

Nonconformity Emerging Through Literature: A Comparative Analysis of A
Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and *The Bell Jar*

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requirements for the degree of
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It is hereby declared that-

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2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material that has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
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Abstract

In literature, modernism is mostly associated with themes such as disillusionment, exile, individuality, loss of religion, secularism, political and social critique, rejecting and questioning tradition, and so forth. People of the late 19th and 20th centuries were encouraged to think and behave freely through literature. It introduced a mindset that defied and questioned customs, regulations, and other socially acceptable actions. Nonetheless, the essential ideas of modernism are thought to be consciousness and individualism. Beyond the expectations or needs of society, modern literary texts reveal the inner self of an individual. One must delve deeply into the background, context, and unique perspectives of everything to comprehend how this occurred via literature. It is stated that an author cannot produce great literature if their environment does not impact their writings. Hence, to acknowledge the influence of surroundings and the non-conformist approach to those, this paper aims to analyze two of the greatest modernist novels - *A Portrait of the Artist as A Young Man* by James Joyce and *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath.

Therefore, the paper aims to analyze the two main characters of the mentioned novels and the context, connecting with the authors and contemporary society to understand how non-conformity emerged in literature, the influence of contemporary societies, and the consequences of conveying such non-conformity. Related theories to the research area are psychoanalytic theory, feminist criticism, and biographical criticism.

Keywords: Modernism, James Joyce, Sylvia Plath, autobiography, nonconformity, opposition, feminist criticism, psychoanalytic theory, biographical criticism.

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Chapter 01

Introduction

“I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use—silence, exile, and cunning” -James Joyce.

One of the pioneer characteristics of the modern period in English literature is that it questioned the socially constructed norms, values, rules, and beliefs, unlike the literature of the Victorian period. The privileged people dared to go against the flow. Hence, a distance was created between the aristocrats and the clergy. Many writers of the modern period mostly considered the Victorian period as the hypocritical era that included false or superficial representations of reality. Hence, elements Victorian period writers elaborated as a part of beauty, modern period writers found questionable. Many modernist writers challenged rulers, religion, and tradition. The influence of such a change of thought can be found in the horrors of the First and Second World Wars, industrialization, the rise of capitalism, first-paced globalization and so on. Writers also developed their new style of writing, rejecting old structures. Additionally, literary writing styles such as stream of consciousness, absurdity, internal monologue, and nonconformity emerged. Instead of focusing on the whole of humankind, modernist writers mostly chose individualism and the psyche to represent their thoughts. Hence, the writers introduced new writing and thinking styles. Some prominent well-known modernist writers include- George Barnard Shaw, William Butler Yeats, James Joyce, Thomas Stearns Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and so on.

This thesis will represent the discussion of how modern literature challenged the norms and beliefs and influenced the writers by providing a comparative analysis of the novels- *A Portrait*

of the Artist as a Young Man and *The Bell Jar*. This paper will first analyze how changes that emerged in personal life were depicted in the literature through analyzing James Joyce's own life and his novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Similarly, the analysis will walk through the life, society, and surroundings of Sylvia Plath in order to comprehend her writing style. Finally, the main comparative analysis will highlight the differences and similarities between the two mentioned literary texts written in the modern period by two different yet influential authors. It has been argued that Sylvia Plath had an influence of James Joyce's writings in shaping her thoughts and writing style as she had read and cited his writings several times. Altogether, the paper aims to discuss the influence of society and personal life in shaping the portrayal of non-conformity in modern literature.

The first selected text is *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* written by Irish novelist James Joyce. He is known as one of the most influential authors of the modern period. He is also known for rejecting Catholicism in his personal life and the portrayal of it in literature. Many of his characters including Stephen Dedalus depicted a portion of Joyce's life and loss of faith in religion. Joyce's departure from Christianity, his literary challenges to Catholic teaching, and his later reading of anti-Catholic literature cannot be seen as signs of a man fighting to keep his faith. Instead, they are signs of a man who knowingly chose to give up the faith of his family and country (Hibbert 196). His mentionable literary texts are- *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), *Exile* (1918), *Dubliners* (1914), *Chamber Music* (1907) and *Giacomo Joyce* (1907). Joyce's passion for words led him to experiment with a unique style of writing that included symbolism, literature, history, mythology, monologue, stream of consciousness and a variety of narrative formats. His constructed words, puns, and allusions formed a distinct language. Many critics have interpreted James Joyce's works in terms of the early twentieth-century modernist movement in

Western literature and art. This movement is credited with formal originality, erudition, and a razor-sharp style (Gurra et al. 4). His writings define the complexities of the human mind and question traditional norms and beliefs. His prose included layers of meaning in every line. On the other hand, his experimental use of language such as the use of puns and Dublin slang portrayed multiple meanings of his writings. In short, Joyce embraced his thoughts and ideas about the world through literature even if they questioned traditional beliefs or practices.

The second selected text for this paper is *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath. She was an American novelist, poet, and short story writer. She is known as a woman who fought against mental illness and portrayed a part of her struggles through writing. She was diagnosed with clinical depression and went through ECT (electroconvulsive therapy) several times. *The Bell Jar* depicts a part of her mental illness and the sufferings she bore because of the society in her era. Some of her mentionable works are- *The Bell Jar* (1963), *Winter Trees* (1971), *Three Women: A Monologue for Three Voices* (1968) and *Ariel* (1965) (Britannica 2024). Plath's writings are often considered a highly personal genre that includes a portrayal of her emotions related to social taboos regarding gender roles, mental illness, and her suicidal thoughts.

For a better understanding, the topic will be analyzed through the theoretical approach of biographical criticism, psychoanalytic theory by Lawrence Kohlberg and feminist criticism. Biographical criticism refers to analyzing literary text using a biographical lens where the author's life explains his works in literature. It is believed that by using biographical criticism, readers can achieve a deeper understanding of how the literary piece was crafted and contemporary issues.

