Between Sanity and Social Constraints

Soldatić, Mia

Sveučilište u Rijeci

Filozofski fakultet

Mia Soldatić

BETWEEN SANITY AND SOCIAL CONSTRAINTS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF KATE CHOPIN'S "THE AWAKENING" AND SYLVIA PLATH'S "THE BELL JAR"

(Završni rad)

Rijeka, 2024.

Sveučilište u Rijeci
Filozofski fakultet
Odsjek za anglistiku

Mia Soldatić
JMBAG: 0009089411

Between Sanity and Social Constraints: A Comparative Analysis of Kate Chopin's "The Awakening" and Sylvia Plath's "The Bell Jar"

(Završni rad)

Sveučilišni prijediplomski studij anglistike i kroatistike
Mentor: prof. dr. sc. Lovorka Gruić – Grmuša

Rijeka 2024.

IZJAVA

Kojom izjavljujem da sam završni rad naslova *BETWEEN SANITY AND SOCIAL CONSTRAINTS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF KATE CHOPIN'S "THE AWAKENING" AND SYLVIA PLATH'S "THE BELL JAR"* izradila samostalno pod mentorstvom prof. dr. sc., Lovorke Gruić – Grmuše.

Svi dijelovi rada, podatci ili ideje koje su u radu citirane ili se temelje na drugim izvorima u radu su jasno označeni kao takvi te su navedeni u popisu literatura.

Studentica

Mia Soldatić

ABSTRACT

Throughout history, there have been numerous persistent discriminatory practices against women - stereotypes, lack of freedom, denial of equal opportunities, exclusion from political life and lack of access to education. The situation was no different in the US, where the same prerogative prevailed for centuries, characterized by pervasive gender inequality and entrenched patriarchal norms. It was not until the second half of the 19th century that a change began to take place, starting with the rise of organized women's rights movements and events. It is undeniable that these laid the foundations for the further development of women's rights in the 20th century. The question, however, is whether they were enough to eradicate the stigma that was so deeply ingrained in society, not only in America, but throughout the world.

By analyzing two novels, Kate Chopin's "The Awakening" from 1899 and Sylvia Plath's "The Bell Jar" from 1963, we not only gain a deeper insight into the conditions that a woman had to accept in order to be considered worthy, but also into the effects of these conditions on women themselves. What happens when one cannot find peace and happiness within the constraints? Who is to blame: society, which sets the ideal, or the outsider who cannot function within the group? By comparing the narratives, characters, and themes, this study will explore women's conflicts between their desire for autonomy and society's expectations while seeking to broaden our understanding of these classical works and their applicability to contemporary conversations about feminism and mental health.

KEYWORDS: *social constraints, sanity, gender inequality, patriarchal norms, 19th century, 20th century, The Awakening (by Kate Chopin), The Bell Jar (by Sylvia Plath), autonomy, societal expectations, mental health*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past, women not only had to juggle multiple roles but also were the foundation of the household. From creating a warm and welcoming home to nurturing the family, their contributions played a crucial role in maintaining the balance and peace the society so much desired. However, in a time without the luxuries we have today, these expectations often left little space for personal growth.

The same struggle is poignantly portrayed in Kate Chopin's "The Awakening" and Sylvia Plath's "The Bell Jar." At first glance, it seems as if we are dealing with two different protagonists from two different worlds: Edna Pontellier, a married woman in 19th century Louisiana searching for an identity beyond mother and wife, and Esther Greenwood, a young student in the 1950s struggling with her internship and mental health. Although set in different eras, both characters struggle with the oppressive roles imposed on them as women.

This paper has two main aims. First, it argues that the patriarchal norms surrounding the protagonists are in direct conflict with their ideas of femininity and identity. This conflict reveals the restrictive nature of societal expectations and the impact on individual self-image. In addition, the study also explores the psychological and emotional effects of these constraints to understand how they contribute to mental breakdowns and eventual outcomes. By examining these aspects, the thesis aims to shed light on the broader implications of gender roles and the importance of personal autonomy.

The thesis consists of two central chapters. The first chapter deeply dives into the evolving societal perceptions of womanhood over the past two centuries. It explains the shift from the rigid gender roles of the 19th century, as exemplified by the "Cult of True Womanhood," to the more complex and conflicting perspectives of the mid-20th century. To truly understand the challenges the main characters face, it is essential to grasp the everyday realities of women during those eras.

This thesis will then conduct a comparative analysis of "The Awakening" and "The Bell Jar," exploring how these novels tackle the battle between societal expectations and individual well-being. The chapter is structured around four key components, delving into how the protagonists navigate societal pressures, particularly with marriage and motherhood, and their rebellious responses to these constraints. It will also explore their pursuit of freedom and the toll it takes on their mental health.

2. THE CHANGING INTERPRETATION OF WOMANHOOD IN THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

2.1. "The Cult of True Womanhood" (1800 – 1860)

To understand how deeply entrenched some values were, we must start at the beginning of the 19th century. The more one learns about the past, the more one realizes that regardless of the changes and progress made toward change, some things still remain. At this time, America was experiencing rapid change and upheaval, a shock for a nation still finding itself. The sudden increase in population, triggered by high birth rates and massive European immigration, contributed to this sense of unrest (Klein 72). With the growth of the cotton industry, increasing grain production, and the beginnings of industrialization and mining, the United States maintained a high level of prosperity (Klein 94).

Conversely, despite all the changes, there was still an imbalance. Americans went straight from point A to point B without having time to adjust or properly transition. To gain stability, they decided to focus more on their personal lives, i.e., their families, especially their (future) wives. Barbara Welter, a professor at Hunter University and a writer, decided to call this movement, i.e., the phenomena that took hold of a large part of women's everyday lives between 1820 and 1860, "the Cult of True Womanhood."[1] The main point is that "True Womanhood" attributes could be divided into four cardinal virtues. "Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife – woman" (Welter 152).

Piety (or religion) was considered the most essential virtue that young men sought in a woman, as it was believed that other desirable qualities would follow their own accord. It was also seen as a means to "help" women achieve peace and happiness; those considered restless and emotional were advised to pray away their feelings. It was also highly valued because it did not interfere with women's traditional role in the home.

Purity is the second virtue that a young woman is expected to possess. During this time, many women's magazines and literary works stressed its importance, instructing readers to maintain it or face severe consequences like madness or death. These cautionary tales often

[1] She came to the following conclusions by examining ~~most~~ women's magazines that appeared for more than three years between 1820 and 1860 and some magazines with a shorter lifespan (Welter 151).

featured once-innocent protagonists who suffered greatly after losing their virtue. For example, in “Lucy Dutton” by Fanny Forester, the naive title character becomes pregnant out of wedlock, leading to her descent into madness and eventual death (Welter 155–6). Conversely, those who resisted temptation were portrayed as superior, such as Bianca in “The Lady’s Amaranth.” Despite being stranded on an island, Bianca remained faithful to her husband and was ultimately rewarded with a new marriage (Welter 156).

“Submission was perhaps the most feminine virtue expected of women” (Welter 158). Although men were also encouraged to be religiously active, many understood why this could not be fully sustained - they did not have enough time for it, as they were “the movers, the doers, the actors” (Welter 159). They were also never expected to be submissive because that was not in their nature. In the hierarchy of authority, God came first, men second, and women last, with women expected to submit to men and God. Women were advised not to express their opinions and ambitions, which could have disturbed the natural order and marital affection.

A woman’s role was primarily in her home. Consequently, domesticity became a highly valued virtue. Their main task was to create a comfortable and pleasant environment so that the man would not look elsewhere for entertainment. To this end, they took on many different tasks and activities, including the role of a nurse. They were also encouraged to take up certain hobbies such as needlework, handicrafts, and gardening because if they practiced these, they were considered to be desirable and thrifty.

Over the years, many tried to free themselves from such social constraints; however, their ingrained nature made this quite a difficult task. Despite the looming political changes, these “virtues” persisted and prolonged the struggle for women’s freedom of choice, which will also be a notable feature in the following chapters.

2.2. The Rise and Fall of “The New Woman” (1860 – 1920)

In the late 19th century, as women began moving beyond traditional domestic roles, the “New Woman” archetype emerged. This transformation is vividly illustrated in Kate Chopin’s “The Awakening,” where the protagonist, Edna Pontellier, epitomizes the new ideal. Edna’s relentless quest for personal freedom, her rebellious rejection of societal norms, and her courageous journey of self-discovery challenge the narrow-minded attitudes of her time. However, the novel’s exploration of these themes was way ahead of its time,

which led to its rejection and even being banned. In order to grasp why Chopin's novel received such a backlash and understand what the author critiqued; it is essential to delve into the "New Woman" era.

The Civil War (1861 – 1865) was the defining conflict in American history, not only because of the changes it brought but also because of its central role in defining the nation's unity. Beyond the primary conflict between the industrialized North and agrarian South, it included African Americans fighting for civil rights and Native Americans attempting to reclaim their lands. Apart from the political developments, this era was also economically significant due to industrial progress, such as the completion of the first transcontinental railroad in 1869 and the booming oil industry. The 1870s marked the beginning of the Second Industrial Revolution, which brought about centralized production, national markets, and large corporations. So, what does this mean for women?

"The Civil War, in the name of patriotism and humanitarianism, had called hundreds of thousands of women out of their homes" (Smith-Rosenberg 173). No longer confined and cut off from public life, they became increasingly aware of the world around them. So, instead of returning to the pre-war arrangement, they focused on solving social problems and reinterpreting the "True Womanhood" values. "In the process of working for herself and other women, she had begun to demand equality in education, in employment, and in wages. Certain of her own abilities, she began again to demand the vote, so as to implement her social visions more effectively" (Smith – Rosenberg 175-176).

