-stupendous land, somewhere there will be the people that never mattered much in our scheme of things anyway."(J 32).

She continues criticizing Senator McCarthy with the following statement,

> There was terror down through history – and the men who saw the Spanish Armada sail over the rim of the world, who saw the Black death wipe out half of Europe, those men were frightened, terrified. But though they lived and died in fear, I am here; we have built again. And so I will belong to a dark age, and historians will say "We have few documents to show how the common people lived at this time. Records lead us to believe that a majority were killed. But there were glorious men." And school children will sigh and learn the names of Truman and Senator McCarthy. Oh, it is hard for me to reconcile myself to this.(J 33)

The danger of McCarthyism is also highlighted in a 1959 story "The Shadow." While writing the story Plath was inspired by the radio series "The

Shadow" that she listened to with great enthusiasm. At the peak of the Cold War years, the shadow turned into a perfect metaphor of the discourse of "the enemy within" that championed the idea that each person around us, especially anyone's neighbor, could be a spy, an enemy. In relation, it is crucial to point out that in most of the stories of *Johnny Panic*, Plath focuses on the relationship among the neighbors and how the characters operate to reflect the era.

The story begins with the following statement, "The winter of the year began, I happened to fall into the bad graces of the neighborhood for biting Leroy Kelly on the leg"(JP 147). Although the story is about two children, one of whom is accused of biting the other, the political message of the story is quite strong. One of the best examples of this is Plath's emphasis on the color red through the depiction of the blood that occurred after the bite. Like Esther, the narrator of the story turns back to the past to relate her trauma to the reader. She states that their neighbors, the Kelly's, told the entire neighborhood that her bite drew blood. However, she points out that,

> The Kellys told certain neighbors my bite drew blood, but Leroy confessed to me, after the excitement died down and we were speaking to each other again, that the only sign he had been bitten was a few purplish teeth marks, and these turned yellow and faded in a day or two"(JP 149-50).

Through the depiction of the 'bite,' Plath mainly illustrates Cold War ideology's emphasis of strong community ties that seemingly protected human relations. While the little child is being accused of being an enemy, she asks to the reader, "Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men?" the nasal, sardonic voice of the Shadow asked rhetorically every Sunday afternoon. "The Shadow knows, heh, heh, heh,heh."(JP 151). However, the narrator gets the answer and understands the discourse of the era, the discourse of "otherness." She says,

> My speculations about this mystery came into focus that Friday when Maureen Kelly hurried to catch up with me on the way to school. "My mother says it's not your fault for biting Leroy." She called out in clear, saccharine tones. "My mother says it's because your father's German."(JP 153)

Later Betty Sullivan asks the narrator "How do you know he's not a spy?"(JP 154). After this remark it becomes apparent that the shadow is not simply radio series but a perfect metaphor of the Cold War hysteria that caused individuals to feel a psychological pressure upon themselves, just like the feeling of a shadow following them. The shadow in the minds of the individuals is also argued by the narrator, she adds,

> The shadow in my mind lengthened with the night blotting out our half of the world, and beyond it; the whole globe seemed sunk in darkness. For the first time the facts were not slanted Mother's way, and she was letting me see it. "I don't think there is any God, then," I said dully, with no feeling of blasphemy. "Not if such things can happen"(JP 155).

The cruelty of her neighbors, who both accuse her father and the narrator of being enemies, causes the narrator to think that if there is a divine law things could not be like that. Plath clearly indicates the reality of the Cold War, the most tragic effect of the ideology of the era, as being the shadow created in the minds of the individual. While the narrator of "The Shadow" uses a radio series as a metaphor for Cold War America, Esther uses the Rosenbergs. Therefore it is evident that both stories enrich the other through an organic bond.[64]

Apparently, the use of the Rosenbergs, as shadows which follow Esther, serves as a perfect metaphor for the environment in which Esther tries to survive has a direct parallelism with Esther and her social and psychological situation. In relation, Esther focuses on the Rosenbergs, her "uncomfortable, expensive

[64] While Plath uses the surname Greenwood in *The Bell Jar*, in "The Shadow" it is altered by "Mr. Greenbloom."

clothes,"(BJ 2) "college" life (BJ 2) and "Madison Avenue"(BJ 2). In one corner of the triangle there is Esther and the Rosenbergs in her mind, in the other corner there are the uncomfortable clothes she has bought for the sake of fashion, and in the final corner there is her success at college that seemingly means nothing on Madison Avenue, which is the symbol of wealth and consumption. It is evident that Esther will attack the consumption-based American culture, which imposes women the idea that the life of women is neither in politics nor education but in the home. As a result she rejects the dominant ideology of the era that promoted the place of women as either at home or shopping. Hence, Esther's intertexuality among the Rosenbergs, the capitalistic Madison Avenue, and her uncomfortable clothes which have been imposed on her, will be the seed crystal of Esther's discourse throughout *The Bell Jar*. In relation, in order to define the suffocating environment she faces, she defines New York as the center of darkness and suffocation.

Under the influences of the suffocating environment, which was surrounded by the execution, the limited social space for women and her tiring college success that meant nothing on Madison Avenue, Esther defines her situation as a portrayal of a young girl who does not know where to go or what to do, like her entire generation. She describes her situation with the following statement,

> New York was bad enough. By nine in the morning the fake, country-wet freshness that somehow seeped in over-night evaporated like the tail end of a sweet dream. Mirage-gray at the bottom of their granite canyons, the hot streets wavered in the sun, the car tops sizzled and glittered, and the dry, cindery dust blew into my eyes and down my throat.(BJ 1)

Apparently, the unlivable and uncontrollable situation Esther faces seems to be her final destiny that she cannot manage to change. However, Esther must have found a way to escape from being metaphorically electrocuted like the Rosenbergs, as at the

very beginning of the novel, while she tells her story, she gives the reader the information that she has a baby and she is probably married. Therefore it is clear that she achieves an escape from the destructive environment of the bell jar. However, what was her tactic that helped her to escape the very limited social space for women that was stipulated by the dominant ideology?

The famous psychiatrist of the Cold War America, whom Plath enthusiastically read, R.D. Laing mentions, “In a world full of dangers, to be a potentially seeable object is to be constantly exposed to danger….The obvious defense against such a danger is to make oneself invisible in one way or another”(“Divided” 109). In Cold War America, which was full of dangers, Esther’s strategy to get into the system of the dominant ideology is to make herself invisible. In order to achieve this, she creates “a psychic landscape,”(J 205) a social space in her unconscious mind. As a reaction to the sanctuary of the social logos, she organizes a mental space. As Claudine Herman confirms The term “space” refers to very different concepts: there is a physical space and a mental space for everyone… In our world, physical space is linked to different functions: one is domination and bondage…another function is hierarchy…”(167). Therefore, while the full space belongs to the patriarchy, the female is associated with a fragmentation that is defined in terms of a schizophrenic state of mind. Thus, a labeling as schizophrenic was the natural result of Cold War ideology. In order to create a simulacra that seems similar to the one postulated by the dominant ideology, Esther divides herself into various fragments to get into the system. In order to strengthen her strategy, she prefers to use a psychoanalytic reading of her culture which is both her reading strategy and the strategy that helps the reader to decipher Esther’s psychic landscape.

It can be assumed that "The novel itself reminds us that the world can be a surreal and alienating and dangerous place, and that the weapon Esther will use to survive is the one that Plath herself uses: the *play* of language"(Peel, "Back" 67).

2.1.1 The Apocalyptic American Simulacra

During the Cold War years, as a result of the rapidly increasing tension of the nation as a whole, subjects such as mental health and psychoanalysis became the kernel of the American culture. Ernest Havemann in *Life* magazine claimed that the 1950's was "the age of psychology and psychoanalysis as much as it (was) the age of chemistry or the atom bomb"(68). In relation, Esther's play of language bases itself upon psychoanalytic reading. Like Esther,

> …the "three H's" of phenomenology, Husserl, Heidegger, and Hegel … seeking in philosophy a way of apprehending a world that saw the rise of dictatorships, that was haunted by the problems of anxiety, fragmented consciousness, doubts hanging over human progress, and all the forms of nihilism deriving from the fear that history might be coming to an end. Lacan belonged to this group.(Roudinesco 28)

Therefore, it is suitable to reread Esther's journey through Jacques Lacan, whose statement denoted the psychoanalytic reading, "The unconscious is structured like a language"(Lacan, "Seminar III" 167). As the unconscious "structures…its laws and thus transforms it into language"(Leader 203) first and foremost, Esther defines and then shapes her simulacras. In relation, the beginning of Esther's story, through the portrayal of the Rosenbergs, gains much more significance as Esther apparently uses the age of McCarthyism, the discourse of Cold War America as a tool to define the hyperreality postulated by the dominant ideology. Hence, it can be claimed that,

> Everywhere we live in a universe strangely similar to the original—things are doubled by their own scenario. But this doubling does not signify, as it did traditionally, the imminence of their death—they are already purged of their death, and better than when they were alive; more cheerful, more authentic, in the light of their model, like the faces in funeral homes.(Baudrillard 11)

Evidently, the execution of the Rosenbergs as the strongest symbol of Esther's generations psychological and cultural mindset is the reflection of the ideology suggested by Cold War America which "is the reflection of a profound reality; It masks and denatures a profound reality; It masks the *absence* of a profound reality; It has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum.(Baudrillard 6). As the execution of the Rosenbergs is a part of the simulacra, then the only way to get into the system is to create another. By creating the double of the simulacra, Esther achieves survival.

As "Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal"(Baudrillard 1). Therefore, first, the simulacra of Cold War America should be deciphered. In relation with that, one is reminded of Baudrillard's idea of Disneyland as a metaphor of how individuals are entrapped by a simulacra in their social lives. While Disneyland seems to be an ideal place, unlike the political space in which the Rosenberg's execution takes place, it is just as dangerous as the McCarthy discourse. Like the communist hysteria;

> …Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality ideology but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real and thus of saving the reality principle.(Baudrillard 12-13)

Like Disneyland, full of joy and leisure activities, Esther's New York, the signifier of Cold War ideology, postulates a childish social space for women. Esther mentions that the guest editors, as women, could write "only about beauty and health"(BJ 31). Therefore, as a simulacra, the Cold War space, like Disneyland,

> …wants to be childish in order to make us believe that the adults are elsewhere, in the "real" world, and to conceal the fact that true childishness is everywhere—that it is that of the adults themselves who come here to act the child in order to foster illusions as to their real childishness.(Baudrillard 13)

As a result of her consciousness of the American simulacra, Esther realizes that the only possible way to survive is postulating a new form of simulacra. It can be argued that her new simulacra cannot be regarded as an illusionary space created by a woman, because in Cold War America, "Illusion is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible. It is the whole *political* problem of parody, of hypersimulation or offensive simulation, that is posed here"(Baudrillard 19).

2.2. THE POST-MODERN DIVINE COMEDY IN *THE BELL JAR*

Through depicting the execution of the Rosenberg's as a case to define both her and her generation's situation, Esther displays to the reader the simulacra she faces. However, she not only displays it, but also postulates a strategy to win the battle between the independent individual and the dominant ideology. In order to understand Esther's strategy, her story can be divided into three parts as Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. Obviously, the sequel is not wholly like Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, as *The Bell Jar* is a post-modern narration that has many flashbacks that destruct the traditional order in a narrative. Through supporting puns and allusions in

The Bell Jar, Esther creates a new simulacra that uses psychoanalytic reading as a reaction to the Cold War ideology.

Esther's post-modern divine comedy includes three parts and the first part is Hell, in which she faces the traumas of her nation embodied by the Rosenberg Trial. As she achieves recognition of the simulacra organized for her, she tries to create a new simulacra to take its place in her unconscious mind.[65] In fact, while telling her story, Esther reveals all her desires, fears, repressed emotions, wishes, unacceptable ideas, desires and traumas, and in the end she manages to survive.

As in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, Esther has many Virgil's as she uses each character as a guide to help her to face both the realities of her culture and to get into the system something that was not earlier possible for a woman to achieve.[66] Therefore, in order to decipher the simulacra of the Cold War America, through her

[65] The unconscious mind is a term invented by the eighteenth century German romantic philosopher Ser Christopher Riegel and later introduced into English by the poet and essayist Samuel Taylor Coleridge.Unconscious mind refers to the unconscious feelings, automatic skills, unnoticed perceptions, habits and automatic reactions hidden phobias, concealed desires which generally reveal themselves through night dreams. Unconscious is later defined as a "Storehouse" by Freud, who defines the unconscious as a storehouse that preserves painful emotions, unacceptable ideas, wishes or desires. In twentieth century Jacque Lacan's claim that "the unconscious is structured like language" altered the definition of the unconscious mind.

[66] Virgil was a famous poet, who was thought to have been born in northern Italy on October 15, 70 B.C. His famous works are *Eclogues* and *Aeneid* that inspired many significant intellectuals including Dante Alighieri. In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante uses Virgil as a guide, who helps him on his pilgrimage through hell, purgatory, and heaven. As Virgil knows all the ins and outs of the enigmatic structures of hell, purgatory, and heaven, he champions Dante to reach Paradise, to Beatrice. The most significant point is the fact that, Virgil doesn't accompany Dante into heaven, as Dante, continues his journey by himself. The parallelism between *The Divine Comedy* and *The Bell Jar* cannot be ignored. In the novel, Esther's Virgils also act like guides who help throughout her pilgrimage in the enigmatic Cold War America. Furthermore, in Paradise, the story passes to the story of Esther Greenwood, in addition to the story of her generation, where she continues her journey alone. For further reading on Virgil see Charles Martindale (ed). *Cambridge Companion to Virgil*. (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1997). Parallelism between Plath and Dante is also underlined by Gilbert and Gubar, they claim, "A similar point could be made about well-known passages in many other *Ariel* poems, all secretly strengthened by the very prosody whose regularities they refuse or revise. The conclusion of "Ariel," for example, has obviously been shaped to emphasize intellectual meaning through the punning reiteration of *I ,I, Eye* at crucial points in important lines, and Plath's use of what is one of her (and Dante's) hallmarks—a last line isolated from the carefully counted-out stanzas (here, as in "Lady Lazarus," rapid tercets)—equally stresses meaning: the mystery of an apocalyptic denouement that cannot be forced into patterned regularity"("Land" 291).

Virgil's, she destroys it and delivers herself into her own simulacra. The system cannot recognize Esther's simulacra as in Cold War America

> …nothing separates one pole from another anymore, the beginning from the end; there is a kind of contradiction of one over the other, a fantastic telescoping, a collapse of the two traditional poles into each other: implosion—an absorption of the radiating mode of causality, of the differential mode of determination, of the differential mode of determination, with its positive and negative charge—an implosion of meaning. *That is where simulation begins*.(Baudrillard 31)

Therefore, as opposed to the limited social space for a woman, she creates a social and a political space in her unconscious mind as the unconscious "structures it according to its laws and thus transforms it into language."(Leader 203). In relation, in *The Bell Jar*, Esther achieves the creation of a dream-like landscape through which she reveals the historical facts of her generation. As a woman, she cannot create a full space, so she divides herself into various selves. Therefore the fragmented selves are not the symptom of schizophrenia, but a reaction against of the prohibited social and psychological space allotted for women. As R.D. Laing states "schizophrenia cannot be understood without understanding despair"("Divided" 38). Therefore the schizophrenic state of Esther's strategy is the result of the despair that encapsulated -Cold War America. After Esther has confronted the execution of the Rosenbergs, as an emblem of despair, she enters hell.

At first, Esther is in a Hell that is like a full moon, the signifier of darkness, danger and suffocation. Esther has to pass through Hell in order to reach Paradise, as without becoming fully aware of the simulacra she is forced to live in, she cannot pass into purgatory, toward paradise. As an indicator of the dark atmosphere of Cold War America Esther mentions, "These girls looked awfully bored to me. I saw them on the sunroof, yawning and painting their nails and trying to keep up their Bermuda

tans, and they seemed bored as hell"(BJ 4). Later, after she goes to a club with her friend, she meets a disc jockey, who tells her, "I'm famous as hell"(BJ 12). As a result of the darkness in the ideology of Cold War America, she tells the reader, "There wasn't a soul in the hall. I let myself into my room. It was full of smoke"(BJ 20). Hell must have seemed so chaotic that she confesses to the reader, "I didn't know in the world where I was"(BJ 19). It is evident that she is the only character in the novel who has a certain form of consciousness about the tragic simulacra she faces, as she says, "It was only me, of course. I was appalled to see how wrinkled and used up I looked"(BJ 20). In addition, Esther's confrontation with Hell has also has reflections in other works of Plath, like the voice in "Fever 103" who explains the trauma,

> Pure? What does it mean?
> The tongues of hell
> Are dull, dull as the triple
> Tongues of dull, fat Cerberus
> Who wheezes at the gate….(A 78).

In her poem "Lorelei" the voice also describes

> A full moon, river lapsing….
> Here, in a well-steered country, Under a balanced ruler"(Col 22-23).

The irony of "a well-steered country" reminds the reader of Esther's confession in *The Bell Jar*,

> Look what can happen in this country, they'd say. A girl lives in some out-of-the-way town for nineteen years, so poor she can't afford a magazine, and then gets a scholarship to college and wins a prize here and a prize there and ends up steering New York like her own private car. Only I wasn't *steering* [emphasis added] anything, not even myself.(BJ 3)

In her journals, Sylvia Plath also defines a similar kind of darkness in which sunlight, paradise, seems to be impossible at the beginning,

> God, who am I? I sit in the library tonight … Girls, girls everywhere, reading books. Intent faces, flesh pink, white, yellow, And I sit here without identity: faceless. My head aches … someone believes I am human being, not a name merely. And these are the only indications that I am a whole person, not merely a knot of nerves, without identity. I'm lost. Huxley would have laughed. What a conditioning center is this! Hundreds of faces, bending over books, fans whirring, beating time along the edge of thought. It is a nightmare. There is no sun … If I rest, if I think inward, I go mad. There is so much, and I am torn in different directions, pulled thin, taut against horizons too distant for me to reach. To stop with the German tribes and rest awhile: But no! On, on, on. Through ages of empires, of decline and fall. Swift, ceaseless pace. Will I never rest in sunlight again – slow, languish & golden with peace? –(J 27).[67]

While Esther is in Hell, as in Plath's poem "Metamorphoses of the Moon," "innocence is a fairy tale; intelligence hangs itself on its own rope"(CP 307). Apparently, at first sight, Esther seems to be helpless in Hell.[68]

Esther's seemingly hopeless conditions can be best understood through Laing's definition of the second form of anxiety, which is "implosion." Laing defines the situation of the anxious individual with the following remark,

> This is the strongest word I can find for the extreme form of what Winnicott terms the *impingement of reality.* Impingement does not convey, however, the full terror of the experience of the world as liable at any moment to crash in and obliterate a vacuum. The individual feels that, like the vacuum, he is empty. But this emptiness is him. Although in other ways he longs for the emptiness to be filled, he dreads the possibility of this happening because he has come to feel that all he can be is the awful nothingness of just this very vacuum.("Divided" 45-46)[69]

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[67] The similar depiciton of the girls at Smith College is reflected in *The Bell Jar* too. However, the name of the college is not mentioned throughout the novel.

[68] However, as she manages to recognize the simulacra organized by the dominant ideology, she begins to apply her strategy through dividing herself not as symptom of schizophrenia, but as a strategic device of her entrance route into the system.

[69] In her journals, Sylvia Plath defines the depresive social environment that causes depression through the word "vacuum." She writes "And so I rehabilitate myself….I had lost all perspective; I was wandering in a desperate purgatory (with a gray man in a gray boat in a gray river: an apathetic Charon dawdling upon a passionless phlegmatic River Styx … and a petulant Christ child bawling on the train …). The orange sun was a flat pasted disc on a smoky, acrid sky. Hell was the Grand Central subway on Sunday morning. And I was doomed to burn in ice, numb, cold, revolving in crystal, neutral, passive vacuums, void of sensation"(J 153).

Just like the suffocating bell jar, Esther feels herself in a vacuum where she cannot steer anything, not even herself. Laing quotes one of his patient's feelings that have a direct parallelism with Esther's case,

> I felt as though I were in a bottle. I could feel that everything was outside and couldn't touch me' But this turns into a nightmare. The walls of the bottle become a prison excluding the self from everything while, contrariwise, the self is persecuted as never before even within the confines of its own prison. The end result is thus at least as terrible as the state against which it was originally a defense.("Divided" 169)

In this case, Laing postulates the idea that a person who lives in that kind of a suffocating environment,

> …. in a world in which, like some nightmare Midas, everything he approaches becomes dead. There are now perhaps only two further possibilities open to him at this stage:
> 1. He may decide to 'be himself' despite everything, or
> 2. He may attempt to murder his self.("Divided" 147)

In the case of Esther, as in the case of Plath's entire works, "The birth of purity from impurity—of her true self ("the universe") from false self—would be miraculous, like the birth and resurrection of Christ"(Kroll 135-136). Therefore, Esther decides to murder her false self in order to rescue her real self. In relation, although at first sight she seems to be captivated in Hell, her "symbolic death and psychic rebirth"(Kroll 105) helps her to apply her strategy successfully. Therefore, Esther's metaphoric death is like a resurrection through which she finds herself in the mirror stage.

2.2.1. The Rosenbergs and the Mirror Stage

In Hell, Esther has been confronted with the historical context of Cold War America, where she gains the power to severely criticize her culture through

depicting the limited social space for both man and women in the mid-century America. As a result of that power, through the juxtaposition between Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, she creates a kaleidoscopic form of vision that encapsulates the simulacra for both men and women. As a result of that vision, she faces the mirror stage[70] in which she associates her social, political, and psychological situation with the Rosenbergs through her female body and psyche that is entrapped in the dominant male ideology imposed on women. In the mirror stage, Esther associates her social, psychological and political situation with the Rosenberg's, Buddy Willard, who is the signifier of the dominant ideology, the female body and psyche entrapped in marriage, the impossibility of a career in business life through the fig tree, her mother and Mrs. Willard who portrays the dominant ideology that championed by women and a Hollywood movie that can only postulate a new simulacra.

> The mirror stage is a structural moment in psychic development, when the child encounters in the mother's gaze the image will shape his or her self-perception. The mirror stage inaugurates for the child the moment of experiencing that he or she is the object of the mother's desire and love"(Gurewich 193-194).

In relation to that, it can be assumed that Esther will shape her self-perception through her confrontation with the execution of the Rosenbergs, which helps her to face the sharp realities of her social and political aura.[71] Evidently, Esther begins to tell her story with the story of the Rosenbergs because she identifies herself with them. Apparently, as Lacan asserts

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[70] The Mirror Stage is a psychoanalytic term introduced by Jacque Lacan. The Mirror Stage illustrates the relation with the body image, when the child recognizes her image in the mirror, just like a confrontation with the body and the reflection of the physical self at the mirror.

[71] As Anthony Wilden highlights, the "mirror phase derives its name from the importance of mirror relationships in childhood. The significance of children's attempts to appropriate or control their own image in a mirror…is that their actions are symptomatic of these deeper relationships. Through his perception of the image of another human being, the child discovers a form *(Gestalt)*, a corporal unity, which is lacking to him at this particular stage of his development.(160) For further reading see Anthony Wilden. "Lacan and the Discourse of the Other."

> the mirror stage in this context a*s an identification*, in the full sense analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes [*assume]* an image—an image that is seemingly predestined to have an effect at this phase, as witnesses by the use in analytic theory of antiquity's term, "imago."("Mirror" 4).

The effect of the Rosenbergs on Esther is so dramatic that she immediately faces the organic bond with the reality of her culture and her situation. Parallel with Esther's depiction of the mirror stage, Lacan argues, "The function of the mirror stage thus turns out, in my view, to be a particular case of the function of imagos, which is to establish a relationship between an organism and its reality—or, as they say, between the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt*"("Mirror" 6). The reality that Esther faces in the mirror stage, in Hell, through the Rosenbergs, is also her own reality, which is living under the same bell jar, one inviolate to both men and women. Therefore Esther first begins to apply her strategy in order to face the social and political realities of her generation and then pass into purgatory.

In order to highlight the mirror stage, at the beginning of her story Esther defines to the reader what was left with her at the end of her journey. She states,

> I still have the make-up kit they gave me, fitted out for a person with a tiny brush, and a round basin of blue eye-shadow just big enough to dab the tip of your finger in, and three lipsticks ranging from red to pink, all cased in the same little gilt box with a mirror on one side"(BJ 3)

In the *Winter Trees* poem "Mirror" the narrator also states,

> I am silver and exact.
> I have no preconceptions ….
> Faces and darkness separate us over and over(CW 34).

The emphasis on the words "silver" and "exact" signifies Esther's suffocation, the full moon, Hell, through which she painfully faces the dilemmas of her time. The dilemmas further mentioned by Esther through the depiction of her "white plastic sunglasses case with colored shells and sequins and a green plastic starfish sewed

onto it"(BJ 3). It can be assumed that her white sunglass are a metaphor of the vision imposed on women in Cold War America, and highlights the artificiality of the McCarthy era.[72] Esther is also cynical about the free gifts given to her while she was a guest editor. She mentions that at first she hid them away but after she "was all right again"(BJ 4) she bought them out. The significant point is that from this news, the reader can understand that Esther manages to survive in her simulacra, as she further points out, "I still have them around the house. I use the lipsticks now and then, and last week I cut the plastic starfish off the sunglasses case for the baby to play with"(BJ 4). It must be highlighted that Esther also becomes a mother, and she achieves a cutting off of the suffocation of the dominant ideology through cutting off the plastic starfish, that signifies the plasticity of her previous social and political world, and gives it to the baby, to the symbol of innocence, and childishness.

From the statements of Esther it becomes clear that in the mirror stage the identification of her social situation with the Rosenbergs helps her to gain a certain form of social and political consciousness. Esther's identification also illustrates the fact that through her experience in the mirror stage, Esther "link[s] the I to socially elaborated situations"("Mirror" 7). Therefore, *The Bell Jar* turns into the story of the Cold War generation, not solely the story of Esther Greenwood. As supported by Lacan in the mirror stage, "the spectacular *I* turns into the social *I*"("Mirror" 7). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar also comment on the issue, they highlight the fact that

> a similar point cold be made about well-known passages in many other *Ariel* poems, all secretly strengthened by the very prosody whose regularities they

[72] The glasses include "green starfish" just like the color of "Green." While Esther's surname symbolizes nature, freedom and tranquility, it is juxtaposed with the word "plastic" that immediately destructs the natural and turn into an artificial element. The word "wood" in Esther's surname also destroys the color green through juxtaposing it with color brown that results in "Greenwood."

> refuse or revise. The conclusion of "Ariel," for example, has obviously been shaped to emphasize intellectual meaning through the punning reiteration of *I ,I, Eye* at crucial points in important lines, and Plath's use of what is one of her (and Dante's) hallmarks—a last line isolated from the carefully counted-out stanzas (here, as in "Lady Lazarus," rapid tercets)—equally stresses meaning: the mystery of an apocalyptic denouement that cannot be forced into patterned regularity.("Land" 291)

In her journals, Plath also writes "I" and "You" and "Sylvia."(J 9). Like in *The Bell Jar*, the spectacular "I" turns into "You", the whole generation, and then "Sylvia" that is the symbol and the embodiment of her generation. In her journals Plath also writes,

> Virginia Woolf helps. Her novels make mine possible: I find myself describing: episodes: you don't have to follow your *Judith Greenwood* [emphasis added] to breakfast, lunch, dinner, or tell about her train rides, unless the flash forwards her, reveals her. Make her enigmatic: who is that blond girl: she is a bitch: she is the white goddess. Make her a statement of the generation. Which is you.(J 289)[73]

Following this, Plath obviously interpreted Esther Greenwood, (whose earlier name was Judith in the writing process,) as an emblem of her entire generation, not simply as a symbol of herself. In relation, the transformation of the personal "I," which has been attacked by some Plath scholars as demonstrative of Plath simply focusing on her own personal experiences in her entire work, into the symbolic social "I" which is the signifier of the whole generation. Therefore, it would be misleading to associate Plath's "I" with only Plath herself as it both signifies the "I" that turns into the "Social I" and "eye." Kathleen Connors confirms the parallelism between "Plath's engagement with the painterly "eye" and the personal "I" of her two major disciplines, visual art and literature"(Connors 66). As a result, it would be illogical to

[73] Plath was probably inspired by the character "Judith" in Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own," who is Shakespeare's sister because in the earlier drafts of *The Bell Jar* Esther's name was Judith.

support the criticisms of Plath that both her poetic short stories, her novel, and her poems solely reflect the personal "I" alone. As acknowledged by Stan Smith,

> All poetry, at its deepest levels, is structured by the precise historical experience from which it emerged, those conjunctures in which its author was formed, came to consciousness and found a voice ….[T]o Sylvia Plath, for example, identity itself is the primary historical datum: the self is a secretion of history; and therefore not initially "my" self at all, but the voice of its antecedents, its progenitors, a "mouthpiece of the dead."(Smith 202)

As the voice in a *Winter Trees* poem "The Detective," "This is a case without a body"(WT 14). The body is not solely Esther, Sylvia, or Elly[74] but the body of a generation, as Esther's case, is a case with not a body, but many body's.

