

IDENTITY CRISIS AND ALIENATION IN SYLVIA PLATH'S

THE BELL JAR

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Yüksek Lisans Tezi

İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı

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ABSTRACT

IDENTITY CRISIS AND ALIENATION IN SYLVIA PLATH'S *THE BELL JAR*

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Alienation is a state of insensibility and estrangement implying a lack or loss of sympathy towards society and being isolated from it. People in the modern and postmodern world find themselves living in a world where life is meaningless and the man feels homeless and estranged. Sense of alienation thus becomes a major theme in modern and postmodern literature, and many writers have expressed their anxiety of this phenomenon. Alienation as a literary theme presents the characters who are under the pressures of society, thus have a sense of feeling of lack. As a result of their feeling of lack of identity, the literary heroes or heroines have many psychological and social troubles and they do not have a feeling of meaningful life. This thesis aims at analyzing alienation and identity crisis reflected in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*. In this respect, the first chapter of the thesis gives definition, background and theory of the term alienation and presents how it is used in literary works. The second chapter applies R.D. Laing's existential psychology to the analysis of the heroine's painful search for identity and illustrate its use for the cure of her mental crisis. The third chapter discusses heroine's alienation in the patriarchal society and presents the United States women's situation and emotional life in the fifties and sixties.

Key Words: identity, alienation, divided self, patriarchy, male gaze

ÖZET

SYLVIA PLATH'IN *SİRÇA FANUS* İSİMLİ ROMANINDA KİMLİK KRİZİ VE YABANCILAŞMA

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Yüksek Lisans Tezi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı

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Yabancılaşma, toplum içerisindeki duygudaşlığın azaldığı veya kaybolduğu, toplumdaki kopuşa işaret eden bir hissizlik ve uzaklaşma durumudur. Modern ve postmodern dünyanın bireyleri, kendilerini hayatın anlamsız olduğu, yurtsuz ve uzak bir dünyada bulmuşlardır. Bu endişeyi eserlerine taşıyan pek çok yazarla birlikte, yabancılaşma modern ve postmodern edebiyatın ana temalarından biri olmuştur. Edebi bir tema olarak, yabancılaşma toplumsal baskı altında olan ve yokluk duygusu yaşayan karakterler sunar. Kimlik krizinin bir sonucu olarak, kahramanlar psikolojik ve toplumsal sorunlarla karşı karşıya kalırlar ve anlamlı bir hayat hissinden yoksun olurlar. Bu tezde Sylvia Plath'ın *Sırça Fanus* adlı romanındaki yabancılaşma ve kimlik krizi temalarının incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Bu bağlamda tezin birinci bölümünde yabancılaşma teriminin tanımı, tarihi ve teorisi incelenmiş, terimin edebi eserlerde nasıl kullanıldığı anlatılmıştır. İkinci bölümde roman kahramanının sancılı kimlik arayışını ve akıl hastalığını anlamlandırmak için, R.D.Laing'in varoluşçu psikoloji teorisi esere uygulanmıştır. Üçüncü bölümde ise ataerkil bir toplumda roman kahramanının nasıl yabancılaştığı anlatılmış ve Amerikan kadınının 1950'ler ve 1960'lardaki portresinin verilmesi amaçlanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: kimlik, yabancılaşma, bölünmüş benlik, ataerkil toplum, erkek bakış

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of alienation has been an important literary theme in the twentieth century referring to the condition of the modern man. The fragile identity of the modern human makes him alienated from the society, thus he finds himself in a meaningless and disconnected situation. With emphasis on the social aspects, alienation is the estrangement from others and from the environment. A socially alienated person lives outside the mainstream of the community's life. He is excluded from the social life. Society does not want to accept him as its member. Whereas, he also distract himself from any relationship with his fellow beings whom he regards as strangers. He does not want to participate and to get emotionally involved in the game of life which, according to him, is the source of problems. Thus, alienation can be said as a kind of mental disease that attacks many people in this modern world.

Sylvia Plath is a renowned confessional poet, novelist and prose-writer in the mid-twentieth century in the United States. *The Bell Jar* is generally considered by critics as an autobiographical novel. It was published in London under the pseudonym Victorian Lucas in 1963 and then republished in America in 1966 under her real name, quickly making its way on the New York Times bestseller list.

The works of confessional poets are always autobiographical, displaying their own inner worlds in a very frank way. Sylvia Plath was considered as the youngest confessional poet with unparallel artistic talent whose poems are full of anger, despair, love, death, mental disorders and self-destruction. She experienced a failed marriage with poet Ted Hughes, short but legendary, which was a turning point for her life and always a myth to the readers. As a distinguish poet, she was haunted in a strong contradiction between her ideal career and the traditional female role in 1950s. The anguish of death and rebirth contributed to her only novel *The Bell Jar* in which Plath tries to explore the dark and painful level of human consciousness. The main concern of the novel is the mental health of Esther Greenwood, her immersion into a deep depression and eventual recovery. *The Bell*

Jar describes the gradual process of mental illness and treatment from a completely distinctive and truthful perspective. Obviously, the “bell jar” which titles the novel has symbolic meanings through the story.

The Bell Jar is the memoirs of a college sophomore girl, Esther Greenwood, a 19 year-old girl from the suburb of Boston who goes to New York working as a guest editor for a fashion magazine and back home with depression and mental disorder after being rejected by the writing course of Harvard. After the tudy, Esther returns to her home town and spends the summer with his mother. Esther feels repressed by the conservative atmosphere of the town. What’s worse, she is refused by the writing class of which she has given high expectation. Under the weight of pressure her rational state of mind collapses. Plath is betrayed by her husband Hughes who has affairs with another woman. Similarly, Esther’s boyfriend makes her distrust men anymore, which leads to her twisted consciousness about sex. Therefore, the reasons why Plath gets mental problems and suicide can be almost traced in *The Bell Jar*. She feels that life is like a bell jar, where the air is sour inside, and the outside world is distorted. Esther can’t see a way out and attempts suicide. After rescued, she undergoes psychoanalytic treatment in a mental hospital. After a tortuous process of rehabilitation and social experience, she manages to re-examine herself and slowly rebuild her confidence. At the end of the novel, Esther is waiting for being discharged and looking forward to begin a new life.

As an autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar* was at first highly controversial that critics have tried to analyze it from various angles. In recent years, research works of Sylvia Plath have reevaluated its importance in the literature and reinterpret the novel from the feminist point of view. Since then, the subject has been extensively explored and previous studies are most carried out from feminist perspective. From the summary of literary reviews on Plath’s life and her works, we can observe that deep research on psychological analysis, ideological and cultural background and reflection on the ritual meaning of death in this novel are still relatively insufficient. Actually, Plath herself was keen on psychological analysis and also applied it to her own writings.

In the novel, Plath describes American society at that time as “a time of darkness, despair, disillusion” (Plath, 1971). The absurdity of the world, the cold sense and human alienation lead to people’s more desire to ask their identities and how to obtain freedom. People under such pathological torture have understood deeper about the existence and vanity than common people, and they would tend to be more innovative. So, when Plath successfully expressed and doubled this anxiety in art forms, people would be access to a more intense shock in the universality of the experience. In this situation, existentialism became the most important ideological foundation of art during this century.

The present study aims to provide a theory of alienation in the contemporary philosophy and present how it was perceived in the modern and postmodern world. In this manner, The First Chapter of the thesis, after providing a definition and background of the term alienation, will focus on the relationship between modernity, postmodernity and alienation referring to the theories of Karl Marx, Melvin Seeman, Jean-Paul Sartre and R.D.Laing. At the end of the chapter how the concept of alienation was used in literary works will be discussed.

The Second Chapter applies R.D. Laing’s existential psychology to the analysis of the heroine’s painful search for identity and illustrate its use for the cure of her mental crisis in Sylvia Plath’s novel *The Bell Jar*. One of the main features of contemporary western academic thoughts is its focus on human subjectivity, aiming at reconstructing the relationship of human and society. R. D. Laing, a contemporary well-known existential Scottish psychologist, has integrated existential philosophy and psychological analysis into a theoretical system, that is, existential psychology.

Furthermore, Plath, through painful but meaningful experience, presents the United States women’s situation and emotional life in the fifties and sixties, as well as embedding the voice of feminism. On the basis of feminism, women’s identity in the patriarchal society is also discussed in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER ONE

THEORY OF ALIENATION

1.1 Alienation: Definition and Background

Alienation is a term derived from the Latin term *alienus* signifying a state of insensibility and estrangement. The term implies a lack or loss of sympathy towards society and being isolated from it. In this sense it is “a psychological or social evil, characterized by one or another type of harmful separation, disruption or fragmentation, which sunders things that belong together” (Honderich, 2005: 21). Alienation in its context implies the concept of estrangement. As a literary theme, it may be described as the estrangement of the literary character or persona from something with which he/she has been, should be, or would like to be in conformity and consonance.

In the *Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity and Culture*, it is written that the term

is widely used to describe people who experience separation or estrangement within modern society and is instilled with both sociological and psychological meaning. Indeed, the term is used to describe the feelings of modern human beings who are unable to influence the social mechanisms and functioning of a capitalistic society and is thus connected with any condition of deprivation of power especially in the sociological sense and the related psychological feelings and emotions. (Bolaffi et al, 2003: 09)

In his book *The Sane Society*, Erich Fromm defines alienation as below:

By alienation is meant a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself. He does not experience himself as the center of his world, as the creator of his own acts-but his acts and their consequences have become his masters, whom he obeys, or whom he may even worship. The alienated person is out

of touch with himself as he is out of touch with any other person. He, like the others, is experienced as things are experienced; with the senses and with the common sense, but at the same time without being related to oneself and to the world outside productively. (2008: 117)

In contemporary philosophy, the term alienation was for the first time used in Hegel's work *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel links the concept of alienation to the development of the human spirit.

For Hegel, alienation, first of all, refers to an awareness on the part of the individual that he has become separated from something from which he is not essentially different and with which he was formerly unified. Secondly, it refers to the individual's deliberate surrender or renunciation of himself as separated from something from which he is not essentially different and with which he was formerly unified (Öztop, 2010: 11)

Özlem Doğan states that "Hegel uses the term 'alienation' in the same meaning as externalization and estrangement. He thinks that the term 'alienation' implies the externalization (Entausserung) of spirit. Nature or body is the externalization of this spirit. The externalization or alienation is a moment until spirit understands itself as itself completely. (Doğan, 2008: 62). This suggests a self-alienation process by which becomes alien to itself.

According to Hegel self-conscious spirit evolves through a series of different historical and social forms. Subjectivity, individuality, and freedom develop through a process in which the self is alienated from itself and then comes to recognise itself in its alienation, so that, at the end of the process, the self eventually comes to be at home with itself. (Sayers, 2011: 4)

In this Hegelian alienation, the soul creates a world of objects which it supposes that is different from its own world. This objective world begins to be dominated by external forces that cannot be controlled which means thought becomes estranged from reality. But later it realizes that this world is its own mental

product and the world which it has created only exist in its actions. Even though it alienates itself, which at first it is not aware of, gradually it understands that this world is not outside of its own world. Hegel sees this process as the cause of alienation. As he ignores the external dimension of the alienation problem, he remarks that consciousness can be reached through alienation.

1.2 Modernity and Karl Marx's Theory of Alienation

With the rise of the industrialization and mechanization in the 19th century, cities became the center for new working areas, thus new types of social classes and individualism appeared. The new production system based on capitalism made individuals define their identities in terms of working status. The key element to determine the social and cultural structures in the society was the economy and production. In this modernizing society, individuals began to experience self-estrangement and alienation. The dimensions of alienation were religious, political, social and economical.

As a thinker, the main core of Karl Marx's philosophy was based on the economic problems created by the rise of modernity and capitalism and their social consequences. For Marx, "work is not only a means to satisfy material needs, it is also a fundamental part of the human process of self-development and self-realisation" (Sayers, 2011: 21). To understand the condition of the modern man, Marx analyzed the work place and found that capitalistic practises led people into feeling alienated from others and the world around them. He uses the term alienation

to portray the situation of modern individuals—especially modern wage labourers—who are deprived of a fulfilling mode of life because their life-activity as socially productive agents is devoid of any sense of communal action or satisfaction and gives them no ownership over their own lives or their products. In modern society, individuals are alienated in so far as their common human essence, the actual co-operative activity which naturally unites them, is powerless in their lives. (Honderich, 2005: 21)

Different from Hegelian alienation, the isolation from the spiritual world, Marx's concept of alienation focuses on the historical materialism through which he attempted to understand economic structures of societies. His "development of the theme of alienation into the themes of commodity fetishism and machine labor follows from his criticism of civil, or bourgeois, society and its rules of exchange, including those rules that mandate alienated labor and the alienated production of goods" (Wendling, 2009: 13). He uses the concept of "historical materialism" to define the social change caused by economy. In *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, the term historical materialism is defined as below:

According to the materialist conception, the fundamental thing in human history is the productive powers of society and their tendency to grow. Productive powers at a given stage of development determine the nature of human labouring activity because labour consists in the exercise of precisely those powers. A given set of productive powers also thereby favours certain 'material relations of production', forms of human co-operation or division of labour which are not directly part of them, but facilitate their employment to a greater degree than rival forms would do. They thereby also favour certain 'social relations of production', systems of social roles relating to the control of the production process and the disposition of its fruits. (Honderich, 2005: 382-383)

Social change is the shift from one mode of production to another, and is the result of economical conflicts. The change of modern societies from feudalism to capitalism happened as a result of feudal nobility and a rising middle class in society and a new social order was created called capitalism. Capitalism is "the modern, market-based, commodity producing economic system controlled by 'capital', that is, purchasing-power used to hire labour for wages." (Honderich, 2005: 147). When Marx first began examining capitalism in the workplace, he saw that capitalistic industries focused on competing with one another to sell their products on the market. In capitalistic industries, Marx acknowledged two main elements: capital and wage labour. Capital refers to any money or asset that can be used or sold to gain more money or buy new assets. Wage-labour refers to most of the population, as this

is the term for people who cannot earn a living themselves, but have to find employment from others that own capital. People sell their labour to a capitalist in return for money for themselves and their family to survive. Those that sell their skills are the working class. A ruling class, or bourgeoisie, was formed from the owners of capital, and their employees would become the working class or the proletariat. This process involved cheap raw materials, constant technical modernisation and cheap labour, thus industrialisation was introduced.

