

The Intersection of Feminist Psychoanalysis and Literature: A Critical Examination of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper"

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Abstract

This paper explores Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" through a feminist psychoanalytical lens, uncovering how Freudian theories have perpetuated gender biases. By examining the themes of hypocrisy and ontological insecurity, this analysis reveals the profound impact of societal expectations on women's mental well-being. The relationship between the two works and feminine writing and the way they both undermine conventional narrative formations while presenting genuine voices of women is also explored in the analysis. Last, this paper also examines the ongoing significance of *The Bell Jar* and "The Yellow Wallpaper" in feminist and women's mental health contexts, emphasizing their continued relevance today.

Keywords: Hypocrisy, Mental well-being, Feminist, Perpetuated gender.

1 Introduction

Literature serves as a reflective lens, offering society a nuanced understanding of the human experience and illuminating the intricate dynamics of psychology and social interactions. Some of the most painful are those stories that are focused on women existing within such power dynamics. This article explores the feminist psychoanalytical critique of two seminal literary works: These two novels display the struggle of the twentieth-century woman between social pressure and independence: *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath and "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. In the process of the analysis carried out in this work and with the help of concepts which are borrowed from the framework of feminist psychoanalysis (Khan, 2022), it is described how these texts depict the psychological impact that patriarchal domination exercises on women and what role in this process belongs to such motifs as subjectivity, psychical health and the struggle for individuality.

1.1 Feminist Psychoanalysis: An Overview

Freud's psychoanalysis and feminist beliefs have inspired psychoanalytic feminism, a vital and

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interesting subfield of feminism (Flax, [2023](#)). Thus, this study technique frames psychological analysis of women's experiences in patriarchal settings. Feminist psychoanalysis explains gender and gendered oppression by describing how patriarchy affects and is mirrored in the subject's mind (Gardiner, [2020](#)).

Many researchers have contributed to psychoanalytic theory and feminist critique, including Juliet Mitchell. Mitchell believes psychoanalysis helps people decipher patriarchal systems' cable wavelength of resentment. She emphasizes that these mechanisms are psychodynamic and social, which explains their persistence (Mitchell, [2000](#)). Positive Steps Toward Feminist Psychoanalysis by Mitchell Mitchell's work has shown how society's ideals shape people's subjectivity, desire, and actions, reinforcing patriarchy (Mitchell, [2020](#)).

Mitchell's approach shines when exploring how societies rooted in patriarchal values shape and enforce gender norms, revealing the complex ways gender identity is constructed, controlled, and experienced (Seow, [2020](#)). She claims that gender identity formation is shaped by unconscious cultural standards rather than socialization. Critical developmental periods involve the formation of sex-based cultural identity, superego development (moral regulation), and the repression of detrimental thoughts and impulses, shaping individual psychosocial dynamics. Feminist psychoanalysis is a useful theoretical tool for studying how patriarchal culture shapes women's psychological realm (Seligman, [2022](#)).

Scottish psychiatrist Archibald D. Laing coined the other Mitchell hypothesis, ontological insecurity. Laing did not postulate his concept in a feminist context, but feminist psychoanalysis can use it to analyze women's existential problems (Priyadarshini et al., [2022](#)). Ontological insecurity is a persistent condition of unease that makes life seem unreal, anxious, and unmanageable (Laing [1960](#)). Feminist psychoanalysis uses ontological insecurity to describe a woman who cannot be a subject in a world that does not respect her agency. It helps analyze the psychological impacts of patriarchal violation of women since it explains that people suffer from spiritual varnish and spiritual anorexia when their souls struggle with society's roles (Reimer-Kirkham et al., [2020](#)).

Feminist psychoanalysis provides the theoretical skills to analyze women's subordination psychologically (Chodorow, [2023](#)). This psychoanalysis-feminism method examines how social discursive practices of power oppression are subjectivized in people's thoughts and implemented in their behaviors and mental health. The critic might use feminist psychoanalysis to demonstrate (Gardiner, [2020](#)) how patriarchal beliefs psychologically constrain women and the conflict between gender and the psyche (Barry, [2020](#)).