In the next generation, the role of women evolved even further with the emergence of the so-called "New Women." During a debate, Sarah Grand, the English writer, and women's rights activist coined the term in 1894 to counter the claim that the "New Woman" was ruining families because she was less willing to have children (Korykowski 3). The term generally referred to women who defied social conventions. These women had a university degree or professional training and often delayed or avoided marriage to pursue their careers.

However, this new ideal faced intense public resistance rooted in longstanding beliefs about gender roles and the sanctity of the home. There was a palpable concern among the public that if women became involved in economic and public roles, their homes would become "a structure [void of] such necessary virtues as grace, gentleness, beauty, courtesy, and piety" (Cogan 260). People saw involving women in public life as a violation of the private sphere, a change believed to threaten American society's foundation according to the prevailing norms.

This is not to say there were no improvements. Movements led by organizations like the National American Woman Suffrage Association and the National Woman's Party successfully secured women's right to vote, resulting in the 19th Amendment. Despite this victory, by the end of the 1920s, "social reforms had stalled, and the women's movement itself was in the doldrums" (Maloni 884), mainly due to the aftermath of World War I. However, their impact was far-reaching, paving the way for the rise of mid-20th-century feminism.

2.3. The Push and Pull of Women's Liberation (1920 – 1960)

The shifting roles of women in the early to mid-20th century, shaped by the impact of the World Wars and the subsequent return to traditional domesticity, provide a crucial backdrop for Sylvia Plath's novel "The Bell Jar." The story, set in the 1950s, delves into the intense conflict between societal expectations and individual dreams. Through the protagonist, Esther Greenwood, Plath critiques the post-war reversion to conservative values, emphasizing the deep dissatisfaction and mental health challenges faced by countless women. The novel's historical context is not just a setting but a significant factor that enlightens and informs readers about the challenges faced by women of that era.

Although the First World War (1914 – 1918) brought much turmoil and trauma, it "helped" women out of traditional constraints to a certain extent by allowing them to work and take on tasks outside the home (Nottingham 667). It improved their social position and gave them more employment opportunities and freedom in their private lives. However, the momentum of the 1920s did not continue into the 1930s and was interrupted by the Great Depression, caused by the stock market crash 1929.

The Second World War (1939 – 1945) was a turning point, once again liberating women from societal constraints. The war significantly expanded employment opportunities for women, as they courageously took on tasks that required technical skills and were closer to combat conditions. Motivated by patriotism, higher wages, and greater social opportunities, women found new options in the armed forces and war industry departments, which offered alternatives to low-paid jobs such as teaching (Nottingham 673).

However, with the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War, progress came to a halt again. There was now a strong urge to return to traditional order, to

something familiar and comfortable compared to the chaos and bloodshed of war. During this time, women were primarily encouraged to find fulfillment in marriage and motherhood. These norms suggested that “truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights… All they had to do was devote their lives from earliest girlhood to finding a husband and bearing children” (Friedan 2). Popular media, such as magazines and movies, supported these ideals, portraying the perfect woman as someone who found happiness in housework and motherhood (Holt 2). Advertising also depicted women in non-working roles, promoting exclusively cleaning and cooking products, reinforcing the idea that a woman’s value lay in her ability to run the household, subtly suggesting that any other role was undesirable.

While the image of the contented suburban housewife was pervasive, it masked a deep dissatisfaction among many women who longed to regain the independence they had temporarily experienced. This dissatisfaction fueled a powerful backlash in the 1960s, ushering in the wave of second-wave feminism. Although society was primarily preoccupied with political and economic issues, the legacy of wartime independence provided a foundation for future generations to fight for their rights and autonomy.

3. THEMATIC PARALLELS IN THE AWAKENING AND THE BELL JAR

3.1 Marriage, Property, and Patriarchy

Marriage, a cultural and religious bond between two people, has been of fundamental importance in societies for many years. From the late 19th to the mid-20th centuries, entering into this sacred union was not merely a social expectation but a deeply ingrained norm. Those who chose not to, often faced considerable pressure to conform or risked being ostracized by society, which many could not afford or endure. As we follow the stories of Edna Pontellier and Esther Greenwood, we witness their fearless rebellion against society's constraints. Their narratives reveal the harsh truth about marriage, often a stifling force rather than a source of happiness, and how such an environment can lead to an individual's doom.

From the first chapter of “The Awakening,” the reader quickly realizes that Edna and Léonce’s marriage is not based on pure love. Instead, it is all about practical benefits, with each partner fulfilling their role to achieve their idea of stability. Edna's increasing discontent with

their lack of genuine affection compels her to search for her true self, resulting in a profound yet heart-wrenching battle against oppressive expectations that drive her to the brink of sanity.

Léonce Pontellier's perception of their marriage is evident from their first interaction. Even though they are merely talking about Edna's sunburns from her summer outing, there is a deeper meaning behind it. When Léonce gazes upon his wife, he does not see a spouse but instead, a "valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage" (Chopin 3). It is a cold and objectifying perspective, reducing her to an item of worth that has lost some of its original luster. She is just another possession of his, valued for her aesthetic and functional quality rather than as an autonomous individual with her agency.

However, Edna is not only seen as Léonce's property in his own eyes; her acquaintances also view her, similarly, often reminding her of this fact. Before she is Edna Pontellier, she is Léonce Pontellier's wife, a role that only further stifles her individuality. One example of this is Mademoiselle Reisz. Though she exemplifies the liberation Edna seeks (to a certain extent), Reisz still emphasizes that Edna is not Robert's. Therefore, he has no right to her, not even to do something as simple as writing a letter: "Does he write to you? Never a line. Does he send you a message? Never a word. It is because he loves you, poor fool, and is trying to forget you, since you are not free to listen to him or belong to him" (Chopin 105).

Robert is another excellent example of Edna Pontellier's objectification. There is no denying that he loves her; his confession is sincere and emotional. Yet, because she is not his to claim and handle, he cannot help but feel off-putted: "You were not free; you were Léonce Pontellier's wife" (Chopin 141).

Edna is not naïve either. She recognizes that her marriage lacks genuine love. Her view, though, is nuanced. "Her marriage to Léonce Pontellier was purely an accident, in this respect resembling many other marriages which masquerade as the decrees of Fate" (Chopin 23).

Initially, he seemed like an ideal man to marry. The appeal of stability and the belief that they shared similar thoughts and tastes convinced Edna to settle. However, it was all an illusion. Though she gained a comfortable lifestyle by choosing Léonce, she also took on the duties of a devoted wife and mother, a sacrifice she had not anticipated. As a result, Edna sees her marriage as a form of confinement, one she fervently seeks to escape. However, the price of such freedom is too much for her to bear, leading to her eventual downfall. Her struggle stems from her inability to fully challenge societal norms, as her non-conformist views clash with the traditional husband-provider and wife-caretaker roles.

In those times, women were often considered mere extensions of their husbands. It was considered the norm, especially in the Creole community, exemplified in the marriage of Monsieur and Madame Ratignolle. Adèle is everything a man desires and needs, “the embodiment of every feminine grace and charm” (Chopin 10). When not comforting her child, Adèle ensures her husband's favorite dishes are ready. When she is not busy sewing winter clothes, she engages in other crafts to make her home as welcoming as her family. Meanwhile, her husband is happy to return from work to a warm and nurturing home. “The Ratignolles understood each other perfectly. If ever the fusion of two human beings into one has been accomplished on this sphere it was surely in their union” (Chopin 73).

Edna, in contrast, did not find the same contentment in her marriage as the other Creole women. She did not aspire to be a mere wife, as she found no fulfillment in the role. Although Léonce was “a rather courteous husband so long as he met a certain tacit submissiveness in his wife” (Chopin 74), this was not enough for Edna. “Temperance, sanity, and rationality are not for Edna, who wants to explore the unknown and forbidden rather than to accept the safe security of her considerate husband in his comfortable mansion. Edna wants to be free to do, but even more, to feel” (Sullivan and Smith 73).

The moment Edna awakens, she comes to hate the institution of marriage. This opinion is first visible in her attempt to destroy the ring. “Edna’s inability to crush the wedding ring, prophecies that it would not be easy for her to be liberated from the shackles of the patriarchal codes of conduct. But her fingers without wedding ring, renders her to paint, make drawings, and earn her living independently without any obstruction that impedes or is burdensome for her” (Jahan 67). Her resentment is also evident in Edna’s refusal to attend her sister’s wedding, which she perceives as “one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth” (Chopin 86-87). She does not just challenge the patriarchy’s status quo by refusing to conform to the role of a contented partner, but she also conveys a powerful message. “Edna’s excuse for not going to her sister’s wedding… is an act of rebellion in that it defines marriage as a consolation event that imprisons women and prevents them from achieving their own freedom” (Khan 1247).

Léonce may try his best to fulfill his role as a husband, but Edna is no longer willing to conform to others' expectations - not her father's, husband's, or society's. As a result, he begins to question her sanity, calling her "odd" and "peculiar" and stating that she makes him "devilishly uncomfortable" (Chopin 85-86). Many people share his view, too, reflecting the

suffocating constraints society imposes on Edna. The forceful approach others take will inevitably have consequences, pushing Edna to true madness.

Even though Esther Greenwood is not yet married, she still feels the societal pressure to fit into the traditional role of a wife. Much like Edna, Esther's mental well-being is at risk as she faces increasing pressure from family, friends, and acquaintances to conform to social expectations. Surprisingly, these expectations of the 1950s mirror those of the 1890s, indicating a societal regression rather than progress. This regression, influenced by the backdrop of violence and war, relegates women to a confining and limiting role that many sought to escape.