2.3. DECONSTRUCTING BUDDY WILLARD AND THE PLASTICITY OF THE AMERICAN SIMULACRA

"Lacan … reminds us that long after the mirror phase, we remain subject to the effects of the "fragmented body" with which it begins"(Luepnitz 225-226). In Hell, Esther's fragmentation first begins with "Buddy Willard"(BJ 2) who is the first character with whom the reader meets in Esther's journey. A punned homonym of the word "body," Buddy Willard is the emblem of the material, therefore, the external forces of Cold War America. While turning back to retell her story, Esther first remembers Buddy Willard. Esther first turns back to Buddy as "[she] refers back to something memorable because it was remembered"(Lacan, "Seminar VII" 209). Esther's remembering of Buddy illustrates that, "Remembering, "historicizing" is coextensive with the functioning of the drive in the human psyche. It is there, too,

[74] Elly is the name which Esther uses in order to hide her real name in the social world. It is also an act of preserving the true self in order to escape from the false self that is imposed by the dominant ideology. In *Johhny Panic*, "Cambridge notes," Plath wrote about her friend "Elly" (JP 65).

that destruction is registered, that it enters into the register of experience"(Lacan, "Seminar VII" 209). Through Buddy, Esther both enters a new form of experience but also of destruction, which is the fragmentation of identity. However, for Esther, parallel with Lacanian reading, "identity …. is necessarily an alienated state – something crucial for functioning in the world, but also radically unstable"(Luepnitz 224).[75] As a result, through fragmenting her identity into various parts, Virgil's, Esther first initiates through Buddy. As an embodiment of the dominant male discourse of the era, Buddy Willard becomes a flesh and blood symbol of Cold War ideology.

Esther begins her strategy through defining Buddy clearly. As a popular medical student at Yale, at first sight Buddy strictly fits into the ideal picture of a young man. As a medical student, he is member of one of the most prestigious Ivy League colleges, which means an economically secure future for his wife. In addition her father is a professor just like Esther's father. However, Esther sharply states, "Buddy Willard went to Yale, but now I thought of it, what was wrong with him was that he was stupid" (BJ 8). Esther confesses that she does not know what a hypocrite he is at first, as he fits into the ideal male picture. In relation to that she says, "Of course, I didn't know he was a hypocrite at first. I thought he was the most wonderful boy I'd ever seen … I discovered quite by accident what an awful hypocrite he was, and now he wanted me to marry him …."(BJ 58). For instance, as the embodiment of the dominant ideology of Cold War America, and as the signifier of the body, of the material forces, Buddy Willard strictly rejects spiritualism. In

[75] In "The Colossus" the narrator also implies the unstable and fragmented character of identity, she says, "I shall never get you put together entirely, Pieced, glued, and properly jointed"(Col 20). The poem also alludes to Buddy Willard, as an oracle, who will shape Esther's observations about her generation.

order to degrade Esther's love of poetry, he asks her, "Do you know what a poem is, Esther?" "No, what?" I said. "A piece of dust." And he looked so proud of having thought of this that I just stared at his blond hair and his blue eyes and his white teeth-he had very long, strong white teeth-and again said, "I guess so."(BJ 62) At this point, it is crucial to underline that in order to apply her strategy, Esther acts as if she shared Buddy's thoughts. However, she thinks completely the opposite. It is evident that the more Esther makes her way into Hell, the more she faces the realities of her time. For instance, she confesses that at first sight she believes that Buddy is an oracle who can teach her the right way in life. Esther says, "My trouble was I took everything Buddy Willard told me as the honest-to-God truth. I remember the first night he kissed me. It was after the Yale Junior Prom"(BJ 63). Both their mothers are close friends, both married professors, both have gone to the same school, and at the end both became housewives Esther accuses her mother because she is the one who always tells Esther that Buddy is the perfect male counterpart. Esther accuses her mother because she is the one who always tells Esther that Buddy is the perfect male counterpart. However, thanks to the mirror stage, Esther deciphers Buddy. Esther's dramatically sharp statement proves this, "I decided to expect nothing from Buddy Willard. If you except nothing from somebody you are never disappointed"(BJ 65).

During her traumatic journey with Buddy in Hell, Esther naturally feels depressed as a result of the bell jar she has to cope with. In her journey in Hell, while fighting with material forces, Esther deeply feels spiritually hungry. She emphasizes that she "was starving"(BJ 269. While Esther is trying to eat in order to end her hunger, she illustrates that "Almost everybody [she] met in New York was trying to reduce"(BJ 27). While most of the people are blown up due to the artificiality of the

American simulacra, Esther is the only one who did not put on weight. As a result, in order to escape from the artificiality of New York, the capital city of the American simulacra, Esther depicts the day on which she goes to Central Park which is like a "duck-pond wilderness"(BJ 32). Esther's depiction of Central Park as a wilderness is significant in the sense that, just like New York City, Central Park is a simulacra which is a hyperreality, as the tranquility, peace, and freedom of a social space are just artificially created. However, the more she tries to escape the more she faces new realities.

Although at first sight Esther seems to be not strong enough to cope with the realities of her culture, she is quite strong. The first hint that this is so is the hotel at which she stays in New York, "the Amazon"(BJ 4).[76] Second, she manages to turn to each experience into a new form of consciousness. She points out, "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 pretend that's the way I knew things were all the time"(BJ 14). Evidently, Esther is strong enough to cope with the material forces she faces. Therefore, defining *The Bell Jar* through Esther's breakdown would be reading the novel from false preconceptions The Bell Jar is not the story of Esther Greenwood and her mental breakdowns, but the story of an entire generation. That's the reason why Plath writes in her journals about her novel, "the main concern: a character who is not myself --- that becomes a stereotype…."(J

[76] "The Amazon" may have many meanings in the novel; first, the term is used in order to define large and strong women. Second, the term is used in Greek mythology to define women warriors who are associated with strength and success. Third, it means a river in America, which is the world's second longest river. In relation to these, Esther defines her existence at the Amazon Hotel in terms of strength, as she has the power to cope New York City which is microcosm of Cold War America.

519). Esther Greenwood, as a stereotype of her generation, turns into the flesh and blood of all the experience a young woman could experience in Cold War America.[77]

In Hell, Esther experiences the distorting effects of the bell jar which can be best defined as sorrow. The best example of that is the day when Esther recognizes what a hypocrite Buddy is. Much more significant than that, Esther recognizes this at the very moment in which she sees "the baby born"(BJ 68). One day, Buddy takes Esther to one of his courses at school in which Esther witnesses the birth of a baby. While Esther is observing the birth, Buddy tells her that the woman is on a drug that will make her forget she any pain as she is in a "kind of twilight sleep"(BJ 72). Buddy's discourse clearly indicates the simulacra, designed for women in Cold War America, as a device to force them to forget all the pain they felt. As a reaction to Buddy's depiction of the drug that causes this "twilight sleep" of the woman, Esther immediately shares her ideas with the reader, "I thought it sounded just like the sort of drug a man would invent"(BJ 32). In relation, Esther depicts another story about a young girl whom she sees in Buddy's "sickle-cell anemia and some depressing diseases"(BJ 70) lecture. In the lecture, they display slides about patients and on one slide Esther recognizes a girl who has a black mole on her cheek. The doctor informs the listeners that after twenty days the girl was announced dead. After that, all of a sudden, the bell rang and Esther does not have the chance of finding out why the girl died or what were the reasons of the mole.[78] Esther describes the final scene with the following remark, "The woman's stomach stuck up so high I couldn't see her face or

[77] This must be the reason why Plath writes in her journal, "I have experienced love, sorrow, madness, and if I cannot make these experiences meaningful, no new experience will help me"(J 530).

[78] It is quite significant to underline that while the girl dies at the end of twenty days, Esther's journey also ends at the end of twenty chapters. It cannot be a coincidence that the girl who dies is in fact metaphorically dies. Just like Esther, she kills not her body but her false self and then rebirths like Esther does at the end of her journey.

the upper part of her body at all"(BJ 72). The black mole is apparently the physical scar that is made by the dominant ideology. As a result, the situation of women seems so unreal and artificial to Esther that she associated this plasticity with the scene in which the baby was born. However, the birth turns into an abnormal one. She mentions the traumatic situation with the following statement,

> Here was a woman in terrible pain, obviously feeling every bit of it or she wouldn't groan like that, and 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, doorless and windowless corridor of pain was waiting to open up and shut her in again ....But the baby's head stuck for some reason, and the doctor told Will he'd have to make a cut. I heard the scissors close on the woman's skin like cloth and the blood began to run down-a fierce, bright red. Then all at once the baby seemed to pop out into Will's hands, the color of a blue plum and floured with white stuff and streaked with blood, and Will kept saying, "I'm going to drop it, I'm going to drop it," in a terrified voice. (BJ 72-73)

It becomes clear that Esther associates the baby with the creativity and freedom of women in Cold War America, who are socially castrated by the dominant ideology, symbolized by male doctors. While the doctors have to cut the women's body, Esther argues, "After a minute or two I felt this burning sensation in my elbow and it occurred to me the cadaver might just be half since it was still warm …"(BJ 69). The cadaver acts as a metaphor of social castration through which female creativity and freedom are cut off by the patriarchy. However, from this psychological and physical turmoil Esther succeeds in giving the message that the more she recognizes the simulacra designed for women the closer she gets to freedom. Example of this are the babies Esther sees in big glass bottles. Esther depicts the scene with the following statement,

> After that, Buddy took me out into a hall where they had some big glass bottles full of babies that had died before they were born. The baby in the first bottle had a large white head bent over a tiny curled-up body the size of a frog. The baby in the next bottle was bigger and the baby next to that one was

> bigger still and the baby in the last bottle was the size of a normal baby and he seemed to be looking at me and smiling a little piggy smile.(BJ 69)

Like the sequence of her journey, the first baby is the signifier of Hell, the second one purgatory, which has a more normal size and the last one is paradise who is normally-sized and who smiles at Esther.[79]

Apparently the babies in The Bell Jar are quite significant in the sense that Esther's first Virgil, Buddy, opens the way for Esther to face the social entrapment of women. The babies in the vinegary fumes are also apparent in Plath's poem, "Two Views of a Cadaver Room" in which the narrator re-tells the story of Esther, she says,

> The day she visited the dissecting room….
> A vinegary fume. In their jars the snail-nosed babies moon and glow.
> He hands her the cut-out heart like a cracked heir-loom.(Col 4-5)[80]

Esther's emphasis of the cadaver as an embodiment of social castration and the portrayal of the third smiling baby in the last bottle, who has achieved a state of normalcy as a reaction to the cadaver, illustrates the fact that Esther's psychoanalytic reading of her generation enables her to truly analyze the picture. As famous British feminist and writer Juliet Mitchell points out,

> rejection of psychoanalysis and of Freud's works is fatal for feminism. However it may have been used, psychoanalysis and of Freud's works is fatal for feminism. However, it may have been used, psychoanalysis is not a recommendation *for* a patriarchal society, but an analysis *of* one. If we are interested in understanding and challenging the oppression of women, we cannot afford to neglect it.(xiii)

It is evident that Esther successfully analyzes the situation of women through the use of her poetic language. As Miller Budick confirms,

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[79] The number three in *The Bell Jar*, which defines Esther's journey that is divided into three parts, is also evident in *Three Women*, a radio-play that Plath wrore for the BBC.

[80] Emphasizing McCarty era, Edward Brunner highlights the fact that the poems in this era "targets as child or children"(Brunner xiii) as a reaction against the corrupted atmosphere.

> Plath's text, I believe, demonstrates a pattern of artistic growth whereby intuitive and spontaneous, self-protective, and often self-destructive forms of female response are converted into an independent aesthetic sufficiently strong not only to withstand the pressures of the dominant male language but finally able to reestablish relations with the male world, from which female writing must take its own birth. The text carefully prepares for the moment of literary crisis and its aftermath first, by raising the possibility that male domination is as much a factor of control over language as of sociological or physical power; second, by having Esther react to the threat of male language through an archetypically female process of withdrawal; and finally, by structuring a narrative both imitating and thus legitimizing the pattern of retreat but also initiating a program of discourse that is the opposite of retreat. This discourse eschews escape (and escapism) and recommits itself to language and art.(873).

Evidently, Esther's language is strong enough to cope with the male dialogue. As a result of this strength, Esther faces one of the most significant symbols in *The Bell Jar*, the story of the fig tree.

Through the story of "the fig tree," Esther meets her second Virgil, Jay Cee, who is the general editor of the magazine, where Esther works as a guest editor during her journey. Later, Jay Cee will highlight the problematic of a professional business career for a woman in Cold War America. While Esther visits Jay Cee at her office, she asks the most significant question in *The Bell Jar*, one that will trigger Esther to question the impossibility of a business career for a woman: "Doesn't your work interest you, Esther?"(BJ 34). After the question, Esther shares her traumas with the reader,

> Oh, it does, it does," I said. "It interests me very much." I felt like yelling the words, as if that might make them more convincing, but I controlled myself. All my life I'd told myself studying and reading and writing and working like mad was what I wanted to do, and it actually seemed to be true, I did everything well enough and got all A's, and by the time I made it to college nobody could stop me.(BJ 34)

She recognizes that her college life, her success in student life can only further delineate the limited social space for women. Success, for a female, is only possible

within the borders of college. However, her experience in New York, and especially Jay Cee's question, awakens Esther to realize that she even has not thought about her future life until that moment. Jay Cee asks Esther, "What do you have in mind after you graduate?"(BJ 35). Again Esther is shocked by the ambiguity of her future life as she knows that college life is not a preparation for career, but only for finding a perfect male counterpart from another Ivy League college. As agreed by Elaine Tyler May,

> For white middle-class women, then, college was an entry into affluent domesticity. Many no doubt believed that if they found a suitable mate at college, it made good sense to quit school and marry. By 1956, one-fourth of all urban white college women married while still in college. To do otherwise was a gamble. A woman who decided to postpone marriage, complete her education, and attempt to pursue a career during these years was likely to find it difficult, if not impossible, to gain access to a professional school or to find a job in the occupation of her choice. She might also find her chances for marriage reduced if she waited too long.(69)

Struggling to define the entrapment of women ,Esther comes to a story about a fig tree,

> This fig tree grew on a green lawn between the house of a Jewish man and a convent , and the Jewish man and a beautiful dark nun kept meeting at the tree to pick the ripe figs, until one day they saw an egg hatching in a bird's nest on a branch of the tree, and as they watched the little bird peck its way of the egg, they touched the backs of their hands together, and then the nun didn't come out to pick figs with the Jewish man any more but a mean-faced Catholic kitchen maid came to pick them instead and counted up the figs the man picked after they were both through to be sure he hadn't picked any more than she had, and the man was. I thought it was a lovely story, especially the part about the fig tree in winter under the snow and then the fig tree in spring with all the green fruit. I felt sorry when I came to the last page. I wanted to crawl in between those black lines of print the way you crawl through a fence, and go to sleep under that beautiful big green fig tree. 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 bay coming out of a woman, and then something awful happened and we went our separate ways.(BJ 60-61)[81]

[81]The story of the fig tree dates back to Jesus. According to Christianity, the gospels of Matthew tell the story of the fig tree. According to his gospels, in the morning Jesus was returning to Jerusalem, as

The most significant element in the story of the fig tree is the fact that, she associates both Buddy and herself as the victims of the concentration camps, just like Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. Apparently, the fig tree is the embodiment of *The Bell Jar*. She says,

> 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. I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest, and, as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and, one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet.(BJ 85).

For Esther, the fig tree naturally encapsulates many alternatives, Esther can choose to be a mother, a wife, a teacher and so on. However, the unnatural aura of Cold War America destroys all the alternatives. The reality is that Esther loses her chance to choose a fig, as all the figs are illusions designed to deceive women, because it is impossible for a woman to *choose*. The story of the fig tree, as an emblem of impossibility, is also evident in Plath's poem "Departure" whose narrator states,

> The figs on the fig tree in the yard are green;
> Green, also, the grapes on the green wine….(Col 18).

Apparently, the natural colors of the figs are green, but the figs decay as a result of unnatural male domination. Evidently, the "tree" is a metaphor for Plath to define strength and creativity in her works. For instance, the narrator in Plath's poem "I am Vertical," starts her story by using the title "I am Vertical," and then says,

> But I would rather be horizontal.
> I am not a tree with my root in the soil

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he was hungry, he stopped in front of a fig tree. When he looked at the fig tree, he recognized that there were not any figs on the tree but there were only leaves. The Jesus asked the fig tree whether it would bear fruit again or not. After Jesus' question, the fig tree all of a sudden withered up. Then Jesus told them, 'I assure you, if you have faith and don't doubt, you can do things like this and much more. You can even say to this mountain, 'May God lift you up and throw you into the sea,' and it will happen. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer. Matthew 21:18-22"(qtd. in "Fig Tree"). The significant point is the fact that Plath's depiction of the fig tree does not imply that Esther will be unsuccessful in life as she does not know which fig to choose, but as a matter of fact there are no figs for her, as she is the one who will create her figs through faith and hardwork.

Sucking up minerals and motherly love
Compared with me, a tree is immortal (CW 12)

The fig tree in Plath's dictionary must have a connection with creativity and strength just like the female body. Evidently, Jay Cee's question is answered through the story of the fig tree that illustrates the impossibility for a woman to *choose*. Jay Cee, as one of the Virgil's of Esther, forces Esther to face her possible future, if she can't do anything. That's the reason why Esther states, "I wished I had a mother like Jay Cee. Then I'd know what to do. My own mother wasn't much help"(BJ 42).

Meeting Jay Cee and the story of the fig tree helps Esther to meet her new Virgils, who are her mother and Mrs. Willard, Buddy's mother, whom Esther severely attacks. Through Esther Greenwood, Sylvia Plath has always been accused of her depiction of the mother figure in *The Bell Jar* as the critics always associate Mrs. Greenwood with Aurelia Plath. However, Plath does not attack her mother in *The Bell Jar* but the social norms she represents. Although Plath has been depicted as a socially problematic figure, who did not even get on well with her mother, the case is different. The answer is given by Plath in her interview with Peter Orr. He asks, "Do your poems tend to now to come out of books rather than out of your own life?"(169). Plath's answer patently refutes the sole use of autobiography in her works. She responds,

> No, no: I would not say that all. I think my poems immediately come out of the sensuous and emotional experiences I have, but I must say I cannot sympathize with these cries from the heart that are informed by nothing except a needle or a knife, or whatever it is. I believe that one should be able to control and manipulate experiences, even the most terrifying, like madness, being tortured, this sort of experience, and one should be able to manipulate these experiences with an informed and an intelligent mind. I think that personal experience is very important, but certainly it shouldn't be a kind of shut-box and mirror-looking, narcissistic experience. I believe it should be *relevant* to the larger things, the bigger things such as Hiroshima and Dachau and so on.(Orr 169-70)

It can be assumed that Plath successfully combines her experiences to tell the story of her generation, just like she does in the case of the "mother figure." As supported by Lynda Bundtzen,

> In cutting herself off in this way from Aurelia and what Aurelia represents, Plath may well have felt herself cut off from all benevolent outside sources, and also from Sivvy, the ideal fiction created for her in the image of her culture-the old perfect self, free from blemish. As a result, only old yellow, the rival ingrate, was left to speak, and Plath was not yet strong enough to ménage all the guilt in giving her voice.("Incarnations" 108)

As a result, in *The Bell Jar*, Plath criticizes "the mother," who is the embodiment of all the mother's of Esthers generation, who intensify the trauma of the patriarchy through their discourses that champion the dominant ideology. Therefore, through the depiction of the mother, Esther reflects upon the discourse of "the enemy within" in Cold War America that forced American women to spend their lives at home in order to protect their children and their family from the communist threat. Actually, the enemy is within but it is not the "Red Scare" but the Cold War ideology that imposes containment as the only possible way to survive. In relation, it should be underlined that the containment is domestic more than political. Therefore traditional female occupations were strictly limited to nursing, and secretarial work. As a result, the captivated women in their cages, at home, lost their political and social voice. That's the reason why Plath, in most of her works, associates the female psyche with Hiroshima and the concentration camps which define the same pain that the socially castrated American women felt. As Adeldon underlines,

> We had as a nation emerged from a great war, itself following upon a long and protracted Depression. We thought, all of us, men and women alike, to replenish ourselves in goods and spirit, to undo, by exercise of collective will, the psychic disruptions of the immediate past. We Could achieve the serenity

> that had eluded the lives of our parents, the men would be secure in stable careers, the women in comfortable homes, and together they would raise perfect children….It was the Zeitgeist, the spirit of the times.(94)

The discourse of the socially castrated women, naturally erected strict borders between the life of a woman and a man in Cold War America. For instance, the seniors in Esther's college remind her that no one can accuse a man of anything if you are not engaged or married. As a result of that mandate, the male world and the female world is immediately separated and is reconstructed by cultural dogma that restricts the female experience. That's the reason why Plath writes in her journals that she wants to be a male in life in order to have freedom,

> Being born woman is my awful tragedy. From the moment I was conceived I was doomed to sprout breasts and ovaries rather than penis and scrotum; to have my whole circle of action, thought and feeling rigidly circumscribed by my inescapable feminity. Yes, my consuming desire to mingle with road crews, sailors and soldiers, bar room regulars- to be a part of a scene, anonymous, listening, recording – all is spoiled by the fact that I am a girl, a female always in danger of assault and battery. My consuming interest in men and their lives is often misconstrued as a desire to seduce them, or as an invitation to intimacy. Yet, God, I want to talk to everybody I can as deeply as I can. I want to be able to sleep in an open field, to travel west, to walk freely at night…(J 77)

However, as an Amazon, Esther refuses to accept the traditional female role imposed on women by the dominant ideology. Esther confesses that, "the trouble was, I hated the idea of serving men in any way. I wanted to dictate my own thrilling letters. Besides, those little shorthand symbols in the book my mother showed me seemed just as bad as let *t* equal time and let *s* equal the total distance"(BJ 83).

In order to attack the patriarchal world, Esther shares with the reader an article that her mother gives her to read. Esther mentions that Mrs. Greenwood[82] cuts

[82] The name of the mother is not mentioned throughout the novel.

the article from *Reader's Digest*.[83] Esther portrays the tragedy with the following words,

> I knew I might have a baby, but that thought hung far and dim in the distance and didn't trouble me at all. There was no one hundred per cent sure way not to have a baby, it said in an article my mother cut out of the *Reader's Digest* and mailed to me at college. This article was written by a married woman lawyer with children and called "In Defense of Chastity." It gave all the reasons a girl shouldn't sleep with anybody but her husband and then only after they were married. The main point of the article was that a man's world is different from a woman's world and a man's emotions are different from a woman's emotions and only marriage can bring the two worlds and the two different sets of emotions together properly. My mother said this was something a girl didn't know about till it was too late, so she had to take the advice of people who were already experts, like a married woman.(BJ 88-9)

Esther severely attacks the article, as the woman lawyer emphasizes the fact that women must be sexually pure in order to find the best man. Esther criticizes the article with her depiction of the discourse of the women lawyer,

> This women lawyer says the best men wanted to be pure for their wives, and even if they weren't pure, they wanted to be the ones to teach their wives about sex. Of course they would try to persuade a girl to have sex and say they would marry her later, but as soon as she gave in, they would lose all respect for her and start saying that if she did that with them she would do that with other men and they would end up by making her life miserable.(BJ 88)

A page later, Esther turns back to the issue again to state that, "the woman finished her article by saying better to be safe than sorry and besides, there was no sure way of not getting stuck with a baby and then you'd really be in a pickle. Now the one thing this article didn't seem to consider was how a girl felt"(BJ 89).[84]

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[83] *Reader's Digest* is a monthly family magazine that founded in 1922. It was the best-selling consumer magazine in America. Especially throughout the Cold War years it was widely read by many American women.

[84] The critics believe that Esther is Sylvia Plath and if the quotation is form Sylvia's life, Aurelia must have given the article to her daughter while she was at Smith. Through the episode Plath highlights the pressure imposed on young women of her generation that was the result of their mother's obeying the patriarchal order.

Apparently, Esther achieves an escape form the bell jar that her mother tries to create for her, as she dramatically responds to the article with a sharp criticism of her mother's misguided reading of the article. She attacks the passivity of the feminine discourse through her mother, who signifies all the mothers,

> It might be nice to be pure and then to marry a pure man, but what if he suddenly confessed he wasn't pure after we were married, the way Buddy Willard had? I couldn't stand the idea of a woman having to have a single pure life and a man being able to have a double life, one pure and one not.(BJ 90)

In addition to the article, thanks to her Virgils, Buddy, Mrs. Willard and her mother, Esther begins to question the definition of marriage in Cold War America. Esther puts her mother and Mrs. Willard side by side in order to reflect upon the traumatic experience of marriage, that cuts off the diversity in women's lives, just like the cadaver Esther sees at the hospital at the very beginning of her story. She tells the reader that, although at first sight, her college life seems to be boring as she is working very hard to get straight A's, she emphasizes the fact that, if she had not been a student, things would not be different. According to Esther, being married is as boring as a wasted life. As Esther underlines,

> This seemed a dreary and wasted life for a girl with fifteen years of straight A'S, BUT I knew that's what marriage was like, because cook and clean and wash was just what Buddy Willard's mother did from morning till night, and she was the wife of a university professor and had been a private school teacher herself.(BJ 93)

Esther points out a significant fact that although Mrs. Willard studied hard once upon a time to be a teacher, nothing changed in her life. Furthermore, she began to obey the rules of the male world even though her profession strictly rejected domination and supported improvement. In order to reflect the fault of Mrs. Willard, who is cheated by the romance of the male world, Esther comments on the issue, "And I

knew in spite of all the roses and kisses and restaurant dinners a man showered on a woman before he married her, what he secretly wanted when the wedding service ended was for her to flatten out underneath his feet like Mrs. Willard's kitchen mat"(BJ 94). As with Willard, Esther also criticizes her mother, who is also entrapped by the patriarchy. Although both women are teachers, who are married professors, they are even incapable of teaching their children the realities of life. As both women insist on the marriage between Esther and Buddy, Esther attacks the concept of marriage through her mother. She ironically informs the reader,

> Hadn't my own mother told me that as soon as she and my father left Reno on their honeymoon-my father had been married before, so he needed a divorce-my father said to her, "Whew, that's a relief, now we can stop pretending and be ourselves"-and from that day on my mother never had a minute's peace.(BJ 94)[85]

It is evident that through Mrs. Willard, Buddy, and her mother, Esther deciphers the anatomy of marriage in Cold War America, that's the reason why she argues,

> 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 any more. 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.(BJ 94)

Apparently, Esther rebels against the social norms of her time through rejecting marriage but especially with Buddy. One of the dialogues indicates how she tries to cope with the dominant ideology, "How could you like to be Mrs. Buddy Willard?" I had an awful impulse to laugh. I thought how that question would have bowled me over at any time in my five- or six-year period of adoring Buddy Willard?"(BJ 102).

[85] Esther's commnet on "honeymmon" as a hyperrelity is also discussed by Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*. She commnets, "The excitement of the traditional honeymoon was intended in part to mask this confusion: torn for some weeks out of her everyday world, with all social ties temporarily

Then she tells explains, “I’m never going to get married.”(BJ 103) As a result, Buddy responds, “You’re crazy ….You’ll change your mind”(BJ 103). However, Esther puts an end to the debate,” No. My mind’s made up.”(BJ 103) Later Buddy reminds her of the night she hitchhiked back to college with him. On that night he asked her whether she wanted to live in the city or the country, and Esther responded “in the country and in the city both”(BJ 103). After that dialogue, Esther highlights the fact that he calls her neurotic. At this point, it must be underlined that, “neurotic” is one of the key words used in Cold War terminology to define women as “case story.” In addition, through the definition of women as neurotics, the terminology automatically labels them as “mad” due to their so-called inherent “mad” nature. However, Esther illuminates the fact that the male world labeled women as neurotic not because they were mentally ill, but because they prefer to choose not one thing but many. For instance, instead of being solely a wife and a mother, Esther wants many things, such as being both economically independent and being a wife, and a mother. In relation, Esther responds,

> “And you,” I continued with sudden force, “laughed and said I had the perfect setup of a true neurotic and that that question came from some questionnaire you’d had in psychology class that week?…Well you were right. I *am* neurotic. I could never settle down in either the country *or* the city.”(BJ 103)

While Esther continues her journey in Hell, she begins to become much more critical about the dominant ideology. A solid example of that is her ironic comment,

> “Neurotic, ha!” I let out a scornful laugh …. If neurotic is wanting two mutually exclusive things at once and the same time, then I’m neurotic as hell. I’ll be flying back and forth between one mutually exclusive thing and another for the rest of my days”(BJ 104).

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broken, the young woman lost her position in space, in time, and in reality. But sooner or later she has to resume that position; and she never finds herself in her new home without some disquiet”(476).

Therefore, it is not difficult to recognize that *The Bell Jar* is not the story of a weak young girl, who is both neurotic and mad but the story of an entire generation. The point is that, in order to find a voice in *The Bell Jar* that is different from the diary of a suicide, *The Bell Jar* needs a reader who is in search of that voice. As Al Alvarez asserts,

> But finding a voice implies there are readers out there who know how to listen, and listening is a skill almost as tricky as writing. It is even, in its way, an art itself, born out of the same obscure passion that animates every writer- the love of language and what Cheever called "its intimacy, its mysteriousness, its power to evoke." The good reader listens as attentively as the writer writes, hearing the tones and overtones and changes of pitch, as absorbed and alert as if he and the writer were in conversation together. Listening this way is the opposite of speed-reading; it is like reading out loud- but silently and in the head. ("Writer's" 46)

If a reader is found, to hear Plath's euphoric voices in the novel, she cannot ignore the significance of the historical analysis of an entire generation through *The Bell Jar*. As Deborah Nelson insists,

> historical analysis enriches Plath's work substantially, bringing out elements of critique and insight that are otherwise invisible. Plath's poetry, on the other hand, reveals aspects of the period in which she wrote that have been overlooked and misunderstood.("History" 21).