1.2 Patriarchal Oppression in *The Bell Jar* and "*The Yellow Wallpaper*"

Sylvia Plath's "*The Bell Jar*" and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "*The Yellow Wallpaper*" poignantly portray women trapped in patriarchal societies, where their voices are suppressed and their identities are erased (Chowdhury, [2023](#)). These powerful stories reveal the inner turmoil and despair of women struggling to break free from societal constraints, highlighting the devastating consequences of denying their autonomy, individuality, and humanity. *The Bell Jar* follows Esther Greenwood, a young woman in 1950s America when gender roles and success were starkly separated (Belrabi & Laoufi, [2024](#)). Esther is a prisoner of a culture that wants brides and mothers at the expense of their uniqueness (Fattor, [2024](#)). A culture that values marriage, motherhood, and obedience alienate Esther, who desires education, self-reliance, and art. As she juggles her husband and motherhood, she becomes increasingly estranged and disillusioned, causing a mental breakdown (Plath, [1963](#)).

Esther goes crazy as she realizes her gender-based social restrictions (Arslan, [2024](#)). In the novel, her character suffers from depression caused by abusive partners and attempts suicide. Esther grapples with the suffocating pressure of societal expectations and her own internalized self-doubt,

feeling trapped in predetermined roles and perpetually falling short of unattainable standards. A prominent theme of *The Bell Jar*, this internal battle reveals how patriarchy invades women's minds and creates mental suffering.

Similarly, "**The Yellow Wallpaper**" depicts the devastating effects of patriarchal rule on women (Raushanfikir et al., 2024). It is an episodic story about an unnamed woman put into the 'rest cure', a popular therapy for 'hysteria' among women (Wagner, 2024). This treatment, which entails full isolation and inactivity, reflects society's view of women's mental problems as treatable by becoming weak and powerless. Instead of improving her mood, the rest remedy makes the narration suffer, causing her to mentally and physically break down (Gilman, 1985).

Without cerebral or artistic stimulation, the narrator obsesses over the wallpaper in her room with her husband, believing it has a woman's imprints trying to escape. A fixation like this shows the narrator as a captive woman who wants independence. As she 'becomes' the woman on the wallpaper, the narrator tries to remove it in the last scenes, showing her mental decline. Gilman highlights the injustice of medical techniques that cut women, society's disregard for their capabilities, and the repression of their voices.

The Bell Jar and "**The Yellow Wallpaper**" depict a male-dominated world that oppresses women, but the main protagonists absorb it (Fellah et al., 2024). Esther and the narrator's psychological issues include this internalization. Both female characters are reduced to objects and defined only by the desires and whims of male users, which is similar to Simone de Beauvoir's phenomenology, notably the idea of 'the Other,' (de Beauvoir, 1949). Objectification creates deep, almost isolated disempowerment, another driving element of both books.

In Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, Esther struggles to define herself owing to society's expectations (Kara, 2023). This occurs in a society where job and intellectual interests conflict with the 'proper' role of a wife and mother (Håkansson, 2024). This identity conflict arises because Esther can only dream of achieving anything significant for women in her day. This dilemma caused her mental breakdown because she could not meet high expectations while keeping her individuality.

As in "**The Yellow Wallpaper**," the narrator is transformed into an object of her husband's control under the guise of her illness (Karniasih et al., 2024). Denied the freedom to pursue her intellectual and creative gifts, she becomes mad. The author discusses patriarchy's oppression of women by showing the main character's mental decline.

The book and story strongly criticize patriarchal female social systems and the male gender's participation in female mental health decline. The texts demonstrate how social pressure affects women's mental health by depicting patriarchal roles and dissonance. Plath and Gilman's protagonists' lives prove that inequality causes women's psychological pain.