Industrialisation introduced production line into companies, which divided up the labour force so they each had their own particular task into the making of the final product. Each person at each stage of the production line would specialise in that particular job, and carry this same task out every day. Workers at this time were used to seeing the goods all the way through the manufacturing process, and so being put on a production line where all workers are detached from the other stages of the manufacturing process, it turns a once cherished skill into “a lifelong partial function”. (Morrison, 2006: 116) Previously the worker would gain a great deal of satisfaction from creating and seeing their product through from the raw materials stage to the completed and final product. However, capitalistic working environments take this job satisfaction away from the workers as they do not get the pleasure of seeing this, they only contribute a small part on the production line. Due to the proletariats working on the same specialised skill every day, on their own, they become isolated and feel alienated.

Marx adapted the term to describe the condition of workers in industrialized, capitalist society, deprived of the satisfaction of experiencing their work as a meaningful expression of themselves. Reduced to viewing the fruits of their labor as objects and commodities, modern workers, according to Marx, experience alienation not only within themselves but also among one another because of the competitive ethos of capitalism. (Quinn, 2006: 17)

Marx identified four different types of alienation that employees might encounter. Each different type of alienation was created from a precise interruption that happens in the people's social relationships out of the workplace.

The first type of alienation that Marx examined is the alienation from the labour's product, and is a result of when workers are out of touch with the product that they are contributing to and lose control over what is being made. Previously in a feudal society, the product that the worker produces can be used immediately, and has a high use value, as they are producing it for their own personal use more than anything else. This suggests that "the labourer has a strong bond with what they produce as it is useful to them" (Morrison, 2006: 122) By now being in a capitalist society, the worker no longer owns or uses the product they are producing as it is now owned by the capitalist industry. This creates alienation from the product and "alters the individual's social relation to what they produce and to the natural world" (Morrison, 2006: 122).

The second type of alienation Marx identifies is about the lack of control over the production process. "In this type of alienation human beings lose control over the capacity of their laboring activity to affirm their being and define their self-existence" (Morrison, 2006: 123). Because they are not working for their own needs, but for the people at the top of the hierarchy, they do not enjoy working and feel detached from the whole manufacturing procedure. As Ken Morrison states; "Marx believed this type of alienation destroyed the relationship humans have to themselves, which is the most crucial of all" (Morrison, 2006: 125)

The third kind of alienation that Marx discovered is the alienation from his or her species being. According to Erich Fromm

the statement that man is alienated from his species life means that each man is alienated from others, and that each of the others is likewise alienated from human life. The alienated man is not only alienated from other men; he is alienated from the essence of humanity, from his "species-being," both in

his natural and spiritual qualities. This alienation from the human essence leads to an existential egotism, described by Marx as man's human essence becoming "*a means for his individual existence.*" It [alienated labor] alienates from man his own body, external nature, his mental life and his *human* life (Fromm, 1961: 52).

Alienated labour changes a person's work from a free and enjoyable task into a 'means of life' and this is now the man's only existence; to serve a job for the capitalist. Marx believed that the division of labour destroys the worker's creativity, and the diversification of labour experiences destroy the real meaning of being human.

The fourth and final type of alienation that Marx looked at is alienation from other human beings. Alienated labour becomes present when previous social relationships convert into economic relationships and the aim of their being is to help the competition of the capitalistic industry they work in. They can become alienated from others in two ways. Firstly it is due to them working on a production line, and because usually only one person carries out that particular job, they are alone for the whole day. Before, people used to cooperate with each other to gain the final product, but now although they are still working together to finish the product, they have to work alone and separate from their fellow colleagues. This leaves them feeling isolated from other humans. A second way in which humans feel isolated from others is due to the separation of the classes. These workers are no longer working for themselves but for the ruling class, which therefore creates "wealth and beauty for one class and poverty and deprivation for the other (Morrison, 2006: 127)

To conclude, capitalism created large divisions between the working class and the ruling class, and was not concerned with people's feelings or their appreciation to the products they were making. Production lines were introduced and workers no longer received the satisfaction of manufacturing the whole product, they only had a specialised skill to carry out. This took away the worker's job satisfaction and caused alienation. Four different types of alienation were identified by Karl

Marx, the alienation from the product, the alienation from the lack of control over the production process, the alienation from their species-being, and from other human beings.

1.3 Jean Paul Sartre's Existential Alienation

Emerged in Germany and France in the 1920s and the 1930s and flourished in Europe in the 1950s and 1960s, existentialism has played an important role in the history of philosophy with its focus on individual's existence. As a philosophical and literary movement, existentialism is a mixed association of shared concerns rather than a particularly systematic account of its ideas. Existentialism cares about individual freedom, responsibility, and authenticity. Soren Kierkegaard was regarded as the father of existentialism while Jean-Paul Sartre had the most significant influence on existentialism.

The term "existentialism" is hard to be defined because "existentialism is not a school of thought nor reducible to any set of tenets" (Kaufmann, 1956: 11). Those who have been classified as existentialists differ from each other in their existentialist thoughts. There are pessimistic existentialism and optimistic existentialism, atheistic existentialism and theistic existentialism, Christian existentialism and new Hegelian existentialism, etc. However, all existentialists concern about individual existence and the whole being of each individual, believing that people should pursue their true existence in this absurd world through their free will and choice. Existentialism takes human as the subject of its philosophical study, and cares about the value of human beings.

According to existentialism man lives in a meaningless and absurd world, and his existence is nothingness. The ultimate goal of our endeavor is to achieve individual freedom so that we can make our existence more meaningful and valuable. It stresses that it is only through initiative choices that can human beings achieve

their freedom. We should live amid the absurd world while revolt against its absurdity to realize the true value of our being.

Jean-Paul Sartre is an important figure with an unprecedented and unsurpassed position in the history of existentialism. It is through his work that existentialism to its highlight and has the most profound influence on his time and the time after. Since the publication of his philosophical book *Being and Nothingness* written in 1943, the ideology of the existentialist movement was spread across Europe and even around the world. As Thomas R. Flynn points out in *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction*: “His name became synonymous with the existentialist movement” (Flynn, 2006: 15).

Sartre’s existentialist philosophy is a revolt against traditional rationalism in the West. With human beings as his main focus, Sartre discussed the freedom of human beings in the world and called for free choice and action to create one’s own being, while bearing the heavy burden of freedom and taking the responsibility for one’s action and the whole world. According to Sartre, what defines existentialism is that “existence precedes essence”. Kaufmann explains this concept as below:

What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world-and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing -as he wills to be after that leap towards existence. Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism. (Kaufmann, 1956: 349)

Sartre’s existentialism is also a philosophy of freedom. He argues that the essence of each individual’s existence lies in freedom and the ultimate goal of our

endeavor is to pursue the freedom of each individual. Man is left alone in this world with no moral orders to guide his actions, so he is free to create his own values. To achieve freedom means to choose. As Sartre says in *Being and Nothingness*, “freedom is the freedom of choosing but not the freedom of not choosing. Not to choose is, in fact, to choose not to choose.” (Sartre, 1978: 481) We have to choose what kind of life we will live through and meanwhile we are responsible for our choices. Only through choices can we decide our being and achieve our freedom.

Among all the influential existential thoughts and concepts of Sartre, there are some basic and dominant ones that constitute the framework of Sartre’s existentialism. Sartre is a representative of atheistic existentialism. He believes that God does not exist. The death of God means the collapse of faith and authority, even the collapse of traditional morals and values. Without God, man is in consequence lonely and helpless, being left alone in this universe, which is irrational, chaotic, absurd and changeable. The relationship between man and the world that surrounds him is intense and inharmonious. Man’s existence is accidental and absurd, with no purpose and meaning. Therefore, man is left to create his own meaning of existence in the absurd world.

As is recognized by some existentialists, the absurdity of the world may evoke alienation among human beings or alienation within human himself, making man feel anxious, desperate and despairing. It is a sense of not belonging, feeling as a stranger or an outsider. We are in the world with others and the Other is indispensable to individual existence. According to Sartre all consciousness is consciousness of an Other. We are only aware of being because of others, that is to say, we do not have consciousness until we are perceived by an Other and the consciousness depends on the presence of the Other. “The fact of the Other is incontestable and touches me to the heart. I realize him through uneasiness; through him I am perpetually in danger in a world which is this world and which nevertheless I can only glimpse.” (Sartre, 1978: 275) Thus, we often feel threatened by the existence of the Other since we are objectified by the Other.

The Other looks at me and as such he holds the secret of my being, he knows what I am. Thus the profound meaning of my being is outside of me, imprisoned in an absence. The Other has the advantage over me. Therefore in so far as I am fleeing the in-itself which I am without founding it, I can attempt to deny that being which is conferred on me from outside; that is, I can turn back upon the Other so as to make an object out of him in turn since the Other's object-ness destroys my object-ness for him." (Sartre, 1978: 363)

Therefore, under the look of the Other, we feel painful, confused and uneasy. Since the conflict with others is inevitable, then alienation among people is formed.

Thus Existentialism defines man by his action. In the existentialists' viewpoints, due to God's death, man is casted away into this absurd and hostile world, and is alienated and isolated from each other. Man is essentially nothing but what he makes of himself, so he is responsible for his being and is free to choose his own way of being. "Every man, without any support or help whatever, is condemned at every instant to invent man" (Kaufmann, 1956: 295). Human's life is an ongoing process of various choices, while at the same time an ongoing process of surpassing oneself. People have to make continuous choices in every day and even every minute to decide what is his life going to be like. In existentialists' mind, a person's life is like a kind of design, everyone is his own designer. As Thomas R. Flynn said in *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction*:

Our entire life is an ongoing choice and that failure to choose is itself a choice for which we are equally responsible. Sartre formulates this bluntly when he asserts that for human reality (the human being), to exist is to choose and to cease to choose is to cease to be. Sartre also echoes Kierkegaard's relation of choice to self-constitution when he adds that, for human reality, to be is to choose oneself. (Flynn, 2006: 33)

1.4 R.D.Laing's Psychological Alienation Theory: The Divided Self

R.D. Laing was a famous Scottish psychiatrist who studied and investigated on mental illnesses. *The Divided Self*, which was published in 1960, is accepted as the representative work of Laing. With this book, Laing has established his image and status as an experienced psychiatrist, excellent existential psychologist as well as radical literature critic. In this section, I will provide basic terminologies and notions of Laing's thought.

Laing discusses the existential foundations to understand what psychosis is and points out two attitudes towards schizophrenia: traditional clinical psychosis and existential psychology. The former isolates the patient from living environment, treating him as a single person, being or even a machine. Instead, the later believes that the patient is always living in the relationship with others, so one's mad speeches and behaviors can be understood through living condition and even earlier experiences during childhood. Laing focuses on the delicate relationship between person's heart and body, as well as the formation and development of schizophrenia. *The Divided Self* his masterwork in this field, has been both influential and continually controversial since published. In this book, Laing says "the present book is a study of schizoid and schizophrenic persons; its basic purpose is to make madness and the process of going mad, comprehensible" (Laing, 1990: 10). The author tries to prove that the schizoid condition can be understood and the recovery is hopeful.

The Divided Self gives an existential analysis on the social and personal causes for schizophrenia. Laing considers that various pressures cause a sense of insecurity to the society. Thus, people would isolate themselves or even get mental breakdown. Only with the help of understanding can one break through the barriers of ideology and get back to the true self. Laing expresses the relationship between the "self" and the "other" as below:

The reality of the world and of the self are mutually potentiated by the direct relationship between self and other. (...). Objects perceived by the self are experienced as real. Thoughts and feelings of which the self is the agent are alive and are felt to have point. Actions to which the self is committed are felt as genuine. (...). If the individual delegates all transactions between himself and the other to a system, the false self, within his being which is not "him", then the world is experienced as unreal, and all that belongs to this system is felt to be false, futile, and meaningless. (Laing, 1990: 82).

