



The End of Me
The Female Voice of Depression in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's
"The Yellow Wallpaper," Jean Rhys' *Good Morning, Midnight* and
Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*

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Contents

Introduction	03
Biographies: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Jean Rhys and Sylvia Plath.....	03
Theoretical Approaches: Narrative Theory.....	08
Psychology.....	13
Feminism.....	16
The Organization.....	18
Chapter One:	
Finding a Voice: An Early Depiction of Depression in “The Yellow Wallpaper”	20
Why She Wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper”.....	20
Early Psychology: On Women and Madness.....	22
Previous Criticism: Women’s Position in Victorian American Culture.....	26
But What Is One to Do?: The Voice.....	31
Chapter Two:	
Depression as a Shield: The Voice of Depression in <i>Good Morning, Midnight</i>	39
Interwar Psychology and Risk Factors.....	39
Modernism in <i>Good Morning, Midnight</i>	41
Alcohol as a Cure.....	42
Previous Criticism: Some Points Worth Mentioning.....	44
Well, That Was the End of Me: The Voice.....	46
Chapter Three:	
Breaking Free: The Voice of Depression in <i>The Bell Jar</i>	60
Psychology and ECT.....	60
The Eisenhower Fifties and the Norm.....	63
Previous Criticism: Symbolism and a Desired Freedom.....	66
I Felt Very Still and Very Empty: The Voice.....	71
Conclusion	83
Bibliography	88

Introduction

This thesis explores the female voice of depression in three literary works: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," Jean Rhys' *Good Morning, Midnight* and Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*. I explore how these voices communicate their depression and what we may learn from listening to such voices. Furthermore, I look at the female voice of depression in these three texts and see how the points-of-view convey their protagonists' battle with depression and all which that entails, in relation to their own world, their families and society in general. This thesis, then, is a compare and contrast analysis of the three texts previously mentioned. By looking at these three texts in relation to one another, and by placing them all in social and historical context, I look at how depression has been narrated by these authors, and what these narrations can tell us about their protagonists' worlds, and consequently also our world. Furthermore, since depression in women at earlier times was seen as being a reaction to oppression, I also wish to explore how much of the depression experienced by these women can be seen as derived from external and/or internal factors, respectively. Nowadays, depression affects many people, and the majority of those are women. I borrow these women's voices to be able to say something about what these narratives tell us about the theme of depression, and how these voices explain some of the unexplainable. Much research and many texts have explored the relationship between women and madness, but very few have dealt explicitly with the female voice. I wanted to explore that aspect of a text, since it appears to be an important dimension, an important expression of depression and oppression. My argument, then, is that the female voice of depression is an important and valuable dimension in a text, and can tell us about the origins of depression, and what is important in a woman's life. A voice can in many ways be seen as an expression and an extension of the subject, of the myriads of emotions, expectations, hopes and fears that are inherent in an individual. By looking at these female voices of depression, I hope to give further life to these voices, and emphasize what they seem to try to voice.

Biographies: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Jean Rhys and Sylvia Plath

Charlotte Anna Perkins was born on July 3, 1860 in Hartford, Connecticut. The great-granddaughter of the famed religious leader Lyman Beecher, and grand-niece of the influential female Beecher rebels, Catharine Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Isabella

Beecher Hooker, Charlotte grew from a rich cultural heritage (Hill, 1980). Although Charlotte seemed to go through her early years with a great sense of confidence and self-awareness, she also suffered from bouts of insecurity, in addition to family strains that hurt, and would continue to hurt immensely. Her parents were separated, and Charlotte failed to accomplish a relationship with her absent and unsupportive father. In addition, her mother also kept an emotional distance between herself and her daughter in an attempt to prepare her for the difficulties of life. Consequently, Charlotte learned to cultivate a decidedly independent spirit which helped to mask her private pain (Knight and Tuttle, 2009).

From an early age Charlotte was steadfast in her determination to contribute something to humanity, and believed that “the first duty of a human being is to ... find your real job, and do it” (quoted in Knight and Tuttle, 2009:xvi). Thus she was torn between the life of work she had envisioned for herself and a life as the wife of Charles Walter Stetson. Although in absolute agony over this choice, she finally decided to marry in 1884. Following the birth of their daughter in 1885, Charlotte suffered a ‘nervous breakdown’ which led to her encounter with the rest cure. However, there seemed to be only one solution to the independent and ambitiously driven Charlotte; she suffered through a divorce necessitated by temporary ‘insanity’ and though she tried to keep her daughter with her, had to finally suffer through a painful separation from her daughter necessitated by an itinerant public career (Hill, 1980).

By the mid 1890s, when she herself was in her mid thirties, she began to experience some measure of success. She began to recover her health, although she did suffer from bouts of depression and loss of energy throughout her life. Furthermore, she renounced her ‘feminine’ responsibilities, and began to write and teach the views she had believed in all her life. In other words, Charlotte Perkins Gilman dedicated her life to work. She was a writer, a lecturer and a socialist reformer and her career was marked by a precipitous rise and a long decline, but Charlotte nevertheless continued to share her views (Knight and Tuttle, 2009). Charlotte continued to fight for what she believed in, even on her dying day:

When all usefulness is over, when one is assured unavoidable and imminent death, it is the simplest of human rights to choose a quick and easy death in place of a slow and horrible one.... Believing this open choice to be of social service in promoting wiser views on this question, I have preferred chloroform to cancer. (Knight and Tuttle, 2009:290)

On the evening of August 17, 1935, after having lived with breast cancer for three years, Charlotte Perkins Gilman died peacefully in her home after inhaling a lethal dose of chloroform (Knight and Tuttle, 2009).

Ella Gwendoline Rees Williams, later to be known as Jean Rhys, was born in Dominica on the 24th of August in 1890, to a Creole mother of Scottish and Irish descent, and to a Welsh doctor father. She lived in Dominica until the age of sixteen when she went to London, to attend the Perse School for Girls in Cambridge. In 1909 she completed two terms at the Academy of Dramatic Art, but after her father died she left school and became a chorus girl. After a while, in 1910, she met the first love of her life, Lancelot Hugh Smith, twenty years her senior. However, the affair only lasted a couple of years (Carr, 1996, and Angier, 1990).

Jean tried to sustain herself through a variety of unsatisfying jobs, until she met her first husband, Willem Johan Marie Lenglet, called John, a Dutch-French poet and journalist. She went to Holland to marry him in April of 1919, and from there they travelled to Paris. The young married couple had little money, and struggled to make ends meet. In January 1920 they suffered a great tragedy, their son William died at the age of three weeks, an event which haunted them for life (Carr, 1996, and Angier, 1990). Furthermore, this painful loss of a son shows up later in her work, as a theme in *Good Morning, Midnight*.

After the death of their child, they moved to Vienna, and experienced an improvement in their financial status, but sadly it was not to last, and the couple returned to Paris and faced the same economical hardship as before. In 1922 they had another child, a daughter named Maryvonne. Unfortunately, since Jean and John barely had enough money to keep themselves alive, they often had to leave Maryvonne at clinics or similar places in the care of others (Angier, 1990).

Jean had been writing all of her life, but it was not until 1924 that her literary and publishing career began. She was ‘discovered’ by Ford Maddox Ford, who encouraged her writing, and her first published story “Vienne” appeared in the *transatlantic review*, edited by Ford, in 1924. Furthermore, Jean entered into a turbulent affair with Ford, which consequently led to a painful break-up, and four novels, each one stemming from an affected party of the events. Jean’s point of view can be found in *Quartet*, published in Britain in 1928 (Carr, 1996, and Angier, 1990).

In 1927 Leslie Tilden Smith had become her literary agent, and *The Left Bank and Other Stories* was published in Britain and the US. By 1928, and the publishing of *Quartet*, Jean had moved to London and began living with Leslie. He also encouraged her writing, and

Jean began the most productive period of her life. *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* was published in Britain and the US in 1930 and 1931 respectively, and in 1934 *Voyage in the Dark* was first published. Jean and John Lenglet got divorced and Jean married Leslie in 1934 (Carr, 1996, and Angier, 1990).

Since Jean Rhys' writing was, perhaps, before its time, she was not awarded much success. She continued to write, however, throughout her second marriage, until the Second World War. *Good Morning, Midnight* was published in 1939, and was Jean Rhys last novel before she disappeared into oblivion, perhaps also because Leslie died in 1945, and one of her greatest supporters was gone. However, Jean found a third husband, Max Hamer. They started living together in 1946 and married in 1947. Alcohol had been a significant part of most of Jean's adult life, which caused problems within her marriages. However, sometimes alcohol also caused Jean problems with outsiders, consequently leading to problems with the law. Thus, Jean was forced to endure a few brief stays in prison, due to conflicts caused by her alcohol abuse (Angier, 1990).

In 1949 Jean had, although presumed dead, been 'rediscovered' by the actress Selma Vaz Dias through an advertisement in the *New Statesman*. The adaptation of *Good Morning, Midnight* into a radio play was broadcasted by the BBC in 1957, and Jean signed a contract with Andre Deutsch for the novel which was to become *Wide Sargasso Sea*. This new contract led to a lot more encouragement and friendship, encouragement Jean desperately needed, and after a lot of coaching the novel was published in 1966, the same year as Max Hamer died (Carr, 1996, and Angier, 1990).

Wide Sargasso Sea became vastly popular, and brought with it the fame, fortune and critical acclaim that Jean Rhys had always dreamed of. All of her previous novels were brought back from oblivion and reissued, which meant that for the first time in her life, Jean did not have to live in abject poverty. Other short stories were also published, and Jean began working on her autobiography *Smile Please*. It was never completely finished, however. Jean Rhys died in 1979, and *Smile Please* was published posthumously (Carr, 1996, and Angier, 1990).

Sylvia Plath was born in Boston on the 27th of October in 1932. She was the first child of Aurelia Schober, a first-generation American of Austrian descent, and Otto Emil Plath, a professor of Biology at Boston University, who grew up in Poland as the son of German parents and immigrated to the USA at the age of 16 (Bronfen, 2004). Throughout most of Sylvia's childhood her father was ill, which resulted in a stern and restraining upbringing. Convinced he suffered from cancer, Otto Plath refused to see a doctor before it was too late.

Diagnosed with diabetes towards the end, Otto suffered through an amputation of his leg and eventually died in 1940. The experience of her father's death in turn signified for Sylvia a traumatic disturbance of her childhood existence, and was a source of pain and inspiration (Alexander, 1991 and Bronfen, 2004).

Aurelia Plath moved her family to Wellesley, and from 1942 until 1950 Sylvia attended public schools there. Furthermore, she began writing poetry and short stories, which occasionally won her contests. In 1950 she won a scholarship granted to her by Mrs. Olive Higgins Prouty, and Sylvia began attending Smith College (Bronfen, 2004). Becoming one of two winners of the *Mademoiselle* fiction competition in 1952 with her story "Sunday at the Mintons," Sylvia was chosen to go to New York during the summer of 1953. She was to work as one of a select group of American college students as a *Mademoiselle* guest editor. Returning home after that experience she was exhausted, and failing to gain admittance to a summer writing class, she felt further bewilderment. Sylvia attempted suicide by taking an overdose of sleeping pills, but was discovered and hospitalized at the psychiatric clinic in Belmont, Massachusetts, and later McLean. Her experiences throughout that summer eventually became the inspiration for *The Bell Jar* (Alexander, 1991 and Bronfen, 2004).

After finishing college Sylvia went to Cambridge University, on a Fulbright fellowship. It was there that Sylvia met Ted Hughes, an aspiring poet in his own right, and married him on June the 16th in 1956. After finishing her studies, Sylvia and Ted returned to the USA in 1957 and Sylvia began working as a visiting professor at Smith College. She soon decided, however, that teaching took up too much time and that she would rather dedicate herself primarily to her own writing. In December of 1959 Sylvia and Ted returned to England and decided to make London their home (Bronfen, 2004).

The couple's first child, a daughter named Frieda Rebecca was born on April 1st 1960. Furthermore, Plath's first collection of poems was published that same year in England, *The Colossus and Other Poems*. Unfortunately, it did not bring with it the critical acclaim and attention that Sylvia had hoped for, and that she felt it deserved (Alexander, 1991 and Bronfen, 2004).

Their second child was born, a son named Nicholas Farrar, on the 17th of January 1962. However, the couple's marriage had been suffering for a while, and they separated in December. Sylvia moved back to London, into the apartment where W. B. Yeats had lived, hoping it would bring her strength and inspiration. However, a hard winter took its toll on Sylvia, who struggled with single motherhood, depression, and an urge to write. It was too much in the end. On the 11th of February 1963, Sylvia Plath committed suicide; the same year

as *The Bell Jar* was published under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas. Her collection of poetry, *Ariel and Other Poems*, was published posthumously (Alexander, 1991 and Bronfen, 2004).

These three authors' lives, then, are important to mention because their own real life difficulties resonate throughout their work. Charlotte Perkins Gilman suffered through a nervous breakdown and a rest cure similar to the one seen in "The Yellow Wallpaper." Jean Rhys struggled through a life filled with loss, pain and alcohol abuse, resembling the life of Sasha Jansen. Furthermore, Sylvia Plath's loss of her father, her own suicide attempt and following treatment share many commonalities with Esther Greenwood's experiences. Thus, it is interesting to note that they all had a female voice of depression themselves that they might have passed on to their protagonists, in order to exemplify their own needs and struggles. Consequently, without saying that the author and the narrator are one and the same, as these terms should not be confused, it would be safe to argue that these authors might have had an authorial intent behind their narrators' female voices of depression, a point I will return to later in this thesis. Furthermore, as these women were female authors the challenges they faced were markedly different from that of their male counterparts, thus linking their voices to the struggles faced by feminism, which I will address later on in this thesis. In addition, as I also will return to later, the psychiatric field has for many years been gender biased, adding to the difficulties faced by depressed women.

Theoretical Approaches: Narrative Theory

As my argument is that the female voice of depression is an important and valuable dimension in a text, it is safe to say that narrative theory has been an important theory in relation to this argument. Narrative theory is a large field, encompassing the most simplistic to the most complex definitions of what exactly a narrative consists of and entails. Perhaps Seymour Chatman put it best when he argued that: "narrative theory has no critical axe to grind. Its objective is a grid of possibilities, through the establishment of the minimal narrative constitutive features. It plots individual texts on the grid and asks whether their accommodation requires adjustments of the grid" (Chatman, 1989:18-19). In other words, narrative theory can be said to be in constant progression, including in it an impressive amount of elements. The theory can be traced back to the Russian formalism of the 1920s and has evolved into the international phenomenon we have before us today. Nowadays, narrative

theory is not only applicable to literary studies, but also to subjects such as history, theology, social anthropology and psychology, to mention a few. As Jakob Lothe points out:

Beyond formalism we may be, but we owe to formalism our understanding that literary texts are meaningful not just because of their ‘content’ but because of the totality of their verbal presentation. Narrative theory builds upon and extends this fundamental insight, and this is the basis for its contribution to literary studies. (Lothe, 2000:vii)

Extensive research has been undertaken in the field of narrative theory in many different countries, this development owing much, as the case might be, to the French theorists’ contribution to the discipline. This contribution is exemplified best, perhaps, by the status of Gérard Genette, and his work *Narrative Discourse*, still a major theoretical reference. Nevertheless, other scholars have offered valuable supplementing theories and concepts, and narrative theory has also been widely applicable to the media of film (Lothe, 2000). In this segment, however, I will delineate a fairly simple rendition of narrative theory, focusing primarily on the elements that are most important in the context of this thesis.

Colloquially, in a common sense sort of way, a narrative can be said to be a story. More precisely: “a narrative presents a chain of events which is situated in time and space” (Lothe, 2000:3). It can, of course, also be defined further, but in this context I find the definition to suffice. Furthermore, according to H. Porter Abbott, a “**narrative** is the representation of events, consisting of *story* and *narrative discourse*, **story** is an *event* or sequence of events (the *action*), and **narrative discourse** is those events as represented” (Abbott, 2002:16). Gérard Genette classifies narrative fiction in a similar way. His starting point is the French term *récit* (narrative) which in French has, at least, three different meanings. Consequently, Genette distinguishes between these three meanings of the word by giving them each a distinct term: discourse (*récit*), story (*histoire*), and narration (narration). Discourse includes the spoken or written presentation of events, meaning what we read; the text to which we have direct access. Story refers to the narrated conflicts and events in narrative fiction, removed from their organization in the discourse and arranged chronologically together with the fictional characters. Narration refers to how a text is written and communicated, including the narrative devices and combinations which can be found in a given text (Lothe, 2000). In other words, there seems to be a consensus, at least to some extent, concerning the elements which constitute a narrative. It all comes down to how

something is communicated, and what it communicates. However, it is, of course, infinitely valuable to have clear distinctions between terms, as Abbott points out:

One important point that the distinction between story and discourse brings out is that we never see a story directly, but instead always pick it up through the narrative discourse. The story is always mediated – by a voice, a style of writing, camera angles, actors' interpretations – so that what we call the story is really something that we construct. (Abbott, 2002:17)

Consequently, the ways in which a story is mediated is immensely important to our perception of the story. In this thesis, for instance, voice becomes one of the most significant elements when it comes to constructing the story of the narrative, and in understanding what is communicated. However, in addition it is important to note that Abbott's statement also points towards the fact that by reading a text we bring with us our own stereotypes and views of the world, thus constructing the story through various biases.

At this point in the exploration of narrative theory I find it suitable to mention the narrative communication model, which has been developed on the basis of various different theories concerning language and narrative fiction. It exists in many different versions, although most of these models are concerned with the same concepts, such as author, narrator, narrative text, narratee and reader. Constituent elements can be traced all the way back to Plato and Aristotle, and other great scholars have contributed their own understanding of how a text is communicated. However, due to the time and space available in the context of this thesis, I choose not to explore the origin of this subject any further. Instead I will blatantly steal Lothe's model, who in turn refers to Aristotle, Kayser and Jakobson (Lothe, 2000). Consequently, the narrative communication model consists of the narrative text, which includes the implied author – narrator – narratee – and implied reader. Outside the text, we find the historical author and the historical reader (Lothe, 2000:16).

In this context I would argue that it is the implied author which holds the most significance. The implied author should not in any way be confused with the historical author, as the implied author is in and of itself a kind of construct which serves to anchor the narrative (Abbott, 2002). Abbott goes on to explain that:

an implied author is that sensibility (that combination of feeling, intelligence, knowledge, and opinion) that "accounts for" the narrative. It accounts for the narrative in the sense that the implied authorial views that we find emerging in the narrative *are consistent with all the elements of the narrative discourse that we are aware of*. (Abbott, 2002:77)

In other words, the implied author serves to fuse together the narrative with a consistent point of view, so to speak. Furthermore: “insofar as we debate the intended meaning of a narrative, we root our position in a version of the implied author that we infer from the text” (Abbott, 2002:78). Consequently, our understanding of the implied author has a lot to do with our understanding of a text. It is also important to note the related, but distinct, concept of authorial intent. This is of course the historical author’s intended meanings or effects, and the concept itself has suffered through a variety of criticism in the last century, the most obvious being that what an author intends is not necessarily what a reader receives. Nevertheless, we do seem strongly inclined to read for authorial intent (Abbott, 2002). In this thesis, the most notable example is, perhaps, the first chapter, since Charlotte Perkins Gilman herself, the author, stated that she wrote ‘with a purpose.’ It is difficult, then, not to try and define what exactly that purpose may have been. Thus it is important to keep the distinction clear, and rather see if the implied author constructs a narrative that combines feelings and knowledge in order to communicate a distinct meaning.

The narrator is the one who performs the narration, and also is not to be confused with the historical author. Instead: “the narrator is variously described as an instrument, a construction, or a device wielded by the author” (Abbott, 63). Consequently, when you narrate, you construct, thus making the narrator a further element of the narrative text. Often, the narrator is also the focalizer in the narrative, which is a concept which relates to “point of view.” Specifically, it refers to the lens through which we see characters and events in the narrative (Abbott, 2002). Thus, focalization can in many ways add to the concept of narrator, as the events in a given story usually are seen through the eyes of the narrator. An often debated point in any given text is the narrator’s reliability, which in many ways is related to the concept of distance. Distance, argues Abbott, is used in two main senses:

1) the narrator’s emotional distance from the characters and the action (the degree of his or her involvement in the story) and 2) the distance between the narrator’s moral, emotional or intellectual sensibilities and those of the implied author. A narrator’s distance (in *both* senses) affects the extent to which we trust the information we get from the narrator, and its moral and emotional coloring. (Abbott, 2002:189)

Thus, if the narrator’s sentiments vary greatly from that of the implied author, it is usually a fair assessment that the narrator is unreliable. In this thesis, however, I have chosen not to debate the narrator’s reliability, but instead I have come to the conclusion of my own accord that the narrators are in fact reliable, due to their consistency and the narrator’s proximity to

the implied author's moral and emotional sensibilities. Instead I have chosen to view distance as an indication of depression, and as an emotional colouring of the text.

Distance may be said to be connected to the concept of perspective, which within narrative theory: "indicates the vision through which the narrative elements are presented" (Lothe, 2000:39). Furthermore, perspective is linked to the utterances of the narrator or character:

Utterances are further related to viewpoints, judgements, or experiences of the narrator or character. This enables us to determine more precisely the concept of perspective according to what aspect of it is important in a given narrative text. Perspective is a question of what makes a narrative presentation probable (or improbable) and distinct from other (alternative) presentations. (Lothe, 2000:39)

Thus perspective is another helpful tool when it comes to determining what a text communicates. In and of itself perspective too affords us with an emphasis within the text, and is another textual element which we can interpret. Speech in itself, of course, has a characterizing function, and "generally speaking, the first person narrator often has a key function in the presentation of speech" (Lothe, 2000:45). Consequently, utterances are a valuable extension of voice and perspective, and signify what is important in any given text.