As a result of the historical analysis of *The Bell Jar*, it becomes clear that,

> From her relationship with Buddy Willard and her mother, to her experimentation with suicide methods, to her fight to escape the bell jar, nearly all the plot episodes within the novel reveal Esther's struggles to gain control over her own life, to determine her own choices, rather than merely to accept those that society presents to her. In fact, one could argue that it is Esther's desire and search for control that threads together the many identities Esther struggles with, including her identity as a young woman, a patient, a daughter, a successful student, an aspiring writer and, of course, a potential wife and mother.(Badia 132)

Esther's divided selves, her Virgils, champion her to interpret the realities of her generation and help her to meet another Virgil; Constantine.[86] Through Constantine, Esther more clearly defines the borders between the male and the female world in Cold War America. Constantine is a United Nations simultaneous interpreter who has a "challenging expression"(BJ 81). His tanned skin and his white teeth immediately separate him from the hypocrite Buddy Willard. The strength and power of Constantine affects Esther so much that she likes the idea of being seduced by him because his mature and considerate ways attract her greatly. Esther mentions that Mrs. Willard is the one who introduced Constantine to Esther. As a result of that Esther thinks,

> The more I thought about it the better I liked the idea of being seduced by a simultaneous interpreter in New York City. Constantine seemed mature and considerate in every way. There were no people I knew he would want to brag to about it, the way college boys bragged about seeping with girls in the backs of cars to their roommates or their friends on the basketball team. And there would be a pleasant irony in sleeping with a man Mrs. Willard had introduced me to as if she were, in a roundabout way, to blame for it.(BJ 88)

However, Esther rejects Constantine in her mind, because she knows that he would be like Buddy Willard in the future. Because once Esther has thought about being the wife of Constantine, she realizes that nothing will change in her life. She confesses to the reader,

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[86] Esther's strength in Hell is also seen in her poem "The Disquieting Muses." The poem takes its inspiration form George De Chirico's painting that has the same name. Esther creates a similar from of a social space in Hell. Soby describes "The Disquieting Muses as a painting that…attracts and repels, beguiles and frightens, conveys a warm nostalgic aura but at the same time suggests an impending catastrophe. There is no action; the piazza is still; the figures wait. What will happen? There is no answer, for this picture is the exact opposite of those seventeenth-century paintings of *banditti* in which a specific, disastrous outcome is foretold. De Chirico's image–his early art as a whole–appeals directly to the counter-logic of the subconscious, to those swamp-like regions at the edge of the mind where ecstasies bloom white and the roots of fear are cypress-black and deep.(136) Like Hell, Plath's poem "The Disquieting Muses" portrays the shadows that signify darkness and depth through returning to the childhood days where innocence and purity are juxtaposed with the air of uncertainty. For further reading see *Collected Poems* p 76.

> I tried to imagine what it would be like if Constantine were my husband. It would mean getting up at seven and cooking him eggs and bacon and toast and coffee and dawdling about in my nightgown and curlers after he'd left for work to wash up the dirty plates and make bed, and then when he came home after a lively, fascinating day he'd except a big dinner, and I'd spend the evening washing up even more dirty plates till I fell in to bed, utterly exhausted.(BJ 93)

As a Virgil, the most significant social fact that Constantine teaches Esther is the strict borders between a man and a woman in Cold War America. While Constantine signifies the use and the power of language as a simultaneous interpreter, Esther signifies the editor, who does not use language but just edits. Therefore, while Constantine is active, Esther proves to be passive.[87]

The passive figure of the female psyche and body finds its embodiment in *The Bell Jar*, and also in a technicolor movie about a football romance. This time Esther meets Hollywood, which is one of the strongest simulacra in Cold War America, just like Disneyland, which

> …. is a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulacra. It is first of all a play of illusions and phantasms: the Pirates, the Frontier, the Future World, etc. This imaginary world is supposed to ensure the success of the operation. But what attracts the crowds the most is without a doubt the social microcosm, the *religious*, miniaturized pleasure of real America, of its constraints and joys.(Baudrillard 12)

According to Esther, the movie is very poor. Classically the movie included a blond girl. As Esther describes,

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[87] In her journals, Plath also focuses on the differenes between the passive female world and the active male world. She writes, "I am jealous of men – a dangerous and subtle envy which can corrode, I imagine, any relationship. It is an envy born of the desire to be active and doing, not passive and listening. I envy the man his physical freedom to lead a double life- his career, and his sexual and family life. I can pretend to forget my envy; no matter, it is there, insidious, malignant, latent"(J 98).

> The movie was very poor. It starred a nice blond girl who looked like June Allyson but was really somebody else, and a sexy black-haired girl who looked like Elizabeth Taylor but was also somebody else, and two big, broad-shouldered boneheads with names like Rick and Gil.(BJ 45)

Through the depiction of the movie, Esther illuminates the binary oppositions in Cold War America, which is the discourse of the difference between black and white. While the color black can be interpreted as the black population who faced segregation in America, the blond girl in the movie is the signifier of the dominant ideology of Anglo-Saxons. As Elaine Tyler May points out,

> Although America seemed to be a united nation, separation was the key word of the era. "People of color were excluded from these suburban communities, and denied the benefits of American prosperity even if they could afford them …Persistent racial discrimination proved to be the nation's worst embarrassment throughout the cold war.(xix)

In relation, at the end of the movie, Esther states,

> Finally I could see the nice girl was going to end up with the nice football hero and the sexy girl was going to end up with nobody, because the man named Gil had only wanted a mistress and not a wife all along and was now packing off to Europe on a single ticket. "At about this point I began to feel peculiar. I looked round me at all the rows of rapt little heads with the same silver glow on them at the front and the same black shadow on them at the back, and they looked like nothing more or less than a lot of stupid moonbrains."(BJ 46)

Hollywood, as a simulacra, is evidently attacked by Esther, which is like an illness that is injected into the Americans.

It is crucial to indicate that the metaphoric illness of American culture that is portrayed by Hollywood, college life and marriage, as different kinds of simulacra all connect back to Buddy Willard. At the beginning of *The Bell Jar*, Esther informs the reader with the following statement,

> Buddy, who was taking the cure for TB somewhere in upper New York State. Buddy's mother had even arranged for me to be given a job as a waitress at the TB sanatorium that summer so Buddy wouldn't be lonely. She and Buddy couldn't understand why I choose to go to New York City instead.(BJ 21)

From Esther's statement, it becomes evident that Buddy is ill. While Esther is the active one who continues her journey, Buddy turns into the flesh and blood criticism of the dominant ideology of the Cold War which injects its poisons into both women and men. That is the reason why Esther criticizes Buddy, who cannot recognize the illness infecting him, with an ironic remark, "He was very proud of his prefect health and was always telling me it was psychosomatic when my sinuses blocked up and I couldn't breathe"(BJ 80). On the contrary, Buddy is the one who is seriously ill and as a result of TB he is kept in a sanatorium. The portrayal of Buddy's entrapment can also be seen in Plath's poem "Insomniac." The narrator reflects the picture in which,

> He is immune to pills: red, purple, blue—
> Are riding to work in rows, as if recently brainwashed.(CW 11)

While the red pill signifies Hell, the blue pill signifies paradise, and purple signifies the mixture of red and blue, which illustrates purgatory in Esther's journey. In addition, the term "brainwashed," which is one of the most significant terms of Cold War America, is used for Buddy, not for Esther.

Thanks to Esther's strength in Hell, she successfully disproves the dominant discourse of the patriarchal world. While, as a woman, Esther rejects a hypocritical life, Buddy prefers a double life. In relation to that Esther associates Buddy's illness with his hypocrisy.[88]She defines his illness with his hypocrisy and as a punishment from the divine order,

> I thought the TB might just be a punishment for living the kind of double life Buddy lived and feeling so superior to people. And I thought how convenient it would be now I didn't have to announce to everybody at college I had broken off with Buddy and start the boring business of blind dates all over again.(BJ 80)

[88] A letter on December 1, 1952 which was written to Warren Plath indicates that Sylvia's friend Dick is turned into Buddy in the novel. Plath writes, "Dick is coming home [*from the sanatorium*] for a few days for Christmas, at the time of Cotillion, darn it, so I will have to give up …"(LH 99).

While Esther defines Buddy's life in the sanatorium in terms of Hell, she also associates his sanatorium days with the suffocating atmosphere of Cold War ideology.

> TB is like living with a bomb in your lung. The color scheme of the whole sanatorium seemed to be based on liver. Dark, glowering woodwork, burnt-brown leather chairs, walls that might once have been white but had succumbed under a spreading malady of mold or damp. A mottled brown linoleum sealed off the floor.(BJ 98)

While Esther visits Buddy at the sanatorium, on a coffee table, she sees *Time* and *Life*. Apparently, Buddy's sanatorium is a simulacra of Cold War ideology, and Esther portrays the magazines as the tools of the apocalyptic simulacra. After she has flipped to the middle of the magazine she sees the face of Eisenhower "beam[ing] up at [her], bald and blank as the face of a fetus in a bottle"(BJ 98). The use of Eisenhower as one of the emblems of the age is quite symbolic as Esther interprets his entrapment in a bottle, just like the babies she saw before in Buddy's lecture. She further comments on Buddy's illness, "The last thing I expected was for Buddy to be fat"(BJ 99). In relation with these, Esther can only see "his eyes burning out of almost fleshless sockets"(BJ 99). Both his fleshless eyes, the signifier of lack of an identity, and his fat body are the symbols of Cold War ideology which distorts the nature of both women and men. Esther shares her ideas about the entrapment of the "male" with the following confession, "But everything concave about Buddy had suddenly turned convex. A pot belly swelled under the tight white nylon shirt and his cheeks were round and ruddy as marzipan fruit. Even his laugh sounded plump"(BJ 99).[89] It is evident that not only women but also men were trapped by the discourse

[89] Héléne Cixous in her work *Sorties*, defines man in terms of the words "form, convex, step, advance, seed, progress"(91) and women in terms of " Matter, concave, ground – which supports the step, receptacle"(91). However, in Esther's terminology, the term "convex" that has been used to define the

of the time. Therefore, through Buddy's sanatorium days, which lack freedom, paralleled with Lacan's discourse of the "phallus," Esther highlights that, "phallus" is defined….as "our wish for completeness. The phallus therefore signifies, paradoxically, the opposite of completion – that is, lack"(Luepnitz 226). In parallel with Esther's discourse,

> For Lacan, there can be nothing missing from the real of the female body. Lack is something that exists in the imaginary register; it is operative (although in different ways) for everyone. And so the phallus is not what men have and women lack; we might say that it is what men believe they have and what women are considered to lack.(Luepnitz 227)

Hence, it is not only women who lack freedom but also men. However, the situation is much more difficult for Esther as she is conscious enough to recognize the simulacra as a female intellectual.

In relation to these, in the final scene of Hell, Buddy teaches Esther how to ski. Apparently, the male character is the only one who has the capacity to teach. Esther tells the reader that "The great eye of the sky looked back at me, its mist-shrouded sun focusing all the white and silent distances that poured from every point of the compass, hill after pale hill, to stall at my feet"(BJ 107). She passes "the zigzaggers, the students, the experts, through year after year of duplicity and smiles and compromise, into [her] own past."(BJ 108). The summit of the sky seduces her so much that she passionately wants to hone herself on it. "I'm going up" she says while Buddy responds to her "No, you're not"(BJ 109). She has already decided to do it again. After that, as stated by Esther: "A queer, satisfied expression came over Buddy's face. "No you're not," he repeated with a final smile. "Your leg's broken in two places. You'll be stuck in a cast for months"(BJ 109). Evidently, while Buddy is

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power of the patriarchy, is used as a negative connotation that illustrates not normality but abnormality. Therefore being concave is a normal situation. In relation to this while Buddy is the one

punished due to his double life, Esther is punished too, as she tries to revolt against her role while skiing. Therefore, both men and women are doomed to be kept under the same distorting bell jar.

In spite of all the difficulties, at the end of Hell, Esther seems to have achieved the strength to battle against the restrictions of Cold War America. As she rebels against the male language and world, she declares,

> That's one of the reasons I never wanted to get married. The last thing I wanted was infinite security and to be the place an arrow shoots off from. I wanted change and excitement and to shoot off in all directions myself, like the colored arrows from a Fourth of July rocket.(BJ 92)

It becomes clear that the symbol of Esther is the arrow that shoots whatever she wants. In Plath's famous poem, "Ariel," the narrator also justifies Esther. She declares,

> And I
> Am the arrow….
> Eye, the cauldron of morning"(A 35).

Evidently, the personal "I" achieves a transformation into the social eye of Esther's generation. Like the narrator of the "Ariel," the voice in "The Courage of Shutting Up" also states,

> But how about the eyes, the eyes, the eyes?
> Mirrors can kill and talk, they are terrible rooms
> Do not worry about the eyes—(WT 9).

It is clear that, the voice heals the reader by communicating that though individualism maybe suppressed by way of the shut mouth, the dominant ideology cannot give harm to the "eye." That's the reason she says "Do not worry about the eyes—"(WT 9). Therefore, the dominant ideology cannot silence women. Last but not

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who lacks normality, the concave Esther is the one who is healthy.

the least, “Lady Lazarus” also declares her freedom, just like Esther. The voice in the poem declares,

> Out of the ash
> I rise with my red hair
> And I eat men like air.(A 17).

Simply put, Esther achieves to passage through purgatory due to her successful reading of the culture’s dominant ideology that tries to silence her as a woman. As a result of her success at the end of Hell, she states “I woke up to the sound of rain”(BJ 92). In relation to that, Sylvia Plath writes to her mother in 1950, “I am glad the rain is coming down hard. It’s the way I feel inside”(LH 60). Plath’s statement indicates that Esther is ready to pass into a new phase, purgatory, where she will attack Cold War America much more sharply than in Hell, as she achieves to an emphatic link with the traumas of Cold War America.

PART III: PURGATORY: ENTERING THE SANCTUARY OF THE CULTURAL LOGOS

And so I rehabilitate myself – staying up late this Friday night in spite of vowing to go to bed early, because it is more important to capture moments like this, keen shifts in mood, sudden veering of direction – than to lose it in slumber. I had lost all perspective; I was wandering in a desperate purgatory…

Sylvia Plath, *The Unabridged Journals*.

3.1. OVERCOMING SILENCE THROUGH ART: KILLING THE FALSE SELF – PRESERVING THE TRUE SELF

After her successful journey in Hell, Esther Greenwood achieves to passage into purgatory, which is the symbolic order, the symbolic realm, where she passes the domain of *culture,* as a result of her interpretation of the historical traumas of her culture in the mirror stage. While in the mirror stage she faces the historical realities of her generation, through the portrayal of the Rosenbergs, in the symbolic stage,[90] she fully enters the borders of culture through which she mirrors the psychological traumas of her generation, which are the results of the historical traumas of the

[90] According to Jacque Lacan, the symbolic stage is the domain of culture that encompasses the terms such as "lack," and "death." The symbolic stage encapsulates the discourse of the unconscious that is the Other. For further reading see Jacque Lacan. *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. Trans. Bruce Fink.(New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006).

American culture. Her strategy in purgatory is the play of language through which she mirrors the social castration of the female body that is labeled as *mad*. In relation to this, in the symbolic stage, Esther tries to kill her false self and reveal her true-self, which signifies purification from the artificial political discourse of Cold War America that labels women *mad*.

After Esther has entered purgatory, the symbolic order, she informs the reader about the feelings she experiences, "I opened the door and blinked in the bright hall. I had the impression it wasn't night and it wasn't day, but some lurid third interval that had suddenly slipped between them and would never end"(BJ 23). It is evident that the suffocating pressure of the full moon in Hell, is turned into a half moon, which illustrates Esther's new mental space which is neither night, like hell, or day, like heaven, but a lurid third interval, which is purgatory. The half moon, as a metaphor of purgatory, can also be seen in Plath's poem "Thalidomide" in which the narrator begins her story with the following remark, "O half moon ….". In addition, in *The Bell Jar* while Esther is in purgatory, she frequently alludes to the color gray through her "gray suitcase"(BJ 126) that only includes "The Thirty Best Short Stories of the Year, a white plastic sunglasses case and two dozen avocado pears, a parting present from Doreen"(BJ 126) At this phase of her journey, Esther's gray suitcase is quite symbolic in the sense that, the color grey which is neither black, like hell, or white, like heaven, indicating that she is between the two colors. This is the signifier of the purgatory in which she tries to decipher the codes of her generation, Esther mentions,

> I felt it was very important not to be recognized. The gray, padded car roof closed over my Head like the roof of a prison van, and the white, shining, identical clapboard houses with their interstices of well-gloomed green

> proceeded past, one bar after another in a large but escape-proof cage. I had never spent a summer in the suburbs before.(BJ 128)

Apparently, Esther feels herself trapped in the uncertainty of purgatory, which is symbolized by "the gray padded car roof"(BJ 128) In addition, she mentions "Somebody seemed to be wheeling a baby back and forth under my window"(BJ 128).[91] The baby that is wheeled back and forth, which is the metaphor for purity and freedom, is again mentioned in purgatory as an embodiment of Esther's generation which is tricked by an illusionary motion that does not aim at moving forward, but moving back and forth around the same point. At this point, it must be underlined that Esther uses the color gray to define the suffocating atmosphere of purgatory in *The Bell Jar*. This is also reflected by Plath in her journals which signal the root of *The Bell Jar*. Plath writes in her journal,

> And so I rehabilitate myself – staying up late this Friday night in spite of vowing to go to bed early, because it is more important to capture moments like this, keen shifts in mood, sudden veering of direction – than to lose it in slumber. I had lost all perspective; *I was wandering in a desperate purgatory* [emphasis added](with a gray man in a gray boat in a gray river: an apathetic Charon dawdling upon a passionless phlegmatic River Styx … and a petulant Christ child bawling on the train …). The orange sun was a flat pasted disc on a smoky, acrid sky. Hell was the Grand Central subway on Sunday morning. And I was doomed to burn in ice, numb, cold, revolving in crystal, neutral, passive vacuums, void of sensation.(J 153)

Although this depressive purgatory seems to force Esther to move only back and forth, like in Hell she achieves to find a way to break out of the simulacra she faces.[92]

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[91] In "Tongues of Stone" Debby also carries "a book of short stories which she did not read because the words were nothing but dead black hieroglyphics that she could not translate to colored pictures anymore"(JP 274). It is evident that just like Esther Debby is captivated by male language in a place like purgatory.

[92] The most significant point is hidden under the fact that Esther has already passed these phases while she is telling her story to the reader. As a result of that, her narration gives the impression that she is telling the story of her generation (her culture) that sounds like the voice of a cultural critique not the voice of a mad woman in the attic.

Plath associates her story with that of Lazarus, in her journals she writes[93] "I talk to God, but the sky is empty, and Orion walks by and doesn't speak. I feel like Lazarus: that story has such fascination. Being dead, I rose up again…"(J 199).

In order to purify herself of her false-self, which symbolizes the death of true-self, Esther rises like Lazarus to live again as her true-self. In order to achieve this, in purgatory, Esther turns back to the very first page of her story, the Rosenbergs as the starting point of her strategy. This time, the Rosenbergs are reflected by the voice of Hilda, Esther's friend,

Esther quotes Hilda's idea about the Rosenberg's with capital letters: "I'M SO GLAD THEY ARE GOING TO DIE"(BJ 110). Then after a few sentences, Esther echoes the same sentence of Hilda, who moves "like a mannequin the whole way,"(BJ 110) but with a different capitalization: "*I'm so glad they are going to die*"(BJ 110). The significance of these identical sentences lies in the fact that after giving a detailed description of the ideology of the male discourse of her generation, through Buddy in Hell, she depicts an opinion about the Rosenbergs, the opinion that celebrates the death of witchcraft, the woman, identified in the form of Ethel Rosenberg who was accused of being the main person responsible for the espionage. Secondly, after understanding the historic, thus, the social atmosphere of her generation, Esther turns back to the beginning of her story only to embark upon the beginning of another one. Hence, it is not a coincidence that she associates Hilda with the shop dummies at the beginning of *The Bell Jar* that signifies the prototype of her generation, who labels the Rosenbergs as the enemy. Later, Esther associates

[93] The name Lazarus can be found both in the New Testament and in Greek mythology. In the New Testament, according to the Gospel of John, which is known as "Lazarus of the Four Days," Jesus restores Lazarus to life after four days of his death. The story of this miracle is supported by the

the voice of Hilda with the voice of a dybbuk that she watched in a play. In the play, "the heroine was possessed by a dybbuk, and when the dybbuk spoke from her mouth its voice sounded so cavernous and deep you couldn't tell whether it was a man or a woman"(BJ 111). After that, Esther asks "Isn't it awful about the Rosenbergs?"(BJ 111) then she gives background information that "The Rosenbergs were to be electrocuted that late night"(BJ 111). Esther reminds the reader that she turns back to the beginning of the story. The flashbacks, the enigmatic and disordered structure of her writing clearly signify her decentered universe and generation that lacks order. Consequently, in response to Esther's information, Hilda responds, "Yes!" and continues "It's awful such people should be alive. She yawned then, and her pale orange mouth opened on a larger darkness. Fascinated, I stared at the blind cave behind her face until the two lips met and moved and the dybbuk spoke out of its hiding place, "I'm so glad they're going to die""(BJ 111).

Esther's turning back to the Rosenberg's is quite significant as "The Rosenbergs were scapegoated as spies, Communists traitors in our midst, with their Jewishness and Ethel Rosenberg's strong womanhood seen as part of the Alien nature of this Enemy Within"(McPherson 2). Through anchoring the Rosenbergs as her starting point, just as she does in Hell, Esther focuses on the hypocrisy of the discourse of Cold War America.[94] While studying at Smith, Plath also commented on the issue in the following statement,

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definition of Lazarus in Latin that is the synonym of "Eleazar which means "God's assistance" and "God has helped."

[94] Aparently Plath associates pain with Jewsih identity. In relation to this Jacquiline Rose asserts that "There is always a history to the shape of the mind. The story of psychoanalysis makes that all too clear ― its panic and drive for legitimation is inseparable from the after-schocks for its predominantly Jewish community, of the Second World War"(Rose, "Sleep" 14).

> … if American ideals of democracy are not secure enough, vital enough, to stand up against propaganda, they deserve to fall under Communist domination. What we need is a remedy for our seeming hypocrisy (e.g. Civil Rights legislation) so that none of our minorities will feel the *need* to support another ideology [exercise from class on Government at Smith]. (qtd. in Rose 111)

Not only Esther but also Plath highlights that the attack against the Rosenbergs is just part of the conspiracy to suppress an entire generation under the name of combating Communism. Sylvia Plath wrote to a friend in 1950. "People don't seem to see that this negative Anti-communist attitude is destroying all the freedom of thought we've ever had….Everything they don't agree with is Communist"(Wagner Martin, "Biography" 59). That is the reason why Esther binds Hilda's declaration "I'm so glad they're going to die"(BJ 111) with her response to the situation, "Come on, give us a smile"(BJ 111). Esther calls into question just to what extent smiling is possible in this traumatic atmosphere during the electrocution of the Rosenbergs, at least for people like her, who have the intellectual capacity to criticize their culture. Later she culminates this situation with a scene in Jay Cee's office, the editor of the magazine. While she is sitting on the "pink velvet loveseat in Jay Cee's office, she is holding a paper rose and facing the magazine photographer. Although Esther tries to conceal herself in the powder room, Betsy spoils her game. Esther describes her situation,

> I didn't want my picture taken because I was going to cry. I didn't know why I was going to cry, but I knew that if anybody spoke to me or looked at me too closely the tears would fly out of my eyes and the sobs would fly out of my throat and I'd cry for a week. I could feel the tears brimming and sloshing in me like water in a glass that is unsteady and too full.(BJ 112)[95]

While the photographer is taking the picture of the guest editors,

> "Betsy held an ear of corn to show she wanted to be a farmer's wife, and Hilda held the bald, faceless head of a hatmaker's dummy to show she

[95] In "Tongues of Stone" the narrator also states that "Once she [the protagonist Debby] began to cry there was no stopping"(JP 274). It should be underlined that there is a strong bond between Esther and Debby.

> wanted to design hats, and Doreen held a gold-embroidered sari to show she wanted to be a social worker in India … When they asked me what I wanted to be I said I didn't know. "Oh, sure you know," the photographer said. "She wants," said Jay Cee wittily, "to be everything." I said I wanted to be a poet"(BJ 112)

It is important to mention that the photograph episode was taken from Plath's journals. While she was the guest-editor of *Mademoiselle*, she experienced a similar episode. However, the significant point is not the fact that Plath uses her real-life experience in *The Bell Jar*, but how she transforms her experience into a cultural criticism. Through Esther's portrayal of the photographer and the photograph which, forces her to take part in, Plath reflects the picture of an entire generation that was forced to take part in a photograph, although it did not fit with their political or social concerns. That's the reason why Jay Cee informs the photographer that Esther's problem is that she wants to be everything. In relation, Esther's response to Jay Cee that she "wants to be a poet" is quite enticing as only a word encapsulates the entire story behind her rebellion against the suppression of women in Cold War America. If she achieves becoming a poet, it will mean that she, as a woman, achieves economic independence and in having such becomes associated not with home and children but with art, freedom of thought, activism and self-reliance, leading to a fragmentation of a woman who can take part both in social and political life. In relation to Esther's situation, Betty Friedman, in her masterpiece *The Feminine Mystique* suggests that,

> The only kind of work which permits an able woman to realize her abilities fully, to achieve identity in society in a life plan that can encompass marriage and motherhood, is the kind that was forbidden by the feminine mystique, the lifelong commitment to an art or science, to politics or profession.(420)

The photographer recognizes that Esther is about to cry, as a result of the artificiality of the picture she is forced to fit into, and Esther admits that she cannot stop crying. The hidden motive of the episode is to draw attention to the fact that Esther cannot

manage to pretence of happiness like the other girls. After the debate on the Rosenbergs, she again crashes into the harsh realities of her culture. Her intuition, which Buddy Willard and other characters are lacking, prevents her from smiling, which highlights her consciousness of the traumatic pressures of her culture. In that scene Esther deals with "the mascara brush, and the eye shadow and the three lipsticks and the side mirror"(BJ 114). Again Esther uses "mirror" as a metaphor of the reflections of the social facts of her generation. Through the photograph episode, and the mirror, Esther illustrates that how you define yourself in social life is the foreshadowing of what you will be in the future. As Simone De Beuvoir mentions in *The Second Sex*,

> Woman is female to the extent she that she feels herself as such. There are biologically essential features that are not a part of her real, experienced situation: thus the structure of the egg is not reflected in it, but on the contrary an organ of no great biological importance, like the clitoris, plays in it a part of the first rank. It is not nature that defines women, it is she who defines herself by dealing with nature on her own account in her emotional life.(69)

In relation, Esther defines herself not as a college student whose main aim in life is to find a perfect husband, but as a poet who symbolizes not dependence but independence. In order to prevent herself from becoming just another one of the girls in the picture, Esther formulates new strategies to survive in purgatory.

3.1.1. Metamorphoses: The Bracing Elixir of Esther Greenwood

As Marjorie Perloff comments, "… the central action of *The Bell Jar* may be described as the attempt to heal the fracture between inner self and false-self system so that a real and viable identity can come into existence"(Perloff, "Ritual" 510). In purgatory, in the symbolic order, where Esther deeply confronts her culture, in order to purge her false-self, she develops different form of solutions to protect her true

self, which are like a bracing elixir. In order protect her true self, in Purgatory Esther acts as if she were obeying the rules of the dominant ideology. However, her silence is the signifier of the most powerful tool she has, the play of language. Therefore she overcomes silence through art, through creating a psychic landscape, a new form of simulacra as a counter attack against the one that is forced upon her by the dominant ideology.