Additionally, Kohlberg was an American psychologist, widely known for his theory of stages of moral development. Through his theory, he set an understanding of how individuals develop their moral reasoning. The theory contains three main levels (pre-conventional,

conventional, and post-conventional) divided into six stages (principle, social contract, law and order morality, good boy attitude, self-interest, and avoiding punishment) building moral reasons (Sanders 2015). The theory can be applied to analyze the protagonists' moral development and individuality in the novels.

Lastly, feminist criticism refers to the analysis of the text using feminist theory. Feminism did not start with the women's movement of 1960. Rather it already existed in earlier literature. In the first wave of feminism, women's voting rights and access to contraception were encouraged. A correlation exists between the second and third waves. The nature of female labor and outlook were the main topics of the second wave. The third wave questioned and criticized the standard of femininity created during the second wave (Barry 116-127).

However, by applying the mentioned theories, this paper aims to analyze *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *The Bell Jar* and explain how non-conformity emerged in literature, the influence of contemporary society, and the consequences of expressing such non-conformity.

1.1 Contemporary History

Both novels are written in the 20th century with different contexts. Yet the common historical background they hold is the world wars and industrialization. It was the time when the world witnessed a drastic improvement in technology including cinematography, telephony, electricity, photography, the conveyor belt, chronophotography, technologies, radiography of speed and so on (Dettemar and Bradshaw 69). Therefore, with the rise of advanced technology and scientific development, faith and religious belief started getting questioned. Technology and industrialization were getting more featured in people's lives.

However, in the early 20th century, when *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* was published, Ireland was fighting for home rule rights from the British. Ireland faced extensive

cultural and political conflict. The conflict was rooted in the clash between protestants and Catholics of Ireland. It started with the death of about one million people during the potato famine of Ireland which reflected the neglect Irish people received from the British ruling government. Complexity escalated by the demand of laissez-faire economics by the Catholics where the government does not interfere in the province's economy. But it was not as crystal as it seems. Many protestants supported home rule. For example, Charles Stewart Parnell led Irish movement supporting home rule. His ideas are discussed in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Later he became an idol for Ireland. However, Irish society was strict about religion and societal duty. All of these contemporary incidents are reflected in the novel *A Portrait of The Artist as a Young Man*.

The 20th century also was the time when the world witnessed two world wars back-to-back. Young and fit men were forced to participate in the world, leading women to handle both the household and the outside world for the sake of their families. This brought the realization that women are capable of working outside too. Hence, the women's movement emerged in 1960 where the idea of contraceptives and voting rights for women were highlighted. Gradually, the second and third waves of feminism took place questioning women's gender roles and limitations in society. Feministic concepts, however, did not emerge from the women's movement. It started in literature long ago. Gradually the number of working women started increasing yet social dominance was always present. Such dominance and the consequence of that has been portrayed in *The Bell Jar*.

1.2 Overview of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is considered a semi-autobiographical modernist novel where the author used stream-of-consciousness to narrate the character

development of the protagonist Stephen Dedalus. Between religion and artistic beauty, Stephen grows up choosing art and his own sense of understanding of moral values.

Stephen's father Simon has drinking problems that brought the financial crisis in the family. Stephen grows up in a rural community in Ireland. He is a timid, shy student who loves writing and has an eye for art and writing. At the end of the school, his teachers wanted him to join as the clergy of the church.

However, through his writing, Stephen met his unique perspective on life. He goes through a conflict between his impulse for the priesthood and his passion to become an artist. Later in his great epiphany, he confessed to his companion Cranny about his desire to pursue art and leave the religious life as they contradict to each other. Stephen's epiphany was a result of a combination of his interactions with different people, social forces, exploration in writings, inner conflict and so on. His epiphany led him towards his artistic interest leaving behind Ireland and social expectations.

1.3 Overview of *The Bell Jar*

The Bell Jar is a classic novel depicting the struggles of a young woman named Esther Greenwood in the middle of the 20th century. Esther is a writer who suffers from mental health issues possibly caused by society's expectations and the behavior of people surrounding her. The novel portrays the challenges of womanhood in the 20th century such as gender roles, social norms, expectations from women and so on. The novel mostly narrates past events. Esther narrates past events of her life and their consequences in present.

The story begins with Esther working as an intern writer at a prestigious magazine in New York. Even though she was ambitious enough and had opportunities, Esther was confused between her career and societal expectations. At a random party, Esther imagines a fig tree that

metaphorically represents different paths for women - career, marriage, family, and social expectations. The thought of the fig tree increased the awareness in Esther about her limitation for being a woman. Her partner Buddy Willard was a hypocrite and social confronter. Because of his double standards, she decided to dump him. Disappointing society caused Esther to doubt herself and detach herself from society. Thus, disillusionment and alienation occurred. Gradually Esther's mental illness declined and she got admitted in a mental hospital where the psychiatrist doctor Nolan failed to identify her problem and judged her for being the way she was. The novel ends with Esther's release from the hospital. There is no perfect ending of the novel but throughout the novel, Sylvia Plath questions the societal expectations and values for women and the consequences of opposing them.

Chapter 02

Literature Review

To begin with, James Joyce was a prominent figure in modern literature. A glimpse of his life and literature can be found in the documentary “James Joyce Documentary.” His every literary work contains unique style of expressing, but in general, he used symbols, monologues, and stream of consciousness as his personal writing style. His works explain how complicated the human mind can be and question socially practiced beliefs and norms. Through literature, James Joyce wrote about his thoughts and ideas about the world, even if they went against what most people believed or did. Through the documentary, it can be understood how Joyce’s life and contemporary society had been depicted through his writings and encouraged non-conformity in literature.

Similarly, a description of the writer Sylvia Plath and her life can be found in the documentary video titled, “Sylvia Plath Documentary–Part 1-6.” In the documentary, video clips of Sylvia Plath are available where she shares her memories and feelings about her childhood, adolescence, and late life. She believed she never felt joy after she crossed 9 years of her life. Adolescence was a tough time for her. In her interviews, she admitted her poems and writings as quite personal and made of the emotions she held from her experience of life. However, she also believed one should also know how to manipulate one's own experiences with an informed and intelligent mind. From the documentary, a comprehensive analysis can be found about Plath’s early life, trauma, mental illness and how it shaped her expression in *The Bell Jar*.