Voice is, of course, a very important concept in the context of this thesis, and is a question of who it is we 'hear' doing the narrating. The simple distinction of voice is grammatical, that of 'person,' of which there are two principal kinds in narration: first person and third person. There has been some attempts at second person narration, but for whatever reason these experiments have been met with little success. Although almost all first person narratives includes third-person narration, first person narratives are defined by the use of the pronouns "I" and "me" when the narrator refers to herself, and she has a participating role in the story (Abbott, 2002). In this thesis, I have focused solely on first person narratives for a variety of reason, but in the context of narrative theory I would argue that a first person narrator has a more clear and distinct voice, which in turn makes their voice of depression more definite and noticeable. Consequently, voice is more than simply a matter of grammar:

Grammatical person is an important feature of voice in narration, but more important still is our sense of the kind of character (or non-character) it is whose voice colors the story it narrates. In this sense, narrative voice is a major element in the construction of a story. It is therefore crucial to determine the kind of person we have for a narrator because this lets us know just how she injects into the narration her own needs and desires and limitations, and whether we should fully trust the information we are

getting. In some cases, when the voice is strong or interesting enough, it may be that the narrator herself, rather than the story, is the centre of interest. (Abbott, 2002:65-66)

Consequently, we have reached the heart of this thesis. Voice is a crucial element in the construction of a story, and by scrutinizing the voice we learn the desires and limitations of the narrator, and how her emotions and point of view colours the narrative. The voice, especially in first person narratives, carry with it, (if reliable), the morality and the world view of the implied author, thus enabling the voice to encompass meaning and, perhaps, underlying truths. To some extent, voice is an element of personality and reality which infuses the text, and creates an added dimension in the text itself.

Furthermore, by specifically focusing on the female voice, as opposed to the male voice which typically has received most focus in the past, the added dimension in a text is extended even further. Not only does the female voice highlight inherent gender biases in a society, but exemplifies needs that need to be met and changes that need to be done. By listening to a female voice in this context it is possible to see reality through the eyes of the weak, or the underdog if you will, and see clearer the truths and injustices which lie behind that voice.

Psychology

As I have already mentioned, narrative theory is applicable to a vast number of fields, not just literature. This makes sense, of course, since many areas in life involve storytelling, not to mention our everyday lives. Jakob Lothe explains this by arguing that: “Part of the explanation for the importance of, and our fascination with, narrative lies in the fact that it is fundamental not only to different forms of cultural expression but also to our own patterns of experience and to our insight into our own lives” (Lothe, 2000:3). This point, the fact that we use narrative in order to construct a cohesive understanding of our own lives, can be seen in relation to psychology, and our need for self-telling. Jerome Bruner proposes, in his discussion of the narrative creation of self that:

there is no such thing as an intuitively obvious and essential self to know, one that just sits there ready to be portrayed in words. Rather, we constantly construct and reconstruct our selves to meet the needs of the situation we encounter, and we do so with the guidance of our memories of the past and our hopes and fears for the future.

Telling oneself about oneself is like making up a story about who and what we are, what's happened, and why we're doing what we're doing. (Bruner, 2004:4)

Consequently, narrative is crucial in order to form an identity, and a meaningful life story. This creation of self does not occur in a vacuum either: "much of self making is from outside in – based on the apparent esteem of others and on the myriad expectations that we early, even mindlessly, pick up from the culture in which we are immersed" (Bruner, 2004:4). Thus, the culture which surrounds us has a lot to do with how we see ourselves, what we think is expected of us, and consequently, how we feel about ourselves in relation to this: "The narrative gift seems to be our natural way of using language for characterizing those deviations from the expected state of things that characterize living in a human culture" (Bruner, 2004:13). Voice, then, can be seen as an expression of this language, this narrative we have constructed of ourselves. It is informed by our culture, and conveys our conformity to the culture we are in, or the pain of our nonconformity. This is perhaps most distinctly exemplified by Esther Greenwood in *The Bell Jar*, but can also, of course, be seen throughout the other two texts in this thesis.

At the foundation of this thesis lies an understanding of depression as a psychological illness, as described in, among others, *Hilgard's Introduction to Psychology*. Depression is characterized as a mood disorder, but in fact there exists four sets of symptoms from which depression is diagnosed: Emotional, cognitive, motivational and physical symptoms. A person need not exhibit all of these symptoms, however, but the more symptoms he or she has and the more intense they are, the more certain we can be that the individual is in fact depressed. All three narrators presented in this thesis exhibit symptoms of depression, albeit in varying degrees. The emotional symptoms are commonly seen as the most indicative of the illness, and of these sadness and dejection are the most salient. The individual usually feels hopeless and unhappy, experiences crying spells, and may contemplate suicide. In addition, activities which used to bring satisfaction seem dull and joyless, and the individual seems to have lost pleasure in life. The cognitive symptoms consist primarily of negative thoughts, in which low self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy are pervasive. They feel hopeless about the future, blame themselves for their failure and doubt that they can do anything to improve their life. Consequently, motivation is deteriorating: the depressed person tends to be passive and has difficulty initiating activities. Finally, the physical symptoms of depression include sleep disturbances, fatigue, loss of energy and changes in appetite (Atkinson, Atkinson, Smith,

Bem, Nolen-Hoeksema and Smith, 2000). Furthermore, in this thesis I have also found significance in the reasons for depression as delineated by Phyllis Chesler:

Traditionally, depression has been conceived of as the response to – or expression of – loss, either of an ambivalently loved other, of the “ideal” self, or of “meaning” in one’s life. The hostility that should or could be directed outward in response to loss is turned inwards toward the self. “Depression” rather than “aggression” is the female response to disappointment or loss. (Chesler, 2005:102)

Depression as a reaction to a loss can be seen throughout the three texts explored in this thesis. Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia,” which also informs my understanding of depression, can be said to be at the origin of this insight. I will return to Freud’s views later on in this thesis.

Furthermore, the belief that depression is the female equivalent to male aggression is related to the gender difference in rates of depression. In childhood, boys and girls show similar levels of depressive disorders and depressive symptoms. Beginning at the age of twelve, however, girls’ rates of depressive symptoms and disorders increase substantially, whereas boy’s rates increase only slightly. Consequently, by the age of eighteen, the consistent ratio found for females with depression to males with depression is 2:1, and this ratio remains relatively constant throughout the adult life span. On the other hand, while boys’ rates of depression increases only slightly from the age of twelve, it is worth mentioning that boy’s rates for criminal behaviour and substance abuse increase at this age to a much greater degree than do girls’ rates (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2006). This, in turn, could suggest that there is truth in the assumption that boys tend to turn towards aggressive behaviour, whereas girls instead turn towards depression.

In addition, there are other reasons why women seem to be more likely to suffer from depression than men. Susan Nolen-Hoeksema argues that three themes have emerged in the literature which provides the basis for contemporary perspectives on gender differences in depression:

First, women experience certain stressors more frequently than do men because of women’s social roles and status relative to men’s roles and sociocultural status, and these stressors contribute to greater rates of depression in women. Second, women may be more prone than men to react to stressors with a depressive outcome as opposed to other forms of psychopathology, because of both biological and socialization-related differences between women and men. Third, more frequent stressors and greater stress reactivity may operate cumulatively to increase rates of depression in women compared with men. (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2006:9-10)

Thus, it is safe to argue that the gender difference found in rates of depression is more than a biological difference, but rather a cultural and socialization-related difference, which consequently results in women's greater vulnerability to depression. Consequently, it is this assumption which informs my view concerning the female voices found in the three texts analysed in this thesis. It makes sense, then, to not only look at the voices in isolation, but to look at the voices in a socio-cultural context, since it seems that these female voices of depression speak not only of themselves, but also express what they need from the world that surrounds them.

Feminism

Current feminist criticism is not a unitary theory or procedure, but rather a great variety of critical vantage points. However, the various feminisms share certain assumptions and concepts that underlie the diverse ways that individual critics explore the factor of sexual difference and privilege in the analysis and evaluation of works of literature (Abrams and Harpham, 2009). These are also at the foundation of this thesis. First of all, the basic view is that Western civilization is pervasively patriarchal, meaning that it is male-centred and controlled, organized in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains. The female tends to be defined by negative reference to the male as the human norm, as an Other, or kind of non-man. In the process of socialization, women are taught to internalize the reigning patriarchal ideology. Secondly, while one's sex is determined by anatomy, the prevailing concepts of gender are largely, if not entirely, social constructs that are generated by the pervasive patriarchal biases of our civilization. By this cultural process the masculine has come to be widely identified with traits such as rational, active and dominating, whereas the feminine has come to be identified with such traits as passive, emotional and timid. Thirdly, this patriarchal ideology pervades those writings which have been traditionally considered to be great literature, and which were mainly written by men for men (Abrams and Harpham, 2009). This is perhaps best exemplified by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and her insistence that she did in fact not write literature, but wrote texts with a purpose. She and her contemporaries were more or less locked out of an exclusively male literary tradition. Just as there existed separate spheres for men and women in society, there also existed separate spheres in literature (Meyering, 1989). Furthermore, the traditional categories and criteria for analysing and appraising literary works, though presented as universal and objective, are in

fact infused with masculine assumptions and reasoning, consequently leading to a gender bias within critical treatments of literary works (Abrams, and Harpham, 2009). This thesis, then, is based on the assumption that the female narrators we learn about in the three texts are all trapped within this patriarchal ideology. By listening to their voices it will hopefully be easier to say something about who they really are, and what they in fact need, in the face of such biases and discrimination.

The concept of voice is also related to psychology and feminism. In a classic study on gender differences in moral reasoning by Carol Gilligan, explained by Kathy Davis:

‘Voice’ referred to an ethic of care and since it tended to be expressed by women, it was, implicitly, the expression of feminine morality. The notion of a different voice had an enormous impact on feminist scholarship. It reasoned with what many feminists had long believed; namely, that gender difference is not just the unfortunate product of patriarchal order which should be attacked in the name of equality, but that women’s practices and ways of knowing might also be a source of empowerment and even inspiration. (Davis, 1994:353)

Thus, although a woman’s voice may be expressing the cultural biases inherent in a society, it is also important to keep in mind the lessons that can be learned from listening to such a voice. Davis goes on to explain the three meanings bestowed upon voice. First, voice is seen as a psychological entity, meaning that voices are the embodied connection between the psyche and the body, on the one hand, and the psyche and culture on the other. Secondly, voice refers to the feminine self, being an authentic expression of what women feel and are. Thirdly, voice is seen as an object of oppression. The feminine voice can be ‘muffled’, ‘suppressed’ or silenced, and in a male-voiced culture a woman’s voice may altogether vanish. This may often be the result if a woman feels she has to be nice, or sacrifice herself for the good of others. In light of all this, Davis argues that:

The metaphor ‘voice’ highlights the existence of an authentic feminine self. It draws attention to a different morality. It focuses on the silencing and suppression of women in patriarchal social order. Drawing upon the metaphor voice, therefore, has important implications not only for research on women’s social experiences but also for feminist theory on femininity, morality and power. (Davis, 1994:360)

Consequently, by focusing on the concept of voice, as is the context of this thesis, I would argue that it is possible to come, at least somewhat, close to the narrators’ authentic feminine selves and their struggles with silencing and suppression in a patriarchal society.

The secondary works which form the foundation of this thesis draw from both psychology and feminism. One of the most significant texts in this context is Elaine Showalter's: *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (1985). As the title suggests Showalter delineates the history of views on women's psychiatric illnesses within psychology from psychiatric Victorianism, through psychiatric Darwinism and up until, and including, psychiatric Modernism. Her intention is to contribute toward the feminist revolution in psychiatric history, with a book that not only speaks for women but also allows women to speak for themselves (Showalter, 1985). Similarly to Showalter, Lisa Appignanesi also explores the ways in which we have understood madness, badness and sadness over the last two hundred years, in her work: *Mad, Bad and Sad. A History of Women and the Mind Doctors from 1800 to the Present* (2008). She argues that some of that understanding has to do with how the dividing lines between the mad, bad and sad were conceived and patrolled, in particular by a growing group of professionals or 'mind doctors.' Furthermore, the book also focuses on the way in which madness, badness and sadness, and other diagnoses, were lived by various women, in addition to exploring various treatment methods. Jane Ussher, in her work: *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?* (1991), attempts to unravel the contradictions in the conundrum which asks whether feminism or psychology has the answer for women. She explores the conflicts between the radical critiques of the so-called antipsychiatrists and the feminists, and those who, faced with the needs of women to receive help, affirm the desperate pleas of women to be heard. Phyllis Chesler's landmark work: *Women and Madness*, (2005 [1972]) has also been an important text in this context. Chesler explores many themes: the mother-daughter relationship, the importance of female role models and the psychology of incest and rape to mention a few. She too takes a look back on the history of women in psychiatry and uses interviews with women in order to support her views.

The Organization

In the first chapter I will look at Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" in the context of Victorian society and early psychiatry. I will take a look back into the history of psychology, and convey some earlier critiques of "The Yellow Wallpaper" which highlight women's position in Victorian American Culture. I will then move on to the analysis of the

voice, and argue that the narrator's voice in "The Yellow Wallpaper" is a voice which tries to find a form of expression in an otherwise fairly stifling environment.

In chapter two I will look at Jean Rhys' *Good Morning, Midnight*. Here too I situate the novel in a historical and psychological context, and explore some risk factors of depression that are relevant to the novel. Furthermore, I also place the novel in a modernistic context, and look at the pervasive theme of alcohol in the text. I will then move on to a discussion of previous criticisms that are valuable in connection to my argument, before I move on to analysing the voice of depression in *Good Morning, Midnight*. My argument is that the voice in this novel utilizes depression as a shield, in order to protect itself from the pain of life.

In the third and final chapter I take a close look at Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*. Again I take a look back into the history of psychiatry and relate the relevant aspects, with an emphasis on electroconvulsive therapy. I then situate the novel in a historical and cultural context, after which I look at some previous critiques which can be said to also highlight the historical and cultural context of the novel. I then move on to an analysis of the female voice of depression in *The Bell Jar*, arguing that the voice of depression in this novel expresses a desire to break free from expectations and norms inherent in society.

In the conclusion I will bring all the three texts together and compare and contrast the previous analyses, although I will focus mostly on the similarities as I find these to be most important. I will argue that the female voices of depression in these three texts add a valuable and significant dimension, and should above all be listened to, and be taken seriously.

Chapter One

Finding a Voice: An Early Depiction of Depression in “The Yellow Wallpaper”

In this chapter I aim to take an historical look at psychology in Victorian times, before seeing “The Yellow Wallpaper” in relation to previous analysis of the text. I will then move on to looking at the voice of depression in the story, and what added dimension this might give us when analysing the story. I would like to argue that the voice of depression in “The Yellow Wallpaper” is a voice which aims to find a voice, and this is perhaps the most important portrayal the story gives us. This search for a voice was important because women in Victorian times rarely had a voice which was listened to; they were more or less dismissed as having no worthy opinions. Thus, many women were frustrated by their dismissal and needed to find a way to express themselves despite this. Consequently, they searched for their voice, perhaps through diaries and letter writing, wanting to narrate their own story and have a voice which was heard.

Why She Wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper.”

“The Yellow Wallpaper” first appeared in the January 1892 issue of *New England Magazine*. Written by Charlotte Perkins Stetson, later to be known primarily as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the story was first received as a tale of horror, but Gilman later made it clear that she definitely had a more distinct purpose for the story. As she pointed out to William Dean Howells when he asked her permission to include it in a collection of fiction: “I was more than willing, but assured him that it was no more ‘literature’ than my other stuff, being definitely written ‘with a purpose.’ In my judgement it is a pretty poor thing to write, to talk, without a purpose” (Gilman, 1992:65). Gilman had herself suffered from a nervous breakdown and depression some time before she wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper.” “This disorder involved a growing melancholia, and that, as those who have tasted it, consists of every painful mental sensation, shame, fear, remorse, a blind oppressive confusion, utter weakness, a steady brainache that fills the conscious mind with crowding images of distress” (Gilman, 1992:59). After trying several remedies in order to defeat her mental illness, she finally sought help from the greatest nerve specialist of the time, Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell. Gilman underwent a rest cure, and after apparent success, was sent home with firm orders to: “Live as domestic a life as possible. Have your child with you all the time. [...] Lie down an

hour after each meal. Have but two hours' intellectual life a day. And never touch pen, brush or pencil as long as you live" (Gilman, 1992:62). Gilman did her very best to follow his commands, but after a few months it became evident that the cure only made her worse, and that she came "perilously near to losing my mind" (Gilman, 1992:63). Consequently, she gave up following the doctor's advice, and went to work again: "ultimately recovering some measure of power" (Gilman, 1992:52).

What Gilman saw as her purpose for writing "The Yellow Wallpaper," then, was to warn others of the perils of the rest cure and perhaps save others as she had saved herself. Most importantly, however, she wanted to convince Weir Mitchell of the error of his ways. She writes in her autobiography that she received no response from Weir Mitchell after sending him the story, but that: "Many years later, I met someone who knew close friends of Dr. Mitchell's who said he had told them that he had changed his treatment of nervous prostration since reading 'The Yellow Wallpaper.' If that is a fact, I have not lived in vain" (Gilman, 1992:65). Apparently, the story was a success, and had accomplished what it was meant to accomplish. However, a closer look at Weir Mitchell's own writing may contradict this success. Discussions of Mitchell's career never mention Gilman, and none of his published letters and papers contains any indication that he altered his thinking about the rest cure. Furthermore: "as late as 1908 he defended his version of the rest treatment before the American Neurological Association, addressing the connections between his methods and the emerging field of psychotherapy" (Dock, 1998:25). So Gilman's hopes that she had reached the doctor himself might not have been so accurate. Nevertheless, Gilman's success might have come in different ways. There is no doubt that "The Yellow Wallpaper" raises questions concerning women and madness that are still relevant today, and that the story helped to bring awareness to several issues of feminism and psychology. In fact, "The Yellow Wallpaper" may be one of the most well-known depictions of a 'madwoman', but it is definitely not the only one. Several other female authors wrote novels that concerned themselves with the female madwoman, and what difficulties and injustices women were met with throughout their struggle. Novels of this kind have been written ever since the Victorian era up until our own day and age. However, not only novels and short-stories have dealt with such issues. Several non-fiction works and authors have concerned themselves with explorations of the real biases and struggles met by women throughout the years in the early stages of a male dominated field of psychology. On that note, it seems fitting to take a look back into the history of the female maladies.

Early Psychology: On Women and Madness

It is a well known fact that in Victorian times white, middle class women were known as ‘the Angel of the house,’ the gentle and virtuous creature which resided in the home, taking care of the children and the house, and whose sole purpose was to create a safe haven where their husbands could be protected from the harsh and cruel outside world. A woman should want nothing else than to be a wife and a mother. Of course, very few options existed. To want something else, say perhaps intellectual work, or to be able to live alone and support oneself, was viewed as unfeminine and, indeed, a form of madness. The idea was that women were far too vulnerable creatures, far too unstable, to be able to survive in the outside world. Those who dared to try faced heavy opposition and were viewed as improper women, displaying masculine traits which were viewed as signs of mental illness in a feminine body. As Lisa Appignanesi points out: “Women were understood as being fashioned by evolution for the home and maternity, nervously fragile, intellectually inferior” (Appignanesi, 2008:106). Furthermore:

Throughout this period, doctors and scientists seemed determined to raise the existing division of labour in the middle class to a universal given, and to transform women’s place in the domestic sphere into a biological inevitability from which deviation of any kind would bring breakdown, not only of the mind but of the species. (Appignanesi, 2008:106)

Being a woman in those days, it is perhaps no wonder that madness seemed like an option. Being reduced to a reproductive organism and a housekeeper might have seemed unbearable for some. To want more was a sign of madness, and surely there were many who were frustrated and wanted more, or simply something else. Elaine Showalter, in her book *The Female Malady*, argues that:

[...] the rise of the Victorian madwoman was one of history’s self-fulfilling prophecies. In a society that not only perceived women as childlike, irrational, and sexually unstable but also rendered them legally powerless and economically marginal, it is not surprising that they should have formed the greater part of the residual categories of deviance from which doctors drew a lucrative practice and the asylums much of their population. (Showalter, 1985:72-73)

In other words, it did not matter if the women themselves saw themselves as going mad, what mattered was how the men in their world perceived them. If the woman dared to oppose the

social conventions of her time, or showed signs of frustration or anger at her place in the home or in life, men had the power to deem her insane. Consequently, they could have her locked up, or ‘treated,’ in order for her to become content with her lot in life and once again be willing to obey orders. Men had the power of definition. They were the doctors and law makers, and they decided when a woman was mad, or when she was sane. As Showalter points out:

The medical belief that the instability of the female nervous and reproductive systems made women more vulnerable to derangement than men had extensive consequences for social policy. It was used as a reason to keep women out of the professions, to deny them political rights, and to keep them under male control in the family and the state. Thus medical and political policies were mutually reinforcing. (Showalter, 1985:72-73)

Since men had the power of definition, in other words, they could also keep this power. As long as they could argue that women were unfit to enter social reality, they could keep women out of their world, and keep them from changing the way the world worked.

One of the most popular female maladies of the time was, of course, hysteria. A well known term even in our day, it is still usually reserved for describing female outbursts of emotionality, although less derogatively:

For centuries, hysteria had been the quintessential female malady, the very name of which derived from the Greek *hysteron*, or womb; but between 1870 and World War 1 – the “golden age” of hysteria – it assumed a peculiarly central role in psychiatric discourse, and in definitions of femininity and female sexuality. By the end of the century, “hysterical” had become almost interchangeable with “feminine” in literature, where it stood for all extremes of emotionality. (Showalter, 1985:129)

Hysteria, then, was used to describe all female displays of improper emotions. It included a wide variety of symptoms, ranging from fits, fainting, laughing, sobbing and vomiting, and the rapid passage from one stage to another made the male physicians scratch their heads in bewilderment. Thus, Silas Weir Mitchell protested that hysteria might as well be called ‘mysteria’ (Showalter, 1985:130). Apparently, hysteria defied all powers of male rationality, and it was believed that the cause for such hysteria was unsatisfied sexual and maternal drives. It was, of course, expected of women to conceal all their feelings in order to adhere to social norms, not just the sexual ones. However, the fact that other feelings might also contribute to hysteria was consistently overlooked. Thus the notion that women hysterics

perhaps reacted to a male dominated society, their emotions simply a symptom of the desire for independence and options, was never viewed as a plausible explanation.

In “The Yellow Wallpaper” however, it is more likely that the narrator would have been diagnosed with neurasthenia by her physician husband. Neurasthenia was also a prevalent disorder of the 1870s, and quite similar to hysteria. It included many of the same symptoms, so much so, in fact, that even the physicians of the time had trouble distinguishing between the two. However, neurasthenia was perceived as a more attractive and prestigious form of nervousness, and thus was more likely to be found in women of higher social standing. As Elaine Showalter explains:

Unlike the disagreeable and disliked hysteria, however, neurasthenics were thought to be cooperative, ladylike, and well-bred, “just the kind of women one likes to meet with,” one doctor declared, “sensible, not over sensitive or emotional, exhibiting a proper amount of illness... and a willingness to perform their share of work quietly and to the best of their ability.” (Showalter, 1985:135)

Consequently, since John, the narrator’s husband, can afford to secure an ancestral home for a summer, and in addition seems to be of the opinion that his wife is no serious case at all, it is likely that neurasthenia would have been the proper diagnosis of the time. “If a physician of high standing, and one’s own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression – a slight hysterical tendency – what is one to do?” (Gilman, 2003:1660). Thus, a ‘slight hysterical tendency’ seems to be in concord with an exhibition of a ‘proper amount of illness.’