1.3 Identity Crisis and the Search for Autonomy

In Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "**The Yellow Wallpaper**," the theme of identity clash serves as a pivotal narrative thread (Call, 2022). Protagonist Esther Greenwood and the unnamed narrator find themselves at odds with the patriarchal societal norms that dictate feminine behaviour, constraining their autonomy and individuality (Storstrøm, 2024). From this conflict between the individual self and social roles arises an intense psychological torment, which in turn: causes this character's mental collapse. The works emotionally express how a woman can be forced to live a life of assigned gender roles thereby making her very rein of her and any measure of personal control.

Esther Greenwood, the protagonist of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, embodies the struggles of feminine identity formation in 1950s America (Belrabi & Laoufi, 2024). Torn between societal expectations and personal aspirations, Esther grapples with defining her role within a patriarchal culture that rigidly dictates women's domestic, professional, and social responsibilities (Rogers,

2021). The years following the war, mainly the fifties, saw a return to the stereotypically ‘feminine’ role of women; for them, post-war was about getting back to the home and the kitchen, having babies, and being obedient to a male-dominated society. Although, as a character, Esther is knowledgeable and intends to become an author, she is frustrated by the limited gender roles expected of her (Kálmánová, 2024). Her desire challenges the norms in a woman’s life into as much as she is expected to secure a corporate job at the expense of marriage and motherhood. Consequently, Esther is held in a psychological predicament of feeling an outcast from the external environment and her personage.

That is not just Esther’s tension between career ambition and femininity. It symbolizes a more profound fight to gain control within a society that restricts her decisions. Her failure to stay in the prescribed gender roles results in a progressive alienation from the self, which leads to fragmentation and mental breakdown. The last stages of the disease are characterized by anxiety and dysphoria; Esther knows this and becomes more psychotic – she feels Aita is not real and that she is helpless and powerless. Esther’s mental illness in the novel is the manifestation of the travesty that is the societal oppression of women as well as their inability to gain self-fulfillment as they are silenced and put under pressure that is counterproductive to their goals and aspirations.

Likewise, in ‘**The Yellow Wallpaper**,’ the narrator is slowly stripped of her selfhood because her husband believes in the rest cure – a treatment that requires one to avoid any social interaction and not to work at all. The narrator cannot work, read, write, paint, study, or in any other way occupy herself intellectually; the only activity that is left to her is to pursue passive leisure and gossip. Gradually, she focuses her attention on the wallpaper in her room, which superimposes her feelings of claustrophobia onto the design, and convinces her that the pattern imprisons a woman. This obsession reveals the range of the narrator’s path to alienation and loss of her individuality – she turns into an object owned by her husband and society.

This is a major source of conflict in the novel because the narrator fights an ongoing internal battle of identity along with the helplessness of John ignoring her thoughts and feelings. Moreover, it is rooted in the prevailing patriarchal attitudes that discredit women’s voices and choices as well as deepen the deficit of the narrator. The moment she lets go of her self-assertiveness and freedom, she becomes a madwoman, and the girl in the wallpaper becomes her. Her final collapse is a cry for freedom, a woman’s last stand, her desire to regain her lost agency in a world that refuses to let her be.

It can be concluded that the ontological insecurity of the subjects – for both Esther and the narrator – can be discussed regarding R. D. Laing’s concept. The concept of ontological insecurity means a state in which the self is in some way undermined, and fear of some sort of unreality, of not being in control of things, prevails (Laing 1960). I found this concept useful especially to explain the psychological journey of the main characters of *The Bell Jar* and “**The Yellow Wallpaper**,” whereby both ladies, experience critical shifts in their psycho-social self-images and have feelings of disorientation in their identity. In the case of Esther, this insecurity stems from the norms that are in place in society, and these norms keep on countering her individual goals. For the narrator, it derives from her forced ‘vagueness’ and the suppression of her mental and artistic self.