As modernism is a key element of this thesis paper, a brief discussion and analysis of modernism in the chosen texts is necessary. The article titled “The Era of Modernism and James Joyce” also highlights modernist elements of the novel. The movement of modernist literature is distinguished from Romanticism, Victorian literary movements, and Realism by its unwavering

will to reject all earlier forms and traditions. It challenges prevailing social, religious, and conventional moral standards and reflects the disorderliness of an increasingly urbanized culture. It also exalts passion above logic. Many critics have interpreted James Joyce's works in terms of the early twentieth-century modernist movement in Western literature and art. This movement is credited with formal originality, erudition, and a razor-sharp style. Modernist literature is sometimes seen as anti-realist because of its experimental and self-reflexive attitude to language and form (Gurra et al. 4).

Additionally, the book "A Companion to Modern Literature and Culture" discusses the reflection of the modern era and its elements in literature such as technology, psychology, politics, religion, philosophy, sex and sexuality and a few more. The authors say, "The modernist era coincides with the historical period that saw the advent of photography, chronophotography, cinematography, radiography, telephony, electricity, the conveyor belt, and technologies of speed" (Dettemar and Bradshaw 69). Therefore, reflection and consequences of the drastic changes can be found in modern literature.

Similarly, the article titled "Critical Study of Joyce's Novel 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man'" discusses the present aspects of modernism in the novel. The author explains the central themes of modernism that are reflected throughout the novel such as individualism, exile, loss of faith, alienation, isolation, rejection, stream of consciousness and so on. Modern literature has brought the concept that one should care less about the obstacles in the way of one's accomplishment. One must leave behind friends, family, nation, religion, and even a beloved to fulfill his dreams. Various sections of the novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* address the physical and emotional exile, loss of faith, isolation, and alienation of Stephan Dedalus, the book's protagonist. His rejection of religion allowed him to embrace art. Being raised in a Catholic

household, he believed it was impossible for someone to pursue art while being religious (Pervez et al. 4).

Additionally, the article “Joyce’s Loss of Faith” highlights how Joyce's separation from Christianity, his literary attacks on Catholic teaching, and his subsequent reading of anti-Catholic literature should not be seen as signs of a man struggling to keep his faith. Instead, they should be seen as signs of a man who chose to leave the faith of his family and country. Critics say that according to Joyce's early essay "A Portrait of the Artist," he lost his faith not because of sexual experiences but because he thought he was better than other people in religious, political, and artistic issues.

Then, “Study Of ‘Stephen Dedalus’, The Main Protagonist of a Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man” analyzes the protagonist in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus, and the reflection of the author's personal life in Stephen Dedalus. Joyce used stream of consciousness in the majority of his writings to visualize the thoughts of the protagonist (Azizmohammadi and Kamarzade 3).

An analysis of the use of stream of consciousness in the novel can be comprehended from the article titled “Stream of Consciousness: Unity and Continuity in Conscious Experience. A Study in James Joyce’s A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.” The author discusses, “Throughout Stephen Dedalus’s character, Joyce reflects his own belief that freedom is something significant for writers and in order to feel this freedom and find their own space in the literary canon, the writers must encroach on all the religious, political, social, and economic restrictions” (Hasan 14). Joyce used the stream of consciousness to disclose Stephen’s personality at an early age. Joyce uses the stream of consciousness in chapter five to show Stephen's self-reconciliation.

His internal conflict over his Catholic faith and his intense desire for sensual pleasure has been resolved.

The Bildungsroman nature of *Portrait* is discussed in the article titled, “Between ‘The Artist’ and ‘a Young Man’: Stephen Dedalus and the Dialectics of Exception in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.” Here Olivier Hercend says,

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man both plays with and ultimately deflates the expectations of the artistic Bildungsroman. Stephen’s attempts to rise to the status of the artist, or any other exceptional status, are short-lived and disappointing. They serve to underline the weight of expectations and prejudices that surround him, in a society built both on hero worship and on a certain hypocrisy regarding “great men”. Faced with the abstractions and myths that surround these figures, Stephen has to devise another way of expressing his originality, which he accomplishes not by confronting the challenges head-on, but by stepping aside (2).

A comprehensive analysis of the character Esther Greenwood from the novel *The Bell Jar* can be found in the article titled “Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*: A Mirror of American Fifties”. The norms and conditions were different for women and men. Women were expected to be pure before marriage but it was not the same expectation from men. The protagonist of the novel *The Bell Jar* is trying to create her own identity in such a patriarchal society. The main character of the novel, Esther, hovers between embracing the norms obediently and rejecting them completely throughout the entire book. Moreover, this indicates that Esther is going through a "crisis in the unity of the self." Here, Esther's ambitions to be a wife and mother and her desires to be an autonomous, free woman are at odds with one another. Esther is perplexed because she has been made to feel that these options are incompatible (Ghandeharion et al. 2).

The situation of America during the era when *The Bell Jar* was published can be found in the article titled “A Study of Social Impact on the Protagonist’s Development in Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*.” Through the entertainment mediums of television, women's magazines, popular psychology, and film, the standards of consumer culture and domesticity have been disseminated. During that time, shows that promoted domesticity, such as "Leave it to Beaver," "I Love Lucy," and “Father Knows Best”, gained a lot of popularity. The main roles of women in these shows are mothers and wives. In such an era, Plath wrote novels depicting her desires that conflicted with the expectations of contemporary society (Agalave 341).