Esther's story is similar to the myth of Philomela and Procne in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In *Metamorphoses*, Ovid portrays the myth of Philomela and Procne as that which turns into the emblem of the desirous female silence, which is supported by the patriarchal discourse. In relation, the story of the two sisters has become one of the most frequently discussed stories in feminist literary criticism. Procne and Philomela are two sisters, and Procne is married to King Tereus. Tragically, the innocent, beautiful Philomela is raped by Tereus. In order to prevent Philomela from telling Procne, Tereus cuts out her tongue and locks her away. However, her silence, that is interpreted as a form of imprisonment a binding by the patriarchal discourse and Tereus, turns into a great power. Although Philomela seems to have been silenced by masculine power, thanks to the play of language, she destroys the patriarchal order. She cries out,

> Yet, if the gods
> Are watching, if heaven's power means anything,
> Unless my ruin's shared by all the world,
> You'll pay my score one day. I'll shed my shame
> And shout what you have done. If I've the chance,
> I'll walk among the crowds: or, if I'm held
> Locked in the woods, my voice shall fill the woods
> And move the rocks to pity. This bright sky
> Shall hear, and any god that dwells on high!(138)

Philomela takes her revenge against the patriarchal power. She overcomes her silence through art, and she weaves her story in cloth and sends it to Procne. After Procne has learned the truth, she says, “This is no time for tears, But for the sword”(140), and she makes a plan. The sisters kill Tereus’s son Itys and serve him to Tereus. When he learns that he has eaten the flesh of his own sun, he tries to kill the sisters. However Philomela is transformed into a swallow, and Procne into a nightingale, and both flee before Tereus kills them. The story stresses that although Philomela is made speechless by the patriarchy, she overcomes silence through art, using it in place of her silenced voice to communicate her plight. In *The Bell Jar*, the dominant ideology also tries to render Esther speechless, silent like Philomela. In order to free herself from this silence, she also uses out in language. One of the most dramatic scenes in *The Bell Jar* is the scene in which Esther changes her name into “Elly Higginbottom” in order to preserve her identity. A sailor asks Esther where she is from, and she immediately defines herself as Elly, who comes from Chicago.She explains her reason fro changing her name with a sarcastic remark,

> I thought if I ever did get to Chicago, I might change my name to Elly Higginbottom for good. Then nobody would know I had thrown up a scholarship at a big eastern women’s college and mucked up a month in New York and refused a perfectly solid medical student for a husband who would one day be member of the AMA and earn pots of money. In Chicago, people would take me for what I was. I would be simple Elly Higginbottom, the orphan. People love me for my sweet, quiet nature. They wouldn’t be after me to read books and write long papers on the twins in James Joyce. And one day I might just marry a virile, but tender, garage mechanic and have a big cowboy family, like Dodo Conway.(BJ 149)

While defining herself as this orphan, Elly, she not only purges herself of her mother, the female who defines herself as a socially destined captive, but also from the father, the patriarchal order which supports the captivation of women. Therefore,

through defining herself as Elly the orphan, she protects her inner self from the dominant ideology of Cold War America. Sylvia Plath's strategy for Esther, who turns into Elly, runs parallel to R.D. Laing's comment, the most well-known psychiatrist of Cold War America. As he claims, "In a world full of dangers to be a potentially seeable object is to be constantly exposed to danger …..The obvious defense against such a danger is to make oneself invisible in one way or another"("Divided" 109). In addition to Elly, Esther's other strategy is taking hot bath, signifying the common theme of Plath's works, which is a "literal rebirth, a new beginning"(Kroll 170). In *The Bell Jar*, Esther frequently takes hot baths which cure both physically and spiritually a ritual of being reborn and purifying both the body and the soul from the false-self system imposed by the Cold War ideology. Esther defines her experience in the hot bath with the following remark,

> There must be quite a few things a hot bath won't cure, but I don't know many of them. Whenever I'm sad I'm going to die, or so nervous I can't sleep, or in love with somebody I won't be seeing for a week, I slump down just so far and then I say: I 'll go take a hot bath.(BJ 21)

She mentions that she mediates in the hot bath, but the water must be very hot. Then she lowers herself inch by inch into the water. The purification ceremony helps Esther to regain her true-self, as she explains, "I never feel so much myself as when I'm in a hot bath"(BJ 22). Esther notes, "I felt myself growing pure again"(BJ 22).[96] Esther's hot bath ceremony reminds the reader of *The White Goddess. A Historical Grammar*, which Plath keenly read and used in her poetry. Robert Graves, in *The White Goddess*, portrays her as a mythic hero who renewed her virginity through

[96] The narrator of Plath's poem "Getting There" also uses a similar discourse to define her achievement to purge herself form the artificial dirt's of the social world. For further reading see *Ariel* 59.

bathing naked in a sacred fountain.[97] As a woman who has the gift of being reborn, like the White Goddess, Esther first dies, killing her false-self, and then is reborn as her true-self. In her journals, Plath also mentions that a hot bath is a form of purification from the social norms,

> I took a hot bath: therapy: the kinks wore out, and I rose purged, for a day, of the sticky collection of sweat and exudings, powdered, in a fresh-laundered torn white-cotton nightgown with purple roses sprigged over it. From now on nothing will be so bad. I'll wash my hair today & start cleaning house. When I feel my liberty?….(J 352)

It is evident that the hot bath, as a form of purification, is used by Esther as a strategy to counter attack against the Cold War ideology. She further comments, I don't believe in baptism or the waters of Jordan or anything like that, but I guess I feel about a hot bath the way those religious people feel about holy water"(BJ 22). Esther explains how the dirt of New York City, the simulacra of Cold War America, forces her to take hot baths, as Esther portrays,

> Doreen is dissolving, Lenny Shepherd is dissolving, Frankie is dissolving. New York is dissolving, they are all dissolving away and none of them matter any more. I don't know them, I have never known them and I am very pure. All that liquor and those sticky kisses I saw and the dirt that settled on my skin on the way back is turning into something pure.(BJ 22)

Although she enters the bath as a false-self, after each ceremony she regains her true-self, she illustrates that "The longer I lay there in the clear hot water the purer I felt, and when I stepped out at last and wrapped myself in one of the big, soft white hotel bath towels I felt pure and sweet as a new baby"(BJ 22).[98]

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[97] For further reading see Robert Graves. *The White Goddess. A Historical Grammar*. (Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy, 1948).

[98] The ending of Esther's sentence reminds the reader of the ending of Plath's poem "Getting There."

While Esther uses the hot bath in order to purify herself from the false-self system, when she goes outside she uses another strategy to protect herself. She shares this fact with her reader, “I dressed up and splashed my face with cold water and put on some lipstick and opened the door slowly. I think I still expected to see Doreen’s body lying there in the pool of vomit like an ugly, concrete testimony to my own dirty nature”(BJ 25). Esther’s strategy in purgatory evidently works, as in purgatory, in the symbolic stage, she manages to purify herself of oppressive cultural influences. The most obvious example of this is the episode in which she feeds her wardrobe to the night wind. She describes the episode with the following remark, “Piece by piece, I fed my wardrobe to the night wind, and flutteringly, like a loved one’s ashes, the gray scraps were ferried off, to settle here, there, exactly where I would never know, in the dark heart of New York”(BJ 124). Esther associates the episode with “the wings of a new angel”(BJ 125). Like a new born baby, Esther associates herself with an angel.

3.2. ENTERING THE DOMAIN OF THE FEMALE AURA: ESTHER’S VIRGILS AT THE HEART OF THE COLD WAR IDEOLOGY

Esther informs her reader that, “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”(BJ 14). In this phase of purgatory, Esther focuses on the college life of women in Cold War America that is surrounded by entrapment and social castration. This time the crucial situation that Esther looks so hard at is the portrayal of women in social life. As in

Cold War America, just as in "In philosophy, woman is always on the side of passivity"(Cixous 91) and in order to highlight the problematic simulacras designed for women in the symbolic stage, Esther meets different female Virgils who will illuminate her way.

In purgatory Esther's Virgil Doreen, who comes

> … from a society girls' college down South and had bright white hair standing out in a cotton candy fluff round her head and blue eyes like transparent agate marbles, hard and polished and just about indestructible, and a mouth set in a sort of perpetual sneer, as if all the people around her were pretty silly and she could tell some good jokes on them if she wanted to.(BJ 5)

Doreen's impact upon Esther is so powerful that Esther states that "Doreen always whispers witty sarcastic remarks to [her] under [her] breath"(BJ 5). Through Doreen, Esther enters into the discussion of college life for a female student in Cold War America and Esther begins to criticize college life through fashion. She argues that,

> Her college was so fashion conscious, she said, that all the girls had pocketbook covers made out of the same material as their dresses, so each time they changed their clothes they had a matching pocketbook. This kind of detail impressed me. It suggested a whole life of marvelous, elaborate decadence that attracted me like a magnet.(BJ 5)

In relation, as Luce Irigaray asserts,

> For woman is traditionally use-value for man, exchange-value among men. Merchandise, then. This makes her the guardian of matter whose price will be determined by "subjects": workers, tradesman, consumers, according to the standard of their work and their need-desire.(Irigaray 105)

In Cold War America, college life is defined in terms of female figures that are mired in consumerism, and in order to find her way in purgatory, Esther uses Doreen as she symbolizes the female figures of her generation. As Esther asserts, "Everything she said was like a secret voice speaking straight out of my own bones"(BJ 8). Through using Doreen's intuition, Esther tries to decipher the Cold War ideal for women. Esther shares with her reader,

> Doreen looked terrific. She was wearing a strapless white lace dress zipped up over a snug corset affair that curved her in at the middle and bulged her out again spectacularly above and below, and her skin had a bronzy polish under the pale dusting powder. She smelled strong as a whole perfume store.(BJ 8)

As an emblem of the typical young girl of her age, Doreen helps Esther to recognize what she will be in future, if she cannot manage to survive in Cold War America. In relation to Doreen, the difficulty of Esther's preservation of her true-self is reflected by Plath through the color silver, which is the symbol of Cold War America in Esther's terminology. Esther points out that while she goes to a bar with Doreen,

> 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.(BJ 11)

While Esther is in the bar with Doreen, she is asked to have Vodka. Although she has never drunk Vodka, she behaves as if she had. She responds to the situation with the following remark, "I always have it plain"(BJ 11). Later she confesses, "My dream was someday ordering a drink and finding out it tasted wonderful"(BJ 12). Her strategy is evidently successful because she says "The drinks arrived, and mine looked clear and pure, just like the vodka ad"(BJ 12). Apparently, she manages to protect herself from the false-self system through her strategies, in spite of the suffocating social space organized for women.[99]

Esther reflects the limited social space through Doreen's smoke and the windows, which cannot be opened. As Esther explains, "They had the windows fixed so you couldn't really open them and lean out, and for some reason this made me

[99] A similar tone of optimism can also be seen in Plath's poem "Stones." The narrator of the poem implies the optimism of Esther's life after hell with the following stanzas, "This is after-hell: I see the light. A wind unstoppers the chamber Of the ear, old worrier"(Col 82-83).

furious"(BJ 20). As Doreen signifies the artificial female figure of Cold War America, when Esther is in the bureau of the magazine with Doreen, "The mirror over her bureau seemed slightly warped and much too silver"(BJ 21). After that scene Esther tells the reader, "I decided to take a hot bath"(BH 21).[100]

Apparently, up to that point of her journey, Doreen acts as a collector of Esther's artificial selves that she has tired to escape. As an indicator of this, Esther describes that "Suddenly Doreen grew even heavier. Her head dropped forward into the puddle, the wisps of her blonde hair dabbling in it like tree roots in a bog, and I realized she was asleep, I drew back. I felt half-asleep myself"(BJ 24). Just like Doreen, who is captivated by the dominant ideology, Esther naturally finds herself half-asleep, as she is in purgatory. In her poem "Insomniac," Plath also defines a city, which is New York City in *The Bell Jar*, as a place of entrapment. The narrator of the poem defines the city as a place of entrapment, which

> …. is a map of cheerful twitters now,
> And everywhere people, eyes mica-silver and blank,
> Are riding to work in rows, as if recently brainwashed.(CW11)

Apparently, Doreen is one of the brainwashed women, who signies the embodiment of the discourse of sameness that labels women in Cold War America. Esther argues,

> "I am an observer," I told myself, as I watched Doreen being handed into the room by the blond boy to another man, who was also tall, but dark, with slightly longer hair. This man was wearing an immaculate white suit, a pale blue shirt and a yellow satin tie with a bright stickpin. I couldn't take my eyes off that stickpin.(BJ 117)

Marco is the name of that gentleman that Esther comes to know with through Doreen, and he is interested in Esther, not because he is attracted by her, but because she just seems like to be all the other female figures, who are solely interpreted as

[100] The color silver, as an emblem of the Cold War in Esther's terminology, is embodied by Doreen as she has already entrapped by the dominant ideology. However, through taking hot baths Esther

sexual objects. According to Esther, Marco is a woman-hater, she further adds, "because in spite of all the models and TV starlets in the room that night he paid attention to nobody but me. Not out of kindness or even curiosity, but because I'd happened to be dealt to him, like a playing card in a pack of identical cards"(BJ 118). Evidently, in order to kill her false-self, Esther uses her experience with Doreen. Although her experience exhausts her, she gets closer to paradise. She describes her situation with this statement, "The city had faded my tan, though. I looked yellow as a Chinaman. Ordinarily, I would have been nervous about my dress and my odd color, but being with Doreen made me forget my worries. I felt wise and cynical as all hell"(BJ 9).

Thanks to Esther's journey with Doreen, Doreen helps her to find her true-self which is embodied in Betsy.[101] In purgatory Esther's new Virgil is Betsy, who symbolizes the innocence that Esther has tried to preserve. As Esther argues, "Deep down, I would be loyal to Betsy and her innocent friends. It was Betsy I resembled at heart"(BJ 25). Betsy comes from Kansas and always talks about "male and female corn in …"(BJ 7). "Corn" as a symbol of nature, which illustrates Betsy's natural habitat as opposed to the artificial Doreen. That's the reason why Esther notes, "Betsy was always asking me to do things with her and the other girls as if she were trying to save me in some way. She never asked Doreen. In private, Doreen called her Pollyanna Cowgirl"(BJ 7). Apparently, Betsy tries to protect Esther from the artificial people and environment that Esther is fighting against. It can be argued that Betsy, as Esther's innocent Virgil, manages to purify Esther because at the Ladies' Day banquet, with all the guest-editors, Esther goes to the meeting, all the girls are

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manages to preserve her true-self.

[101]The name Betsy is mentioned in Plath's journal whom was Plath's friend "Betsy Powley"(J 65).

consuming delicious food, while Esther is watching them. The meeting is symbolic in the sense that it alludes to the conspicuous consumption of New York City, the kernel of the American simulacra, where the body is corrupted by materialism. When Esther combines the awful Hollywood movie she watches with the Ladies Day banquet and the caviar she has eaten, she feels terribly sick. She reports, "By the time they reached the hotel I had puked once and Betsy had puked twice"(BJ 47). "Puking" at the Ladies Day banquet is a perfect metaphor of Esther's false-self that is purged through puking. The poisonous Cold War ideology is ousted by Esther through puking, which is a different form of purification. After Betsy and Esther have puked, the hotel nurse comes and says "Poisoned, the whole lot of you. I never seen anything like it. Sick here, sick there, whatever have you ladies stuffin' yourselves with?"(BJ 51).

It can be assumed that Betsy, Esther's innocent Virgil, apparently helps Esther to preserve her true-self and reject the false self system that insists on accepting all the social and political norms imposed by Cold War ideology. As a result, Esther metaphorically pukes out all the false values of Cold War ideology. The significant point is the fact that all the guest-editors are poisoned by this false-self system. Therefore, the banquet that is organized for young college girls serves as a perfect symbol of the entrapment that is designed for women. Although Esther and Betsy puke, other girls apparently cannot survive themselves outside of their cages of ideological entrapment. In relation to that, so as to criticize the social entrapment of women in Cold War America, Esther introduces her reader to her new Virgil; Dodo Conway.

Dodo Conway is a Catholic and her husband is an architect. Esther indicates that Dodo interests her in spite of herself. As she is married, Esther states that Dodo's house is unlike all the others in her neighborhood both in size and color. Dark brown, gray and purple are the colors that surround the psychological space of the house. Dodo has three children, and Esther is sure that she will probably have another one. While depicting the life of Dodo, Esther confesses: "Children made me sick"(BJ 131). Esther declares that children make her sick because in Cold War terminology women who have children, signify a life spent at home which can be defined as a life devoid of politics, social activities and a professional career. In relation, she defines Dodo as "[a] woman not five feet tall, with a grotesque, protruding stomach, was wheeling an old black carriage down the street. Two or three small children of various sizes, all pale, with smudgy faces and bare smudgy knees, wobbled along in the shadow of her skirts"(BJ 129). While the woman is smiling into the sun, Esther states "I knew the woman well"(BJ 129). Esther ironically says that she knows the woman well, as Dodo is the embodiment of female freedom and creativity that is usually castrated by the patriarchy in Cold War America. As Dodo signifies marriage and motherhood, Esther is thrilled by her sole devotion to home, and her rejection of any activity that does not encompass marriage and motherhood. It should be mentioned that Dodo's social situation is not a surprise as most of the American women in Cold War years turned their faces to home in order to protect themselves from the artificial traumas of Cold War America. As Elaine Tyler May endorses,

> Why did postwar Americans turn to marriage and parenthood with such enthusiasm and commitment? Scholars and observers frequently point to the family boom as the inevitable result of a return to peace and prosperity. They argue that depression-weary Americans were eager to put the disruptions and hardships of war behind them and enjoy the abundance at home.(xiii)

However, the seemingly abundance was an emblem of redundancy. As freedom was a utopia for the American women, they automatically turned their faces to home, where no political oppression could touch them. However, they could not recognize the fact that they were at the center of the political and social oppression while they stayed at home, because the "ideal home with many children and a devoted wife" was actually the picture imposed by Cold War ideology. While analyzing Cold War ideology, Simone De Beauvoir's comment is quite significant,

> Since the husband is the productive worker, he is the one who goes beyond family interest to that of society, opening up a future for himself through co-operation in the building of the collective future; he incarnates transcendence. Woman is doomed to the continuation of the species and the care of the home – that is to say, to immanence.(449)

As a result, through Dodo Conway, Esther has the chance of criticizing the woman of her generation, who are blinded by the patriarchal order. Esther rejects staying at home. For instance, as Simone De Beuvoir argues,

> A man is socially an independent and complete individual; he is regarded first of all as a producer whose existence is justified by the work he does for the group: we have seen why it is that the reproductive and domestic role to which woman is confined has not guaranteed her an equal dignity.(Beauvoir 446)

As a result of this, Esther admires Jay Cee as she has a professional career, in spite of the ideology imposed on women. That is the reason why she notes,

> 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 couple of languages and knew all the quality writers in the business.(BJ 6)

However, although Jay Cee seems to be much stronger than the other female characters that Esther meets, she is not utterly free, because as an editor she can only edit the language which is used by the patriarchal world, but cannot create a voice of her own. In relation, after this, Esther remembers that she had applied for a summer

school course with a famous writer. In this course the would-be applicants send the manuscripts of their stories and the instructor decided whether they were good enough to apply to the course or not. Esther states: "I decided I'd surprise Jay Cee and send in a couple of the stories I wrote in this class under a pseudonym"(BJ 115).[102] After the debate on writing under a pseudonym, she confesses that if she walked the streets of New York by herself all night something of the city's mystery and magnificence might rub off on to her at last.(BJ 115)

In *The Bell Jar*, Esther evidently portrays the meaninglessness of human existence in the chaotic atmosphere of Cold War America. Therefore, it can be claimed that, "*The Bell Jar* is closer to Beckett than it is to Salinger, closer to Kafka and Hamsun than it is to American fiction. Even though the world it describes is quintessentially American, the treatment is not"(Peel, "Political" 77).

3.2.1. Facing the Psychological Trauma

In purgatory, Esther first develops the techniques to preserve her true-self and then diagnoses the cultural traumas of her generation. Through Betsy, Jay Cee, Dodo Conway, and Doreen, Esther achieves an overview on how the women of her generation are entrapped by the patriarchy from different perspectives. As a result in order to pass into paradise, Esther focuses on the most tragic psychological trauma of her generation that is the discourse of madness that labels the creative intellectual mind as mad solely to suppress it. In this part of purgatory, the problem that Esther

[102] Esther's hiding her identity implicitly gives the message that Ester writes under a pseudonym in order to display her success and display her creative capacity. It must be underlined that should Esther has always been identified with Sylvia Plath by the literary critics, is it possible that she writes *The*

highlights is the fact that "If a woman had a problem in the 1950's and 1960's, she knew that something must be wrong with her marriage or with herself"(Friedman 62).

Unlike Hell, in Purgatory Esther's narration of the story gains a new momentum that is not as divided as the one in Hell. As she gets closer to paradise, she begins to tell her story much more systematically. At this phase of her journey, Esther begins her new story with the following remark, "Maybe I could study the eighteenth century in secret. But I didn't know shorthand, so what could I do? I could be a waitress or a typist. But I couldn't stand the idea of being either one"(BJ 140). While Esther's allusion to being a waitress means serving the patriarchal order, her allusion to a typist illustrates women who only write what the patriarchal order offers. Therefore, Esther rejects both. After this episode, Esther remains a blank, at least for two or three sentences and then she reflects in this dialogue: "You say you want more sleeping pills?" "Yes." "They don't work any more."(BJ 140) After this episode, Esther introduces the reader to Teresa, who is Esther's aunt's sister-in law and also her family doctor. After Constantine, for the first time Esther indicates that she liked Teresa as she has a "gentle, intuitive touch … because she was Italian"(BJ 141) When Teresa asks Esther what the problem is, Esther responds that she cannot sleep. Then Teresa recommends to Esther another doctor, who might help her much better than herself, Doctor Gordon.[103] The most significant point of this part is that, as a woman, Teresa does not think that she can help Esther, instead she recommends a male doctor, whom she believes to be much more effective in Cold War America.

Bell Jar under a pseudonym in order to surprise both the people in her life but also the audience of her generation that strictly denies the intellectual power of women?

[103] The name "Gordon" (J 96) is mentioned by Plath in her journals.

However, as a male figure, does he have the capacity to understand the feelings of Esther, whose problem is not the problem of a psychotic woman, but the problem of a woman who is forced to be the victim of the dominant male discourse?

When Esther gets into the waiting room of Doctor Gordon's office, she defines it as "hushed and beige"(BJ 142). The room is devoid of pictures and mirrors, preventing the imagination from forming different ideas about life and also negating the chance of finding the true-self through mirroring. Hence the Doctor's room signifies entrapment of the female creativity by male discourse. Esther continues giving information about the waiting room; it has a coffee and a magazine table. In addition, the color of green that decorates the room is not the lighter but the darker tones of green that foreshadow the fact that Esther's psychological condition will not be cured, but will be intensified by the male discourse. Instead of pictures and mirrors, the walls of the room only bear the certificate of Doctor Gordon, symbolizing his sole male authority. Despite of all these negative symbols, at first sight Esther seems to feel herself safe, however, that safety is only the harbinger of an entrapment, because she later realizes that there are no windows, and the air conditioning makes her shiver. While waiting, she is wearing "Betsy's white blouse and dirndl skirt"(BJ 142). Esther mentions,

> I was still wearing Betsy's white blouse and dirndl skirt. They dropped a bit now, as I hadn't washed them in my three weeks at home. The sweaty cotton gave off a sour but friendly smell. I hadn't washed my hair for three weeks, either. I hadn't slept for seven nights … The reason I hadn't washed my clothes or my hair was because it seemed so silly … It seemed silly to wash one day when I would only have to wash again the next"(BJ 142).

The significant point is the fact that attempting to purify the outer body does not mean anything as the main trauma is in the soul, and that cannot be purified by water or new clothes. She says: "I wanted to do everything once and for all and be through

with it."(BJ 143). The danger Esther foreshadows through Dr. Gordon comes true as he has a "silver pencil" the color that generally has a negative connotation, not only in *The Bell Jar*, but also in all Plath's poems. Hence, it is not surprising that Dr. Gordon asks Esther: "Your mother tells me you are upset"(BJ 143). During that time Esther can only hear "his pencil- tap, tap, tap-across the neat green field of his blotter"(BJ 143). The repetitive voice reflects the vicious cycle that Esther will find herself in as a result of the male discourse. That's the reason why Esther tells the reader that "his eyelashes were so long and thick they looked artificial"(BJ 144) In addition, he is also the ideal male figure of the time "whose features were so perfect he was almost pretty"(BJ 144).

Although the reader might think that Esther likes Dr. Gordon, she confesses that "I hated him the minute I walked in through the door"(BJ 144). In the waiting room, Esther expects to meet a psychiatrist who is an old and unattractive man, "who helps her, step by step, to be herself again"(BJ 144). However, Esther is surprised to meet a young, good-looking man. Although he is good-looking, Esther displays the danger hidden in him through depicting "a photograph on his desk, in a silver frame, that half faced him and half faced [her] leather chair"(BJ 144).[104] The color silver, the signifier of the dominant ideology of Esther's generation, reflects Dr. Gordon's stiffness as a psychiatrist. He tells Esther: "Suppose you try and tell me what you think is wrong"(BJ 145). Esther's response to the reader portrays the entire picture of the female psyche in twentieth century America, in which millions of women unfortunately and involuntarily took part. That's the reason why Esther says: "I

[104] Annette Lavers postulates that in some cultures white is the emblem of death and this emblem is "coupled with the other attributes of death, makes the moon the perfect symbol for it"(109).Furthermore Lavers claims that "words like 'pearl,' 'silver' or 'ivory,' which can be used to describe moonlight, always announce some untoward event"(qtd. in Kroll 112).

turned the words over suspiciously, like round, sea-polished pebbles that might suddenly put out a claw and change into something else. What did I *think* was wrong? That made it sound as if nothing was *really* wrong, I only *thought* it was wrong"(BJ 145). Dr. Gordon's attitude towards Esther is a clear depiction of how the dominant male discourse define a woman as a beings whose excessive imagination turn into a mad, psychotic beings who tries to recreate the world they live in. As a result, the female psyche is defined as 'ill' as it has the capacity to exaggerate anything it experiences. However, the real picture is completely different, and Esther, who is a product of her generation, brilliantly tells the true story of womanhood.[105] The most significant point is that Plath's defining of the problematic interpretation of female psychology in Cold War America through Esther has a strong parallelism with Betty Friedan's arguments about the same period. In parallel with Esther, Friedan asserts that,

> Other women were satisfied with their lives, she thought. What kind of a woman was she is she did not feel this mysterious fulfillment waxing the kitchen floor? She was so ashamed to admit her dissatisfaction that she never knew how many other woman shared it. If she tried to tell her husband, he didn't understand what she was talking about. She did not really understand it herself. For over fifteen years women in America found it harder to talk about this problem than about sex. Even the psychoanalysts had no name for it. When a woman went to a psychiatrist for help, as many woman did, she would say, "I'm so ashamed," or "I must be hopelessly neurotic." "I don't know what's wrong with women today," a suburban psychiatrist said uneasily. "I only know something is wrong because most of my patients happen to be women. And their problem isn't sexual." Most women with this problem did not go to see a psychoanalyst, however, "There's nothing wrong really, "they kept telling themselves. "There isn't any problem."(62)[106]

[105] As Merjorie Perloff argues, "To label Esther as "schizophrenic" and leave it at that does not take us very far. For Sylvia Plath's focus in *The Bell Jar* is not on mental illness per se, but on the relationship of Esther's private psychosis to her larger social situation. Indeed, her dilemma seems to have a great deal to do with being a woman in a society whose guidelines for women she can neither accept nor reject"(511).

[106] The Parallelism between the discourse of Esther and Betty Friedman is underlined by Linda Wagner Martin. She claims, "For Plath, gender complicated aesthetics. Much is made of the fact that her novel, *The Bell Jar*, published in England just weeks before her suicide on II February 1963, could be paired with Betty Friedan's 1963 *The Feminine Mystique*…"(Wagner , "Poetry" 52).

With this the ideology imposed on women, they were forced to ignore their social problems, because they were erroneously regarded as psychological problems. In relation that, as Esther immediately understands that Dr. Gordon cannot, and will not, help her, she hides from him that her main problem is that she cannot write anymore. Hence, her sleeping and eating problems are the extensions of her creative problem. Esther confesses to her reader that she has tried to write a letter to Doreen but found she could not. Apparently, not the psychotic female mind, but the creative female mind faces the social castration of the male discourse, which is the main problem. However, Esther is quite in control of the situation. She does not mention anything about the letters. That's the reason why Esther tells her reader, "Doctor Gordon didn't ask to see them, as I hadn't mentioned them, and I began to fell pleased at my cleverness. I thought I only need tell him what I wanted to, and that I could control the picture he had of me by hiding this and revealing that, all the while he thought he was so smart."(BJ 146). It is evident that Esther manages to decipher the simulacra of the male discourse although it apparently quite deceptive. Although the male doctor seems to help Esther, he is not interested in her situation. Esther crystallizes the picture with a sarcastic remark, "The whole time I was talking, Doctor Gordon bent his head as if he were praying, and the only noise apart from the dull, flat voice was the tap, tap, tap, of Doctor Gordon's pencil at the same point on the green blotter, like a stalled walking stick"(BJ 146). All of a sudden, Dr. Gordon asks her: "Where did you say you went to college?"(BJ 146). As Esther mentions,

> I thought he was going to tell me his diagnosis, and that perhaps I had judged him too hastily and too unkindly. But he only said, "I remember your college well. I was up there, during the war. They had a WAC station, I remember now. I was doctor for the lot, before I was sent overseas. My, they were a pretty bunch of girls.(BJ 147)

Of course, Esther is thrilled by Dr. Gordon's attitude towards a patient. However, one cannot ignore the fact that Esther is the one who achieves diagnosis of both of her culture and the dominant discourse of her generation, that's the reason why she does not completely share her story with him. Esther is consciousness enough to recognize that Dr. Gordon's sessions could turn into sessions of brainwashing. In relation with her fear, R.D. Laing declares that,

> Psychiatry could be, and some psychiatrists are, on the side of transcendence, of genuine freedom, and of true human growth. But psychiatry can so easily be a technique of brainwashing, of inducing behavior that is adjusted, by (preferably) non-injurious torture. In the best places, where straitjackets are abolished, doors are unlocked, leucotomies largely foregone, these can be replaced by more subtle lobotomies and tranquilizers that place the bars of Bedlam and the locked doors *inside* the patient. Thus, I would wish to emphasize that our 'normal' 'adjusted' state is too often the abdication of ecstasy, the betrayal of our true potentialities, that many of us are only too successful in acquiring a false self to adopt to false realities.("Divided" 12 Preface to the Penguin Edition)

Ironically, as a result Esther mentions "Doctor Gordon cost twenty-five dollars an hour"(BJ 147). One should ask, what is the result? Of course the result is the seeming success of the male discourse.[107] Therefore, she tells her story through a psychoanalytic reading of her situation, which in turn, reflects the story of her entire generation. In this part of Purgatory, Esther becomes much stronger to cope with the patriarchal simulacra. She says,

> I thought if I ever did get to Chicago, I might change my name to Elly Higginbottom for good. Then nobody would know I had thrown up a scholarship at a big eastern women's college and mucked up a month in New York and refused a perfectly solid medical student for a husband who would one day be member of the AMA and earn pots of money. In Chicago, people would take me for what I was. I would be simple Elly Higginbottom, the orphan. People love me for my sweet, quiet nature. They wouldn't be after me to read books and write long papers on the twins in James Joyce. And one

[107] Sylvia Plath also argues in her journal, "Whom can I talk to? Get advice from? No one. A psychiatrist is the God of our age. But cost money"(J 151).

> day I might just marry a virile, but tender, garage mechanic and have a big cowboy family, like Dodo Conway.(BJ 149)

After the scene in Dr.'s office, Esther directly passes on to this dialogue: "Hi there, what's your name?" "Elly Hiiginbottom." The sailor fell into step beside me, and I smiled … Where do you come from, Elly?" "Chicago." I had never been to Chicago, but I knew one or two boys who went to Chicago University, and it seemed the sort of place where unconventional, mixed-up people would come from."(BJ 147-8) However, thanks to Esther's poetic language, she achieves a destruction of the simulacra of the dominant ideology. At this point it is crucial to indicate that, not only in Dr. Gordon's office does Esther hide her real self in or order to survive, but also when she is in the outside world, in the male arena, she repeatedly defines herself as Elly, in order to protect her real self.