Peculiarly, in both tales, the lack of capacity to assert selfhood in a world that refuses to acknowledge the characters’ agency results in the heroes’ mental collapse. The element of alienation presented in the novel for readers, is not simply a backlash to the external pressure, as it is also a search for an identity that is to be combined into the existing norms and rules of both communities. It is this existential struggle that lies at the root of their mental disintegration and is a powerful demonstration of how patriarchal subjugation can undermine a female subject’s autonomy.

1.4 The Role of Psychoanalytical Concepts

Freud's psychoanalytical theories though have been criticized for their stereotypic portrayal of women do provide a map to the psychological conditioning of Esther and Gribby. Though the Freudian approach, the theories of the unconscious, repression, and development of the superego help in understanding how societal pressure is internalized and leads to mental illness.

Freud was also posthumous in his thinking about gender; while proposing that the superego was more advanced in males than in females to account for gender differences inherent in patriarchal societies in the socialization process (Mitchell, 2000). Freud identified the superego as society's conscience; it is acquired through the process of identifying the moral codes of society, often the parents, especially the father figure. This commonly leads to the assimilation of male power and the cultural values that place men and boys above women and girls. In case of both Esther and the narrator, this internalisation of male authority is witnessed in the shows of helplessness in the face of the expectations set by a Patriarchal society.

Esther's ESP breakdown, thus in *The Bell Jar*, is partly due to her failure to come to terms with her desire to rise to the societal status that would entitle her, even as a woman, to gaze at the world as a man would. Such expectations result in the formation of a social psychosexual conflict, which according to Freud, causes repression in which unwanted desires and impulses are ejected from the conscious mind (Cherry, 2022). Thus, such personal goals as ambition and intellectual payoff become oppressed when Esther tries to adhere to gender expectations. However, this repression helps her to worsen her mental state since she is not able to be herself because society limits her to certain roles.

Likewise, in "The Yellow Wallpaper", the portrayal of the narrator's gradual mental decline is consonant with the idea of repression. The positions assigned to her force her into a passive and lonely lifestyle, thus suppressing her ability to become a subject who is intellectually and artistically free and who, as a result, denies her wish for agency. This repression is portrayed by her excessive focus on the wallpaper which serves as a representation of her oppressed persona and lusts. In the course of the story, one can observe that she can no longer maintain the repression of her thoughts causing her to have a nervous breakdown.

The two books' psychological features lie in Freud's theory of repression where societal norms are seen as influential in shaping the human psyche and causing mental disorders. The subjection of impulses that are antisocial leads to a psychological battle which is in several ways exhibited in a number of mental disorders present in Esther and the narrator. In *The Bell Jar* and 'The Yellow Wallpaper' different instances of societal containment of the protagonists, their lack of agency and suppression of their sexual desires directly leads to the protagonists' mental decline. This unfortunate fate is the consequence of Esther's failure to reconcile working and being a wife and a mother; the narrator, on her part, is confined to a wheelchair and is confined to her home, and this leads to her losing her marbles. They shall be extending Freud's psychoanalytical theories used in interpreting these dynamics even as they are considered sexist by feminists.

While Freud's theories have been criticized and faced objections, the subject of psychoanalysis as such and, in particular, feminist psychoanalysis continues to develop Freud's visions and embrace new perspectives on the psychological world of women. Feminist psychoanalysis is a useful method for analysing the interaction of gender and identity, and the relation of these factors to mental health and well-being, in *The Bell Jar* and "The Yellow Wallpaper."

1.5 Cultural Repression and the Female Psyche

Oppression through culture is another important theme of *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow paper'. The culture is portrayed as a force that hinders the processes of vitalization and education of women. Such cultural pressures are portrayed in the two books so that the main female characters of each work are forced into conventional female roles hence disallowed from experiencing personal and professional success. These oppressive

influences also extinguish the main characters' creativity and aspirations and the psychological deterioration is a depiction of cultural repression's disastrous effect on the female character.