Thus, when someone is under the living condition of "false-self system," the individual is "differentiated from the rest of the world, so that his identity and autonomy are always in question." (Laing, 1990: 41). Therefore, the body can never reflect his inner self and becomes a system for the false self who is futile and hypocritical when communicating with others. The only console is fantasy which, however, makes the situation worse. The patient tries to safeguard his identity but get mental breakdown in the end.

Laing puts out that "a basically *ontologically* secure person will encounter all the hazards of life, social, ethical, spiritual, biological, from a centrally firm sense of his own and other people's reality and identity" (Laing, 1990: 39). The existence of the individual seems whole and real to him/her, "so that his identity and autonomy are never in question" (Laing, 1990: 42). However, the individual in the ordinary circumstances of living "may lack the experience of his own temporal continuity and not possess an over-riding sense of personal consistency or cohesiveness" (Laing, 1990: 42). One is always confused about his identity and autonomy and can not assume that whether he is valuable or not. Therefore, one may have the feeling that his self is apart from his body. The author explains that the individual who can't fit his "inner self" into the real world but separated from his body is unable to develop normal self-consciousness and may live under the risk of "ontological insecurity". Laing characterizes "three forms of anxiety encountered by the ontologically insecure person" (Laing, 1990: 43) which are engulfment, implosion, petrification:

Engulfment is “a firm sense of one’s own autonomous identity is required in order that one may be related as one human being to another. Otherwise, any and every relationship threatens the individual with loss of identity” (Laing, 1990: 44). In this kind of anxiety, the existence of being is bound to another one, thus he is ontologically dependent on the other.

Implosion is “a tendency for the false self to assume more and more of the characteristics of the person or persons upon whom its compliance is based. This assumption of the other person’s characteristics may come to amount to an almost total impersonation of the other” (Laing, 1990: 45). In this kind of anxiety, the individual uses another personality as the vehicle to express his own existence, thus the real personality of the individual is lost. As Laings states,

this phenomenon is one of the most important in occasioning disruption in the sense of losing one’s own identity when it occurs unwanted and compulsively. The dread of this occurring is one factor in the fear of implosion. The individual may be afraid to like anyone, for he finds that he is under a compulsion to become like anyone he likes (Laing, 1990: 58).

Petrification is “when one is threatened with the possibility of becoming no more than a thing in the world of the other, without any life for oneself, without any being for oneself. In terms of such anxiety, the very act of experiencing the other as a person is felt as virtually suicidal” (Laing, 1990: 46).

In short, Laing gives several cases on schizophrenia under ontological insecurity and deeper psychological analysis on development of schizoid patient’s heart-body relationship.

1.5 Alienation in the Postmodern World: Melvin Seeman’s Social Alienation Theory

The rapid change in every aspect of life and culture after the Second World War, the world witnessed a new era of doubt and fragmentation today called as

postmodernism, a concept which brought a variety of changes in almost all aspects of western culture. Within the postmodern world, the concept of alienation has also changed. Melvin Seeman's text *On the Meaning of Alienation*, published in 1959, has been accepted by critics as one of the key sociological texts concerning alienation in the postmodern world. In this work, Seeman categorizes five kinds of alienation: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation, and self-estrangement.

Being the first kind of alienation, powerlessness is "the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his own behaviour cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcements, he seeks" (Seeman, 1959: 784). In this sense, powerlessness can be understood as a term referring to both personal and social condition. The sense of powerlessness suggests the individual's feeling that he is not in control of his own life, but is instead he is "dependent upon external conditions, such as chance, luck, or the manipulation of others" (Seeman, 1959: 785). Thus, the individual doesn't feel that they can do anything to change it. According to Devorah Kalekin-Fishman, "a person suffers from alienation in the form of 'powerlessness' when she is conscious of the gap between what she would like to do and what she feels capable of doing" (Seeman, 1996: 97). According to this belief, powerlessness is a dilemmatic phenomenon in which one is mixed up in what he wants to do and what he has to do.

The second level Seeman identifies is the concept of meaninglessness through which he argues that "the individual is unclear as to what he ought to believe - when the individual's minimum standards for clarity in decision making are not met" (Seeman, 1959: 786). The individual in the post-modern world is confused between the views, beliefs and reality which makes him alienated. Seeman writes that

meaninglessness is characterized by a low expectancy that satisfactory predictions about the future outcomes of behaviour can be made. Put more simply, where the first meaning of alienation refers to the sensed ability to control outcomes, this second meaning refers essentially to the sensed ability

to predict behavioural outcomes. (Seeman, 1959: 786)

The individual loses his ability to predict outcomes in this postmodern world. In an environment where outcomes are unpredictable, the individual feels meaninglessness.

The third level of alienation is called normlessness. According to Seeman, normlessness is “the situation in which the social norms regulating individual conduct have broken down or are no longer effective as rules for behaviour” (Seeman, 1959: 787). Normlessness in this sense refers to “personal disorganization, cultural breakdown, reciprocal distrust, and so on” (Seeman, 1959: 787). In this level of alienation, the individual sees the rebellion against social norms as the only way to reach his goals.

The fourth level of alienation is social isolation which refers to being segregated from the society and losing interaction with the people. In this kind of alienation, the individual separates from society since there is a conflict between his values and those of society. Kenneth A. Schmidt explains it as below:

A condition of alienation, isolation occurred when the human perceived a distancing from the social group. It could precede a deeper sense of social alienation, or be the result of social alienation. If the former, isolation could be a personally induced phenomenon in which the human was unable to equate the significance of the highly valued goals, beliefs, or rewards of the society to the fulfillment of the personality aspect of the being through the social actions of the individual. If the latter, isolation could be a socially induced phenomenon in which the human was unable to equate the significance of the highly valued goals, beliefs, or rewards of the society to the fulfillment of the personality aspect of the being through the social actions of the individual (Schmidt, 2012: 47).

Seeman claims that such isolation “leads men outside the environing social structure to envisage and seek to bring into being a new, that is to say, a greatly

modified, social structur” (Seeman, 1959: 789). The reasons for isolation is usually caused by the problems of modern world. As Neal and Collas state,

while social isolation is typically experienced as a form of personal stress, its sources are deeply embedded in the social organization of the modern world. With increased isolation and atomization, much of our daily interactions are with those who are strangers to us and with whom we lack any ongoing social relationships. (Neal and Collas, 2000: 114).

In terms of literary meaning, Seeman argues that “social isolation is most common in descriptions of the intellectual role, where writers refer to the detachment of the intellectual from popular cultural standards” (Seeman, 1959: 788).

Seeman’s last level of alienation is self-enstrangement which refers to the individual’s problem of identification with others. According to Seeman, self-enstrangement is “the loss of intrinsically meaningful satisfaction” such as “the worker who works merely for his salary, the housewife who cooks simply to get it over with, or the other-directed type who acts only for its effect on others” (Seeman, 1959: 790).

1.6Literary Practice of Alienation

Technology has been advancing at a rapid pace from the beginning of the twentieth century up to now. This development brought the standard of living in Western cultures to unprecedented height. At the same time, our world have witnessed the cataclysmic carnage of two world wars and the other violent events throughout the 20th century. In such a world, the loss of faith continued with greater intensity into the century.

In the postmodern world, science and technology destroyed man’s ability to believe unquestioningly. According to Agnes Heller, the alienated man of the postmodern world

rebelled against the complacency of industrial progress and affluence, as well as claiming for itself the sense and the meaning of life. Freedom remained the main value, however, and unlike the existentialist generation the alienation generation has remained committed to collectivism. The quest for freedom was a common pursuit (Heller, 1993: 502).

People in the modern and postmodern world found themselves living in a world where life is meaningless and the man feels homeless and estranged. “The chaos, disorder, annihilation and fears and frustration on the one hand and the crumbling traditional values and old world views including loss of faith and God and trust in man along with anguish and anxiety, estrangement and loneliness rendered the life absolutely absurd, meaningless, directionless and futile.” (Saleem and Bani-ata, 2013: 283). Sense of alienation thus becomes a major theme in modern and postmodern literature, and many writers have expressed their anxiety of this phenomenon. According to one scholar

critics have used the concept of alienation to allude to highly diverse types of experience in Literature. In its most specific use it has been applied to those works where the characters' estrangement is determined by fate: they are born alienated, and there is no possibility for them to create a sense of order in life; they find themselves in a "wasteland (Vila, 1996: 247).

In the *Dictionary of Literary Themes and Motifs*, Jean-Charles Seigneuret identifies six basic types of alienation seen in literary works: The alienation from the physical environment, the alienation from one's own epoch, the estrangement of characters from the society, separation from the Creator and the cosmic order, alienation from the divided self and existential estrangement from the condition of human being. (Seigneuret, 1988: 31-32). Daronkolaee and Hojjat also identifies some common types of alienation seen in literary works:

there are three types of alienation common in literature. First, the man's alienation from himself. Modern man often finds it hard to be himself; he

has become a stranger to himself. Second, he has become estranged or alienated to his fellow man. He experiences alienation from the world in which he lives in, and finally alienation of man from God. In existential writing, the concept of alienation is used primarily to refer to a kind of psychological and spiritual malaise which is pervasive in modern society though it is not specific to it (Daronkolaee and Hojjat, 2012: 202).

In short, alienation as a literary theme presents the characters who are under the pressures of society, thus have a sense of feeling of lack. As a result of their feeling of alienation and lack of identity, the literary heroes have many psychological and social troubles and they do not have a feeling of meaningful life. This sense of meaninglessness and alienation becomes one of the most common theme of 20th century literature.

CHAPTER TWO

IDENTITY CRISIS

Sylvia Plath (1932-1963), born in Massachusetts, was a prominent confessional poet in the mid-twentieth-century. Being intelligent and sensitive, she began writing poems and stories at a very early age. Actually, she was only eight when her first poem went into print. Since then, her talent poured into her works. In 1955, she graduated from high school with the highest honor and won full scholarship to study at Cambridge, England. The Cambridge experience marked a turning point in her life. She made the acquaintance of Ted Hughes at a ball and soon fell in love with each other. They got married and had two children in the following years. This man, who later became England's Poet Laureate, had exerted great effect on Plath, both her life and writing. However, they did not live happily afterwards, just like the tale told. Their marriage set Plath into a dilemma. She made her efforts to play the traditional role well in the family, but being a wife and mother had exhausted all her time and energy. Sadly, there was no room left for her writing. She got tired, confused and lost. What's worse, Ted had an affair with another woman and the couple chose to live separately. The harshness and cruelty of reality forced Plath to dive into writing for comfort and company. Such solitude and desperation drove her crazy, and finally she went to collapse and killed herself by gas at home.

Looking back Plath's short life, it is easy to find that she is definitely a prolific writer. Meanwhile, Plath's legendary marriage and suicidal death tinged her works with the color of mystery. It is both her talent and life tragedy that forged her name in the history of American literature. Although Plath's fame is based on her confessional poems, her only novel is also of great importance.

The Bell Jar, published in 1963, is an autobiographical novel. The heroine's life experience corresponds with her own mental breakdown and suicidal attempt. Since many events of theirs paralleled or even overlapped, it offers us a detailed

record account of Plath's life trace. In the novel, Esther, a college student from Massachusetts, is invited to a fashion magazine in New York as a guest editor. During the short stay, she experiences various kinds of people and events. After coming back to her hometown in Boston, the conventions and static life style makes her feel suffocating. Besides, the New York life haunts on her mind and deprives her of the ability to live a normal life. Esther, the heroine, to some extent, is just the author's shadow. So Plath's spiritual pilgrimage can find full expression in Esther's psychological journey.

2.1 Conflict Between The Inner Self and The False Self

The role of the environment plays during one's journey for self-actualization should not be neglected. It can either foster or hinder the individual's growth and development. The better society should encourage the development of individual's potential. In contrary, the bad one or the psychologically sick one can frustrate man's need-satisfaction, because it is in short of love, trust, respect and safety. What's worse, it is filled with domination, hostility, contempt etc. When analyzing Esther's anxiety of marginality, the general social context certainly should be firstly taken into consideration.

Many factors attribute to the forming of one's inner self which are closely related to his or her growth environment. When the reality begins to cover over people's mind, some accept the reality living without questioning the meaning of existence while others refuse to be passive and try to change their fate. Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* is about "the alienated Esther Greenwood, a young woman who is coming of age, struggling to find her position in a society marked by its political and sexual restrictions" (Baerevar, 2007: 6). Patriarchal society and deficiency of her family have negative influence on Esther's maturity. Generally, Esther's divided self is displayed in two aspects: the sensitive and rebellious "inner self" and the obedient and excellent "false self". Through acting her false self, she temporarily gains respect and satisfaction. However, the more faultless she acts to be, the further she loses touch with her inner self. She attempts to be an ideal person taking on many conflicting identities and cares too much to fulfill others' expectations. Lingering

between dream and reality, Esther is tortured by her divided self so much that she feels stressed out and cannot find a way to solve the crisis.

