

T.C.
İSTANBUL YENİ YÜZYIL UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE DEPARTMENT
ANGLO-AMERICAN LITERATURE AND CREATIVE WRITING
PROGRAMME



POSTMODERN FEMINISM: A COMPARATIVE
ANALYSIS OF SYLVIA PLATH'S *THE BELL JAR* AND
MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*

MA THESIS

HAYAT YACOP SAED ABU SETTA

21131308017

İSTANBUL, DECEMBER 2024

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T.C.

İSTANBUL YENİ YÜZYIL UNİVERSİTESİ

..... ENSTİTÜSÜ MÜDÜRLÜĞÜ

TEZ ONAY BELGESİ

(BU SAYFA ENSTİTÜ TARAFINDAN VERİLECEKTİR.)

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ETHICAL STATEMENT

I prepared my project following the thesis writing rules of the Institute of Social Sciences at Istanbul Yeni Yüzyıl University, and I hereby declare that;

- I have obtained the data, information, and documents provided within the thesis according to academic and ethical rules,
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- I have not made any changes to the data used,
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25/12/2024

HAYAT YACOP SAED ABU SETTA

PREFACE

To my respected supervisor, Assist. Prof. Dr. Barış Ağır, whose advice, insight, and support have greatly influenced this effort. I sincerely appreciate all of your help and guidance during this journey. To my cherished hubby, whose unwavering support, love, and patience have served as my cornerstone. I appreciate your support and belief in me during the entire process. To my amazing kids, you are my biggest inspiration and source of happiness. I was able to conquer every obstacle because of your love and smiles. To my oldest brother: Your counsel, encouragement, and faith in my skills have been a huge source of solace and inspiration. I appreciate your unwavering support. With deep love and appreciation, this work is dedicated to each and every one of you.

ISTANBUL, 2024

HAYAT YACOP SAED ABU SETTA

ÖZET

POSTMODERN FEMİNİZM: SYLVIA PLATH'IN *SIRÇA FANUS* VE MARGARET ATWOOD'UN *DAMIZLIK KIZIN ÖYKÜSÜ* ROMANLARININ KARŞILAŞTIRILMALI BİR İNCELEMESİ

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Bu araştırma, postmodern feminizmin merceğinden Sylvia Plath'ın *Sırça Fanus* ve Margaret Atwood'un *Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü* adlı eserlerini incelemektedir. Geleneksel toplumsal cinsiyet kavramlarının, güç ilişkilerinin ve toplumsal çerçevelerin eleştirel bir incelemesi postmodern feminizmin odak noktasıdır. Bu yaklaşım, kadınların deneyimlerini ve edebiyatta nasıl tasvir edildiklerini anlayabilmek için analitik bir mercek sağlar. Bu çalışma önerisinde, her ikisi de postmodern feminist edebiyatın başlıca eserleri olarak kabul edilen Sylvia Plath'ın romanları karşılaştırılacaktır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, yazarların toplumda var olan yaygın ataerki kurumlarla yüzleşmek için postmodern feminist fikirleri, stratejileri ve anlatı tekniklerini nasıl sağladıklarını araştırmaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ataerki, Cinsiyet, Feminizm, Kesişimsellik, Postmodernizm.

ABSTRACT

POSTMODERN FEMINISM: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SYLVIA PLATH'S *THE BELL JAR* AND MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*

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Through the lens of postmodern feminism, this research investigates the works of and Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. A critical examination of traditional concepts of gender, power relations, and societal frameworks is the focus of postmodern feminism. This approach provides an analytical lens through which one can comprehend the experiences of women and how they are portrayed in literature. *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath and *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, both of which are considered to be major works of postmodern feminist literature, will be compared and contrasted in this study proposal. The purpose of this study is to investigate the ways in which the authors provide postmodern feminist ideas, strategies, and narrative techniques in order to confront the pervasive patriarchal institutions that exist in society.

Keywords: Gender, Feminism, Intersectionality, Patriarchy, Postmodernism.

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INTRODUCTION

This study aims to examine Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* through the lens of postmodern feminist theory. Our interest in literature, which is a reflection of our society, has been rekindled as a result of the intense theoretical discourse. All facets of the human experience are presented in literature, and a thorough examination of a wide range of literary genres offers a perceptive perspective on the cultural norms and philosophical trends that are prevalent in a society. The purpose of this thesis is to do an analysis of the feminist aspects and nuances that are present in *The Bell Jar* and *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Both novels are works of fiction that transport us to a Puritanical England during the 1950s and then to a New England that is dominated by a militant kind of Puritanism. In both of these stories, the restrictive atmosphere of these civilizations and the repercussions that they have on women are depicted in a striking manner. When attempting to contextualize postmodern feminism, it is necessary to do an analysis of the paradigm-shifting socio-historical background of the era. Recent years have seen the emergence of postmodern feminism as a response to critics who argue that, despite the fact that it is not without its flaws, modern society is a significant departure from the pre-feminist era, which was characterized by the objectification and enslavement of women. Both novels appear to challenge the obligation of postmodern feminists to show the harsh reality of women's historical conditions, rather than merely concentrating on the self-expression of women in the present day. Through the use of a comparative analysis, it will be demonstrated how the second author attacks the sexist society of the past in her work. This critique is inspired by the experiences and viewpoints that were shaped by earlier feminist movements in current culture.

Postmodern feminism, which is an extension of postmodern philosophy, places an emphasis on gender discourse as well as the impact that sexism has on our perception of gender. In spite of the fact that the acclaimed works initially highlighted concerns over gender and culture in the late 1980s, the movement did not begin to garner scholarly traction until the 1990s. As a result of the fact that all

postmodern theorists question previously held beliefs and that there are no universal principles that are universally applicable all critics, postmodern feminism poses new challenges to fundamental feminist goals. Nevertheless, a theory that distinguishes sex from gender and correlates the latter with culture is one that nearly all postmodern feminists accept exists.

Instead of being determined by an individual's biological make-up, present postmodern philosophy proposes that an individual's gender is formed by their connection to a society that is distinguished by its male and female elements. As a result of this battle, profoundly dualistic writings were produced, which is something that postmodern philosophy frequently challenges. Those who subscribe to the postmodernist school of thought argue that extreme opinion, rather than acknowledging the true spectrum that exists between the two extremes or embracing a simplified binary, frequently stifles cultural and individual expression. Within the realm of postmodern feminist literature, the term "phallogocentrism" is utilized by postmodern feminists to describe the negative consequences that are brought about by extreme. Despite the fact that they intend to avoid radical ideologies, postmodern feminists are unable to come to a consensus on a single, unchanging notion. As is the case with other postmodern theorists, every single postmodern feminist has a unique perspective regarding the definition of gender discourse and the investigation of its cultural repercussions. Literary narratives that are feminist in nature are intertwined with the sociopolitical context. The sociopolitical climate of the time period was a significant factor that contributed to the growth of the feminist movement. Consequently, these fundamental criticisms, inquiries, and oppositions acted as the catalysts that prompted women to publicly contest the roles that were imposed upon them by their societies. Instead of being communicated through a novel media, the critique of gender roles evolved as a result of the feminist movement as a whole. Within the context of the current feminist movement, the traits of feminist writing were directly inspired by the characteristics of the movement.

Both novels shed light on the difficulties that women experience in terms of their ability to express themselves and their sense of identity. Both of these authors have attempted to highlight the state of women and the responsibilities that they play in society from a modernist and domestic point of view via their writing. Throughout

the middle and latter part of the 20th century, they were the authors of their works. As a consequence of the fact that women did not have equal rights during the time period of writing, their historical experiences were frequently kept hidden. The status of women and the oppression they have experienced in their houses and society emerged as significant themes of discussion throughout the years that the books were being written. These concerns have a profound impact on what women experience in their lives. These works continue to hold significance in today's society, where they are regarded as topical rather than as a historical issue.

Both of these narratives make it very evident that women play an important part in the organizing and writing processes. In order to show contrasting yet similar depictions of the same society, Plath and Atwood use different creative and emotional approaches to their writing. In order to fill the void that currently exists in the field of criticism, this literary study will place an emphasis on the comparative perspective of both volumes. In the Canadian dystopia, researchers have not conducted a comprehensive investigation into the comparative perspective about the attitudes of Esther and the narrator with regard to childbearing and surrogate parenthood. In order to provide interpretive nuance and fresh perspectives on these texts, our analysis will concentrate on the gaps found in them. In conclusion, I will use a theoretical framework to investigate the similarities that exist between the female psychotics in the somatic wing of *The Bell Jar* and *The Handmaid's Tale*. There are a number of literary techniques that align with the primary categories of psychoanalytic, religious, and mythological criticism for the former, and one principal Freudian and one Jungian criticism for the latter. Some examples of these methodologies include feminism, deconstruction, and postmodern critique.

The most significant criticism leveled against current feminist philosophy is the essentializing of women and men according to the biological functions that they play. It is the position of postmodern feminism that the male/female dichotomy is excessively inflexible and simplistic, and that it ought to be questioned rather than accepted when it is presented. For postmodern feminists, the ties to and among these categories should not be erased; rather, they should embrace unforeseeable biological variations across distinct cultural, racial, or ethnic contexts. This is a reflection of the chaotic diversity that characterizes postmodernism. It is only the beginning of the

process when a favorable dissolution or fragmentation occurs. The era that followed World War I was characterized by a number of linguistic transformations, one of which was that the pen was no longer exclusively the domain of the white bourgeois male. In spite of the fact that it encompassed all of those aspects, mediating both the self and the individual through their individual representation, the belief that was mentioned earlier proposed that women were interconnected through both spoken and unspoken revelations. This meant that women were fragmented and transcended any singular identity.

In the context of the relationship between humans and machines, it was stated that the distinction between the creator and the created is still left open to interpretation. There is also a lack of clarity on the distinction between the mind and the body in machines, which ultimately boils down to coding techniques. Because both types of authorship and originality are essentially coded and textual practices, in other words, social performances that reflect the postmodern self as a simulation of reality, the author purposefully blurs the lines between established binary oppositions. With the ultimate result being a publication that sparked a discussion in the field of gender and media studies during the early 1990s. The specter of psychoanalysis, which has been outlawed for a long time, is once again reversed and annihilated as a result of the development of a rush of feminine works that symbolize the repressed returns lauded by postmodern feminists.

The protagonist of *The Bell Jar* is Esther, a disturbed poet who represents Sylvia Plath's own self. The story follows Esther as she travels through life. In an era in which feminism has just recently begun to gain steam, the book investigates the mental health of women as well as the demands that society places on them. Through the use of the first-person narrative voice, the author has shed light on a number of patterns, including the double standards that are applied to male and female sexuality, the expectations that society has for attractive women to marry, the conditions that surround pregnant women, and the interactions that exist between a teacher and a student.

Within the context of a patriarchal society, *The Handmaid's Tale* is a work of feminist fiction that takes place in the future and emphasizes the liberty of women.

The psychological suffering that Offred experiences and the spiritual anguish that is caused by the totalitarian rule of Gilead are the primary topics that are explored throughout the novel. A connection is drawn between the sadness that Esther and Offred go through in the novel, which is evocative of *The Bell Jar*. Offred is forced to deal with a patriarchal culture that is oppressive, while Esther navigates her troubles in a milieu that is more emancipated.

There are many obligations that come along with being a woman, such as being a mother, a spouse, a sister, and a daughter. In addition, the expectations that society places on women to retain their beauty can impose a tremendous amount of stress. Esther has revealed her feelings of depression and her psychological disconnection from her community in an open and honest manner. As an additional point of interest, she makes reference to Kate Millet's predicament in her book that functions as a scripture of women's liberation, in which her impassioned idealism morphs into sexuality and the expression of both conscious and unconscious forces of male supremacy. One thing that both of these female heroes have in common is that they are fighting against patriarchal oppression. Every single bias that is directed on women is subtly weaved throughout each of these myths. Female solitude was portrayed as a result of two problems: fighting their oppressors and adapting to their psychological tendencies. Both of these challenges were depicted differently. They are both depressed and agitated because they feel as though they are alone and because they are unable to communicate their hostility and hatred to one another. The majority of the pieces contain a symbolic language that is characterized by feminist undertones and iconographical importance. Significant topics are discussed in both of these books, including the concept of oppression and the identity of the person who oppresses others. Different types of textual narratives are distinguished from one another in a number of ways. Expressing sadness and despair is accomplished by the use of an aquiline style in a number of different areas. The alternative style causes the reader to have feelings of repulsion in regard to the harm that is brought to women as a result of the repressive governmental structure that is depicted in the novel. As a result, *The Bell Jar* promotes the idea that it is equally important for a woman to make an effort to maintain her psychological integrity, sometimes known as her ego. On the other hand, *The Handmaid's Tale* portrays

womanhood via the lens of society's judgment, according to which a woman may be subjected to human cruelty, legal and psychological sadism, or an irredeemable masculine psyche.

Postmodern feminist and poststructuralist literary criticism and theory, which rigorously investigated both the text and the writing process, have had a major impact on the humanistic realm of literature since the 1970s. This has been the case since the beginning of the field. It has been determined and documented that the criteria for judging postmodern feminist literary criticism and theory have been established through the examination of novels written by renowned feminist authors. Inside the double binds of ideologies that simultaneously reject and impose patriarchally sanctioned techniques of self-awareness and the construction of both their inner and outer identities as women, this will demonstrate how women ought to establish a narrative space inside the confines of these ideologies. When conducting technical analysis, the primary focus is initially on the text itself. Subsequently, relevant insights from the fields of psychology and psychiatry are added in order to enhance the effectiveness of the methodologies. Because of this, the significance of analyzing women within the context of postmodern feminist literary criticism and theory will be brought into focus.