Mrs. Greenwood is the first to push the idea that a woman is incomplete without a man. In her view, marriage is a crucial milestone, reflecting the common belief that a woman's worth is tied to her marital status. This is evident in how passionately she endorses Buddy Willard as the ultimate choice. Described as a "fine, clean boy" (Plath 64) from a respectable family, he is the epitome of an ideal partner and the safest path for a woman. "It could be argued that Mrs. Greenwood fears that her daughter will end up like herself: without a husband. Worse than being widowed, Esther could remain unmarried" (Carlstein 8).

Mrs. Willard, Buddy's mother, is yet another character who strongly advocates the traditional marriage. She believes that women are defined by marriage, describing men as "arrows into the future" and women as the "place the arrow shoots off from" (Plath 67). "Locating these offensive homilies with Mrs. Willard allows Plath to include women in her criticism of gender politics in the 1950s, time when women, too, accepted the stereotyped roles society urged them into" (Wagner-Martin 33). Esther is determined not to follow in Mrs. Willard's footsteps, even though she feels the pressure to conform.

Mrs. Willard's efforts still go unnoticed despite all the hard work and sacrifice. She spent weeks meticulously sewing a beautiful rug from her husband's old suits, pouring her heart and soul into the project. But to her dismay, the rug was just tossed into the kitchen, where it soon became dirty and worn. This seemingly small act spoke volumes to Esther, reinforcing her cynical view of marriage: "And I knew that 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" (Plath 80).

The metaphor of the kitchen mat goes beyond just physical surrender; it also includes giving in emotionally and psychologically. Esther realizes that women are expected to "flatten

out" like a mat after marriage, adopting a passive role that promotes their husband's success at the expense of their own dreams and desires (Carlstein 9).

Esther simply cannot bear the thought of giving up her career and becoming a housewife like Mrs. Willard. The idea of surrendering to a man and committing herself to a lifelong marriage is not only restrictive but also belittling. She articulates her sentiments clearly: "The trouble was, I loathed the notion of serving men in any capacity. I desired to compose my own exhilarating letters" (Plath 72). Esther sees marriage as more than just a mere commitment. To her, it is like being shackled to a lifetime of unfulfilling domestic duties dictated by society. The thought of devoting herself to tasks she perceives as dull and trivial is unbearable. She reflects on this when she describes marriage as "a dreary and wasted life for a girl with fifteen years of straight A's" (Plath 80). Unable to ignore her intellectual potential for the unexciting yet secure future that marriage appears to provide, she finds her mental well-being suffering at the mere contemplation of it, emphasizing the ongoing struggle between her sanity and societal norms.

Buddy Willard, a medical student, and Esther's former boyfriend also embodies the traditional values his family taught him. Raised in a household where his mother often repeated the belief that women only need "infinite security" (Plath 67), he, too, adopts a conventional view of gender roles. His condescending remark that poetry is "a piece of dust" (Plath 53) and the fact that he believes a woman loses her ambition as soon as she has children (Plath 81) are more than indicative of his stifling patriarchal views. Esther is unable to cope with his opinions, which leads her to become disillusioned and even start to believe that wives are essentially "brainwashed... slave(s) in some private, totalitarian state" (Plath 81). As a result, Esther decides to distance herself from a man she once viewed as perfect in order to keep hold of her sanity.

When Esther expresses her disinterest in marrying him, Buddy calls her "crazy" (Plath 88). Such a reaction reflects a broader societal tendency to dismiss or pathologize women who do not conform. This is not just Buddy's personal idiosyncrasy but rather a reflection of the prevailing cultural narrative that sees marriage as a crucial component of a woman's identity and social status (Whittier 132). Women like Esther, who aspired to a career or personal independence, were often ostracized or viewed skeptically. However, she would rather be labeled as "neurotic" (Plath 89) than conform to that suffocating social expectation.

Moreover, Buddy's proposal is not just about marriage; it represents an invitation for Esther to surrender her identity. When Buddy asks, "How would you like to be Mrs. Buddy

Willard?" (Plath 88), he implies that Esther's identity should be subsumed under his. This idea is reinforced by the fact that most married women are referred to by their husbands' names, reducing them to mere extensions of their spouses (Carlstein 12).

Therefore, Esther is trapped between conformity and autonomy, unable to embrace either. She refuses to sacrifice her true self to fit into the role of a dutiful wife, yet the appeal of security still tugs at her. This internal conflict only deepens her distress as social constraints continue to push her to the edge of sanity.

3.2 Motherhood and Identity

Besides being a wife, another must for a woman was to be a mother. In the period these stories are set, motherhood was often portrayed as an absolute necessity for women, with children seen as the bearers of happiness and joy. The protagonists, however, do not share this attitude. Rather than seeing motherhood through rose-tinted glasses, "The Awakening" and "The Bell Jar" present a deglamorized reality of traditional maternity and its consequences. Feeling the weight of the motherhood, both Edna Pontellier and Esther Greenwood struggle to maintain their sanity while confronting societal pressures.

In "The Awakening," Kate Chopin explores the different experiences of motherhood, mainly through Adèle Ratignolle, who embodies the ideal mother, and Edna Pontellier, who grapples with those exact expectations. Edna always felt like an outsider, not only because of her origins but also because of the lack of common ground with the "mother-woman" tropes. Among them is Adèle Ratignolle, who is rarely seen without her beloved children and whose hands are always busy with some craft. However, that does not bother her in the slightest because Adèle needs nothing other than the happiness of her loved ones. Even the hobbies she learned did not serve her pleasure but those of others: "She was keeping up her music on account of the children, she said, because she and her husband both considered it a means of brightening the home and making it attractive" (Chopin 31).

Adèle‘s pregnancy is a crucial aspect of her character, as she fully embraces and relishes her role as a nurturing mother. She views it not only as a womanly duty but also as a fulfilling and joyful experience every woman should have. Conversely, pregnancy is not just a passing phase but a "condition" (Chopin 11) that ultimately defines her.

In contrast, “Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman” (Chopin 10). This simple but bold statement immediately sets Edna apart from the collective. Unlike Adèle, who is a constant presence in her children’s lives, Edna’s approach to motherhood is unconventional. She loves her children and cares for them in her own way, but her attention is inconsistent. “Instead of a constant, guiding, loving hand, Edna alternately pets and ignores her children. She treats them much as Léonce treats her, as a prized possession to keep intact” (Schaffer 21).

Despite her sporadic interest, Edna truly loves her children. Visiting them at their grandmother’s fills her with overwhelming joy, and she often finds herself tearing up when they embrace her. Nevertheless, a different kind of contentment washes over her when Edna is alone. “Their absence was a relief, though she did not admit this, even to herself. It seemed to free her of a responsibility which she had blindly assumed and for which Fate had not fitted her” (Chopin 24). Without the demands of motherhood, Edna feels a newfound sense of control and finally has the opportunity to prioritize herself. It is the only way Edna can keep a small amount of her sanity, not wholly losing herself to the suffocating constraint she was unprepared to embrace.

Her husband could not quite put his finger on it. However, he could sense her efforts to keep her distance: “It would have been difficult for Mr. Pontellier to define to his own satisfaction or anyone else’s wherein his wife failed in her duty toward their children. It was something he felt rather than perceived...” (Chopin 9). So, he decided to address her behavior, although his approach seemed more critical than constructive.

Leonce wasted no time revealing to his wife that their son Raoul was running a fever and required immediate attention. Instead of giving her a chance to respond, he launched into a tirade, blaming her for neglecting their child. “If it’s not a mother’s responsibility to care for the children, then whose job is it?” (Chopin 7), he demanded, insinuating that the burden naturally fell on her. This was just one of the many incidents that made Edna realize she no longer wanted to live such a stifling life. She craved freedom — something her husband and children could not offer. To escape her despair, Edna knew she had to break free from the constraints of her existence. Edna did not bother to justify herself either; all that consumed her was her yearning to pursue the passions she had suppressed for far too long.

Edna fearlessly challenges societal norms every step of the way. She defies her father’s wishes by marrying a Catholic man, and eventually, she bravely decides to leave him to pursue her passions. However, a candid conversation with Doctor Mandelet compels Edna to confront

the reality that she cannot avoid her responsibilities forever. Despite her best efforts to escape, Edna realizes that she will always be tethered to her children and the demands of motherhood. Such a harsh truth begins to take a toll on her mental well-being, sending her sanity into a tailspin as everything finally falls into place in her mind.

Edna's deep love for her children intensifies her internal conflict. She confesses, "I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself" (Chopin 62). Despite this devotion, Edna finds herself yearning for the brief taste of freedom she once experienced, haunted by the knowledge that her passions will once again be suppressed, plunging her back into the depressive emptiness. Consequently, she begins to view her children as "antagonists" who only "sought to drag her into the soul's slavery for the rest of her days" (Chopin 150–151). Unable to give up her sense of self, Edna tragically feels driven to end her own life, officially losing the battle between sanity and social constraints.

In "The Bell Jar," Sylvia Plath boldly challenges the American glorification of motherhood, echoing the sentiments of Kate Chopin's "The Awakening." In her work, Plath not only explores the harmful effects of societal pressures but also provides a profound critique of the belief that every woman should strive for motherhood above all else. In addition, she also emphasizes the steep cost, including loss of autonomy and declining health, that women are expected to bear, thereby enlightening us about the harmful effects of societal pressures.