2.1.1 The Inner Self

Inner self can be regarded as the core of one's personality that is closely related to one's growth environment, and once formed, it can be hardly changed. The inner self concentrates on how to maintain its identity and freedom, maintaining to be definitely controlled, fixed or occupied. However, it is somewhat secret and personal, and only under ideal circumstances can one's inner self be really completely expressed, so people always would rather keep it intact by the outer world than get hurt. Esther feels that her ideals are incompatible with the surrounding real world and the existence of her ideal inner self has been under a great threat. In order to find a sense of security, she has her inner self free from all the real-world experience and action, concealing in her own hallucinations, thoughts and memories instead. In fact, she can never grasp the unstable sense of identity from the intrusion of reality.

The novel takes place during the height of the Cold War that causes a sense of loss or confusion about the standard of value in the 1950s, a time when most people felt depressed in spirit. In this sense, the people in the USA at that time were living under a big bell jar, unable to breathe the air of freedom. The beginning of the novel relentlessly presents the conflict in that period:

It was a queer, sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs, and I didn't know what I was doing in New York. I'm stupid about executions. The idea of being electrocuted makes me sick, and that's all there was to read about in the papers -- goggle-eyed headlines staring up at me on every street corner and at the fusty, peanut-smelling mouth of every subway. It had nothing to do with me, but I couldn't help wondering what it would be like, being burned alive all along your nerves (Plath, 1971: 1).

The Rosenbergs, executed as the spies from Russia, are the political victims of the Cold War and the reference to their death symbolizes the ruthlessness of an

unjust and uncaring world. And as to Esther, the electrocution refereed several times in the novel is a symbol of Esther's worry, anxiety, and unhappiness. Also, traumas of the Second World War make people desperate for security and most capable women victims of that time who have to return homes to be wives and mothers after war in American history. In Plath's novel, we can see the profound effect that the prevailing ideology of female dependency and domesticity had upon women of that time. As Harold Bloom quotes from critic Paula Bennett

the novel's principal focus is on the heroine's interaction with the world at large and particularly on the pressure put on young women in our culture to conform to a stereotyped view of femininity if they wish to achieve social, as opposed to professional, success (Bloom, 2009: 19).

Unfortunately, Esther was born into a time unfitting to her, a time and circumstances in which what society demands of her runs completely opposite to her inner self.

The death of Esther's father also leaves an unhealed pain in her heart for years. It seems to Esther that her father's death is unreal.

I thought it odd that in all the time my father had been buried in this graveyard, none of us had ever visited him. My mother hadn't let us come to his funeral because we were only children then, and he had died in the hospital, so the graveyard and even his death had always seemed unreal to me. (Plath, 1971: 135)

The only interaction between Esther and her father in *The Bell Jar* comes when Esther pays a visit to her father's graveyard. "I had a great yearning, lately, to pay my father back for all the years of neglect, and start tending his grave. I had always been my father's favorite, and it seemed fitting I should take on a mourning my mother had never bothered with" (Plath, 1971: 159). Esther even supposes if her father didn't die, her life would be much more different.

Esther was brought up by her grandmother as her mother was busy devoting much time to supporting the family and taking care of her brother. Esther's brother is

only mentioned when she is in hospital and little conversation between them also exhibits the family's alienation. In Esther's description, Mrs. Greenwood is a practical and traditional woman and seems seriously lack of understanding. Obviously, deficiencies of a single-parent family have negative impact on Esther's mature and self-understanding, leading to her sensitive and gloomy personality.

The early chapters of the novel also portray Esther's financial insecurity. She has grown up poor since her father's death. Philomena Guinea is Esther's patron, a famous, wealthy and elderly novelist who funds Esther's scholarship. Also, and it is through the sponsorship that Esther is able to go to spend a summer in New York. So she feels isolated in upscale restaurants in New York and pressure to do well weighs heavily on her.

Look what can happen in this country, they'd say. A girl lives in some out-of-the-way town for nineteen years, is so poor that she can't afford a magazine, and then she gets a scholarship to college and wins a prize here and a prize there and ends up steering New York like her own private car" (Plath, 1971: 2).

It truthfully depicts the situations when young students, especially diligent and aggressive ones from countryside, has to face the fickle society and don't know what to do when first entering the metropolis.

I wondered why I couldn't go the whole way doing what I should any more. This made me sad and tired. Then I wondered why I couldn't go the whole way doing what I shouldn't, the way Doreen did, and this made me even sadder and more tired (Plath, 1971: 24-25).

We can see from the foregoing that Esther's adolescent development is a lonely one. As a result, Esther can not establish a positive genuine sense of self and she gradually drives to depression and disillusion.

When disillusioned by reality, people can always find consolation in literature, holding a proud and idealistic self through illusion. Laing holds that "many schizoid writers and artists who are relatively isolated from the other succeed in

establishing a creative relationship with things in the world, which are made to embody the figures of their fantasy. But theirs is not our present story” (Laing, 1990: 89). Esther is dissatisfied with the reality and only in fantasy can she find balance and remove distress. She has great enthusiasm about literature and ambition to be a writer. She loves poetry so much that she wants to be a poetess.

What I always thought I had in mind was getting some big scholarship to graduate school or a grant to study all over Europe, and then I thought I'd be a professor and write books of poems or write books of poems and be an editor of some sort (Plath, 1971: 26-27).

She decides to become an ordinary English major when she is in the college. However, the traditional literary courses are not as what she expected. She goes “to look up the requirements of an ordinary English major at her college. There are lots of requirements, and she doesn't have half of them. One of the requirements was a course in the eighteenth century.” (Plath, 1971: 102) She has spent most of her time on Dylan Thomas and “hates the very idea of the eighteenth century with all those smug men writing tight little couplets and being so dead keen on reason” (Plath, 1971: 102). Esther once decided to spend a summer writing a novel with the heroine named Elaine. “A feeling of tenderness filled my heart. My heroine would be myself, only in disguise” (Plath, 1971: 98). As Laing states,

In fantasy, the self can be anyone, anywhere, do anything, have everything. It is thus omnipotent and completely free - but only in phantasy. Once commit itself to any real project and it suffers agonies of humiliation - not necessarily for any failure, but simply because it has to subject itself to necessity and contingency. It is omnipotent and free only in phantasy. The more this fantastic omnipotence and freedom are indulged, the more weak, helpless, and fettered it becomes in actuality. The illusion of omnipotence and freedom can be sustained only within the magic circle of its own shut-upness in phantasy. And in order that this attitude be not dissipated by the slightest intrusion of reality, fantasy and reality have to be kept apart. (Laing, 1990: 84).

However, this is the ideal which exactly contradicts with traditional female role in the society that time and the affliction which at last causes her mental breakdown.

2.1.2 The False Self

In accordance with Laing, when the individual feels the inner self always trapped, he or she would keep it untouched by the outer world and delegates all transactions with others to the false-self system in order to maintain his or her identity and freedom. Under this circumstance,

people always use two chief maneuvers to preserve security. One is an outward compliance with the other. The second is an inner intellectual Medusa's head we turned on the other.. Both maneuvers taken together safeguard our own subjectivity which we have never to betray openly and which thus can never find direct and immediate expression for itself. (Laing, 1990: 48)

Therefore, false self generates from the obedience to wishes or expectations of others, or imagined wishes or expectations of others. This is often manifested in the passive coordination to standards of others rather than their own, and in the inhabitation of the objective expression of their true wishes. Under different circumstances, people may act as different roles, and masks inevitably become the tool to protect one's inner self.

In 1950s, women's social status is evaluated by and confined into their families. A woman must remain a virgin until marriage and then as a wife must submit herself to her husband's will and further his success and livelihood. So, the patriarchal society neglects women's own demands of development which is actually deeply rooted in the mind of some conservative parents. Esther's own mother and her Buddy's mother Mrs. Willard are both highly educated and also good housewives married to their college teachers. Mrs. Willard, Buddy's mother, believes that a woman must support her husband's ambitions while silencing her own. She tells Esther that "“What a man wants is a mate, and what a woman wants is infinite

security,” and “What a man is is an arrow into the future, and what a woman is the place the arrow shoots off from” (Plath, 1971: 58).

Buddy becomes Esther’s boyfriend just because the society and her family view Buddy as the perfect man for her to marry. Everyone believes “how fine and clean Buddy was and how he was the kind of a person a girl should stay fine and clear for” (Plath, 1971: 55). Also, when the girls hear she was going to Yale to see Buddy, they treat her with amazement and respect. Although Esther feels little compassion for Buddy, she is good at playing the part of the concerned girlfriend and tells her friends they are practically engaged. It seems that a woman’s value can only be manifested by her male mate. Esther has always been a gentle submissive girlfriend for Buddy. When Buddy dismisses her favorite poetry to “dust”, Esther hides her anger and humbly says: “Maybe yes.” Actually, what Buddy despises is not poetry or the profession as a poet but a poet-ess. When Buddy invites her to ski, though she has never skied before, she agrees because it never occurs to her to say no. In fact, when someone makes some comments or seeks Esther’s views, her most common response is “probably yes” or “I think yes” although she doesn’t necessarily agree with it. Linda Wagner-Martin argues that “even though the men in Esther’s life are responsible for these events, Plath shows clearly that Esther’s passivity and her lack of questioning are also responsible. Esther’s malaise has made her incapable of dealing with aggression either subtle or overt, except privately” (Wagner-Martin, 2009: 75). According to Laing, “this compliance is partly, therefore, a betrayal of one’s own true self, but it is also a technique of concealing and preserving one’s own true possibilities” (Laing, 98). Unclear about what kind of people exactly she wants to be, Esther knows how she is supposed to act.

The basic characteristics of this obedience in Esther’s false self is to cater to her mother’s wishes and expectations, which is also a kind of escape from making choice. Since her father’s death, Esther has always been an obedient and progressive daughter. Mrs. Greenwood loves her daughter but doesn’t understand her. Esther has always been a very good child. Also, she is an excellent student good at getting good scores, but she hopes that Esther can follow the traditional path for women and asks

Esther to learn shorthand from her in order to make a living. Esther discriminates this boring kind of work, but she still tries to do as her mother asks her to. Esther volunteers at a hospital because her mother convinces her that volunteering will help her pulling out of depression, which actually aggravates her anxiety. Although she considers other options herself, such as becoming a Catholic to talk out of suicide, and then wonders if she could become a nun to hermit, her mother laughs at these ideas but can never find her daughter's anxiety which she doesn't pay much attention to. In her view, her daughter has "always been perfectly normal, and thought present eccentricities are simply an adolescent phase" (Laing, 1990: 70). She would like to pretend that Esther's stay in the mental hospital never happened:

"We'll take up where we left off, Esther," she had said, with her sweet, martyr's smile. "We'll act as if all this were a bad dream". A bad dream. I remembered everything. I remembered the cadavers and Doreen and the story of the fig tree and Marco's diamond [...] Maybe forgetfulness, like a kind snow, should numb and cover them. But they were part of me. They were my landscape. (Plath, 1971: 193-84)

However, Esther feels guilty for not being her sickness: "A daughter in asylum! I had done that to her. Still, she had obviously decided to forgive me." (Plath, 1971: 193) She says nothing because her mother thinks that they both should look back on this "as if all this were a bad dream" (Plath, 1971: 193). As to Esther, she is actually of the age when we today call "Period of Adolescent rebellion". But hardly can she find a good way to communicate with her mother successfully. Therefore, when facing a variety of puzzles during her growth, Esther only hides them deeply in the heart and unwilling to disclose her inner self.

Esther always has a high standard of herself to be a diligent, studious and accomplished girl. She has won numerous praises and financial aids in light of her talent and hard work. And these achievements are what she feels proud of: "All my life I'd told myself studying and reading and writing and working like mad was what I wanted to do, and it actually seemed to be true, I did everything well enough and got all A's, and by the time I made it to college nobody could stop me" (Plath, 1971:

26). Perhaps, she doesn't even know what the significance for study is, and she strives just for others' recognition which is under the disguise of self-realization because she can only gain confidence through this way.

In fact, Esther is just one of the representatives who get lost in the so-called American Dream. Although poor, she obtains an enviable opportunity to internship in a well-known magazine in New York. Esther arrives in New York with high expectations: "I was supposed to be the envy of thousands of other college girls just like me all over America." (Plath, 1971:2). She also imagines that others would consider her lucky: "A girl lives in some out-of-the-way town for nineteen years, so poor she can't afford a magazine, and then she gets a scholarship to college and wins a prize here and a prize there and ends up steering New York like her own private car" (Plath, 1971: 2). So the totally different surroundings satisfy her curiosity about new things, and this challenge arouses her potential to prevail over others. She and eleven other girls are put in a hotel called Amazon that originally refers to the female warriors in Greek mythology. Plath tries to indicate that these selected lucky girls hope to encounter the world competition and accomplish their dreams like their male counterparts. Ironically, these expectations and pressures are in conflict with her actual experiences. As soon as Esther settles down in this hotel, she immediately notes that "they were mostly girls my age with wealthy parents who wanted to be sure their daughters would be living where men couldn't get at them and deceive them" (Plath, 1971: 3). They are chased, appreciated and confined to the house or "jar". She is so inexperienced in social etiquettes in New York. To make things worse, she finds that she even loses her charm getting along with males in contrast to Doreen. However, she doesn't want to be inferior to others. So she makes effort to integrate into the circle. She joins various parties and dates with guys, pretending to be popular and cheerful. "I felt like a racehorse in a world without racetracks or a champion college footballer suddenly confronted by Wall Street and a business suit, his days of glory shrunk to a little gold cup on his mantel with a date engraved on it like the date on a tombstone" (Plath, 1971: 62).