Neurasthenia was originally viewed as an American disorder, consequently fittingly named American nervousness, and was thought to be caused by the increasingly modern society. All manners of things were blamed. In men, such nervousness was thought to be caused by progress, such progress caused by steam power and the telegraph, and women were particularly vulnerable to increased mental activity. In light of this, Silas Weir Mitchell developed the rest cure, which was first described in 1873, and which became the standard treatment. The cure depended on seclusion, massage, immobility and a diet designed to give the patients more flesh on their bones. In addition, as Appignanesi points out: “All of this comes with goodly doses of the doctor’s willpower and avuncular firmness, just short of threat. Symptoms, like women, were there to do Weir Mitchell’s bidding” (Appignanesi, 2008:121). Gilman herself described the rest cure as designed for “the business man exhausted from too much work, and the society woman exhausted from too much play”

(Gilman, 1992:62). The rest cure might have been restorative for some women, who perhaps were unable to accept their own emotions and dependencies, and indeed it was helpful for some. For others, however, such a cure was perhaps nothing else than a boring and frustrating delay of their real problems. Weir Mitchell himself noted:

When they are bidden to stay in bed a month, and neither to read, write, nor sew, and have one nurse – who is not a relative – then rest becomes for some women a rather bitter medicine, and they are glad enough to accept the order to rise and go about when the doctor issues a mandate which has become pleasantly welcome and eagerly looked for. (Showalter, 1985:139)

Thus, for some, the sheer boredom of being confined in a childlike state was much more of a ‘prison’ than the ‘prison’ from which they came, and their dependent, mundane and unfulfilling existence at home seemed much to be preferred to the rest cure. Consequently, the rest cure served its purpose: “Forced back into “womblike dependence,” the patient was reborn, re-educated by the parental team of subservient female nurse and godlike male doctor, and “returned to her menfolk’s management, recycled and taught to make the will of the male her own”” (Showlater, 1985:139). It is safe to say, then, that the rest cure really did not cure most women in their own eyes, but they were cured in the eyes of men, and in the end, that was all that mattered.

The rest cure offered physicians not only domination over the woman’s body, but also domination over her voice. Hysterical women were observed and viewed, but were seldom allowed a chance to speak. One of the first great European theorists of hysteria was Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893), and he was one of many who spent a lot of time looking carefully at hysterical women, but paid very little attention to what they actually were saying. It seems that there existed a prevalent belief that therapeutic authority depended on domination over the patient’s voice, which, to some extent, is true. ““If a patient...interrupts the speaker,” Robert Carter admonished his fellow doctors, “she must be told to keep silence and listen; and must be told, moreover...in such a manner as to convey the speaker’s full conviction that the command will be immediately obeyed”” (Showalter, 1985:154). It was not until Freud and Breuer made the female hysteric the starting point for their development of psychoanalysis, that hysterical women were given a voice. Freud and Breuer amended Weir Mitchell’s rest cure by adding psychoanalysis. They believed that women who were of a bright and energetic disposition would find the mundane and repetitive activities of their existence too boring, and would find an outlet in fantasizing. Thus, the boredom of the rest

cure would only allow the patient to succumb to even further fantasizing, and would not be a cure on its own. Consequently, Freud's *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) was the first insight into hysterical women's lives and voices (Showalter, 1985:158).

Previous Criticism: Women's Position in Victorian American Culture

After its rediscovery, "The Yellow Wallpaper" has been read and critiqued several times, usually with more or less similar interpretations. It is, of course, possible to read the text as the depiction of an obstinate wife who refuses to adhere to her husband's treatment plan, and pays the price of madness because of it. It has, without a doubt, been read that way in its time as a gothic horror story. However, it seems more likely to take the author's mission into account, and read it with the purpose she most likely would have imagined for it. Thus a feminist reading of the story, in which the wife struggles in the face of patriarchy, seems like more an ideologically probable reading of the text, and is the approach usually taken. We, as readers, are more used to, or attuned to, a feminist reading in our day and age, and accept as more likely that the narrator is searching for her voice, instead of being just a difficult wife. As Jean E. Kennard points out:

To see the narrator as a quester for self-fulfilment is to agree to grant her our trust (to see her as the accurate perceiver of reality), which we do partly because she is female, partly because she speaks to us directly (though we have the choice here of opting for the unreliable narrator convention), and partly because we agree to read madness as sanity. (Kennard, 1989:87)

In other words, it seems more likely that the narrator deserves our trust, perhaps because most of us share her, and the implied author's, ideology. We do not find her situation to be bearable, so we understand her need to escape it in any way possible.

The implied author's ideology as a feminist is embedded throughout the text, and to some extent that ideology is also shared by the narrator. This has been read by many critics in the feminist tradition as a stern critique of the patriarchal society of the Victorian era. The creative spirit of the wife is throughout the story contrasted to the sensible husband, making evident the differing personalities of the two. Consequently, married life is depicted in a rather bleak light. The narrator reveals to us that: "John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in a marriage" (Gilman, 2003:1660). This is, then, not only revealing in that it

says something about how John treats his wife when she tries to share with him her beliefs or worries. It is also revealing in that it says something about marriage in general. Evidently, a wife should expect her husband to laugh at her because, in essence, she is nothing more than ‘a blessed little goose,’ and should expect ridicule when in the company of the voice of reason. Furthermore, the ideology of the text becomes even more evident when the narrator reveals her own voice and her own opinions: “John is a physician, and *perhaps* – (I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind) – *perhaps* that is one reason I do not get well faster” (Gilman, 2003:1660). The uncertainty with which this opinion is voiced bears testament to the inferior status of the wife. A wife should not question her husband in such matters, especially when the husband is a physician and the wife his patient.

Depression is most commonly seen as a reaction to something, and the inability to see that something is possible to overcome, thus fuelling the feelings of hopelessness and helplessness:

Traditionally, depression has been conceived of as the response to – or expression of – loss, either of an ambivalently loved other, of the “ideal” self, or of “meaning” in one’s life. The hostility that should or could be directed outward in response to loss is turned inwards towards the self. “Depression” rather than “aggression” is the female response to disappointment or loss. (Chesler, 2005:102)

This traditional view of depression does in many ways fit well with the narrator’s perception of reality. She is trying to adjust to a life as a wife and new mother, and in the process she has lost the possibility of living her own life, a life in which she can create and be an individual in her own right. She has lost her ‘ideal’ self, or lost the life she might have envisioned for herself before she got married. In addition to this, the narrator continues to write despite being told not to: “I did write for a while in spite of them; but it *does* exhaust me a good deal – having to be so sly about it, or else meet with heavy opposition” (Gilman, 2003:1660). It is, of course, possible to see this opposition as the cause of the narrator’s depression.

In relation to this theory of depression it is interesting to point out that it can easily be tied to the most common feminist readings of “The Yellow Wallpaper.” Not being able to develop her true self, the narrator feels that the ‘ideal’ self is threatened, and fears the loss of it. This fear can in turn be seen in relation to what Thomas Szasz describes as ‘slave psychology’ (Chesler, 2005:101). Slaves were typically driven to work until they showed signs of exhaustion, their tasks unending. The only way to stop the master from driving them,

then, was to show signs of imminent collapse. The same mechanism can be related to the so-called hysterical women, seeing as their tasks as wives and mothers never ended either, the only way to get temporary relief was to show signs of exhaustion. Whether these feelings were genuine or not did not matter, since showing signs of exhaustion typically induced feelings of fatigue. Furthermore: “Many of these patients are unconsciously ‘on strike’ against persons (actual or internal) to whom they relate with subservience and against whom they wage an unending and unsuccessful covert rebellion” (Chesler, 2005:101). Consequently, the narrator’s depression can be seen as the result of such a mechanism. Being unable to do with her life as she wishes, seeing her new duties as a wife and mother as unending, the only way to perhaps get away from it all for a while may be to show signs of fatigue. However, what is most interesting in this respect is the likelihood that the narrator is in fact waging an unending covert rebellion against her husband and the society which trapped her in her subservient role, robbing her of the possibility of having a voice of her own. This is also the reading most commonly agreed upon by critics, that the narrator is indeed waging a covert rebellion against patriarchy, trying to break free from the bonds imposed on her as a woman.

In relation to the fact that depression might be the result of a sense of loss, in this case, a sense of loss of the ‘ideal’ self, there is also the possibility that the narrator feels depressed because her own reality or feelings are in conflict with society’s expectations. This has frequently been another cause for madness throughout the centuries. In literature, this feeling has commonly been described as the sense of being ‘split.’ In “The Yellow Wallpaper” this split is clearly stated through the narrator’s identification with the woman behind the wallpaper: “So feminist critics can readily identify Gilman’s narrator’s division of herself as an example of this split. The need to assert the female personal voice as a way to re-establish wholeness or health results from an awareness of the split” (Kennard, 1989:85). The narrator does assert her female personal voice through her journal. She insists on telling her truths despite the fact that she has to hide them from the people closest to her, otherwise she would remain split into two halves: the dutiful wife she does not know how to be and the creative soul she is not allowed to be. Consequently she asserts her voice, and finds a way to re-establish wholeness, a complete identification with the woman behind the wallpaper. She is the woman behind the wallpaper. Even though the price might be high, she at least finds a way to be whole, instead of split.

The narrator is more or less confined to a room previously used as nursery, with rings in the walls and barred windows. The room itself as a symbol has also been the origin of much debate. Many critics have interpreted the room as having been used to imprison mad

people, as Conrad Shumaker argues: “[...] but her description reveals bit by bit a room that has apparently been used to confine violent mental cases [...]” (Shumaker, 1989:69). I would argue, however, that this interpretation is somewhat unnecessary. The room is just as scary, and just as much a prison, in the capacity of being a nursery. It does not need to be a prison for mad people in order to remain significant in itself. The nursery might just be one of those ‘little things’ which seems harmless, but which constitute the true prison of the Victorian woman: it represents the women’s sphere, their role as wife and mother, which in reality was their prison, and what might have made them mad to begin with. Susan S. Lanser points out the importance of these little things in her interpretation of another novel, arguing that it is this piling up of little things, seemingly harmless and unimportant, which drive women to the edge of reason. Furthermore, she quotes Virginia Woolf, who writes, at a later time: “when a woman comes to write a novel, she will find that she is perpetually wishing to alter the established values – to make serious what appears insignificant to a man, and trivial what is to him important” (Woolf, after Lanser, 1992:146). Consequently, it might not be a mere coincidence that the narrator finds herself confined to a nursery. Such a room carries with it symbolic implications of childbearing, caretaking and emotions, such things which might seem trivial to a man since they belonged in a woman’s sphere. In other words: just insignificant womanly things. A nursery, then, is perhaps just as destructive, and just as significant, as any other kind of prison could ever hope to be.

The most significant symbol in the story, however, is the wallpaper, as the title would suggest. The nursery the narrator is residing in is covered with repellent wallpaper, stripped of in great patches: “One of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin” (Gilman, 2003:1661), and the colour is a “smouldering unclean yellow” (Gilman, 2003:1661). There are many ways in which the wallpaper can be read. The wallpaper can, for instance, be viewed as a symbol for women’s voices, as opposed to the voices of men. The wallpaper’s design is swirling and infinite, defying all sense of logic and reason. Reason was of course men’s sphere, whereas women were seen as unreasonable and more prone to fancy and emotions. Thus, the wallpaper is in some sense the image of the woman, desperate for attention and a voice, wanting to be taken seriously but viewed as horrid and unpleasant, trapped, like the woman behind.

The figure behind the pattern reveals itself gradually, and it is not until the sixth journal entry that the narrator is sure that the figure is in fact a woman. However, it is the tenth journal entry which signifies the start of the narrator’s identification with the woman behind the pattern. She realizes that the woman gets out during the day and that she creeps

and hides: “I don’t blame her a bit. It must be very humiliating to be caught creeping by daylight! I always lock the door when I creep by daylight. I can’t do it at night, for I know John would suspect something at once” (Gilman, 2003:1669). The identification becomes complete, however, in the last journal entry. She *is* the woman in the wallpaper, when she asks herself: “I wonder if they all come out of the wall-paper as I did?” (Gilman, 2003:1670). In the same instance, the room which had at one time seemed confining, is claimed as independent space: “But I am securely fastened now by my well-hidden rope – you don’t get me out in the road there!” (Gilman, 2003:1670). Furthermore, she has locked the door to the outside world: ““You keep me in” has become “I keep you out”” (Kennard, 1989:86). The room and its wallpaper are now her space, a symbol of her freedom and her self-proclaimed right to do as she pleases. As soon as she assumes this role, as her own person, her voice becomes quite calm and serene, even though her husband is crying desperately outside her door: “How he does call and pound! Now he’s crying for an axe” (Gilman, 2003:1670). Her calmness signals a role reversal; now she is the voice of reason, while John is the hysterical one: “Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time!” (Gilman, 2003:1671). The narrator reveals her opinion in the most sensible manner, which in turn can be read as proof that there is, indeed, sanity in her madness. “There is a dramatic shift here both in *what* is said and in *who* is speaking. Not only has a new “impertinent” self emerged, but this final voice is collective, representing the narrator, the woman behind the wallpaper, and women elsewhere and everywhere” (Treichler, 1992:206). It is, in other words, liberation, albeit a limited one, in the new freedom the narrator is experiencing. The narrator has reclaimed the freedom wanted by most women in her time. The narrator has reclaimed her own body, and her own space, and in doing so, finds the only treatment for her depression possible: “It is certain that Gilman did interpret the experience of being a woman in America with power and sensitivity, rendering for the first time the invisible truth visible, giving the silence of the inner life a voice, an inner discourse that is disruptive of her social order” (Quawas, 2006:10). The narrator needed to give her spirit a voice, in order to heal. Living a life prescribed for her did not help, but is rather what made her ill in the first place. She could not heal until she had given her inner life a voice, although it went against society’s norms.

But What Is One to Do?: The Voice

Previous analyses of “The Yellow Wallpaper” all contribute interesting and valid points. It makes sense to argue that the narrator’s depression stems from a loss of an ‘ideal’ self. Furthermore, she now finds herself in a situation where she even struggles to be a good wife. In this sense, however, her depression might, to some extent, be helpful: “Sometimes “depressed” women are even less verbally “hostile” and “aggressive” than nondepressed women; their “depression” may serve as a way of keeping a deadly faith with their “feminine” role” (Chesler, 2005:102-103). Although the narrator’s depression, or neurasthenia, keeps her in place as a typical fragile, nervous Victorian wife, she still refuses to do exactly as she is told, and defies advice by writing. This is where, I would argue, the narrator’s voice of depression conveys an added dimension to the previous criticisms of “The Yellow Wallpaper.” In addition to being a story about women’s rights, it accentuates the importance of having a voice with which to voice your opinions and be heard. Instead of just being a story about inequality, it gives us a reminder to be true to ourselves, and to our own inner voices. Furthermore, it reminds us of the importance of being able to tell your own story, to narrate for yourself who and what you are, and the importance of being believed. The narrator’s voice of depression as seen in “The Yellow Wallpaper,” I would argue, is an exemplified struggle to do exactly that: to narrate her own story, to find her own voice. In doing so, in finding her voice, the narrator would also be able to make her story count, to make herself a real person who should be listened to. By taking back, or finding, your own voice, you make sure that you are no longer invisible and that your story has just as much significance as that of a man’s story. The narrator, then, by finding her voice also gives herself the right to be worth as much as any man.

In Victorian times, writing a diary and writing letters were more or less the only two acceptable forms of writing a woman could engage in. Thus, the fact that the narrator conveys her story to us in diary form seems fitting. Not only can she keep the diary a secret, keeping it away from the watchful eyes of her husband and his sister, but she can also speak freely, without worrying about censure from prospective editors or readers. The diary form, then, creates a certain sense of being taken into the narrator’s confidence, in which she reveals information she would not otherwise reveal. Thus, I would argue, the diary form gives the narrator a greater sense of reliability. There seems to be no reason not to believe her story, since she tells it without fear of reprimands, judgment or scorn. She tells it in confidence to dead paper. Consequently, the use of the diary form and the I-narration creates closeness

between text and reader, a closeness derived from the confiding tone of the story as well as the direct approach in which the reader (or the dead paper, as the case might be) is addressed. It is almost as if the narrator succeeds in creating the sense that since she does confide in the reader, the least the reader can do is believe in what is being told, and this, of course, creates a close affinity between text and reader, and the narrator and reader. At least among the female readers of this text, the diary entries have been read as a plea from a fellow sister in need, and few among us would turn their backs to such a plea. This is perhaps also why the feminist readings of this story have been so persistent; the feminists have felt this affinity to the narrator and decided to change the story.

Writing as a woman in a patriarchal society, where male domination over women was the norm, women's writing, and women's voices were not quite their own. Men also controlled textuality. The only areas of writing where women could be reasonably sure that they would avoid male interference were through letter writing and diaries. Included in this control of textuality was men's domination over storytelling and over definitions. Men told the stories, and women were mere characters in the plot. Men had told the story of the world, and how the world worked, and women could either fit into the story, or be outsiders. As Judith Fetterley points out: "Writing from the point of view of a character trapped in that male text [...] Gilman's narrator shifts the centre of attention away from the male mind that has produced the text and directs it instead to the consequences for women's lives of men's control of textuality" (Fetterley, 1992:254). In other words, we are offered an insight into the consequences the narrator faces because her husband has the power to define her, as good or bad, insane or sane. John controls the text that is their life and has already decided what kind of character his wife is supposed to play. Thus the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper" tells her own story, by telling how she tries to fit into her husband's story, but is unable to. Consequently, she directs her energy inward, creating a narrative where she is the protagonist and her husband a character, instead of the other way around.

In "The Yellow Wallpaper," Gilman argues that male control of textuality constitutes one of the primary causes of women's madness in patriarchal culture. Forced to read men's texts, women are forced to become characters in those texts. And since the stories men tell assert as fact what women know to be fiction, not only do women lose the power that comes from authoring; more significantly, they are forced to deny their own reality and to commit in effect a kind of psychic suicide. (Fetterley, 1992:254)

Indeed, as Fetterley points out, the inability to narrate your own story and reality does in fact lead to a sense of being invisible and a kind of self-obliteration that will increase the feeling

of depression, if not create it. It does, then, make sense to argue that this lack of control over textuality is, to some extent, why the narrator's voice of depression becomes so important in this text. The narrator is in fact depressed when she begins to tell her story, and the fact that she is not believed by those who are supposed to care for her, might just be one of the major points of the story. In regards to any mental illness, depression included, self-narration, being able to tell your story, is fairly important when it comes to healing. Through such self-narration the person is able to see who she is, and see where she is going, while her sense of reality is being validated. If denied this option, the depression experienced will perhaps refuse to subside and become a permanent state. Although it is not a matter of who is right or wrong, the narrator's voice of depression needs to be taken seriously and listened to. She needs to be allowed to tell her story. These are needs, then, which are not being met by her family, consequently leading her to seek outlet in her diary. There, at least, she is able to tell her own story and finds her voice at last. Through her diary, through writing, she is allowed to narrate her own story, easing the stress and emotions which led her to become depressed in the first place. She is allowed the possibility of healing.

"The Yellow Wallpaper" consists of twelve journal entries, written during a three month summer stay in a colonial mansion. The text, then, is made up of several implicit ellipsis and twelve scenes (Genette, 1987). We know very little of what happens during the time of the implicit ellipsis, but we infer from what the narrator says that her time is spent following her husband's carefully planned treatment of her: "I have a schedule prescription for each hour in the day" (Gilman, 2003:1661). The text is a first-person narrative, and the narrator remains the focalizer throughout the text. The other characters, primarily John but also Jennie, are seen through the eyes of the narrator, although we do occasionally hear their voices through quotation. However, the narrator is the one we receive subjective information about and thus is the one we feel the closest affinity to, whereas we receive mostly objective information in relation to John and Jennie (Lanser, 1981). It seems reasonable, then, to argue that the implied author wants the reader to sympathize with the narrator in her present situation.

The sympathy the narrator attempts to gain from the reader is achieved through various means. For instance, the narrator contrasts her own opinions to those of her husband's opinions throughout the story. Her husband's opinions, presumably opinions of reason and sanity, are mentioned alongside the narrator's presumably inferior opinions. However, in doing so, the narrator succeeds in sounding superior despite her inferior status. The sympathy is created as soon as the reader realizes what admonishing voices the narrator is facing, while

her own opinions seems to be just as likely and reasonable. To most readers it seems apparent that the husband would do well to listen to his wife. The sympathy created, then, is twofold. Firstly, most readers will have been belittled at one time or another in their lives, especially the women reading the story when it was first published, and would not wish belittlement onto anyone. Secondly, it seems evident that the narrator should at least have some say in her own treatment, as she does, at least to begin with, seem to have valid opinions concerning her needs in order to get better. Consequently, the fact that the narrator has to struggle in the face of such adversity deems her an eligible candidate for sympathy. In relation to this is it worth mentioning that Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck point out, in their discussion of gender, that: “Gender studies of the narrator are also characterized by ambiguity and conflict. According to Susan Lanser, the female voice is polyphonic. At one level, it seems to conform to male rhetoric; at another level it undermines it” (Herman and Vervaeck, 2005:138). This point seems to be in accordance with how the narrator creates sympathy. In one sense, the narrator conforms to her husband’s views, and does as she is told; in another sense the narrator voices her own opinion, undermining her husband’s opinions, consequently creating sympathy. This sympathy is important in the context of depression not only because it, to some extent, validates the depression but also because it is easy to understand the adversity the narrator must overcome in order to heal. We feel the narrator’s pain, and empathize with her need to find her voice and be heard, in order to enable her to fight her depression.