Based on the evaluation, it is clear that the works are particularly suitable with a feminist theoretical framework that is founded on postmodern and feminist ideas. By explicitly formulating novel concepts regarding women's experiences or by promoting feminism, it is imperative to possess a completely independent interpretation of the book. This is because the same issues that were faced by earlier feminists continue to exist, which is the necessity of establishing a unified theoretical framework for argumentation. The comparative study indicated that these books serve as an effective tool for emphasizing oppression and facilitating a full investigation by juxtaposing their characters with current theoretical hypotheses through a feminist theoretical lens. This was proved by the fact that the approach was successful in highlighting oppression. Due to the fact that both novels make use of the strategies and styles that are characteristic of postmodernism, it is possible to make a compelling argument that postmodernism serves as a conduit between the two types of ideologies. In doing so, it encompasses the uneasiness that is associated

with a postmodern society that is made up of individuals who have lost faith in their patriarchal cognitive frameworks, and as a result, justify their own behavior or the behavior of others.

Postmodern feminism can be traced back to the critical writings of French authors during the 1970s and 1980s. Critiques of a prevalent linguistic and social framework from a psychoanalytical and Marxist perspective are the primary emphasis of this presentation. In a manner that is analogous to that of earlier feminist criticism, the ideas of postmodern feminism offer a framework for the examination of works that have already been produced. Postmodern critics caution against assessing literature solely on its immediate political significance, emphasizing the discernible boundaries of sociopolitical and sexual dynamics, the strategic negotiation of cultural, sexual, and social symbols, and the methods by which marginalized or oppositional women and women writers manipulate these symbols in both astute and deceptive manners, alongside the perplexing ambiguity of opposition or difference. Moreover, the feminist critique of postmodernity analyzes women's responses to these indications and their utilization in crafting a narrative of transformation.

Numerous studies have been conducted on women's literature; nonetheless, throughout history, patriarchy has ignored this genre. These works are situated within a variety of situations that are culturally and historically diverse from one another. According to the postmodern feminist critique, literature, on the other hand, offers a forum for considering issues pertaining to service, significance, human cognition, subjectivity, and experience. In contrast to modernism and conventional feminist critique, which confine literature to a limited, inscriptional, and contextually prescribed interpretation, postmodern feminist analysis examines literature within an environment that is comprised of multiple facets and is considerably determined. In a postmodernist context characterized by intertextuality, pluralism, and multiformity, it is unfeasible to adhere to a singular definition of woman. The suggestion underscores the possibilities inherent in the distorted, adaptable, and corporeal constructs of the chora, exploring, concealing, and covertly integrating to subvert rigid classifications, societal norms, comprehensible limitations, and commodifiable spaces where women encounter negotiation difficulties. A self-aware reconstruction of new experiences

takes place at times of despair and limitation when the victim-subject's practical ego develops and exhibits a more skilled subjectivity than is typically ascribed to them. This occurs when the victim-subject's history of injustices falls away. In light of this, it is possible for literary studies and a particular form of feminist criticism to coexist within the framework of postmodernist practitioners. As a result of the fact that construct modifications of the self make it easier to verify reading while negating writing, a number of different narratological methodologies can be utilized in order to investigate the supplemental topic of narrative selfhood and the self-positioning styles that are present in women's writing. Because of this, it is possible to investigate the material components of women's writing from a postmodernist perspective, and in fact, on a more nuanced level.

Theorists that are utilized by postmodern feminist literary critics include a large number of renowned figures who serve as exemplars. These theorists participate in discussions about language and employ psychoanalytic theories in novel ways, to varying degrees, and they do so simultaneously. The participation of one thinker in discussions about women and writing has garnered a lot of attention and recognition. In her research, she investigates the ways in which female authors can establish their uniqueness and combat the textual violence they are subjected to. Additionally, she investigates the ways in which patriarchal rhetoric serves to marginalize women from positions of authority unless they are regarded as being dangerous and othered. Additionally, another theorist says that women might be judged in a different manner through the medium of writing. It is believed that a single concept is responsible for the mother body's wisdom as well as its capacity to remodel subjectivity and narratives. When it comes to literature, particularly feminist literature, the concept of social structures can potentially embrace it. The idea of "intersectionality," which will be examined in the paper that comes after this one, is an example of a single theory. Although the terms "multiculturalism" and "diversity" are sometimes used interchangeably, the term "intersectionality" refers to a more nuanced understanding of differences in terms of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. An interrelationship that is systematic can be seen between these distinctions. In order to properly explain this relational complexity, intersectionality must be taken into consideration. This helps to explain why a person who identifies

as a feminist may readily come to terms with concepts such as "intersectionality."

In both "The Bell Jar" and "The Handmaid's Tale," women are confronted with the problem of overcoming the common notion that certain archetypes, such as the housewife, the domestic woman, or the wife and mother, are vital and acceptable. As a whole, it is abundantly evident that gender alone is not sufficient to adequately represent the issues that the protagonists in both works face. The concept of "intersectionality" is adopted since it outlines the linkages to a number of different power structures. The multifaceted nature of tyranny is the defining trait of this form of government. This is going to be really important, especially when it comes to handling the conflicting feelings that women have toward one another. Despite the existence of oppressive structures, not all women are victims, and not all men are the ones who cause harm. Consequently, in addition to the development of two female characters that are both captivating and beautifully crafted, *The Bell Jar* and *The Handmaid's Tale* also convey a theoretical stance on the concept of intersectionality.

With the help of this theoretical framework, the study of postmodern feminist themes in *The Bell Jar* and *The Handmaid's Tale* is improved. This study will examine how characters in the novels navigate and resist patriarchal oppression. Additionally, the study will investigate how *The Bell Jar* and *The Handmaid's Tale* employ postmodern feminist themes, strategies, and narrative techniques to critique oppressive patriarchal structures within their respective contexts. In addition, it will investigate the manner in which these depictions exemplify the different postmodern feminist ideas that Plath and Atwood have espoused. For the purpose of conducting research on the chosen texts, this study proposal will make use of a comparative analysis approach. We will be able to identify and evaluate the ways in which *The Bell Jar* and *The Handmaid's Tale* approach postmodern feminist issues if we conduct a thorough comparison of the two works. During the comparative study, the texts will be subjected to a thorough examination, with particular attention paid to the development of characters, the strategies of narrative, and the linguistic choices made by the authors in order to transmit their feminist ideas. The theoretical frameworks of poststructuralism, postmodernism, and feminist literary criticism will be utilized in this research project, which will take an interdisciplinary approach. By taking into account the larger cultural, social, and political settings in which the

works were created, this multidisciplinary approach will make it easier to gain a thorough understanding of the works. The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* utilize postmodern feminist approaches to undermine patriarchal power structures. The study will also highlight the significance of both narratives in terms of deconstructing gender stereotypes and criticizing oppressive social systems.



1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: POSTMODERN FEMINISM

Postmodern feminism, an extension of postmodern philosophy, emphasizes gender discourse and the influence of sexism on our understanding of gender. Although the acclaimed works initially expressed issues of gender and culture in the late 1980s, the movement began to attain scholarly prominence in the 1990s. Postmodern feminism challenges fundamental feminist ideals, as all postmodern theorists interrogate prior ideas, asserting that no universal rules are universally applicable all critics. Nevertheless, a theory that differentiates sex from gender and associates the latter with culture is one that nearly all postmodern feminists acknowledge exists.

Modern postmodern philosophy posits that an individual's gender is shaped by their connection to a society characterized by its male and female constituents, rather than by their biological composition. The outcome of this conflict was strongly dualistic texts, which postmodern philosophy often contests. Postmodernists argue that extreme thinking, rather than recognizing the nuanced spectrum in between or embracing a simple dichotomy, often constrains culture and individual expression. In postmodern feminist literature, postmodern feminists employ the term 'phallogocentrism' to characterize the declines induced by extremism. Postmodern feminists are unable to reach consensus on a singular, fixed concept, despite their intention to eschew radical ideologies. Each postmodern feminist possesses a distinct viewpoint about the definition and examination of the cultural ramifications of gender discourse, akin to other postmodern intellectuals. The socio-political landscape is permeated by feminist literary discourses. The sociopolitical environment of the period facilitated the rise of the feminist movement. Consequently, these fundamental criticisms, inquiries, and oppositions served as the catalysts for women to publicly contest the roles forced upon them by their communities. The critique of gender roles emerged during the feminist movement rather than through a novel medium. The characteristics of feminist writing were directly influenced by the attributes of the contemporary feminist movement.

1.1. Key Concepts of Postmodernism

Postmodernism emerged as a significant cultural and intellectual movement in the mid-20th century, drawing influences from various fields such as philosophy, literature, art, and architecture (Hutcheon, 1988; Jencks, 1977). It can be understood as a reaction against the principles and values of modernism, which emphasizes rationality, progress, and the pursuit of universal truths (Jameson, 1991; Lyotard, 1984). Postmodernism challenges the idea of a single, objective reality and instead emphasizes the subjective nature of knowledge and the role of language and discourse in shaping our understanding of the world (Foucault, 1972; Rorty, 1979). Key figures associated with postmodernism include Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jean Baudrillard (Gleason, 2006; Sim, 1999; Smart, 1993). Jean-François Lyotard's book *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) is often considered a foundational text of postmodernism, where he argues that society has entered a state of incredulity towards grand narratives or metanarratives (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv). Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory, which emphasizes the instability and multiple interpretations of texts, had a significant influence on postmodern thought (Derrida, 1976; Norris, 1990).

Postmodernism's impact extends beyond philosophy and influenced various artistic and cultural domains. In literature, postmodernism is characterized by techniques such as fragmentation, intertextuality, and metafiction, challenging traditional narrative structures and blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 116). In art and architecture, postmodernism rejects the rigid principles of modernist design and embraced eclecticism, irony, and pastiche, often incorporating elements from different historical styles (Jencks, 1977, p. 75). Furthermore, postmodernism criticises the concept of the autonomous, individual subject, highlighting the ways in which power structures, language, and culture shape our identities and experiences (Butler, 1990, p. 45). The influence of postmodernism extends to various fields, including sociology, cultural studies, and anthropology, and continues to be a subject of debate and interpretation in contemporary intellectual discourse (Bauman, 1992; Jameson, 1991; Jenkins, 1992).

As a philosophical and intellectual movement, postmodernism brings about

significant shifts in how knowledge and reality were understood. It challenges the notion of a single, objective reality and instead emphasized the subjective nature of knowledge construction and the role of language and discourse in shaping our understanding of the world (Rorty, 1979, p. 320). One of the key critiques of postmodernism is directed towards the modernist project of seeking universal truths and grand narratives that claim to provide comprehensive explanations of the world. Jean-François Lyotard, in his influential work *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), argue that these grand narratives had lost their credibility in the postmodern era. Instead, he proposes the idea of "incredulity towards metanarratives," suggesting that different language games and local narratives coexist, each with its own rules and logics (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv). This fragmentation of knowledge challenges the notion of a unified and objective reality.

Furthermore, postmodernism questiones the stability and objectivity of language and discourse. Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction plays a crucial role in this regard. Deconstruction aimes to reveal the multiple meanings and contradictions within texts, highlighting the inherent instability of language (Norris, 1990, p. 64). According to Derrida, language is not a transparent medium for representing reality, but rather a system filled with gaps, contradictions, and differing interpretations. This view challenges the idea that language could accurately reflect an objective reality.

Michel Foucault, another influential figure in postmodern thought, focuses on the relationship between power, knowledge, and discourse. He argues that power structures shape the production and dissemination of knowledge, influencing what is considered to be true or false (Foucault, 1972, p. 145). Foucault's concept of "discursive formations" highlights how language and discourse are not neutral, but rather embedded with power dynamics that shape our understanding of reality.

These epistemological shifts brought about by postmodernism had significant implications across various disciplines. In sociology, for instance, postmodern thinkers like Jean Baudrillard questions the traditional sociological frameworks that assume a direct correspondence between social reality and language (Gleason, 2006, p. 436). Baudrillard's concept of "hyperreality" suggests that contemporary society is

characterized by simulations and signs that have replaced the real, blurring the boundaries between representation and reality.

In cultural studies and anthropology, postmodernism challenges the idea of a fixed and stable cultural identity. Influenced by poststructuralist thought, scholars like Judith Butler emphasizes the performative nature of identity and the ways in which power structures shape and constrain our identities (Butler, 1990, p. 100). Postmodernism also influences literary studies, where it disrupts traditional narrative structures and embraces techniques such as fragmentation, intertextuality, and metafiction, blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality (Hassan, 1987; Hutcheon, 1988).

While postmodernism has made significant contributions to intellectual and cultural discourse, it has also faced criticisms and generated debates regarding its ideas and implications. These include its alleged embrace of skepticism and relativism, its alleged lack of coherence and tendency towards fragmented and inaccessible language, and some critics argue that postmodernism's emphasis on language, discourse, and power dynamics leads to a form of political passivity. Postmodernism has also been criticized for its alleged rejection of essentialist categories and the associated implications for identity politics. In addition, postmodernism has been criticized for its focus on critique and deconstruction without offering a positive alternative or constructive theory which often leads to a nihilist impasse. All in all, as with any philosophical movement, postmodernism has its critiques and shortcomings.

However, despite these shortcomings, postmodernism has had a significant influence on various fields of study and continues to shape intellectual and cultural discourses. Its impact can be observed in several areas. For instance, in literature, postmodernist works often challenge traditional storytelling conventions through unconventional narrative techniques, intertextuality, and metafiction (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 40). Similarly, in visual arts, artists have embraced postmodernist ideas by incorporating elements of past styles, parody, and pastiche to question notions of originality and authenticity (Hassan, 1987, p. 54). Postmodernism's emphasis on blurring boundaries and the mixing of different cultures and identities has

contributed to the study of globalization (Harvey, 1989, p. 114). Scholars have explored how globalization processes have led to the emergence of hybrid identities, cultural hybridization, and the interconnectedness of local and global contexts. This perspective has been particularly influential in the field of cultural studies (Shields, 2003, p. 72).