If Esther were really a docile and conservative girl, all her behaviors can be regarded normal. However, it is just because that she is so intelligent and well-educated that she has penetrating insight and cast doubt on everything. The self, shut up with itself, complains of futility, of lack of spontaneity. Existentially, “the self is extremely aware of itself, and observes the false self, usually highly critically” (Laing, 74). Actually, the more she acts her false self, the farther the distance from her inner self is. She feels her self-relationship turns to be a pseudo-interpersonal one, and her mind is like a bell jar, vacant, futile and meaningless.

2. 2 Schizoid Condition of The Female Identity

In the 1950s, the seemingly prosperous New York life is actually decayed to its core. Every person has his or her mask on the face which is distorted by pressure and that is why Esther can only get in touch with one facet of every character and is unable to find the truth of life. Therefore, the “bell jar” is haunting over everyone’s mind and the whole society is like a big bell jar with no air for breathing. As for Esther, on the one hand, she wants to be an excellent and traditional woman as others expected; on the other hand, she is unwilling to give up her own ideal. Especially, her female identity sharpens the role crisis between human and the society so that she was unconvinced by the unfair patriarchal society.

Through most of the novel, Esther manages to maintain her good girl image but meanwhile unwilling or unable to shed it. Esther falls into a passive position, feeling hatred to the society and also upset about herself. She despises women who cater for the patriarchal system that divides and exploits them, scolds men who enjoy prestige but hypocritical and violent, and also looks down upon herself above all for having no courage breaking out of this dilemma. The gap between her and the world widens. At last, she is completely isolated from others. Everyone and everything are in her question, so she is always confused about her identity and unable to make sure that she is good or valuable.

According to psychology, “the experience of losing one’s own individual isolated selfhood can be tolerated in certain circumscribed situations without too

much anxiety” (Laing, 92), but if one simultaneously suffers the ontological insecurity such as implosion, engulfment and petrification, he or she plunges into a sense of loss and confusion. Unfortunately, Esther is in this typical case, feeling deeply haunted and eventually gets mental breakdown and even tries to suicide herself in many ways. The individual in this living circumstance may feel “precariously differentiated from the rest of the world, so that his identity and autonomy are always in question” (Laing, 1990: 42). Laing defines this psychological condition as “ontological insecurity” of which the typical psychotic symptoms are engulfment, implosion, and petrification.

Engulfment is a situation in which “a firm sense of one’s own autonomous identity is required in order that one may be related as one human being to another. Otherwise, any and every relationship threatens the individual with loss of identity” (Laing, 1990: 44). According to Diane Bonds, the novel dramatizes the dilemma “for women in which, on the one hand, as an independent existence, is presumed to be autonomous and whole, and yet, in which, on the other hand, women have their identity primarily estimated by relationship to men” (Bonds, 190: 49). Society and family regard Buddy as the perfect man for her to marry. But Esther is aware of Buddy’s flaws: He dismisses her passion for literature, he patronizes her, and he does not want a woman who aspires to anything beyond her wifely duties. Especially when Buddy admits having a fair with a waitress, Esther feels betrayed and very disappointed to his cheating. In Esther’s eyes, he seems to be hypocritical. Esther balks at and rejects society’s double standard, realizing that Buddy can construct his own sexual identity while she cannot. Esther believes that Buddy wants her to choose between being a writer and becoming a mother. According to Boyer,

If Buddy Willard had manipulated Esther into skiing down a slope, another man is equally responsible for her loss of self-esteem because he is not only spiteful, but abusive. At the behest of Doreen, Esther agrees to go on a blind date with Marco, a Peruvian. In order to pave his way with Esther, Marco gives her his diamond stickpin, a signifier for marriage rights and an object she might have used to later defend herself. But the diamond stickpin is a signifier for marriage rights. As they are dancing, Esther is asked by Marco

to pretend that she is “drowning” (...). Marco’s intention is that she totally submits to his will as if she were a dead body, without cognizance of self-worth or identity of her own. As Esther follows Marco’s lead, she becomes riveted to him, and the two become like one person on the floor, not through a union, than through engulfment” (Boyer, 2004: 209-221)

Esther becomes critical to men for the reason that she can’t be absolutely persuaded by such false reasoning and she believes that people should be judged by intelligence instead of gender. In fact, she wants to show others the true self, to achieve her own success: “The last thing I wanted was infinite security and to be the place an arrow shoots off from. I wanted change and excitement and to shoot off in all directions myself, like the colored arrows from a Fourth of July rocket” (Plath, 1971: 68). On the other hand, the women around Esther are representatives of each certain woman that she can become. Esther feels pushed toward assuming different stereotypical female roles, everyone is exclusive and all of them her a sense of “implosion”. Implosion is

a tendency for the false self to assume more and more of the characteristics of the person or persons and its compliance is just based on them. This assumption of the other person’s characteristics may come to amount to an almost total impersonation of the other. (...).There is evoked a welter of afflicting emotions, from a desperate longing and yearning for that others have and she lacks, to frantic envy and hatred of all that is theirs and not hers. These feelings may, in turn, be offset by attitudes of disdain, contempt, disgust, or indifference. (Laing, 1990: 91 - 100).

First, the elder can’t give Esther a satisfactory answer for future. Esther’s mother and Buddy’s mother Mrs. Willard were both students in the university, but become housewives after marriage. What’s worse, Dodo Conway at last just reduces into a machine of giving birth to children. Then, in New York, two women who are internships as Esther at *Ladies’ Day* magazine have particularly attracted her interest. Doreen, with blond and beautiful hair, young but rich in social experience, is good at showing her charm in front of males, which makes Esther feel fascinated but ashamed. She rebels against social conventions with an attitude that Esther admires

but still doesn't entirely embrace. Betsy, on the contrary, is simple, gentle and well-behaved, and her biggest life goal is to be a good housewife. Esther's ideals wonder between their images, and instinctively rejects Betsy first and when she finds Doreen's absurdity she returns to Betsy. Jay Cee is the senior editor and Esther's boss during the internship; she is ambitious, confident as well as professional and represents the typical career woman.

However, Esther thinks that it is a pity to sacrifice her femininity for independence in order to pursue her career. But there are examples that the lesbian poet at Esther's college and Joan with her horsy smell are independent women at the expense of their womanhood. Looking at the choices made by the women she knows, she tries to imitate only to find that it cannot acceptable alternative for herself. Throughout the novel, though she listens to advice that various women provide, she finds herself unable or unwilling to follow the particular paths they take. Neither kind of woman presents Esther with a model for herself or an example she wishes to follow. Confronted by the gulf between her gender or being and her aspirations, Esther is left feeling numb, stuck, as she says over and over again, in a dark, airless sack like an aborted fetus under its glass bell: "Doreen is dissolving, Lenny Shepherd is dissolving, Frankie is dissolving, New York is dissolving, they are all dissolving away and none of them matter any more. I don't know them. I have never known them and I am very pure" (Plath, 1971: 17).

Esther was deep into the the role of crisis "since relationship of any kind with others is experienced as a threat to the self's identity" (Laing, 1990: 76). Esther's "self feels safe only in hiding, and isolated" (Laing, 1990: 76). It is impossible to confirm her role in society, and she completely lost direction in life, and even cannot see the reason to survive. For her own future, Esther imagined that she had been sitting in a fig tree:

I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig tree, starving to death, just because I couldn't make up my mind which of the figs I would choose. I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest, and, as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go

black, and, one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet. (Plath, 1971: 63)

The figs symbolize what Esther wants to be: a wife and mother or a poet. She not only looks forward to enjoying traditional lifestyle but also has long been yearning to get into the artistic world that she is talented in. Hesitated, wandering among many chances for choice, she wants to get everything but only to get nothing eventually. Apparently normal, she is suffering from her divided self. Her behavior is becoming more and more erratic, and fragmented in her thought. At this point, Esther's only hope is, on her return to Massachusetts, to take the summer writing class taught by a famous writer that she applied to. Esther's mother waits for her at the station and inconsiderately serves Esther bad news "that she didn't make that writing course" (Plath,) stripping away Esther's only hope for the summer. This disappointing development, and Esther regards it as a personal defeat, which precipitates her breakdown. "The major depression that Esther experiences throws her body into a disabled state that affects all aspects of her being, especially her thought processes" (Boyer, 2004: 214). Overwhelmed, listless and detached, Esther cannot read or write. Despite efforts to reverse her condition, Esther continues to lose touch with reality. Petrification is when

one is threatened with the possibility of becoming no more than a thing in the world of the other, without any life for oneself, without any being for oneself. In terms of such anxiety, the very act of experiencing the other as a person is felt as virtually suicidal...Then the world is experienced as unreal, and all that belongs to this system is felt to be false, futile, and meaningless. (Laing, 2004: 47-80)

Everything "comes to be experienced as more and more unreal and dead." (Laing, 2004: 82). Esther finds, "however, another way of adjusting herself to her particular anxieties". (Laing, 2004: 128). She hopes to go to another part of the country where she is a stranger. When a sailor approaches her on the Boston Common, she flirts with him under the guise of Elly Higginbottom who is a fictitious character in her unaccomplished novel. Actually, she had never been to Chicago where seems her "unconventional, mixed-up people would come from" (Plath, 1971

) Elly is her “other”, more flirtatious and socially confident. Growing up as an orphan, Elly does not feel burdened by family pressures or expectations.

Esther “plays an elaborate game of pretence and equivocation” (Laing, 2004: 114) and feels safer and more comfortable to get on with others only when no one knows her. She can be herself in safety only in isolation and until then she totally loses touch with the reality. She extricates the inner self and avoids contacting with the reality, which is a defense mechanism of self-protection, so her “social self is felt to be false and futile” (Laing, 2004: 114). Haunted by her false self, consequently Esther is completely breakdown mentally. The schizoid treatment is specifically discussed in Laing’s book:

The term schizoid refers to an individual the totality of whose experience is split in two main ways: in the first place, there is a rent in his relation with his world and, in the second, there is a disruption of his relation with himself. Such a person is not able to experience himself together with others, but on the contrary, he experiences himself in despairing aloneness and isolation. Moreover, he does not experience himself as a complete person but rather as split in various ways. (Laing, 1990: 17)

Esther can barely sleep, eat or read, falling into an abnormal mental state of depression, so Mrs. Greenwood has to send Esther to Dr. Gordon’s private hospital. Dr. Gordon, who symbolizes the patriarchal power of the medical establishment, does not want to understand her suffering but wants to mold her into one of the “shop dummies”. But Esther immediately distrusts him and she is cold, withdrawn, exclusive, and suspicious at the very beginning of the treatment. As Boyer quotes from Barnard, “by the time she becomes Dr. Gordon’s patient, her confusion is far advanced; virtually incapable of action, she has become the helpless object of the acts of others. The clumsily applied shock treatment represents the epitome of such acts” (Boyer, 2004: 214-215).

In addition, the mechanical, detached scene depicts the power of doctors over a female patient, which Esther witnesses on her tour with Buddy. Esther explains how Buddy takes her on a tour of the hospital including dissected cadavers and

fetuses in glass jars. The two also watch a baby being bom, a violent and painful scene, as an early example of the medical establishment's control over a woman's body, foreshadowing Esther's later experience with electroshock therapy. Besides, the electrotherapy episode connects to the opening of the novel, when she expressed fear of the Rosenbergs' electrocution. Esther seems to be increasingly paranoid and unreliable in her perception of reality. Eventually this severe depression causes "Esther's shock treatments, which debilitate her even further since they are administered in a barbaric fashion, akin to electrocution. The shocked body is an even deeper representation of the minimalization of language in Esther Greenwood" (Boyer, 2009: 134).

The hospital symbolizes the powerful society which deprives people's thought, personality and humanity. Esther is just one of those who make resistance or challenge to the unreasonable social tradition and people's numb obedience. However, she doesn't find a way out, and degenerates into the victim of the patriarchal society. She "sinks deeper and deeper into a psychotic state" (Boyer, 2004: 217). Esther decides not to go back to Dr. Gordon. She feels suffocated when she says "the air of the bell jar wadded round me and I couldn't stir" (Plath, 1971: 152). Now Esther is determined to find her own cure: death, which is the only cure in her distorted view.