A similar analysis from the feminist lens can be found in the article titled, “The Feminist Aspirations of Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*” where the author highlights the double standards based on genders in America. During the time when the novel was written, a man having multiple sex partners was seen as very normal. No one judged a man’s character or personality based on his relationship. In the case of women, the scenario was different. A woman had to save her virginity for the man to whom she would get married one day. Women’s key role was expected to be serving their families. The main aim of a woman’s life was to get married and have a family. Such double standards are present in the novel as well where the protagonist Esther feels trapped inside a “bell jar” due to social expectations and pressure. This novel is a reflection of the author’s own struggle in life as similar incidents happened in her life ten years before she wrote the novel (Gnanamuttu 3).

From the journal book of Sylvia Plath, titled “Sylvia Plath's Unabridged Journals”, one can get enlightened about Plath’s personal experiences, trauma, illness, treatment and resemblance to the novel as well. In the journal, Plath wrote about her daily life, struggles and illness she had been through. She said,

I could not sleep, although tired, and lay feeling my nerves shaved to pain & the groaning inner voice: oh, you can't teach, can't do anything. Can't write, can't think. And I lay under the negative icy flood of denial, thinking that voice was all my own, a part of me, and it must somehow conquer me & leave me with my worst visions: having had the chance to battle it & win day by day, and having failed (Plath 622).

Plath also wrote about her suicidal tendencies in her journal. She said, "I cannot ignore this murderous self: it is there. I smell it and feel it, but I will not give it my name. I shall shame it. When it says: you shall not sleep, you cannot teach, I shall go on anyway, knocking its nose in" (Plath 622). These lines from the journal depict the writer's will to be cured. Unfortunately, she did not receive proper support or treatment to win her battle against herself. A lot of these have been portrayed in the novel *The Bell Jar* which made the novel semi-autobiographical.

As the paper intends to have a comparative study of the two novels, a comparative discussion about the two writers' writing styles is necessary. There are arguments about Sylvia Plath having an influence of James Joyce's writings in her thinking process as she was a regular reader of his writings. However, in an article titled "Portrait of the Artist as a Model for Sylvia Plath, or Waking Up to *Finnegans Wake*" author Julia Gordon-Bramer highlighted some literary texts and quotes of James Joyce that shaped Sylvia Plath's work as a modernist where the author says, early in 1953, Plath began reading Joyce. She decided to audit the author's class and thought about using him as the subject of her thesis at that point. It seems incredible that Plath, at the age of twenty, would take up *Finnegans Wake*, much less try to write a thesis on it. It is incredible to think that she tried this less than a year after her first unsuccessful attempt at suicide. After recovering from horrible insulin and brain-shaking electroconvulsive therapy, she had to relearn how to read and write for several months (Bramer 2-5).

By January 1956, Plath told her mother in a letter from Cambridge: “The important thing is the aesthetic form given to my chaotic experience, which is, as it was for James Joyce, my kind of religion, and as necessary for me is [sic] the absolution of the printed word as the confession and absolution of a Catholic in church” (Bramer 3). Plath had mentioned about her interest in Joyce’s writings in a few other letters as well. She also had the spirit of talking non-conformity through literature like Joyce did. Overall, it can be argued that contemporary writers influence new writers as well.

Additionally, in the article titled, “The Same Anew’: James Joyce’s Modernism and Its Influence on Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*”, the writer highlighted Sylvia Plath’s long-standing interest in Joyce’s writing and traces in her notes and marginalia a consistent focus on Joyce as an artistic example. Plath refers to Joyce both in *The Bell Jar* as well as in her published journals and correspondence. According to the Plath collection, Plath's reading of Joyce as a student was methodical, at first concentrating mostly on the works' unique handling of time and representation. This connects aspects of Plath's college education in contemporary art and modern history and shows a common approach to modernism. Plath demonstrates her sensitivity to aspects of the narrative outside of Dedalus's chronological progression in her undergraduate reading of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by focusing in particular on memory's capacity to transport both the reader and Dedalus back in time.

Furthermore, a feminist analysis of the novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* can be found in the article titled, “Women in a Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.” Within the novel's first two chapters, the role of women can be guessed easily. The male gaze and objectifying women inspired Stephen to be an artist in order to describe the beauty he views through the artistic form (Gaikwad 1).

2.1 Theoretical framework

Theories that have been applied in this paper are biographical criticism, feminist criticism, and Lawrence Kohlberg's moral development theory. To start with, biographical criticism requires the analysis of the author's biography and the co-relation of it with the novel. Biographical criticism is necessary for this paper as it aims to analyze the non-conformity portrayed in the selected novels that were influenced by the contemporary society of the authors' lives. In order to relate the contemporary society and societal practices, biographical criticism of the novels is inevitable.

Additionally, the theory of stages of moral development can be found in the journal article titled, "Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development" published in the online journal Britannica. American psychologist Kohlberg is well-known for his theory of moral maturation phases. He established a framework for understanding how people form moral reasoning through his ideas. The theory breaks down moral reasoning into six stages: principle, social contract, law and order morality, good boy attitude, self-interest, and avoiding punishment. These stages are separated into three basic levels: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional (Sanders 2015). In pre-conventional children follow and respect the moral laws set out by the authorities, which are primarily their family and the community. Their behavior becomes immoral if it causes them to be disappointed or punished. However, in the conventional period, moral reasoning becomes challenging for teenagers. They search their surroundings for ethical justifications. Some teenagers adhere to the laws set out by authority without question, while others just want to be liked by their surroundings and keep their positive personality in society steady. In the post-conventional era, an individual's comprehension of the ethical perspective is crucial in determining the moral justifications for their acts. Even if an action benefits them in other ways, a person may do it for their own advantage or refrain from creating it to escape punishment. According to

Lawrence Kohlberg, not everyone can reach the post-conventional stage of moral development. Precisely, Stephen and Esther faced socially constructed moral values and norms compared to their own sense of moral values. Therefore, the moral development of Stephen Dedalus and Esther Greenwood can be understood better by applying Kohlberg's moral development theory.