Postmodernist ideas have also influenced social and political theory. Concepts such as the "politics of representation" and the examination of how language shapes social reality have become central to critical approaches in sociology, political science, and cultural studies (Butler, 1990; Norris, 1990). Furthermore, postmodernism's critique of grand narratives and power relations has intersected with postcolonial and subaltern studies, challenging dominant narratives and giving voice to marginalized groups (Lyotard, 1984, p. 95).

Ethics has also been a subject of exploration within the realm of postmodernism. The constructed nature of knowledge and the recognition of multiple perspectives have led to discussions on ethical relativism and the challenges of moral universalism (Rorty, 1979, p. 2). Postmodern ethics seeks to critically examine traditional ethical frameworks and consider the complexities of moral decision-making.

While postmodernism has made significant contributions, contemporary perspectives have emerged in response to its limitations. New Materialism challenges the linguistic focus of postmodernism and emphasizes the materiality of the world (Braidotti, 2006, p. 254). Speculative Realism and Object-Oriented Ontology propose new ontological frameworks that go beyond linguistic analysis (Latour, 2005, p. 237). Additionally, some scholars argue for a post-postmodern era, reintroducing the possibility of objective truth and a more nuanced understanding of subjectivity and objectivity (Wolfe, 2010, p. 67).

In conclusion, postmodernism has had a lasting impact on various disciplines, challenging traditional epistemological frameworks and emphasizing the subjective nature of knowledge and language. It continues to shape intellectual and cultural discourses, while contemporary perspectives offer alternative insights and approaches to further our understanding of reality, knowledge, and identity.

1.2. Relation Between Postmodernism and Feminism:

The relationship between postmodernism and feminism is complex and multifaceted. Both movements emerged in the latter half of the 20th century, and they share some common concerns and critiques of traditional structures of power and knowledge. However, they also have distinct differences and tensions that have shaped their interactions and dialogue over time. Exploring the relationship between postmodernism and feminism requires an examination of key themes, debates, and contributions within each movement, as well as their intersections and divergences.

Postmodernism, as a theoretical framework, challenges the idea of a singular, objective truth and emphasizes the constructed nature of knowledge and reality. It questions binary oppositions, such as male/female, and critiques grand narratives that claim to provide universal explanations (Hutcheon, 1988; Lyotard, 1984). Feminism, on the other hand, is a social and political movement that seeks to challenge and dismantle gender-based oppression, advocating for gender equality and the recognition of women's rights and experiences (Butler, 1990, p. 50). One area where postmodernism and feminism intersect is in their critique of essentialism. Essentialism, in the context of feminism, refers to the belief in inherent, fixed characteristics or qualities attributed to women or men. Postmodernism's skepticism towards fixed categories and essentialist notions of gender aligns with feminist critiques of essentialism, as it challenges the idea that gender is a stable and universal category (Nicholson, 1990, p. 43). Both postmodernism and feminism question the notion of a singular, essential female experience, recognizing the diversity and intersectionality of women's identities and experiences.

Postmodernism's emphasis on language and discourse has also influenced feminist theory and analysis. Poststructuralist feminist scholars, such as Judith Butler, have drawn on postmodernist ideas to deconstruct gender as a performative and socially constructed category (Butler, 1990, p. 41). Butler's concept of gender performativity argues that gender identity is not an inherent trait but rather a repetitive performance produced through social norms and language. This perspective has been influential in expanding understandings of gender and

challenging traditional binary conceptions. Furthermore, both postmodernism and feminism highlight the importance of the agency and subjectivity of individuals. Postmodernism emphasizes the role of subjectivity in shaping knowledge and reality, while feminism seeks to recognize and empower women's subjective experiences and voices (Butler, 1990; Lyotard, 1984). Feminist standpoint theory, for instance, argues that marginalized perspectives, like those of women, offer critical insights into power structures that are often obscured by dominant discourses (Haraway, 1988, p. 43). Postmodernism's focus on multiple perspectives and the decentering of dominant narratives aligns with the feminist goal of amplifying marginalized voices.

However, despite these intersections, there are also tensions and debates between postmodernism and feminism. One point of contention is the critique of universalism. Postmodernism challenges the idea of universal truths or experiences, while feminism has historically sought to identify and address universal forms of gender-based oppression (Butler, 1990; Nicholson, 1990). Some feminists argue that an emphasis on difference and multiplicity in postmodernism undermines the recognition of women's shared experiences and the pursuit of collective goals. Another area of tension is the critique of essentialism within feminism. While postmodernism challenges fixed categories and essentialist notions of gender, feminism has also relied on the concept of a shared identity and experiences of women to mobilize political action and advocate for change (Nicholson, 1990, p. 325). Some feminist scholars argue that postmodernism's rejection of essentialism can undermine feminist activism and the pursuit of gender equality. Additionally, postmodernism's emphasis on the deconstruction of language and meaning has been critiqued by some feminists for potentially erasing material realities and materialist analyses (Fraser, 1989, p. 249). Materialist feminists argue that focusing solely on language and discourse can distract from the material conditions that shape women's lives, such as economic inequalities and systemic oppression.

Despite these tensions, the relationship between postmodernism and feminism has evolved over time, leading to various hybrid approaches and new theoretical frameworks. Postmodern feminism, for example, seeks to bridge the gap between these two movements by integrating postmodernist ideas with feminist analysis (Nicholson, 1990, p. 34). It explores how power operates through language,

discourses, and cultural representations, while also recognizing the material realities of gender-based oppression. Intersectional feminism, another significant development, acknowledges the multiple and intersecting systems of oppression that shape individuals' experiences, including gender, race, class, sexuality, and more (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 104). Intersectional feminism recognizes that the experiences and forms of oppression faced by individuals are shaped by the intersections of various social categories. This perspective aligns with postmodernism's emphasis on the complexity of identity and the recognition of multiple subject positions.

In conclusion, the relationship between postmodernism and feminism is characterized by intersections, shared critiques, and tensions. While both movements challenge traditional power structures, notions of essentialism, and binary oppositions, they also have distinct differences that have shaped their interactions and debates. The influence of postmodernism on feminism is evident in its impact on feminist theory, language, and the recognition of subjectivity. Conversely, feminism has also contributed to postmodernism by highlighting the importance of gender, intersectionality, and social justice concerns. The ongoing dialogue and engagement between postmodernism and feminism continue to shape our understanding of gender (Butler, 1990; Nicholson, 1990).

1.3. Postmodern Feminism

Postmodern feminism is a theoretical framework and social movement that emerged in the latter half of the 20th century, combining elements of postmodernist theory with feminist analysis. It seeks to challenge dominant power structures, question fixed categories, and deconstruct essentialist notions of gender. Postmodern feminism recognizes the intersectionality of different forms of oppression and emphasizes the complexities of identity and subjectivity. It emerged in the late 20th century as a response to the limitations of earlier feminist movements and the influence of postmodernist thought. It seeks to address the shortcomings of second-wave feminism, which was criticized for its essentialism and universalizing tendencies (Nicholson, 1990, p. 33). Postmodern feminism aims to challenge the binary constructions of gender, question the notion of a singular "women's experience," and recognize the diverse and intersectional nature of identities and

oppressions.

To understand the development of postmodern feminism, it is important to consider its historical context. The second wave of feminism, which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, focused on issues such as reproductive rights, workplace discrimination, and gender inequality (Tong, 2009, p. 26). However, second-wave feminism was also criticized for its exclusionary tendencies, as it primarily represented the experiences and concerns of white, middle-class women. This criticism led to the rise of intersectional feminism, which emphasized the interconnectedness of different systems of oppression, including race, class, sexuality, and gender (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139). Simultaneously, postmodernism was gaining prominence in various disciplines, including philosophy, literary theory, and cultural studies. Postmodernism challenges the notion of a singular, objective truth and highlighted the constructed nature of knowledge and reality (Lyotard, 1984, p. 284). It questions the validity of grand narratives and sought to deconstruct binary oppositions and fixed categories.

Postmodern feminism rejects essentialist notions of gender, which posit fixed and inherent characteristics attributed to women or men. It challenges the idea that gender is a stable and universal category and highlights the social construction of gender identity (Butler, 1990, p. 208). Postmodern feminists argue that gender is performative, meaning that it is continuously produced and reproduced through social norms and language (Butler, 1990, p. 192). Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity has been influential in postmodern feminist thought, as it emphasizes the role of language and discourses in the construction of gender identities. Postmodern feminism also critiques binary oppositions, such as male/female, masculine/feminine, and reason/emotion. These dualistic categories are seen as limiting and exclusionary, as they fail to capture the complexities and fluidities of gender identities and experiences. Postmodern feminists argue for the deconstruction of these binary oppositions and the recognition of multiple subject positions (Nicholson, 1990, p. 134). By challenging these binaries, postmodern feminism seeks to create space for gender diversity and to disrupt hierarchical power structures.

Intersectionality is a central concept in postmodern feminism, acknowledging

that individuals' experiences are shaped by the intersections of various social categories, including gender, race, class, sexuality, and more (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242). Postmodern feminists argue that these intersecting systems of oppression cannot be understood in isolation but must be examined in relation to one another. Intersectionality challenges the tendency to prioritize certain forms of oppression over others and emphasizes the need for an inclusive and comprehensive feminist analysis.

Postmodern feminism highlights the importance of subjectivity and individual agency in shaping knowledge and reality. It recognizes that individuals' experiences and perspectives are influenced by their social, cultural, and historical contexts. Postmodern feminists emphasize the value of diverse voices and subjective narratives, particularly those that have been marginalized or silenced by dominant discourses (Butler, 1990; Haraway, 1988). The focus on subjectivity and agency aligns with feminist goals of recognizing and empowering women's voices and experiences.

Postmodernism's emphasis on language, discourse, and representation has led to criticisms that postmodern feminism neglects material realities and materialist analysis. Some argue that the focus on language and discourse obscures the structural and institutional factors that contribute to gender inequality (Fraser, 1997, p. 172). This criticism highlights the need to integrate postmodern insights with a materialist analysis that considers the economic, political, and social dimensions of oppression.

Another debate within postmodern feminism revolves around the tension between deconstructing essentialist categories and the importance of identity politics. While postmodern feminism seeks to challenge fixed categories, some feminists argue that identities based on shared experiences, such as race or gender, are important for political mobilization and the recognition of specific forms of oppression (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 4). This debate raises questions about how to navigate the complexities of identity without reifying or essentializing categories.

Postmodern feminism has expanded feminist discourse by challenging essentialist and universalizing tendencies. It has opened up space for discussions on the complexities of gender and the intersections of various forms of oppression.

Postmodern feminist perspectives have enriched feminist theory by emphasizing the importance of language, discourse, and subjectivity in the construction of gender identities. The recognition of intersectionality as a key concept in postmodern feminism has had a profound impact on feminist theory and activism. Intersectional feminism acknowledges the ways in which different forms of oppression intersect and compound one another, leading to unique experiences of discrimination and privilege (Crenshaw, 1989). This perspective has contributed to a more inclusive and comprehensive feminism that seeks to address the needs and experiences of diverse communities. Postmodern feminism's emphasis on agency and subjectivity has influenced feminist activism by centering individual experiences and perspectives. It has encouraged the amplification of marginalized voices and the recognition of the diverse ways in which individuals resist and challenge oppressive structures. This focus on agency has also contributed to the development of participatory and inclusive feminist methodologies. Postmodern feminism's critique of power structures, binary oppositions, and essentialism has provided tools for challenging dominant discourses and power hierarchies. It has enabled feminists to question and disrupt normative gender roles and expectations, contributing to the deconstruction of oppressive systems. Postmodern feminist perspectives have been particularly influential in areas such as queer theory, transgender studies, and postcolonial feminism.

To sum up, postmodern feminism emerged as a response to the limitations of earlier feminist movements and the influence of postmodernist thought. It challenges fixed categories, essentialist notions of gender, and universalizing tendencies within feminism. Postmodern feminism recognizes the complexities of identity and subjectivity, emphasizes the intersectionality of different forms of oppression, and highlights the role of language and discourse in the construction of gender identities. While postmodern feminism has faced debates and criticisms, it has made significant contributions to feminist theory and activism by expanding feminist discourse, promoting intersectional analysis, centering agency and subjectivity, and critiquing power structures. By recognizing the multiple ways in which gender and power operate, postmodern feminism contributes to a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of gender equality and social justice.

2. POSTMODERN FEMINISM IN SYLVIA PLATH'S *THE BELL JAR* AND MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*

2.1. Postmodern Feminism in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*

Postmodern feminism emerged from the convergence of feminist theory and postmodernist philosophy. Postmodernism rejects a universalizing approach to its subjects in favor of infinite complexity, acknowledging individual variances. It analyzes the framework of readiness and primarily concentrates on the interplay between ethics and power dynamics. It interrogates the formation of identity in literature and necessitates introspection on identity. It has highlighted popular culture and its representation in gender studies. In literature, postmodern theory and poststructuralism are often used synonymously. The consequences of this misperception are hard to ignore. For example, French feminists aligned with a significant wave of critical postmodern theoretical concepts choose the designation "poststructuralists." This is generally attributed to the inclination of individuals interested in postmodern feminist theories to assert that postmodernism is impervious to essentialist gender myths. Critical theories challenge the formation of identity beyond the binary system into which all humans endeavor to conform to a theory, consistent with postmodernism. Recent studies of the relationship between postmodernism and *The Bell Jar* suggest that the protagonist's schizophrenia represents an inability to establish the essentials of a functional identity rather than an expression of empowerment. Esther is thereby confined within a binary reestablished through her demise.