Esther Greenwood struggles through a world in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* which restricts a woman's role and potential profession to marriage and child-bearing. With the societal pressure for women placed on marriage and motherhood and with childbearing and marriage seen as a woman's highest achievement, the repression shows itself to hinder Esther's pursuit of higher knowledge and art. Though a gifted writer who is poised for success, Esther never forgets that her primary purpose is to become a wife, and the idiomatic female role of the America of the fifties (Millett, [1971](#)). This societal pressure sets the stage for the main internal conflict within the novel as Esther struggles to find for herself a place that would allow her to chase her dreams, she is fully aware that she is a mere bird in a golden cage.

Esther's oppression is not only societal oppression, but she also gains internal oppression as she starts doubting herself. That is why the received message of society, according to which women are inferior to men in the public sphere and are supposed to find their only happiness in domestic duties, turns Esther into an identity crisis. Their inability to realize their dreams in contrast to the expected roles of women of the time leads to the fragmentation of her personality and in turn her mental collapse. The cultural repression that Esther undergoes is, therefore, societal and psychological – it is a part and parcel of her person and mind.

Likewise, '**The Yellow Wallpaper**' features John, the protagonist's husband who represents the male-dominated doctors, whose chief function is to confine her as a patient even as they claim to cure her. The rest cure was a common treatment for women diagnosed with hysteria or other nervous disorders during the latter half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. The damaging treatment includes complete inactivity and the ban on any kind of intellectual and creative work, which, aimed at the improvement of the narrator's health, only worsens her illness. The rest cure also becomes a form of cultural oppression, and the narrator is deprived of any possibility of creativity and cognitive activity.

This is evident and explained by the narrator's husband's adherence to the rest culture as an instrument of a woman's recuperation. The fact that John does not permit the narrator to write, paint or perform any kind of work is the reflection of what was the socially accepted idea that women were intellectually inferior to men. Their purpose was to be obedient to their husbands. This suppression of the narrator's scholarly and imaginative ambitions made her concentrate intensely on the wallpaper in her room, which turns out to represent her confinement. Her restraint and the forcible subjugation of her spirit by her husband and by a cultural patrimony lead her to homicidal frenzy, a potent depiction of what such repression does to a woman's mind.

Thus, Juliet Mitchell's idea of 'cultural hypocrisy' can be viewed as one of the most suitable for understanding these works. Mitchell claims that culture offers women the opposite message of emancipation and self-fulfilment at the same time. It imposes a wretched domestic drudgery once they grow up (Mitchell, [2000](#)). This is seen in *The Bell Jar* and in '**The Yellow Wallpaper**' where the main female characters are encouraged to embark on the lane of honing their intellect and creativity, only to be confined by the societal force that demands that they accept their place in the domestic sphere and be submissive. The tension between the self and the outside world thus becomes a very strong source of psychological stress for the two main characters of the novel, Esther and the narrator, culminating in their state of mental collapse.

The nature of the culture porter in *The Bell Jar* is depicted by Esther's experiences and feelings as she is appreciated for her academic success but at the same time expected to drop out for marriage and bearing children. Since society sends her diametrically opposite signals, she cannot tame her frustration – the desire to get the intellectual equipment she needs is pitted against the realities of gender. This internal conflict happens to be one of the primary subjects of the novel as it explains

the extent to which women of colour can suffer from cultural repression and mendacity and their attempt to carve out a life for themselves in cultures that seek to cage them.

In “**The Yellow Wallpaper**”, the oppression experienced by the narrator is also linked to the ‘culture’ that made women as intelligent and also as inferior to men. Instead of helping her improve her health and regain mobility, the rest cure is thus a means by which the medical profession imposes on the woman the role that society has defined for her. Through such cultural subjugation, the narrator is channeled to gradually go mad as she is not allowed any freedom or chance to pursue her sexual inclination but has been relegated to a dutiful wife and her rightful place. Feminist Critiques of Psychoanalysis

As encouraging as it is to argue that Freud’s psychoanalytical theories have enriched our understanding of human psychic structure, critics argue that psychoanalysis has been favorable to a patriarchal worldview and androcentrism. Freud’s theories, systemic theories that have their origin in early twentieth-century Europe, include inherent gender bias, which puts them in the crossways of criticism of not being able to explain female experiences adequately.