Though Esther decides to end her life, she masks this desire when around others, attempting to act stable and normal around others. She thinks about various ways of suicide and even consideres going to the church:

I knew the Catholics thought killing oneself was an awful sin. But perhaps, if this was so, they might have a good way to persuade me out. [...] The only trouble was, Church, even the Catholic Church, didn't take up the whole of your life. No matter how much you knelt and prayed, you still had to eat three meals a day and have a job and live in the world. (Plath, 1971: 134)

Therefore, as to Esther, religion is just an excuse for her to escape that can't resolve anything in reality. On a day at a beach, Esther challenges her friend Cal to swim out to a rock, thinking that "drowning must be the kindest way to die, and

burning the worst” (Plath, 1971: 128). Esther continues swimming toward her death, “my heartbeat boomed like a dull motor in my ears. I am I am I am” (Plath, 1971: 129). “I am I am I am” appears several times in this novel, and it is a yell deeply from her soul which means eternal life, symbolizing Esther’s eagerness for spiritual rebirth through death of body. After her several suicide attempts, which she always abandons out of fear or for attempting an impractical means, Esther swallows sleeping pills and chooses to die in is symbolic of a womb. “I felt the darkness, but nothing else, and my head rose, feeling it, like the head of a worm” (Plath, 1971: 139). She hopes for rebirth in her search for death. She wakes up in the hospital feeling hopeless: nothing has change. She is in despair at her situation and now even more paranoid. “The contortions of sight, hearing, language and the physical appearance continue Esther’s anxiety: nothing is recognized” (Wagner-Martin, 2009: 5). Her “face was purple, and bulged out in a shapeless way, shading to green along the edges, and then to a sallow yellow” (Plath, 1971: 142). Esther’s search for identity is reflected in her obsessive fascination with faces throughout the novel. In this reflection, she is disfigured and her mental desperation is symbolized by the horror of her face. She breaks the mirror when she realizes that the person in the mirror is just herself. Also, feeling trapped, she expresses her anger and sense of entrapment by smashing a stack of thermometers. Before the nurse wheels her out, she scoops up a ball of mercury, which symbolizes her need to find a way to mend the disconnected parts of self: “I opened my fingers a crack, like a child with a secret, and smiled at the silver globe cupped in my palm. If I dropped it, it would break into a million little replicas of itself, and if I pushed them near each other, they would fuse, without a crack, into one whole again” (Plath, 1971: 175). The disembodied faces and distorted reflections in which she does not recognize herself are symbols of her struggle with a divided self. This enhances Esther’s sense of danger, and she remains isolated, vulnerable and exposed. At the same time, Esther’s perception of identity continues to be fragmented, and she feels desperate and unable to breathe fresh air outside living in the “bell jar”.

2. 3. Discovery of The Self and Recovery

Traditional clinical psychiatry isolates the patient as a single person or an organism or even a conscious machine. However, it is proved that schizoid treatment in this way by Gordon fails on Esther. On the contrary, According to Laing, the existential psychology states that the patient is still living in relationship with others, which is simultaneously interrelated and independent, and the radical solution is to reconstruct the patient's relationship with the world. "Psychotherapy is an activity in which that aspect of the patient's being, his relatedness to others, is used for therapeutic ends" (Laing, 1990: 28). To mention it, Laing believes the divided self differs from madness with reasons that based on reality. For example, Esther can always give clear and insightful account of herself when suffering by her "divided self". Laing believes that the traditional clinical psychiatry can't solve the problem, and hope for recovery depends on the later.

Therefore, reconstructing the relationship with others is the only way to escape from the solitary bell jar. Through people's help and another try of psychotherapy, Esther makes effort in getting rid of her false self and finally finds the value of her existence and thus begins a new life. During the process of growth, it is important for young people, despite his or her nationality, to face the problem of how to grow up and how to make himself or herself successfully accommodated into adult world.

Laing believes that through analyzing the living condition and experience during earlier age and even childhood, we can much more easily understand patients' meanings in their insane speeches and behaviors. Esther lives in contradiction as she feels that her ideals and the surrounding real-world are incompatible and realizes that the existence of the ideal self has been under a great threat. Finally she had her inner self free from all the real-world experience and action, concealing in her own hallucinations, thoughts and memories to find a sense of security. She is, therefore, driven compulsively to seek companies, so love is something Esther increasingly needs. She gradually gets trust from others and confidence from herself and begins to unmask after encountering some important people in her life.

In New York, Esther's problems and worries mount and become increasingly impossible to ignore, as Bennett explains: "Esther discovers that the image on which she has depended for the first nineteen years of her life is a fraud" (Plath, 105). Esther feels disappointed in herself because her many scholastic achievements suddenly seem meaningless. She immediately imagines herself attaining similar achievement as Jay Cee has made. "I tried to imagine what I would be like if I were Ee Gee, the famous editor, in an office full of potted rubber plants and African violets my secretary had to water each morning." (Plath, 1971: 32) However, when Cee asks Esther to show more about her ambition, Esther admits that she is only a girl with no particular particular direction and can not commit to any single action.

I felt very low. I had been unmasked only that morning by Jay Cee herself, and I felt now that all the uncomfortable suspicions I had about myself were coming true, and I couldn't hide the truth much longer. After nineteen years of running after good marks and prizes and grants of one sort and another, I was letting up, slowing down, dropping clean out of the race. (Plath, 1971: 24)

In *Adolescent Psychology*, Linda Nielsen mentions that "suicidal youth often report feeling unloved and unwanted, suggesting that their parents have been unable to create an accepting, loving atmosphere in the home" (Nielsen, 1987: 685). Based on the detailed analysis of Esther's life in adolescent development, it is no doubt that Esther's mental breakdown and suicidal attempt are definitely under the influence of her loss of father. She can never fulfilled by her father's affection, which is regret in her whole life.

Esther goes on a date with Constantine, a talkative and experienced simultaneous interpreter. Though he is much too short, he is polite, kind, and smart and has what no American man she has ever met. Her father's death left a profound gap in her life. As a child, she did not question her identity or her happiness, but now, in New York, Constantine's mature impresses Esther and causes her to dwell on her perceived inadequacies. Esther thinks that Constantine sees through all that stuff what she really is. When Constantine grabs her hand and squeezes it, she

decides to let Constantine seduce her. But things don't go as she supposed to. Constantine just turns on some favorable music and falls down side by side with her talking until she falls asleep. Despite one's "longing to be loved for the real self, the schizophrenic is terrified of love" (Laing, 1990: 163), because he or she "preserves the secrecy and the privacy of the inner self against intrusion, engulfment and implosion" (Laing, 1990: 63). In fact, outward understandings always threaten the whole defensive system because "it is lonely and painful to be always misunderstood, so from this point of view isolation is a measure of safety." (Laing, 1990: 45). Laing believes

In therapy with such a person, the last thing there is any point in is to pretend to more 'love' or 'concern' than one has. The more the therapist's own necessarily very complex motives for trying to 'help' a person of this kind genuinely converge on a concern for him which is prepared to 'let him be' and is not in fact engulfing or merely indifference, the more hope there will be in the horizon. (Laing, 1990: 45)

After the invalid treatment in Gordon's hospital, Esther is transferred to Doctor Nolan's private asylum. Different from the Gordon, Nolan is a kind, sympathetic, and helpful psychiatrist. Dr. Nolan challenges the predominate view of the 1950s that only men could be doctors. She gives Esther the support and understanding she needs. Dr. Nolan decides that Esther should not have any more visitors, and Esther is pleased. Because the visits diminish her sense of self-worth and make her especially sensitive to her current situation. Esther sees her as a mother figure and grows to trust and love her: "I liked Doctor Nolan, I loved her, I had given her my trust on a platter and told her everything" (Plath, 1971: 173). Laing suggests that "this provides striking confirmation of Jung's statement that the schizophrenic ceases to be schizophrenic when he meets someone by whom he feels understood" (Laing, 1990: 165). Therefore, "the physician's love that recognizes the patient's total being with no strings attached" (Laing, 1990: 165) is crucial to the patient's psychological recovery. Sophisticated, smart, and gentle, Dr. Nolan helps to lead Esther on a path to healing. No matter what others teach her and how they care for her, the most important thing is that Esther herself has to pluck the courage to face

the trouble and end it. Otherwise, she would be the “dead baby” living in the stifling bell jar forever. Esther is a clever girl after all and unwilling to be defeated, pouring out accusations of persecution to the people with whom she has been complying for years. With strong self-consciousness, Esther is determined to throw her cowardly masks and get back her self, regardless of any price. With the improvement, Esther picks more courage to face her own negative sentiments. From Esther’s narrative, we can see that she often has sharp and penetrating vision, but before her mental breakdown, she has almost never expressed her true thoughts. However, after committing suicide, Esther begins to demonstrate to be unscrupulous by speech.

In the hospital, she feels she is being viewed and evaluated in terms of the all-American girl she once was, which is yet another way she feels pressured to conform to a societal ideal: “I hated these visits, because I kept feeling the visitors measuring my fat and stringy hair against what I had been and what they wanted me to be, and I knew they went away utterly confounded.” (Plath, 1971: 166). She shouts to the curious visitors to get out and stop coming. This is the first time Esther uses foul language, shows her dissatisfaction with the world and expresses her resistance to others’ injury. For her birthday, when Mrs. Greenwood brings her some roses that mean romantic love but obviously unfitting for her situation, Esther says, “Save them for my funeral.” and then tells Dr. Nolan, “I hate her” (Plath, 1971: 166). Though Mrs. Greenwood loves her daughter, she only adds to Esther’s feelings of inadequacy and makes Esther feel guilty for not being the perfect daughter. “My mother was the worst. She never scolded me, but kept begging me, with a sorrowful face, to tell her what she had done wrong” (Plath, 1971: 166). At this point in the narrative, she no longer pretends to be the perfect young woman and daughter. Esther’s straightforward, decisive speaking style shows her determination to be a free, independent woman, taking her destiny into her own hands. Because she is able to honestly confront her feelings, she grows more confident, which in turn furthers her recovery.

To some extent, the formation of the “bell jar” above Esther’s mind partly comes from her twisted sexual awareness that is shown in two aspects: Esther’s

preoccupation with virginity and her understanding of sexuality as being equal to violence. "It should be noted that her encounters with men have been nearly devastating. Esther's malaise has made her incapable of dealing with aggression either subtle or overt" (Bonds, 1990) After hurt by Marco in the party, she returns "to the Amazon and carries all her expensive clothes to the roof of the hotel and throws them into the sky to show her reject to the traditional image of pretty, smart girl, object for man's acquisition" (Bonds, 1990). Betrayed by Buddy, she turns down his proposal at the sanitarium, which is a transitional decision she has made, even though she still doesn't know where the way out is. After a talk with Eric, who lost his virginity to a prostitute but is so repulsed by the experience that he decides he will separate sex from love, Therefore, Esther thinks that losing her virginity will be a revenge on Buddy's betray and help her reach a better sense of her self, another example of her youth and naive: "I thought a spectacular change would come over me the day I crossed the boundary line" (Plath, 1971: 66). Esther views losing her virginity as, without the fear of getting pregnant, a sign for freedom and independence. Then following Dr. Nolan's recommendation, Esther gets fitted for a diaphragm, a birth-control device, freeing her from the possibility of pregnancy. Bennett asserts that "Her dilemma is resolved, however factitiously, the contraceptive device that will presumably allow her to exercise her femininity without fear of accidentally falling under the domination of a man by becoming pregnant and therefore dependent" Erwin is a University Professor of Mathematics with whom Esther had a physical relationship. She chooses him because he seems intelligent and experienced and because he is a stranger. Despite the pain, Esther seems pleased that she took control of her sexuality. And thus Esther found a relief and balance towards the double standards on the chastity for men and women.

At last, Buddy visits her at the hospital and wonders who would marry Esther, given her history of mental instability, and his concerns echo her own anxieties on the subject: "I didn't know who would marry me now that I'd been where I had been" (Plath, 1971: 195). However, such considerations do not seem to upset her, though, as they would have before her progress at the hospital. Esther symbolically separates herself from the men who have hurt her and makes it clear she does not

want to see him again: “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” (Plath, 1971: 182). In the process of interaction with the males, Esther feels women’s vulnerability in the patriarchal society, and manages to make fight with it in her own way.

During the time in Amazon, Esther feels herself surrounded by despair and degradation. After witnessing the drunken, animalistic interlude at Lenny’s, she cleanses herself by bathing, noting: “I felt pure and sweet as a new baby.” (Plath, 1971: 17). The bath, symbolizing baptism, serves as a way to separate herself from the false self and as a way to remember her inner self: “I never feel so much myself as when I’m in a hot bath.” (Plath, 1971: 17). She believes that she is growing pure again comparing the bath water to holy water. Later, Esther moves into a sunnier room of the asylum, and Joan Gilling, an acquaintance from college whom Buddy has dated before Esther, checks in. Joan represents Esther’s thoughts and feelings, a part of Esther’s false self. Esther considers Joan as “the beaming double of my old best self” (Plath, 1971: 167). In the end of the novel, Joan hangs herself and completely is destroyed while Esther gets her real independence because she views Joan’s suicide as a waste of a life and no longer wants to die. At the funeral, she looks at Joan’s body. The burial of Joan symbolizes Esther’s burial of the illness and her old imprisoned self. As Kendall asserts “The novel’s repeated references to the promise of rebirth seem to be finally realized when Esther survives and is apparently healed by her therapy; the suicide of her double, Joan Gilling, is an integral part of this symbolic pattern” (Kendall, 2001: 125).