Sylvia Plath, a renowned American poet and novelist, was born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1932. Her early life was marked by a strong intellectual curiosity and a passion for writing, which was nurtured by her supportive family. However, this idyllic childhood was tragically disrupted by the suicide of her father, a college professor, when she was eight years old. This traumatic event had a profound and enduring impact on Plath's life and work, shaping her exploration of themes such as loss, grief, and the complexities of familial relationships (Walker, 1985, p. 9). Plath attended Smith College, where she excelled in her studies and began to develop her

writing skills. Despite her academic success, she also struggled with mental health issues, including depression and anxiety. These challenges were exacerbated by the societal expectations placed on women during her time, which often limited their opportunities and constrained their aspirations. During her time at Smith, Plath attempted suicide, resulting in a period of hospitalization. This experience would have a lasting impact on her understanding of mental illness and her own personal struggles.

After graduating from Smith, Plath moved to England, where she married the English poet Ted Hughes. They had two children together, but their marriage was troubled, and Plath's mental health continued to deteriorate. The pressures of motherhood, combined with the challenges of her relationship with Hughes, contributed to her increasing sense of isolation and despair. In 1963, Plath committed suicide by gas poisoning. She left behind a collection of poems, including *Ariel*, which is considered one of the most important works of American poetry of the 20th century. Plath's poetry often explores themes of mental illness, loss, and the complexities of female identity. Her work is characterized by its raw emotional intensity, its unflinching exploration of difficult subjects, and its ability to capture the nuances of human experience.

The Bell Jar addresses various themes commonly linked to feminist literature. The protagonist confronts the pressures exerted by patriarchal figures, which primarily examines the conflict of identity and selfhood. The primary sources of this pressure are her family and others associated with her academic life. The protagonist's cognitive limitations are depicted by the bell jar. She grapples with mental health issues exacerbated by a society that is simultaneously involved and indifferent to a woman's pursuit of her self-defined aspirations. The concept of alienation, stemming from the pursuit of personal fulfillment and the obligation to conform to gender-specific societal norms and behaviors, intensifies this issue. Amidst the excruciating daily torment of alienation, which would erode the strongest steel and blunt even the keenest wit, the protagonist ultimately succumbs. The protagonist, conditioned to believe she must act as someone else or a complete fake to achieve success, acknowledges that these layers of expectations closed in on her. This precludes the protagonist's authentic opportunities for personal development

beyond the taxing, mentally depleting task of replicating hexagons, which could otherwise facilitate success and survival. This constraint exemplifies the actions and attitudes of the 1960s that inform women's understanding of what they require to feel empowered in society.

One interpretation of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* is as a narrative exploration of her struggles with mental illness and identity. Plath's oppression by societal standards and the need to conform to feminine identity is mirrored in the subjective experiences of the unnamed protagonist. The narrative voice of the novel suggests the protagonist's quest for a singular civic value—be it a service, craft, or political engagement—that might offer the direction and personal fulfillment that remained perpetually unattainable in Plath's life, by confronting the false dichotomy in American culture that positions women as either creative and liberated or as foolish, cynical, and stagnant. A significant aspect is a troubling event that has plagued countless abhorrent interpretations of a blend of romance permeating popular culture, alongside the various explicit and ironic parallels between the protagonist's experiences and Plath's life. Social and familial expectations significantly influenced individuals in 1950s America, often constraining their autonomy and freedom of choice. Self-actualization generally entails confronting entrenched societal conventions and assumptions. The predominant gender-specific expectations influenced Elizabeth's life, as illustrated in the novel. Elizabeth's identity is disjointed due to social and psychological influences, beginning with her difficulty in accepting the identity imposed by society and in creating her own.

The burden of chronic mental illness complicates the quest for self-identity. As self-identities are formed, socially imposed expectations simultaneously hinder expressing contrast to mental illness. The narrative illustrates how the inclination towards passive acceptance of a constructed identity and existence hinders the woman from achieving her full potential, as she forfeits her sense of self. Character categorization is universally philosophical, as evidenced by the comparison of contemporary cultural revolutions. The protagonist grapples with societal rejection throughout the narrative. She exhibits significant self-doubt and remains perpetually indecisive. Esther diligently strives to be a successful wife and an exemplary mother to align with the societal standards that dictate an ideal lady. Her tale centers on her

struggle for self-identity within a society that dictates a woman's function. The narrative portrays a female character who reacts and resists: upon closer inspection, Esther's seeming embrace of fundamental femininity reveals contradictions and complexities. Esther's partial acceptance of conventional gender roles is evident throughout the narrative. She not only embraces her husband's vision of a supporting, adoring, and self-committed woman, but also metamorphoses into an artistic housewife to align with societal expectations. However, in her presentation, Esther's compelled corrections are perpetually unpredictable, improbable, and sarcastic. Her struggle to establish her identity exemplifies the initial phase of contemporary feminist thought and highlights the dichotomy between the authentic self and the socially constructed exterior self.

Numerous elements in Plath's novel pertain to postmodernism. Fragmentation is a distinctive characteristic of the postmodern narrative that is prevalent in *The Bell Jar*. The book's narrative, addressing the disjointed themes of identity and illness, is constructed from the author's detached perspective. Unlike postmodern writing, the book maintains a uniform narrative perspective, articulated by a singular first-person narrator. Nonetheless, the fragmented representations of Esther, the variations in subjects and narratives, along with the recurrence, all foster a sense of dissolution. The narrative of Esther's struggle is complicated by the use of ambiguity, a characteristic of postmodern literature. The book exhibits ambiguity due to significant uncertainty.

Postmodern narrators are widely recognized for generating ambiguity between the conditions of tangible reality and the storytelling process. The sardonic tone and humor seen in the recounting of Esther's experience are notably characteristic of postmodern literature, raising concerns due to the ostensibly personal nature of the subject matter. Irony is often utilized to shield the narrator and reader from anguish by lessening the weight of trauma. This is most apparent in *The Bell Jar*, where the agony arises from the predicament of women succumbing to the constraints of patriarchy. It is a "psychic narcotic" or a mechanism for coping. Humor facilitates detachment and transcendence. *The Bell Jar* contains poetic parts where Esther's voice is differentiated from others through her use of exquisite language. The author appears to depict two potent forces engaged in a compelling

power struggle that is interwoven, perhaps exerting coercive influence on one another.

A defining feature of postmodern literature is the novel's amalgamation of the specific and the universal. Plath used distortion to suggest parallels between the protagonist's individual anguish and the broader societal distress, with Esther's suicidal ideations being the apex of this suffering. Plath seeks to deconstruct the traditional association of femininity with a lack of identity or instability by emphasizing the connection between her anguish and societal afflictions. The initial wave of postmodernism, serving as a feminist critique of the rigid gender binaries characterizing modernism, emerged from the interrelation between the political and the personal within the postmodern perspective. Many of their theories were integrated into postmodernism, as noted by postmodern feminist critics. The narrative tension is intensified by the aforementioned elements and the resulting confusion they generate. Esther's anxiety is reflected in the narrative, manifesting as her progressively neurotic behavior as the plot unfolds and her condition deteriorates.

The novel employs a fractured narrative and postmodern literary aesthetics to convey the protagonist's confusion and divided worldview. The protagonist's psychological instability results in a disconnection of perception, memory, and understanding of reality. The narrative's fragmented form reflects the protagonist's psychological state, as well as the dissonance and resulting perplexity of the book's disparate portions. The breakdown of classical conceptions emphasizes the theme of alienation by overturning entrenched belief systems and questioning the assumptions deeply rooted in our culture. The work exemplifies an early critique of postmodern deconstruction of gender and mental health assumptions that have infiltrated our understanding to the extent of being considered self-evident. Deconstruction involves articulating the opposing viewpoint, the antithesis, or the unexpressed element to improve the reader's comprehension. The purpose of the various iterations of a word or phrase that precede the original is to provoke amazement and reconsideration. Fragmentation and deconstruction are attributable to two factors. They initially prompt the reader to contemplate the novel's genuine stakes. Moreover, they enhance the portrayal of femininity by addressing the profound impact of the loss of virginity and appearance on individuals. The subsequent segment of this section, characterized

by its argumentative nature, deconstructs several visuals and concepts to furnish more evidence for the theme. The author obscures the distinctions between word meanings to underscore the objectives of classification; specifically, she reveals internal conflicts that demonstrate the absurdity of classification. Gender standards insufficiently define or direct the novel's protagonist, who experiences a tumultuous journey from happiness to sadness, recuperation, social success, mental instability, and suicidal ideation. The conclusion posited by the novel, which asserts that gender norms suppress and hinder female agency, is notably more radical.

Since its debut, *The Bell Jar* has also garnered significant feminist critique. The novel's portrayal of the constrained scope of female experience has been the reason for this. The narrative also examines the significance of masculine power, which evaluates its subordinates through approval or disapproval. The book articulates a compelling case for inclusion in the feminist literary canon. The framework of patriarchal hegemony and its impact on women's identities and well-being have been extensively analyzed. Esther gets increasingly alienated from the external world due to her efforts to conform to society's narrow view of women. The novel is regarded by numerous feminist critics as an authentic representation of 1950s gender norms and societal constructs. From this perspective, the narrative assumes a prophetic quality as the remainder of the century introduced societal upheavals such as women's liberation and the sexual revolution to public consciousness. Furthermore, *The Bell Jar* lays the foundation for literary investigations of gender and identity by transmuting experiences from the author's life into a narrative of transformation that may be utilized to assess different epochs in women's history. Scholars emphasize *The Bell Jar* as a feminist critique by connecting the narrator's struggles to the societal limitations imposed on the author in her daily life. *The Bell Jar* is established as a feminist novel contextualized within the social milieu of its day, utilizing feminist readings from the 1950s and 1960s. The book remains pertinent in contemporary discourse on gender politics in the twenty-first century, over fifty years post-publication.

Plath methodically delineates the societal expectations imposed on women in *The Bell Jar*. Alongside highlighting the detrimental impact of societal expectations on women, the protagonist, Esther, ironically suggests her own confinement. Women

who fetishize and simulate the duties of motherhood and femininity experience a deceptive sense of fulfillment when they adhere to patriarchal standards. Consequently, psychological fiction is emphasized in literature as hindered by the era's constructed feminine myths and its underdog viewpoint, which compels the externalization of vanity through societal conditions. Since it indicates normal male dominance, such a constrained interest could never be paramount. Women discover that they can only achieve self-loss when they are compelled to imitate their mothers, sisters, and friends in a quest to acquire equivalent satisfaction and identity as men. The protagonist's struggle with gender roles is central to *The Bell Jar*. Esther Greenwood, residing in New York for a month-long writing scholarship, dates a different man each night while simultaneously aspiring to become a successful poet. Society, along with her acquaintances, asserts that a female writer cannot achieve both success and happiness. Esther is restricted by the burdensome routine of daytime activities that a male protagonist, residing in the same boarding house, appears to evade effortlessly. This acts as a perpetual symbolic reminder of the expectations associated with Esther's gender throughout the book. *The Bell Jar* clearly illustrates that a primary impetus for the characters' actions is explicit gender conventions and expectations. Emulating femininity would finally afford Esther and her associates enhanced agency over their lives. Consequently, it is evident that the choices made by the women in the tale are shaped by gender roles.

The Bell Jar, Sylvia Plath's sole novel, examines gender and social power dynamics via the narrative of a young woman's descent into mental illness and subsequent recovery. The narrative emphasizes that women are not a monolithic group but embody diverse identities, providing an intersectional viewpoint on society. *The Bell Jar*'s unclear depiction of the achievable status of women from diverse ethnic backgrounds illustrates that not all cultures can conform to the ideal of a European feminine standard. Although Plath's protagonist, Esther Greenwood, and feminist theory necessitate a predefined framework for success within a patriarchal society, the author demonstrates this notion through female characters embodying diverse expressions of femininity that defy singular categorization. Feminism can recognize that the protagonist's composite characteristics enhance her dread and hinder her self-identification through the lens of intersectionality. These variables

encompass relationships, the appearance deemed attractive for securing a husband, and societal expectations for achievement. Due to the narrative's focus on the white middle class, Esther's ethnicity was never an issue in her life. The delay in completion and the failure to meet expectations demonstrated lower-class standards. Esther's financial constraints may profoundly affect her attempts to assimilate with both the Southern Belle archetype and the accomplished "factory-made" women, thereby alienating her from the expectations, conventions, opportunities, and privileges of her social class. In conclusion, Esther's narrative suggests that, according with feminist theory, various interpretations of the ideal woman exist within society, even while her ethnicity and status remain unspecified. Through the amalgamation of various race, gender, and class identities, Plath's intersectional portrayal illustrates the complexities of a woman's existence, while also emphasizing the overarching societal restrictions imposed on women and their necessity to adapt to other perspectives.

In this sense, the novel offers a nuanced exploration of female subjectivity, mental illness, and societal expectations through a postmodern feminist lens. The novel challenges traditional notions of gender and identity, presenting a fragmented and complex protagonist who struggles to reconcile her own desires with the expectations imposed upon her by patriarchal society. Esther Greenwood, the protagonist of the novel, is a young woman who is grappling with the pressures of adulthood and the expectations placed on her as a woman. Her narrative is fragmented and disjointed, reflecting her own sense of confusion and disorientation. This fragmentation challenges the traditional notion of a unified, coherent self, suggesting that identity is a fluid and constantly evolving construct. (Showalter, 1977, p. 270)

The novel also critiques the essentialist view of gender, which posits that women share a common essence or nature based on their biological sex. Esther's experiences as a woman are complex and multifaceted, and she does not conform to traditional gender roles or expectations. Her struggles with mental illness, isolation, and oppression highlight the ways in which patriarchal society can limit and constrain women's lives. Furthermore, *The Bell Jar* explores the ways in which patriarchal power structures can be internalized and reproduced within women

themselves. Esther's internalized misogyny and self-doubt contribute to her mental health struggles and her sense of alienation. This suggests that even within patriarchal societies, women can be complicit in their own oppression.