In *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan provided major acerbation to Freud because his theories perpetuated the stereotypical roles of women in society, which provided reasons for the subjection of women to anyone I considered dominant (Friedan, 1963). Friedan criticized this and applied it to *The Bell Jar* and “**The Yellow Wallpaper**” because the societies put the main characters through struggles that Freud’s theories by inference endorse. For instance, the psychoanalytical assertion of ‘penis envy’ by Freud which asserts that women have a feeling of being inferior to men due to the absence of a genital organ not only reduces the understanding of the female personality to their genitals but also neglects the role of social and cultural factors in the experience of women.

In *The Bell Jar* and “**The Yellow Wallpaper**” the confusion about the female identity is reflected in the main characters’ mental illness which Freud’s theories contribute to. The role of women is clearly illustrated in Esther’s mental conflicts throughout the story; she has to fight with her depressive thoughts and feelings of inadequacy as well as the social pressure that would require her to derive satisfaction from marriage and motherhood, pressure that Freud does not seek to alter. Likewise, the narrator of “**The Yellow Wallpaper**” is treated based on a view that is common in Freudian psychoanalysis, which denies women’s reason and creativity.

Another critic of psychoanalysis is the French feminist theorist, Luce Irigaray who pointed out that psychoanalysis is too masculine-centered and cannot sufficiently capture women’s sexual subjectivity (Irigaray, 2016). Based on the experiences described by Irigaray, *The Bell Jar* and “**The Yellow Wallpaper**” point to the fact that the mental disorders that the novel’s protagonists experience are not the result of one’s illness but are caused by social patterns that constrain female lives. This suggestion is grounded in the framework of the critique that Irigaray provides of psychoanalysis as a means of examining the position of women who do not do so through the lens of the theories of masculinity that dominate it.

Psychoanalytical criticism originating from the feminist school of thought can therefore be said to be highly enlightening when trying to decipher the psychological elements involved in *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath and ‘**The Yellow Wallpaper**’ by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Such criticisms have helped extend the traditional arguments used in psychoanalytical criticism by including the social factors that hinder women from attaining full freedom. This perspective is significant in the analysis of the mental health problems of the heroes of these texts because it reveals socio-cultural oppression and patriarchal culture’s influence on subjectivity.

1.6 Mental Health and Feminist Psychoanalysis

The link between mental health illness and the subject of Feminist Psychoanalysis is pivotal in the analysis of *The Bell Jar* and “**The Yellow Wallpaper**” as both texts unpack the effect of societal oppression on the mental well-being of women. The protagonists’ mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and psychosis are portrayed not as individual flaws but as consequences of societal injustice, which deny the characters control over their lives.

In *The Bell Jar*, the main character Esther Greenwood transforms into a depressed and suicidal young woman due to the societal pressures that dictate her life, which she does not want to lead. This is worsened by the cultural repression that is placed on her by society as she is reminded over and over again that a woman’s value is only as good as her ability to be a wife and mother. The antagonist is seen in Esther, who feels like a hopeless and trapped woman confined to stereotyped roles and isolated from her community thus despair fills her up (Cooper, [2003](#)).

Likewise, in ‘**The Yellow Wallpaper**,’ the gradual mental decline of the protagonist can be seen as the cultural confinement that her husband and the physicians endorse. Any attempts at the rest cure, which deprives her of any stimulating activities, any creative endeavors, further her psychological confinement and do not help her recover. The latter speaks of the narrator’s slow transformation into a lunatic, which is due to her forced inactivity and the consequent erosion of herself.

Using Mitchell and R. D. Laing’s concept of feminist psychoanalysis, these mental health issues can be seen as not simply the woman’s flaws but are linked to the woman’s subjugation under the patriarchy and her inability to be herself. Using Mitchell’s concept of cultural repression, and Laing’s idea of ontological insecurity, these texts can be understood more effectively in terms of the psychological processes that are involved in the dissatisfactory condition of women’s mental health (Mitchell, [2000](#); Laing, [1960](#)).