Additionally, the chapter "Feminist Criticism" for the book *Beginning Theory* by Peter Barry provides a comprehensive understanding of Feminist theory and its literary criticism. It says, the women's movement of the 1960s was not the start of feminism. Rather the thought of feminism existed in early literary texts and writings. Feminism is often divided into three waves. The first wave occurred during the First World War. It promoted the contraceptive and voting rights of women. The second and third waves are correlated. The second wave focused on the nature of female work and outlook. The third wave criticized some of the facts about the second wave such as the essential definition of femininity that only emphasizes upper-middle-class white women. Three types of feminism Barry discussed in his books are- American feminism, Marxist feminism, French or poststructuralist feminism. Here, poststructuralist feminism is very theoretical. It seeks a deep analysis of the language, psychology, and philosophical issues of the literary texts. However, non-conformity in the novel *The Bell Jar* can be analyzed better by using the lens of feminist criticism.

Comparative studies, however, on *The Bell Jar* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* are scarce or nonexistent according to the findings. Analysis of the representation of denial in opposition to socially acceptable norms and beliefs is also included. Given that the primary goal of the thesis is to examine the growing nonconformity in the contemporary era, it seemed interesting to examine denials that both genders—or any human—could have expressed in contemporary literature by examining two books written by different genders. For a deeper

understanding, the analysis will also incorporate Kohlberg's stages of moral development theory and feminist theory. This thesis's research gap, which has been covered in next section, is this comparative analysis.

Chapter 03

Methodology

3.1 Research Question

To start with, the research required a basic understanding of modernism and the discussed theories. Then, modernistic analysis of the two primary texts and the influence of authors' personal life in the texts has been examined. Gradually, the thematic analysis and influence of Joyce in shaping Plath's writing style and thoughts have been explored. Documentary videos of the two authors have also been looked at in order to get a glimpse of their lives and writings. Equally important, contemporary society and its expectations have been researched as one of the key discussions of this paper is about non-conformity emerging through literature. To explain the area, exploration of the conformities of contemporary society was the first requirement. Later, the comparative analysis required a discussion by using all the information and sources collected so far.

In short, the paper focused on highlighting the non-conformity expressed in literature by analyzing the chosen novels, using biographical criticism, feminist criticism, and psychoanalytic theory.

3.2 Research Gap

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and *The Bell Jar* are semi-autobiographical novels. They also represent the core characteristics of modern literature. The secondary sources discussed in the literature review section are mostly related to the primary texts, writers, and applied theories. Some articles explained the modernistic characteristics in the writing style of the authors whereas some are about their personal lives and the connection of those with the novels. I have used two books and a scholarly article for a better understatement of the theories. Few of the secondary sources

discussed how Sylvia Plath was a reader of James Joyce and referred to his writings and texts in her academics and a few of her writings.

However, there is little to no comparative research on *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *The Bell Jar*. Also, the analysis of the portrayal of denial against the expected norms and beliefs in society is not researched according to the findings. As the main aim of the paper is to analyze the emerging non-conformity in the modern period, I found analyzing two novels written by two genders important to cover denials both men and women or any human could have expressed in the modern era of literature. Additionally, feminist theory and the stages of moral development theory by Kohlberg will be applied in the analysis for better understanding. Such comparative analysis is the research gap of this thesis which has been discussed in the further analysis.

3.3 Data Collection Method

The research has been conducted through a qualitative approach. The two novels- *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *The Bell Jar* are selected as the primary texts. The secondary sources are collected from academic journal websites such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and a few more. Two documentaries of the two writers are collected from video sharing and social media platform YouTube. Two books for the theoretical approach have been collected from online libraries for research purposes. After collecting all the data, a research gap has been identified and further analysis focused on answering the research gap with the help of collected data.

3.4 Contribution of the Paper

This paper will add to the existing analysis of the literature. The two primary texts hold significant importance in modern literature. Already there is uncountable research present regarding the topic. However, research has yet to be found about the comparative analysis of the two primary texts by

applying the selected three theories. It is an interesting topic to research because even though modern literature contains the basic elements of modernism such as loss of faith, alienation, stream of consciousness, and so on, every person's life experience and barriers are unique and different. The social norms Joyce or his character Stephan Dedalus tried to reject are not similar to Sylvia Plath or her character Esther Greenwood's attempt at rejection. Similarly, the consequences they faced were different as well. However, the authors connect with their writing style and the living period. Plath was a reader of Joyce as well. However, comparative analysis of the novels can provide an overview of how societal expectations differed from men to women and so do the non-conformity. Therefore, a comparative analysis can add more meaning of their writings and the modern era of literature. In addition, this paper's main contribution would be adding to existing research and opening more areas of research.

Chapter 04

Analysis of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

4.1 Autobiographical Analysis

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man is a novel about the development of Stephen Dedalus, from his childhood to youth. The non-conformist behavior of Stephen is a depiction of Joyce's own life. The development significantly reflects the author's own development from childhood to adulthood as a writer. James Joyce portrayed the norms and beliefs practiced in Irish society in the contemporary period of the novel. He did not necessarily represent every factual detail of society and his experience of Ireland, but most part of his 21 years of life in Ireland has been portrayed throughout the novel. Therefore, in order to comprehend the depiction of reality and non-conformity in the novel, a biographical analysis of the novel is inevitable.

To begin with, the main character of the novel, Stephan Dedalus has grown up in a similar environment as the writer James Joyce. The settings of the novel portray similar social pressure, national identity, strict education, limited opportunity and catholic upbringing. The protagonist of the novel, Stephan Dedalus, grows up in Dublin and so did the author. Joyce studied at Clongowes Wood College and Stephen studied at Clongowes Preparatory School.

Both schools were catholic and known for strict discipline. They were Irish people living in Dublin City. Both families were bound to follow social rules and expectations and were struggling financially at certain points in life.