It is apparent that Esther trusts her reader much more than anyone, that's the reason why she implies that the space in which she tells her story is the one space where she can truly define herself. She just wants to be herself, she just needs a space in which she can be the orphan. As an orphan, she can be devoid of the dominant male discourse of the father, the culture, and the pressures of these values, which are forced upon her by the mother of the age, Mrs. Greenwood, and Sylvia's mother, Aurelia. This section of the novel also creates a new dimension for the reading of Sylvia Plath as she has always been accused of attacking her mother, like Esther. However, one should try to decipher the hidden motive behind this 'hatred of mother.' If, according to the literary critics, Sylvia and Esther are one and the same, they do not appreciate the fact that 'the mother' is the signifier of all the values that are lost from female freedom. Just like Aurelia Plath, Esther's mother signifies the values which are imposed by the male discourse. As a result, the hatred of the

mother, and the visualizing of the mother as an enemy, is a rebellion against the female attitude that obeys male ideology. That's the reason why Plath writes in her journal that the day her psychiatrist lets her hate her mother, Sivvy feels herself free.[108] Because, if the mother is the articulator of the values imposed on Sylvia and Esther, identifying the mother as the bell jar that can descend at any time, representative of the values of her generation that cause both Esther and Sylvia to feel suffocated. She confesses how she wants to be the orphan Elly in the episode in which she is talking with the sailor. After she gets out of Gordon's office recalls her experience with the sailor.[109] Esther decides to pretend that she was only asking directions of the sailor because Mrs. Willard will be waiting for her in the station. When the sailor puts his arm around Elly, he says

> "You mean you got no mom and dad, Elly?" "No." I let out a tear that seemed ready. It made a little hot track down my cheek. "Say, Elly, don't cry. This lady, was she mean to you?" "She was … she was *aw*ful!" The tears came in a rush, then, and while the sailor was holding me and patting them dry with a big, clean, white, linen handkerchief in the shelter of an American elm, I thought what an awful woman that lady in the brown suit had been, and how she, whether she knew it or not, was responsible for my taking the wrong turn here and the wrong path there and for everything bad that had happened after that.(BJ 151)

Esther accuses Mrs. Willard and her mother, who are the embodiment of the "mother" as a living organ of social castration, as imposed on women of the time. Hence, it is not a surprise that Esther associates the mothers in the story as the ones who is responsible for her trauma, because they always prefer to be silent.

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[108] In her journals, Sylvia Plath mentions that during her therapy, her psychiatrist told her that she achieved to be free as she confessed that she hated her mother. Apparently, the psychiatric treatment of Plath's time mainly focused on female existence as a danger against another one.

[109] The flashbacks are of course quite significant in the sense that she achieves to create a fragmented story. As the women of her generation has always been defined as half or fragmented selves, while the males are whole selves, and from this fragmented story she achieves to reflect a whole story of both women and men who are entrapped under the same bell jar. Hence Esther's story manages to reflect a whole picture. She uses flashbacks, puns, allusions, and pastiches not from different sources but from her own life in order to form a new strategy against patriarchy.

Apparently, Esther associates the metaphoric silence of her mother and Mrs. Willard with herself as a woman, because she mentions in purgatory, “The silence depressed me. It wasn’t the silence of silence. It was my own silence”(BJ 20). That does not mean that they are not speaking, not using language only that they utter the words which the male discourse imposes upon them. That’s the reason why Esther tries to purify her unconscious mind through declaring herself an orphan in a game to become an unknown person in her life a free agent. After her episode with the sailor, Esther again returns to Dr. Gordon’s office while he asks her how she feels that week while cradling his pencil “like a slim, silver bullet”(BJ 151). Evidently, the dangers of the dominant discourse appear once again as his pencil signifies a silver bullet that aims at killing Esther’s freedom of thought and idea and speech. In order to protect herself, Esther responds, “The Same…So I told him again, in the same dull, flat voice, only it was angrier this time, because he seemed so slow to understand, how I hadn’t slept for fourteen nights and how I couldn’t read or write or swallow very well”(BJ 151). Later Dr. Gordon wants to talk with Esther’s mother although Esther does not want it. Privacy is again invaded by the male discourse. Her mother, the collector of the dominant discourse, tells Esther that if she does not improve, she “should have some shock treatments at his private hospital in Walton”(BJ 152). Esther foreshadows the danger only a couple of sentences before. She states, “I watched my mother grow smaller and smaller until she disappeared into the door of Doctor Gordon’s office building. Then I watched her grow larger and larger as she came back to the car.”(BJ 152) As her mother becomes the swollen with the male discourse she grows larger and larger. Esther dramatically portrays this malady, this infection, which was the tragedy of most women in Cold War America,

> I hurried out into the hot, dusty, end-of-July afternoon, sweating and sandy-mouthed, as if late for a difficult interview, and boarded the red bus, whose motor was already tuning. I handed my fare to the driver, and silently, on gloved hinges, the door folded shut at my back"(BJ 156)

Esther's cultural journey up until that time transmutes into a psychological journey that will tell the story of the trauma of women, which is caused by the patriarchal order. And the more Esther tries to tell Dr. Gordon that she cannot express her creativity, the more Dr. declares her as mad. While her hands are covered by the gloves, her creativity repeatedly assaulted by the male discourse.

3.3. ASYLUM AS A NEW FROM OF SIMULACRA: THE BURDEN OF CARRYING THE LETTER "M"

In the earlier parts of *The Bell Jar*, Esther defines female entrapment in terms of the organic bond among fashion, women and consumerism. At this point of the story, Esther passes into another organic bond among women, madness, and consumerism in Cold War America. This time women are not viewed as objects that are forced both to consume and to be consumed, but as objects who must be intellectually entrapped in order to prevent the destruction of the dominant ideology. As a result of that, women are kept in asylums, and the sense of female captivity is intensified by Esther's depiction of the hospital's "yellow clapboard walls"(BJ 157) that reminds the reader of "The Yellow Wallpaper" of Charlotte Perkins Gilman whose creative capacity was also diminished and derided by nineteenth century American psychiatrists. By means of comparison, Esther portrays how twentieth century American women were labeled as mad and how they had to carry the burden of the letter "M" upon their bosoms just like Hester Prynne carried the letter "A" in

The Scarlet Letter. However, in spite of all the pessimism, the "soft red carpets" and "the sunlight"(BJ 157) of the asylum postulates a new dimension for the hospital, as a new form of simulacra for women in the sense that mixing the colors red and yellow results in orange which signifies energy and vitality foretelling of Esther's freedom and achievement at the end of Purgatory, before she passes paradise.

After Esther has entered into the asylum, she begins to interpret the hospital through informing her reader that "none of the people were moving"(BJ 158). Furthermore, she says,

> I focused more closely, trying to pry some clue from their stiff postures. I made out men and women, and boys and girls who must be as young as I, but there was a uniformity to their faces, as if they had lain for a long time on a shelf, out of the sunlight, under siftings of pale, fine dust. Then I saw that some people were indeed moving, but with such small, birdlike gestures I had not at first discerned them.(BJ 158)

Evidently the hospital for Esther represents a social and psychological space, a microcosm of the Cold War years, and the most significant element is hidden beneath Esther's enticing comment on the individuals in the hospital. If the bell jar exists, it is apparent that it does not exist only for women but also for men, as the hospital encompass both women and men. Therefore, Esther's story is not only the story of women but also of men. Furthermore, from Esther's statement it becomes apparent that uniformity has become one of the most clear-cut values of Esther's generation producing a generation of people who are pale as dust. Therefore, under the umbrella of the Cold War the individuals of both men and women is helplessly smothered because at Esther's hospital while "a gray-faced man was counting out a deck of cards…at the piano a young girl leafed through a few sheets of music…"(BJ 158). It can be assumed that the hospital is not a place that is designed to cure people but just another simulacra designed for the suppression of both women and men to.

R.D. Laing, the famous psychiatrist of the era mentions that it is a very easy act to label the individuals as mad, which turns into a normal thing.

> In the context of our present pervasive madness that we call normality, sanity, freedom, all our frames of reference are ambiguous and equivocal. A man who prefers to be dead rather than Red is normal. A man who has lost his soul is mad. A man who says that men are machines may be a great scientist. A man who says he *is* a machine is 'depersonalized' in psychiatric jargon. A man who says that Negroes are an inferior race may be widely respected. A man who says his whiteness is a form of cancer is certifiable.("Divided" 11 Preface to the Penguin Edition)

In relation, Esther comments on the hospital with the following words: "I felt as if I were sitting in the window of an enormous department store. The figures around me weren't people, but shop dummies, painted to resemble people and propped up in attitudes counterfeiting life"(BJ 159). It should be underlined that at the beginning of the story Esther depicts the shop dummies in New York and associates them with women who are the victims of consumption and materialism and who are forced to live in a simulacra. Esther again associates her social milieu with the material world, but this time in a private hospital, the signifier of Private Corporation in Cold War America, where intellectual people are labeled as 'mad.' In addition, in order to emphasize the fake atmosphere of hospital life, Esther uses the word 'counterfeiting' to highlight the fact that the hospital is a place that is designed by the dominant discourse. As an example of that, while at the center of the hospital as Esther is following Dr. Gordon somewhere in distance, she hears a woman shouting. Esther describes the episode: "As the woman dragged by, waving her arms and struggling in the grip of the nurse, she was saying, "I'm going to jump out of the window, I'm going to jump out of the window, I'm going to jump out of the window"(BJ 159). Thus, ironically, Esther comes across another woman who is trying to free herself from the suffocating environment of the hospital albeit by physical rather than

psychological means. Later she meets a nurse, and she tries to understand the nurse's vision. She cannot decide which eye is the real one and which is the false. Although Esther cannot help thinking about the woman who tries to free herself, the nurse makes the last point on the issue: "She thinks she's going to jump out of the window but she can't jump out of the window because they're all barred!"(BJ 160). The female entrapment portrayed and the asylum as a new form of simulacra are the signifiers of the final strategy of Cold War America in labeling creative minds as "Mad." This strategy is apparently the extension of the discourse of "the enemy within" which involved labeling any innocent person with views contravening the status quo as a Russian spy. In relation, the suffocating barred-windows that signify both McCarthyism and the strategy of suppressing female creativity have their extensions in the poems of Plath. In "Tulips," the narrator defines her tragic situation with the following statement,

> I am nobody; I have nothing to do with explosions.
> I have given my name and my day-clothes up to the nurses
> And my history to the anesthetist and my body to surgeons.
> They bring me sleep
> Now I have lost myself I am sick of baggage—
> My patent leather overnight case like a black pillbox.(A 18)

The narrator juxtaposes tulips, that signify spring, vitality, and nature, with the surgeons, nurses and silence, which highlight entrapment and an unnatural space, a simulacra. In her poem "Wintering," Plath also gives voice to the same dark windows that Esther's generation face. The narrator describes her situation while "Wintering in a dark without window"(A 89). Like the yellow walls of the asylum, the narrator describes "Chinese yellow on appalling objects"(A 89). However, despite the entrapment Esther, like in the voices in the poems, is conscious about the

simulacra that takes the form of an asylum this time. The voice in the poem "Cut" notes,

> O my
> Homunculus, I am ill.
> I have taken a pill to kill.(A 27)

Like the voice in the "Cut," Esther also takes her pills and acts as if she were part of the simulacra in order to kill both her false self and the simulacra she faces.

Although Esther is in control of herself, at first sight she does not want to believe the nurse, and she later describes the atmosphere,

> I saw that the doors in that part were indeed barred, and that the room door and the closet door and the drawers of the bureau and everything that opened and shut was fitted with a keyhole so it could be locked up. The wall-eyed nurse came back. She unclasped my watch and dropped it in her pocket. Then she started tweaking the hairpins from my hair.(BJ 160)

The entrapment of Esther is intensified by the neutralization of feminity. By taking her hairpins, one of the strongest symbols of Esther's feminity made absent. While she is being prepared for ECT, the nurse tells her: "Don't worry … Their first time everybody's scared to death"(BJ 160). The trauma of ECT is deeply felt by Esther. She says, "I tried to smile, but my skin had gone stiff, like parchment. Doctor Gordon was fitting two metal pates on either side of my head. He buckled them into place with a strap that dented my forehead, and gave me a wire to bite. I shut my eyes"(BJ 161). The traumatic experience of ECT is one of the strongest criticisms of Esther's generation, which is symbolized by the electrocution of the Rosenbergs.

After Esther shuts her eyes, "there was a brief of silence, like an indrawn breath"(BJ 161). She depicts her tragedy with the following words:

> …something bent down and took hold of me and shook me like the end of the world. Wheee-ee-ee-ee-ee, it shrilled, though an air crackling with blue light, and with each flash a great jolt drubbed me till I thought my bones would

> break and the sap fly out of me like a split plant. I wondered what terrible thing it was that I had done.(BJ 161)

It becomes apparent that one of the first aims of ECT[110] is to convince people that at sometime in their lives they must have done something so bad that they have had to face this tragic, painful, and unbearable consequence. However, the only bad thing, according to the dominant ideology of the time, is that Esther and her generation have dared to rebel against the artificial system which is imposed upon them by patriarchal order and the female figures, especially mothers, who strictly obey it. Once the reader has remembered the very first sentence of *The Bell Jar*:

> IT WAS A QUEER, sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs, and I didn't know what I was doing in New York….(BJ 1)

It now becomes evident why Esther associates her experience with the Rosenberg's throughout her story. The relationship lies in the fact that both Esther Greenwood and Ethel Rosenberg, whose maiden name was Greenwood, face the same tragedy. One labeled as mad, and the other as the spy, neither having being judged properly. In relation, Dr. Gordon's inability to diagnose Esther's writing problem runs parallel with the Rosenberg's being falsely judged of betraying their country. Both Esther and Ethel are accused without a deep analysis. It is patent that Esther begins her story with the Rosenberg's as they both face the same dilemma: being burned alive all along their nerves. It can be asserted that the claim that supports the idea that "*The Bell Jar* is a novel of descent into madness, uniquely female in viewpoint ... and circumstances"(Paterno 135) is not right, as it does not tell the story of Esther Greenwood as someone inherently mad, but how her culture

[110] Through her heroine Plath sharply criticizes her culture and the medical world both of which were the extensions of the dominant political discourse of the Cold War America. Although instead of ECT there were many different options for psychiatric problems, ECT was used as a tool to brainwash the minds of the intellectuals. In relation to these Plath's case was not exceptional, as poets such as, Robert Lowell and Ann Sexton also stayed at McLean, and faced similar treatments.

labels her as mad. Therefore, because Plath emphasizes "the priority of the political interpretation of literary texts"(Jameson, "Unconscious" 1) in *The Bell Jar*, she describes the political traumas of her generation that resulted in psychological traumas. As Merjorie Perloff argues,

> To label Esther as "schizophrenic" and leave it at that does not take us very far. For Sylvia Plath's focus in *The Bell Jar* is not on mental illness per se, but on the relationship of Esther's private psychosis to her larger social situation. Indeed, her dilemma seems to have a great deal to do with being a woman in a society whose guidelines for women she can neither accept nor reject"(511).

After ECT, the emblem of Esther's generation, which aims at causing a psychological trauma, Esther feels her watch replaced on her wrist, and it looks odd. In addition, the unfamiliar positioning of the hairpins makes Esther to feel that her natural life has already become an unnatural one that is controlled by not nature but by a simulacra. The asylum apparently turns into a Disneyland because As Baudrillard argues,

> …everywhere in Disneyland the objective profile of America, down to the morphology of individuals and of the crowd, is drawn. All its values are exalted by the miniature and the comic strip. Embalmed and pacified. Whence the possibility of an ideological analysis of Disneyland …: digest of the American way of life, panegyric of American values, idealized transposition of a contradictory reality. Certainly. But this masks something else and this "ideological" blanket functions as a cover for *a simulation of the third order*: Disneyland exists in order to hide that is the "real" country, all of "real" America that is Disneyland …Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality & ideology) but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real and thus of saving the reality principle.(12-13)

The asylum is just like a simulacra, like Disneyland, which forces Esther to believe that what is real is her madness not her creativity. When Dr. Gordon asks Esther how

she feels after ECT, she says that she feels good, but she feels absolutely terrible. At this crucial moment, Dr. Gordon again asks Esther the name of the college she attends, but this time he connects Esther's college with war. "Ah!" Doctor Gordon's face lighted with a slow, almost tropical smile. "They had a WAC station up there, didn't they, during the war?"(BJ 162) Dr. Gordon's association of Ester's college with the war is quite significant in the sense that while American culture tries to uplift the generation through education, it also tries to suffocate the same generation through regulations and ideologies that prevent democracy and freedom. One should remember that when Esther first visits Dr.'s office he immediately asks her the name of her college and that time he associates it with the young girls he remembers. The point is that female intellectuality is never associated with college as an intellectual aura, but with a place that is a pool full of fishes which are waiting to be hooked by males who are expected to be rich, and preferably studying in a medical profession both like Buddy Willard and Dr. Gordon. Hence it could be asserted that thousands of girls in the colleges are expected to find a male partner thanks to a college life that will have no use in a later married life. Hence, the reader faces with this absurdity, an education that is not a preparation for professional life but for motherhood and marriage. Therefore, it is not a surprise for the reader to read, "A few more shock treatments, Mrs. Greenwood," I heard Doctor Gordon say, "and I think you'll notice a wonderful improvement"(BJ 163).

Although Dr. Gordon does not do anything to diagnose Esther, he advises more shock treatments for material gain. The actual act of arbitrarily labeling people mad is self-fulfilling that which is designated as mad become the definition of madness. Even Esther's mother states that her baby is not like the awful dead people

at the hospital. In relation, Esther associates her mother's discourse with Jay Cee. At the hospital Esther remembers Jay Cee's question "*Doesn't your work interest you, Esther? You know, Esther, you've got the perfect set up of a true neurotic. You'll never get anywhere like that, you'll never get anywhere like that, you'll never get anywhere like that.*(BJ 164). Through labeling Esther neurotic, Jay Cee, like the symbol of the patriarchal order Dr. Gordon, defines her as the 'Other' because the word neurotic, like mad, is jut like another label that is put on the female body and psyche, as this is a form of strategy to keep women dependent on psychiatrists. As Simone de Beauvoir confirms,

> History has shown us that men have always kept in their hands all concrete powers; since the earliest days of the patriarchate they have thought best to keep woman in a state of dependence, their codes of law have been set up against her; and thus she has been definitely established as the Other. This arrangement suited the economic interests of the males; but it conformed also to their ontological and moral pretensions. Once the subject seeks to assert himself, the Other, who limits and denies him, is none the less a necessity to him : he attains himself only through that reality which he is not, which something other than himself only through that reality which he is not, which is something other than himself.(171)

Therefore, it is natural that, after echoing Jay Cee's comments, Esther remembers her creative writing professor at college who defines her story "Factitious." Later, Esther uses this word to define her situation at the hospital as "Factitious, artificial, sham"(BJ 164). After uttering these words, she again echoes the same sentence: "*You'll never get anywhere like that.* I hadn't slept for twenty-one nights."(BJ 165). It is evident that it is the soul of Esther that is contaminated by the dominant ideology of her generation. Hence, the enemy is not within, but outside, in the social world that threatens the psychological health of the individual. However, it is patent that the ideology that labels Esther as mad, as the Other, does not achieve a suppression of Esther because, through her play of language, Esther deciphers that as

> Appearing as the Other, woman appears at the same time as an abundance of being in contrast to that existence the nothingness of which man senses in himself; the Other, being regarded as the object in the eyes of the subject, is regarded as *en soi*; therefore as being. In woman is incarnated in positive form the lack that the existent carries in his heart, and it is in seeking to be made whole through her that man hopes to attain self-realization.(Beauvoir 173)

As she is not the one who this is *lack*, in order to free herself from the artificial world she lives in, she decides to take a bus to Boston. In relation, if anxiety is both the key word of Cold War America and Esther's asylum days, it is crucial to focus on R.D. Laing's definition of "three forms of anxiety encountered by the ontologically insecure person: engulfment, implosion, petrification"("Divided" 43).While focusing on the 'Engulfment,' he points out that,

> The main manoeuvre used to preserve identity under pressure from the dread of engulfment is isolation. Thus, instead of the polarities of separateness and relatedness based on individual autonomy, there is the antithesis between complete loss of being by absorption into the other person (engulfment), and complete aloneness (isolation). ("Divided" 44).

Apparently, as a strategy, Esther uses engulfment, which helps her to isolate herself from the asylum, through going to Boston. Evidently, she manages to protect her identity in this way. At this phase of her journey, Esther's trip to Boston is quite significant because she tries to return to the center of American nation where the first settlers came in the name of the essence of freedom and democracy. As a return to the aura of the founding fathers, it is not a coincidence that Esther comes across with her father. Esther meets a fat man in the ticket booth and he asks her where she is trying to go. She defines her feelings with the following words,

> I could feel the tears start to spurt from the screwed-up the screwed-up nozzles of my eyes. "It's my *fat*her." The fat man consulted a diagram on the wall of his booth. "Here's how do you do," he said, "you take a car from that track over there and get off at Orient Heights and then hop a bus with The Point on it." He beamed at me. "I'll run you straight to the prison gate."(BJ 167)

The appearance of the father like an angel is quite symbolic. He appears both as an angel who will illuminate a new path, a new way to Esther, and as a figure who also symbolizes the return to the values that were born by the founding fathers. In the same episode, in order to intensify the sense of departure from the values of the founding fathers, Esther depicts the prison, the asylum that she has to enter into, as having "red brick buildings"(BJ 168).[111] One of the workers at the hospital asks Esther: "How do you get into that prison?(BJ 168). He thinks that Esther might have stolen a car or robbed a store so that she can get into the hospital that promises "TV and plenty to eat"(BJ 169) in order to hypnotize the people who are kept in it. Hence, prison is the signifier of the hospital that acts as a simulacra offered to anaesthecise the creative organ. Plath's emphasis on television reminds the reader of Baurillard's comment on television. He claims that "…nothing resembles the control and telecommand headquarters of the nuclear power station more than TV studios …"(Baudrillard 53). Esther depicts the episode with the following remark,

> I waited, as if the sea could make my decision for me. A second wave collapsed over my feet, lipped with white froth, and the chill gripped my ankles with a mortal ache. My flesh winced, in cowardice, from such a death. I picked up my pocketbook and started back over the cold stones to where my shoes kept their vigil in the violet light.(BJ 172)

The emphasis upon the water is an allusion to the return to the mother, the womb, in order to refresh both the soul and the body. In relation to thst, Esther implicitly turns her face to the mother, the natural. In addition, the water signifies the unconscious mind, where Esther buils upon her strategy. Hence, it is not a surprise that Esther

[111] The color red is the illustrator of McCarthyism that is the dominant ideology of Esther's generation.

opens a chapter with this new this sentence, "OF COURSE HIS MOTHER KILLED HIM"(BJ 173).

The chapter begins with a description by Esther of Jody and Cal, little boys, Esther's mother and the cozy atmosphere that encapsulates the family. Esther portrays them as,

> After we ate, Jody and Mark ran down to the water hand-in-hand, and I lay back, staring into the sky, while Cal went on and on about this play. The only reason I remembered this play was because it had a mad person in it, and everything I had ever read about mad people stuck in my mind, while everything else flew out.(BJ 174)

Without a doubt, one of the most obvious discourses of the twentieth-century America is the concept of 'madness.' As a result of that Esther can only remember the play in relation to the idea of madness. This leads her to want to learn how the boy was killed by his mother. Although she remembers the story perfectly well, she wants Carl to retell the story. Carl says that the boy was killed by "morphia powders." Then, Esther asks:

> If you were going to kill yourself, how would you do it?" Cal seems pleased. "I've often thought of that. I'd blow my brains out with a gun." I was disappointed. It was just like a man to do it with a gun. A fat chance of laying my hands on a gun. And even if I did, I wouldn't have a clue as to what part of me to shoot at. I'd already read in the papers about people who'd tried to shoot themselves, only they ended up shooting an important nerve and getting paralyzed, or blasting their face off, but being saved, by surgeons and a sort of miracle, from dying outright. The risks of a gun seemed great.(BJ 176)

Evidently, Esther associates madness with death, or with urge that causes individuals to end their lives.[112] Like the babies in the jars, Esther's environment is walled in by

[112] It is interesting that like the head of a workshop, she opens the debate of different types of committing suicide that is one of the prominent topics of her generation. This episode has direct parallelism with both her journals and her poem 'Lady Lazarus.' Just like in her journals, she depicts one of her attempts to understand how it feels if she committed suicide. This chapter ends with Esther's depiction of the ocean, the sharks and whales teethes, and the waves. This episode reminds the reader of Sylvia Plath's suicide attempt, inspired by Virginia Woolf, in which she put stones in order to drawn.

the discourse of madness, especially in the case of individuals who try to purge themselves of that suffocating milieu. The significant point is that, when she meets with water, Esther echoes

> 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.(BJ 178)

Because the houses' ceilings are low she cannot actually kill herself. She calmly continues depicting her case with the following statement,

> After a discouraging time of walking about with the silk cord dangling from my neck like a yellow cat's tail and finding no place to fasten it, I sat on the edge of my mother's bed and tried pulling the cord tight. But each time I would get the cord so tight I could feel a rushing in my ears and a flush of blood in my face, my hands would weaken and let go, and I would be all right again … 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. Only my case was incurable. I had bought a few paperbacks on abnormal psychology at the drug store and compared my symptoms with the symptoms in the books, and sure enough, my symptoms tallied with the most hopeless cases.(BJ 179)

Ironically, Esther alludes to the popular psychology books of her age that generally label women as hopeless cases, as women like Esther are aware enough to resist being forced into a picture of reality that had no part in creating. In relation, after the hanging fiasco, Esther begins to think about what would happen if she returned to face the doctors. However, she immediately remembers Dr. Gordon and "his private shock machine"(BJ 179) she says, "Once I was locked up they could use that on me all the time"(BJ 179). She further comments,

> And I thought of how my mother and brother and friends would visit me, day after day, hoping I would be better. Then their visits would slacken off, and they would give up hope. They would grow old. They would forget me. They would be poor, too. They would want me to have the best of care at first, so they would sink all their money in a private hospital like Doctor Gordon's.

> Finally, when the money was used up, I would be moved to a state hospital, with hundreds of people like me, in a big cage in the basement. The more hopeless you were, the further away they hid you.(BJ 180)

Although the tragedy of Cold War America, that forces Esther to carry the letter "M" in her social life, seems to be only Esther's trauma, it is also the trauma of not only twentieth century but also of twenty first century America. Elizabeth Wurtzel in her national best-seller work *The Prozac Nation*[113] observes,

> There's nothing I want, nothing I can use. As far as I can tell, the sweatpants and pajama top I have had on since I got back from England will never be peeled off of my body again. I have to remember to leave a note telling them that this is what I want to wear in my coffin, this is my ten-feet-under attire. Because I'll have no occasion to change my outfit from this day forward: Bathing seems like an exercise in futility, like making my bed or brushing my teeth or combing my hair. Clean the slate, then let it get sullied once more. Wipe it down, and wait for more filth. This inevitable pattern of progress and regress, which is really what life is all about, is too absurd for me to continue. The moment in *The Bell Jar* when Esther Greenwood realizes after thirty days in the same black turtleneck that she never wants to wash her hair again, that the repeated necessity of the act is too much trouble, that she wants to do it once and be done with it, seems like the book's true epiphany. You know you've completely descended into madness when the matter of shampoo has ascended to philosophical heights. So far as I'm concerned, the last shower I took is the last shower I will ever take.(292)

Sylvia Plath also writes in her journals, "To get up, brush teeth, wash face, and begin again in the merciless daylight, all the rituals of dressing that our culture subscribes to"(J 50). It can be asserted that for Plath, rejecting washing her hair, is just a passive resistance to the social norms of her culture. That may be the reason why Esther rejects washing her hair as a reaction to Cold war ideology that portrayed women as shop dummies. As a final resort Esther remembers her mother's idea that the cure for thinking too much about yourself is helping somebody who is worse off than you are. Therefore, Teresa arranges for her to sign on as a volunteer at their local hospital.

[113] "Prozac" is the name of the anti-depresant that has been prescribed to most of the Americans in twenty-first century.