Esther is now more confident, more forgiving, and more willing to face her emotions as she moves toward recovery. Eventually, she gets the diagnosis of rehabilitation and is released from the asylum. Dramatically, Esther wakes up from the electroshock therapy and feels peaceful: “The bell jar hung, suspended, a few feet above my head. I was open to the circulating air” (Plath, 1971: 176). This open bell

jar means Esther's ability to breathe air of freedom and the ending is hopeful, signifying Esther's recovery, independence, and reclaiming of her identity.

However, the novel leaves open the question of how to interpret Esther's recovery. It seems to be controversial about this ending by numerous critics. As Laing concludes by his experience in the treatment of schizophrenia, "I am quite sure that a good number of 'cures' of psychotics consist in the fact that the patient has decided, for one reason or other, once more to play at being sane" (Laing, 1990: 148). Since the evidence for such a positive conclusion is ambiguous and it also seems limiting to argue that sexual freedom, at a literal or symbolic level, is sufficient to solve all the conflicts which lie behind her breakdown. The conflict in the society and roles of female remain the same, and her value is still not fully reflected. She also recognizes her vulnerability because she is not brand new but "patched, retreated and approved for the road" (Plath, 1971: 199). Recovery, at the end of the novel, equates to conformity to the society which she blames for her breakdown.

In fact *The Bell Jar* provides no definitive means of judging the success of Esther's treatment. Esther sounds like an omniscient narrator, until it becomes clear that she remains implicated in the breakdown of her younger self, and is still not free. The image of the bell jar, with its associations of suffocation and illness, may return. She reveals a fear in the final pages that her recovery may only have been temporary. Conceivably, in the bell-jar-shaped society, Esther was likely to once again into the role of crisis, losing the courage to another new life. Actually, Plath's own new life did not last long. The wrong person living in the wrong era is destined to be a tragedy.

CHAPTER THREE

ALIENATION IN THE PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

In the 19th century, since the industry ushered an era of prosperity, it was widely held that wealth and possession weighed more than anything else. People did not appear in their authentic state, instead, they had to wear masks to protect themselves. The idealization of women became heavily domestic. During that time, the American generally believed that man was active, dominant and assertive, while woman should be passive, submissive, and domestic. Though America was a newly born democratic nation with “everyone is born equal” written in constitution, women then did not share equal rights with men. The male’s domination and authority was beyond everything and they never showed the real respect for women. Located in such a specific historical period and social milieu, Esther is naturally influenced by the conceptualization of gender of her time. However, Esther could never become a traditional docile girl. Being obstinate and rebellious marks her character. Although she is comparatively in the absence of self-knowledge at the beginning, she refuses to obey those conventions. So Esther projects all her ambitions and dreams into writing and expends all her energy in pursuit of a goal that seemed impossible for a woman to attain at that time.

Tracing back to the nineteenth century, we would easily find out that the most popular idea among American girls was the motto of “true womanhood”, which served as a flag waving in every woman’s heart, calling for their life-long efforts to achieve this. Thus, all the young ladies’ dreams were strung together on the thread of this well cherished wish that ran through them. Actually, this logo was so exaggerated that, to some extent, it seemed to be every woman’s sole goal in the whole life. In short, it could be characterized by four basic aspects: piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity.

Top on the list was piety. It was the core standard of women's virtue. In accordance with the code, women were expected to be faithful, tender, modest and always ready to sacrifice her. Secondly, purity required women to preserve their innocence and virginity, and never thought about those things related to sex, which was men's domain. In addition, submissiveness was of great significance to a women's virtue. They were born to obey the God and their husband willingly and obediently. It was women's duty to accept their position and to suffer any pains without any complaint. Last but not least, being a woman was equivalent of being domestic, and thereby affirming domesticity was an essential property of women. They were advocated to stay at home, to nurse and assist, to comfort and manage. Marriage was their only sphere for protection. As a housewife, the very emphasis was played on the "house", which meant being confined to the domestic sphere. They should be a perfect wife, a caring mother and a diligent loyal housekeeper.

Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* is set in 1950s. It was a transition period during which the World War came to an end. During the World War, since men were set to fight in the battlefield, women walked out their house and took over men's work to maintain the society's operation. It was obvious that women were relatively independent economically and participated actively in social work. After the war, men returned back and got back their position both at work and home. The clowns, and magazines and other mediums all encouraged women to go back home and play the traditional role as a domestic housewife. The portrait of idealistic marriage suggested that women's best way should not be to find a job but a decent husband. Their whole youth's dream was to be a model wife and mother. Many girls gave up education at very early age and plunged into the marriage castle. The average age of getting married became much earlier in America, and young girls all devoted to hunting husbands and maintaining marriages.

Esther's education and her outstanding talents convince her that she is doomed to be as successful as men, and she is certain to embrace a promising future. However, located in that special historical period and social context, Esther's confidence naturally suffers setbacks and frustration. As she starts stepping into

society, it is so difficult for her to change those ideal pictures in her mind into reality. She fails to notice that, women are still in less favorable positions in legal, business and other areas. It is still men that had absolute public power both legally and commercially, while women's domain is confined to the hearth and home, thus affirming the marginality of women. In this case, Esther's anxiety of marginality comes into being, especially when she tries to play the extra role as a female intellectual.

Besides, born in such a social context, Esther of course is deeply influenced by those social expectations. However, so many years of education and her ambition in writing gives rise to her bewilderment. On the one hand, she can't identify those female images advocated by the social expectation. On the other hand, she has no example to follow and to find a way to get rid of all those social restrictions. Her anxiety of marginalization as a woman is evident in various aspects, ranging from family role to social position.

It is her boyfriend that firstly brings her into the confusion about women's role playing in family and interrelationship. In accordance with the standards of his age, Buddy seems so flawless that Esther admires him as a perfect guy. Everyone, including Esther's mother and grandmother insist that Buddy is definitely a perfect choice to marry with. But even such a perfect man believes that men should enjoy more rights and privileges than women. In his opinion, there are double standards in sexuality, which means that men can have sex before marriage while women must keep virginity for their husband. As far as sex is concerned, he firstly pretends that he is innocent. As Esther feels,

From the first night Buddy Willard kissed me...he made me feel I was much more sexy and experienced than he was and that everything he did like hugging and kissing and petting was simply what I made him feel like doing out of blue, he couldn't help it and didn't know how it came about (Plath, 1971: 56)

Even after he tells Esther that he had slept with some waitress, he had no sense of guilty. These affairs reveal Buddy's true look and enable Esther to realize

Buddy's hypocrisy. Besides, when Buddy take her to visit the medical school, she surprisingly finds out that all the doctors, including those who helped women to give birth, are male. Esther is so astonished that a pregnant is treated like some objects with no consciousness. The drug deprives the women of both the pain and pleasure of giving birth to a new life. These pictures make Esther realize that, the medical institution is also a place where men have control over women. Because of her social background, living environment and absent father image, Esther has been confined to a narrow family circle for so long and knows little about the external world. So when Buddy intrudes into her life, he becomes her universe. Thus, Esther instills Buddy with a kind of idealized perfection that he neither possesses nor deserves.

When it comes to women's role in marriage, this is the quotation from his mother: "What a man wants is a mate and what a woman wants is infinite security" (Plath, 1971: 58). The word "mate" suggests that women should be just a sexual partner in a marriage. In other words, a woman is just an object for man to get sexual enjoyment. And women always get married on the purpose of gaining shelter and financial support from men. They are inevitably dependent on men in all aspects. Only in this way can a woman gain the sense of security.

As to women's social position, it is obvious that the disrespect toward women's talent are pervasive. A career only belongs to male's sphere and privilege and the women are born to be a tender wife whose duty is to support her husband and to make the home attractive and comfortable. A woman must be confined to her house by the job of nurturing the husband and his ambition. Esther can easily imagine the women's pictures in a marriage. Esther is such a talented girl that she had won lots of prizes in poetry writing contests. To "be a professor and write books of poems or write books of poems and be an editor of some sort" (Plath, 1971: 26-27) is deeply rooted in her dream. However, Buddy never shows any respect or appreciation for her interest and artistic creativity.

He smiled and said, 'Do you know what a poem is, Esther?'

'No, what?' I said.

In fact, Buddy doesn't really look down upon the profession of a poet or a writer. He reads poems by a doctor and even tries to write poems during the treatment in the hospital. The reason that leads to his despise is that Esther is a woman. He tries to brainwash Esther and persuade once she had children. And his words once works and manages to make Esther believe that after getting married and children, she would not have any desire of writing anymore, because those trivial things would not allow her to continue her dream and turned her into a numb slave. Esther is caught in a dilemma. Her anxiety of marginality is very obvious. On the one hand, she can not accept the restriction upon women and fails to keep integrity with other women. On the other hand, it is so hard and impossible to identify with the mainstream value and culture which are dominated by the male.

As a young lady with great talent and ambition, being a house angel wouldn't be favored by Esther. Actually, she is eager to break out the conventionality, so that she can enjoy her own freedom and independence. However, all the expectations and living situations from people around make her gain a vague perception that women do not stand at the core of culture and society. They are marginalized and rendered as "the other". The future could not turn to be as promising as she used to think. At this moment, she has to project her hope and wishes into those writings.

The pen serves as her sole sword to fight against the inequality. It is through writing that her feelings are expressed and her daydreams have a place to resent. Before those imaginary readers, she is the protagonist, and she is respected and listened. In this sense, writing definitely serves as both her weapons to gain her position and her castle in the air to place her daydreaming, namely her unsatisfied self-identification needs. Despite all the obstacles, she persists in the search for self-identity and self-actualization. Her tragedy, to some extent, is also a minimum of all modern female's living state. If they want to be different from their peers, they have to stand up and fight against the conventionality, which would inevitably bring them frustration and setbacks.

Esther almost spends all the time on reading and writing in the hope of gaining economic independence and self-identification. With a keen insight and sensitive heart, Esther is eager to express her feelings and feels the aching desire to create. After comparing different women's living situation, her repressive emotions and creative fever burn like a volcano, which could explode at anytime. Writing is the only way to calm down the violent heat inside.

3.1 Deconstructing the Male Gaze

The "male gaze" is sort of the embodiment of patriarchal authority. It can serve as invisible hands that regulate the female's thoughts and behaviors. Through these invisible regulations, women unconsciously take those conventions established by men as the daily norms. They think as what they should think, they speak as what they should speak, and they act as what they should act. Those expectations make a woman. It is through that invisible regulation that the male gaze exerts its effect on the female. For example, in a marriage the husband's will and authority are far more important than his love for his wife. There are many obligations imposed on the wife and, regardless of her own rights and freedom, the husband needs to be in control of the wife's whole life.

In the process of constructing Esther's ideal daydream, the stay in New York as the magazine's quest editor is short but impressive. It shatters her naive idea about being a successful writer. After the short stay in New York, Esther comes back to the town. The conservative and dull life styles that are so chunky that Esther can not find the meaning of reality. What's worse, she is turned down by the training class which symbolizes her dream of writing. Confronted with such frustration, her physiological needs are endangered. In respect that physiological needs play the most vital role, Esther has no choice but to satisfy these needs with all means. When Esther realizes that there is so limited space for women, and she also would finally turn to be a slave or tool in the marriage, she is compelled to put all the wishes aside and lower her psychological needs to a minimum. She is deconstructing male gaze and questioning all those established rules or so-called conventions.

Esther is not a submissive girl who obeys every established principle and the conformity of culture. So many puzzles shadows her mind, and make her fall into identity crisis. Esther needs to leave all that kind of staffs aside and find a place to escape, to shelter and to reflect. And the asylum comes to be her choice. Actually, she is not sent there passively. Instead, Esther is so clear about her needs and chooses to enter the asylum by herself.

As human beings are different from other animals, no one can go without any self-consciousness. The only differences lie in the degrees of such psychological phenomenon, and it is closely related to the outer environment. As to Esther, although at first her self-consciousness is in short and withering, it gradually grows stronger and stronger. Through jumping out of the narrow family circle, Esther's self-consciousness finally gains an upper hand. Since the male gaze is deconstructed, her true self is displayed, which leads to her efforts for self-redemption, even at the price of being labeled as madness. In Esther's deconstructing male gaze, her spontaneous self-redemption invites readers' special interpretation. Her strong self-esteem overwhelms her blind filial piety toward the patriarchal authority, and at last, the environment and her own recognition make herself sprout.

Esther's crisis is resulted from her failure in conducting role-shifting. A woman has to play so many roles: daughter, wife, mother, etc. Esther failes to play well during these role shifting. She has her own insistence, and wishes she could be treated not just as a wife or a children's mother. Top on the list, she needs to realize her individual value, a poetess. The key point was the "-tess", because among all those roles, she firstly is a woman, a person with true feelings. If we compare the society as a stage, everyone is an actor with multi-roles to play. In the novel, Esther is a daughter, a student, a girlfriend, and now she is expected to be a wife, a mother and so on. However, before all those identities, she is firstly a woman, a person with her own feelings and dreams. Esther falls into identity crisis, including both the sexual identity and the social identity. Be whore or a virgin? Be housewife or a career woman? She is at the cross road and has to make choices. This confusion drives her crazy and forces her to the asylum sheltering from the identity crisis.