Furthermore, it is tempting to point out the correlations between the narrator, the implied author and the author herself, knowing Gilman’s engagement with women’s rights issues. It has generally been frowned upon within narrative theory to confuse the author with the narrator or a character. These two terms have more or less been seen as separate entities. However, the author has increasingly been linked to the narrator or a character within a text despite this, especially in relation to ideological approaches such as feminism (Herman and Vervaeck, 2005). It is no surprise, then, that Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s views on women’s rights have been directly attributed to the narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper”. However, in this discussion it seems enough to point out that the authorial intent seems likely to be shared by both the actual author and the implied author (Abbott, 2002). The implied author has, in other words, clearly designed the story so that the reader will understand the narrator and recognize the challenges she faces, thus rendering her descent into madness likely. This, I would argue, has been done in order to further achieve sympathy. Seeing as an increasing number of women were questioning the inequality between the sexes, accentuating one

woman's struggle in the care of a well-meaning, though misguided husband, would most likely hit a nerve with many, and award the narrator sympathy, as it still does today.

In the first journal entry the narrator writes in order to have a voice, but despite her resolution to defy those who oppose her, it seems that she nonetheless has incorporated her husband's and society's views on how she should behave. It is, of course, almost impossible not to. We are all, to some extent, products of our culture. As Jerome Bruner points out: "[...] much of self-making is from outside in – based on the apparent esteem of others and on the myriad expectations that we early, even mindlessly, pick up from the culture in which we are immersed" (Bruner, 2004:4). Consequently, it is no surprise that the narrator finds it difficult to completely free herself from her husband's opinion of her. She appears more or less resigned to her situation: "Personally, I disagree with their ideas. Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good. But what is one to do?" (Gilman, 2003:1660). She knows very well what she would want for herself if she had a say in things, but the detached use of 'one' instead of 'I' implies a resignation, as if the situation is hopeless, and that she herself has no power over it. This can, of course, also be read as an indication of her depression. A further example of the narrator's inability to trust her own voice over her husband's voice is given a little further on: "I sometimes fancy that in my condition if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus – but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad" (Gilman, 2003:1660). The narrator barely manages to finish her train of thought before her husband's admonishing commands overwhelm her. Clearly, his views regarding her condition are to some extent substituted for her own.

In relation to this it is also natural to point out that the narrator is surrounded by voices of authority, while her own voice is not heard. Her opinion is of no consequence, although she does indeed have an opinion: "Personally, I disagree with their ideas. Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good. But what is one to do?" (Gilman, 2003:1660). It would be hard to make her voice heard, not only by a husband, an authority figure in his own right, but a physician husband nonetheless, who not only has domination over her as his wife but also as his patient. This, of course, could perhaps only make her worse: "But John says if I feel so, I shall neglect proper self-control; so I take pains to control myself – before him, at least, and that makes me very tired" (Gilman, 2003:1661). In addition to this, the narrator faces the possibility that if she does not obey these voices of authority and get better, she will only face even further voices of authority: "John says if I don't pick up faster he shall send me to Weir Mitchell in the fall. But I don't want to go there

at all. I had a friend who was in his hands once, and she says he is just like John and my brother, only more so!” (Gilman, 2003:1663).

Undoubtedly, denying herself everything that once gave her pleasure, and trying to repress the parts of her personality which are creative and fanciful, would evidently be very tiring. Anyone who has tried to be something they are not can bear witness to that fact. The internal struggle which can be read between the lines here is a powerful struggle and an ancient one. The narrator tires herself out, caught between her desire to be a good and loving wife and mother, and the desire to be herself, a creative, strong and free individual. The result, then, is not being able to be neither of those two. The challenge suddenly seems insurmountable, and the entire situation leaves the narrator with feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, and as a result: depression. As she states herself: “But these nervous troubles are dreadfully depressing” (Gilman, 2003:1661).

Met by voices of authority, she can not convey her feelings either. She is dismissed as a ‘little girl’ or as a ‘little goose,’ and her husband insists that she is getting better, although she is not. Consequently, she says nothing more on that subject, except writes it in her own voice, in her diary. She dares not tell John the truth anymore, but she nevertheless needs to tell someone the truth, even though it just might be to dead paper: ”As both her greatest deception and her attempt to be honest, the journal embodies in its very form the absurd contradictions inherent in her role as a wife” (Shumaker, 1989:69). Thus the narrator can only remain a dutiful wife by not allowing her voice to be heard, confiding instead to her journal. In the same instance, however, not having her voice heard is perhaps what made her depressed in the first place. There is no wonder, then, that the narrator starts to see a trapped woman behind the wallpaper and that she begins to relate to her. She is divided into two different personalities, the one who is silent and the one who dares to speak.

The wallpaper in itself can, of course, also be seen as a symbol of the narrator’s depression. It is a common feeling when depressed to feel detached from the world, not quite connecting to the outside reality. This might be why the narrator feels such identification with the woman behind the pattern, because she too feels that there is something barring her from connecting with the outside world. Furthermore, the pattern itself can also be viewed as an image of depression: “It is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate and provoke study, and when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide – plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard of contradictions” (Gilman, 2003:1661). The pattern does not seem to connect to anything; there is no order to its behaviour. It contradicts itself, and plunges into

suicide. Much like the feeling of depression, the paper is not reasonable, but rather conveys a feeling of despair and detachment. Consequently, the paper does little to help the narrator out of her depression. "This paper looks to me as if it *knew* what a vicious influence it had!" (Gilman, 2003:1662).

However, taking all of these above mentioned points into consideration, it seems as if there exists a continuum within the story where the ideal Victorian housewife occupies one end of the continuum and the woman behind the wallpaper occupies the other. The narrator exists somewhere in the middle, her depression keeping her from being either one or the other. Throughout the story, though, the narrator glides towards the woman behind the paper. She starts out wanting, perhaps, to identify with the ideal Victorian wife, but as she starts to find her voice she identifies more closely with the woman who wants to be her own, and free. This is exemplified with her detached use of 'one' in her first journal entry, where she apparently is not strong enough to even sustain clear statements of her own. Gradually, though, she increases her uses of 'I' statements, until finally she and the woman behind the wallpaper are one and the same at the end. Her voice, and her sense of herself, becomes stronger. In this sense, the voice of depression becomes significant. Her depression is a symbol of her conflict. She cannot, or will not, be the perfect wife for this keeps her away from the freedom she desires. However, being completely free and doing what she wishes to do is not acceptable or possible. Her depression, then, becomes somewhat of a compromise between the two. It is only through her writing that she is able to defy society's norms, no longer caring what is acceptable. Her depression causes her to narrate her own story, and it is through this self narration, creating her own story instead of listening to other stories about herself, that she becomes more complete.

So she finds a voice in the end, and she lives to tell about it, giving others hope. Depression is not necessarily the end. Perhaps it is just what is needed in order to take yourself and your voice seriously, not letting others dictate your life. Living your life as a compromise seldom leads to happiness. At least this is what the narrator seems to say. We do not get to know what happens to her after her husband wakes up. Chances are, he is not too happy, and probably will not let her creep on forever. But perhaps 'what happens next' is of no importance. The narrator faced her voice of depression and made it her own. Whatever happens, at least she now dares to be her own person and voice her own story. Undoubtedly, this has given many, who have read the story, hope for the future. That is another reason, I would argue, why her voice of depression was, and is, important.

As the narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” claims her voice, it is appropriate to turn our focus towards another woman in another time. She has a voice, but is still frequently silenced, not simply because she is a woman but because she is a woman in addition to being poor, an outcast and an alcoholic. She is not middle-class and she is not labelled a hysteric, but that is perhaps because she is not worthy of labels in the first place. Like the narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” she is depressed, but her depression runs a different course, as 1939 displayed a much different world from that of the Victorians. Being a woman was different too, but changes done were perhaps not for the better, or perhaps nothing really had changed at all. You were still expected to be taken care of by a man, and if you chose not to, you were on your own in an unforgiving world. It is time to take a closer look at *Good Morning, Midnight*.

Chapter Two

Depression as a Shield: The Voice of Depression in *Good Morning, Midnight*

In this chapter I aim to look at *Good Morning, Midnight* in a psychological as well as a modernistic context. I will then highlight some aspects of previous analysis of the text which I find to be important in this context. I will then take a closer look at the text itself, and the voice of depression in it, and try to see what added dimension this might offer in this analysis. In contrast to “The Yellow Wallpaper” the narrator of *Good Morning, Midnight* has a voice, albeit not a very powerful one. Nevertheless, she needs her voice in order to try to protect herself and survive in a world which is different than the Victorian one seen in “The Yellow Wallpaper.” I would like to argue that the voice of depression in *Good Morning, Midnight* is a voice which tries to protect itself from the pain of life, and the world, by using depression as a shield. Consequently, by using her voice to protect herself, Sasha mirrors a language born out of a world in disarray. Sasha’s voice of depression, a voice which does not want to face the facts, is a poster-child of a literary world which questions the harshness, the depression and the alienation of the modern world.

Interwar Psychology and Risk Factors

During the interwar period baffled psychologists faced the onslaught of male hysterics. Interestingly though, the treatment for hysterical soldiers and the rest cure imposed upon neurasthenic women were significantly different (Showalter, 1985). “Hugh Crichton-Miller protested that rest in bed, nourishment, and encouragement were insufficient to restore masculine self-esteem: ‘Progressive daily achievement is the only way whereby manhood and self-respect can be regained’” (Showalter, 1985:181). Thus when, in contrast to Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the poet Siegfried Sassoon was diagnosed with hysteria, or shell shock as the male version was called, he was not forced to be passive, but rather encouraged to resume a life of energetic masculine activity. Most importantly, he was allowed to continue his work, and was never deprived of his voice (Showalter, 1985).

Sasha Jansen, the narrator of *Good Morning, Midnight* was never diagnosed or spent time in a mental institution. Nevertheless, it makes sense to argue that she is depressed. She has more than one reason to be. As Jane Ussher points out, there are many routes to madness (Ussher, 1991), and the narrator of *Good Morning, Midnight* exemplifies more than one of

these routes. Sasha Jansen lives in a patriarchal society, expected to fulfil the roles deemed suitable for a woman. She has no money, and consequently, very little freedom in her existence. In addition, she has lived through the loss of a child and a failed marriage. In her youth she grew accustomed to being able to use her sexuality in order to gain what she wanted, but growing older, she struggles with herself as a sexual being. She has in many ways lost her 'ideal' self, the young, attractive, rich, successful woman she wishes she was, and is instead faced with middle-age, poverty and loneliness. Denise Russell points out that: "Experiencing unhappiness with her lot, yet seeing no escape, a woman may become very depressed, frigid, anxious and fearful or attempt suicide, even though these paths may magnify the despair" (Russell, 1995:114). There is little doubt that Sasha Jansen is unhappy with her present situation. She is depressed and contemplates suicide, but this only serves to make her less happy. Russell goes on to explain: "Genuinely mad women step outside the female role, becoming dominating, perhaps even hostile and violent, but usually retaining feelings of inferiority, helplessness and self-mistrust" (Russell, 1995:114). Sasha Jansen has undoubtedly stepped out of the female role; she does not fit into society's acceptable mould for women. In addition, she is most definitely hostile, if not perhaps to all people, then to society. Still she feels inferior and helpless, unsure as to how to survive another day; so she makes carefully laid out plans for herself. Freud argues, in his essay "Mourning and Melancholia," that melancholia, in addition to a loss of a more ideal kind than we are accustomed to in mourning, displays something else which is lacking in mourning: "an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale. In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself" (Freud, 1968:246). This can be said to be definitely true of Sasha. Doubtlessly, she has lost all self-regard, and struggles with issues of self-esteem and entitlement to life. In addition to the fact that Sasha also suffers from mourning, caused by the loss of her youth, her marriage and her child, she also exists in a perpetual state of melancholia.

Sasha Jansen has perhaps lost her ability to interact with the world, lulling herself into her depression as if it was a protective blanket. However, considering the novel was published in 1939, on the eve of the Second World War, it is perhaps no surprise that the world Sasha tries to survive in is a very bleak and depressing one. Male authors wrote novels of anxiety and emasculation, impotence being the central image of psychic anxiety in postwar literature, a major trope of literary Modernism (Showalter, 1985). Authors felt, like most people, disillusioned, having just barely survived a devastating war and now finding themselves on the brink of another. War had lost its glory and men questioned their manhood and meaning.

What better way to describe women, then, in the fragmented literary world of women, than with a disillusioned, shunned, lonely and depressed heroine. In so far as art imitates life, there could hardly be a better example of this than the interwar literature. Women too felt disillusioned and lost, having lost husbands, sons and brothers in the First World War. Joining the work force and supporting their troops as best they could, they too searched for meaning and redemption. Sasha Jansen is in many ways the embodiment of a woman during this time who fell between the cracks, having no way to help, not even able to help herself.

Modernism in *Good Morning, Midnight*

Using a broad definition, modernism can be said to describe literature, and arts, produced in the interwar period and which deals with the modern world. In a more narrow sense, modernism refers to literature which deals with the breakdown of traditional society under the pressures of modernity (Norton, 2003:1814). As M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham point out: “The catastrophe of the war had shaken faith in the moral basis, coherence, and durability of Western civilization and raised doubts about the adequacy of traditional literary modes to represent the harsh and dissonant realities of the postwar world” (Abrams and Harpham, 2009:202). In other words, the world was a new one, without perhaps the illusions of the past, and to interpret these harsh new realities there was a need for a different form of language. The world seemed less coherent and less straightforward. Consequently, in order to convey this new reality more appropriately, a key characteristic of the modernist work emerged: its construction out of fragments. Furthermore, modernist literature is also notable for what it omits, compared to earlier literature. Explanations, summaries and interpretations are left out, and there is more emphasis on understatements, symbolism, irony and shifts in perspective, voice and tone (Norton, 2003:1814-15).

There seems to be little doubt among critics that *Good Morning, Midnight* fits into the modernistic mould. As Elaine Savory puts it: “*Good Morning, Midnight*’s modernist fabric has often been noted, modernism being an aesthetic which, in its embrace of fragmentation and alienation, identified the times” (Savory, 2000:117). She goes on to point out the novel’s tension between humour and tragedy, its critique of society and its depiction of a devastating and enervating spiritual chaos (Savory, 2000). In addition, she states that: “Rooms and houses may have characters, but people can behave as machines, a particularly modernist construction of technologically developed society and highly functional in this story of a

humanity depressed and degraded in the shadow of fascism” (Savory, 2000:127), which is a sentiment shared among many critics who have seen *Good Morning, Midnight* in a modernist light. It is fairly safe, then, to argue that *Good Morning, Midnight*, with its fragmented narrative of rooms after rooms, its social critique and depressed mood and theme, fits well into a modernistic context. The world was depressed, after all, having just barely survived a world war, not to mention a fairly devastating economic depression, so there is no wonder that Sasha and the world she enters into is a depressed and cold place to live in. In addition, the world was filled with antagonism and hate and, without perhaps knowing it, was preparing for a second world war. As Helen Carr puts it: “She is describing the febrile nightmarish world of Europe on the eve of the Second War World, with its anti-Semitism, its racism, its class-machinery, its nationalistic posturing” (Carr, 1996:48). She describes it well too. Jean Rhys definitely found a language which helped her convey the harsh realities of the modern world. This language is significant because by using this language Jean Rhys was able to create a character that mirrors the bleak realities of her day and age. Sasha Jansen is as fragmented as the world she lives in, just as defeated, paradoxical, shattered and depressed. Sasha wants to shield herself from reality, exactly like many of her contemporaries, and Jean Rhys found a language which communicates that.

Alcohol as a Cure

I suppose there is no wonder why Sasha drinks. It has, after all, been a popular remedy for depressions of any kind ever since mankind discovered alcohol. Her drinking, of course, only reinforces her status as an outcast, since it is most definitely quite the unrespectable pastime for a lady. However, Jane Nardin argues that *Good Morning, Midnight*, as well as Jean Rhys’ other texts, take issue with the dominant early-twentieth century view of alcoholism as representing a failure of will. Instead, they suggest that women’s addictions can be seen as symptoms of patriarchal oppression or as protests against it, and by refusing recovery these women simply refuse a return to the predicament against which they were protesting in the first place (Nardin, 2006). As Nardin further points out: “Although *Midnight* does indeed resemble the masculine “drunk narrative, in which alcoholism is inseparable from the modernist ethos of despair” [...], the grimly prosaic reasons that underlie Sasha’s despair are largely specific to women in a patriarchal society” (Nardin, 2006:11). Consequently, drinking takes on a larger symbolic meaning in Sasha’s life. By drinking she not only tries to flee from

her own, more mundane day to day problems, but she also opposes the social machinery which created these problems in the first place.

However, drink does seem to be somewhat of a liberation for Sasha Jansen, at least some of the time. If for nothing else, drinking does seem to take the edge off her pain, at times, and helps to shield her from the unloving environment of society. As Savory points out, drink serves many roles in the writings of Jean Rhys:

Rhys so often makes alcohol a crucial factor in her novels: it is part violation of the normative codes of expectations for women, part a way to express the repressed inner core of her characters' emotional lives, liberated if distorted by the drug, and part story of the prevalence of drink in the cultural spaces of Rhys wrote about, as well as in her own life. (Savory, 2009:70)

All this is true, of course, but although drink does help Sasha to express her inner voice and gives her strength at times, drink is still an added element of despair in Sasha's life. As Nardin suggests Sasha insists on carrying with her a hope for tomorrow which compensates for frustration today, and somehow Sasha feels that drinking might just be the solution, if for nothing else a temporary one: "The heroines all drink because, at some point in their lives, alcohol promises to help them deal with the problems they face as women" (Nardin, 2006:11). Unfortunately for Sasha alcohol rarely is the solution. Although it might give her temporary strength or power, it always fails her in the end. Alcohol is both the culprit and the cure, hope and hopelessness. She drinks because she is depressed, and she becomes more depressed because she drinks.

All of this, however, suggests that Sasha uses alcohol as a form of self-medication. As the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" uses writing as a way to keep in touch with reality, Sasha uses alcohol as a way for her to dare to venture out into reality. By drinking Sasha feels able to step outside of herself and feels stronger and more equipped to deal with whatever cards life will deal her. By drinking, she feels less vulnerable and more powerful because she is no longer just herself. Alcohol alters Sasha's state of mind, which is exactly what she feels she needs in order to survive. Despite the fact that it might have the opposite effect, consequently rendering her more vulnerable and less powerful, Sasha still persists in thinking that alcohol is exactly the remedy and the cure that she so desperately needs.

Previous Criticism: Some Points Worth Mentioning

Many places and events have symbolic meaning in *Good Morning, Midnight*. Rooms, for example, have symbolic implications which I will discuss later on. Another place which assumes symbolic significance is the lavatory. Sasha seems to frequently end up in lavatories, whether willingly or not, and once again she has found a place which functions as a hideout, a shelter from the staring eyes of others. Savory points out that lavatories can be seen as commenting on social hierarchies, which is true, but even more important in this context is her description of the lavatory as being: “[...] like a grimly funny Hades: a place for the living dead to hide, and eternally a source of ribald humour” (Savory, 2000:124). In a way, Sasha is a living dead, not sure whether she wants to be living or dead. She uses the lavatories as a way to hide when she needs to escape, much like she tries to hide from her depression, or how she uses her depression, or alcohol, to hide from the outside world.

Furthermore, because Sasha needs the lavatories to escape her life for a little while, she is also unable to escape them when she wants to, like an ironic catch-22. When she is sent on her way by Mr. Blank in order to deliver a letter, she is unable to understand to whom she is expected to deliver it to, thanks to Mr. Blank’s mispronunciation. Consequently, Sasha wanders aimlessly around in the building, opening door after door, and it seems that all she is able to find are lavatories. There seems to be no escape, then. She ends up in lavatories even though she does not want to, and she ends up in them when she does want to. Being the place where human waste is expelled, it is interesting to note the symbolic link between Sasha and waste: she is at the bottom of the pile, not worth much, supposed to be discarded at any time. Lavatories seem to be her fate, where she belongs: being a part of society, but still outside it, hiding out in the underworld, unable to get up and out.

In relation to lavatories, mirrors carry with them further symbolic meaning in *Good Morning, Midnight*. Helene Carr argues that looking-glasses are a leitmotiv in Rhys’ work: “Her protagonists spend a good deal of time looking in mirrors, sometimes at photos, even at ghosts of themselves, descending into the unknown, searching for some understanding of their being which is other than the definitions thrust upon them” (Carr, 1996: 58-59). This is true, but even more important is the fact that mirrors represent a supposed truth and is thus yet another thing Sasha hopes to shield herself from:

This is another lavatory that I know very well, another of the well-known mirrors. ‘Well, well,’ it says, ‘last time you looked in here you were a bit different, weren’t

you? Would you believe me that, of all the faces I see, I remember each one, that I keep a ghost to throw back at each one – lightly, like an echo – when it looks into me again?’ All glasses in all lavabos do this. But it’s not as bad as it might be. This is just the interval when drink makes you look nice, before it makes you look awful.
(GMM:142)

Sasha uses her depression and her coping mechanisms, such as drinking too much, in order to try to forget how old she has become and how little she has amounted too. However, mirrors and lavatories seem to remind her of who she is and how sorrowful her life is. Mirrors convey to her the truth she tries to hide from. Thus mirrors are a source of depression, though also an escape because she keeps trying to alter her appearance in order to see a different truth. Nevertheless, she is also aware of the fact that mirrors do not always necessarily convey the truth: “The truth is improbable, the truth is fantastic; it’s in what you think is a distorting mirror that you see the truth” (GMM:63). Thus mirrors in this novel also mirror the paradoxes Sasha’s voice communicates. Nothing is ever constant; Sasha’s voice fluctuates between cause and effect, between wanting to die and wanting to live.

Helen Nebeker argues that there is an existential theme in *Good Morning, Midnight*. She states that the horror with which Sasha’s mind cannot cope, and what she must shield herself from, is the blackness of life which in turn translates into the nothingness of death (Nebeker, 1981). Although Sasha does not seem to have too much against the idea of death, it is true that she does seem to hold on to a meagre hope of life. She does not want to be obliterated; she still has not quite given up. Consequently, this existential theme is strongly related to a sense of self extinction. Sasha hardly exists in the world in which she lives; she has no face, no name and no country: it is as if she is already dead. Thomas F. Staley also comments on this aspect. While discussing René, the gigolo, he points out that: “Moreover, Sasha’s own name is rarely referred to; there is a nameless quality to both characters which reinforce the dissolution of self, central to the theme of the novel” (Staley, 1979:88). This threat of dissolution is important, because not only does it offer Sasha sympathy for her bleak existence, but it also offers an understanding of why she is depressed. Not having a secure feeling of identity would surely bring anybody down. Obviously, it is also a reinforcing, downward spiral: the more she feels depressed, the more she loses touch with herself, and the more the feeling of self is extinguished, the more depressed she will become. It is also understandable how Sasha came to feel this way: “She lives in the 1930s, when women were supposed to gain social standing through marriage to a man (preferably of means), or, if they remained single, to hold onto respectability even in hard times” (Savory, 2009:68). Sasha has

neither retained a husband or her respectability, so there is no wonder, then, that she fell off the map of society. She is an outcast of sorts, one who is ignored and frowned upon. She has no right to a 'self' because she refuses to play by the rules.