There are many examples of Esther's discomfort with motherhood, but one of the most important is when she watches a woman give birth. Instead of romanticizing the process, Plath presents it rather starkly and unsettlingly. The woman is depicted lying on what is referred to as a "torture table," with an enormous belly and "ugly spindly" legs, emitting an "unhuman whooping noise" during labor (Plath 61). This sight deeply affects Esther, and despite Buddy's attempts to reassure her, his efforts only serve to exacerbate the situation: "Later Buddy told me the woman was on a drug that would make her forget she'd had any pain and that when she swore and groaned she really didn't know what she was doing because she was in a kind of twilight sleep. I thought it sounded just like the sort of drug a man would invent" (Plath 61).

This paragraph dives into the dehumanization of women. It highlights how men often fail to truly comprehend the physical and emotional toll of childbirth and motherhood. The pain and suffering that women endure are often trivialized and not given the seriousness they deserve. "Esther perceives that ignorance has been substituted for comfort, that the drug is

amnesiac without being truly anaesthetic" (Whittier 137). The idea that women had to endure such hardships, only for it to be played down, truly disgusts Esther.

Furthermore, it underscores the troubling reality that a single man dedicated extensive effort to creating a drug that could potentially strip women of their autonomy. This drug, in its attempt to erase the memory of pain, presents a false image of a painless childbirth. The potential consequence is subsequent pregnancies without a full understanding of the physical and emotional implications, ultimately affecting women's well-being. Such an approach, rather than an act of compassion, is seen as a means of controlling and directing women's reproductive journey and their mental state. "Her posture, too, is divisive her mind and face erased, her procreatively necessary parts exposed as if to indicate that reason has no place in parturition; she is significantly without words" (Whittier 137). The delicate line between maintaining her sanity and adhering to societal norms becomes increasingly hazy as we realize that many women have had to make sacrifices, unable to preserve both. Either a woman surrenders her independence and mental well-being in conformity with tradition, or she faces abandonment and social exclusion, left without support or security.

In "The Bell Jar," Dodo Conway serves a similar purpose to Adèle Ratignolle in "The Awakening." Despite being a minor character and just a neighbor, Dodo significantly influences Esther's perception of motherhood. Dodo represents the typical 1950s mother - constantly pregnant, entirely dedicated to her children, and seemingly content with her life. However, Esther sees this portrayal differently. She mainly focuses on Dodo's physical appearance, commenting on her "grotesque, protruding belly" (Plath 111). She feels no maternity or affection but instead feels the same disgust that she did when witnessing the heavily medicated birth.

In addition, Esther dehumanizes Dodo by comparing her to an animal, which further diminishes her worth: "Her head tilted happily back, like a sparrow egg perched on a duck egg, she smiled into the sun" (Plath 112). Esther does not just critique Dodo's life decisions; she also denounces a society fixated on a woman's reproductive role while disregarding her individuality. Her mind has been so thoroughly erased that she now resembles a bird more than a human. The theme of sacrificing sanity or conforming to social norms emerges again, with women finding themselves trapped with minimal options dictated by society.

However, Esther cannot wholly dismiss the idea despite her reservations about embracing motherhood. She is torn after witnessing women lose their sense of self to the same

social constraint, yet she is still attracted to the security it could bring. Her indecision, a complex web of conflicting desires, is taking a toll on her sanity as she struggles to align with societal expectations while yearning for the freedom to be herself. Until she finds a role model who can guide her without imposing strict social norms or compromising her well-being, her mental health will continue to suffer.

3.3 A Journey of Self-Discovery and Liberation

Throughout history, society has expected women to fit into specific roles. While many accepted and even found pleasure in them, others, like Edna Pontellier in "The Awakening" and Esther Greenwood in "The Bell Jar," felt the opposite. Initially, they wished to be "normal" and follow the same path as those around them. However, as they embarked on their journeys of self-discovery, they realized that conforming to societal norms conflicted with their true selves. Bound by constraints threatening their sanity, they grappled with the crushing weight of expectations while yearning for personal freedom and a more profound sense of identity.

Edna Pontellier's awakening is closely linked to the liberating atmosphere of the seaside resort where she spends her summer. For Edna, raised conservatively, Grand Isle feels like a completely different world. Unlike the stifling society of New Orleans, Grand Isle offers a relaxing and freeing experience where people express themselves openly. Edna is surprised by the candid discussions on topics like childbirth and provocative novels, even from a devoted mother like Adèle. She is also bewildered by Robert's unrestrained attention, which many, even Léonce, perceive as a gesture of hospitality rather than inappropriate.

However, it is not the resort but the sea, with its seductive voice and sensual touch, that drives her to seek freedom. Though Edna often gazes at the sea in awe, her awakening begins only when she fully embraces it during her first swim: "Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her" (Chopin 57). In that moment, the sea, with its vastness and mystery, helps her uncover her hidden self, reflect on it, and ultimately establish her identity. Therefore, the ocean symbolizes liberation as it juxtaposes Edna's confinement within her home (Khan 1245).

Edna is now left with two choices—either blend into her conventional existence or transcend the role imposed on her by society. The decision is anything but easy, and yet she tries to make sense of it all by observing her two female acquaintances.

The first is Adèle Ratignolle, whom she met during her stay on Grand Isle. Adèle embodies the ideal woman of the time, who "idolized their children," "worshiped their husbands," and considered it a "holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals" (Chopin 10). Despite their friendship, Adèle and Edna have fundamentally different views on life.

Much has already been said about Adèle's role in Edna's journey. Still, to understand the whole picture, we must also understand the second woman who had a significant influence despite her adversities and differences. Mademoiselle Reisz is the opposite, not only of the perfect Adèle but also of the rest of the Grand Isle community. Described as a "homely woman with a small, weazened face and body, and eyes that glowed" (Chopin 32), Reisz stands out with her unfeminine appearance. Her personality is no better—she is irritable, scornful, and has no patience for anything ordinary or mundane. Nevertheless, despite all the negative associations, she is also an incredibly talented pianist, ready to sacrifice much in life to pursue her art with no constraints and limitations.

Even though the two women do not always agree, they share many characteristics. Both are keen observers of the people around them and can see what is happening beneath the surface. They are also refreshingly blunt and not afraid to speak their minds. This straightforwardness is a common trait, as is their aversion to anything fake or hypocritical. However, their shared appreciation of art bonded them the most. Under Reisz's guidance, Edna discovers a spiritual side to life beyond her mundane existence as she begins to think of herself as an artist.

Reisz also warns that an artistic path is more challenging than many believe. "To be an artist includes much; one must possess many gifts—absolute gifts... And, moreover, to succeed, the artist must possess the courageous soul" (Chopin 83). The bond between Edna and Mademoiselle Reisz goes beyond inspiring her to pursue art; it also helps her break free from society's constraints on women.

Through their friendship, Edna learns to navigate the predominantly male world of public life. Mademoiselle Reisz, a symbol of artistic freedom, becomes Edna's muse, encouraging her to explore the world of painting. She also becomes someone Edna leans on for guidance or when she needs to pour her heart out, confident that Reisz's free-spirited nature will not condemn her like most people in society would.

Since her awakening, her resistance has only grown stronger. “She made no ineffectual efforts to conduct her household en bonne ménagère, going and coming as it suited her fancy, and, so far as she was able, lending herself to any passing caprice” (Chopin 74). Not only did she start to show disrespect, but she also showed a lack of empathy towards the people she was supposed to cherish. Edna grew distant and indifferent, feeling more relieved by their absence than longing for their presence. Consequently, she became disconnected from her past life both physically and emotionally.

Edna's actions can be interpreted in various ways—some might see them as evidence of declining well-being, while others might view them as an act of rebellion. However, one thing is clear – Edna is purposefully taking control of her life to pursue her passions. At this stage, she feels confident that her actions will resolve the conflict between her sanity and societal constraints, allowing her to express herself freely and focus on her self-discovery journey without interruptions.

The clearest sign of Edna’s transformation is her move to the “pigeon house.” When she confides in Mademoiselle Reisz, it becomes evident that her plan signifies more than just a change of address; it is her desire to liberate herself from societal constraints. One morning, she realizes how much her individuality has been suppressed by her dependence on her husband’s “bounty” (Chopin 110). To achieve true freedom, Edna must give up her comforts and relinquish the obligations that have held her back.

In the past, Edna felt suffocated by the duties and expectations of being a wife and mother. The grand house she shared with Léonce Pontellier was a beautiful but confining symbol of her entrapment within societal norms. On the other hand, the “pigeon house” gave her a haven to freely explore her passions and individuality without society’s constant scrutiny and criticism. Despite being much smaller than her previous residence, she adores it because it is truly her own. This marks another step towards finding peace and maintaining the newfound sense of clarity, free from the restrictions that have kept a close eye on her every move, and finally feeling truly fulfilled.

In addition to the physical aspect, there is also an emotional distance to her old life, and this is particularly evident in her relationships with other men, both of whom play a crucial role in her self-image. The first significant mention is Robert Lebrun, who starkly contrasts Edna’s husband, Léonce Pontellier, from the novel’s beginning. Robert is warm, attentive, and free-spirited—everything that the authoritarian and traditional Léonce is not. When Robert decides

to stay with Edna instead of joining Léonce in the men's club, it becomes clear that he does not fit the conventional mold. His goal is not to stay away from the women in his life but rather to enjoy their company, which sets the stage for a friendship to develop into something greater later on: "Robert and Mrs. Pontellier sitting idle, exchanging occasional words glances or smiles, which indicated a certain advanced stage of intimacy" (Chopin 12).

Edna only truly appreciated his presence after he left for Mexico. It was a wake-up call for her to confront her feelings and strive for independence. "Robert's going had in some way taken the brightness, the color, the meaning out of everything. The conditions of her life were in no way changed, but her whole existence was dulled, like a faded garment which seems to be no longer worth wearing" (Chopin 59-60). She misses him, his physical presence, and how he made her feel alive. Even in his absence, she often searches for information about Robert and reflects on their time together, using these memories to preserve her newfound identity.