As they were Catholic, artistic mindset or such career interests were unexpected and unappreciated. Going against the values of the church and society has been shown as shameful and unwanted in the novel which is a reflection of Joyce's contemporary society. A reflection can be found in the novel where Joyce talks about "the perfect study" - "The door opened quietly and

closed. A quick whisper ran through the class: the prefect of studies. There was an instant of dead silence and then the loud crack of a pandybat on the last desk. Stephen's heart leapt up in fear” (Joyce 43). This resembles the expectations of family and society that built fear in Stephen. In the pre-conventional stage, Stephen followed the societal rules and feared doing anything that might cause disappointment in his family.

The novel was written in the 20th century when Ireland was having political and identical conflicts. Catholic protesters wanted independence from British rulers and created their own parliament. This created limitations and neglect coming from the British government, and Ireland became an isolated and underprivileged area. The novel portrays the horrors and limitations as well. Stephen says, “Do you know what Ireland is?... Ireland is the old sow that eats her farrow” (Joyce 187). Here, Stephen believes young people like Parnell are sacrificing their lives for Ireland and he is not supportive of it. In real life, James Joyce was not a political activist either. His writings were more about individualism and inner conflicts rather than political or social issues. Just as Joyce left his homeland and spent a good amount of time in exile, Stephen Dedalus left Ireland as well. Joyce’s mother on her deathbed wanted him to confess his sins at easter but he refused to do so and left Dublin for Paris (James Joyce Documentary 0:8:40).

The novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* follows the structure of artistic bildungsroman in the case of character development. In the pre-conventional stage of moral development, Stephen follows his authority. He was devoted to the church and aimed to become a priest. In other words, Stephen, at his young age, finds himself confronted by the stereotypical identity, given by his family and society. In the conventional stage of moral development, Stephen builds a different perspective and is in constant guilt as he is expected to be the noble young man of Ireland by defending Catholicism and joining the nationalist movement. Thus, to be or not to

be question hunts Stephen throughout the novel. “The artist and the typical young man are two nets which Stephen tries to fly by, and, in literary terms, two “topoi”, which Joyce the author plays against each other” (Hercend 2). Throughout his childhood, Stephen is confronted with two different sets of forces. In one hand, his family is suggesting him to take his father’s legacy and become the new head of the family. His father says, “Stephen—at least I hope we were—and bloody good honest Irishmen too. That's the kind of fellows I want you to associate with, fellows of the right kidney” (Joyce 84). The society wants him to take part in the rising national movement of Ireland along with supporting catholicism. On the other hand, Stephen’s own desire is telling him to leave everything behind in order to pursue an artistic life. In the process of character development, Stephen listens to his own will and so did James Joyce. In the post-conventional stage, Stephen has an epiphany and decides to follow his own moral values rather than the socially constructed ones in chapter 4 when he meets a young girl standing in water. The girl symbolizes the beauty and artistic desire of Stephen. That was the moment of epiphany that appears in the novel when the author says, “Heavenly God! cried Stephen's soul, in an outburst of profane joy” (Joyce 156). In the process of this character development, Stephen listens to his own will and so did James Joyce in real life. Joyce left Ireland and spent his exile in Paris, London, and Trieste (James Joyce Documentary 0:18:10).

Therefore, the novel portrays a part of Joyce’s life from his childhood to his early twenties where his moral development and understanding of the world changed. They both showed the same artistic interest, inspiration, alienation from national and social values, religion and so on.

4.2 Questioning Traditional Practices

The novel questions and in many cases rejects traditional values and norms. To start with, Stephen's struggle with knowing his identity started by questioning the traditional system of naming a human connecting with his religious identity. In his pre-conventional stage of moral development, Stephen tried to follow the rules of authority blindly but it broke during the argument he had at the dinner table and later by the unfair punishment he received at his school. "Nasty Roche had said: What kind of name is that? And when Stephen had not been able to answer Nasty Roche had asked: what is your father? . . . Is he a magistrate?" (Joyce 8). Roche's question Stephen's first name came after the martyr of the Christian religion who was stoned to death by a mob because he claimed he saw God appear in heaven (Azizmohammadi and Kamarzade 2). Before Stephen could create and accept his own identity, society forced him by giving him a religious name. Joyce chose this name to depict the fact of a Christian martyr in the novel (Azizmohammadi and Kamarzade 3).

Joyce questioned the authority and teaching of Catholicism through his character Stephen Dedalus. Stephen questioned the dominant role of religion in Ireland and ultimately rejected it by choosing an artistic life over a religious one. Various sections of the novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* address the physical and emotional exile, loss of faith, isolation, and alienation of Stephen Dedalus, the book's protagonist. In chapter one, Stephen feels different than his acquaintances. Being raised in a Catholic household, he believed it was impossible for someone to pursue art while being religious (Pervez et al. 4). In the beginning, Stephen feels guilty for having doubt in his mind. He was aware of his sins and at the same time doubted considering them as a sin too. However, he continued committing sins.

A restless feeling of guilt would always be present with him: he would confess and repent and be absolved, confess and repent again and be absolved again, fruitlessly. Perhaps that

first hasty confession wrung from him by the fear of hell had not been good? Perhaps, concerned only for his imminent doom, he had not had sincere sorrow for his sin? (Joyce 139).

The last sentence of the above quote questions the sincerity of Stephen's guilty feelings. A person usually does not make the same mistake if s/he genuinely feels guilty. Gradually, Stephen starts opposing religion as it is against his art and desire. "Throughout Stephen Dedalus's character, Joyce reflects his own belief that freedom is something significant for writers and in order to feel this freedom and find their own space in the literary canon, the writers must encroach on all the religious, political, social, and economic restrictions" (Hasan 14). Joyce used the stream of consciousness to disclose Stephen's personality at an early age. Joyce uses the stream of conscience in chapter five to show Stephen's self-reconciliation. His internal conflict over his Catholic faith and his intense desire for sensual pleasure has been resolved. In chapter 5 Stephen made it clear that he will only act according to what he believes. He says,

I will tell you what I will do and what I will not do. I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use—silence, exile, and cunning (Joyce 230).