As we saw in "The Yellow Wallpaper" being silenced is also an aspect which recurs in *Good Morning, Midnight*: "Rhys is presenting a gendered allegory of the modern condition of unbelonging as her female protagonist's voice, like the voice of the woman writer, is effectively silenced, dispersed within male-dominated literary space" (Howells, 1991:103). Sasha, as a woman, has no voice to be reckoned with. She has no power over her own existence, how she is judged, or by which standards she is measured against. That is perhaps why the narrator's voice of depression is so important, because, through the context of this novel, she is indeed given a voice with which she can offer her opinion:

The seizing of definitions of morality and worth by the representatives of the coercive power of organized society is what appals Rhys. Even if the women Rhys describes are not 'shut up', as Virginia Woolf puts it, in the sense of being confined to the home, they are frequently shut up in the sense of being silenced. Did Sasha say all this to Mr Blank? She did not. The novel as a whole can be read as Sasha's attempt to give her version of her story: events and spoken dialogue are interwoven with her inner commentary, the speeches she wishes she had made, the connections she inwardly makes, the memories which return. (Carr, 1996:56)

Even though Sasha has a more audible voice than the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper," then, she is still silenced by the norms of society. She cannot utter every opinion which comes to mind. This might be one of the reasons for her depression in the first place, not being able to be heard, which leads to a sense of powerlessness. However, she does find an acceptable way to voice her opinions. A way which is more secret, more hidden, as she feels she herself must be, but still perhaps able to reach some. Thus Sasha is given a voice, a voice that speaks for the other voices of society which are not being heard. Even though efforts were made in order to silence her, she got the last word in the end.

Well, That Was the End of Me: The Voice

Good Morning, Midnight is written in a highly poetic language. Short, staccato words and clipped lines, combined with sentences without verbs, contribute a rhythm to the telling which creates a voice that is unsure, overpowered and sad. There is a circular shape to the novel

(Angier, 1990), always ending up at the beginning or beginning at the end, almost like a dog biting its tale. The voice is allusive and glancing, as if it belongs to someone very lonely who has no one left to talk to but herself. Carole Angier puts it beautifully when she writes that: “Like all good poetry, the telling of *Good Morning, Midnight* mirrors what is told. Sasha is trapped and divided: and so is her narrative. She is dazed by drink, besieged and battered by memories: and so is her language” (Angier, 1990:386). Memories flow through the narrative like an unforgiving stream of reoccurring flashbacks. Sasha is unable to escape them; so many things remind her of her past. Consequently, symbolism is also used frequently in this narrative, often revolving around the same themes. For instance, Sasha never does seem to find her way out, even though she wants nothing else. This comes back to haunt her, in her nightmares, and in real life. Ellipsis is also used frequently in *Good Morning, Midnight*. The voice halts, and something is left out, whether or not it is hours or just minutes.

Good Morning, Midnight, like “The Yellow Wallpaper,” is a first person narrative and the narrator remains the focalizer throughout the text. The text is mainly made up of Sasha’s internal monologue and external dialogue, although Sasha’s voice becomes best known to the reader through her internal monologue. As Helen Carr points out: “Rhys’s narrative technique [...] turns what is silence in terms of plot into inner speech, constructing a dialogue between the powerful (who speak out loud) and the disempowered (who speak inwardly)” (Carr, 1996:57). Furthermore, the voice shifts from speaking in the first person to the second, and sometimes the third person (Carr, 1996), creating a sense of further detachment and alienation. Other characters in the novel are primarily represented through the narrator’s eyes and through their dialogue with her. It is safe to argue, then, that the narrator is the only character in the novel we receive subjective information about and thus is the one we feel the closest affinity to.

This affinity to the narrator affords the reader with a greater capacity for feelings of sympathy towards the narrator. It is easier to understand and feel empathy for a heroine when we get inside her head, so to speak, and when we feel that we are privy to thoughts and emotions we would not normally get access to. In addition, once we feel sympathy for this depressed character her depression becomes more understandable, and her struggle makes more sense. It is easier for the reader to understand her pain, frustration and detachment from the world. This detachment also functions in the narrative as a crucial aspect of the ‘message’ of the text. It is a component of the communication, reception and interpretation of the text. This is what is known as a text’s psychological stance, an aspect of point of view, which

entails the question of the narrator's distance or affinity to events and characters represented in the text (Lanser, 1981). As Susan Sniader Lanser explains:

It is virtually impossible for a narrator to tell a story without communicating, either explicitly or, as is more common, implicitly through a variety of means, some degree of distance or affinity, detachment from or involvement with the various subjects (events, objects, places, and especially personae) which constitute the story world. (Lanser, 1981:202)

Undoubtedly, this is particularly true of *Good Morning, Midnight*. Sasha Jansen, the narrator, communicates in many ways her detachment to people and events, both explicitly (she does indeed admit her fear and hatred for other people to René), and implicitly (through symbolism, memories, fantasies). It makes sense, then, that the psychological stance in this novel is a vital part of its message, in so far as the distance Sasha feels towards society and her own life is part of the alienation and pain the novel, presumably, aims to portray. It can, in addition, also be read as part of the novel's ideology. Still, in this context, what is most important to point out is that this psychological stance can be read as one of the most significant examples of depression as a shield. Sasha is detached from events and people and is so, perhaps, because she is depressed. In addition, she might be depressed and distant in order to avoid dealing with the real trauma of her life. As Cathleen Maslen points out: "Sasha's hyperbolic melancholic persona seems superimposed over an abyssal loss, a narrativisation that staves off acknowledgement of the 'real,' inaccessible, unspeakable trauma" (Maslen, 2009:125). In other words, it is as if her depression, her melancholia, in itself serves as a shield which protects Sasha from having to deal with even more traumatizing feelings which lies beneath the surface.

Furthermore, in an effort to try to avoid further disappointments and more pain, Sasha detaches herself from the world so that she does not have to get involved in relationships, or events, which she fears might lead to rejection or heartbreak. Sasha envelops herself in a sort of cocoon of depression, so to speak, trying to build a protective armour against the disappointments of life. The only way to achieve this, however, is to distance herself completely from the rest of the world. Which, in turn, of course, will inevitably cause her to suffer an even greater depression. This circularity can be seen in Sasha's voice throughout the novel. She insists that she will not be excited or drink too much, trying to protect herself from failure, but ends up failing, drinking too much and crying despite her resolutions. She never succeeds in distancing herself completely, but never stops wanting to distance herself

nevertheless. Throughout, this paradox is evident in Sasha's voice: her depression leads her to desire protection even more, which compels her to use her depression as a way to defend herself.

Good Morning, Midnight consists of four parts. Part one introduces us to Sasha and her depression. She has taken certain precautions in order to survive her life in Paris: "I have been here five days. I have decided on a place to eat in at midday, a place to eat in at night, a place to have my drink in after dinner. I have arranged my little life" (GMM:9). It seems that, to some extent, Sasha is aware of her own limitations:

But careful, careful! Don't get excited. You know what happens when you get excited and exalted, don't you? ... Yes. ... And then, you know how you collapse like a pricked balloon, don't you? Having no staying power. ... Yes, exactly. ... So, no excitement. This is going to be a quiet, sane fortnight. Not too much drinking, avoidance of certain cafés, of certain streets, of certain spots, and everything will go off beautifully. (GMM:14)

Consequently, it makes sense, then, to argue that Sasha's depression functions as a shield, or an armour, protecting her from what she can not deal with. She knows what she needs to avoid in order to function properly. This voice of depression, which aims to shield itself from the world, can be seen in relation to what I've mentioned previously: the significance of Jean Rhys' language, a language created in a disillusioned and depressed interwar world. Not only is Sasha poor and defeated, she is also alive during a time of a defeated and disenchanted world. Thus Sasha's voice of depression, a voice which portrays a need to protect itself from a cold and harsh reality, can be said to mirror the perceived reality of its time. Because Sasha is depressed she needs to shield herself from further disappointments and because she needs to shield herself from further disappointments, it makes sense to remain depressed, taking a step back from entering reality completely. Thus she arranges her little life, and she avoids certain streets and cafés, making sure she can remain unexcited and passive and simply flow through life on a wave of approximate indifference. It is not always quite so easy, however. The only way to escape life completely is to die, otherwise, as long as you are still alive, you will always be faced with other people and challenges:

My life, which seems so simple and monotonous, is really a complicated affair of cafés where they like me and cafés where they don't, streets that are friendly, streets that aren't, rooms where I might be happy, rooms where I never shall be, looking-glasses I look nice in, looking-glasses I don't, dresses that will be lucky, dresses that won't, and so on. (GMM:40)

Sasha is unable to escape her feelings and her depression which, to some extent, only makes her more depressed because she has to face the stares of others and her own eyes in the mirror. Sometimes, even, it seems as though she has left her armour at home. She is afraid that she might be remembered: “Besides, what if he has, what’s it matter? They can’t kill you, can they? Oh, can’t they, though, can’t they? Today I must be very careful, today I have left my armour at home” (GMM:42), and she frequently needs to escape into the lavabo because she starts to cry. Most obvious, however, is her need to drink, in a further attempt to remain somewhat indifferent and somewhat calm. In order to try to keep her head above water, as they say, she tries desperately to keep her focus on her arranged little life and the plans she makes for herself during her stay in Paris: “I try to decide what colour I shall have my hair dyed, and hang on to that thought as you hang on to something when you are drowning” (GMM:44). Furthermore, her depression is also narrated to us in Sasha’s interpretations of other people’s stares: “I have seen that in people’s eyes all my life. I am asking myself all the time what the devil I am doing here. All the time” (GMM:46). There is no wonder that Sasha is depressed if that is what she has been met with all her life. To wonder what the devil you are doing here, to feel that you occupy no rightful place in the world, surely could lead anyone into a depressed state. This sentiment also echoes the question she received upon returning to England five years earlier: “Why didn’t you drown yourself in the Seine?” (GMM:36). Fortunately, or unfortunately, for Sasha, the same person who asked her that question also informed her of a legacy she was to receive, which, to some extent, gave her a solution: it gave her the bright idea of drinking herself to death:

Well, that was the end of me, the real end. Two-pound-ten every Tuesday and a room off the Gray’s Inn Road. Saved, rescued and with my place to hide in – what more did I want? I crept in and hid. The lid of the coffin shut down with a bang. Now I no longer wish to be loved, beautiful, happy or successful. I want one thing and one thing only – to be left alone. (GMM:37)

The legacy, then, afforded her with the final solution to her problems and depression: a possible complete escape. Much like the narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper” she feels trapped and needs to find a way out of her situation. The difference being, however, that the narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper” does not know how to escape whereas Sasha thinks she has found the solution: death. Sasha didn’t quite succeed yet though, and in the midst of trying she was given the opportunity to come to Paris, in order to get away and to buy some

new clothes. So this is where we meet Sasha then, in Paris, not really sure whether or not she wants to be a part of society.

Part one also introduces us to the other characters in *Good Morning, Midnight*. We hear of the *commis*, lurking in the hallways of Sasha's hotel, and we meet the Russians who thinks that Sasha looks sad: "Yes, I am sad, sad as a circus-lioness, sad as an eagle without wings, sad as a violin with only one string and that one broken, sad as a woman who is growing old. Sad, sad, sad. ... Or perhaps if I just said 'merde' it would do as well" (GMM:39). Towards the end of part one Sasha also encounters René, the gigolo.

In part one Sasha also conveys her futile attempts at keeping a job, through flashbacks. There was the job as a receptionist, where Mr. Blank sent her on a misguided endeavour to find a *kise*, which only ended in lavatories. In addition, there was the job as a guide, where Sasha also struggled to find her way: "I try, but they always see through me. The passages will never lead anywhere, the doors will always be shut. I know. ..." (GMM:28). Sasha never seems to find her way. Just like her depression: she does not know how to live with it, or find her way out of it.

Furthermore, towards the end of part one we also get another flashback which perhaps helps to explain how Sasha ended up wanting to drink herself to death. She remembers her baby: "And there he is, lying with a ticked tied round his wrist because he died in a hospital. And there I am looking down at him, without one line, without one wrinkle, without one crease. ..." (GMM:52). She is left without a mark, as if nothing happened. She has to go back to her ordinary life, without any sign of what she has been through. Obviously, this incident might explain Sasha's depression in the first place or at least give us a sense of its origin. The narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper" suffers from depression after having her first child. This more or less gives us reasons to attribute her depression to post-partum depression, or at least see the connection between depression and hormones and a drastic change in life circumstances. Sasha may well have suffered from post-partum depression too, adding to perhaps an already existing depression, and not to mention grief and trauma after losing her newborn child. The mere poetry of this account, and the distance we feel in Sasha's voice, goes a long way, perhaps, in order to create sympathy in the reader for the narrator. Cathleen Maslen insightfully remarks that: "[...] Rhys's writerly enterprise demands our respect and empathy in that she strives to facilitate a *witnessing* of the suffering of marginalised women" (Maslen, 2009:30). Thus, we are forced to witness Sasha's distress and grief, mainly caused by the fact that her son died because she could not afford to feed him. Consequently, we understand that this is not just simply a sad, middle-aged woman, who takes a break in her

attempt to kill herself in order to come to Paris on a shopping spree. This is a woman who has lived through loss and pain. In most readers the loss and pain is felt and we are willing to award the narrator our sympathy. Perhaps it is exactly how Carole Angier puts it: “We do not need to be told that Sasha is alone and lonely, lost in her memories and dreams. Her language shows her loneliness; it is loneliness distilled” (Angier, 1990:387). Thus we feel her loneliness through her words, and we feel for her, because we all know the sadness which accompanies loneliness.

Part two offers further remembrances and reflections. Sasha goes to meet the Russian painter and she remembers an episode of meeting a man for a couple of drinks, after having nothing to eat for several weeks. It did not end well, and this memory leads to further contemplations on her misery and depression:

People talk about the happy life, but that’s the happy life when you don’t care any longer if you live or die. You only get there after a long time and many misfortunes. And do you think you are left there? Never. As soon as you have reached this heaven of indifference, you are pulled out of it. From your heaven you have to go back to hell. When you are dead to the world, the world often rescues you, if only to make a figure of fun out of you. (GMM:75-76)

This is true of course, to some extent. Many carry with them the misconception that depressed people are indifferent to the world, whereas the truth is that indifference is what they all wish they could feel. Feelings are usually much too strong in depression, so the hope, and the relief, would be to feel nothing at all instead.

At the Russians’ house, Serge relates the story of the mulatto from Martinique who did not quite belong in London and who ended up outside his apartment, crying, dishevelled and drunk. Serge comments that: “She was crying because she was at the end of everything” (GMM:80), much like Sasha, who is also usually drunk and sometimes crying, because she does not quite belong anywhere either, and because she too is at the end of everything. As Sasha puts it herself: “I have no pride – no pride, no name, no face, no country. I don’t belong anywhere. Too sad, too sad. ...” (GMM:38). Nevertheless, Sasha does try to fit in. She buys a hat, new clothes and dyes her hair. “Faites comme les autres – that’s been my motto all my life. Faites comme les autres, damn you” (GMM:88). It is not easy, however, despite her efforts: “Please, please, monsieur et madame, mister, missis and miss, I am trying so hard to be like you. I know I don’t succeed, but look how hard I try” (GMM:88). She feels, perhaps, that she is judged before she is even given a chance: “Every word I say has chains round its ankles; every thought I think is weighed with heavy weights. Since I was born, hasn’t every

word I've said, every thought I've thought, everything I've done, been tied up, weighed, chained?" (GMM:88).

It is also worth mentioning that part two contains a foreshadowing of what is about to come: the inevitable end. Sasha sees herself living in an apartment much like the one the Russians have, cold and small. She envisions what her life would be like if she had an apartment such as that one. "And the dreams that you have, alone in an empty room, waiting for the door that will open, the thing that is bound to happen. ..." (GMM:83). Undoubtedly, the thing that is bound to happen does happen at the end of the novel when the *commis* enters Sasha's room, despite the fact that it is another door to another room which is the door which actually opens.

On that note, rooms are what define part three of *Good Morning, Midnight*. "Quite like old times," the room says. "Yes? No?" (GMM:9) The very first sentence in *Good Morning, Midnight* refers to a room, in fact personifies a room. This, if nothing else, speaks to the symbolic significance of rooms in this novel. Here it is also interesting to note the connection to "The Yellow Wallpaper." The narrator in that short story resides and spends most of her time in a room, the nursery in which she is confined. That is where she writes, that is where she finds her voice and that is where her breakthrough starts to happen. Sasha too spends most of her time in a room, albeit different rooms. That is where she hides from the wolves outside and that is where she shields herself from the cold reality of her life. Sasha Jansen has arranged her little life and a lot of her life consists of different rooms. This, in a way, allows Jean Rhys to structure her narrative in the way that Sasha structures her life: one room after another, each room allowing for remembrances of her past. Part two of the novel ends with Sasha looking at the painting she bought from the Russian painter:

... I stare back at him and think about being hungry, being cold, being hurt, being ridiculed, as if it were in another life than this. This damned room – it's saturated with the past. ... It's all the rooms I've ever slept in, all the streets I've ever walked in. Now the whole thing moves in an ordered, undulating procession past my eyes. Rooms, streets, streets, rooms. ... (GMM:91)

These words take us into part three of the novel which more or less completely consists of rooms of Sasha's past. It is through these rooms that we might come to understand our heroine a little better.

What is most significant in this respect, however, is the fact that the rooms, to some extent, functions as an extension of Sasha's armour. A room helps to shield her from her own

current life and helps her to avoid having to deal with society. Helen Carr points out that: “For Woolf a room of one’s own is privacy within the bourgeois home: for Rhys a room is never home, only the latest bleak retreat from a hostile world” (Carr, 1996:51). A room is, then, to Sasha, a place where you can go and hide and not have to deal with the outside world and the people in it anymore. As she herself says, after trying to find a new room, a lighter room, and having failed, returns to her own dark room: “A room is a place where you hide from the wolves outside, and that’s all any room is. Why should I worry about changing my room?” (GMM:33).

As Sasha tries to shield herself from the things that will hurt her, however, she is unable to escape the memories of her past. Trying to hide from the wolves outside she cannot help but to be haunted by the rooms of her earlier life, with fragments of her life with Enno coming back to her in agonizing flashes. She remembers getting married, each of them thinking that the other one had money. She remembers the rooms they stayed in before reaching Paris. After a while, she remembers the beginning of the end, with Enno’s hurtful, emasculating comment: “‘You don’t know how to make love,’ he said. That was about a month after we got to Paris. ‘You’re too passive, you’re lazy, you bore me. I’ve had enough of this. Goodbye’” (GMM:107). Nevertheless, he did return, but Sasha was too weak and defeated to do anything else than to pretend nothing had happened: “Now is the time to say ‘Peel it yourself’, now is the time to say ‘Go to hell’, now is the time to say ‘I won’t be treated like this’. But much too strong – the room, the street, the thing in myself, oh, much too strong. ...” (GMM:108). At this point, one could argue, she is already depressed and her narrative shows signs of wanting very little out of life, as if she has, to some extent, given up: “The musty smell, the bugs, the loneliness, this room, which is part of the street outside – this is all I want from life” (GMM:109). Although it is unclear whether it is the Sasha of the past who makes this statement, or whether it is a comment from the slightly older, narrating Sasha, I would argue that it makes little difference. Whether it is the younger or the older Sasha who narrates her own lack of want, or zest, for life, the recognition is still there. The voice narrated is a voice of one who just wishes to be left alone and whether Sasha knows when this started or not, the voice is still sufficiently poignant.

A few more occurrences are needed, however, before Sasha herself fully admits that she starts to go to pieces. Firstly, she has to live through the traumatic event of losing a child: “‘God is very cruel,’ I said, ‘very cruel. A devil, of course. That accounts for everything – the only possible explanation’” (GMM:116-117), and then she has to suffer through the realization that life actually goes on as if nothing happened:

Well, there you are. It's not that these things happen or even that one survives them, but what makes life strange is that they are forgotten. Even the one moment that you thought was your eternity fades out and is forgotten and dies. This is what makes life so dull – the way you forget, and every day is a new day, and there's hope for everybody, hooray.... (GMM:118)

Clearly, Sasha has a hard time trying to forget and trying to actually believe that there is new hope for everybody. She neither forgets, nor acquires new hope. The irony, I would argue, is that Sasha recognized the possibility of new hope and the relief of forgetfulness, but however hard she tries, she is unable to achieve either.

After this, Enno leaves: "A room? A nice room? A beautiful room? A beautiful room with bath? Swing high, swing low, swing to and fro. ... This happened and that happened.... And then the days came when I was alone" (GMM:118). It is this event, then, that Sasha herself recognizes as the catalyst to her own plummet into darkness: "Did I love Enno at the end? Did he ever love me? I don't know. Only, it was after that that I began to go to pieces. Not all at once, of course. First this happened, and then that happened...." (GMM:119). Despite the fact that she is still able to go into a café to drink only coffee and feel gay on half a bottle of wine, the pattern to her existence slowly emerged: "After all this, what happened? What happened was that, as soon as I had the slightest chance of a place to hide in, I crept into it and hid" (GMM:120). Thus, with these words, we are brought back from the rooms of her past into the narrator's present time, with her desire to hide, forget and drink her life away still intensely with her: "And when I have had a couple of drinks I shan't know whether it's yesterday, today or tomorrow" (GMM:121).