Esther's job at the hospital is "to put the right vases at the right beds in the right rooms"(BJ 182). However, while she is walking with her trolley full of flowers, she nitices that the flowers in the rooms of the mothers are dead. She says: "It would be discouraging for a woman who'd just had a baby to see somebody plunk down a big bouquet of dead flowers in front of her, so I steered the trolley to a washbasin in an alcove in the hall and began to pick out all the flowers that were dead.(BJ 182) She immediately decides to change the dead ones with the fresh ones. Plath's juxtaposition of the dead and the live flowers is quite significant in the sense that women are associated with flowers that are cut off from their roots and turned into ornaments that are exploited and whose intellectual and creative capacities are then thrown away, just like the flowers. In addition to the flowers, another juxtaposition is rebirth and death. While the female body is naturally associated with rebirth through giving birth, on the other hand, they lose their freedom as they are not women anymore, but mothers. The women at the hospital "…were all sitting up and knitting or rifling through magazines or putting their hair in pin curls and chattering like parrots in a parrot house"(BJ 183). After describing the life of the women at the hospital, Esther moves on another story and the first sentence is "Which way is the graveyard?"(BJ 184). It is clear that, Esther associates the flowers with the dead bodies of women who have become the slaves of women's magazines. The significance of this beginning lies in the fact that Esther associates the women of her generation with the dead flowers and the dead bodies in the graveyard. She apparently does not want to be one of them. Hence, at short intervals she thinks of killing herself. Then Esther combines her metaphoric death as a woman with her father's death. She shares her feelings about her father with the reader. Furthermore,

if the reader should associate Sylvia with Esther, it must be underlined that Sylvia shares her feelings about her father for the first time so intensely. The loss of her father that she strictly both embraces and rejects is shared for the first time with the reader. Hence, the strong emotional tone of her novel is far from a poet's casebook. In the same episode, Esther visits her father's graveyard for the first time. In *The Bell Jar* Esther brings to her fathers graveyard "azaleas"(BJ 188) just like Plath, who wrote her poem "Electra on Azalea's Path." She shares her feelings with the reader

> Then I remembered that I had never cried for my father's death. My mother hadn't cried either. She had just smiled and said what a merciful thing it was for him he had died, because if he had lived he would have been crippled and an invalid for life, and he couldn't have stood that, he would rather have died than had that happen. I laid my face to the smooth face of the marble and howled my loss into the cold salt rain.(BJ 188-189)

After she has visited her father's grave, she begins to tell the story of her second suicide attempt, the story which had already been written in the journals of Sylvia Plath. In the novel Esther describes her attempt with the following words,

> I ran upstairs and dragged a chair into my mother's closet. Then I climbed up and reached for the small green strongbox on the top shelf … Then I unlocked the strongbox and took out the bottle of new pills. There were more than I had hoped. There were at least fifty. If I had waited until my mother doled them out to me, night by night, it would have taken me fifty nights o save up enough. And in fifty nights, college would have opened, and my brother would have come back from Germany, and it would be too late. Then I went downstairs and into the kitchen. I turned on the tap and poured myself a tall glass of water. Then I took the glass of water and the bottle of pills and went down into the cellar.(BJ 190)

It is significant to remember that, at the beginning of the chapter, Esther's association with the water and the return to the mother are both related with death and rebirth. Parallel to the journals, *The Bell Jar* describes the same episode, "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"(BJ 191). Apparently, it is not a coincidence that the last line of the chapter ends with

“Then, at the rim of vision, it gathered itself, and in one sweeping tide, rushed me to sleep”(BJ 191). The sleep that Esther passes into is the deep sleep that Esther’s generation is forced to live in, and the deep darkness is the only thing that is provided by the dominant ideology. That’s the reason why chapter fourteen starts with “IT WAS COMPLETELY DARK. I felt the darkness, but nothing else …”(BJ 192) and Esther cries, “MOTHER!”(BJ 193). After Esther has shouted, she says that she cannot see, and later she mentions that “A cherry voice spoke out of the dark. “There are lots of blind people in the world. You’ll marry a nice blind man someday”(BJ 193). Then, Esther combines this voice with the depiction of Philomela Guinea’s “black Cadillac”(BJ 208). The black Cadillac, apparently, signifies power in the sense that the color black implies wealth, dominance and strength. In addition, as the Cadillac is an emblem of prosperity in America, Esther states that, “Philomela Guinea’s black Cadillac eased through the tight, five o’clock traffic like a ceremonial car”(BJ 208). Cadillac’s symbolism in American culture is reflected upon by Esther, as throughout the Cold War years, American culture tried to combat the Soviet Union’s self-promoting propaganda through by portraying itself as a culture that was both materially and spiritually rich. While the spiritual richness was meant to be fostered by strong family ties, the material richness was equivocated with having the most luxurious life not as a super power, but as the greatest super power. The luxurious life that Esther portrays through Philomela, is intensified by her depiction of Philomela’s car: “In front of me I could see the Spam-colored expanse of the chauffer’s neck, sandwiched between a blue cap and the shoulders of a blue jacket and, next to him, like a frail, exotic bird, the silver hair and emerald-feathered hat of Philomela Guinea, the famous novelist”(BJ 208). The color silver that signifies the

dominant ideology of Cold War America, foretells the power of the ideology that Esther has tried to combat. In addition, although Miss. Guinea seems to be as strong as she is materially rich, she is psychologically traumatized by her culture because as Esther shares with her reader, "All I knew was that she had interested herself in my case and that at one time, at the peak of her career, she had been in an asylum as well"(BJ 208). What is significant is the reality that Sylvia Plath recreates Olive Higgins Prouty in *The Bell Jar*, who helped her financially to organize her treatment at Mc.Lean , which was the hospital where Sylvia Plath spent some time recovering after her suicide attempt, like Elizabeth Wurtzel, Olive Higgins Prouty and many other famous intellectuals.

After reading Esther's suicide attempt in the newspapers, Mrs. Guinea sent a telegram to Esther's mother from the Bahamas. What is significant is that she immediately asks,

> "Is there a boy in the case?" If there was a boy in the case, Mrs. Guinea couldn't, of course, have anything to do with it. But my mother had telegrammed back, "No, it is Esther's writing. She thinks she will never write again" So Mrs. Guinea had flown back to Boston and taken me out of the cramped city hospital ward, and now she was driving me to a private hospital that had grounds and golf courses and gardens, like a country club, where she would pay for me, as if I had a scholarship, until the doctors she knew of there had made me well.(BJ 209).

Evidently, Mrs. Guinea would not have helped Esther, if she were male. Hence, for the first time a woman enriches the life of Esther. In addition, it must be underlined that, with the appearance of Mrs. Guinea it becomes evident that Esther will pass into a new phase that is Paradise, because Esther meets an individual who understands her intellectual trauma one that indeed can only be diagnosed by a woman intellectual like her. In addition, Mrs. Guinea does not diagnose Esther in the same way as Dr. Gordon, who champions classical psychological treatments that label

intellectuals mad. The most significant point is that, as an intellectual electrocuted by the dominant ideology, as Mrs. Greenwood writes to Olive Prouty, “Esther thinks she will never write again”(BJ 209) It is apparent that Esther symbolizes here the female intellectuals of her generation, who could not write due to the stifling environment they had to live with. The word ‘writing’ most probably acted as a spur for Mrs. Guinea to understand the creative trauma which Esther has had to combat. As a result, Mrs. Guinea takes Esther away from the city hospital, and takes her to a private hospital that has “golf courses and gardens, like a country club …”(BJ 209) However, Esther is quite sure that even this top quality private hospital will not help her. She clearly indicates that her problem is not so simple that it can be cured by a private hospital,

> I knew I should be grateful to Mrs. Guinea, only I couldn’t feel a thing. If Mrs. Guinea had given me a ticket to Europe, or a round-the-world cruise, it wouldn’t have made one scrap of difference to me, because wherever I sat—on the deck of a ship or at a street café in Paris or Bangkok—I would be sitting under the same glass bell jar, stewing in my own sour air.(BJ 209)

As Esther further comments, “I sank back in the gray, plush seat and closed my eyes. The air of the bell jar wadded round me and I couldn’t stir”(BJ 210). What must be highlighted is the fact that Esther begins to repeat the existence of ‘the bell jar’ again and again, although she is being taken to a private hospital that is completely different from the one she has been in recently. However, she feels the stale air of the bell jar much more than at any other time.

Why Esther feels herself suffocated more and more lays in the fact that Esther will find herself at the very center of the simulacra she has tried to escape. As a private hospital, the center of capitalism, embodies the very epitomy of the values that Esther wants to escape. It can be assumed that the illusionary atmosphere of the

hospital is the amalgamation of all the influence of Esther's generation. The asylum she is taken into is the same as the life that her generation faces. At first sight everything seems to be perfect, the golf areas, and the alluring social activities that are designed to be enjoyed by the patients, just like Disneyland. However, the main aim of the asylum is to benumb the patients more and more placing them under the same bell jar in order to make them believe that the outside world is unreal. However, outside and inside are almost the same and this fact negates the social space that the patients may create to cure themselves. As a result, through the negation of the creation of the social space, the creative capacity of the patients is destroyed.

In the final part of purgatory, at supper, while Esther sits at the table, she sees that many of the women at Belsize, her new hospital, are fashionably dressed and most of them are married, and most of the time they are laughing and gossiping with each other. The final criticism of purgatory also signals Esther's achievement of reaching paradise. Esther says, when she enters into the hospital, "a slim young woman had come and introduced herself. "My name is Doctor Nolan. I am to be Esther's doctor."(BJ 210). The female psychiatrist not only signifies Esther's achievement of destroying the patriarchal world but also her achievement of reaching paradise.

PART IV

PARADISE: ESTHER'S DIAGNOSIS FOR THE AMERICAN CULTURE

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked,
dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix....

Allen Ginsberg, "Howl."

4.1. WIPING OUT THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SCAR

Esther's story, which starts with Hell, where she reflects the historical traumas of her generation through mirroring the Rosenberg Trial continues with purgatory, where she again chooses the Rosenberg's case as a starting point to reflect upon the social and psychological traumas of Cold War America.[114] However, at the end of her story, when she reaches paradise, this time the Rosenberg case turns into a mirror that reflects the story of Esther as a special case. Therefore, it can be assumed that starting from an exemplary case, the story ends with a special case highlighting the results of the historical, social, and psychological traumas that left psychological scars on Esther, as an emblem of the female body of her generation. Interestingly, parallel to Cold War America, Esther's paradise, which encompasses both trauma and achievement, is a unique landscape, a "Paradise which is at the same time eerily frightening, an unalterably spot-lit vision of death"(Kroll 81).[115] In Paradise, Esther

[114] In her journals Plath writes that she thinks about giving the name "The Girl in the Mirror" to her novel which would be *The Bell Jar*. She notes, "All for the novel. Beginning Monday: try for 7 or 8 pages a day. "The Girl in the Mirror"(J 290).

[115] Judith Kroll in her successful work mentions how Plath was inspired by George de Chirico's painting "The Disquieting Muses" that reflects the concept of a paradise in Plath's works. See *Chapters in Mythology: The Poetry of Sylvia Plath*.

objectively reflects the ending of her story that naturally both encompasses fear and happiness in Cold War America. In the final part of her journey, Esther is in "the real" which is the foreshadowing of not the divided self but the complete self. As a result, in paradise, thanks to Esther's powerful discourse, *The Bell Jar* comes to full circle to where she strictly responds to all the impositions of Purgatory and Hell.

In Paradise, Esther passes into the "the Real" after her psychic journey in "the mirror" and "the symbolic stage." According to Lacanian reading, "the real" resists representation that can be interpreted as pre-mirror, pre-imaginary and pre-symbolic. As "the real" is a concept that loses its reality once it has been symbolized through language, Esther's final part of her journey is depicted not through language but through reflecting on Esther's experience, form a personal perspective. According to Lacanian reading as "the real" does not include absence, it is not surprising that the story comes full circle. As 'the real' resists symbolization, Esther will apparently achieve freeing herself from all the symbolizations of Cold War Ideology imposed on her, such as being a mother, a wife, and a housewife.

Esther enters paradise after remembering Jay Cee's sentence, "*You'll never get anywhere like that*. I hadn't slept for twenty-one nights" (BJ 165). That morning she makes a start. She defines her fresh beginning with the following words, "That morning I made a start. I had locked myself in the bathroom, and run a tub full of warm water …"(BJ 165). In order to purify herself from the artificial dirt of the bell jar, she takes hot baths as she did before. She believes that removing the dirt from the skin and the soul can help her to destroy the enemy within, the false self, which she has tried to destroy. However, she later understands that the artificial thing that bedaubs her body and soul is something different that is related with the outer world.

Therefore, alluding to the psychological trauma of her generation, she says, "It was as if what I wanted to kill wasn't in that skin or the thin blue pulse that jumped under my thumb, but somewhere else, deeper, more secret, and a whole lot harder to get at"(BJ 165). As a result of that, Esther begins to shout as she thinks that she is blind. Later the doctor ends her worries, he says: "You're a very lucky girl. Your sight is perfectly intact"(BJ 194).[116] Although she thinks that the false self of the American simulacra has destroyed her vision, her true self achieves an awakening. As Judith Kroll observes,

> The location of devils to be cast out is sometimes a place, but usually it is a person who is possessed. In Plath's mythology the heroine is not possessed by her father in this sense, but by the false self who is in his thrall. That is why the true self is released (as in "Purdah" and "Lady Lazarus") when the oppressor is made hateful, and thereby overthrown.(125).

In relation, at the hospital, in order to face the consequences of the suicide attempt, she wants to see a mirror. What is significant is the fact that Esther wants to face the scar, the false-self, which is made by the dominant ideology of her generation. Esther's insistence on seeing a mirror is like opening up an old wound. The scar, which is made upon her soul, is so deep that she wants to see a mirror both for self-criticism and for the criticism of her culture. However, through the mirror she wants to see, Esther reflects the entire picture of a generation. The point that Esther tries to highlight is the fact that the face she sees encapsulates both a man and a woman. Hence, the problematic situation of Esther defines not only the story of women, but also the story of men. She defines the picture she sees with the following words,

[116] Plath's using an episode from her life is quite significant. It would not be misleading to claim that her story does not only belong to her but also to her generation. Many intellectuals, both male and female, young individuals, married women, professionals and various other people tried to commit suicide in Cold War America. Although some of the episodes of *The Bell Jar* seem to be semi autobiographic, Esther's story is the story of her generation.

> At first I didn't see what the trouble was. It wasn't mirror at all, but a picture. You couldn't tell whether the person in the picture was a man or a woman, because their hair was shaved off and sprouted in bristly chicken-feather tufts all over their head. One side of the person's face was purple, and bulged out in a shapeless way, shading to green along the edges, and then to a sallow yellow. 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.(BJ 197)

After Esther has faced the picture of her generation through the mirror, she smiles at the mirror and "the mouth in the mirror cracked into a grin"(BJ 197). What is interesting is the point that, although the picture that Esther sees is depressing she smiles at it. After that, the mirror tumbles to pieces which is an allusion to the divided selves in twentieth-century America which Esther so perfectly destroys. In order to highlight the entrapped women, Esther tells the reader that while sitting at her room, her roommate asks Esther the reason for her staying at the hospital. Once she has said that she tried to kill herself, the woman immediately "snatches up a movie magazine from her bed table and pretended to be reading"(BJ 199). Here Plath implicitly underlines the women of her generation, who tried to close their eyes to the realities of their culture both psychologically and socially. That's the reason why the woman pretends as if she were reading a movie magazine. The movie magazine is quite symbolic in the sense that the women in Esther's generation are forced to live in a simulacra that is propelled and promoted by Hollywood as the extension of the dominant ideology. That is the reason why at the hospital, Esther hates people who ask her how she is over and over because she finds it absurd to ask this question, as she knows that they know she feels like "hell and expect to say "Fine"(BJ 200).[117]

[117] Parallel with Esther's comments on "Cold War Hollywood" Jean Baudrillard responds to the cinema of Cold War years with the following remark, "Today, it is history itself that invades the cinema according to the same scenario—the historical stake chased from our lives by this sort of immense neutralization, which is dubbed peaceful coexistence on a global level, and pacified monotony on the quotidian level—this history exorcised by a slowly or brutally congealing society

Although Esther's main problem is the fact that she cannot read, and as a result cannot eat or sleep, she grows more and more depressed. The hospital cannot cure her, instead it intensifies the crisis she faces. The dialogue between her mother and Esther clearly depicts her situation,

> Oh, Esther, I wish you would cooperate. They say you don't cooperate. They say you won't talk to any of the doctors or make anything in Occupational Therapy …." "I've got to get out of there," I told her meaningly. "Then I'd be all right. You got me in here," I said. "You get me out."(BJ 203)

As a result of the suffocating environment of the asylum, Esther always repeats that she is starving. Although the doctors, nurses and the patients can understand her physical starvation, no one can understand her emotional starvation is the result of the destruction of the social and psychological space that enable the freedom to create and to choose in Cold War America. That's the reason why Esther wants to say to one of the patients,

> I wanted to tell her that if only something were wrong with my body it would be fine, I would rather have anything wrong with my body than something wrong with my head, but the idea seemed so involved and wearisome that I didn't say anything. I only burrowed down further in the bed. (BJ 206)

In a 1958 story, *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*, the limited social and psychological space of Cold War America is also reflected by Sylvia Plath. The narrator of the story states, "Every day from nine to five I sit at my desk facing the door of the office and type up other people's dreams"(JP 156). In this story Plath postulates a new landscape as a reaction to the Cold War ideology; the landscape of dreams, that can be shaped but not reached, as she does in *The Bell Jar*. In addition, the dreams are not only a form of escape, but also the very center of the dominant ideology where the unconscious mind operates. In relation, "Lacan subsequently

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celebrates its resurrection in force on the screen, according to the same process that used to make lost myths live again"(Baudrillard 43).

stipulated that the unconscious is a body of knowledge which expresses itself in various formations (dreams, slips, symptoms) without this knowledge being operated by a conscious regulator"(Nobus 61).

In order to highlight the power of the unconscious mind, the female narrator is working at a clinic where she types up the daytime complaints of the patients, in addition also to their dreams. As a result, Plath's focus on the unconscious mind as an alternative landscape, a social space, is refocused on dreams in Jo*hnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*. As a collector of dreams, she metaphorically collects the realities and anxieties of her culture. As Freud claims in *The Interpretation of Dreams*,

> The unconscious is the true psychic reality; *in its inner nature it is just as much unknown to us as the reality of the external world, and it is just as imperfectly communicated to us by the data of consciousness as is the external world by the reports of our sense organs*.(445)

That's the reason why the narrator associates herself with all the patients whose dreams she collects. She confesses, "There isn't a dream I've typed up in our record books that I don't know by heart. There isn't a dream I haven't copied out at home into Johnny Panic's Bible of dreams. This my calling"(JP 157). It can be assumed that the narrator deeply experiences the dreams she is copying, as she is experiencing similar traumas just as described in the patient's dreams that she records. The point is that, as a female, the narrator's work simply is to record the patient's dreams, just like Jay Cee who can only edit the articles of her magazine. Apparently, the female intellectual capacity is again castrated. However, the narrator achieves an empathy

with the dreams she records.[118] In relation to that, the narrator criticizes the traumas of Cold War America that are reflected through dreams. The narrator asserts that "A lot of people these days dream they're being run over or eaten by machines. They're the cagy ones who won't go on the subway or the elevators"(JP 157). This common dream is natural as the unconscious mind realizes an awareness of the machine-like Americans created and controlled by the Cold War America. In relation, the narrator also has a dream of her own, in this dream she sees "a lake stretching away in every direction, too big for me to see the shores of it, looking down from the glass belly of some helicopter"(JP 158). The lake is just like the fig tree in *The Bell Jar*, which has many branches, but fades in the end. Like the end of the story of the fig tree, at the bottom of the lake, the narrator sees "real dragons" that lead her to pessimism. She later associated this lake with the "people's minds run at night"(JP 158). Later she sees "the surface of the lake warming with snakes, dead bodies puffed as blowfish, human embryos bobbing around in laboratory bottles like so many unfinished messages from the great I AM"(JP 159).[119] Apparently, the ideology of the Cold War affects the individuals so strongly that the unconscious mind naturally reveals fear and danger in dreams. On the other hand, the dreams have also positive connotations for the individuals. It can be assumed that the dreams offer a metaphysical landscape for the individuals for whom the real world has already lost its reality. Also

> For Sylvia Plath, the typical "metaphysical" landscape provided a visual setting for the fixed, super-real, ominous, inaccessible drama of the osyche. The mannequins—especially the "disquieting muses"—became the presiding

[118] Plath in her journals comments, "I must be imaginative and create plots, knit motives, probe dialogue – rather than merely trying to record descriptions and sensations. The latter is pointless, without purpose, unless it is later to be synthesized into a story. The latter is also a rather pronounced symptom of an oversensitive and unproductive ego"(J 77).

[119] The narrator's emphasis on "I AM" can be found in most of the works of Plath, including her journals, poems, short stories and *The Bell Jar*, whose ending is based on the conformation of identity and self through repeating the phrase "I AM."

> spirits of the drama. Onto such a stage she could easily project her autobiographical and psychological concerns.(Kroll 25)

In relation, Plath in her story creates a metaphysical landscape where she records the psychological concerns of her generation by using her autobiographic inheritance. As each dream is unique, through her narrator, Plath resists the discourse of the Cold war through rejecting her subsumption into the structure postulated by it. That is the reason why the narrator comments,

> This is my dream. You won't find it written up in any casebook … In our clinic, treatment doesn't get prescribed. It is invisible. It goes right on in those little cubicles, each with its desk, its two chairs, its window and its door with the opaque glass rectangle set in the wood. There is a certain spiritual purity about this kind of doctoring.(JP 159)

The narrator compares that kind of doctoring with the others and once Esthers episode of ECT Esther has been remembered, the violence reappears in this story.[120] In order to highlight the atmosphere of fear and entrapment, the narrator reads the title of the book where she collects dreams, "…Johnny Panic's Bible of Dreams, Third Book of Fear, Chapter Nine on Dirt, Disease and General Decay"(JP 165). At the end of the story, the narrator summarizes the air of fear in America. She responds to the Cold War with a poem,

> The only thing to love is Fear itself.
> Love of Fear is the beginning of wisdom.
> The only thing to love is Fear itself
> May Fear and Fear and Fear be everywhere. (JP 171)

Apparently, just like Esther's unconscious thoughts, the narrator in *Johnny Panic* achieves a decipherment of the Cold War ideology that is based upon fear. Therefore, it can be argued that, both Esther and the narrator in *Johnny Panic* manages to create a social, psychological space in order to protect themselves.

[120] While in *The Bell Jar* Esther sees "neon lights," in *Johnny Panic* the narrator faces "artificial lighting" (JP 162) that signify the "Divine Light" which is attacked by the Cold War ideologies.

4.1.2. Rebellion against Entrapment

> **Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The trouble-makers. The round heads in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. They're not fond of rules, and they have no respect for the status-quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify, or vilify them. But the only thing you can't do is ignore them. Because they change things. They push the human race forward. And while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do.**
>
> **Jack Kerouac, *On the Road***

In the final stages of her journey, in paradise, when Esther enters into the hospital, she meets “a slim young woman [who] had come introduced herself. “My name is Doctor Nolan. I am to be Esther’s doctor.””(BJ 210). Once Esther has seen Dr. Nolan, she is surprised as she does not know that there are women psychiatrists. Furthermore, while she is walking around the hospital, nobody stops her. It is evident that Esther’s new Virgil is Dr. Nolan, who will help her to recognize the different forms of reality of her generation. Later, she reaches the dining room, where “a maid in a green uniform was setting the tables for supper”(BJ 211). Esther compares the “paper cups” she was using at the city hospital with the “real glasses”(BJ 211) at her

new asylum. In her new asylum, Esther meets her other Virgil, Valerie. Esther describes her with the following words,

> I sat down near Valerie and observed her carefully. Yes, I thought, she might just as well be in a Girl Scout camp. She was reading her tatty copy of *Vogue* with intense interest. "What the hell is she doing?" I wondered. "There's nothing matter with her."(BJ 213).

Although the reader may think that once she reaches paradise she also gains the power to reach freedom this would be overly optimistic. While she is in paradise, Esther gains only a greater strength to face the traumas of her generation. The using of the popular magazine *Vogue* is quite symbolic as it reflects the popular female figure of the age. The magazine that Valerie reads focuses on a female figure that is only interested in fashion, shopping and enjoyment, unlike the figure that Esther symbolizes. Apparently, the magazine clearly reflects the dominant ideology that tries to benumb and detain women through fashion, cinema, and television. That's the reason why Esther cannot understand Valerie's existence at the hospital because her reading of "*Vogue*" indicates that she admits the power of the dominant ideology. Hence, the outer world cannot be dangerous for her as she will probably never try to kill herself due to the bell jar created by the same ideology, as she is the extension of the dominant ideology itself.[121] On the other hand, Esther is the one who always tries to kill herself as she is conscious enough to rebel against the ideology trying to be imposed upon her. In relation, after Esther's depiction of Valerie, she directly passes to Dr. Nolan's question: "Tell me about Doctor Gordon," Doctor Nolan said suddenly. "Did you like him?" I gave Doctor Nolan a wary look … "No," I said. "I didn't like him at all.""(BJ 213). Esther tells her about Doctor Gordon's machine that

[121] Plath also mentions in her journal that "The twentieth century is an age of popular fallacies, of scientism and symbolism … so I pause before the door and I know that of all the houses turning after

was strong enough to make her sick. Doctor Nolan states it "was a mistake"(BJ 213). Esther senses that she will probably face the same treatment again, she says to Doctor Nolan: "If anyone does that to me again I'll kill myself"(BJ 214). This time, unlike Doctor Gordon's therapy that advised ECT to dampen Esther's creative mind, Doctor Nolan advises insulin therapy, that is a metaphoric inflator of women. The fatter Esther gets the more she is bloated by the dominant ideology. It is interesting that in order to reflect the entrapment of women in the Cold War years, Plath uses Valerie. While Valerie meets Esther, as she is taking insulin treatment at the hospital, Esther tells her that nothing happens after the insulin treatment. However, Valerie says: "Oh, it will. I've had it"(BJ 216). As an embodiment of a female figure which is swollen by the dominant ideology, Valerie acts as a mirror to reflect the bell jar that the women have to live under. As a result of the effects of the bell jar, just as with insulin treatment, Esther grows fatter and fatter. Esther says, "Mrs. Guinea hadn't seen me like this, because I looked just as if I were going to have a baby"(BJ 217). The artificial outlook of Esther becomes the symbol of the women of her generation, the women who have to live with the scar marked on their souls by the male discourse.[122] Like Esther who has scars due to her therapy, Valerie displays to Esther her "pale marks on either side of her forehead …"(BJ 217). These scars are the results of "lobotomy"(BJ 214). When Esther asks her how she feels, she answers, "Fine. I'm not angry any more. Before, I was always angry. I was in Wymark, before, and now I'm in Caplan. I can go to town now, or shopping or to a movie, along with a nurse"(BJ 217). Apparently, Valerie can go outside of the asylum with a

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me as I passed, this house is the one crowded with the ghosts of boys and all varieties of kisses … and I am surrounded by the friendly fingered familiar places …"(J 56).

[122] In a letter to Aurelia, Olive Prouty writes "… I am very hopeful there will be no disfiguring scars left on either [Sylvia's] her body or soul"(LH 127). Obviously, she highlighted the traumas of ECT.

female, a nurse, who always reminds her of the borders of her life. Hence, the asylum proves that the outside world is as unreal as the inside, as both indicate the space of the dominant ideology. As a result it can be assumed that the bell jar that Esther tries to escape is the asylum itself, the same one which her family members deeply believe will cure her.

However, Esther manages to turn the disadvantages of the asylum to her advantage. She is informed that a friend of her is at the same asylum. Esther is surprised by the fact that Joan checks into the asylum after she has read of Esther's suicide attempt in the newspapers.[123] Esther thinks that Joan must be crazy. However, her story is the story of Esther that encapsulates the story of their generation. Although most of the critics have underlined the fact that Joan is the twin of Esther who kills herself at the end, due to her abnormal feelings toward Esther, the story of Joan actually refers to something completely different.[124] First, Joan's therapy strictly highlights the problematic of 'privacy' in the Cold War America. Second, Joan's portrayal in the novel helps Esther to reach a certain form of consciousness about the lack of humanity, and in relation, the lack of empathy in her culture. Joan first focuses on her treatment with the following remark,

> Oh, it was one of those cold, wet days, and I thought, my first psychiatrist—you know. Anyway, this psychiatrist kept eyeing that fur coat the whole time I talked to him, and I could just see what he thought of my asking to pay the student's cut rate instead of the full fee. I could see the dollar signs in his eyes.. Well, I told him I don't know whatall—about the bunions and the telephone in the drawer and how I wanted to kill myself—and then he asked me to wait outside while he discussed my case with the others, and when he called me back in, you know what he said? …Miss Gilling, we have decided that you would benefit by group therapy …That's what he said.

[123]The names "Joan" and "Elaine" are mentioned in Plath's journals, for further reading see Journals 78-79.

[124] Esther mentions that, through Joan, she sees the black image of herself, and underlines the fact that in every crisis of her life, Joan reminds her what she has been before. Hence, through Joan, Esther faces her old artificial selves. In relation, Joan signifies the double of Esther Greenwood.

> Can you imagine me wanting to kill myself, and coming round to chat about it with a whole pack of strangers, and most of them no better than myself….(BJ 223)

Evidently, the problematic of privacy in Cold war America is highlighted by Joan, which is interpreted by Esther as "crazy" and "not even human"(BJ 223). Joan emphasizes the fact that "…how a man like that had no business setting himself up to help sick people…."(BJ 223). The problematic of privacy in the Cold war years is also emphasized by Elaine Tyler May. She gives an example from a young married couple, who experienced the trauma of lack of privacy,

> IN SUMMER OF 1959, a young couple married and spent their honeymoon in a bomb shelter. *Life* magazine featured the "shelter honeymoon" with a photograph of the duo smiling on their lawn, surrounded by dozens of canned goods and supplies. Another photograph showed them descending twelve feet underground into the 22-ton steel and concrete 8-by-11-foot shelter where they would spend the next two weeks. The article quipped that "fallout can be fun," and described the newlyweds' adventure—with obvious erotic undertones—as fourteen days of "unbroken togetherness." As the couple embarked on family life, all they had to enhance their honey honeymoon were some consumer goods, their sexuality, and privacy. This is a powerful image of the nuclear family in the nuclear age: isolated, sexually charged, cushioned by abundance, and protected against impending doom by the wonders of modern technology.(ix)

Like May, Plath successfully portrays the trauma of Esther's generation who were entrapped by Cold War ideology. In relation with that, Esther notes,

> Joan rummaged in her open suitcase and came up with a fistful of clippings … The first clipping showed, a big, blown-up picture of a girl with black-shadowed eyes and black lips spread in a grin. I couldn't imagine where such a tarty picture had been taken until I noticed the Bloomingdale earrings and the Bloomingdale necklace glinting out of it with bright, white highlights, like imitation stars. (BJ 223)

Sylvia Plath's strong symbolism used to reflect the internal drama of Esther's generation is quite enticing. Esther associates her life with Bloomingdale's items which look like imitation stars. Bloomingdale's, the center of shopping and fashion, alludes to the life women who are surrounded by illusions. As a result the seemingly

brilliant life of women is just like the imitation stars Esther has. It is not a coincidence that Esther writes the sharpest sections of her suicide attempt with capital letters. In addition, she divides the sentences into different parts of the paragraphs. She first writes: "SCHOLORSHIP GIRL MISSING. MOTHER WORRIED"(BJ 223). Esther first juxtaposes her brilliant academic career at Smith and her suicide attempt as a result of that suffocating life. Later she writes: "SLEEPING PILLS FEARED MISSING WITH GIRL"(BJ 224). This time, she juxtaposes the attempt to benumb her as a female and how she imitates the same experience with the sleeping pills, as the reason of her taking one prescribed sleeping pill each night indicates how the dominant ideology advocates her numbing.. Finally Esther writes: "GIRL FOUND ALIVE"(BJ 224). Finally, she juxtaposes her dead life with the one declared as alive. The point is altough the system declares her alive, she has already lost her soul. Here, the biologic functions of the body do not indicate that the soul has survived too.