This perspective contradicts several historical notions of psychiatry that tend to misunderstand and diagnose the symptoms of women as post-traumatic, while the actual problem remains unacknowledged oppression. Historically, cultural repression and patriarchal norms were erased from the understanding of gender and its relations under capitalist modes of production; finally, feminist psychoanalysis introduced this factor into the understanding of the psychological effects of gender relations. Such an approach not only gives the readers an insight into the lives of the main characters of *The Bell Jar* and ‘**The Yellow Wallpaper**’ but also raises questions about female pathological states in the contemporary world.

1.7 Narrative Structure and the Expression of Madness

The plot of *The Bell Jar* and the frame and the story of ‘**The Yellow Wallpaper**’ are important for explaining the psychological states of the main characters and the effects of oppressive cultures on the female psyche. As for the techniques employed by the authors of the texts, both of them use the first-person narrative to present the hero’s experiences and reveal the processes taking place in their mind, which makes the texts rather close and claustrophobic, as well as portraying the characters’ downward spiral into psychosis.

The Bell Jar is a first-person’s narrative. Thus, the readers get a first-hand experience of what is going on in Esther’s mind. This kind of writing makes it easy for the reader to follow her, and see her worsening, of being a prisoner in her own body. Superficially, Esther’s discursive thinking exposes her increasing detachment from reality and her inability to conceptualize a stable persona when under the pressure of the system (Budick, [1987](#)). The technique of first-person narration also plays an important role in developing the essential atmosphere of the novel: the reader is in close emotional contact with the heroine, and her psychological crises are depicted in a highly realistic manner.

Likewise, “**The Yellow Wallpaper**” is narrated in the first-person diary, and this gives the story an up-close view of how the main character was gradually going insane. The given story is close to the stream of consciousness, the narrator’s thoughts are fragmented, and obsessive, which corresponds to her psychological disorder and the structure of the text. The use of the diary style of writing lets the reader see the transformation of the narrator from the person who is obsessed with the wallpaper to a delusional paranoid woman. The plot configuration of “**The Yellow Wallpaper**” is therefore effective in giving a vivid portrayal of the protagonist’s mental decline, and the effect of cultural confinement on her.

None of these is mere rhetorical flourishes or optional for the kind of feminism psychoanalytic criticism has to offer on the texts. Since the protagonists’ accounts are given in first person, Plath and Gilman engage with male-generated narrative realism to expose the exclusion of women’s subjectivity or reduction of it to a pathological state. The prologue and conclusion of the book written down in the first-person point of view can prevent the distortion of the female psyche and demonstrate the effects of social oppression on women’s minds.

1.8 Ecriture Feminine and the Subversion of Patriarchal Language

It is possible to consider both *The Bell Jar* and “The Yellow Wallpaper” as works of *écriture féminine*, a concept introduced by the French theoretician Hélène Cixous (Cixous [1976](#)). Postmodernism, feminine writing, or *écriture féminine*, advocates fluidity, multiple voices, and the representation of the unconscious; it can thus effectively render a counter-narrative to the dominant male discourse.

Esther’s similarly blunt and frequently sarcastically critical observations of her life which are presented in *The Bell Jar* can be seen as a negative counter-statement to the expectations set for her by the society. Language is used as a tool by the lady to reclaim her personality and also to convey her grievances regarding assigned roles in society. In the story of Esther, the genre of humor is dominant and she sharply ironizes the situation around her and the demands put on her. This is how, addressing the language with patriarchal connotations, Esther can stay in control of herself even if she is suffering from mental illness.