Even though Stephen does not declare himself as a non-believer, he refuses to follow the strict rules of church and the life of a priest. He says, "I neither believe in it nor disbelieve (eucharist) in it" (Joyce 222).

Additionally, the novel does not shy away from depicting the natural sexual needs of a grown-up man. Stephen has his first sexual experience at the early age of his life. In chapter two

when he travels with his father for business purposes, he has his first sexual experience. The author says, "In her arms he felt that he had suddenly become strong and fearless and sure of himself" (Joyce 93). The novel does not romanticize the traditional norm of sex after marriage or any other restriction. It challenged the repression and modesty around sexual matters in contemporary society.

Political non-conformity plays a vital role in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Stephen does not hold much interest in Irish nationalism. The novel does not glorify patriotism and nationalism in the traditional way. Rather Stephen opposes the idea of sacrificing one's life or youth devoting Ireland. He says, "My ancestors threw off their language and took another... They allowed a handful of foreigners to subject them. Do you fancy I am going to pay in my own life and person debts they made? What for?" (Joyce 186). Here, Stephen is refusing to take responsibility for the decisions their ancestors made for Ireland. He also says, "Ireland is the old sow that eats her farrow", which means Ireland's history, its own conflict and struggle brought the contemporary sufferings which he is refusing to take responsibility. He also believes nationalism is exaggerated. Charles Stewart Parnell was an Irish nationalist whose name has been mentioned in the novel several times. Everyone praised him for his bravery but ultimately his political career was ruined by scandal. Stephen believes only a fool would want to be like Parnell. Stephen's point of view on politics and nationalism depicts nationalistic ideology as potential disillusionment rather than something follow-worthy.

Additionally, "Silence, exile and cunning" (Joyce 230)- these three categories turned out as Stephen's strengths in figuring out his identity as well as the author's. James Joyce used these qualities as a way to question act against nationality, religion, languages that alienated him from having a life of free will. Stephen says, "... but he was happy only when he was far from them,

beyond their call, alone or in the company of phantasmal comrades” (Joyce 81). Joyce in real life left Ireland not only because of his differences but also because of the hatred of Irish people towards artists. His writing *Stephen Hero* was rejected in Ireland due to its controversial statement of Irish society. The novel criticizes the socially constructed idea of a “great men”. As Jean-Michel Rabaté puts it: “Joyce hated Romanticism with a passion, and his writings contain among many other things a scathing indictment of hero worship” (Hercend 4). In the novel when Stephen visits the National Theater, he sees people showing hatred by saying, “We want no amateur atheists. — We want no budding Buddhists” (Joyce 209). The conversation makes Stephen angry because he questions the ideology of nationalism.

Stephen also believes there should not be any obligation for his writings or art to serve Irish nationality or Ireland. By this, he challenged one of the key elements of the traditional writing style where nationalism was considered as a key element. He says, “When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets” (Joyce 186). This portrays his refusal to accept socially constructed expectations of nationality, religion and language.

Furthermore, Joyce added his innovative form of language that included a stream of consciousness, use of monologue and different perspectives. Stephen’s perspective and ideology also depict the rise of secularism and evolve of social norms and values. The novel challenged and portrayed non-conformity in literature through an innovative use of language rejecting the traditional writing style. It takes historical knowledge and understanding of the world to delve into the meaning of the novel.

In short, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* questions and in some cases rejects the religious boundaries, social practices, and norms about art, adultery, nationalism, politics, and literary writing style that depict the contemporary society of Ireland.

Chapter 05

Analysis of *The Bell Jar*

5.1 Portrayal of Plath's Contemporary Society

The Bell Jar is a semi-autobiographical novel that depicts the social expectations of women in the mid-20th century and the consequences of confronting them. To be specific, it portrays the life of a woman during the 1950s in America. The novel is divided into 20 chapters and depicts the life of the author as she was also a woman of that era struggling with mental illness and societal pressure (Agalave 341). For a better understanding of the criticism made by Sylvia Plath on the norms and values of contemporary society, biographical criticism of the novel is inevitable. *The Bell Jar* was written in October 1932, ten years after the incidents happened in real life. Plath stayed with some ladies in the Barbizon Hotel and soon after she was sent to McLean Hospital for depression (Gnanamuttu 3).

One of the major themes of the novel is the mental illness of a woman in the mid-20th century caused by social pressure and ill-treatment. The depiction is not completely fictional as Plath's own struggle is reflected through Esther. In the novel Esther says, "I felt very still and very empty, the way the eye of a tornado must feel, moving dully along in the middle of the surrounding hullabaloo" (Plath, *The Bell* 3). It resembles Esther's losing interest in life. Everything is failing to fill the void inside her. Similarly, in Plath's personal journal, she said,

I could not sleep, although tired, and lay feeling my nerves shaved to pain & the groaning inner voice: oh, you can't teach, can't do anything. Can't write, can't think. And I lay under the negative icy flood of denial, thinking that voice was all my own, a part of me, and it must somehow conquer me & leave me with my worst visions: having had the chance to battle it & win day by day, and having failed (Plath, *The Unabridged* 622).

This depicts Plath's restless nights when she finally gives up on herself. After a few days of writing these lines on her journal, Plath committed suicide.

Esther Greenwood was pressured by society and family to fulfill the gender role of women expected by society. The same goes for the author Sylvia Plath. Esther's partner Buddy Willard discouraged her from being a writer. She says, "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 anymore" (Plath, *The Bell* 45). This created a fear in Esther's mind. In the next line, she agrees saying, "So I began to think maybe it was true that when you were married and had children it was like being brainwashed, and afterward you went about numb as a slave in some private, totalitarian state" (Plath, *The Bell* 45). This is part of the pre-conventional stage of Esther's moral development where she blames herself for thinking differently than society.

However, in real life, Plath committed suicide one year after her son was born and her daughter was three years old. Plath was suffering from mental illness. In the novel, Esther fears marriage and having children.