It can be assumed that, in *The Bell Jar*, Plath uses "suicide" as an act of rebellion against the depression of the social world, which was one of the most prominent subjects of Cold War America. Not only *The Bell Jar* but also other various works of the Cold War generation strictly focus on suicide as a form of passive resistance against the dominant ideology that created from the depression underlying by the psychological traumas of an entire generation.[125] In relation to that, Plath also portrays suicide as an act of resistance that calls for freedom in her 1956 short story "The Wishing Box."

[125] Elizabeth Wurtzel defines *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Bell Jar* as "the great classics of depression literature"(360).

In “The Wishing Box,” Plath’s new character Agnes Higgins reminds the reader of “Elly Higginbottom” in *The Bell Jar*. Just like in *The Bell Jar*,

> She [Plath] realizes that suicide cannot image or embody a female aesthetic, because it is, literally, a dead end. Therefore, through Esther’s largely intuitive, spontaneous retreats lead to self-destruction, Plath’s process of textual retreat, in the college/Jay Cee/*Ladie’s Day* sequence and in the novel as a whole, represents a feminist discourse charterized not only by retreat but also by recovery.(Budick 877)

In relation to that, in “The Wishing Box,” Plath follows a similar discourse that portrays suicide as an act intended to purify the true self from the false one, and promotes this act as a necessary to be reborn purely. This organic bond is also evident in her poems, as Judith Kroll endorses,

> Such poems in which Plath’s protagonist confronts death, or contemplates dying or suicide, are essentially envisioned rituals whose ultimate motive is to kill the false self along with the spoiled history and to allow the true self to be reborn—that is, simply to be disclosed…(Kroll 171)

Parallel to Esther and the voices in the poems in this story the protagonist, Agnes, is married and finds herself “perpetually exiled”(JP 214) as she cannot dream, but has to live under the shadows of her husbands’ dreams. For instance, at first, her husband sees William Blake in his dream, which signifies the ability to enter the intellectual world. This causes Elly to be jealous of her husband, a jealousy “which had been growing on her like some dark, malignant cancer”(JP 213). While Agnes’s husband meets positive things in his dreams, in her dreams Agnes sees

> dark, glowering landscapes peopled with ominous unrecognizable figures. She never could remember these nightmares in detail, but lost their shapes even as she struggled to awaken, retaining only the keen sense of their stifling, storm-charged atmosphere which, oppressive, would haunt her throughout the following day.(JP 124)

Agnes’s dreams are similar to Esther’s dreams and the ones of the narrator in *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams* whose dreams are all the reflectors of the entrapment they feel. Therefore in her short stories, in addition to the poems, “In *The Bell Jar* as

well, Plath shapes her heroine Esther Greenwood's fate in Freudian terms and retrospectively may be explaining the unconscious motivation for her own suicide attempt in 1953"(Bundtzen, "Incarnations" 41).

Apparently, the female body is limited by nightmares, which are the results of the unconscious mind. As a result, Agnes

> dreamed of a wishing-box land above the clouds where wishing boxes grew on trees, looking very much like coffee grinders; you picked a box, turned the handle around nine times while whispering your wish in this little hole in the side, and the wish came true. Another time, she had dreamed of finding three magic grass blades growing by the mailbox at the end of her street: the grass blades shone like tinsel Christmas ribbon, one red, one blue, and one silver. In yet another dream, she and her young brother Michael stood in front of Dody Nelson's white-shingled house snowsuits; knotty maple tree rots snaked across the hard, brown ground; she was wearing red-and-white-stripped wool mittens; and, all at once, as she held out one cupped hand, it began to snow turquoise-blue sulfa gum. But that was just about the extent of the dreams Agnes remembered from her infinitely more creative childhood days. At what age had those benevolent painted dream worlds ousted her? And for what cause?(JP 215).

Later Agnes tells to her husband about her childhood dreams,

> when I was little, I had a dream about Superman, all in Technicolor. He was dressed in blue, with a red cape and black hair, handsome as a prince, and I went flying right along with him through the air—I could feel the wind whistling, and the tears blowing out of my eyes. We flew over Alabama; I could tell it was Alabama because the land looked like a map, with 'Alabama' lettered in script across these big green mountains"(JP 216)

Harold is surprised by Agnes's past ability to dream. In fact his life is so preoccupied with his dreams to the point where Agnes becomes an invisible being in his life. The more tragic fact is, unfortunately, Agnes cannot dream anymore, as even dreams belong to the patriarchy. Revealingly, while Agnes sees her dreams playing in the back of her head, Harold sees them on the front of his eyelids "like on a movie screen"(JP 217). After discovering this, Agnes begins to compulsively buy newspapers, women's magazines, the Sears Roebuck catalog and "anything to keep

from facing the gaping void in her own head of which Harold had made her so painfully conscious. But as soon as she lifted her eyes from the printed matter at hand, it was as if a protecting world had been extinguished"(JP 218).

It is apparent that, like Esther Greenwood, Agnes is becoming entrapped in the patriarchal world. As Agnes cannot sleep, in fact cannot dream, she goes to her family physician who immediately prescribes sleeping pills to Agnes. After he has diagnosed Agnes he says, "Just a bit of nervous strain, that's all. Take one of these capsules at night for a while and see how you sleep"(JP 219). Agnes does not ask the doctor whether the pills she is prescribed can give her dreams; but simply put the box of fifty pills in her bag and returns home.[126] After Harold has arrived home he finds Agnes lying on a sofa. Unlike the other days, the narrator's voice indicates that Agnes reaches a certain kind of beauty and tranquility. She is wearing her

> favorite princess-style emerald taffeta evening gown, pale and lovely as a blown lily, eyes shut, an empty pillbox and an overturned water tumbler on the rug at her side. Her tranquil features were set in a slight, secret smile of triumph, as if, in some far country unattainable to mortal men, she were, at last, waltzing with the dark, red-caped prince of her early dreams.(JP 220)

Apparently, through wearing her princess-style gown Agnes a return to purity from impurity, like a new born baby. Although the act seems to be an attempt to kill the self, it is an act of purification that does not signify death but rebirth. Therefore Agnes's death illustrates a "symbolic death and psychic rebirth"(Kroll 105), just like Esther's suicide attempts

[126] Focusing on the parallelism with "The Wishing Box" and *The Bell Jar* Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar comments that "Esther Greenwood in *The Bell Jar*….consumes a "wishing box" full of sleeping pills and dies into the only country of dreams accessible to her"(Gilbert and Gubar 281). Although the parallelism they postulate between two works can be acceptable, both for Esther and Agnes suicide is not a possible way to reach freedom through killing the self, but through killing the false self in order to reveal the true self.

4.2. THE NEW MOON, KILLING THE FALSE SELVES- REACHING THE TRUE SELF: NOT THE ENDING BUT THE BEGINNING

At the center of her traumatic experience, in paradise, Esther puts Joan, at the center, who intensifies the trauma through her discourse, because through Joan the reader finds a chance to add a new element to the story of Esther. Esther's new Virgil, Joan, will illuminate how the false self of Esther will be killed through her successful strategies. Joan says: "I read about you," Then Joan goes on, "Not how they found you, but everything up to that, and I put all my money together and took the first plane to New York"(BJ 225). When Esther asks Joan why she chose New York, Joan confesses: "Oh, I thought it would be easier to kill myself in New York"(BJ 225). Through Joan, Esther achieves the creation of a mirror through which she crystallizes the final step of her journey. As the beginning of Esther's journey starts in New York, the city where the values of Esther's generation gather in at the last step of her journey Esther again turns back to New York, the center of the simulacra, which creates the bell jar, the same bell jar that will force Joan to kill herself.[127]

In paradise, Esther depicts the simulacra she has to combat with, which is the asylum. Her nurse tells Esther how lucky she is as she is ready to go to "Belsize"(BJ 230) that means more freedom. As an indicator of her improvement, Esther will go to Belsize. However, although the doctors think that she has improved, she cannot

[127] At the end of this chapter Esther confesses that she hates her mother and she says: "Doctor Nolan only smiled at me as if something had pleased her very, very much, and I said, "I suppose you do""(BJ 229). Esther's confession is parallel with the one Plath writes in her journals. If this is a freedom, if she achieves to free herself, the closing of chapter sixteen foreshadows the fact that Esther becomes much stronger than she is at the beginning of her journey. She achieves to free herself from the social restrictions and taboos which are embodied through the mother.

understand how she is declared as an improved patient when even she cannot see a slight improvement in herself.

However, in spite of the difficulties she faces, in this paradise of conflicts throughout her story, for the first time Esther trusts a person, and especially a woman. Unlike her mother, Mrs. Willard, Jay Cee and Doreen, Esther trusts Doctor Nolan as she knows that Doctor will warn her about any forthcoming shock treatment so that she will be able to prepare her mind and soul for that process. Although Esther does not have a warm relationship with her mother, when Doctor Nola puts her arm around Esther and hugs her like a mother(BJ 238) she feels like a child. However, things not go in the way that Esther hopes. She faces ECT once again and this time she finds the courage to rebel against Doctor Nolan. "You said you'd tell me!" I shouted at her through the disheveled blanket"(BJ 239). Esther wants to trust Doctor more than at any time, and she wants her to promise that she will be there. Later, as Esther indicates, "Doctor Nolan took out a white handkerchief and wiped my face. Then she hooked her arm in my arm, like an old friend, and helped me up, and we started down the hall"(BJ 239). Esther calmly continues depicting her trauma with dramatic statements,

> The walls of the asylum were bright, white lavatory tile with bald bulbs set at intervals in the black ceiling. Stretchers and wheel-chairs were beached here and there against the hissing, knocking pipes that ran and branched in an intricate nervous system along the glittering walls. I hung on to Doctor Nolan's arm like death, and every so often she gave me an encouraging squeeze. Finally, we stopped at a green door with Electrotherapy printed on it in black letters. I held back, and Doctor Nolan waited. Then I said, "Let's get it over it with," and we went in.(BJ 240)

Later Esther hears a voice saying "Esther"(BJ 242). Esther wakes out of a "deep, drenched sleep"(BJ 242). The first thing Esther sees is Doctor Nolan's face swimming in front of her and calls her name. Although, in paradise Esther seems to

get weaker shock treatments, she becomes much stronger because the more Doctor Nolan repeats her name the more Esther justifies her identity and later Esther takes "the silver knife"(BJ 243). This time Esther has the power in her hands. Evidently, this time she begins to question why she loves knifes, as the destructive capacity now passes to Esther. In relation to that, Esther reaches the highest form of consciousness enabling her to diagnose her culture's illness, which is entrapment. Therefore, she comments that at Belsize, even at Belsize, the doors have locks, but the patients do not have the keys. Esther attacks the destruction of privacy with the following remark, "A shut door meant privacy, and was respected, like a locked door. One knocked, and knocked again, then went away. I remembered this as I stood, my eyes half-useless after the brilliance of the hall, in the room's deep, musky dark. (BJ 246) Although Belsize seems to be the ideal place for a patient, even this Disneyland-like place cannot give the feeling of freedom to Esther. She interprets this illusionary atmosphere of Belsize as a simulacra that is the microcosm of the outside world that makes Esther ill. In addition, although there are doors at Belsize the patients do not have the keys to create new routes for themselves. While Esther defines "door" as a metaphor of entrapment, she also defined Joan's thoughts about Buddy in order to highlight another entrapment that is embodied in Buddy. Joan admits that she never likes Buddy, who believed that he knew everything about life. In paradise, Esther turns back, and begins to remember the crucial subjects of hell and purgatory. The most obvious one is her plans for her future. She remembers the question: "But what about your career?"(BJ 248). After hearing this question, Esther begins to feel a pain in her head, the problem is that in an environment that can only manifest a simulacra, an unknown future that is surrounded by the Cold War rhetoric and nuclear weapons,

how can one think about the future let alone a career. Once the reader has remembered the story of the fig tree, it becomes evident that it is not because the fig tree has disappeared before that Esther decides what she wants to be in life, but because of the fact that the simulacra that her generation lives in does not allow them to 'choose' what they want to be in life. As a result, although the choices are apparent they do not actually exist when Esther is about to decide. Therefore, both the fig tree and the choices become also a part of the simulacra in which both Esther and other female characters have to live in. However, only Esther is aware of the trick which is played on women, and that is the reason why when she sees Valerie at the hospital reading Vogue she cannot understand why she is at the asylum, because as Valerie accepts the ideologies of the patriarchy she must be outside. Apparently Valerie cannot reach the degree of consciousness necessary to unveil the submissiveness and entrapment that surrounds her. Hence, she does not need to be diagnosed as she is not made ill by the system. Her problem is the fact that she is blinded by the dominant ideology that has already chosen a role on behalf of Valerie and her role is to be female figure who is only interested in reading women's magazines.

Unlike Valerie, Esther rebels against the impositions of the dominant ideology, that is the reason why she says,

> My head ached. Why did I attract these weird old women? There was the famous poet, and Philomena Guinea, and Jay Cee, and the Christian Scientist lady and lord knows who, and they all wanted to adopt me in some way, and, for the price of their care and influence, have me resemble them.(BJ 248)

It is apparent that Esther does not want to fit into any of the female categories that are postulated by women. The significant point is that the female figures force her to be part of the vicious cycle. The problem is not that Esther does not know which fig

to choose but the reality that the figs are just illusions that do not exist. In reality the figs are all the extensions of the patriarchy.

Apparently Esther is the only one who is aware of the power of the patriarchy, that is the reason why "being under a man's thumb"(BJ 249) irritates her. In relation, Esther is anxious about babies. She tells Doctor Nolan, "A man doesn't have a worry in the world, while I've got a baby hanging over my head like a big stick, to keep me in line"(BJ 249). When Doctor Nolan asks Esther whether she would have acted differently, if she had not had a baby, she immediately says "YES"(BJ 249). Most of the readings of *The Bell Jar* and the *Ariel* poems ignore the fact that Esther's hatred towards babies indicates that she is not desensitized enough to be able to bear the idea of an innocent baby growing up in a decentered world that is full of paranoia, anxiety, and power struggles. In addition to *The Bell Jar*, in the *Ariel* poems Sylvia Plath also uses the 'baby' as a symbol of the world she lives in.[128] Apparently, the innocence of the baby is juxtaposed with the contaminated world Plath has observed throughout the Cold War years. In *The Bell Jar* Plath sets the poetic use of 'baby' as a symbol,

> I leafed nervously through an issue of *Baby Talk.* The fat, bright faces of babies beamed up at me, page after page—bald babies, chocolate-colored babies, Eisenhower-faced babies, babies rolling over for the first time, babies reaching for rattles, babies eating their first spoonful of solid food, babies doing all the little tricky things it takes to grow up, step by step, into an anxious and unsettling world.(BJ 250)

Esther's dramatic contrasts in relation with different portrayals of babies highlights not that Esther/Sylvia Plath is an insensitive woman who hates babies, but the craziness of giving birth to a baby in such an unsettling world that is full of

[128] Emphasizing McCarty era, Edward Brunner highlights the fact that the poems in this era "targets as child or children"(Brunner xiii) as a reaction against the corrupted atmosphere. For further reading see

uncertainty. In addition, most women of her generation have babies in order to fulfill the social norms that are imposed by the patriarchal simulacra. As a response to that Esther says, "How easy having babies seemed to the women around me! Why was I so unmaternal and apart? Why couldn't I dream of devoting myself to baby like Dodo Conway? If I had to wait on a baby all day, I would go mad"(BJ 250). It is crucial to highlight that Esther rebels against the traditional female role that is not only biologically, but also socio politically imposed on women. As a result, Esther cannot imagine herself fitting into the picture designed for her by the male discourse.

Evidently Esther has, step by step, purified herself from the exposures of the dominant ideology, which are the fear caused by McCarthyism, the anxiety resultant from being a woman in a man's world. In accordance with this Esther calls herself "Mrs. Nobody"(BJ 251). Hence rejecting being one of the female figures postulated by other people. Instead, she wants to create an empty space as Mrs. Nobody[129] that will be filled in by her own desires. As a result, in paradise, she freely tells her reader, "I am my own woman. The next step was to find the proper sort of man"(BJ 251).

It is apparent that Esther achieves the preservation of her identity during her dramatic journey through American culture. Therefore, it is patent that Esther achieves an to answer the most crucial question of her life. In order to justify her strength, Esther opens a new chapter with the following remark: "I'M GOING TO BE A PSYCHIATRIST"(BJ 252). The capitalization of Sylvia Plath is quite enticing

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Edward Brunner. *Cold War Poetry: The Social Text in the Fifties Poem*. (Chicago:University of Illinois Press, 2001).

[129] In her journal Plath also celebrates the freedom of denying the false identities. She writes, "One fine day I would float to the surface, quite drowned, and supremely happy with my newfound selfless self."(J 100).

in the sense that each capitalization signifies a significant diagnosis about her generation, and she underlines the most significant social diagnosis concerning American culture, the psychological trauma that is created by the dominant ideology.

4.2.1. Destroying the Taboos

In paradise, Esther decides to destroy the social and psychological traumas that her mother represents, and the strongest one is sexuality. At this point of her journey, Esther meets Irwin, a young friend of hers. This time she decides to practice her "new, normal personality on this man …"(BJ 254). Esther calls Doctor Nolan to ask permission to stay overnight in Cambridge with Joan. In order to meet Irwin, she says, "I felt the first man I slept with must be intelligent, so I would respect him"(BJ 256)

Although Mrs. Willard and Esther's mother define purity, the necessity of being a virgin before marriage, Esther recognizes that,

> The Virgin is fecundity, dew, wellspring of life; many statuettes show her at the well, the spring, the fountain; the phrase 'Fountain of Life' is one of the most widely used; she is not creative, but she fructifies, she makes what was hidden in the earth spring forth into the light of day. She is the deep reality hidden under the appearance of things: the Kernel, the Marrow. Through her is desire appeased: she is what is given to man for his satisfaction.(Beauvoir 212)

Therefore, in order to destroy the taboos of her generation, Esther decides to lose her virginity, and Irwin seems to be the ideal partner. As a result of the experience, Esther begins to bleed, but this is not a normal bleeding, just like the bleeding scene Esther saw at Buddy's lecture at the beginning of her story. This time it is hemorrhaging. What is significant is the fact that the blood is "half black"(BJ 258). The black blood is the signifier of losing her innocence in an unsettling, prosaic, and

decentered culture, and after the bleeding Esther says, "Then the stories of blood-stained bridal sheets and capsules of red ink bestowed on already deflowered brides floated back to me"(BJ 258). Most of the critics reread Esther's losing of her virginity as a part of Plath's life. However, the symbolic strength of the episode is much stronger than the critic's reading of the case. First, Esther's decision to lose her virginity is a rebellion against the social norms that society has tried to impress upon her unconscious mind. Esther has always been reminded of the restrictions which are placed upon her gender through cultural construction.[130] As a result of that, through deciding to lose her virginity Esther aims at purifying herself of the discourses of her mother and Mrs. Willard who strictly underline that a woman must be sexually pure in order to deserve a good husband. However, after she has encountered with the hypocrite Buddy Willard, Esther rejects the concept of purity as equal to the hypocrisy of the woman around her. In addition, Esther also rebels against the discourse of Doctor Gordon who thinks that Esther just tries to create problems for her self that do not really exist. Hence, loosing her virginity is the destruction of the artificial purity that society has tried to stamp on her. Second, the abnormal amount of blood resulting form the hemorrhaging is the signifier of the abnormal way of life that society tried to impose on Esther. In relation to that after the night with Irwin, Esther returns to Belsize and meets Joan, Joan immediately understands that Esther has lost her virginity. After that episode, Joan disappears, and Doctor Quinn asks Esther questions about where Joan might be.

[130] For further reading on gender see Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (New York: Routledge, 1990).

Although at first sight Joan's death seems to be a tragic ending, it is not. The death of Joan is the death of the traditional female role that Esther strictly rejects. After Joan's death Esther says,

> A FRESH FALL OF SNOW blanketed the asylum grounds—not a Christmas sprinkle, but a man-high January deluge, the sort that snuffs out schools and offices and churches, and leaves, for a day or more, a pure, blank sheet in place of memo pads, date books and calendars.(BJ 266)

The capitalization is quite significant in the sense that, the 'fresh fall of snow' signifies the purification that Esther achieves in the last chapter of her journey. Her treatment ends and she meets her mother, whose face is like a "pale, reproachful moon"(BJ 267). Esther defines her situation with a tragic statement,

> A daughter in an asylum! I had done that to her. Still, she had obviously decided to forgive me. "We'll take up where we left off, Esther," she had said, with her sweet, martyr's smile. "We'll act as if all this were a bad dream." A bad dream. *To the person in the bell jar, blank and stopped as a dead baby, the world itself is the bad dream. A bad dream.*[emphasis added] I remembered everything. I remembered the cadavers and Doreen and the story of the fig tree and Marco's diamond and the sailor on the Common and Doctor Gordon's wall-eyed nurse and the broken thermometers and the Negro with his two kinds of beans and the twenty pounds I gained on insulin and the rock that bulged between sky and sea like a gray skull. Maybe forgetfulness, like a kind snow, should numb and cover them. But they were part of me. They were my landscape.(BJ 267)

It can be assumed that the quotation above is one of the most significant quotations of the novel. Through Esther's statement, it becomes clear that Esther is not the one who is schizoid, but the discourse of her mother which tries to make Esther believe that everything is a dream is schizoid. In relation to Esther's description of her trauma, one should take into consideration R.D. Laing's comment, as it is crucial to understand the problematic discourse of the mother.

> In the schizoid condition associated with "such thoughts as 'This is like a dream', 'This seems unreal', 'I can't believe this is true' , 'Nothing seemed to be touching me', 'I cannot take it in', 'This is not happening to me', i.e. with feelings of estrangement and derealization. The body may go on acting in an

> outwardly normal way, but inwardly it is felt to be acting on its own, automatically. However, despite the dream-nature or unreality of experience, and the automatic nature of action, the self is at the same time far from 'sleepy'; indeed, it is excessively alert, and may be thinking and observing with exceptional lucidity.("Divided" 79)

Therefore, it is not Esther who is schizoid but the discourse of her mother. As opposed to the discourse of the dominant ideology, Esther encompasses all the real experiences she has lived through so far instead of rejecting them.

The discourse of Esther's mother, which forces Esther to reject her real experiences, must have been quite significant for Plath because she had already been focusing on the identical discourse in her 1955 short story "Tongues of Stone." Just like Esther,the protogonist of the story Debby, "never slept anymore"(JP 274). In addition to that while Esther cannot write, due to the discourse of the patriarchal power, Debby cannot do artistic work. "The ragged red square of knitting in her hands"(JP 273) signifies the entrapment of her artistic creativity. Furthermore, she cannot remember her past. Apparently, while Esther carries the burden of the letter "M," Debby associates that kind of a pain with the scarlet letter that Hester Prynne carries, but Debby carries the scarlet letter not on her bosom but on her face through "the ugly purple scar on the left cheek that marked her like a scarlet letter"(JP 276). In relation to that her psychiatric treatment is just a form of brainwashing like Esther's. It is not surprising that Debby cannot improve. While Esther says, "The Same … So I told him again, in the same dull, flat voice, only it was angrier this time, because he seemed so slow to understand, how I hadn't slept for fourteen nights and how I couldn't read or write or swallow very well"(BJ 151), Debby says, "I feel the same. The same." And it was true"(JP 275). It is quite interesting that after her treatment Debby also says, "But I can't see, I can't see"(JP 278) because in *The*

Bell Jar chapter fourteen starts with "IT WAS COMPLETELY DARK. I felt the darkness, but nothing else …"(BJ 192) and Esther cries, "MOTHER!"(BJ 193). After Esther has shouted, she says, " I can't see," I said. A cherry voice spoke out of the dark. "*There are lots of blind people in the world. You'll marry a nice blind man someday*"[emphasis added](BJ 215). The organic form of writing of Plath can be understood from this quotation because in "Tongues of Stone" the narrator also states,

> The nurse, who had also believed that she [Debby] was blind, tried to comfort her, saying, "There area lot of other blind people in the world. *You'll meet a nice blind man and marry him someday*"[emphasis added](JP 278).

Last but not least, Debby is also asked to forget her past, "After a while they would get tired of waiting and hoping her that there was a God or that someday she would look back on this *as if it were a bad dream*[emphasis added]"(JP 274).[131] However, just like Esther Greenwood, Debby rejects forgetting her past. Therefore it is not surprising that at the end of her story Debby faces "the everlasting rising of the sun [,]"(JP 280) the sun that Esther faces in Paradise. In the end, it appears she regains her memory. In relation to these, it becomes clear that their attitude is the thing that makes them Esther Greenwood and Debby not Mrs. Willard, Buddy, Doreen or Mrs. Greenwood, who are the slaves of Cold War ideology.

4.3. PERFORMATIVE ACT OF A CONFIRMATION OF IDENTITY

In *The Bell Jar*, Esther rejects interpreting her experiences as a dream, as through deciphering the code of each character she meets the realities of her culture

[131] "Tongues of Stone" clearly indicates the fact that throughout her creative process Plath always focused on composing the outline of *The Bell Jar* that was her grand project. Therefore, it would be misleading to claim that Plath wrote *The Bell Jar* in five or six weeks that was a pot-boiler for her.

and that is the reason why each character is a Virgil, helping her to reach a new form of consciousness. As a result of this, she achieves the creation of a landscape where she scripts both the story of her generation and her culture, and she keeps each part carefully in order to complete the puzzle. The picture that Esther manages to complete is the true picture of Cold War America.

Apparently, the last chapter is a kind of symbolic gathering of all the Virgils Esther has met throughout the whole of her journey. Esther's most dramatic criticism, at the end of her journey, is about the meaning of college education in America. She says,

> What was there about us, in Belsize, so different from the girls playing bridge and gossiping and studying in the college to which I would return? Those girls, too, sat under bell jars of a sort.(BJ 268).

She clearly underlines the fact that there is not an obvious difference between academic life, life in an asylum, or social life in general. Therefore she alludes to the reality that all the spaces are artificial areas that are in actuality only different parts of the same vicious cycle, the simulacra, that is postulated by the dominant ideology of Esther's generation. Therefore it does not matter whether you have a college education, or have been clinically diagnosed, or perfectly prepared for social life. Nothing really changes the social life of the individuals no matter whether they have a college degree or not, especially women who are aware of the existence of the bell jar. In relation, during the last part of her psychic journey, it is not difficult to surmise that the first male character Esther focuses on, Buddy Willard, is also the last one who visits her at the end. After Esther tells the reader that the experiences she has had so far has become the psychic landscape that makes her, 'Esther,' different, she hears a voice saying "A man to see you!"(BJ 268). The sharp realities of her

generation mirrors Esther's face as she meets Buddy Willard. At the beginning of Esther's journey she describes the "white plastic sunglasses case with colored shells and sequins and a green plastic starfish sewed onto it"(BJ 3), at the end of her story the green plastic starfish, that is the signifier of Esther's creativity and freedom, are turned into the "khaki cap"(BJ 268) that belongs to Buddy. Evidently, the artificial objects of the patriarchal discourse gain a different shape. This time the artificial objects belong to Buddy with his khaki cap that reminds the reader of the caps of the American soldiers. As the signifier of the war, the artificial life imposed on Esther's generation finds its true embodiment not in Esther but in Buddy. Hence, the darker tone of green becomes a part of Buddy Willard. In relation Esther says, "Well, Buddy"(BJ 268), and Buddy responds "Well, Esther"(BJ 268). The dialogue reminds the reader of a story that has to come to an end. The most obvious difference is that at the beginning of the story Buddy seemed to be the ideal partner, studying medicine and representing the symbol of purity, but thanks to her journey, Esther is able to turn each character into a different experience that explains the dramatic realities of her generation.

At the end of the story, Esther is the only character who develops, changes, improves and revitalizes. Therefore, when Esther sees Buddy, she just feels "nothing but a great, amiable boredom"(BJ 268). At the beginning of the story Buddy is the one who sets Esther off on her journey and as in the beginning, at the end, he is the one whom Esther faces as an embodiment of the simulacra in which Esther begins to survive after getting out of the asylum. While helping Esther to get out of the asylum, Buddy tries a new trick. He asks Esther. "Do you think Esther there's something in me that that drives women crazy?"(BJ 270). After Buddy's question Esther cannot

help laughing, as at the end of her journey, she is conscious enough to understand the weakness of Buddy, both psychologically and ethically, although he is interpreted as a symbol of strength among the members of Esther's generation. Although Buddy is gilded by his medical profession at Yale and a respectable family, he is the embodiment of the corruption in American culture. That's the reason why Esther states: "I couldn't help myself, I burst out laughing–maybe because of the seriousness of Buddy's face and the common meaning of the word "crazy" in a sentence like that"(BJ 270).