As I've mentioned previously, *Good Morning, Midnight* has a perfect, circular shape, especially part four of the novel (Angier, 1990). It begins with Sasha expecting the *commis* to be at her door, but instead she finds René. At the end, she wants René to come back, but instead the *commis* enters. It is, as if, nothing she expects in life will ever come true. When René first arrives, they go for drinks, and take a trip to the exhibition. They have another drink and realize that they have worked at the same place in Antibes. Sasha is in somewhat of a good spirit, but it cannot last. René asks her what she is afraid of, and yet again Sasha has to face the darkness within:

You are walking along a road peacefully. You trip. You fall into blackness. That's the past – or perhaps the future. And you know that there is no past, no future, there is only this blackness, changing faintly, slowly, but always the same. 'You want to know

what I'm afraid of? All right, I'll tell you. ... I'm afraid of men – yes, I'm very much afraid of men. And I'm even more afraid of women. And I'm very much afraid of the whole bloody human race. ... Afraid of them?' I say. 'Of course I'm afraid of them. Who wouldn't be afraid of a pack of damned hyenas?' (GMM:144)

She wants to stop talking, thinking there is no use, but she cannot stop. The despair and depression within her is unyielding:

And when I say afraid – that's just a word I use. What I really mean is that I hate them. I hate their voices, I hate their eyes, I hate the way they laugh. ... I hate the whole bloody business. It's cruel, it's idiotic, it's unspeakably horrible. I never had the guts to kill myself or I'd have got out of it long ago. So much the worse for me. Let's leave it at that. (GMM:144-145)

This is the voice of a woman defeated, tired of trying to survive in a world in which she feels she does not belong. This is the voice of sadness, of loneliness, of the outsider. This is the voice of a narrator who finally allows herself to put into words her fears, her anger and her despair. This is the voice of a woman finally coming to terms with the cards dealt her by life, but she is still unable to escape the yearning for something else. She still desires love, perhaps, or at least not to have to be so alone: "Only five minutes ago I was in the Deux Magots, dressed in that damned cheap black dress of mine, giggling and talking about Antibes, and now I am lying in a misery of utter darkness. Quite alone. No voice, no touch, no hand. ... How long must I lie here? For ever? No, only for a couple of hundred years this time, miss. ..." (GMM:145).

Her wish seems momentarily to be granted. She heaves herself slowly out of the darkness and they return to the hotel. Sasha tells René to leave, but he comes back anyway, and for a moment Sasha is happy and hopeful again: "I have my arms round him and I begin to laugh, because I am so happy. I stand there hugging him, so terribly happy. Now everything is in my arms on this dark landing – love, youth, spring, happiness, everything I though I had lost. I was a fool, wasn't I? To think all that was finished for me. How could it be finished?" (GMM:148). However, the moment is fleeting. As always, Sasha has trouble letting down her guard in order to let love in. She does not want to relinquish her shield and a struggle between the two is inevitable. For a moment it seems that the gigolo succeeds in his attempts and Sasha is unsure as to whether the pain she experiences is good or bad: "I feel his hard knee between my knees. My mouth hurts, my breasts hurt, because it hurts, when you have been dead, to come alive. ..." (GMM:153).

However, it does not end there. Sasha lies there silently underneath René until she finally hears herself speak: “Thinking nothing. Listening to a high, clear, cold voice. My voice” (GMM:153). Her narrative has become split, as though she herself has split into two halves. As Helene Carr points out: “[...] Sasha’s own narrative is often split, creating a wholly internal dialogue within a psyche torn between contradictory emotions” (Carr, 1996:57), and at this point in the novel Sasha shifts between the first person and the third person as the ultimate example of this split. I have already mentioned this phenomenon in chapter one, as a sensation commonly described in literature by depressed narrators when they fail to live up to society’s expectations. This is true of Sasha too. However, Sasha does not only fail to live up to society’s expectations. She let René into her room and dared to hope for love, thus failing to live up to her own expectations too. In a way, then, the part of herself which wants to protect her from life, love and hurt, creates a split in her personality and she feels somewhat out of touch with herself: “Don’t listen, that’s not me speaking. Don’t listen. Nothing to do with me – I swear it. ...” (GMM:153). She does not recognize herself anymore. In a way she is alienated from herself: “I cry in the way that hurts right down, that hurts your heart and your stomach. Who is this crying? The same one who laughed on the landing, kissed him and was happy. This is me, this is myself, who is crying. The other – how do I know who the other is? She isn’t me” (GMM:154). Coral Ann Howells argues that: “As a divided subject indulging in an anguished series of self-protective gestures, Sasha has invented a deterministic script which results not in the paralysis of feeling for which she had hoped, but in another emotional disaster at the very moment of her painful reawakening (Howells, 1991:95). In other words, what was meant to protect Sasha results instead in a feeling of being split, thus only adding to the feeling of helplessness and hopelessness Sasha experiences after René leaves. Her shield protected her from René, but perhaps it cost her far too much in return. “It is the most painful form of doubled discourse when the feeling subject is silenced and transformed into an object of ironic criticism by another self who speaks out, taunting, suspicious and entirely destructive” (Howells, 1991:96). Perhaps this split only caused Sasha to become more vulnerable, as she has to finally face a part of herself which has taken the side of society: the wolves. She cannot hide from them anymore, as they have become a part of her own voice.

The circle is completed then, as I have previously mentioned, with the *commis* entering Sasha’s room, although it is René she has willed to come back. Sasha is at the end of her rope and she lets him enter. “He doesn’t say anything. Thank God, he doesn’t say anything. I look straight into his eyes and despise another poor devil of a human being for the

last time. For the last time. ... Then I put my arms round him and pull him down on to the bed, saying: ‘Yes – yes – yes. ...’” (GMM:159). She has surrendered her shield and accepts him. As Carole Angier points out: “René was Sasha’s last chance of love, and she threw it away. This is unambiguously bad and sad. But now the *commis* gives her her last chance of hate, and she throws that away too: *and for the Jean Rhys heroine that is also bad*” (Angier, 1990:382). In other words, she has let go of everything which she previously held on to. This end is truly the end, the end of her. Furthermore, Angier goes on to explain:

Wide Sargasso Sea shows us that ‘the real death’ is not of the body but of the soul, so that once the soul is dead, the death of the body is a desirable, triumphant escape. And only hate, pride, fierceness can rouse a dead soul to escape. That is why it is a bad thing and not a good one that Sasha gives up hate at the end of *Good Morning, Midnight*. Only hate would keep her alive, keep her *herself*. Accepting the *commis voyageur* means accepting death and nothingness. (Angier, 1990:383)

This makes sense, a lot of sense. However, what is important in this context, I would argue, is not whether or not the hate Sasha relinquishes at the end is a part of herself or not, because it is most definitely a part of her shield against the world. By giving up on her ability to hate too, as well as her ability to love, means that she can no longer use her armour to protect herself. She has lost her advantage. For a moment she dared to hope for love, and a way out of the stone cold grip of depression, but she failed, and instead was left with nothing at all to help her survive another day. Perhaps. We do not know what happens after that. Certainly, the narrator at least lives long enough to narrate her story, but nevertheless, no matter what does indeed happen after those last words, it is definitely a real end for Sasha Jansen.

There are many reasons why Sasha’s voice of depression is an important one. She lends her voice to those that are forgotten, and who no longer have a voice of their own. It speaks of a woman who has lost everything; love, youth, a child, and who tries to live with the cards life dealt her. It is a voice of despair and it reminds us all of how we might feel if we suddenly found ourselves without anything. For this, we empathize, because although we might not have hit rock bottom ourselves, we can imagine how devastating that must be.

Sasha’s voice is important because it conveys to us survival techniques, how strong our will to live and our desire for love really is and how important the things we normally take for granted; like love, a home and money, really are for life to be fulfilling. It is a voice which speaks honestly about how traumatizing life events truly can be and how important it is to deal with them, because no matter how much you might wish to never deal with painful memories again you can never escape them either.

Just like Sasha Jansen wishes to protect herself, so is our next narrator already protected: she is unable to act, unable to feel, feeling disconnected from the world. Trapped underneath the bell jar, Esther Greenwood struggles to break free and become an individual again. Like Sasha she is depressed, using her voice to protect herself from the pain of life. The main difference, however, is that while Sasha is middle-aged and relatively without choice, Esther is young and talented with many choices, although she is unable to choose. To Esther, the things she wants seem mutually exclusive, while the things she does not want are the things she is expected to conform to, leaving Esther without hope. Thus, she is trapped underneath the bell jar, stewing in her own sour air.

Chapter Three

Breaking Free: The Voice of Depression in *The Bell Jar*

In this chapter I aim to take a closer look at *The Bell Jar* and place it in a psychological as well as an historical context. I will then highlight some previous analysis of the text which I feel accentuates my arguments, before I move on to a close reading and analysis of the text itself. In the previous two chapters we have seen that the voice of depression serves as both a tool in order to gain a voice, as well as a shield when it comes to trying to protect oneself from the harsh realities of the world. In this chapter we take a step forward in time to an era defined by the Cold War, strict social conventions and the beginnings of the sexual revolution. The Western world might have been free from the constricting rules of an actual war, but instead other rules of behaviour and appearances, just as constricting, were put in place instead. In this chapter I aim to argue that in *The Bell Jar* the voice of depression implicates a desire to break free from the norms and expectations inherent in such a society. The narrator we meet in this novel feels the restraining norms and rules on her soul. All she desires is to break free from the bell jar and its symbolic conformity and become a woman of her own.

Psychology and ECT

As the world stumbled to its feet after two devastating world wars and the psychiatric field moved beyond the discovery of shell shock in male patients, another disorder was about to inherit the throne from the female hysteric and become as central a cultural figure for the twentieth century as the hysteric was for the nineteenth: the schizophrenic woman. Modernist literary movements have made the schizophrenic woman into the main symbol of linguistic, religious and sexual breakdown and rebellion (Showalter, 1985). Esther Greenwood, the heroine and narrator of *The Bell Jar*, has often been awarded the dubious honour of representing one of these symbolically significant schizophrenics, although in my understanding it is far more likely that Esther was in fact just simply depressed. However, it may be that such psychiatric labels are not of the utmost significance at this point, since schizophrenia and depression were treated more or less similarly.

The treatments for schizophrenia, and depression, have strong symbolic associations with feminization and the female role. From the 1930s to the 1950s, the main treatments for

schizophrenia and depression were insulin shock, electroshock, and lobotomy. Although serious questions have been raised concerning the effectiveness and ethics of all three treatment forms, all are still in use today, albeit in a diminished degree. Interestingly enough, although women do not outnumber men when it comes to being diagnosed with schizophrenia, in the case of all three treatment forms women are still both statistically and representationally predominant as patients (Showalter, 1985).

Esther Greenwood receives both insulin therapy and electroshock after her suicide attempt. Sixty years after “The Yellow Wallpaper” one would perhaps assume that psychiatry had left its old treatment plans behind, but the inactivity and fattening results of insulin therapy begs to differ: “Under insulin therapy, patients also gained twenty to sixty pounds, and in this respect for women this prolonged and very controlling treatment seemed to parallel the pseudopregnancy of the rest cure” (Showalter, 1985:205). In this sense, Esther Greenwood and the narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” mirror each other exactly.

However, it is electroconvulsive therapy, or ECT, which is the most significant treatment form in Esther’s story. Developed by an Italian researcher, Ugo Cerletti, tested in the slaughterhouses of Rome and first administered to human subjects in 1938 (Showalter, 1985), ECT rapidly became one of the major treatments for all types of depression (Ussher, 1991). In the early days of ECT, before the advent of muscle relaxant drugs, the spasms produced by the current were so powerful that nurses had to hold patients down and, unsurprisingly, fractures of the spine, arms, pelvis or leg were not uncommon (Showalter, 1985). If the patient was not held down, he or she, (usually she), would be physically tied down in order to control the convulsions (Ussher, 1991). No wonder, then, that such a treatment might lead to desires of breaking free from such bonds.

However, ECT seems to have had varying results; some found it helpful while others saw it as a nightmare:

Many patients loathed and feared the passivity, the scrambling of memory, the zombie-like condition of those who came back from treatment. Others found it beneficial, calming agitation and lessening anxiety, particularly after it began to be administered with a general anaesthetic – the way McLean’s used it, an innovation at the time. (Appignanesi, 2008:323)

Doubtlessly, ECT may be quite helpful for a lot of patients. However, it seems important to point out that for many others ECT might seem to be helpful in the end, but for all the wrong reasons. ECT does influence the brain chemistry, and might lead to serious and damaging side

effects. Peter Breggin, an American doctor and a forceful opponent of ECT argues that women more often than men receive this treatment because they are judged to have less need of their brains:

Much psychiatric literature on ECT, he maintains, recommends it for the less skilled persons whose livelihoods are not dependent on the use of memory and intellect; housewives can be seen as excellent candidates on these terms. The “improvement” seen in their behaviour after the treatment may simply reflect their greater tractability, or reflect the male bias in the profession that finds “mental incapacity and helpless dependence ... far more acceptable in women than in men.” (Showalter, 1985:207)

This is important to keep in mind because, in this sense too, we might not have moved too far away from “The Yellow Wallpaper,” at least not in the life and times of Esther Greenwood. Men were still predominantly the figures of authority who decided definitions, who was ‘sane’ or ‘insane,’ ‘right’ or ‘wrong.’ Women were still inferior to men, expected to keep house and take care of the children, while men made all the important decisions and ruled most of the world.

In addition to all this it is interesting to note that Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia” may be just as applicable to Esther Greenwood as it was to Sasha Jansen in *Good Morning, Midnight*. To remind ourselves, Freud distinguished between mourning and melancholia by stating: “In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself. The patient represents his ego to us as worthless, incapable of any achievement and morally despicable; he reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and punished” (Freud, 1968:246). Furthermore: “This picture of a delusion of (mainly moral) inferiority is completed by sleeplessness and refusal to take nourishment, and – what is psychologically very remarkable – by an overcoming of the instinct which compels every living thing to cling to life” (Freud, 1968:246). Whereas in Sasha we instantly recognized the feelings of worthlessness and the empty ego, it is perhaps the incapability of achievement and the expectations of punishment which are most notably present in the life of Esther Greenwood, albeit if, for now at least, we overlook her overcoming of the instinct to stay alive. Esther suffers from a fall in self-esteem, suddenly failing to see any of her achievements as noteworthy, and in addition she is chastising herself for not living up to her own and other’s ambitions for her: “I was supposed to be having the time of my life” (TBJ:2). However, as Freud notes himself:

If one listens patiently to a melancholic's many various self-accusations, one cannot in the end avoid the impression that often the most violent of them are hardly at all applicable to the patient himself, but that with insignificant modifications they do fit someone else, someone whom the patient loves or has loved or should love. (Freud, 1968:248)

This, in turn, leads me to agree with Lynda Bundtzen when she suggests that Esther is in fact trying to come to terms with the loss of her father and her anger towards him for deserting her. Unable to do so she turns the anger towards herself instead, which results in her depression. Throughout the novel we see Esther's first attempts at accessing her feelings towards her father, like when she realizes her unhappiness after losing him:

And while Constantin and I sat in one of those hushed plush auditoriums in the UN, next to a stern muscular Russian girl with no make-up who was a simultaneous interpreter like Constantin, I thought how strange it had never occurred to me before that I was only purely happy until I was nine years old. (TBJ:70-71)

Bundtzen argues that: "With a simple change in tone, we recover the feelings of a child who did not forgive her father for dying and deserting her. This is at least one of those terrible, unknown crimes that causes guilt in Esther Greenwood and ultimately leads her to attempt suicide" (Bundtzen, 1983:134). I am inclined to agree with her. Such feelings of desertion can be strong, especially when they involve a parent, and can doubtlessly be hard to deal with. Thus, it makes sense that a young Esther Greenwood turned her feelings of anger and guilt towards herself instead, culminating in the descent of the bell jar.

The Eisenhower Fifties and the Norm

The Bell Jar, while first published in 1963, depicts the American 1950s. Although a far stretch from Victorian times, the 1950s retained a similar view of women and their role in the home, thus echoing the restraining role faced by the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper." Furthermore, although in the 1950s the world was in a time of peace, another perhaps more frightening war was fought: the Cold War. Thus, the bleak and dark times of *Good Morning, Midnight* is also mirrored in the uncertainty and terror of the world of *The Bell Jar*. As Linda Wagner puts it: "Nowhere have I found so forceful a depiction of what it was like to be an adolescent in the stifling, hermetically-sealed world of the Eisenhower Fifties. The 'distorted

lens' of madness gives an authentic vision of a period which exalted the most oppressive ideal of reason and stability" (Wagner, 1988:108). Fear is perhaps a keyword here then, exemplified by the execution of the Rosenbergs, fear of the unknown, the different, that which we cannot control. There was a need to divide the world into understandable and easily separated groupings; this was not the time for grey areas. Perhaps there is no wonder why some people strived for some sense of 'normalcy' and 'decency' in a world bounded by the Cold War on one side and the sexual war on the other (Scholes, 1985). The world was in enough disarray as it was; something needed to remain the way it had always been. Thus, attention was turned toward the family:

When pop-Freudianism wed functionalism in post-war mass culture, a monstrous norm of Family was hatched. Taking Freudian ideas about how children acquire gender identity, and avoiding any claims of the unconscious, the sociologist Talcott Parsons created a pragmatic model of the nuclear family functioning by means of sex roles, females 'expressive' both by nature and nurture, males 'instrumental'. 'By the late 1940s' Benita Eisler argues, the therapeutic culture had arrived at 'a definition of mental health as social adjustment' to roles [...], and the Norm was born. (Macpherson, 1991:3)

Consequently, women were supposed to fulfil certain expectations and fit into a certain role so as not to deviate from the norm. To place oneself outside the norm was seen as a sign of mental illness. Thus, in this sense the world seemed quite similar to the Victorian world faced by the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper," as if history repeats itself. Pat Macpherson points out that: "The cruellest assumption, to my mind, was the paradox that one's role came naturally, and failure to be fulfilled was sign of sickness. So each citizen was set self-policing to enact a 'fulfilled' conformity convincing to others if always fraudulent to oneself" (Macpherson, 1991:3). It was still assumed then, in other words, that the role of wife and mother were the roles which came most naturally to a woman and were the ultimate goals in a woman's life. To want other things, to want more, or to feel that another life and different goals seemed to be a more natural choice, were deviations from the norm and seen as a failure of conformity, which in turn could be seen as a sign of sickness. Sickness, of course, had to be treated and controlled:

Medical technology refined the behavioural control of women patients under the principle of adjustment toward normalcy. More than one woman interpreted her treatment and even her depression as her punishment for deviancy, for failure to fulfil her role – or, even more shameful, for failing to *want* to fulfil her role. Taking the

blame for breakdown is halfway back to normalcy, accepting one's responsibility to adjust oneself. (Macpherson, 1991:55)

Thus, once again, women were punished for wanting to dictate their own lives and their own desires, uninfluenced by the voices of male authority. For failure to adjust to the norm and the roles imposed upon them by society, they were placed under even stricter bonds and behavioural control. No wonder, then, that some might have felt the burning desire to break free from such stifling bonds and become a woman of one's own. And no wonder, either, that others felt their own failure to adjust as a heavy depression upon them, which led to the desire to live a life without expectations and norms. Seeing Esther Greenwood in this light, I am inclined to agree with Linda Wagner when she says that Esther's: "madness' is presented as a necessary consequence of, indeed as consubstantial with, the world surrounding her" (Wagner, 1988:125). Esther was a creative young woman, who wanted more than just one fig of the fig tree. She needed a grey area, where she could become more than what she had seen her mother be, and more than Buddy Willard's mother was. So perhaps there is no wonder that the bell jar descended on her head, because she already felt trapped and needed to break free. That is what her voice of depression gives us in this narrative; it gives us a voice which starts believing in itself, and slowly gains the strength to break free.

The Bell Jar is not the only depiction of breakdown and institutionalization of its time. Scores of literary and journalistic works produced by women between the 1920s and the early 1960s dealt with the breakdown and 'the schizophrenic woman' seen through their eyes, and they too usually make the link between an oppressive society and mental illness: "They are guilt-ridden accounts of institutionalization as a punishment for transgressing the codes of feminine behaviour, docility, and affection. Unlike the representations of madwomen in male texts of the same period, they do not romanticize madness" (Showalter, 1985:211). In other words, these works also recognized the dilemma faced by Esther Greenwood: how to live the life you want and stay within the boundaries set up by society. Evidently, she was not the only one having problems with adjustment:

While the earlier novels did not question the idea that madness was the woman's own fault, these novels place the blame for women's schizophrenic breakdowns on the limited and oppressive roles offered to women in modern society, and deal very specifically with institutionalization and shock treatment as metaphors for the social control of women. (Showalter, 1985:213)

Consequently, these voices of depression and breakdown demanded to be heard and refused to be defined within a system of male authority. Women wanted things to change, and if nothing else, bring some awareness to the public. Consequently, by the early 1960s, a powerful female literature, which presented schizophrenia and institutionalization as extremes of typical female experiences of passivity and confinement, had developed outside the medical and psychiatric fields. The feminist aspects of this literature were, among other things, important in the early years of the women's liberation movement, which in its reclamation of female 'victims' in turn made Sylvia Plath, among others, a heroine (Showalter, 1985).

Previous Criticism: Symbolism and a Desired Freedom

Sylvia Plath makes use of a significant array of symbols and metaphors in *The Bell Jar*. The most notable being, of course, the bell jar itself:

It is a metaphor for her inner life: she exists in the bell jar as a stillborn baby. Because Esther's mental life reflects in a transformed way what culture, society, has already done to her as a human being, the bell jar does eventually serve as a symbol of social oppression, and Plath, as we have seen, uses it in this way in the final chapters of the novel to define the female condition. (Bundtzen, 1983:131)

Thus the bell jar is an important symbol both of Esther's dark and depressing state, but also of all women's bleak existence in that day and age. However, what is most important in this context is the fact that the bell jar is a most fitting description of Esther's depression, and a valuable expression of Esther's voice of depression. Not only does the bell jar encompass the stifling surroundings and state the voice is currently in, but it also signifies what the voice desires: to break free, to be set free into the circulating air outside the bell jar and find a path of expression which offers more possibilities than are currently available.

The mirror is a recurring symbol in *The Bell Jar*, as it was in *Good Morning, Midnight*. While mirrors served to remind Sasha of her past and what she no longer was, as well as making her face herself and the truth, in Esther's world mirrors reflect an image she is unable to recognize: "When Esther returns to the Amazon, she sees in the mirror of the self-service elevator a "big smudgy-eyed Chinese woman," the first of a number of mirrored distortions or hallucinatory pictures of herself that will prevail throughout the novel"

(Lameyer, 1977:147). It is as if she is unable to see that her reflection is in fact herself, that she has lost the ability to see herself, and instead sees a blurred image where her real identity and confidence should manifest itself: “The mirror over my bureau seemed slightly warped and much too silver. The face in it looked like the reflection in a ball of dentist mercury” (TBJ:18).