The Bell Jar offers a powerful critique of patriarchal society and its impact on women's lives. Through its exploration of fragmented subjectivity, essentialism, and the construction of female identity, the novel can be interpreted as a significant contribution to postmodern feminist literature. It offers a nuanced exploration of female subjectivity, mental illness, and societal expectations through the lens of Esther Greenwood, a young woman struggling with her identity and place in the world. The novel delves into the complexities of female experience, challenging traditional notions of femininity and highlighting the ways in which societal pressures can contribute to mental health struggles. Esther's fragmented narrative reflects the fragmented nature of her identity, as she grapples with conflicting desires and expectations. This portrayal of female subjectivity challenges the traditional notion of a unified, coherent self, suggesting that identity is a fluid and constantly evolving construct (Showalter, 1977, 270). Furthermore, Esther's experiences with mental illness, particularly depression and anxiety, are presented with raw honesty, challenging the stigma associated with these conditions and highlighting the importance of seeking help (Marcus, 1978, p. 213). This portrayal contributes to a more compassionate and understanding society, as it humanizes mental illness and encourages individuals to seek support.

Additionally, the novel critiques the societal expectations placed on women during the mid-20th century. Esther's experiences of isolation, boredom, and a sense of purposelessness reflect the limitations imposed on women by patriarchal norms and values. The novel challenges these expectations, suggesting that women should not be confined to traditional gender roles and that they have the right to pursue their own desires and ambitions (Gilman, 1913, p. 195). The novel can be interpreted as a critique of the medicalization of female distress. Esther's experiences with psychiatric treatment and hospitalization highlight the ways in which women's mental health issues can be pathologized and dismissed as individual problems rather than being recognized as systemic issues (Chesler, 1972, p. 62). This critique is particularly relevant in today's world, as women continue to face challenges in

accessing mental health care and experiencing stigma associated with mental illness.

The Bell Jar offers a powerful exploration of female subjectivity, mental illness, and societal expectations. Through Esther's experiences, Plath challenges traditional notions of femininity and highlights the importance of mental health awareness and advocacy. The novel's portrayal of female subjectivity is particularly relevant in today's world, as it continues to challenge harmful gender stereotypes and promote a more inclusive and equitable society. It offers a nuanced critique of traditional gender roles and stereotypes, exploring the ways in which women are constrained and limited by societal expectations. While Plath's poetry and prose often express a sense of alienation and isolation, she also presents complex and multifaceted female characters who challenge patriarchal norms and values.

One of the ways in which Plath challenges traditional gender roles is through her exploration of female sexuality. In the novel, Esther Greenwood is presented as a young woman who is struggling to reconcile her own sexual desires with the expectations placed on her by society. This challenges the puritanical and repressive attitudes towards female sexuality that were prevalent during Plath's time. (Showalter, 1977, p. 120) Plath's portrayal of female sexuality is particularly subversive, as she refuses to conform to traditional notions of female passivity and submission. Instead, she presents women as active agents who have the right to control their own bodies and desires. Plath also critiques the notion that women are primarily defined by their roles as mothers and wives. In her poetry, she often explores the complexities of motherhood and the ways in which it can be a source of both joy and frustration. Plath's work challenges the idea that women's worth is solely measured by their reproductive abilities, instead suggesting that women are capable of leading fulfilling and meaningful lives outside of traditional domestic roles. (Marcus, 1978, p. 11)

Furthermore, Plath's work explores the ways in which women are often silenced and marginalized by patriarchal power structures. Her poetry often expresses a sense of isolation and alienation, as well as a desire to be heard and recognized. This challenges the traditional notion that women's voices are less important or valuable than men's voices. Plath's writing can be seen as a form of

resistance against patriarchal oppression, as she uses her poetry to give voice to the experiences of women who are often marginalized and silenced. Sylvia Plath's work offers a powerful critique of traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Through her poetry and prose, she challenges the notion that women are passive, submissive, and confined to domestic roles. Instead, she presents them as complex, independent individuals with their own desires and aspirations. Plath's work continues to be relevant today, as it challenges harmful gender stereotypes and promotes a more inclusive and equitable society.

2. 2. Postmodern Feminism in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

Postmodern feminism, rooted in the postmodern and existentialist critique of the biases and inflexibilities of dualistic thinking, is characterized by its repudiation of a universal definition of woman. Postmodern feminists critique contemporary feminist philosophy due to their aversion to absolutist notions. As they do not regard philosophy as the quest for a transcendent truth, they lack interest in making assertions about the cosmos. A pervasive mistrust towards overarching narratives and assertions of truth characterizes postmodernism. Deconstructionists and ordinary language philosophers assert that there is no feasible method to ascertain the existence of an objective reality. Upon analyzing the circumstances that have historically impeded women and other marginalized groups, philosophical concepts such as the aforementioned inevitably arise. Notwithstanding their pessimism, these perspectives arise from a more extensive concern or critique of the theoretical assumptions underpinning "knowledge" and "truth" in Western culture. Feminism has been both reinvigorated and questioned in numerous theoretical and fictional works due to the discourse surrounding belief, knowledge, identity, and subjectivity. In the twentieth century, poetry, art, sculpture, theater, music, and fiction significantly contributed to our understanding of individuals' struggles with themselves and their environment. The postmodern stage is when commercials, magazine advertisements, situational comedies, newspaper editorials, cereal packaging, and several other candidates are showcased. This extensive concern in representation and meaning provides feminists with new instruments to combat gender and power issues.

Margaret Atwood, a renowned Canadian author, was born in Ottawa, Ontario, in 1939. Her early life was shaped by her parents' academic pursuits and their frequent moves, which exposed her to a variety of cultures and experiences. Atwood's childhood was also marked by a deep love of nature and a fascination with storytelling. Atwood attended Victoria College, University of Toronto, where she studied English and studied under renowned literary figures such as Northrop Frye and Harold Bloom. During her time at university, she began to develop her writing skills and published her first collection of poems, *Double Persephone*, in 1961. After graduating from university, Atwood worked as a journalist and editor. She also continued to write poetry and fiction, publishing her first novel, *The Edible Woman*, in 1969. This novel explores themes of female identity, societal expectations, and the complexities of relationships. Atwood's career as a writer has been prolific and diverse. She has published numerous novels, short stories, poetry collections, and essays.

Atwood's writing often explores themes of dystopia, feminism, and environmentalism. Her novels are known for their complexity, their rich characters, and their ability to engage with contemporary social and political issues. Atwood has been praised for her innovative storytelling, her use of language, and her ability to create unforgettable worlds. In addition to her literary accomplishments, Atwood has also been an outspoken advocate for social and environmental justice. She has served as a patron of Amnesty International and has been involved in various environmental campaigns. Atwood has also been a vocal critic of Canadian government policies, particularly those related to the environment and indigenous peoples. Her work has been translated into numerous languages, and she has received numerous awards and honors, including the Man Booker International Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award. Atwood's contributions to literature and her commitment to social and environmental justice have earned her a place among the most important writers of our time.

A multitude of individuals contend that *The Handmaid's Tale* is fundamentally a postmodern creation. Notwithstanding its postmodern elements, the work possesses several classical traits. It embodies a genre that has traditionally concentrated on the disquieting facets of human existence. This study considers the

work fundamentally postmodern due to its innovative narrative techniques that deviate from the linear storytelling methods of psychological novels and realist literature. An exemplar of a hybrid novel that integrates classical elements while distinctly exhibiting a postmodern inclination is *The Handmaid's Tale*.

The intertextuality of postmodern literature is its most prominent characteristic. Numerous literary works, narratives, and historical accounts are employed in *The Handmaid's Tale* to analyze and reconstruct events for a novel examination. The frequent employment of flashbacks to analyze the perceived linearity of the narrative, together with intermittent footnotes, exemplifies this deconstructive characteristic. *The Handmaid's Tale* is a work of metafiction, exhibiting a keen awareness of its narrative status and occasionally seeking to undermine the reader's understanding by blending fiction with reality. The reader is convincingly led to believe that *The Handmaid's Tale* is grounded in reality. The novel analyzes gender and identity using diverse narrative styles. Readers are anticipated to exhibit greater complexity in their creative pursuits, rather than resorting to clichés for immediate, simplistic imagery. The characters and situations in the story pose challenges, fostering chances for reflection and exploration while striving to completely subvert readers' anticipations. A characteristic of postmodern literature is the shift from first-person to third-person storytelling, offering a broader range of perspectives. Diverse values within the hierarchy of significance are conveyed through varying verbal constructs, phrase patterns, and viewpoints on events. Transitioning from verbal expression to action and then to emotion is often cumbersome, typically manifested through internal monologue. This discomfort is deliberate. Due to these language alterations, readers may find the lack of cohesive internal processes distasteful and unattractive. It acts as a persistent reminder of the discrepancies between language and reality, as well as the fragmented nature of the depicted universe. Feminist issues such as the enslavement and objectification of women are effectively illuminated through the duality created by language and actions.

The Handmaid's Tale is replete with allusions and self-referential tactics characteristic of contemporary experimental postmodern literature, indicating a fascination with intertextuality and metafiction. Atwood seems to depend on critics'

preconceived notion that fiction inherently pertains to its own nature and the narrative construction process, neglecting the possible ramifications of endorsing this assumption. Consequently, the book seems somewhat outdated. *The Handmaid's Tale* is both derived from and enhances the articulation of certain dominant tendencies in Western literature. Intertextuality, unlike just citing historical events or cultural symbols, involves a connection with other literary works, encompassing implied or unarticulated meanings and identities, as exemplified by Atwood in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The work contains numerous references to and echoes of South American magical realism and *The Scarlet Letter*. Atwood asserts that employing a literary allusion or cognate serves to signify and amplify a shared experience between the author and the reader—the literary experience. The work is seen as contributing to a vast literary tradition or discourse. Moreover, an additional concern emerges from this plethora of references: *The Handmaid's Tale* is seen as equally concerned with other narratives as it is with the depiction of women, and it encompasses more than merely the construction of the future. Consequently, intertextuality seems to serve as an augmentation of feminist representation rather than an independent method.

The novel is perceived as a reflection of other women's films, literature, and essays, so situating it within feminist history rather than offering a distinct or feminist viewpoint. Atwood illustrates a society characterized by overt female subordination and juxtaposes it with authors who have criticized the portrayal of women and the lack of authentic female experiences in male narratives, yet she fails to provide a substantial critique of male-dominant discourses. *The Handmaid's Tale* ought to emphasize feminist principles. *The Handmaid's Tale* subverts traditional gender concepts by illustrating the biologization of women in Gilead and diminishing their identities to their reproductive functions. Offred and the other handmaids are perceived as asexual and lacking separate bodily life, as they are solely reproductive entities. The narrative showcases multiple sequences confined to the home, the conventional sphere of women. The Gilead regime designates a specific role for women in society while also regulating the internal domain of the female body. The adherents of the "true faith" assert that women can be categorized into four distinct roles: handmaid, wife, prostitute, and temptress. These roles are imposed by males

and a masculine perspective; they are not simply narrative positions that women can assume. The handmaids do not seek liberation, even though feminism has enlightened women about their oppression; such an attitude would be seen inappropriate for a woman to embrace. Furthermore, the 'jezebel' or prostitute removes sexual choice from its setting. Women possess the autonomy to make choices; but, the downward-facing symbol constrains their options. A system focused on female identity, autonomy, and sexuality is upheld through the mechanisms of heterosexuality and marital constraints. The notion that a woman's body is her own property is a concept that many males are reluctant to concede. Nonetheless, male ideology also influences the men within this culture. Gilead is indeed a "old boys' club," characterized by male dominance in positions of control and decision-making. The roles of the guy as a parent and as a rapist, seducer, or tempter are not central themes in the narrative.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, men are depicted as the regime's enforcers, integral components of a system that unceasingly implements Gileadean regulations. Empowered by total authority, misogynistic men eschew responsibilities like as parenting and childcare, exemplified by Gilead's disintegration of institutions like the family and church. It also depicts men as fearful of women who reject their predetermined roles. Nonetheless, the notion that Gileadean males are victims of a patriarchal system has faced challenged. They argue that by framing the men's reactions as misguided normalcy, the narrative circumvents confronting the system in which they exist. The Gileadean community's portrayal contests prevailing gender conventions and values, with the violent relationships that provide their biographical foundation, while also highlighting the detrimental effects of patriarchy's triumph. Gender identity issues are emphasized in other subsequent publications by the deliberate manipulation of appearances, imagery, and the execution of quotidian bodily routines. The narratives offer platforms for examining the transition to a "gendered" framework and the contentious embrace of the concept of sexual "intrinsicity." The women in *The Handmaid's Tale* exist in a realm that is both realistic and linked to "convenient" fantasy. Ultimately, the text compels us to reevaluate and reinterpret approaches to dismantling traditional dualities by emphasizing the inescapable presence of the ordinariness and inherent nature of

sexual difference. *The Handmaid's Tale* fundamentally embodies feminist themes. Moreover, it not only became an instant classic but also solidified Atwood's status as a seminal figure in the feminist literary canon. Atwood is among the few authors who has been equally critical of the proliferation of feminist publications, periodicals, and bookstores. The term "intersectionality" was essential in discussions of feminist issues as it emphasized the differences among feminists. Atwood further illustrated the distinctions of gender, ethnicity, and class within a single individual. This was the inaugural instance in which the issue transcended mere skin tone. Atwood's Gilead illustrates that the realities of oppressed individuals cannot be homogenized, irrespective of their position within the hierarchy of oppression. A key issue of feminist criticism and debate has been and continues to be the significant challenge of reproductive adaptation.