When they finally confess their love for each other, their passion faces yet another obstacle – the constraints of society. Despite Robert initially treating Edna as an equal, he still holds onto traditional 19th-century values. His expectation for Léonce to "hand over" Edna overlooks the fact that she is not someone's possession: "I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose" (Chopin 142), Robert still refuses to accept this as a reality. He longs for Edna to be his wife but struggles with embracing her freedom and independence. Unable to possess her completely, Robert makes the painful decision to walk away.

Robert is a pivotal character in Edna's life, as he serves as both her love interest and the catalyst for her crumbling sanity. He had promised Edna eternal love and affection, but when she failed to meet his expectations of a submissive wife, he abandoned her. Edna's exhilarating sense of liberation was deeply intertwined with her love for independence. The profound realization that no one, not even Robert, could truly understand her burning desire for freedom left her feeling utterly disillusioned.

The second man who plays a role in her awakening is Alcée Arobin. Although he seems to be just another visitor to the racecourse, the opera, and the fashionable clubs, he stands out for his charm. "There was a perpetual smile in his eyes, which seldom failed to awaken a corresponding cheerfulness in anyone who looked into them and listened to his good-humored voice" (Chopin 97). At first, Edna tries to distance herself from him by coolly answering his

letters and rejecting his presence, but this does not deter him in the slightest from his pursuit. After all, he is a notorious womanizer who knows a thing or two about seduction.

He takes Edna to the racecourse with his friend Mrs. Highcamp, knowing she loves horse racing—a pastime she cannot indulge in because her husband opposes it. He also shows interest in Edna's paintings, writes her persuasive letters, and helps her furnish her new house. These actions gradually weaken Edna's defenses, especially as she feels increasingly isolated by the absence of her husband, children, and Robert.

Edna, like many others, has conformed to societal expectations way too young and feels trapped in a life that doesn't align with her true desires. Struggling with boredom and discontent, she finds a captivating contrast in Alcée. Unlike others, he challenges conventions, remaining unmarried and charming countless women. Despite his unconventional ways, Alcée has a unique ability to ignite passion in women, Edna included. "Alcée Arobin was absolutely nothing to her. Yet his presence, his manners, the warmth of his glances, and above all the touch of his lips upon her hand had acted like a narcotic upon her" (Chopin 102).

Motivated more by a passionate longing than a deep emotional bond, this relationship plays a crucial role in Edna's journey towards self-discovery and realization of her desires beyond the confines of societal expectations. The decisive moments of touch and kiss are bold gestures of rebellion against societal expectations, showing Edna's assertion of her true self. The implication that they spent the night together adds an intriguing layer to the story, as the narrator states: "He did not say good night until she had become supple to his gentle, seductive entreaties" (Chopin 122).

In Edna's journey, the powerful force of lust acts as a tempest, pushing her towards impulsive decisions that mirror her deteriorating mental state. "Edna never really becomes a free woman because she confuses impulsive action with liberation and because she never understands herself or her own wishes and goals" (Sullivan and Smith 63). The inner conflict Edna experiences, where a profound sense of emptiness accompanies her pursuit of physical pleasure, hints at the idea that defying societal norms may not always lead to genuine freedom.

In the end, Edna finds that neither her love for Robert nor her attraction to Alcée can provide the solution to her search for her true self. While these relationships offered her a temporary escape from reality, she grappled with the desire for complete freedom and self-fulfillment. The more she struggled with this realization, the more her sanity deteriorated,

leaving her feeling trapped and longing for true freedom. To reinforce this idea, Chopin employs the image of a bird with a broken wing.

While the symbol is mentioned several times throughout the novel, its most poignant appearance occurs in the final moments. As Edna walks into the sea, she sees a bird with a broken wing "beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water" (Chopin 151). This image powerfully symbolizes Edna's situation. She feels trapped by societal norms and her emotional boundaries and cannot entirely escape the life she has led. "Aware that she cannot have the life she wants, Edna becomes the bird with the broken wing spiraling down to the water" (Elz 24).

Esther Greenwood and Edna Pontellier, seemingly opposite, actually share a significant internal struggle. Whether as a dissatisfied wife and mother like Edna, or in Esther's different circumstances, the battle between preserving one's sanity and yielding to societal pressures is a force that shapes their lives. Their quests for self-discovery also highlight a significant conflict - the choice between embracing their true selves and risking social rejection or surrendering their autonomy for stability.

Right from the start, Esther's insecurity is palpable. Her discussion of her family's financial situation and accomplishments reveals her feelings of aimlessness and the societal pressure she feels. Even securing an internship, a goal many young women aspire to, hasn't lifted her spirits. In her own words: "I guess I should have been excited the way most of the other girls were, but I couldn't get myself to react. I felt very still and very empty, "I guess I should have been excited the way most of the other girls were, but I couldn't get myself to react. I felt very still and very empty, the way the eye of a tornado must feel, moving dully along in the middle of the surrounding hullabaloo" (Plath 2-3). Esther's experiences show a clear difference between outer success and inner satisfaction. She is doing everything "right" based on society's standards—attending a prestigious college, interning at a top magazine, and keeping up a specific image. However, these accomplishments do not lead to personal fulfillment or a sense of purpose.

During her internship for Ladies Day magazine, Esther meets Doreen and Betsy, who embody two extremes. Doreen is a sophisticated, sexy, and spontaneous blonde Southerner, and initially, Esther finds this appealing and even tries to emulate her. This admiration is deeply felt, as Esther says, "Everything she said was like a secret voice speaking straight out of my own

bones" (Plath 7). However, the more time they spend together, going out and interacting with men, the more Esther realizes their differences.

The turning point comes when Doreen meets Lenny. Infatuated, Doreen leaves all other commitments behind and distances herself from Esther and others, her earlier attitude and stances changing drastically. Esther witnesses this transformation firsthand, observing how Doreen becomes passive when Lenny looks at her: "Doreen wasn't saying a word… but the man didn't seem to mind. He kept staring at her the way people stare at the great white macaw in the zoo, waiting for it to say something human" (Plath 10). Esther's feeling of betrayal intensifies as she witnesses Doreen's actions conflicting with her words, prompting her to question her longing for independence. This marks the beginning of her declining mental health, a direct result of the societal pressures she is trying to resist. Her doubts about the sincerity of her independence and her growing insecurity about the future are all manifestations of this struggle.

Moreover, Doreen's behavior is far too reckless and vulgar for Esther to handle. Her wild and unrestrained actions, such as the chaotic dance with Lenny in which she bites, screams, and blasphemes, testify to her lack of self-control. Esther, on the other hand, could never do the same despite her longing for liberation. She cannot help but feel a tinge of envy and resentment because, in contrast to herself, Doreen seemed to go through life utterly free without inhibitions.

Unlike Doreen, Betsy is a simple and cheerful girl "imported straight from Kansas with her blonde ponytail and Sweetheart-of-Sigma-Chi smile" (Plath 6). While Esther understands why Betsy is appealing and even envies her simplicity, she still cannot truly connect with her. Betsy wants nothing more than happiness in a traditional setting, lacking the depth Esther tries to preserve. It is also her naivety and obliviousness that the overly realistic and pessimistic Esther cannot handle, pinning her as just another "Pollyanna Cowgirl" (Plath 6).

Esther struggles with the conflicting images of Betsy and Doreen. In her mind, society's influence portrays Betsy's identity as the safer choice, reinforced by the media and movies she consumes. These societal messages perpetuate the idea that only the pure, innocent girl will find happiness, while the rebellious, sensual girl is destined for isolation. Esther feels torn between these extremes, unable to identify with either Betsy or Doreen. As a result, Esther starts to doubt her own sanity, feeling like a failure due to her indecisiveness and inability to find true contentment.

Another woman Esther tries to identify with is Jay Cee, the magazine editor. She seems to have it all—a flourishing career and a marriage. Jay Cee's keen intellect and professional skills catch Esther's eye and give her an inkling of a path she could follow. Despite her initial admiration, Esther's enthusiasm wanes. This disappointment sets in when Jay Cee suggests Esther learn shorthand, which she considers essential to her professional success. Esther, however, disagrees, claiming it is a way to force her into subordination, which she finds oppressive and restrictive.

"Jay Cee is only another version of female submission. She is the masculine in female disguise" (Budick 876). Her insistence on learning shorthand symbolizes the societal expectation that women must conform to male norms to succeed. A similar idea is also reflected in Esther's relationship with her mother, who advocates shorthand as a path to success. Despite their strength and independence, both women are molded by a society that forces them to adopt a male-centric approach to work and life. Esther, however, is unwilling to sacrifice her femininity for social acceptance and instead continues to search for a path that will honor her identity without submitting to oppressive norms.

At this point, Esther feels wholly lost to the point that she does not even understand who she is in the essence. Such a notion further affirms the ongoing battle between sanity and social constraints as a woman with ambitious aspirations suddenly considers following a more traditional path. The lives of others who conform to societal norms seem much more straightforward and easier to navigate. Despite critiquing Dodo Conway for lacking individuality, Esther cannot help but ponder the possibility of adopting her lifestyle: "And one day I might just marry a virile, but tender, garage mechanic and have a big cowy family, like Dodo Conway" (Plath 127). Ultimately, these musings are just fantasies, as Esther realizes she cannot follow other women's predetermined paths, even if she struggles to accept this as a fact.