The sexual identity crisis centers around one key word, purity. Esther is confused about the attitude towards purity. On the one hand, her mother's warning, keeping "pureness was the great issue" (Plath, 1971: 66), makes her deal with men restrainedly. On the other hand, when Doreen's seduction attracts the men successfully, she feels envious and wishes to identify with her. However, being aware that men only chase them for sex, Esther feels awful and longs for finding back purity by hot water.

I feel about a hot bath the way those religious people feel about holy water. I said to myself: 'Doreen is dissolving, Lenny Shepherd is dissolving... New York is dissolving... I don't know them, I have never known them and I am very pure... the dirt that settled on my skin on the way back is turning into something pure' (Plath, 1971: 17)

Buddy's hypocrisy again throws her into a dilemma. "It might be nice to be pure and then to marry a pure man, but what if he suddenly confessed he wasn't pure after we were married, the way Buddy Willard had? I couldn't stand the idea of a woman having to have a single pure life and man being able to have a double life, one pure and one not" (Plath, 1977: 66). And even a man is not pure, he still takes it for granted to "teach their wives about sex. they would try to persuade a girl to have sex and say they would marry her later, but as soon as she gave in, they would lose all respect for her and start saying that if she did that with them she would do that with other men and they would end up making her life miserable" (Plath, 1971: 66).

People have double moral standards toward women and men. A man is acceptable to have more than one sexual partner while a woman is confined to her only husband. As to men, they have a common secret desire: expecting to marry a pure virgin but being ready to have sex with those seductive whores outside. Esther feels confused and furious about all these prejudices. Puzzled by the double standards, she feels torn between the idealized virgin and the sexual whore images. Since men prefer to marry a virgin and have sex with a whore, Esther's experience with different kinds of men leads to her mental split. She feels tortuous by the

controversy of the ideal purity of woman and the dreadful hypocrisy of man. Women are pushed into an inferior and subordinate position in marriage, which is a nightmare for Esther.

Meanwhile, Esther have to make a choice between career and family, but she wants both. This is why she suffers from social identity crisis, because the marriage issue also contributes to her mental split. The idea of happy homemaker was pervasive in 1950s. Women were encouraged to stay at home and their major concern was how to be a good wife. It was their duty to serve men in every aspect without any complaint. To sum up, the home must be peaceful in order that a husband could renew himself thoroughly. However, looking around, she can not help feeling depressed, since no model can be set as an ideal example to follow. Betsy, Jay Cee and Dodo are typical examples that represent current situation of women's living conditions.

Betsy is a very typical example and can be seen as the model girl for social expectations. She is so docile and keeps being optimistic about marriage. Being satisfied with the traditional role she plays in the marriage, she has no ambitions at all. Esther wishes that she can be a simple girl like Betsy and even tries to stay away with Doreen. But that is just a fantasy, when it comes to the real life of Besty, Esther finds out that cleaning and cooking all day is not her life. The traditional role expectation makes her freak out.

Dodo, Esther's neighbour, raised six children and is having the seventh. It seems that she always appeared as a pregnant woman. To Esther, children makes her sick. Moreover, being a tool for giving birth of children is absolutely a tragedy for women. Esther does not want to be treated as an animal, whose job is just to mate and give birth.

Jay Cee, the woman who invites Esther to be a guest edition, is a very successful magazine edition in her field. Esther admires her lot, and wishes one day she could be an editor like Jay Cee. However, this successful career woman is laughed at considered as a freak by the society. For example, Doreen says, "Jay

Cee's ugly as sin. I bet that old husband of hers turns out all the light before he gets near her or he'd puke otherwise" (Plath, 1971: 4- 5). Suddenly, her adored idol turns to be mockery, which disillusiones her cherished dream. The conflict between her imaginary ideal ego and the cold reality drives her crazy. She becomes mentally split by the fact that she has to make choice between womanhood and woman's artistic ambition. Sadly, there is no way to resolve the conflict.

If she chooses career, she is afraid to be the next Jay Cee, who is laughed at by people around. However, if she devoted her whole life to the family, maintaining marriage and raising children, she would go mad for losing her self-identity and ambitions. Being an independent poetess is what she dreams for. Esther wishes to find a path which could both realize her self-actualization and keep her traditional roles of being a wife and mother. Esther is not a docile girl but a rebellious girl. However, she is not brave enough to break up the restrictions of conventionality at the beginning, because she is born in the male-dominated culture. And as a freshman entering the society, she can not see through its superficial meaning and comprehend the essence.

In a broader sense, the patriarchal authority is everywhere. All the men around her are characterized by strong male chauvinism and lack real respect for women. In such a disadvantageous environment, it is very difficult for women to establish a complete and mature perception of human nature. She loses faith in men and just can not face her life course objectively and correctly.

Her deconstruction of male gaze is mainly shown in her new understanding about beauty, the fitting of diaphragm and the refusal of Irwin's invitation. The deconstruction of male gaze enables her to be herself. She has the free will to choose her own likes or dislikes. Instead of pretending to be a so-called lady, she begins to express her own view and is not determined by the male's invisible controlling.

The different understanding about Doreen's appearance could serve as the typical example of Esther's interpretation of women's beauty. On the way to the

party held by the *Lady Magazine*, several men stop them and invite them to have a drink. Doreen tends to dress herself like a sexual goddess:

She was wearing a strapless white lace dress zipped up over a snug corset affair that curved her in at the middle and bulged her out again spectacularly above and below, and her skin had a bronzy polish under the pale dusting-powder. She smelled strong as a whole perfume store (Plath, 1971: 6)

The invisible controlling power of male gaze is functioning. What they see and judge is actually just by men's eyes and standard. They try to be nothing but men's sexual possession. Doreen makes all efforts to attract men's eyes, which makes Esther feel inferior. Esther's female consciousness enables her to realize the underlying reasons that cause her to feel inferior to Doreen. They are actually manipulated by the invisible hands of the male gaze. There is no essential difference among every woman. They are all obedient and passive dolls dominated by the male. So Esther begins to walk out of the blind worship of Doreen and redefines the meaning of true beauty.

A new step of deconstructing male gaze is her refusal of Irwin's invitation. Irwin, who is proud of being a professor in Cambridge, is chosen by Esther to take her revenge. His showing off his status and privilege makes Esther feel sick, but he is just "somebody quite experienced to make up for my lack of it" (Plath, 1971: 186). The sexual experience, which makes her bleed severely, is bad, but Esther feels relieved. "It occurred to me that the blood was my answer" (Plath, 1971: 187). It is her answer to the male domination. She insists on leaving Irwin's apartment by herself. After the emergency, Esther asks Irwin to pay the bill and refuses his visit without any hesitation. As she dumps Irwin in the way a man deserted a woman, Esther is absorbed in the spiritual triumph over patriarchal order and announces that "I was perfectly free" (Plath, 1971: 198).

The fitting of the diaphragm marks the turning point of her life. Virginity was a heavy stone that the social convention imposes on Esther's mind. Being unable to reconcile with it, Esther deconstructs and goes against it. In the hospital, she writes,

I climbed up on the examination table, thinking: '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, 1971: 182)

This small operation makes Esther cheer up, because a new life is beginning. From then, she frees herself from the worries of raising children and the oppressive male dominance. So, "the next step was to find the proper sort of man" (Plath, 1971: 182). It is Esther's wish that she could seduce a man and dumped him in the way he dumped a woman. She wants to take her revenge on the patriarchal society.

Moreover, she learns to say no, and would not do things to please others, including her mother. Esther's traditional and conservative mother has great influence on her, especially her attitude toward sex. She tries all means to convince Esther that, "pureness was the great issue" (Plath, 1971: 66). The article entitled as "In Defense of Chastity", is cut out from the magazine by her mother to prove that, "a girl shouldn't sleep with anybody but her husband and then only after they were married" (Plath, 1971: 65). And Mrs. Greenwood's response toward everything, including Esther's mental breakdown, is so passive and so female. Her blind obedience under the male dominance contributes to Esther's confusion about womanhood. And she once tries her best to please her mother and her mother's expectations. But Esther finally manages to speak out her real thought. When her mother sends red roses to celebrate her birthday, Esther drops them in the wastebasket, and says, "save them for my funeral" (Plath, 1971: 166).

Since Esther is labeled as a crazy woman, she is not afraid of any conventions and does not conceal any feelings or emotions any more. She makes her efforts to deconstruct male gaze in her own way for self-redemption and rose to rebel against conventions in her own way. It more or less enables her to gain her own mental development, which is marked by her awakening of self-consciousness.

To sum up, *The Bell Jar* is not only a record of Plath's personal experience and spiritual journey, but also a picture album of women's life situation in that

specific era. The confusion, questioning, reflection and struggling of the heroine are not personal but universal for those young women who are going to step into the social stage, especially for those with great talent and ambitions. Frankly, the patriarchal authority is everywhere. All the men around Esther are characterized by strong male chauvinism and lack real respect for women. In such a disadvantageous environment, it is very difficult for women to establish a complete and mature perception of human nature. She loses faith in men and just can not face her life course objectively and correctly.

CONCLUSION

As a female intellectual, Sylvia Plath's life is permeated with feelings of insecurity about the society as well as herself. As a daughter, she is trying to meet her mother's expectations; as a wife and mother, she suffers her husband's betrayal and the pressures of life; as a poet, her ideal of writing is in conflict to the traditional female roles in the 1950s. In her only novel *The Bell Jar*, Plath depicts an intelligent educated girl who struggles to reject the moral values of traditional women and makes rebellion and suicide attempts after disillusions.

The novel narrates the development of Esther's mental illness, suicide attempts and her hospitalization, depicting the history of schizophrenic treatment in the 1950s. As a work of fiction, *The Bell Jar* seems to complement the clinical theories of the Scottish psychiatrist R. D. Laing, because it is written from the view of Esther, the distraught patient, rather than from someone else observing her. In this thesis, I applied Laing's existential psychology to the analysis of the heroine's painful search for identity and illustrated its use for the cure of her mental crisis. The author explains that the individual who can't fit his "inner self" into the real world but separated from his body is unable to develop normal self-consciousness and may live under the risk "ontological insecurity".

Laing's schizoid situation corresponds to Esther's anxiety. For Esther, the image of a bell jar is related to suffocation, death and distorted growth. Living in an airless and suffocating environment, Esther can hardly have a successful and healthy initiation. Generally, Esther's divided self is originated from two parts: the sensitive and rebellious "inner self" and the obedient and traditional "false self". Many factors attribute to the forming of Esther's inner self which is closely related to her growth environment. Turbulence of the current society and deficiency of her single-parent family have crucial influence on Esther's maturity. Through acting her false self, she temporarily gains respect and satisfaction, however, the more she acts, the more she loses touch with her inner self. She attempts to take on many conflicting identities

and tries to fulfill others' expectations. Lingering between dream and reality, Esther is tortured by her divided self so much that she feels stressed out and cannot find a way out until the inner self retreats all transactions with others to the false-self system. Under this circumstance, the "bell jar" begins to shape and cover upon her mind.

Unconvinced by the patriarchal society, Esther falls into a passive position, feeling hatred to the society and also upset about herself. The gap between her and the world widens and at last she is completely isolated from others. She suffers the ontological insecurity such as implosion, engulfment and petrification. Feeling deeply haunted by a sense of loss and confusion under the bell jar, Esther eventually gets mental breakdown and tries to suicide.

The schizoid treatment by traditional clinical psychiatry which isolates the patient as an organism or even a conscious machine has produced little or even worse effect on Esther. However, on the contrary, according to Laing, the existential psychology states that the patient is still living in relationship with others, which is simultaneously interrelated and independent, and the radical solution is to reconstruct the patient's relationship with the world. Therefore, reconstructing Esther's relationship with others is the only way for her to escape from the solitary bell jar. Through people's help and another try of psychotherapy by Doctor Nolan, Esther makes great effort to get rid of her false self, finally aware of her existence value, and thus begins a new life. The "bell jar" is finally lifted with fresh air coming into her mind. Nevertheless, she also recognizes her vulnerability and reveals a fear in the final pages that her recovery may only have been temporary because the conflict in the society and roles of female remain the same, and her value is still not clearly reflected. In the bell-jar-shaped society, Esther was likely to once again plunge into "the role of crisis".

In short, through the description of the heroine's recovery process of spiritual crisis, the novel reveals similarities of the growing experience among young female intellectuals: how to accept their own female genders, how to get rid of loneliness and confusion, how to make a choice for the future. The physical,

psychological characteristics of adolescent girls determine that part of the introverted, sensitive, vulnerable individuals will suffer divided self. Actually, the reality, like a huge “bell jar”, covers over their mind, and some accept the reality living without questioning the meaning of existence while others refuse to be passive and try to change their fate. In this sense, it is a lonely and painful process for young female intellectuals to go through the physical and mental changes during their life.

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