In the book, Margaret Atwood critiques the patriarchal and restrictive political and judicial structures that men have imposed on women due to their dominance. Through this approach, Atwood illuminates the diverse aspects of patriarchal society for the reader. Atwood effectively critiques not only the male subjugation of women but also, through subsequent theoretical developments, the oppression of women from other indigenous cultures and denominations by contextualizing varied expressions of dominance within a singular patriarchal framework. The work explores the interplay between women's bodily duties, like as childbirth, and their cultural context inside Gilead's totalitarian, patriarchal society. The contemporary civilization in which readers reside has been transformed by zealous religious extremists. The tale is presented from the first-person perspective of an oppressed socialist recuperating from bulimia in Serena Joy's residence, detailing her new life as a victim of capitalism and patriarchy. Conventional values have returned. New modalities of consumption have arisen, alongside the sexual assault and disfigurement of women. Among all entities, including the lesser-known graphic artist of color working for a prominent environmentally-conscious corporation, who is the architect of the fictitious force attributed to the women's "hymen."

The Handmaid's Tale not only depicts women collectively but also serves as a groundbreaking illustration of the diverse experiences of oppression they endure, as

well as their potential to reclaim agency across all categories, including race and class identities. The other women in the text, including Offred, Serena Joy, and the Aunts, are depicted as role models who confront ambiguous potential storylines that illustrate the symbols of diverse forms of societal oppression. This underscores that various readers will interpret distinct characters in diverse manners. According to literary studies over time, the Marthas, econowives, Jezebels, and Aunts in Atwood's world are reinterpreted from diverse stereotypes into symbols of resistance against patriarchal norms. Simultaneously, recognizing these familiar patterns indicates their genuine oppressors and the extent of their repressive power. The novel concludes that a transformative paradigm of feminism, capable of effecting lasting change, has yet to emerge, as feminist discourses remain fragmented along racial, socioeconomic, ideological, and collective philosophical lines. Atwood asserts that feminism must transcend a generalized, flawed discourse that often marginalizes competing or conflicting perspectives to uphold an idealized conception of what the "common woman" should embody and aspire to.

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is a dystopian novel that offers a powerful critique of patriarchal power structures and the ways in which women are oppressed and marginalized. Through its exploration of themes such as reproductive rights, female autonomy, and the dangers of totalitarian regimes, the novel can be interpreted as a postmodern feminist text. One of the ways in which "The Handmaid's Tale" can be seen as a postmodern feminist text is through its critique of essentialism. The novel challenges the idea that women are defined solely by their reproductive abilities and their role as mothers. Instead, it presents a complex and nuanced portrayal of female identity, highlighting the ways in which women are subjected to patriarchal control and surveillance.

Another postmodern feminist theme in *The Handmaid's Tale* is the exploration of fragmented subjectivity. The novel's narrator, Offred, is a woman who has been stripped of her identity and forced to become a reproductive slave. Her fragmented narrative reflects her own sense of confusion and disorientation, as well as the ways in which her identity has been erased by the totalitarian regime. Furthermore, "The Handmaid's Tale" can be seen as a critique of the medicalization of female bodies. The novel's depiction of the Gilead regime's control over women's

reproductive functions highlights the ways in which women's bodies can be objectified and exploited for political and social purposes. (Chesler, 1972, p. 236). The novel also offers a powerful critique of the dangers of totalitarian regimes. By portraying a dystopian future in which women are stripped of their rights and freedoms, Atwood warns of the potential consequences of unchecked government power. This critique is particularly relevant in today's world, as democratic societies continue to face threats from authoritarian regimes.

The Handmaid's Tale offers a powerful critique of patriarchal power structures and the ways in which women are oppressed and marginalized. Through its exploration of themes such as dystopian societies, female oppression, and reproductive rights, the novel warns of the dangers of unchecked government power and the potential consequences of gender inequality. One of the ways in which *The Handmaid's Tale* explores dystopian societies is through its portrayal of Gilead, a totalitarian regime that has overthrown the United States government. Gilead is a patriarchal society that is based on religious fundamentalism and the control of women's bodies. The novel's depiction of Gilead is a warning of the dangers of authoritarianism and the potential for societies to regress towards oppressive and repressive systems.

The novel also offers a scathing critique of female oppression in Gilead. Women in Gilead are stripped of their rights and freedoms, and they are subjected to a system of surveillance and control that is designed to maintain their subservience. Women are divided into different castes based on their reproductive abilities, with fertile women, known as Handmaids, being forced into sexual servitude to produce children for the ruling elite. *The Handmaid's Tale* also explores the ways in which women's reproductive rights are violated in Gilead. The regime's control over women's bodies is a central theme of the novel, as women are forced to bear children for the ruling elite and are denied the right to make their own reproductive choices. This exploration of reproductive rights is particularly relevant in today's world, as women continue to face challenges in accessing reproductive healthcare and making their own reproductive decisions. The novel's exploration of dystopian societies, female oppression, and reproductive rights is not only relevant to the context of Gilead but also to contemporary society. By warning of the dangers of unchecked

government power and the potential consequences of gender inequality, *The Handmaid's Tale* encourages readers to be vigilant and to work towards creating a more just and equitable society.

The Handmaid's Tale offers a scathing critique of patriarchal power structures and the ways in which women are oppressed and marginalized. Through its exploration of themes such as reproductive rights, female autonomy, and the dangers of totalitarian regimes, the novel challenges traditional gender roles and stereotypes. One of the ways in which Atwood critiques patriarchal power structures is through her portrayal of the Gilead regime. Gilead is a totalitarian state that is based on religious fundamentalism and the control of women's bodies. The regime's power is maintained through fear, surveillance, and the suppression of dissent. Atwood's depiction of Gilead serves as a warning of the dangers of unchecked government power and the potential for societies to regress towards oppressive and repressive systems. In Gilead, women are subjected to a system of surveillance and control that is designed to maintain their subservience. They are denied the right to work, own property, or make their own decisions. This portrayal of patriarchal power structures highlights the ways in which women's lives are shaped and limited by societal norms and values. (Butler, 1990, p. 48). Furthermore, *The Handmaid's Tale* challenges traditional gender roles by presenting a dystopian future in which women are stripped of their rights and freedoms. The novel's portrayal of women as reproductive slaves and objects of sexual desire subverts traditional notions of femininity and masculinity. By challenging these traditional gender roles, Atwood suggests that gender is a social construct that can be manipulated and controlled by powerful individuals and institutions. (Haraway, 1991, p. 43)

The novel also explores the ways in which patriarchal power structures can be internalized and reproduced within women themselves. Offred, the protagonist of the novel, struggles with her own internalized misogyny and her desire to conform to the expectations of the Gilead regime. This portrayal of internalized oppression highlights the ways in which women can be complicit in their own subjugation. (Chesler, 1972, p. 86). Through its exploration of themes such as reproductive rights, female autonomy, and the dangers of totalitarian regimes, the novel challenges traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Atwood's work serves as a warning of the

potential consequences of unchecked government power and the importance of fighting for gender equality and social justice.

In summary, *The Handmaid's Tale* lays the groundwork for a theory of literary politics and production that acknowledges the moral obligations of the individual, the difficulties in asserting a universal claim on her behalf, and the dangers of employing her to illuminate material conflicts. Atwood underscores the dangers of literary representational approaches that may inadvertently substitute for particular modern issues, so obscuring current political demands while simultaneously reiterating them. Through this action, Atwood positions herself in stark contradiction to the competing perspectives of masculinism inherent in post-modern pluralism. Her novels unequivocally challenge the prevailing humanities perspective on women and civilizations. In our succinct memoir discussion, they contest post-modernist relativism and artistically intricate oppositions to assertions by articulating the moral and aesthetic dilemmas of any claims from an opposing perspective.

2. 3. Comparison of the Novels

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* are both significant works of postmodern feminist literature that offer powerful critiques of patriarchal society and its impact on women's lives. While these novels share many similarities, they also differ in their approaches to exploring issues of postmodern feminism. Both novels challenge traditional notions of gender and identity. Both novels present complex and multifaceted female protagonists who struggle to reconcile their own desires with the expectations placed on them by society. However, the ways in which these novels explore these themes differ significantly. *The Bell Jar* focuses on the individual experience of a young woman struggling with mental illness and societal expectations. Esther Greenwood's narrative is fragmented and disjointed, reflecting her own sense of confusion and disorientation. This exploration of fragmented subjectivity is a key theme in postmodern feminist literature, as it challenges the traditional notion of a unified, coherent self. (Showalter, 1977, p. 11). In contrast, *The Handmaid's Tale* is set in a dystopian future and explores the ways in which women are oppressed and

marginalized by a totalitarian regime. The novel's focus is on the collective experience of women in a patriarchal society, rather than on the individual experiences of a single protagonist. This exploration of collective oppression is another important theme in postmodern feminist literature, as it highlights the ways in which women's experiences are shaped by broader social and political structures. (Butler, 1990, p. 3)

Both novels also explore the ways in which women's bodies are objectified and controlled by patriarchal power structures. In *The Bell Jar*, Esther's experiences with dieting and beauty standards reflect the ways in which women are pressured to conform to unrealistic ideals of femininity. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, "women's bodies are literally controlled by the state, as they are forced to bear children for the ruling elite. This exploration of the medicalization of female bodies is a common theme in postmodern feminist literature, as it highlights the ways in which women's health and well-being are subordinated to patriarchal interests.

While both novels share many similarities, they also differ in their approaches to exploring issues of postmodern feminism. *The Bell Jar* focuses on the individual experience of a young woman struggling with mental illness and societal expectations, while *The Handmaid's Tale* explores the collective experience of women in a patriarchal society. Both novels offer powerful critiques of patriarchal power structures and the ways in which women are oppressed and marginalized. Both are significant works of postmodern feminist literature that offer powerful critiques of patriarchal society and its impact on women's lives. While these novels share many similarities, they also differ in their approaches to exploring issues of postmodern feminism, including the portrayal of female subjectivity, mental illness, societal expectations, and patriarchal power structures.

Female Subjectivity: Both novels explore the ways in which women's identities are shaped and limited by societal expectations. However, they do so in distinct ways. Both novels delve into the complexities of female subjectivity, exploring the ways in which women's identities are shaped and limited by societal expectations. However, they do so in distinct ways, reflecting the different historical and cultural contexts in which they were written.

The Bell Jar focuses on the individual experience of Esther Greenwood, a young woman struggling with mental illness and societal expectations in 1950s America. Esther's narrative is fragmented and disjointed, reflecting her own sense of confusion and disorientation. This exploration of fragmented subjectivity is a key theme in postmodern feminist literature, as it challenges the traditional notion of a unified, coherent self. (Showalter, 1977, P. 261). Esther's struggle to find a sense of self and purpose is central to the novel, as she grapples with the conflicting desires and expectations placed upon her. Her experiences highlight the ways in which women's identities can be constrained by societal pressures, cultural norms, and personal traumas. In contrast, *The Handmaid's Tale* is set in a dystopian future and explores the collective experience of women in a totalitarian regime. The novel's focus is on the ways in which women are oppressed and marginalized by a patriarchal power structure. The Handmaids, a group of women forced into sexual servitude, are stripped of their individual identities and reduced to mere reproductive vessels. This exploration of collective oppression is another important theme in postmodern feminist literature, as it highlights the ways in which women's experiences are shaped by broader social and political structures. (Butler, 1990, P. 203).

Both novels challenge traditional notions of femininity, which often portray women as passive, submissive, and confined to domestic roles. Instead, they present women as complex and multifaceted individuals with their own desires, aspirations, and agency. However, they do so in different ways. *The Bell Jar* focuses on the individual experience of a woman struggling to find her place in a patriarchal society, while *The Handmaid's Tale* explores the collective experience of women who are systematically oppressed by a totalitarian regime. In conclusion, both novels offer powerful explorations of female subjectivity, challenging traditional notions of femininity and identity. Through their distinct approaches, these novels provide valuable insights into the ways in which women's experiences are shaped by societal expectations, cultural norms, and political power structures.

Both novels also explore the ways in which mental illness can be a consequence of societal pressures and patriarchal oppression. However, they do so in distinct ways, reflecting the different historical and cultural contexts in which they

were written. In *The Bell Jar*, Esther Greenwood's mental health struggles are exacerbated by her experiences with sexism and discrimination. Her descent into mental illness is triggered by her experiences of sexual assault, societal expectations, and the pressure to conform to traditional gender roles. This highlights the ways in which women's mental health can be negatively impacted by patriarchal power structures and societal norms. In contrast, *The Handmaid's Tale* explores the collective experience of mental illness among women in a totalitarian regime. The women of Gilead are subjected to a system of surveillance and control that is designed to maintain their subservience. This can lead to feelings of hopelessness, despair, and even madness. The novel suggests that the oppressive conditions in Gilead contribute to the mental health struggles of the women who live there. Both novels challenge the stigma associated with mental illness and highlight the importance of seeking help. By portraying mental illness as a valid and understandable human experience, these novels contribute to a more compassionate and understanding society. However, they also emphasize the ways in which mental illness can be exacerbated by societal pressures and patriarchal oppression.

Both novels offer powerful critiques of the ways in which women are expected to conform to traditional gender roles and stereotypes. These novels challenge the notion that women are inherently passive, submissive, and confined to domestic roles. Instead, they present women as complex individuals with their own desires, aspirations, and agency. In *The Bell Jar*, Esther Greenwood is pressured to conform to the expectations of a good wife and mother. She is expected to marry, have children, and lead a traditional domestic life. However, Esther struggles to conform to these expectations, and her rebellion against societal norms leads to her descent into mental illness. This highlights the ways in which traditional gender roles can be oppressive and harmful to women. In contrast, *The Handmaid's Tale* portrays a dystopian future in which women are forced to become reproductive slaves. The Gilead regime has stripped women of their rights and freedoms, reducing them to mere objects for the reproduction of the ruling elite. This extreme form of female oppression highlights the dangers of unchecked patriarchal power and the ways in which women can be systematically exploited and controlled.