Plath masterfully depicts Esther's indecision and identity crisis through the famous image of the fig tree. "One fig was a husband and a happy home and children, and another fig was a famous poet, and another fig was a brilliant professor, and another fig was Ee Gee, the amazing editor..." (Plath 73). Esther, however, feels paralyzed and incapable of choosing, leading her to "starve to death" (Plath 73). Despite being offered many choices, Esther finds them meaningless because she cannot pick just one. Each decision involves some degree of loss, causing her to spiral further into confusion, lost among the many possibilities but unable to decide which one will truly define her. Through this depiction, Plath portrays Esther's turmoil

and highlights the crushing pressure of conformity and the psychological toll of fitting into narrow, predetermined molds (Dodge 13).

The exploration of identity and deteriorating sanity is intricately intertwined with the symbolism of mirrors. From the start, Esther's interactions with mirrors are marked by unease and bewilderment. The reflection she sees often feels unfamiliar as if she is staring at a stranger. However, in the elevator at the Amazon Hotel, this symbolism truly comes to life when Esther cannot identify her own reflection. In that moment, a seemingly harmless object transforms into a harbinger of her inner turmoil, further adding to the disparity between her true self and outward appearance.

Esther's relationship with mirrors reaches a critical point after her suicide attempt. In the hospital, a nurse hands her a mirror. Taken aback by her reflection, Esther says: "At first I didn't see what the trouble was. It wasn't a mirror, it was 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" (Plath 168).

This moment is crucial because it visualizes Esther's complete loss of self. Her inability to recognize her reflection symbolizes the depth of her identity crisis and the extent to which her depression has distorted her self-perception. The sight of her face, so completely alien and deformed, fills her with rage and prompts her to throw away the mirror to reject this broken identity symbolically (Krishna 117).

Dr. Nolan's influence on Esther stands out sharply from that of other women. While many impose their expectations and ideals, Dr. Nolan offers something different - genuine support without constraints. Instead of acting as a role model, Dr. Nolan becomes an "anti – model" (Perloff 521), a concept that allows Esther to discover her true self rather than conform to someone else's vision.

Dr. Nolan plays a vital role in helping Esther discover her true self. A powerful example of this is when she supports Esther by providing access to birth control, dispelling the negative stereotypes surrounding premarital sex, and helping her obtain a diaphragm. Dr. Nolan's actions empower Esther to embrace her sexuality without the fear of unwanted pregnancy, enabling her to explore her identity freely and safely. Such support is not only practical but also essential in allowing Esther to live life on her own terms while maintaining her mental well-being.

At first, Esther blames herself for not being able to conform. In the clinic waiting room, surrounded by pregnant women, she is acutely aware of her otherness and senses the silent condemnation from those around her. However, Esther embraces her decision once she sits at the medical table. Her newfound sexual freedom liberates her from the overwhelming fear of motherhood, empowering her to make her own choices. She can now decide whether to engage in intimate relationships, choose her partners, and prioritize her pleasure over procreation. Reflecting on this newfound liberation, she thinks, "I am climbing to freedom, freedom from fear, freedom from marrying the wrong person, like Buddy Willard, just because of sex, freedom from the Florence Crittenden Homes where all the poor girls go who should have been fitted out like me, because what they did, they would do anyway, regardless…" (Plath 213).

Even as Esther undergoes changes and looks towards a brighter future, she does not seek to discard her past as Edna did in her pursuit of identity. Instead, she embraces her memories as an integral part of her. Despite the daunting challenge, she is determined to break free from societal constraints and embrace her journey of self-discovery with unwavering confidence, refusing to let anything shake her sense of identity or sanity: "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" (Plath 227).

3.4 Madness and Sadness

Women, especially those struggling with mental health issues, have been mistreated for far too long. Trapped between the need to keep their sanity and the constraints imposed by these norms, many women face an agonizing battle for autonomy. This same reality is poignantly portrayed in "The Awakening" with Edna Pontellier and "The Bell Jar" with Esther Greenwood.

Both characters are overwhelmed by oppressive expectations, and their mental health crises are exacerbated by a society that disregards their suffering. Their stories provide a raw and compelling insight into how crushing societal pressures can be on women's mental well-

being, exposing the devastating consequences of being caught between the fragile balance of sanity and the suffocating constraints of societal expectations.

When we meet Edna for the first time at the Grand Isle resort, everything seems straight out of a picture book. She is just one of many upper–class women enjoying the summer with her husband, children, and friends. However, it soon becomes clear that there is more under the surface.

One evening, after her husband Léonce returns home from gambling and scolds her for neglecting the children, Edna retreats to the porch and bursts into tears. “The tears came so fast to Mrs. Pontellier’s eyes that the damp sleeve of her peignoir no longer served to dry them” (Chopin 7-8). Distraught and overwhelmed by the expectations placed on her, Edna struggles to understand the source of her unhappiness. By societal standards, she should be content; after all, she has a husband, two children, a comfortable lifestyle, and stable finances. However, despite these apparent blessings, Edna feels unfulfilled and restless.

Her emotional instability and constant mood swings are prevalent features throughout the novel. There are moments when she is at ease, cherishing time with loved ones and diving into her hobbies. However, there are also days when she battles with motivation, bouncing between oversleeping and sleeplessness and struggling with either too much or no appetite at all. Caught in the whirlwind of intense emotions, she struggles to find stability, a battle that many would interpret as the initial stage of a mental crisis.

The narrator also explains this phenomenon: “There were days when she was very happy without knowing why. She was happy to be alive and breathing, when her whole being seemed to be one with the sunlight, the colour, the odours, the luxuriant warmth of some perfect Southern day… There were days when she was unhappy, she did not know why, — when it did not seem worth while to be glad or sorry, to be alive or dead; when life appeared to her like a grotesque pandemonium and humanity like worms struggling blindly toward inevitable annihilation” (Chopin 76).

When coping with her depressive episodes, Edna often feels a sudden and inexplicable urge to sleep. While Chopin uses these sleep episodes as a metaphor for Edna’s awakening to her desires, they also emphasize her depressive episodes and fluctuating moods (Ryan 268). For example, when Edna refuses to leave her hammock, she consciously chooses to sleep over her husband. “The physical need for sleep began to overwhelm her, the exuberance that had sustained and fuelled her spirit left her helpless and yielding to the condition that held her

captive" (Chopin 41). Yet again, Edna falls into a deep sleep at Madame Antoine's house. Upon waking up, she asks Robert, "How many years have I been asleep?" (Chopin 49). This question not only shows that sleep is a form of escape for Edna but also stresses the depth of her escapism. She seems to prefer the dream world, where time is suspended, over the cold reality of her life, defined by constraints.

Her increasing outbursts also show how much she is struggling. The first time Edna stands up to her husband, it ends in a violent and unexpected backlash. When Léonce comes home and realizes that Edna is not dressed for the usual Tuesday reception, he is taken aback. He asks her if she is tired because she has been receiving guests all day, to which Edna replies, "I found their cards when I got home; I was out." (Chopin 66). This act of defiance, coupled with her neglect of domestic duties, infuriates Léonce. Feeling his authority challenged and diminished at home, he storms out of the house and seeks refuge at his club, where his authority and traditional values are still respected.

As soon as he leaves, Edna retreats to her room, angry and frustrated. She begins by tearing a delicate handkerchief into strips, rolling it into a ball, and throwing it away. Then she takes off her wedding ring and throws it on the carpet. Edna tries to crush it, too, but her heel is too small to make any difference. Finally, in a rage, she picks up a glass vase from the table and hurls it against the fireplace tiles. "She wanted to destroy something. The crash and clatter were what she wanted to hear" (Chopin 69).

At this stage in her journey, the tension between her mental stability and societal expectations becomes strikingly apparent. She battles to reclaim her autonomy and strives to maintain her sanity while challenging the constraints that once suppressed it. Such a task proves to be too much for Edna, as her behavior, in the end, is not one of harmony. Instead, her behavior is "capricious, unguided, unthinking, and misleading" (Sullivan and Smith 66), which becomes more and more evident as the story progresses.

It all began with something as simple as horse races. Once forbidden, she finally rediscovered her old passion with the help of Alcée Arobin and Mrs. Highcamp. Their influence was significant, the sensation like none other, and the game's exhilaration sent her anticipation soaring to new heights: "The fever of the game flamed in her cheeks and eyes, and it got into her blood and into her brain like an intoxicant" (Chopin 97).

Edna fearlessly defies all caution, transitioning from risking her finances to risking her place in society and even her marriage, all in pursuit of instant gratification and exhilaration.

Her affair with Alcée Arobin, devoid of romance but full of passion, is just one example of her impulsive behavior. Driven purely by sudden urges, she makes spontaneous decisions without emotional preparation, acting on her impulses without considering the consequences. When Edna finally succumbs to his advances, it is a heat-of-the-moment choice, and despite knowing it is wrong, she feels no guilt – at least, not because of Léonce. “She did not mean her husband; she was thinking of Robert Lebrun. Her husband seemed to her now like a person whom she had married without love as an excuse” (Chopin 102).

Because of her behavior, Edna is often dismissed as “a little mentally unbalanced” (Chopin 75). Her true feelings are finally pouring out, but no one, not even her husband, seems to notice. Some, like Doctor Mandelet, consider this a passing phase, believing that most women are naturally sensitive and fickle (Chopin 87). Others, like Edna’s father, advise Léonce to be more authoritarian and force her to obey (Chopin 93-94). Such responses only prove that she will never be taken seriously no matter what Edna does. The men around her, whether sympathetic or not, patronize her, treat her like a child or a possession, and offer no meaningful support.

Edna’s impulsive decisions, such as her move to the “pigeon house” and her relentless pursuit of Robert, indicate her determination to explore all facets of her passions and possibilities. However, the harsh reality, like a looming storm, eventually catches up with her. Edna realizes she can never be completely free, as her past choices, especially becoming a wife and mother, cannot be undone by mere wishes. She also recognizes that no man can satisfy her need for real understanding and freedom.