It makes sense, then, to argue that Esther feels similarly to many schizophrenic women. Elaine Showalter points out that many suffering from such a diagnosis sense themselves as being unoccupied bodies: “Feeling that they have no secure identities, the women look to external appearances for confirmation that they exist. Thus they continually look at their faces in the mirror, but out of desperation rather than narcissism” (Showalter, 1985:212). Although Esther does not continually look at herself in the mirror, she does arguably exhibit the same signs of having an insecure identity, thus failing to confirm that she exists by looking in the mirror. Instead she sees others there, figures she does not recognize. That is perhaps why she breaks a mirror in the hospital after her suicide attempt, because she still is not who she wants to be.

Sex is another important aspect in *The Bell Jar*. Whereas sex outside the marriage was nonexistent for the narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper,” non-marital sex was more or less a commodity in the life of Sasha Jansen. To Esther, however, sex is viewed as something bordering on a defining feature:

Instead of the world being divided up into Catholics and Protestants or Republicans and Democrats or white men and black men or even men and women, I saw the world divided into people who had slept with somebody and people who hadn't, and this seemed the only really significant difference between one person and another. (TBJ:77)

After learning about Buddy Willard's affair, she deems him a hypocrite: “I couldn't stand the idea of a woman having to have a single pure life and a man being able to have a double life, one pure and one not” (TBJ:77), but she soon realizes that she is in fact subject to societal double standards. A man's sexual experiences were seen as normal and simply a need to ‘sow some wild oats’ whereas a woman's sexual experiences would be judged as promiscuity: “In other words, what she realizes is that Buddy can construct his own sexual identity while she cannot” (Badia, 2006:134). Consequently, she feels she ought to go out and sleep with somebody herself, as her virginity is weighing like a millstone around her neck, in order to regain or create her own sexual identity. Nevertheless, she does not quite achieve this until

after Dr. Nolan helps her out into a world where contraception is an option. She feels free, and after having received her diaphragm, she finally rids herself of her virginity: “I smiled into the dark. I felt part of a great tradition” (TBJ:219). This is, of course, important in the sense that gaining sexual freedom is an aspect of gaining her complete freedom. By placing so much significance on sexuality, or the possibility of having a sexuality to begin with, Esther’s voice of depression highlights the conformity she suffers under and the need to break free from all such bonds in order to become the person she was meant to be. Esther can not be put down by other people’s norms and expectations any longer, she needs to create and figure out her own expectations, in order to break free from the bell jar.

Furthermore, by using contraceptives, Esther gains the freedom to choose when and if she wants to have a baby. As in the two other texts I have already discussed where babies also hold significant symbolic value, babies also recur throughout *The Bell Jar*. To Sasha Jansen, of course, the memory of the brief life and death of her child caused her much pain and sorrow. To the narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” however, her baby served to exemplify her own failure as a wife and mother, in addition to adding stress to her life as she tried to figure out what it meant to be a young, new mother. Through the opening pages of *The Bell Jar*, we understand from an older, narrating Esther that she does indeed have a child at a later date after the events of the novel have taken place, as she explains how she creates toys for her child out of the gifts she herself received during her stay in New York. However, the Esther who lives through these events, the narrator of that particular time in her life, shows a strong ambivalence towards the prospect of having a child: “Why couldn’t I dream of devoting myself to baby after fat puling baby like Dodo Conway? If I had to wait on a baby all day, I would go mad” (TBJ:212-213). Of course, it could have something to do with society’s expectations, and her own misconception that having a baby basically meant the end of her:

I also remembered Buddy Willard saying in a sinister, knowing way that after I had children I would feel differently, I wouldn’t want to write poems any more. So I began to think maybe it was true that when you were married and had children it was like being brainwashed, and afterwards you went about numb as a slave in some private, totalitarian state. (TBJ:81)

Obviously, this is quite a terrifying prospect for an aspiring, young poetess, which in itself could make anyone question the meaningfulness of going to school and working hard:

This seemed a dreary and wasted life for a girl with fifteen years of straight A's, but I knew that's what marriage was like, because cook and clean and wash was just what Buddy Willard's mother did from morning till night, and she was the wife of a university professor and had been a private school teacher herself. (TBJ:80)

This understanding that she has worked so hard for something her entire life, only to come to the realization that it was all for nothing, that she will just end up married with children without a voice of her own, is perhaps at the heart of Esther's identity issues and the source of the agony Esther's voice of depression is expressing. Thus, babies become, in this novel, a symbol of the shackles society is tying around her ankles, making it impossible for her to move around as she pleases. However, babies do have a dual meaning in this novel: "Babies recur both externally and as images throughout the novel. Often they are images of horror and death but also ones of regeneration and creativity" (Connell, 1993:53). Thus, babies also carry with them a positive significance at certain points in the text, for instance the times Esther feels relaxed and calm, she does feel as fresh as a baby. This is perhaps alluding to the indefinite possibilities and the innocence a new child harbours, the possibilities and the innocence Esther might wish she too still possessed. Consequently, the fact that Esther does have a baby at the time of the narration of the story could be a sign that she has successfully broken free from the assumption she and Buddy Willard had, that babies signify the end of individuality. Her baby, then, can be seen as a symbol of the new possibilities and the new beginning Esther gained by breaking free and by realizing that being a mother did not necessarily mean that she had to give up everything that was important to her.

In relation to the theme of babies, we find the theme of mothers. Esther's resentment towards her mother is hardly a secret throughout the novel and she keeps encountering other mother figures and wishing she could substitute them for her own: "I wished I had a mother like Jay Cee. Then I'd know what to do" (TBJ:36). It is Dr. Nolan, however, who arises as the quintessential mother figure, nurturing and understanding: "If Doctor Nolan's therapeutic function in the novel is hardly elaborated, she nonetheless emerges as the good, holding mother, in stark contrast to Esther's own" (Appignanesi, 2008:322). Like, for instance, when she comes to take Esther for her ECT the first time: "Doctor Nolan put her arm around me and hugged me like a mother" (TBJ:203). It is, however, Dr. Nolan's validation of Esther's feelings which puts her in stark contrast to Esther's real mother. Whereas Esther's mother more or less sees Esther's breakdown as a punishment of her, or a manifestation of all the things she did wrong in Esther's childhood: "My mother was the worst. She never scolded me, but kept begging me, with a sorrowful face, to tell her what she had done wrong"

(TBJ:195), Dr. Nolan accepts Esther's real feelings without blame or denouncement. Even when Esther commits what is in her eyes the ultimate sin and reveals her hatred for her mother, Dr. Nolan seems to understand: "I hate her," I said, and waited for the blow to fall. But Doctor Nolan only smiled at me as if something had pleased her very, very much, and said, 'I suppose you do'" (TBJ:195). This admission, and the consequent permission, to hate her mother is, according to Lisa Appignanesi, a crucial step in Esther's treatment. She goes on to argue that: "this quintessential vampire of an American Mom can be neutralized with the help of a better mother" (Appignanesi, 2008:325), which is, in many ways, true. Arguably, Esther does need to be met with more understanding than what she receives from her mother in order to get better. However, what I think is most important in this context is not whether or not Esther actually does hate her own mother, but that she comes to the realization that she hates what her mother represents. What Esther remembers of her mother is her self-sacrifice, her struggle to keep her family financially secure after her husband died, and the constant insistence that Esther follow in her footsteps and learn something useful, like shorthand. What Esther hates is the idea that she will become just like her mother. Her voice is depressed, literally and figuratively, underneath all of the well meaning advice from her mother, and she needs so desperately to carve out an existence of her own, full of activities and goals she herself finds useful and meaningful. Thus, Esther's permission to hate her mother is indeed a crucial step in her treatment, because it is also a permission to refuse to become something she does not want to be.

Furthermore, keeping in mind my earlier argument that Esther's depression might stem from misdirected anger after the loss of her father, it is worth mentioning that this might also be one of the reasons why she feels she hates her mother. In an attempt to restore life back to normal as quickly as possible after the death, Esther's mother might have overlooked Esther's need for validation of her feelings of grief and anger, thus creating a hate towards her in her daughter caused by the insistence of normalcy and survival. Consequently, it is possible to imagine that Esther not only hates her mother because of what she represents in terms of expectations and conformity, but also because she represents the suppressed feelings which created the bell jar. Thus both the mother and the father are linked to depression in this novel, signifying the importance of expressing your feelings, and receiving validation, in a safe environment, such as a family environment should be. Otherwise the need to break free emerges because the feelings never disappear, but manifest themselves in one way or another, as the bell jar symbolizes.

I Felt Very Still and Very Empty: The Voice

The Bell Jar, like the two preceding texts, is a first-person narrative. The heroine and narrator, is a young, college girl called Esther Greenwood and she remains the focalizer throughout the text. Thus, the narrator is also the only one we receive subjective information about. Although other characters figure prominently in the text they are, without failing, always seen through Esther's eyes and consequently serve to enlighten us more about Esther's state of mind than their own. Furthermore, since we do get to know Esther's thoughts and dreams, fears and sorrows, it makes sense to argue that with this novel too we, as readers, feel a close affinity with the narrator, thus enabling us to feel a sense of sympathy and understanding towards the heroine. A first person narrative seems to always create a closer bond between reader and narrator, as if the reader is being awarded with a deep and meaningful confidence.

Vance Bourjaily points out that whatever abstract roles we decide to assign the characters in *The Bell Jar* they are never abstractions, but rather that they all are brought to brief, vivid and particular life, even the most minor. In addition, the novel consists of a number of quick-drawn scenes, Bourjaily counting seventy-five or eighty distinct scenes: "The effect is movielike, and the movie smartly paced" (Bourjaily, 1985:143). The narrative, then, is characterized by a series of scenes and flashbacks, a movement back and forth in time, and a direct and lucid language. The voice of Esther is a simple one, needing few embellishments, and: "mostly the language and image combination in *The Bell Jar* is of an easy, colloquial voice in which the thing to be visualized can grow as if in a culture" (Bourjaily, 1985:143). Much of Esther's voice, then, can be gathered from the implications of what she says, and from what she does not say: that which is between the lines. As Robert Scholes points out, the deceptively simple may not be so simple after all:

In *The Bell Jar*, Sylvia Plath has used superbly the most important technical device of realism – what the Russian critic Viktor Shklovsky called "defamiliarization." True realism defamiliarizes our world so that it emerges from the dust of habitual acceptance and becomes visible once again. This is quite the opposite of that comforting false realism that presents the world in terms of clichés that we are all too ready to accept. (Scholes, 1985:132)

In other words, Esther's voice, which might be a simple and colloquial voice, turns our attention to the reality of her existence, being a young woman in the 1950s. Accepted by most as the way life and society should be, Esther, by her struggle to do the same, exemplifies what might have gone awry with society and conformity. By doing so, the narrator is also awarded

further sympathy, since most people can recognize the despair of feeling trapped and coerced into thinking they have to be or behave a certain way which does not feel right to them.

The voice of depression in *The Bell Jar* is a clear voice, full of biting remarks and dark irony. Caroline King Barnard argues that Esther's voice expresses the dilemma Esther faces, of being caught in a vicious circle of destructive behaviour where her coping mechanisms reinforce her isolation. Her tone, she continues, is "carefully postured, mocking, caustic, defensively nonchalant" (Barnard, 1978:28). It is this tone of voice which creates Esther's rather bleak but sharp, and sometimes very funny, image of the world. As Howard Moss points out: "A plain recital of the events in *The Bell Jar* would be ludicrous if they were not balanced by genuine desperation at one side of the scale and a sure sense of black comedy at the other. Sickness and disclosure are the keys to *The Bell Jar*" (Moss, 1985:126). In addition, this tone of voice further awards the narrator sympathy, as it creates the feeling that the narrator is disclosing secrets to us which she under normal circumstances would keep to herself.

Furthermore, Esther's use of black comedy can in one way be seen as a way for her to protect and distance herself from the world: "Esther's wit is brilliant, and her humorous observations are incisive. Such a voice can protect, but it can also protect too well, building an impregnable barrier between its speaker and the world, between the self and other people" (Barnard, 1978:28). Thus it seems that Esther and Sasha have something in common: the need to protect themselves. Where Sasha's voice of depression served as a way for her to hide from the world, so does Esther's sharp wit and voice try to do the same: trying to protect herself from the real pain of her existence. Thus Esther needs to break free from building such a barrier too, if she ever hopes to break free from the bell jar.

The Bell Jar consists of three parts. The first one recounts Esther's days in New York, the second deals with her experiences at home during the summer leading up to her suicide attempt, while the third and final part depicts Esther's subsequent therapy. Lynda Bundtzen points out that *The Bell Jar* has a structure which resembles a Chinese box, more than it resembles a linear narrative with a distinct beginning, middle and end, caused by the many flashbacks which move the narrative inward and backward in time (Bundtzen, 1983). "This Chinese box mode of development is exemplified by Esther's progressive recognition of her isolation from other people and in her regression back to the time of her father's death. Her suicide attempt is a further regression; it is depicted as a retreat into the womb and nonentity" (Bundtzen, 1983:116). Furthermore, the developments of the social, artistic and psychological allegories also resemble a Chinese box, beginning with social oppression: limitations on

Esther's ambitions because she is a woman, moving to specific threats against her creativity by friends and relatives, and finally, to the ways in which she victimizes herself (Bundtzen, 1983). "In this movement, there are many missing links between episodes, but it is downward and inward to the single hope that the puzzle has been solved, the last box has been opened, and she may crawl in and extinguish her pain" (Bundtzen, 1983:116). After the suicide attempt the process is reversed, and Esther is able to venture out again. This reversal is exemplified by the fact that one of Esther's first encounters in the asylum is with a catatonic woman, before she starts to engage in conversations and relationships with other people again (Bundtzen, 1983).

As I've mentioned previously, the first part of the novel deals with Esther's experiences in New York, and is the longest of the three parts. We understand that it is an older, narrating Esther who is now telling the story of her descent into the bell jar, and her subsequent release from it, and the first part of the novel depicts the beginning of her descent. Clearly, Esther feels depressed in New York, even though she should be having the time of her life:

Only I wasn't steering anything, not even myself. I just bumped from my hotel to work and to parties and from parties to my hotel and back to work like a numb trolley-bus. I guess I should have been excited the way most of the other girls were, but I couldn't get myself to react. I felt very still and very empty, the way the eye of a tornado must feel, moving dully along in the middle of the surrounding hullabaloo. (TBJ:2-3)

Esther does not know any longer what she wants or doesn't want. She has more or less lost a will of her own, which is a defining feature of depression, but to some extent also a result. "After Doreen left, I wondered why I couldn't go the whole way doing what I should anymore. This made me sad and tired. Then I wondered why I couldn't go the whole way doing what I shouldn't the way Doreen did, and this made me even sadder and more tired" (TBJ:27-28). As Caroline King Barnard points out: "This is the tiredness of depression which Esther feels, a depression produced by the immobility which baffles and frustrates her. Esther is indeed trapped within the stifling confines of the bell jar" (Barnard, 1978:26). In the beginning then, all Esther desires is to break free from her depression so she can go back to doing what she has always been doing. She feels the heaviness of the bell jar above her.

In an attempt to find an identity, since she seems to have lost her own, Esther looks to the people surrounding her. The use of doubles is an important narrative device in *The Bell Jar*, especially in the first and third section of the novel. In New York it is both Doreen and

Betsy's identities she tries on for size, unable to decide whether she is, in fact, a 'naughty' or a 'nice' girl at heart. At first she decides that she is in fact exactly like Doreen: "Doreen had intuition. Everything she said was like a secret voice speaking straight out of my own bones" (TBJ:7). However, after a rather disastrous night out, she changes her mind and decides that her real identity is that of Betsy's: "I made a decision about Doreen that night. I decided I would watch her and listen to what she said, but deep down I would have nothing at all to do with her. Deep down, I would be loyal to Betsy and her innocent friends. It was Betsy I resembled at heart" (TBJ:21). However, in the end, this complete identification with Betsy does not quite work out either: "Vacillating between the innocent, wholesome Betsy and the urbane, sexy Doreen, she finds herself unable to form a complete identification with either one, since she herself is divided, in a similar way, between conditioning and desire" (Barnard, 1978:25). Thus, Esther's identity clearly encompasses both these features, both the 'nice' and the 'naughty' girl, making it impossible for her to be simply one or the other. Interestingly though, this desire to identify with either Doreen or Betsy is just an expression of Esther's own feelings of inadequacy: "All of the female characters are doubles for Esther – possible roles she tries on and then discards, because they do not fit her self and because her own sense of self is so fragmented. This desire to be someone else is primarily a form of escape from a feeling of fraudulence and failure" (Bundtzen, 1983:117). In other words, Esther does not feel that she can live up to the image she has created for herself any longer, consequently making her wish she was someone else completely. This can also be seen by the fact that she chooses to be a non-existent girl, a figment of her own imagination, when she meets new people. She splits into two selves, herself and Elly Higginbottom from Chicago. This sense of being split is not a new phenomenon in depressed characters; we saw it both in "The Yellow Wallpaper" with the narrator's identification with the woman behind the wallpaper, and in *Good Morning, Midnight* when Sasha does not recognize her own voice though she is the only one speaking. Esther is no exception, then, but Esther's split personality may be a slightly more conscious choice than it was for the two previous narrators. Esther does not know who she is any longer, so why not simply create a whole new person? And Esther does not want to be depressed anymore, she wants to break free from the bell jar, so why not be someone else and start fresh? In other words, Esther's split personality is more or less a manifestation of her desire to escape. This is significant because not only does it testify to the severity of Esther's depression, but also because it highlights the reasons why she does not want to be herself any more.

Some of these reasons are explained further on in the first part of *The Bell Jar*. Up until her time in New York Esther had spent most of her time studying hard and making good grades, always imagining a bright future. All of a sudden, she does not know what she wants to do after college: “‘I don’t really know,’ I heard myself say. I felt a deep shock, hearing myself say that, because the minute I said it, I knew it was true” (TBJ:30), and feelings of inadequacy starts to mount up:

The trouble was, I had been inadequate all along, I simply hadn’t thought about it. The one thing I was good at was winning scholarships and prizes, and that era was coming to an end. I felt like a racehorse in a world without race-tracks or a champion college footballer suddenly confronted by Wall Street and a business suit, his days of glory shrunk to a little gold cup on his mantel with a date engraved on it like the date on a tombstone. (TBJ:73)

She imagines the fig tree, with all her possibilities branching out before her, but unable to choose, all the figs die and fall to the ground. The trouble being, of course, that Esther feels she does have to choose, that all the things she wants out of life are somehow mutually exclusive. It is hard to argue with her logic, though, keeping in mind the era in which she lived. In addition, other people also seem to think that some things are incompatible with others, like when Buddy Willard suggested that she might want to stop writing after she had a baby, or that wanting to live both in the country and the city was neurotic: “‘Neurotic, ha!’ I let out a scornful laugh. ‘If neurotic is wanting two mutually exclusive things at one and the same time, then I’m neurotic as hell. I’ll be flying back and forth between one mutually exclusive thing and another for the rest of my days’” (TBJ:89-90).

Furthermore, one of Esther’s possibilities is to get married and have children, a prospect that is fairly unappealing to her. This has, of course, much to do with Buddy’s assumption that such a choice will mean the end of Esther’s creative days, but also with Esther’s impression of what a husband might want of her: “And I knew that in spite of all the roses and kisses and restaurant dinners a man showered on a woman before he married her, what he secretly wanted when the wedding service ended was for her to flatten out underneath his feet like Mrs Willard’s kitchen mat” (TBJ:80). Esther wanted more than to be subdued by a husband: “That’s one of the reasons I never wanted to get married. The last thing I wanted was infinite security and to be the place an arrow shoots off from. I wanted change and excitement and to shoot off in all directions myself, like the coloured arrows from a Fourth of July rocket” (TBJ:79). Consequently, Esther feels depressed, unable to choose. What she does not want is what is expected of her, and what she does want seems out of reach and

impossible because it involves breaking the norm. Thus Esther finds it harder and harder to do anything at all: “Given this state of siege, Esther’s deepening disillusionment and dissent are never spoken, except as her nervous breakdown itself. Then the muted female body speaks its paranoia as paralysis of the will” (Macpherson, 1991:38). She leaves New York tightly secured underneath the bell jar.

As Esther steps off the train from New York and into the second part of *The Bell Jar*, she is met by the stifling environment of the suburbs, representing all that she wants to escape: “I stepped from the air-conditioned compartment on to the station platform, and the motherly breath of the suburbs enfolded me. It smelt of lawn sprinklers and station-wagons and tennis rackets and dogs and babies. A summer calm laid its soothing hand over everything, like death” (TBJ:109). Returning home to her well-meaning but insensitive mother, who symbolizes the kind of wife and mother Esther fears she will become, in addition to returning to her home in the suburbs, the embodiment of ‘the family,’ is perhaps not something Esther will benefit from. As Pat Macpherson argues:

While withholding all direct analysis of cause, the narrative implicitly connects Esther’s constricting vision with the claustrophobia-inducing concentric circles of containment-oriented, security-minded suburban regional planning. Lewis Mumford [...] called the suburbs ‘an asylum for the preservation of illusion’, and in the 1950s, Mom stood at the centre of the illusion of security – and its breakdown. (Macpherson, 1991:41)

In other words, the suburbs and the mother represent to Esther an illusion she no longer believes in, thus contributing few feelings of security. Furthermore, since Esther’s mother seems to be the ideal mom of the 50s, returning home to her only seems to exaggerate Esther’s feelings of being trapped and depressed.

Having failed at getting into a writing class which would have gotten her out of the suffocating suburbs for the summer, Esther’s depression escalates: “All through June the writing course had stretched before me like a bright, safe bridge over the dull gulf of the summer. Now I saw it totter and dissolve, and a body in a white blouse and green skirt plummet into the gap” (TBJ:110). She finds it hard to motivate herself to do anything at all: “I crawled back into bed and pulled the sheet over my head. But even that didn’t shut out the light, so I buried my head under the darkness of the pillow and pretended it was night. I couldn’t see the point of getting up. I had nothing to look forward to” (TBJ:113). There seems to be no future, no hope, like her life has already ended: “I saw the years of my life spaced along a road in the form of telephone poles, threaded together by wires. I counted one, two,

three ... nineteen telephone poles, and then the wires dangled into space, and try as I would, I couldn't see a single pole beyond the nineteenth" (TBJ:118). Clearly, her voice of depression now expresses the immense hopelessness and helplessness of a severe depression. To some extent, she is even at the point where she does not even want to break free, because that would imply actually doing something, and she has no energy left. Her voice speaks of utter despair, a pain which is possible to sympathize with, and she wants what Sasha Jansen also desired: to be left alone.