Likewise, in ‘**The Yellow Wallpaper**,’ the narrator’s fixation with the wallpaper is a way of regaining what she lost: control of her surroundings and, by extension, her thoughts. The wallpaper is an embodiment of the protagonist and since the representation is coming from the first person’s point of view, the descriptions are an embodiment of her feelings and need to be free. As she continues to obsess more and more on the wallpaper, the narrator starts seeing figures of a woman imprisoned behind it – something she is also experiencing. The only form of rebellion that the main character can express is through her words while describing the wallpaper; she tries to carve out an independent personality in a society that does not want to hear of it.

The episodic and fairly disjointed plot of *The Bell Jar* together with the desire-defying organization of “**The Yellow Wallpaper**” symbolically captures the state of the female consciousness, which is at odds with the orderly, logical, and, thus, patriarchal, narratives. In other words, both Sylvia Plath and Charlotte Perkins Gilman harness a distinctly feminine writing style to challenge and reclaim the cultural narratives that have historically silenced women. . This subversion of patriarchal language is one of the features of women’s psychoanalytical narrative style since it is a way of telling the oppressed female subject’s story.

2 The Legacy of *The Bell Jar* and “*The Yellow Wallpaper*” in Feminist Literature

Works by Sylvia Plath and Charlotte Perkins Gilman are still among the most important pieces of early Anglo-American feminist fiction. Both have still been counted as pioneering pieces of writing in the canon of feminist literature, which has called generations of female writers and scholars to take up the subject of gender and identity as well as mental health. Some of them were

more engaged in providing their opinions on issues to do with women's mental health, women's ability to make their own decisions independently and the impacts of patriarchy.

Since their time, the works under consideration have been studied from different viewpoints of feminism and all of them provide different insights into the psychological and social aspects described. For instance, Adrienne Rich has devoted her time to establishing how women's writings have been used to counter the domination and suppression of women, making them the most crucial texts in producing the feminist literary tradition (Rich, 1979). In analysing the women's writing Rich stresses language as a subversive weapon to claim women's identity which is a topical issue in *The Bell Jar* as well as in "**The Yellow Wallpaper**."

For the same reason, Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity provides tools for analyzing how the main characters of *The Bell Jar* and "**The Yellow Wallpaper**" negotiate and subvert the roles assigned to them according to their gender (Butler, 1990). It is thus in this line of thinking that Butler goes further to state that gender is not inborn, but rather, is 'done' through a compilation of subsequent acts that define acceptable gender behaviours in a given society. It's in this regard that one can argue that the main misunderstandings stemming from identity and autonomy are a form of subversion of gender expectations. Esther and the narrator also rebel against these roles, thereby rejecting the hegemonic male dominance as the one that determines the women's roles and security.

In this paper, the place of *The Bell Jar* and "**The Yellow Wallpaper**" will persist as works that are significant to understanding the fight for women's liberties and awareness of mental illnesses and the challenges that accompany the fight even today. They continue to be highly relevant sources for analyzing women's lives in the patriarchal structures and for feminist research and practice. Moving on to consider the relations between feminism, psychoanalysis, and literature, *The Bell Jar* and "**The Yellow Wallpaper**" do not let readers forget about the necessity to struggle for women's liberation and their right to be independent and healthy.

3 Conclusion

The analysis of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "**The Yellow Wallpaper**" under the lens of such concise and to-the-point feminist psychoanalytical critique allows for the understanding of how patriarchal oppression affects female minds. By depicting the protagonists' identity crises, psychological disorders, and resistance against the patriarchal language of the culture, the texts counter the limiting representations of women and vested feminine roles and insist on the centrality of feminism in literary studies. Thus, according to the principles of Freudian psychoanalysis, stressing instead the role of gender, the nature of society's relation to an individual's psyche can be studied, and how literature can mirror or transform it.

The effects of these works can still be felt today, and people can take a lot from them in continuing campaigns for women's rights and raising awareness of mental health issues. Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "**The Yellow Wallpaper**" remain pivotal texts in the intersection of feminism, psychoanalysis, and literature, offering timeless insights into the female experience. These works continue to resonate in the 21st century, inspiring new generations of readers and scholars to challenge social inequalities, patriarchal dominance, and the intricate relationships between power, identity, and mental health.

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