At this stage, Edna finds herself teetering on the brink of sanity, struggling against society's suffocating expectations. Her emotional fatigue is noticeable, and her health suffers under the unyielding weight of societal pressures. In a final, bold act of rebellion, Edna seeks refuge in the ocean, ultimately meeting a tragic fate.

Here, Edna encounters the sea once again, but this time with a deeper self-awareness. The sea no longer just calls to her soul, but to her physical being, accentuating her physical and existential liberation. Standing before the sea, she sheds her clothes, symbolizing the release from societal constraints and the revelation of her true self. This act of becoming “naked” signifies her rebirth, like a “newborn creature” facing the world anew (Chopin 151).

By surrendering herself to the sea, Edna achieves a transcendent form of liberation. Although her death is tragic, it is also a powerful confirmation of her striving for self-determination. It is a poignant commentary on the limitations imposed on women and the paths one can take to reclaim one's autonomy. Edna's final swim thus encapsulates the profound complexity of her journey and marks the culmination of her awakening and her freedom from social constraints.

Esther and Edna, two complex characters, share a striking similarity in their mental health struggles. Signs of their inner turmoil were evident long before the events in the novel unfolded; however, it is undeniable that their sanity deteriorated further as they grappled with the suffocating pressures of society. Their experiences, though unique, resonate with the universal human struggle against societal expectations.

In order to understand both the 1950s background and their approach to mental health, the reader has to have a deeper understanding of the opening lines 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 couldn't help wondering what it would be like, being burned alive all along your nerves. I thought it must be the worst thing in the world" (Plath 1)

This event is more than a historical detail; it serves as a chilling precursor to the electroshock therapy that Esther Greenwood endures later in the story. As she reflects on the Rosenbergs' fate, she wonders what it would feel like to be "burned alive along the nerves," a haunting thought foreshadowing her experience. This treatment, administered by male doctors to "cure" her, is a clear parallel to the Rosenbergs' harsh punishment. "For those like Esther who dare to challenge social norms, the repercussions may manifest through methods such as electroconvulsive therapy, subjecting them to the punishing consequences of disobedience and dissent" (Gazairi 632).

Esther Greenwood, a dedicated and talented young woman, has always seen a promising future ahead, much like her male peers. With a solid academic record and a commitment to her studies, she seemed destined for success. However, Esther becomes acutely aware of the formidable societal barriers that limit her opportunities. The mounting pressure to conform slowly begins to take a toll, chipping away at her sanity and significantly impacting her mental health.

Plath's clever use of the bell jar imagery vividly depicts Esther's tumultuous battles with depression and self-identity. This metaphor first takes explicit form when Esther describes her sense of entrapment: "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" (Plath 178).

The quote powerfully illustrates Esther's sense of confinement, emphasizing how her depression seems inescapable, no matter where she finds herself physically. "Plath uses the imagery of the bell jar to convey a tangible sense of being physically ensnared, almost as if Esther is an enigmatic specimen under a scrutinizing microscope – laid bare to the world with no means of escape and steadily suffocating" (Håkansson 12).

Beyond this, however, the bell jar also serves as a poignant symbol of the social constraints that weighed heavily on women in the 1950s. The metaphor serves as a mental cage that imprisons Esther and restricts her freedom and ability to pursue her desires (Håkansson 14). Buddy Willard's role in Esther's life illustrates her confinement under the bell jar. Through his presence and Mrs. Greenwood's encouragement, Esther is further pressured to conform to traditional female roles, which is at odds with her professional ambitions. This clash between what society expects and what Esther wants significantly adds to her declining mental health and her feeling of being trapped.

In addition, Esther also struggles with a sense of purposelessness, which is particularly evident in her career and creative pursuits. The first clue of such behavior is noticeable in her conversation with Jay Cee. Esther was confident she had everything figured out, especially with her flawless academic record. Nevertheless, when Jay Cee asks about her plans after graduation, Esther responds, "I don't know" (Plath 30). From then on, the subject of her future becomes even more sensitive, causing her mental health to deteriorate as time goes by, not only because of social constraints but also because of a lack of direction.

Esther's world comes crashing down when she returns home from her internship, only to be met with the devastating news that she did not make it into the writing class she longed for. This rejection not only shatters her hope but also sends her spiraling into a deep depression. Plath portrays Esther's heavy sense of emptiness and her inability to carry on with daily life—she withdraws to her bed, tunes out the outside world, neglects her appearance, and lets the

phone ring unanswered. From this point on, her struggle between sanity and social constraints will take a physical shape, too.

Her deteriorating mental state is also reflected in her writing (Krishna 114). As vividly portrayed: “The letters grew barbs and rams’ horns. I watched them separate, each from the other, and jiggle up and down in a silly way” (Plath 120). These distorted letters, mirroring her bewildered thoughts, reveal her profound struggle to articulate herself coherently amidst the turmoil in her mind.

As her depression deepens, the writing that once brought her joy becomes an impossible task. This inability to create mirrors her struggle to reconcile her true self with the expectations imposed upon her. The “barb-like letters” symbolize the trauma she is experiencing, with each sharp letter representing the painful societal expectations she cannot fulfill (Krishna 114). The fact that she cannot read nor write properly is the biggest reason for her shame, causing her even more to be drawn into herself rather than confide in.

Because Esther’s behavior became so bad that not even her family could ignore it, she is referred to Dr. Gordon, whose treatment exemplifies the disinterest and harshness often found in male-dominated psychiatry (Zirker 34). Esther's wariness towards Dr. Gordon becomes evident as she observes his seemingly flawless life—the picturesque family and idyllic setting (Plath 124). His perfect world starkly contrasts with her chaotic and troubled existence, making it difficult for her to see how his experiences could possibly relate to her struggles. This disconnect fuels her refusal to trust him, stressing the broader divide between those who comfortably adhere to societal norms and those whose mental stability is scrutinized and questioned.

Rather than showing empathy, Dr. Gordon only reacts when Esther expresses anger, viewing it as a challenge to his authority rather than a plea for support (Zirker 35). It is not until Esther drops a letter on his desk that he finally considers her in need of treatment, not because he empathizes with her suffering but because her behavior threatens his control.

Esther reflects on her experience of ECT as deeply traumatic. She feels confused and disoriented, mainly because the treatment was administered without proper preparation or her consent. Her distress is clear when she says, “I wondered what terrible thing it was that I had done” (Plath 138). Dr. Gordon’s quick decision to use ECT without considering other therapeutic options shows his disregard for Esther’s individual needs and autonomy. Esther's

experience, however, is just one of many that prove the troubling intersection of sanity and social control.

The conflict between sanity and social constraints comes to a head as Esther perceives suicide as her only escape. Overwhelmed by her mental turmoil and societal pressures, she feels utterly trapped. Her actions reveal her desperate attempt to assert control over her life, yet her survival instincts persist. As she swims out to sea, intending to drown herself, she hears her heartbeat, which she interprets as “I am, I am, I am” (Plath 152), symbolizing her primal desire for self-affirmation even in the face of death.

There are some similarities in the approach to death, as both Edna and Esther take to the sea to lose their lives in search of liberation from social constraints. However, there are two differences in these attempts. Firstly, while Edna’s attempt is mainly seen as a spontaneous act, Esther plans her death before she arrives at the beach, seeing it as “the kindest way to die” (Plath 151). Secondly, Edna succeeds in her attempt. Meanwhile, Esther fails. The symbol of the beating heart explains this.

When she tries to drown herself, she thinks she can swim far enough out to get too tired to return. However, her heart “boomed like a dull motor” (Plath 152), driving her back to shore. Similarly, when she tries to hang herself, each time the cord tightens, her body’s survival instincts take over, causing her to let go. “Her beating heart seems to be the only thing that is truly sane about her, part that is almost unconscious but still exists in her like a piece of hope” (Krishna 117). Even when her sanity is at its lowest, Esther’s body refuses to yield to the constraints of society. A resilient part of her, perhaps her unconscious, resists, urging her to rise and try again. Ultimately, she does just that, seizing another chance at life.

4. CONCLUSION

The novels “The Awakening” by Kate Chopin and “The Bell Jar” by Sylvia Plath sharply criticize the restrictions that society imposes on women and spin captivating stories around the intense struggles of their protagonists. Through close examination of emotional and powerful scenes, it becomes clear how these restrictions shape their identities, alter their paths and emphasize the timeless struggle for women's autonomy and self-realization.

The first social constraint is marriage, portrayed as a confinement rather than a union of love. Edna's marriage lacks true love, and it is more about fulfilling social roles than achieving genuine emotional connection. As her yearning for a meaningful connection intensifies, she strives for independence. Yet, the weight of societal norms, which she feels acutely, pushes her to the edge of sanity. Unable to reconcile her longing for freedom with these rigid constraints, she ultimately buckles under the pressure, finding herself unable to break free from the expectations imposed upon her.

In Esther's world, women are frequently pressured to make marriage their top priority, with their worth often objectified and judged solely by their partners. Esther's refusal to conform to this expectation only adds to her mental anguish as she struggles with the fear of losing her individuality in a marriage that requires her to suppress her true self. However, being unable to deny the appeal of security further tests her sanity. She is torn between two starkly different paths - one steeped in tradition, the other defined by independence. Unable to commit to either, she grapples with the fear of potential consequences: personal dissatisfaction or ostracism by society.