Both novels challenge the idea that women are defined solely by their

reproductive roles. In *The Bell Jar*, Esther's pursuit of a career as a writer challenges the expectation that women should primarily focus on domestic duties. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the women of Gilead resist the regime's attempts to control their bodies and minds, forming underground resistance movements to challenge the patriarchal power structure. These novels also explore the ways in which societal expectations can be internalized by women themselves. In *The Bell Jar*, Esther's self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy are rooted in her internalization of patriarchal norms and values. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the women of Gilead are subjected to a system of indoctrination that is designed to convince them of the legitimacy of the regime's oppressive ideology. These novels challenge these expectations and suggest that women should be free to pursue their own desires and aspirations. By doing so, they contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society.

Both novels offer powerful critiques of the ways in which patriarchal power structures can be oppressive and harmful to women. These novels explore the ways in which societal norms, values, and institutions reinforce gender inequality and limit women's opportunities. In *The Bell Jar*, Esther Greenwood's experiences with sexism and discrimination reflect the ways in which patriarchal power structures can constrain women's choices and limit their aspirations. Esther is expected to conform to traditional gender roles, such as being a good wife and mother, and she is discouraged from pursuing a career. These societal expectations are rooted in the patriarchal norms and values of her time, which privilege men and marginalize women. (Butler, 1990, p. 51). *The Handmaid's Tale* offers an even more extreme example of patriarchal power structures. The Gilead regime is a totalitarian state that is based on religious fundamentalism and the control of women's bodies. The regime's power is maintained through fear, surveillance, and the suppression of dissent. Women in Gilead are subjected to a system of control that is designed to maintain their subservience and ensure the reproduction of the ruling elite. This extreme form of patriarchal oppression highlights the dangers of unchecked government power and the potential for societies to regress towards oppressive and repressive systems. Both novels challenge the notion that women are inherently inferior to men and that they should be confined to traditional gender roles. Instead, they present women as complex individuals with their own desires, aspirations, and

agency. By critiquing patriarchal power structures, these novels contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society.

Both novels offer complex and nuanced explorations of female subjectivity, challenging traditional notions of femininity and identity. Through their fragmented narratives, these novels highlight the ways in which women's identities can be fractured and disoriented by societal pressures, patriarchal power structures, and personal experiences. In *The Bell Jar*, Esther Greenwood's narrative is disjointed and fragmented, reflecting her own sense of confusion and disorientation. Esther's struggle to find a sense of self and purpose is central to the novel, as she grapples with conflicting desires and expectations placed upon her. Her fragmented narrative reflects the ways in which her identity is shaped and limited by societal pressures, mental illness, and her own internalized misogyny. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the Handmaids' experiences of oppression, isolation, and loss of identity highlight the ways in which women can be dehumanized and objectified by patriarchal power structures. The Gilead regime's control over women's bodies and minds erases their individual identities, reducing them to mere reproductive vessels. This exploration of collective oppression challenges the traditional notion of a unified, coherent self, as it suggests that women's identities can be shaped and limited by broader social and political structures. Both novels contribute to the broader discourse of postmodern feminism by challenging the idea of a fixed, essential self and emphasizing the fluidity and instability of identity. They suggest that women's identities are shaped by a variety of factors, including societal expectations, personal experiences, and historical and cultural contexts. By exploring the complexities of female subjectivity, these novels offer a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of gender and identity.

Both novels offer powerful critiques of essentialism, the idea that women share a common essence or nature based on their biological sex. These novels challenge the notion that women are inherently passive, submissive, and confined to domestic roles. Instead, they present women as diverse individuals with complex and multifaceted identities. *The Bell Jar* explores the ways in which women's identities can be shaped and limited by societal expectations. Esther Greenwood's experiences defy traditional gender roles and expectations, as she struggles to find her place in a

patriarchal society. This challenges the essentialist view of women as naturally submissive and domestic. (Showalter, 1977, p. 85). *The Handmaid's Tale* also critiques essentialism by presenting a dystopian future in which women are forced to conform to a narrow and restrictive definition of femininity. The Handmaids are reduced to mere reproductive vessels, stripped of their individual identities and forced to serve the patriarchal regime. This exploration of the ways in which women can be dehumanized and objectified challenges the idea that women share a common essence based on their biological sex. By challenging essentialism, both novels contribute to the broader discourse of postmodern feminism. They suggest that gender is a social construct that is shaped by cultural, historical, and political factors. This challenges the idea that women are defined solely by their reproductive roles and rejects the notion of a universal female experience.

Both novels offer powerful critiques of traditional notions of gender and identity, which are often based on binary oppositions such as male and female, public and private, and reason and emotion. These novels challenge the idea that gender is a fixed and essential category, instead suggesting that it is a fluid and socially constructed concept. In *The Bell Jar*, Esther Greenwood's experiences with sexism and discrimination highlight the ways in which women are expected to conform to traditional gender roles and stereotypes. She is pressured to be a good wife and mother, and she is discouraged from pursuing a career. This challenges the notion that women are naturally suited to domestic roles and that they should not aspire to greater things. *The Handmaid's Tale* presents an even more extreme example of the ways in which women are subjugated to patriarchal power structures. In the dystopian world of Gilead, women are completely stripped of their rights and freedoms, and they are forced to conform to a narrow and restrictive definition of femininity. This challenges the idea that women are inherently passive and submissive, and it suggests that gender roles are socially constructed and can be manipulated for political and social purposes. By challenging these traditional notions of gender and identity, both novels contribute to the broader discourse of postmodern feminism. They suggest that gender is not a fixed and essential category, but rather a fluid and socially constructed concept that is shaped by cultural, historical, and political factors. This challenges the idea that there are natural

differences between men and women and suggests that gender roles are not fixed and immutable.

Both novels explore the ways in which gender intersects with other social categories, such as race, class, and sexuality. This intersectionality is a key theme in postmodern feminist literature, as it highlights the ways in which women's experiences are shaped by multiple factors. (hooks, 1984; Mohanty, 1988; Spivak, 1988). In *The Bell Jar*, Esther Greenwood's experiences are shaped by her class and her relationship with her mother. As a middle-class white woman, Esther is privileged in some ways, but she is also constrained by societal expectations and the pressure to conform to traditional gender roles. Her relationship with her mother is a complex and fraught one, and it contributes to her feelings of isolation and alienation. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the women of Gilead are further marginalized based on their race and social status. The Handmaids, who are forced into sexual servitude, are primarily women of color from the lower classes. This highlights the ways in which women's experiences can be shaped by both gender and race. By exploring the ways in which gender intersects with other social categories, both novels contribute to the broader discourse of postmodern feminism. They suggest that women's experiences are not determined solely by their gender, but also by factors such as race, class, and sexuality. This recognition of the importance of intersectionality is essential for understanding the complexities of women's lives and for developing effective strategies for achieving gender equality.

Both novels utilize dystopian settings to explore the potential consequences of unchecked patriarchal power. While *The Handmaid's Tale* presents a more overt and explicit dystopian vision, *The Bell Jar* also hints at the possibility of a dystopian future. *The Handmaid's Tale* paints a chilling picture of a totalitarian regime that has overthrown the United States government and established a patriarchal theocracy. In this dystopian world, women are stripped of their rights and freedoms, and they are subjected to a system of surveillance and control that is designed to maintain their subservience. The novel's portrayal of Gilead serves as a warning of the dangers of authoritarianism and the potential for societies to regress towards oppressive and repressive systems. *The Bell Jar* also hints at the possibility of a dystopian future. Esther Greenwood's descent into mental illness and her increasing sense of alienation

from the world around her suggest that she may be slipping into a state of madness. This exploration of the potential for individual and societal breakdown can be interpreted as a warning of the dangers of unchecked patriarchal power and the ways in which societal pressures can contribute to mental health struggles. By exploring dystopian futures, both novels contribute to the broader discourse of postmodern feminism. They serve as cautionary tales about the potential consequences of unchecked patriarchal power and the importance of fighting for gender equality. These novels also highlight the ways in which women's experiences can be shaped by broader social and political structures, and they emphasize the need for individuals to resist oppressive systems and work towards creating a more just and equitable society.

CONCLUSION AND PROPOSALS

Postmodern feminism has emerged as a worldview influenced by the advancements of feminist movements in North America and Europe, alongside movements such as Womanism and Black feminism. Its theoretical roots encompass other social theories such as poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction, with preceding feminist scholarship and concepts. Postmodern feminism's endeavor can be contextualized both historically and philosophically within the shift towards postmodern philosophy and epistemology. Feminist academics, employing varied methodologies from multiple disciplines, agree that it is essential to consider the contextual factors of women's lives while examining their circumstances. This signifies that although these scholars recognize the distinctions among women, they also perceive the commonality of oppression and experience shared by everyone.

Postmodern feminism provides an alternative to both early theoretical studies on gender and traditional feminist concepts by examining disparities and their underlying causes. Furthermore, postmodern feminists dismiss the notion that gender or difference possesses any absolute significance and investigate how distinctions are formed, along with the relationship between gender and meaning. Gender identity is intricate and fluid, encompassing several interpretations. Postmodern feminism perceives women, men, lesbians, gays, Black individuals, White individuals, the working class, and other groups as deficient in integrity and authenticity. Nonetheless, the primary interests of scholars in this area are identity and women's issues.

The fundamental concepts of postmodern feminism revolve around deconstruction. Texts are seen not to be objective stores of meaning; rather, they are performatively and unconsciously influenced by the ideologies and power structures that produce them. The foundational ideology and norms of a discourse may be equally critiqued. Analyzing ideology may uncover elements deemed unjust or attributable to dominant gender roles. Propaganda asserts that women and men possess a specific essence, which is, however, constructed and indeterminate. The notion that specific activities are linked to femininity and masculinity is a form of propaganda. Postmodern feminism highlights the problem of rigid gender identities.

Individuals lack a universal, immutable, and intrinsic gender identity; rather, we exhibit gendered performances and behaviors.

Due to gender performativity, both masculinity and femininity experience perpetual anxiety. Rather than affirming that women vary from males, which results in optimal behaviors, feminists should examine the uniqueness and diversity of women. This unites businesses, women's organizations, and individual women. The viewpoint that recognizes women's fluidity, adaptability, and multiplicity, together with the distinctions among their individualities, is exclusively feminine. Highlighting the differences among women undermines the notion of a singular "women's movement" and permits each individual to embrace her distinctiveness and individuality, provided her perspective is acknowledged. Postmodern feminism asserts that women are both the subject of the body, specifically feminine, and a somatological gender. This exposes anti-essentialized women rather than all women. Multiplicity seems to be a dependable metric for this exposure. Many women embody several femininities and present various representations of deindividuated bodies, rendering feminism unexpectedly intricate and difficult to comprehend. Deconstruction has theoretically exerted a considerable influence on the humanities in recent decades. Moreover, it has been essential in influencing postmodern feminism. By interrogating the unequivocal relationships between words and their referents, deconstruction reveals the assumptions regarding gender, identity, and reality that underpin traditional feminist discourse. The term "deconstruction," which has a long history, denotes a philosophical stance initially formulated in Europe around the eighteenth century. The fundamental premise of deconstruction is that language is not impartial; instead, it is imbued with power.

The patriarchal supremacy inherent in the Western symbolic framework has imbued masculinity and reason with favorable connotations, while relegating femininity, feminine identity, and irrationality to negative associations. The categories women, woman, man, and man are politically contentious and evolve over time, influenced by the historical specificities of age, culture, power, knowledge, class, race, and ethnicity. The opposition between construction and deconstruction as a method of inquiry underpins the characteristics advocated by deconstruction pioneers, including "undecidability," "différance," and "aporia." Earlier feminist

universalisms are clearly reexamined and reinterpreted through the lenses of ambiguity, uncertainty, and instability. A multitude of postmodern feminists examine female bodies, sexuality, and male empowerment, emphasizing the fluid and evolving nature of gender identity. Deconstruction enables the analysis of women's lived experiences in connection to dominant cultural and political ideologies that oppress them. If thought relies on the contentious premise of "the intensity of absolute power," then post-structural feminists have situated their analysis of patriarchal power's intensity beyond the scope of conventional political theory. Instead of being the catalyst for her inclinations or decisions, the female subject becomes a result of patriarchal ideological discourse. The concept of 'agency' as articulated by feminist deconstructive theory is expansive and unclear; it does not depict women as 'asserting control' over their liberation goals; instead, it denotes the 'interstices' of negotiation with the dominant masculinist culture.

The fundamental principle of postmodern feminism, intersectionality, asserts that women's experiences are not monolithic but are shaped by several, simultaneous identity factors. Race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability are exemplars of these identities. This approach is based on the premise that addressing gender in isolation is inadequate; additional intersecting identity elements must also be considered. According to the intersectionality thesis, feminist theorists must consider a multitude of identities, circumstances, and experiences when addressing social change, as oppression is not a singular phenomenon. The diverse "ways of being" in our world, including acts of embodiment, are intricately connected to intersectionality. Postmodern feminism has traditionally contested feminist theories that concentrate on a singular archetype of woman or a sole determinant of gender inequality. Many individuals have accused women of the second wave of feminism for embracing a form of biological determinism and adopting a perspective solely reflective of affluent women. Postmodern feminists assert that gender constitutes a significant nexus of oppression.

Postmodern feminists advocate for the repudiation of gender essentialism to comprehend gender as a potentiality rather than an intrinsic reality. The majority of feminists contend that socialization or nurture, rather than biology or nature, is the principal source of gender and the ensuing oppression. Postmodern feminists

embrace this as resolutely as historical feminists, as it was a fundamental attribute of the second wave. Gender theorists dispute the second-wave notion of the female body as an unproblematic foundation for freedom, asserting that bodies are not value-neutral. It is essential to underscore that intersectionality is not merely a theoretical construct but is actively implemented in both activism and scholarly pursuits. It has been employed to promote the involvement of traditionally marginalized identity contexts.