While Esther's interpreting Buddy as a worthless hypocrite illustrates the structure of her culture that she is ready to fight, Valerie illustrates the female role that Esther leaves behind because Valerie is the one who sees Esther off while Esther is leaving the asylum. The most significant detail is that while Buddy will exist in the outside world, Valerie as a woman will be kept in the asylum reading *Vogue*. Hence, for a woman, it does not matter whether you are outside or inside, as both the outside world and the asylum are the same sorts of simulacra. While leaving the asylum Esther's comment is very significant, as her comment is the most famous quotation of *The Bell Jar*,

> *Valerie's last cheerful cry had been "So long! Be seeing you." "Not if I know it," I thought. But I wasn't sure. I wasn't sure at all. How did I know that someday at college, in Europe, somewhere, anywhere the bell jar, with its stifling distortions, wouldn't descend again?*[emphasis added](BJ 271).

From this quotation, it becomes evident that Esther achieves reaching paradise not because she reaches a social space that is full of optimism and freedom in Cold War America, but she achieves the creation of a psychological space that signifies her consciousness as an intellectual young woman who wants to take herself out of the vicious cycle, and who is quite in control of both her *identity* and *body*. The most

obvious example of her strength in combating the male discourse is her interpretation of Buddy's words. After she confesses to the reader that she is not quite sure whether the bell jar will descend once again or not she says,

> And hadn't Buddy said, as if to revenge himself for my digging out the car and his having to stand by, "I wonder who you'll marry now, Esther. "What?" I'd said, shoveling snow up onto a mound and blinking against the stinging backshower of loose flakes. "I wonder who you'll marry now, Esther. Now you've been," and Buddy's gesture encompasses the hill, the pines and the severe, snow-gabled buildings breaking up the rolling landscape, "here." And of course I didn't know who would marry me now that I'd been where I had been. I didn't know at all.(BJ 271-272)

Esther is quite aware of the fact that rejecting Buddy's marriage proposal, the very embodiment of the dominant ideology, means that she will be labeled as 'mad' by the members of her culture. That is the reason why Buddy reminds her that she will face a harsh social life outside of the asylum as she will carry the burden of the letter "M" just like Hester Prynne carries the letter "A" on her bosom. Buddy's warning underlines the reality that marrying Buddy and becoming a housewife will immediately remove the letter "M" from her bosom. As Buddy understands that Esther rejects both marriage and his hypocrisy he tries to preserve the final discourse of his ideology; labeling of individuals as mad who rebel against the social norms of their culture. However, Esther has already deciphered the code of the ideology of her generation, and she is completely sure that she will never accept the restrictions that are imposed on her. As a result, she says "I was perfectly free"(BJ 273). Her freedom is the proof of her capacity to read her culture perfectly. Furthermore, she also purifies herself of the traditional female figure, and it is a piece of remarkable editing on the part of Plath to put Joan's funeral at the end of Esther's and Buddy's dialogue. Hence, the dead *body*, becomes the signifier of the rejection of Buddy Willard's portrayal of woman. While watching the funeral Esther says: "I wondered what I

thought I was burying"(BJ 273). It is clear that Esther buries the traditional female role along with Joan while strictly resisting Buddy's corrupted values and ideals. In relation, Joan's funeral is the indicator of burying all these false values. In addition, Joan's hanging herself can also be interpreted as a mirroring process of the lives of all the women that end with the metaphoric death of freedom of thought and speech, because after Esther becomes sexually liberated Joan hangs herself. As Esther's act, of rebelling against social norms, seems impossible for Joan, the only possible way out was hanging. Last but not the least, Joan's death can also be interpreted as a symbolic rebirth, as Esther leaves both Buddy and Joan, who are the symbols of the values that Esther has tried to escape from behind, and starts a new life. Esther depicts Joan's funeral with this statement,

> There would be a black, six-foot-deep gap hacked in the hard ground. That shadow would marry this shadow, and the peculiar, yellowish soil of our locality seal the wound in the whiteness, and yet another snowfall erase the traces of newness in Joan's grave.(BJ 274)

Digging the soil alludes to Esther's journey that brings up all the traumas of her generation that are kept in her unconscious mind. At the end of her journey Esther watches the deciphered traumas which are buried under the yellowish soil with Joan. The color yellow is used by Esther to illustrate the corrupted and rotten ideals imposed upon her. After having witnessed the funeral, Esther says: "I took a deep breath and listened to the old brag of my heart. I am, I am, I am"(BJ 274).

That famous line of Plath is literally significant in many ways. First, Esther's repetition of "I am" is a performative act of a confirmation of her own identity that she has tried to separate from the pressures of the dominant ideology. Second, it is an act of self-actualization, the return to the true self. Third, that kind of self-actualization becomes the basis of many of the Plath's poems.

The ending of *The Bell Jar* that emphasizes Esther's conformation of her existence and identity in Cold War America, is not only the signifier of her success in surviving as her true self, but also of her miraculous discourse that counters and heals all the social castration which is organized for women. Therefore, through the play of language, Plath starts Esther's journey with pessimism, edits it with uncertainty and finally postulates an ending for Esther that stands for the achievement of the true self. The most significant point about the structure of *The Bell Jar* is the fact that its structure was used as an outline for Plath in most of her poems, especially the *Ariel*_poems, which are strictly separated by the critics from *The Bell Jar*, both in terms of style and quality. However, an objective analysis of the novel clearly reveals the fact that *The Bell Jar* apparently served as an example of the style that comes into full circle at the end. Plath evidently uses that style in most of her poems. For instance in the "Mystic," in order to confirm the existence of the identity, the narrator states, "The heart has not stopped"(WT 5). In the poem "Detective" the story starts with pessimism, the depiction of the "yellow milk"(A 32) and "the white stones"(A 32) and ends with the phrase "…. and the moon smiled"(A 32) that illustrates the optimistic ending, the rebirth that Esther achieves at the end of her story. In addition, in "Face Lift" the narrator begins to report her story from a clinic where Esther's story ends. The narrator states,

> You bring me good news from the clinic,
> Whipping off your silk scarf, exhibiting the tight white
> Mummy-clothes, smiling: I'm all right.(CW 5)

After conforming the existence of the identity "I" just liker Esther, the voice adds,

> Mother to myself, I wake swaddled in gauze,
> Pink and smooth as a baby.(CW 6)

The ending of the poem signifies the survival of the true self that achieves its freedom from the clinic, the asylum, where the simulacra tries to destroy the identity just like in Esther's story.

The strongest discourse of the birth of purity form impurity and the subject of rebirth is without a doubt seen in Plath's famous poem "Lady Lazarus," where the narrator manages to survive in a world of chaos, just like Esther's Cold War America. As Judith Kroll claims,

> The location of devils to be cast out is sometimes a place, but usually it is a person who is possessed. In Plath's mythology the heroine is not possessed by her father in this sense, but by the false self who is in his thrall. That is why the true self is released (as in "Purdah" and "Lady Lazarus") when the oppressor is made hateful, and thereby overthrown.(Kroll 125)

In "Lady Lazarus," the narrator starts her story with the information that one year in every ten she kills her self. However, voice of the poem highlights the fact that her face is "featureless"(A 14) and her skin is as "Bright as a Nazi lampshade"(A 14). Apparently, the voice associates itself with the Jewish people, just like Esther who says at the beginning of her story, "but I couldn't help wondering what it would like, being burned alive all along your nerves. I thought it must be the worst thing in the world" (BJ 1). Illustrating the Rosenbergs who were also Jews, Esther associates her pain with theirs. In "Lady Lazarus" the narrator also associates her pain with the Jewish identity when she starts her story. Just like Esther, the voice in Lady Lazarus is strong enough to cope with the traumas of her life as she asks,

> O my enemy
> Do I terrify?—(A 14).

The voice later asserts that

> Dying
> Is an art like everything else.
> I do it exceptionally well.

I do it so it feels like hell.
I do it so it feels real.
I guess you could say I've a call.(A 15)

Like Esther's journey, the voice in "Lady Lazarus" bottoms out intentionally so much, because this is the only possible way to find the true self once again. Because

> Such poems in which Plath's protagonist confronts death, or contemplates dying or suicide, are essentially envisioned rituals whose ultimate motive is to kill the false self along with the spoiled history and to allow the true self to be reborn—that is, simply to be disclosed …(Kroll 171)

In Lady Lazarus and in *The Bell Jar*, the protagonist meets "a miracle"(A 16), which helps them to survive. Then at the end of the poem, the narrator calls for "Doktor," "Lucifer," "God" and "the enemy" which are all the symbols of Cold War America. It can be claimed that, "Doktor" signifies the discourse of the "enemy within" that marked the era through inhuman psychological treatments, while "Lucifer," the God of death, signifies the destruction of the true self and the trauma that caused many Americans to think that if there were a "God," he would have prevented these inhuman motivations. Therefore, it is quite difficult to read the poem under in light of Plath's biography as the work naturally encompasses the traumas of not only Plath but also of her generation, who faced suicide, depression and trauma as a result of all the social and political restrictions.[132] At the end of the poem, just like Esther, the narrator is strong enough to cope with the realities of her traumatic world, she declares her strength with the following statement,

Beware
Beware.
Out of the ash
I rise with my red hair
And I eat men like air.(A 17)

[132] It would be misleading to read the poem as the reflector of Plath's biography because when Plath's father died she was not ten years old but nine.

In *The Bell Jar*, at the end of her story, just like Lady Lazarus, Esther is also a strong woman who achieves the decipherment of the patriarchal world. As Majorie Perloff comments,

> The New Women, I would posit, will not *let men off that easily* [emphasis added]. Esther, having undergone emergency treatment for the hemorrhage induced by Irwin's lovemaking, calmy sends him the bill.(Perloff 522)

Therefore, it would not be misleading to say "There is a similar danger of missing the meaning of her [Plath's] poetry in regarding her themes and imagery as illustrations of pathological symptoms, as if what is of significance in her poetry were reducible to the presentation of a case history"(Kroll 5).

In addition to "Lady Lazarus," in "Tulips" the narrator's story starts with pessimism, however, just like Esther's story, the narrator manages to the reach purity from impurity as the voice of the poem states, "I am a nun now, I have never been so pure"(A 18). Like "Tulips" in "Fever 103°" the narrator starts her journey in hell,

> Pure? What does it mean?
> The tongues of hell
> Are dull, dull as the triple
> Tongues of dull, fat Cerberus
> Who wheezes at the gate. (A 78)

Then the narrator passes into purgatory, like Esther, and comes across "Hiroshima ash"(A 79), "Radiation"(A 79), and "yellow sullen smokes"(A 78) which are the signifiers of Esther's purgatory, where she associates the color yellow with her hospital. However, at end of the story in "Fever 103°," the narrator says,

> (My selves dissolving, old whore petticoats)—
> *To paradise*. [emphasis added] (A 80)

Apparently, the narrator achieves reaching paradise in spite of the chaos she faces in hell. A similar style is also evident in "Wintering" which is the final poem of *Ariel.* At the beginning of the poem the narrator portrays herself "Wintering in a dark

without window"(A 89). Just like *The Bell Jar*, and in many of the *Ariel* poems, the narrator achieves freedom from herself form the suffocating environment she has to cope with. At the end of the poem, the narrator portrays a picture in which, "The bees are flying [and] They taste the spring"(A 90).

It is patent that the style that Sylvia Plath uses in *The Bell Jar* served as a basis for many of her works. Finally, Esther's confirmation of her identity and existence is also evident in her *Colossus* poem, "Suicide off Egg Rock" in which the narrator confirms her identity and existence "I am, I am, I am"(Col 35).

In addition to the poems, which have an identical style to *The Bell Jar*, Esther's echoing of the same phrase "I am I am I am" can also be interpreted as an act of preparation to preserve her identity in the outside world that is a new form of simulacra. Therefore Esther states, "I had been "analyzed." Instead, all I could see were question marks"(BJ 275). It is evident that the asylum though it was a popular place for most of the intellectuals of Plath's oeuvre, did not help Esther in the slightest. Rather, instead it intensifies her paranoia about her future that will be shaped by a different form of simulacra, and the final sentence of *The Bell Jar* proves that,

> "All right Esther, Esther." I rose and followed her to the open door. Pausing, for a brief breath, on the threshold, I saw the silver-haired doctor who had told me about the rivers and the Pilgrims on my first day, and the pocked, cadaverous face of Miss Huey, and eyes I thought I had recognized over white masks. The eyes and the faces all turned themselves toward me, and guiding myself by them, as by a magical thread, I stepped into the room.(BJ 275)

Apparently, the final sequence of the novel is an open ending designed by Plath for her reader. Her message is hidden under the final sentences of Esther. Although Esther steps into the room, the reader does not know what will happen next. On the

other hand, at the beginning of the novel Esther informs the reader that she has a baby and she is not at the asylum anymore. As a result, it is apparent that Esther's story is intentionally ended by Plath as if it were the preparation for another journey. It is not a surprise that Plath's second novel (as a matter of fact the third) is about a married woman and her traumas during her marriage. Unfortunately, she lost her life after she had written only more than half of the novel. The tragic point is the fact that Ted Hughes informed Plath scholars and readers that the manuscript of her last novel had somehow gotten lost. It is apparent that her last novel was destroyed by Hughes just like the last part of her journal. Hence it becomes apparent why Esther Greenwood's story ends with an open ending, because her second journey would have started form her life after marriage, in which she becomes a mother, as at the beginning of her story she indicated that she had a baby. That is the reason why Esther's final sentences give not the impression of a real ending. Furthermore, Esther creates a space for the reader to fill their own ending according to their ideas. What is alluring is that Esther gives the message that creating an ending is in the hands of the reader, not only in literature but also in life.

In conclusion, thanks to her successful observations in Hell and Purgatory, Esther achieves Paradise, where *The Bell Jar* comes to a full circle and where Esther responds to all the restrictions of Cold War ideology. It should be underlined that at the end of Paradise, Plath does not create a classical happy ending which is full of optimism because as Esther says, *How did I know that someday at college, in Europe, somewhere, anywhere —the bell jar, with its stifling distortions, wouldn't descend again?*[emphasis added](BJ 271). The significant point is that at the end of

Paradise, Esther manages to diagnose the culture that does not have the potential or power to diagnose her properly itself.

CONCLUSION

The Bell Jar compositely offers striking answers to the dilemma of the Plath scholars and readers, who are lost in the mazes of subjective Plath biographies and literary critics, under the name of the 'Plath myth.' However, it can be assumed that *The Bell Jar* clearly disproves the interpretations of Sylvia Plath as somehow political, or as someone whose works should be read without any association with political commentary. However, "disempowering Plath's politics is to represent her as a mad genius, supersensitive to the general horror of the modern world, inspired by a poetic furor that drove her ever onward to desperate expression and death"(Sinfield 209) not only proves inadequate, but also shadows the organic form of writing that Plath built upon *The Bell Jar*, which was her grand project. Although *The Bell Jar* has been regarded as a poet's 'casebook,' which does not have the potential to reflect the sociology of Cold War America, it is in fact a milestone work, not only for the Plath reader, but also for the twentieth century literary reader in general, who seeks for a work that reflects the sociology of Cold War America. It should be underlined that through *The Bell Jar*, Plath not only portrays the sociology of her culture, but also disproves all the claims that her works are apolitical texts that are the result of madness. Therefore *The Bell Jar* is an "astonishingly skillful" "intensely interesting" "brave" and "terribly likable"(Butler 34) novel, which is "a very distinguished American novel"(Tanner 262). In relation, it becomes patent that Plath and *The Bell Jar* are not at all simply part of a fairy tale, a myth, but the flesh and blood embodiment of an entire generation.

Although the name Sylvia Plath has always been associated with schizophrenia, madness, trauma and ambiguity, and although her works have been read in the light of these key words, which form the kernel of the Plath myth, reading *The Bell Jar* with an objective mind supplies a completely different picture. Through re-reading *The Bell Jar* it becomes patent that Plath not only achieved the development of an organic form of writing through *The Bell Jar*, but also built her political discourse upon her novel, which was not a potboiler, but a reflector of the sociology of Cold War America. Therefore, while most of the early Plath biographers and critics declared *The Bell Jar* as a work of lesser value, unlike the *Ariel* poems, they could not realize the fact that without *The Bell Jar*,[133] the *Ariel* poems could not have been created. In relation to that, it must be underlined that most of the critics have read *The Bell Jar* as a work that was created in 1961 and as such the Plath scholars and critics rarely put *The Bell Jar* at the center of the Plathian style. Therefore, most of them declare *The Bell Jar* as of lesser value, as they widely believe that Plath had already achieved the creation of a unique form of writing while creating the *Ariel* poems. Therefore they support the idea that even if *The Bell Jar* had never been written, Plath could have achieved the writing of the *Ariel* poems. However, most of the critics tend to ignore the fact that, *The Bell Jar* stands at the very center of the Plathian style, a style that champions an organic form of writing, which is the very first dilemma about *The Bell Jar*.

Although, according to some critics, *The Bell Jar* has been interpreted as the most invaluable work of Plath's texts, it is nonetheless the most polemical work, as it

[133] An example of that is Plath's strategy to write the *Ariel* poems at the back of one of *The Bell Jar* manuscripts. Apparently, while she was writing the *Ariel* poems, the energy and literary achievement she experienced throughout the creation process of *The Bell Jar* served as an inspiration for Plath.

has been recreated, reinterpreted again and again, just like her journals and her life. At this point it is crucial to mention that if the interpretations of the novel encapsulate the bonds between the novel and the journals, it can be argued that the enigmatic voices of the journals and Esther Greenwood apparently share an organic bond with each other. In relation to that, it should be underlined that just like the journals, *The Bell Jar* is the result of a process that was completed step by step, and one of the most controversial issues about this writing process is the heated debates over the exact time of creation of the novel.

If most of the works on Plath support the idea that the novel was written in 1960, as was claimed by Hughes, why do they strictly underline Ames's claim? Furthermore, critic Melody Zajdel underlines the fact that Plath would not have written her novel in six or eight weeks as Hughes claimed. She comments that some of the *Johnny Panic* stories clearly indicate the fact that Plath had already begun to organize an outline of *The Bell Jar*. Therefore, it would be misleading to claim that Plath wrote *The Bell Jar* sometime in 1960. Furthermore, the names, the symbols, the episodes and the setting of *The Bell Jar* have an obvious parallelism with Plath's journals, especially with the ones written during her Smith College days which date from 1960 or 1961 but from the period between 1950 and 1954. Therefore Louis Ames's claim is quite hard to disprove. Therefore, it can be assumed that *The Bell Jar* stands at the very center of the writing process of Sylvia Plath on which she built her short stories, her radio plays and the *Ariel* poems, as well as *Double Exposure* which was going to be the sequel to *The Bell Jar*. Hence, trusting Plath's journals, instead of Hughes and Aurelia, who declared the novel a potboiler and a cruel and fake depiction of the loved ones of Sylvia, is entirely wrong. The novel must have

been so significant for Plath that she published it under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas. If the critics insist on associating Esther solely with Plath why do not they trust Esther? In the novel she states, “I decided I’d surprise Jay Cee and send in a couple of the stories I wrote in this class under a pseudonym”(BJ 115). Surprising Jay Cee through the publishing of marvelous literary works might have been Plath’s strategy all along while she was publishing *The Bell Jar*.

Another polemical issue about the novel is the problematic of the feminist discourse in *The Bell Jar*. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar accuse Plath of not having built a feminist discourse in her works, and as a form of punishment they state, “Although Plath claimed in a late radio interview to be deeply concerned with world politics, she did not have an explicitly political imagination”(“Land” 297). The significant point is that Plath cannot serve the feminist discourse that Gilbert and Gubar seek, as most of the Plath’s texts portray a strong, confident female character who achieves survival in the end. The most crucial example of that is Esther Greenwood, upon whom Plath built most of her significant figures in her works such as “Lady Lazarus,” and the female voice in the *Johnny Panic* stories. Unlike Gilbert and Gubar, and many other critics, who accuse Plath of not having been interested in politics or the social traumas of women, Robert Taubman states “clever first novel ...the first feminine novel ...in the Salinger mood”(127). In addition to Taubman, Ellen Moers claims that “No writer has meant more to the current feminist movement”(xv). While Gilbert and Gubar compare and contrast Woolf with Plath, in order to imply that Plath cannot even be compared with Virginia Woolf, Linda Wagner Martin, in her critical study, states that, “Plath creates a narrative method that draws from the devices of stream of consciousness…”(“Fifites” 31).

In addition to Gilbert and Gubar, Steven Gould Axelrod's claims on Plath and her lack of interest in world literature or politics is disproved by his insufficient claims. In his work, he states that, "…she seems not to have read "A Room of One's Own" with great enthusiasm, since it is unmarked"(Axelrod 105). Axelrod evidently tries to separate Plath from politics, feminism and literary circles through declaring her ignorance as a proof of having not read even "A Room of One's Own." However, only a couple of pages later, he states, "It is possibly not coincidental that Plath called Esther Greenwood "Judith" in her initial plans for *The Bell Jar*(Smith ms.).(110)." If he claims that, Plath did not read the text, why does he state that Judith was the name Plath thought about for the protagonist of *The Bell Jar*? Apparently, in order to declare Esther Greenwood as a character who was inspired by the Woolfian style, Axelrod uses Virginia Woolf just like Gilbert and Gubar do. However, his claim proves inadequate as Esther is much stronger than Judith. Although Judith believes that there is no way to survive Esther fights all the restrictions and survives at the end. While Judith commits suicide, as a result of hopelessness, Esther commits suicide in order to achieve rebirth. Declaring Esther Greenwood as a minor Judith, who is not interested in women or politics, would be reading *The Bell Jar* under false pretexts.[134] In *The Bell Jar*, Plath puts Esther, the independent female figure, at the center of her text, thus analyzing the political, therefore, social and historical issues of her generation. In *The Bell Jar*, Esther does

[134]Plath's writing to her journal the name "Judith Greenwood" proves that she had already started working on *The Bell Jar* as she wrote the name Judith Greenwood in 1957. Therefore, it becomes clear that Plath can't have written the novel in 1960's, all of sudden, solely in five or six weeks. As a result the date 1957 displays that she had already had a draft of the novel in 1957, which would be altered step by step till 1961. The name Judith is altered many times in the unabridged journals. Therefore Ames's claim that "It is probable that Sylvia already had a version of *The Bell Jar* in her trunks when in [in 1957] she returned to the States"(Ames 287) is right.

this through a mirroring the psychological traumas of Esther's generation that is built upon the Rosenbergs. However, the story of Esther is not solely the story of Plath, but an entire generation at that specific time in American history. Therefore, "While the trauma, loss, and mourning work staged in the writing can never be entirely disentangled from the narrative of her life and death, it none the less exceeds the personalizations of biography"(Britzolaskis 148). In the novel, Plath organizes Esther's story so professionally that each chapter builds another reality of Cold War America upon the former. While in Hell, the reader confronts the historical realities of Cold War America, in Purgatory it becomes much clearer that Esther is able to break through the bell jar of the Cold War ideology, where she focuses on female entrapment, both sociologically and psychologically. In the second part of her journey, Esther analyzes the problematic of marriage, and college life in Cold War America. It would be misleading to interpret Plath's using marriage and women's lives at college, as subjects of her personal life. Because as Dougles Miller and Marian Nowak, in their critical study, *The Fifties: The Way We Really Were* mentions, "Everybody got married in the fifties, or at least it was a supreme sign of personal health and well-being to be engaged in the social act of marriage and family raising"(147). It can be assumed that through putting the female body and psyche at the center of her text, she objectively reflects cultural facts, not the fairytale of Esther.

In addition to the universal themes Plath uses in *The Bell Jar*, the discourse of madness in Cold War America is another significant element that Plath underlines. Although Plath analyzes one of the most problematic subjects of 1950's America, the discourse of madness in *The Bell Jar* has always been associated with schizophrenia,

female psychosis, and as the signifier of the ill female psyche. Therefore, it is not a surprise that Esther has been read in terms of the personal life of Sylvia Plath who was also labeled schizophrenic and mad by her biographers and critics who ironically did not have the slightest education in psychology. As a result, interpretations of Esther's suicide attempts and her survival should be carefully re-analyzed, as suicide and death as a tool for rebirth is the central motive of Plath's entire collection of poems and short stories. As Marilyn Yalom comments, women writers have

> appropriated literary insanity for their own ends and have endowed it with specifically female parameters. Many have emphasized the gender-related aspects of mental illness....The best of these works possess a symbolic structure beyond the narrative line, with levels of meaning that elucidate the female situation in particular and the human condition in general. Thus, Sylvia Plath's story of her breakdown and recovery in *The Bell Jar* is simultaneously a pre-feminist exposé of the adverse effects of sexist culture on American women in the 1950s and … a pan-human myth of death and rebirth.(2)

Therefore, Esther's killing of her false self, in order to preserve her true self is a strategy for Cold War America. In relation, it can be assumed that the discourse of madness as a labeling of women is the embodiment of the ideology of the patriarchy that Esther criticizes.

In order to attack the patriarchy, and diagnose it properly, while separate female figures are scattered, Plath puts Buddy Willard, who is the embodiment of the patriarchy that is the extension of the Cold War ideology an ideology imposed on Esther and all the other female figures in the novel, at the center of her story. While the female body and psyche are divided into various characters, the male body and psyche are represented and reflected through Buddy Willard, who seems to represent the perfect complete self, as opposed to the divided selves of the female body and psyche, which are embodied by Esther. However, Esther's divided selves, her female

Virgil's, help her to maintain her true self in spite of Buddy's attempts to destroy it. Thanks to Esther's relationship with Buddy, Esther achieves a reflection of the patriarchal discourse in American culture that aims at labeling woman as divided, psychotic selves. It can be assumed that *The Bell Jar* gives voice to the traumatic experiences of the Cold War generation who experienced a form of social dictatorship. Apparently Esther achieves an escape from the bell jars of sexuality, marriage, madness and the domination of the patriarchy. In the final part of her journey, Esther criticizes the taboos of Cold War ideology much more severely than before, and her suicide attempt is not the indicator of her powerlessness, but her enigmatic strength that derives its source from the play of language. It can be asserted that *The Bell Jar* is "a very distinguished American novel"(Tanner 262).

After Hell and Purgatory, apparently, at the final part of her journey, the death of Joan is the signifier of the death of the false self in order to take control of the true self. Therefore, before the patriarchy kills the true self of Esther, she kills her false self who is embodied through Joan. It can be assumed that,

> *The Bell Jar* is constructed upon the bedrock of significant existential experiences: the protracted illness and early death of the author/ heroine's father that filled her with lifelong anxiety; the rite of passage into adulthood necessitating choice and forcing a discovery of her own aging process; and the escape into madness as a reaction to intolerable internal and external stress. But it also bears witness to female specificity, most notably in the recurrent images of decaying figs, dead babies, jarred fetuses, and other forms of aborted maternity that are objective correlatives of the protagonist's inner state of terror….Paradoxically, one way of denying the absolute reality of death is by taking control of it— by killing yourself before death kills you.(Yalom 14)

The final part of Esther's journey also encapsulates Esther's destruction of the discourse of sexuality which is one of the most significant taboos of her culture. Her sexual experience with Irwin, and sending him the hospital bill for her hemorrhage

due to their experience, is the signifier of Esther's decision to directly accuse the male discourse for the abnormal bleeding and the abnormal psychology of the women of her generation. As Majorie Perloff comments,

> The New Women, I would posit, will not *let men off that easily* [emphasis added]. Esther, having undergone emergency treatment for the hemorrhage induced by Irwin's lovemaking, calmly sends him the bill.(Perloff, "Ritual" 522)

Therefore, it is not a surprise that at the end of *The Bell Jar* Esther totally frees herself form all the restrictions she has faced, both as a woman and as a college student. In relation to that, Linda Wagner Martin comments that

> *The Bell Jar* has repeatedly been banned and taken out of secondary school libraries in the 1980s and 1990s suggests that Plath's approach to sexual topics was ahead of its time, and our own. Her deference to the established literary conventions, in what she could not write about sexual experience, suggests that she understood all too well what her role as a woman writer was to be.("Fifties," 95).

Martin's comment is illuminating in the sense that, just like Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, *The Bell Jar* was also banned from libraries due to discourse ahead of its time. Therefore, it would not be misleading to claim that, *The Bell Jar* achieves its aim at both telling the true story of an entire generation and of forewarning against the upcoming dangers in American culture, as Esther says after she has completed her treatment at the asylum,

> *How did I know that someday at college, in Europe, somewhere, anywhere the bell jar, with its stifling distortions, wouldn't descend again?*[emphasis added](BJ 271).

In conclusion, *The Bell Jar* is the most significant work of Plath necessary not only to understand the value of her life as a female intellectual who experiences the traumas of the Cold War on both sides of the Atlantic, but also to understand the

strong emphasis on politics upon which she built almost all of her works on. As highlighted by Paul Alexander,

> As soon as she finished *The Bell Jar* in spring 1962, she immediately began work on a sequel that would depict Esther Greenwood's successful marriage and the birth of her daughter. This novel, dedicated to Hughes, was not the one that "disappeared" in 1970. Plath burned the manuscript herself after discovering Hughes' infidelity in July 1962, a discovery evoked in "Words heard, by accident, over the phone" and "The Fearful" (CP 202-203, 256).She then began writing a new novel, which she termed in her letters her "second and which Aurelia Plath amends in Letters Home to "third." This is the novel that vanished after her death. Although its exact contents remain a mystery, its title, *Double Exposure*, suggests that it explored, as Plath wrote in another context, the way time "blooms, decays, and double-exposes itself (*JP* 61) — and particularly the way time can reveal a marriage to be a sham.(Axelrod 17)

Therefore, it would be misleading to interpret *The Bell Jar* as a potboiler both for Plath and for the Plath readers and scholars, because if it was a potboiler, why would Plath write its sequel? The answer will not only illuminate the problematic of the Plath myth but also of *The Bell Jar*, which is a milestone work of twentieth century American literature.

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