The second constraint, motherhood, is an equally forced notion upon an individual. We encounter a similar character difference: Edna is a mother, while Esther is not. However, both women are dealing with the same issue of the expectation to be solely a mother. Edna is overwhelmed by the suffocating weight of traditional motherhood, as epitomized by Adèle Ratignolle. Desperate to maintain her sanity, she strives to break free from these constraints. Despite her deep love for her children, Edna finds herself unable to wholeheartedly embrace the role of a mother without losing her identity or compromising her mental state.

Esther Greenwood is, too, profoundly troubled by the idolization of motherhood, especially as she observes the immense physical and emotional strain it places on women. Her journey mirrors a larger criticism of how societal norms can strip women of their humanity, leaving them to grapple with the choice between their mental health and fitting in. Characters such as Dodo Conway serve as a stark reminder of the loss of identity that Esther fears, adding even more emphasis to the inner struggle between societal pressures and personal well-being.

Because of such constraints, the protagonists began their journey of self–identity. For both women, the critical role in such a search was the people they surrounded themselves with, either those they loved or shared the same social circle with. In Edna's story, she looks to her female acquaintances, Adele and Reisz, for inspiration and to contrast her choices. However,

her relationships with male acquaintances significantly impact her personal growth. In her pursuit of escape from the suffocating confines of social expectations, Edna finds brief respite in her relationships with Robert Lebrun and Alcée Arobin. However, rather than offering her the support and understanding she craves, their actions push her closer to the edge of sanity.

Esther is surrounded by a diverse group of women in her journey, each representing extreme personalities. There is the rebellious Doreen, the naïve Betsy, and the assertive Jay Cee. Despite this, Esther struggles to find a connection with any of them, causing further harm to her mental health. She longs for independence and autonomy yet feels paralyzed by the constraints of tradition. However, Dr. Nolan, an ambitious yet grounded woman, becomes a source of comfort for Esther, helping her navigate the challenges and maintain her sanity.

Nonetheless, their journey was filled with many obstacles, including their mental health. Edna, from the beginning, displayed concerning behavior consisting of frequent mood swings, outbursts, and impulsivity. For Esther, it is her depression that came in the way of her writing, as well as making any progress in her identity search. Driven to the point of hopelessness, they see suicide as an escape from the suffocating society. Edna succeeds in doing so, finding her liberation in the sea because of the irreversible life choices. Meanwhile, Esther fails in all her attempts, proving that her body is still not ready to give up despite her mind saying otherwise. She gets another chance at life, and because she is provided with help, she has hope for a better tomorrow.

The compelling stories of both women serve as a powerful reminder of the impact of social constraints on their lives and mental well-being. The harsh reality of society being a significant obstacle to happiness and opportunities is a recurring theme throughout the book. Despite some finding the courage to challenge these constraints, success is far from guaranteed. Chopin's "The Awakening"' is a stark portrayal of the consequences of allowing societal pressures to overwhelm one's sanity. However, it also offers a glimmer of hope that insecurity and instability can be overcome with the proper support and understanding, a message that resonates with the reader. Plath's "The Bell Jar" offers a better outcome, but it does not diminish the protagonist's struggle in the least. The 1890s and the 1950s were both marked by gender inequality, neglect of mental health, and dismissiveness toward those who did not conform. Understanding these issues is crucial for improving the present and providing support and empathy to those in need, regardless of their background or identity.

5. WORKS CITED

Budick, E. Miller. “The Feminist Discourse of Sylvia Plath’s The Bell Jar.” College English, vol. 49, no. 8, 1987, pp. 872–85. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/378115. Accessed 9 July 2024.

Carlstein, Ebba. Marriage and Motherhood in Sylvia Plath’s The Bell Jar: An Analysis of Gender Expectations and Poetic Language. Bachelor’s Thesis, Linköping University, Department of Culture & Society, English, Spring Term 2023, Digitala Vetenskapliga Arkivet, https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:liu:diva-195280. Accessed 1 July 2024.

Chopin, Kate. The Awakening and Other Stories. Canterbury Classics, 2018.

Cogan, Frances B. All-American Girl: The Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America. University of Georgia Press, 1989.

Dodge, Jane E. “Sylvia Plath’s Fig Tree: Discourse Formation and the Production and Consumption of Women’s Identity.” 2024. Honors Thesis. https://scholar.utc.edu/honors-theses/461. Accessed 11 July 2024.

Elz, A. Elizabeth. “‘The Awakening’ and ‘A Lost Lady’: Flying with Broken Wings and Raked Feathers.” *The Southern Literary Journal*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2003, pp. 13–27. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20078364. Accessed 25 July 2024.

Gazairi, Alaa. “Unveiling the Female Self through Madness in Sylvia Plath’s The Bell Jar.” International Journal of Social Science and Human Research, vol. 7, no. 1, 2024, pp. 626–634, Department of English Language and Literature, Istanbul Aydın University, Istanbul, Turkey. Index Copernicus, https://journals.indexcopernicus.com/api/file/viewByFileId/1902193. Accessed 20 July 2024.

Håkansson, Alma. “Fatal Female Anxiety in *The Bell Jar* - The Fear of the Future and the Now in Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*.” Bachelor’s thesis, Linköping University, Department of Culture & Society, English, Spring Term 2024. Digitala Vetenskapliga Arkivet, https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:liu:diva-204880 Accessed 20 July 2024.

Holt, Jennifer. “The Ideal Woman.” California State University Stanislaus, 2015, www.csustan.edu/sites/default/files/honors/documents/journals/soundings/Holt.pdf. Accessed 25 June 2024.

Jahan, Mursalin. “Expressive Individualism in the Nineteenth Century Patriarchal Creole Society: A Study of the Portrayal of Edna Pontellier in Kate Chopin’s The Awakening.” International Journal of English and Literature (IJEL), vol. 7, no. 2, 2017, pp. 65–74. ResearchGate, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324137161_Expressive_Individualism_in_the_Nineteenth_Century_Patriarchal_Creole_Society_A_Study_of_the_Portrayal_of_Edna_Pontellier_in_Kate_Chopin%27s_The_Awakening. Accessed 27 June 2024.

Khan, Farhadiba H. “Consolidation Through Rebellion in Kate Chopin’s ‘The Awakening.’“ Journal of Language Teaching and Research, vol. 13, no. 6, Nov. 2022, Gale Academic OneFile, https://jltr.academypublication.com/index.php/jltr/article/view/4980. Accessed 27 June 2024.

Klein, Herbert S. A Population History of the United States. Cambridge University Press, 2004. http://ndl.ethernet.edu.et/bitstream/123456789/55664/1/55.pdf. Accessed 13 June 2024.

Korykowski, Geneva. “The Emergence of the New Woman in Victorian Children’s and Family Literature.” Senior Honors Theses and Projects, no. 379, 2014, https://commons.emich.edu/honors/379. Accessed 19 June 2024.

Krishna, Aswathy. “Ripples: Symbolism in The Bell Jar, an Exploration of the Entangled Psyche of Sylvia Plath.” Baselius Researcher, vol. XIX, no. 2, July-Dec. 2018, pp. 110–120.

Maloni, Ruby. “DISSONANCE BETWEEN NORMS AND BEHAVIOUR: EARLY 20TH CENTURY AMERICA’S ‘NEW WOMAN.’“ Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, vol. 70, 2009, pp. 880–86. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44147735. Accessed 20 June 2024.

Naka, Ryoko. “The Thematic Meaning of the Sea in Kate Chopin’s The Awakening.” Core, vol. 15, 1986, pp. 35–50.

Nottingham, Elizabeth K. “Toward an Analysis of the Effects of Two World Wars on the Role and Status of Middle-Class Women in the English-Speaking World.” American Sociological Review, vol. 12, no. 6, 1947, pp. 666–75. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/2086952. Accessed 22 June 2024.

Perloff, Marjorie G., and Sylvia Plath. "'A Ritual for Being Born Twice': Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar." Contemporary Literature, vol. 13, no. 4, 1972, pp. 507–22. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/1207445. Accessed 15 July 2024.

Plath, Sylvia. The Bell Jar. Faber & Faber, 2019.

Ryan, Steven T. "Depression and Chopin's 'The Awakening.'" The Mississippi Quarterly, vol. 51, no. 2, 1998, pp. 253–73. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/26476988. Accessed 18 July 2024.

Schaffer, Shari Dean. "Victorian Maternity and Edna Pontellier's Awakening." 1986. Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects, William & Mary, Paper 1539625355. https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-mabn-x945. Accessed 30 June 2024.

Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America. 1st ed, A.A. Knopf, 1985.

Sullivan, Ruth, and Stewart Smith. "Narrative Stance in Kate Chopin's The Awakening." Studies in American Fiction, vol. 1 no. 1, 1973, p. 62–75. Project MUSE, https://doi.org/10.1353/saf.1973.0020. Accessed 19 July 2024.

Wagner – Martin, Linda. *The Bell Jar: A Novel of the Fifties*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992.

Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." American Quarterly, vol. 18, no. 2, 1966, pp. 151–74. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/2711179. Accessed 13 June 2024.

Whittier, Gayle. "The Divided Woman and Generic Doubleness in The Bell Jar." Women's Studies, vol. 3, no. 2, 1976, pp. 127–146. https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.1976.9978383

Zirker, Eva. "'I Am, I Am, I Am' – The Reconciliation of Discipline and Deviance in Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar." Bachelor's thesis, University of Köln, Faculty of Arts, English Seminar I, September 2022. University of Köln, https://phil-fak.uni-koeln.de/sites/phil-fak/Relaunch_Startseite/Relaunch_Aktuelles/Examensfeier/W22/2022-10-30_Zirker_Eva_BA-Arbeit__EG_Rauscher__geschwaerzt.pdf. Accessed 22 July 2024.