In a society where gender dualisms remain deeply ingrained, Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* offers compelling insights into the manifestation of the self. It employs complex and subtle postmodern theories to address the distinct challenges encountered by women. A psychological condition that society is reluctant to confront underlies the examination of the already fragmented self. The outcome is a novel speech that articulates the experiences of lives typically marginalized, muted, or subordinated, and conveys a sense of otherness. The portrayal of complicated identity is enhanced by a discontinuous and fractured narrative structure, which is particularly distressing when that identity is restricted by societal norms that society overlooks. The pervasive although never entirely constricting network of societal prejudices subjugates women uniformly and significantly governs their lives.

Despite the psychoanalytic paradigm's significant oversight on femininity, the matter can no longer be regarded as inconsequential. The deconstruction of "woman" in *The Bell Jar* is characterized by recurrent requests for reevaluation and the complex social contexts associated with feminism. In contrast to a psychoanalytic approach, it offers a more enriching and less solely objectifying means of comprehension, despite the fact that these interpretations are ever evolving. Postmodern feminism incorporates intersectionality as a crucial element in understanding women's experiences. Comprehending this is essential, as the book's merit stems from both its thematic content and its portrayal of the complexities of feminine existence during moments of turmoil. However, the core concept remains unchanged: women's experiences are intricate and disjointed, and the reading style of *The Bell Jar* provides the book with a general comprehension rather than being confined just to the category of mental health. The work has significantly enriched both feminist literature and the ongoing, growing discussions that accompany it. For

any writer, student, literary theorist, or philosopher, interface development can be very important.

In an attempt to split time into discrete periods, frequently to concentrate on the present, contemporary feminists often avoid the feminist movements of the past. They not only construct a national narrative asserting that nearly all difficulties confronting women in the West have been resolved, but also dismiss the battles of first and second wave feminists as unworthy of consideration. This is a perilous disposition. The needs of women vary, and to effectuate positive change, we must employ the concept of "intersectionality." This theory posits that our identities—encompassing race, heritage, sexual orientation, and class—intersect and influence our experiences of privilege and oppression. Due to the pervasive influence of systemic racism and the construction of ligature, an immoral act perpetrated against a white woman differs fundamentally from the same act against a black woman within the context of patriarchy.

Intersectionality facilitates the exploration of the diverse elements constituting women's lives. The protagonists' many nationalities, socioeconomic statuses, and sexual orientations are examined thoroughly, revealing the intricate terrain of women's lived experiences that liberal feminists have mostly overlooked. We must first address discipline and eliminate the masculine lens from our feminist idols before we can begin to combat patriarchy and dismantle the barriers. All of these subplots compel us to analyze the female protagonist from an intersectional viewpoint. The emphasis of feminism has always been on both this and that, rather than solely on or. This essential lesson underscores the necessity for feminist researchers and activists to continually analyze, contextualize, and navigate the disenfranchising and distinct boundaries between these bodily politics, which exhibit significant similarities. Only then, despite our apparent objective of uniting women, can we progress, challenge, and surpass the often established and hazardous limits that separate us.

The Handmaid's Tale is seldom considered a postmodernist work, which is intriguing due to its importance in the analysis of women's literature and feminism. Atwood is safeguarded from post-structuralist and postmodernist interpretations by

the formalist variant of feminist criticism. Her involvement in a feminist movement fighting Canadian neo-conservatism further distances her from postmodernism and 'theory.' Margaret Atwood, after attaining significant literary recognition, was one of the first notable female authors of her generation to identify as a feminist and promote political activism.

The Handmaid's Tale is often considered a departure from Atwood's previous works due to its fable-like structure, bizarre content, and overtly didactic intensity. It addresses several societal concerns related to the oppression of women, critiques Eurocentrism, cultural opportunism, and xenophobia, examines violent trends within societies, denounces casual racism, and argues against the complacency associated with financial speculation. The novel is undoubtedly a part of fragmented literature, with other narratives either omitted or overlooked. The predominant narrative tactics employed by Atwood throughout that period are postmodern, or at the very least, current. This work can be viewed as a critique of mass movements, societal norms, and complacency. The narrator symbolizes a significant population of downtrodden individuals, who are shown in the book as victims of an exaggerated meat grinder. Feminist apprehensions on gender-based inequity are integrated into a quest for justice, which may be construed as physical liberation. Both the backlash and the avalanche are historical occurrences; no leader is impervious to feminists. Both Atwood and postmodern feminists endeavor to liberate the serf from his constraints, hence linking Atwood to the movement.

The Handmaid's Tale employs many narrative techniques that significantly enhance the book's exploration of oppression and resistance. Unlike realistic, conventional methods, the book employs a postmodern, non-linear storytelling style and presents its plot in the first person. Images and symbols that delve into topics such as the resilience of the past and the authenticity of personal resistance are prevalent in Offred's narrative. Through the utilization of unique language, imagery, and structure, these tactics both foster empathic engagement and create a sense of detachment for the reader. The amalgamation of Offred's characteristics with these narrative techniques unveils a deeper critique of social attitudes and mechanisms of oppression, especially concerning feminism and the subjugation of women. Offred's instability, sadness, and resistance reflect the ambiguity within feminism, prompting

the reader to contemplate their own identity and connection to power systems prior to forming a clear interpretation of feminism in regard to the struggles of oppressed individuals.

Literary analysts assert that *The Handmaid's Tale* employs a narrative technique that is individualized through Offred's personal experience. Offred articulates her thoughts and emotions, perhaps eliciting empathy from the reader. The first-person narrative diminishes her emotions using this technique. Moreover, readers may experience worry stemming from the peculiar and commonplace quality of certain emotions. Offred's adversities, isolation, and incapacity to differentiate between significant and trivial matters are profoundly affecting. Her emotions deter readers from adopting a formal, academic approach to the book, thereby prompting them to contemplate a narrative that is more rooted in reality and to analyze the influence of power dynamics.

This study analysis novels where gender and identity are prominent and recurring topics. From a postmodernist viewpoint, gender and identity are challenging to define and categorize due to their representations and processes being perpetually interpreted and reinterpreted by culture. Offred and Esther Greenwood exemplify the plight of their repressed gender, with the authors of each narrative extensively exploring gender construction within a patriarchal framework. The authors contested prevailing patriarchal and mundane assumptions, endeavoring to provide novel insights into the roles, identities, and opportunities afforded by society.

Esther undergoes many stages of internal conflict that hinder her from reconciling her historical background with her perspective, resulting in a personal identity crisis. Overall, her efforts to adhere to societal norms and integrate into a patriarchal structure are futile. Esther slowly recognizes that writing is her sole aspiration. Like Esther, Offred resists the harsh patriarchal regime established in her country. In a situation that contradicts reason, she likewise struggles to comprehend her existence. Both resisted the roles of the amiable, appealing, subservient wife and oblivious mother they felt obligated to assume. Offred embraced motherhood, unlike Esther, who repudiates the maternal paradigm in which she was raised. She complied with the instructions, notwithstanding her resentment towards her children. Her

subjugated history, which determined her expected identity, is the origin of her grievances. She endeavors and succeeds in resisting. However, when the subversive lacks alternative options, they will ultimately resort to the suppression of quiet. In certain respects, Offred's daughter's absence will similarly hinder her escape, like to Agnes's absence for Esther. There are too ambiguous alternatives. Despite facing analogous circumstances of coerced expectation, both characters pursue the reclamation of their agency through distinct methods.

In *The Bell Jar*, patriarchal systems and practices are reinforced by the societal framework of 1950s America. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, same behaviors are similarly enforced in the future by the militaristic totalitarian regime of Gilead. The presence of patriarchy shapes and dictates the lives, choices, and values of individuals within their communities and institutions, as demonstrated by both works. The patriarchal framework in *The Bell Jar* enforces rigid standards regarding mental and physical illness, exerting significant pressure, expectations, and moral consequences on individuals conforming to the feminine social 'ideal.' The patriarchy depicted in *The Handmaid's Tale* serves as an illustration of the ramifications of Christian Reconstructionism, wherein women are perceived as moral and mental 'adults' whose commitment to asserting control over their lives through bodily autonomy, as advocated in feminist discourse, is to be presumed.

Esther Greenwood, the protagonist in *The Bell Jar*, expresses a sentiment of being stuffed onto the wrong life. She is advised to pursue professional therapeutic intervention, encompassing institutionalization and both individual and group psychotherapy, due to her demoralized mental condition, pervasive distress, and significant anxiety regarding her future. These wellness practitioners can extract compartmentalized narratives, secrets, and feelings of distress under the pretense of caring for her psyche, ensuring her 'comfort,' and evaluating her as 'normal.' Various characters in the novel, including friends and medical and psychiatric professionals, express value judgments regarding Esther's sanity or mental health based on her ability to conform to and function within the patriarchal norms of a woman's 'role,' particularly concerning the social, financial, and economic status of the young men she dates. Their designation as "free" is compromised in both narratives by illustrating acts of "free will" that align with patriarchal beliefs. In England, date rape

is infrequently classified as rape unless accompanied by considerable violence and/or the employment of weapons. A significant number of individuals in America, and potentially in other nations, exhibit skepticism. Women receive prescriptions for sedatives and electroconvulsive treatment, occasionally resulting in Esther experiencing inward paralysis. Her unwillingness to partake in the cuisine constitutes an act of defiance. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the oppressed populace is visually constrained and silenced by limited sexuality, yet they intermittently exhibit symptoms of insurrection and fury. This engenders a profound sense of pessimism and fatalism, as both insurrections culminate in failure and reinforce patriarchal rule.

A crucial element pertains to language deconstruction, narrative constructs, and deviations in narrative threads. *The Bell Jar* employs a first-person narrative perspective of a patient experiencing a breakdown. It is a reflective soliloquy regarding Esther's confinement, sparked by the onset of a psychological collapse. As a schoolgirl, Esther's narrative pertains to her experiences, reflecting either her interactions with peers and society or, from a more paranoid perspective, their persecution of her. Both phrases reference the narrative of trauma, indicating a clear connection between the systems of schools and mental asylums. It is essential to dismiss the initial assumption that conflates stream of consciousness with first-person narrative as unfeasible. The only space present is an internal one, presumably an enclave or an afterlife symbolizing utopia. The compilation of life narratives, however, possesses a wholly unique framework. Despite individual contributions, it remains heteronomous and collaborative. The narrative predominantly revolves around the subjects of observation, while the tales are recounted by external voices, notably Gilead. This may be the inaugural teleological gesture that connects stated and intended narratives, thereby signifying the commencement of a shared, collective future. The location she desires to visit is recognizable. One perspective on the anthology of narratives is to see them as chronicles of aspiration and autonomy that may serve as corroborative material for a resistance movement. Furthermore, collecting the myriad life narratives of Gilead's women provides a narrative framework for strategic planning and fostering solidarity. A consciousness juxtaposes the narratives of existence with the essence of life. It produces teleology, rationale, and a sense of lament for the class-embodied entity. Conversely,

alternative narratives with varying assertions, temporal structures, and connections occupy an intermediary position. Narratives and chronicles engage and enthrall individuals. The objective is not to long for the past, however. To conclude its closure, it necessitates the formulation and narration of a new beginning that integrates the past to impact the present.

Both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Bell Jar* address themes of autonomy and psychological well-being. Social constraints and expectations profoundly affect the emotional states of Esther Greenwood and Offred. The societal institutions that both characters are expected to conform to lead them to become increasingly disenchanted. Initially in her narrative, Esther assimilates the gender conventions and societal expectations of her day, believing she must embody the helplessness and vulnerability of a naive child. Esther is progressively limited by the field, which often serves as an escape for the author, as she perceives such oppressive institutions as her sole options. Institutional gendered violence is not merely an abstract fear; it constitutes a tangible array of possibilities and expectations shaped by a society constrained by oppressive systems. One symptom of patriarchal oppression is the cultural attitude and disdain for women's mental health.

The Bell Jar examines the 1950s societal stigmatization of women experiencing mental illness. Esther's challenges with mental illness enhance our understanding of mental health within society. By dismissing the legitimacy of those negatively and potentially fatally affected by repressive systems and by denying them resources, she exemplifies the danger of perpetuating the status quo. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, set in a dystopian future America, mental anguish is pervasive. To sustain authority and control, the dictatorship that subjugates and impregnates Offred accomplishes this by "restraining" women. Both books attribute systemic societal issues to personal trauma, leading to a conflation of the two concepts. A postmodern feminist theory, asserting that political engagement is intricately linked to psychological labor, aligns with the sociostructural ramifications of these works. Women contend with the constrictive frameworks that shape their existence on both internal and external levels.

In conclusion, the two novels of this thesis illuminate the complexities of

women's lives, encompassing the experience of inhabiting our own bodies and the reality of being among marginalized individuals. Furthermore, the implicit storytelling technique illustrates how real experiences are muddled by discordant voices, rendering them both undervalued and ordinary. The two texts prompt readers to reevaluate their understanding of knowledge acquisition, to relinquish a constructionist epistemology, and to embrace alternative avenues being investigated by postmodern feminists through their analyses of the body and the individual constrained by structure. In conclusion, the texts prompt readers to contemplate deeper epistemic practices that prioritize decentering and the evaluation of knowledge. Both authors assert that the awareness of womanhood might suddenly become salient, reminding society of a complex and unpredictable entity that frequently engages in identity manipulation. Considering the growing corporeality of the textual body, my forthcoming research project may commence a reassessment of feminist literary analysis employing this approach. Epistemic chances exist to comprehend the restrictions on social formation and individuals, despite being confined to an identity imposed upon us rather than one of our choosing. This region is, in my view, prepared to challenge the current limitations imposed on identity discourse.

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