However, Esther does ask for sleeping pills to help her sleep, because she is unable to do anything at all, but her doctor eventually refers her to Dr. Gordon. He is, of course, the quintessential male doctor, barely listening to his patients before he knows what is best for them. After a couple of sessions, in which he hardly sees or hears Esther, he decides that she is not improving and orders her to undergo electroconvulsive therapy. This turns out to be a nightmare for Esther, as the ECT is either performed incorrectly, or the staff fails to administer muscle relaxant drugs to their patient:

Then something bent down and took hold of me and shook me like the end of the world. Whee-ee-ee-ee-ee, it shrilled, through an air crackling with blue light, and with each flash a great jolt drubbed me till I thought my bones would break and the sap fly out of me like a split plant. I wondered what terrible thing it was that I had done.
(TBJ:138)

Obviously, she has done nothing wrong. However, the gruesome ECT experience can be read as patriarchy's punishment for failing to conform. Esther should, being young and talented, want nothing else than to finish college and become a successful man's wife some day. Instead she dares to question her possibilities and becomes depressed because of her lack of actual choice. This then, is a break of convention, which consequently leaves her vulnerable to a punishment resembling that of the Rosenbergs. The Rosenbergs, of course, create an important backdrop to the novel, as the famous opening of the novel suggests: "It was a queer, sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs, and I didn't know what I was doing in New York" (TBJ:1). They were the ultimate symbol of Cold War paranoia, convicted of giving away the secret of the atomic bomb to the Russians, although their guilt and punishment were debated then, and ever since (Macpherson, 1991). As Pat Macpherson puts it: "The Rosenbergs were scapegoated as spies, Communists, traitors in our midst, with their Jewishness and Ethel Rosenberg's strong womanhood seen as part of the Alien nature of

this Enemy Within” (Macpherson, 1991:2). Thus they too failed at conformity, at the same time as an example needed to be set. The thought of electrocution troubles Esther:

The idea of being electrocuted makes me sick, and that’s all there was to read about in the papers – goggle-eyed headlines staring up at me on every street corner and at the fusty, peanut-smelling mouth of every subway. It had nothing to do with me, but I couldn’t help wondering what it would be like, being burned alive all along your nerves. I thought it must be the worst thing in the world. (TBJ:1)

This sentiment is, of course, a foreshadowing of what is to come. Esther does get to find out what it feels like, and she is right: it is the worst thing in the world, at least in the hands of Dr. Gordon. However, when it is administered right, it can also be liberating: “Ironically, that same electrical power which destroys the Rosenbergs restores Esther to life” (Scholes, 1985:131). Perhaps this can be seen as an allusion to the fact that when power is in the hands of the able, and administered with good intentions, the result can be liberating and beneficial. If not, the results can be disastrous.

Unsurprisingly, Esther decides not to go back to Dr. Gordon’s hospital and the ECT, which, also unsurprisingly, makes her mother very happy. Her sweet, insensitive mother, who fails to understand the dire need her daughter is in, had perceived Esther’s depression as a matter of choice: “My mother smiled. ‘I knew my baby wasn’t like that.’ I looked at her. ‘Like what?’ ‘Like those awful people. Those awful dead people at that hospital.’ She paused. ‘I knew you’d decide to be all right again’” (TBJ:140). Once again we are reminded that the suburban mother represents an illusion of security, a security which only exists for the daughter if she fulfils the criteria of the successful, well adjusted daughter. Esther is no longer any of these things and we understand from her voice of depression that this loss of a real mother only serves to make her more depressed, and makes her feel more alone.

Thus Esther decides to kill herself, contemplating various ways in which to achieve this goal, her mirrored split self not always cooperating: “If I looked in the mirror while I did it, it would be like watching somebody else, in a book or a play. But the person in the mirror was paralysed and too stupid to do a thing” (TBJ:142). At one point she finds herself outside a prison, in a symbolically significant scene, alluding to the prison she herself is in. The prison guard tells her of the bums who get themselves incarcerated in order to survive the winter. ‘That’s nice,’ says Esther, when the guard depicts their days there: “‘Nice if you like it,’ said the guard” (TBJ:145), which is exactly the point: an imprisoned life can be nice if, and only if, you like it. If not, it can be hell. Consequently, Esther keeps trying to die. After a visit to

her father's grave, and after: "I laid my face to the smooth face of the marble and howled my loss into the cold salt rain" (TBJ:161), she takes her sleeping pills and ventures down into the crawl space in the cellar, into darkness, and hopes to die. Obviously, all the events in the second part of *The Bell Jar* are all there in order for Esther's voice of depression to accentuate her desire to break free from the life she finds unbearable. By alluding to the prison she is in, the patriarchy that surrounds her and the loss of her father, there are many explanations revealed in this second part which help to explain the pain, hopelessness and paralysis which can be traced through her voice. From all the things we have learned of Esther so far, it is fairly easy to deduce the significance of events in her life which have led her to a breakdown, and a subsequent desire to break free from conformity and expectations. As Elisabeth Bronfen puts it:

Overwhelmed with an anxiety that makes her feel as though she 'were being stuffed farther and farther into a black, airless sack with no way out' [...], a real encounter with death – which is to say a radical form of dislocating herself from accepting any symbolic mandates – emerges as the only viable solution to her psychic dilemma. (Bronfen, 2004:119)

In other words, being unable to perform even the most basal activities and unable to decide where she is going with her life, ending it all seems to be the only way in which she can avoid making a choice. Luckily, however, she lives to tell about it.

Waking up after her suicide attempt, Esther is introduced to other women who are being punished for their failure to conform to society's norms. Her first encounter is with a woman who ignored her duty to succumb to her husband and be gracious to her mother-in-law: "She giggled again. 'My husband knows I can't stand her, and still he said she could come and visit us, and when she came, my tongue stuck out of my head, I couldn't stop it. They ran me into Emergency and then they put me up here,' she lowered her voice, 'along with the nuts' (TBJ:170). Clearly, a small rebellion warrants a stay in a mental institution. Esther also meets another girl, Valerie, who is not allowed to stay angry, or to find the source of her anger:

'I've had a lobotomy.' I looked at Valerie in awe, appreciating for the first time her perpetual marble calm. 'How do you feel?' 'Fine. I'm not angry any more. Before, I was always angry. I was in Wymark, before, and now I'm in Caplan. I can go to town, now, or shopping or to a movie, along with a nurse.' 'What will you do when you get out?' 'Oh, I'm not leaving,' Valerie laughed. 'I like it here.' (TBJ:185).

Apparently, lobotomy was a genuine choice for doctors who found it to be more important to keep a woman in her rightful place than to actually help her out of a hopeless situation:

Sargent and Slater's widely used English psychiatric textbook published in 1972 recommends psychosurgery for a depressed woman "who may owe her illness to a psychopathic husband who cannot change and will not accept treatment." When separation is ruled out by the patient's religious convictions or her "financial or emotional dependence" and when antidepressant drugs do not work, the authors suggest that a lobotomy will enable the woman to cope with her marriage. (Showalter, 1985:210)

Obviously, for many women in the 1950s, financial dependence on a husband would still be widely common, so the actual choice here seems insufficient. Thus, it is fairly reasonable to surmise that quite a few women were lobotomized in order for them to keep fulfilling their role as wives and mothers. Consequently, Esther's voice of depression allows other voices to echo through the pages, highlighting the dangers of failure to conform. To Esther, then, these voices only help to emphasize her own voice's need to break free.

In this final part of *The Bell Jar* we are also introduced to another double of Esther's: Joan: "Joan was the beaming double of my old best self, specially designed to follow and torment me" (TBJ:197). Joan seems to be very similar to Esther in many aspects, right down to the suicide attempt which seems to have been inspired by Esther herself. In many ways Joan appears to be the human equivalence to the bell jar, reminding Esther of her pain and her struggles:

I looked at Joan. In spite of the creepy feeling, and in spite of my old, ingrained dislike, Joan fascinated me. It was like observing a Martian, or a particularly warty toad. Her thoughts were not my thoughts, nor her feelings my feelings, but we were close enough so that her thoughts and feelings seemed a wry, black image of my own. Sometimes I wondered if I had made Joan up. Other times I wondered if she would continue to pop in at every crisis of my life to remind me of what I had been, and what I had been through, and carry on her own separate but similar crisis under my nose. (TBJ:209-210)

Thus Joan is a slightly darker, slightly more hopeless version of Esther, mirroring her own sentiments and desires. In addition, Joan seems to be the embodiment of Esther's fears. Esther fears her resemblance to Joan because she fears the bell jar, and Joan reminds her of that part of herself. Thus, in order to reject the bell jar and break free from the bonds that tie her down, Esther needs to reject Joan: "'I like you.' 'That's tough, Joan,' I said, picking up my book. 'Because I don't like you. You make me puke, if you want to know'" (TBJ:211). In the end,

Joan dies and Esther lives, and it can seem that Joan has to die in order for Esther to live. This makes sense, of course, in the sense that Esther needs to break free from all aspects of the bell jar in order to gain a new beginning. Since Joan is the human equivalent to the bell jar she has to die, so that the bell jar can symbolically die with her, leaving Esther able to break free. Esther attends Joan's funeral: "I'll go," I said, and I did go, and all during the simple funeral service I wondered what I thought I was burying" (TBJ:232). It is, of course, the bell jar Esther tries to bury. By symbolically seeing Joan as the bell jar and as a version of herself who failed to escape, Esther is able to take another step towards her freedom from the bell jar by burying Joan. By killing the side of herself who remains underneath the bell jar, she ventures even further in her attempt to break free from all that is holding her back.

Interestingly, as I have already mentioned, it is in fact ECT therapy which helps Esther to wake up from her bad dream. After being taken care of by the much more progressive mother figure Dr. Nolan, Esther experiences an ECT session that is widely different from the one Dr. Gordon gave her, and Esther feels freer at last: "All the heat and fear had purged itself. I felt surprisingly at peace. The bell jar hung, suspended, a few feet above my head. I was open to the circulating air" (TBJ:206). Thus Esther is able to move beyond her depression. She is, as she says: "patched, retreaded and approved for the road" (TBJ:233). However, she does recognize the universality of the bell jar: "What was there about us, in Belsize, so different from the girls playing bridge and gossiping and studying in the college to which I would return? Those girls, too, sat under bell jars of a sort" (TBJ:227). Her voice, then, acquires a tinge of despair as she recognizes the possibility that she might be trapped underneath the bell jar again someday: "But I wasn't sure. I wasn't sure at all. How did I know that someday – at college, in Europe, somewhere, anywhere – the bell jar, with its stifling distortions, wouldn't descend again?" (TBJ:230). She can not know, of course. However, it is important that she understands the possibility, because that means that she understands the limitations in the world she is about to venture out into again. In many ways Esther has successfully broken free: she is open to the circulating air, she has gained her sexual freedom, she has recognized her hatred for her mother and all that she represents. Nevertheless, the world still consists of norms and roles, conventions she will have to face after she leaves the safe haven of Dr. Nolan. It is not enough that Esther's voice have broken free from the bell jar, she needs to continue to break free in order to survive and breathe.

In addition to all of this, it is also important to note that Esther's voice of depression does not solely desire to break free from the bell jar or to break free from the imposing conformity into an already decided role. Janet Badia argues that:

From her relationship with Buddy Willard and her mother, to her experimentation with suicide methods, to her fight to escape the bell jar, nearly all the plot episodes within the novel reveal Esther's struggles to gain control over her own life, to determine her own choices, rather than merely to accept those that society presents to her. In fact, one could argue that it is Esther's desire and search for control that threads together the many identities Esther struggles with, including her identity as a young woman, a patient, a daughter, a successful student, an aspiring writer and, of course, a potential wife and mother. (Badia, 2006:132)

This is all true, of course, Esther does struggle with many identities, unable to chose only one. What is important in this context, however, is that Esther needs to break free from the assumption that these identities are mutually exclusive. She can, in fact, be more than one thing; she can merge several different identities and become a more whole and balanced person. Thus, I would argue, this is the most important perspective Esther's voice of depression gives us; that most identities are not mutually exclusive and that it is vital to break free from this belief in order to be completely free.

As we have seen so far, the female voice of depression can express many facets of need in a woman's life. It is important to have a voice with which you can express yourself, and it is sometimes important, albeit also perhaps dangerous, to be able to hide. Esther Greenwood struggles with the bell jar until she is finally able to break free. However, all of these needs are important, and all of these voices need to be listened to. It is time to move on to the conclusion.

Conclusion

The three female narrators we have come to know in the three preceding texts are all very different. Time separates them, as they live their lives at fairly different points in history. Furthermore, they all have contrasting economical and social statuses, creating perhaps a continuum with the narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” on the one side as the representative for the upper class, whereas Sasha Jansen exists at the other, distant end, without money, respect or country. Their diagnosis differ, or perhaps the lack thereof, and their reasons for depression are varied, and perhaps many. In addition, their coping mechanisms are diverse, from writing, to drinking, to withdrawal from the world. In essence, they all have different needs, and that is what their voices express. However, no matter how much these three narrators differ, the interesting thing is how much, despite this, they actually are alike. In this conclusion I will take a closer look at some of these most significant similarities between these three female voices of depression.

Behind every narrator there is an implied author, and behind the implied author there is a historical author. Despite the temptation to draw correlating lines between the historical author and the narrator it will suffice to argue that the historical author might have shared some views with the implied author, which thus transferred over to the narrator in some form or another. In other words, I assume that the implied author wrote with some sort of purpose, as Charlotte Perkins Gilman herself described it, which in turn gives the narrator’s voice a purpose. The authorial intent in these three texts might as I see it, among other things, be expressed through these female voices of depression. Consequently, even though these voices express different needs, they do have a significant aspect in common: the need to be listened to. By the creation of these three first-person female voices the implied author creates a close affinity between the text and the reader which makes it hard not to listen, thus demanding the sort of attention which is needed in order for things to change; in everyday life, in literature, in the world. The first step is to listen. As Elaine Showalter so accurately put it, with her final sentences in her work *The Female Malady*:

Throughout the history of psychiatry, there have been many male liberators – Pinel, Conolly, Charcot, Freud, Laing – who claimed to free madwomen from the chains of their confinement to obtuse and misogynistic medical practice. Yet when women are spoken for but do not speak for themselves, such dramas of liberation become only the opening scenes of the next drama of confinement. Until women break for themselves, the chains that make madness a female malady, like Blake’s “mind-forg’d manacles,” will simply forge themselves anew. (Showalter, 1985:250)

Thus this, I would argue, is the intention behind these female voices, to speak for themselves and be listened to, in order to break some chains. No matter what the authorial intent may be beyond this, at least the three narrator's voices have in common this first major part of the presumed authorial intent; to get attention.

Furthermore, the close affinity between the text and the reader created mainly through the use of first-person narration and the fact that the narrator remains the focalizer throughout the text, which is true in the case of all the three texts presented here, also facilitates a stronger sense of sympathy towards the narrator. This being, perhaps, because we as readers get to know all the narrators' thoughts and views, and is, possibly, more intimate than a third-person narrator might be. It creates a bond between text and reader, so to speak, which makes it possible for the reader to empathize further with the narrator and consequently award her sympathy. Such an establishing of sympathetic feelings is present in all the three texts and is important because not only does it evoke memories of similar experiences in the reader which creates an even stronger affinity between narrator and reader, but it also highlights the injustices faced by these depressed female voices. Thus, the reader is able to recognize the significance of these voices, and perhaps the significance of her own voice, and the importance of speaking and being heard in order for things to change. Consequently, establishing sympathy with the narrators aids the voices towards being heard.

The idea that depression stems from a loss of an 'ideal' self seems to be applicable to all three narrators. In "The Yellow Wallpaper" the narrator struggles with the loss of her creative, free self. Sasha Jansen mourns the loss of her younger, more beautiful self, the self that felt she still had possibilities in life. Esther Greenwood might be said to battle with the loss of a self that felt she did not have to choose. However, in Esther's case the anger is what is most notable; the anger towards her father for deserting her, and the anger towards her mother for expecting that she will be just like her. The anger, I would argue, can also be heard in the voices of the two other narrators, albeit not so obviously. It makes sense to surmise that the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper," in addition to mourning the loss of her 'ideal' self, also feels anger towards the world and the patriarchy for refusing her the possibilities to express herself and choose her own individual path in life. Sasha's anger is more apparent, it can be found in her fear and hatred for men, people in general, not to mention society. She is an outcast after all, with very few allies. Thus the mourning of an 'ideal' self, and the anger towards whatever represents life as it is, can be heard through the voices of all three narrators, defining their needs and what they want to change.

Another phenomenon the three narrators have in common is the splitting of the self into two halves. Esther Greenwood experiences the most conscious splitting, as she decides to create another self in order to avoid being her real self. Still, her creation can be said to be a part of her real self, as it represents the freer, unbounded self she wishes she could become. In Esther's case, however, her doubles can be seen as aspects of herself, split images of who she is or who she wants to be, although this is not an actual splitting of the self. Sasha splits into two selves when she is at the end of her rope and her world comes tumbling down. Her other self is another voice which she does not recognise, but still is unmistakably her own, as if it was an entity of emotions finally surfacing from deep within. The narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" splits into two selves as she starts seeing a woman trapped behind the wallpaper. The other self being, doubtlessly, an image of how she herself feels; trapped and hidden. Thus, it makes sense to argue that in all three cases the splitting of the self is an extension of the voices of depression. They all express what they need and what they can no longer live with. In order for them to become a unified self again their needs have to be met, forging a bond between the seemingly mutually exclusive divided selves.

The splitting of the self can also be seen as a sign that the narrators lack a secure feeling of identity. This is, of course, most evident when it comes to Sasha. She has no name, no face and no country; she belongs nowhere and does not recognize herself anymore. Esther exhibits the same signs, unable to recognize herself in mirrors, seeing others where her reflection should be. Thus, this lack of a secure feeling of identity is closely connected to the symbolism of mirrors. Sasha realizes this, as she sees both truth and distortions in mirrors, as she herself embodies truth and distortions. There exists no unified self, either for Sasha or Esther. In "The Yellow Wallpaper" the wallpaper can be said to represent a mirror of sorts, mirroring the unconscious feelings of the narrator. She feels bounded by rules and admonishing commands, wanting to exercise her free will and creativity. The woman behind the wallpaper is the woman she has become; subdued, but still rattling the cage. Consequently, the lack of a secure feeling of identity and the mirror images are all, to some extent, a continuation of their voices of depression, signifying a longing for a unified self, where all the conflicting aspects and emotions inherent in them can merge together, constructing a more balanced being.

Furthermore, all three narrators have to struggle with the fact that they are being silenced. The most obvious example is, of course, the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper." She is not allowed a voice, not when it comes to taking a part in her own treatment plan and not even when it comes to writing in her diary. She defies that restriction, however, but not

without paying a price. Sasha too is being silenced, caused by the fact that she lives at the edge of society. Very few listen, because she is barely considered to be worthy of life. Occupying no respectable place in life, her opinions are of little consequence. Esther is silenced by other's expectations and perhaps her own. However, she too faces the voices of authority who claim to know better what is good for her, than she does. The quintessential voice of authority is perhaps Dr. Gordon, who never listens, but claims to know what she needs despite this. Thus Dr. Gordon mirrors John, the authorial male doctor who claims to know how to heal his wife in "The Yellow Wallpaper." Sasha, on the other hand, faces Mr. Blank, who simply dismisses her as an imbecile, and the other voice of authority who asks her why she did not drown herself in the Seine. There is no surprise, then, that all three narrators harbour a wish to step out of the female role and become voices of authority in their own right. This is one of the reasons why it can be argued that their depression is, to some extent, a covert rebellion against patriarchy. Resembling the slave psychology I mentioned in chapter one, where the only way to be able to escape was to show signs of exhaustion, the covert rebellion can also be seen as evidence of the fact that women tend to become depressed, rather than to show signs of aggression. Thus their depression too, is a form of anger towards the established order of society, in which they are silenced. Thus, perhaps, Sasha drinks in order to remove herself even further from the female role she has given up trying to fit into. The narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper," on the other hand, continues to write despite the rules, and Esther gains her sexual freedom. In other words, they all continue to rebel against patriarchy, wishing for a world without restrictions based on gender. Consequently, these female voices of depression highlight important aspects in a text, aspects that should not be forgotten. These voices deserve an audience, and to be taken seriously.

This desire to be heard is, perhaps, most apparent in "The Yellow Wallpaper" and *The Bell Jar*. The narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" needs to find her voice in order to heal, and Esther does not start to heal properly before she finds someone willing to listen. However, Sasha too still exhibits a longing to be heard; otherwise she would not narrate her story. Despite her hunger for indifference, her ability to protect herself and the fact that she sees death as a solution, she still needs to be heard. Her coping mechanisms, as they are, are more symptoms than the illness itself; they are symptoms of depression caused by, to some extent, never being listened to. Esther wants indifference, just like Sasha. She, as well as Sasha, tries to protect herself and when all else fails turns to death as the solution. Nevertheless, her suicide attempt never quite kills the urge in her to be heard, to be taken seriously, to carve out the life she wants for herself. Consequently, it is vital to listen to these voices, and to learn.

These voices should not only be taken as expressions of needs that existed a long time ago. Even in our own time these needs should be taken seriously. It does not take too much awareness to notice the male voices of authority that still, in our own day and age, are out there, wanting to silence and hide what is not just. Thus these voices should be brought into our own lives; as a warning, an emphasis and as a reminder. Not only to remind us of the importance of being listened to in society, but to remind us of the importance of listening to ourselves.

In a way, these three female voices of depression accentuate needs we all have, and their depression furthers this accentuation. We all need to find our voice, as the narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” exemplifies. We all have a need to hide when pain overwhelms us, as Sasha Jansen’s voice so poetically underline. Furthermore, we all need to break free from expectations imposed on us, expectations which hinder our freedom. In a sense then, all three texts exemplify aspects of the same thing, needs inherent in a human soul, perhaps even more so, in a woman’s soul. These needs are like the three-headed dog guarding the gates of Hades, without one head it would be incomplete, and something less than it was supposed to be. These three female narrators are at the end of their rope, so to speak, forced to deal with their needs; there is no escape. Most of us do try to hide until there is no hiding anymore. Thus, these female voices of depression can help to highlight aspects of ourselves we perhaps were not aware of, helping us to break free on our own. Consequently then, I would argue that these female voices of depression are a most valuable and significant aspect of a text, adding a dimension in any narrative that is worth listening to. Listen and learn, as they say. These female voices of depression bring into attention facets of life and individuality that should be listened to, and taken seriously. Listen and learn.

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