Additionally, society including her boyfriend and mother only expected her to settle down by getting married. When Esther rejects the marriage proposal of Buddy saying she does not want to get married now, Buddy keeps calling her "neurotic" indicating her as abnormal or mentally unstable for not wanting that. By rejecting Buddy, Esther listens to her own moral values of not marrying a person who does not respect her individuality which indicates her post-conventional moral development stage. Esther's mother was not empathic towards her illness. Esther says, "The more hopeless you were, the further away they hid you" (Plath, *The Bell* 84). She believes her mother would admit her to the asylum and forget about her. She also recalls how her mother did not allow her to visit the graveyard of her father after his death. She also says, "My mother was

the worst. She never scolded me, but kept begging me, with a sorrowful face, to tell her what she had done wrong” (Plath, *The Bell* 107). Clearly, the incident left a scar on Esther’s mind and created a distance between her and her mother.

Both Esther and Sylvia Plath visited psychiatrists and were not treated with care. Mental health issues are often rooted in patients' experiences of life and traumas. Esther says she was happy when she was a child. Similarly, Plath admitted in one of her interviews that she was happy till the age of nine. She believed in magic and was carefree. After nine, she stopped believing in magic, Santa Claus and such (Sylvia Plath Documentary, part -02). The innocence of her life was gone. In the case of Esther in the novel, her psychiatrist doctor Nolan focused on giving her ECT and other treatments without analyzing her life events that might have caused her mental illness. After the treatment, Esther’s mental health did not improve. She attempted cutting her wrist, drowning herself, taking pills to commit suicide but later abandoned the plan. Yet in real life, Plath failed to abandon her suicidal instincts. But surely her treatment failed to cure her sufferings too.

Additionally, Esther and Plath both wanted to recover from their mental sufferings. They put their trust in their doctors and got betrayed by having unnoticed shock therapy. In *The Bell Jar* Esther says, “It wasn't the shock treatment that struck me, so much as the bare-faced treachery of Doctor Nolan. I liked Doctor Nolan, I loved her, I had given her my trust on a platter and told her everything, and she had promised, faithfully, to warn me ahead of time if ever I had to have another shock treatment” (Plath, *The Bell* 111). Similar experience of Plath’s life can be comprehended from her journal. Plath wrote, “My panics are seldom. If only I can get a doctor I trust, firm, capable and kind, and a hospital where I will know what is going on, I shall be all right” (Plath, *The Unabridged* 529). These lines convey Sylvia Plath’s urge to recover from her illness by getting

treatment from a trustworthy doctor and friendly environment but unfortunately, she was unable to heal from her mental illness.

5.2 Questioning Traditional Practices

Through the novel, Plath questioned the social practice of glorifying motherhood and pregnancy ignoring the labor pain and rapid changes of body and mind a mother go through. Motherhood is beautiful but at the same time, it is painful and can be horrifying for a woman. To lessen the pain, drugs are used. Esther says,

Here was a woman in terrible pain, obviously feeling every bit of it or she wouldn't groan like that, and she would go straight home and start another baby because the drug would make her forget how bad the pain had been, when all the time, in some secret part of her, that long, blind, doorless and windowless corridor of pain was waiting to open up and shut her in again (Plath 35).

Society resents women who do not get married or have children. Even women themselves mostly think that their lives would be incomplete without marriage and children. The novel questioned such mentality by portraying Esther as having a different point of view. She says, “Why was I so unmaternal and apart? 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” (Plath 117). Due to having a different point of view than society, Esther feels alienated from everyone. In her conventional stage of moral development, she keeps thinking and thinking about all the questionable norms of society that gradually snatched away her mental peace.

Additionally, in the 60s of America, double standards of sexual relationships were present. A man having many relationships or sexual partners before and after marriage was seen as normal.

Yet the women were expected to preserve their virginity for the man they would get married. In the novel, Mrs. Willard and Mrs. Greenwood are examples of supporting such double standards despite being women themselves. When Esther visits her partner Buddy's home, she says about Mrs. Willard, "I knew Mrs. Willard was a real fanatic about virginity for men and women both. When I first went to her house for supper she gave me a queer, shrewd, searching look, and I knew she was trying to tell whether I was a virgin or not" (Plath 38). Buddy had multiple partners and blames women saying they need to know how to please men otherwise men will get involved with multiple partners. Eventually, in the post-conventional moral development stage, Esther decides to dump him for his hypocrisy. Through rejecting Buddy, the novel rejects the double standards of sexual relationships during the 60s in America.

The novel questioned mental health treatment for women in the 20th century. Esther trusted her psychiatrist Doctor Nolan for her treatment. He promised her not to give electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) without telling her but did not keep it. In the 20th century and before, mental illness especially in women was not taken seriously. Childhood trauma, depression, and frustration can be caused by family and other relationships. But such issues got limelight in the treatment or therapy process. Esther was given sleeping and antidepressant pills without curing her inner conflict and traumas. Later, she was treated with ECT. Esther did not get the chance to prepare herself mentally for the ECT. She says, "Another shock treatment. If she had told me the night before I would have lain awake all night, of course, full of dread and foreboding, but by morning I would have been composed and ready" (Plath 111). This portrays the lack of understanding between the psychiatrist and the patient. The novel also shows how mentally ill women were treated by the society in the mid-20th century.

The novel also questioned the limited job opportunities for women and how society does not value a working woman. Esther is a passionate writer who wants to build a writing career. But hardly anyone appreciated her work life. Even her partner Buddy mocked her saying, “Do you know what a poem is, Esther?... A piece of dust” (Plath 30). Esther was shocked to give a proper reply to his mockery but later she prepared the reply in her mind saying- “So are the cadavers you cut up. So are the people you think you're curing. They're dust as dust as dust. I reckon a good poem lasts a whole lot longer than a hundred of those people put together” (Plath 30). Through Esther, Sylvia Plath refused to confront the idea of undervaluing working women in the 20th century.

The Bell Jar highlighted the common phenomenon American women faced which can be better understood through feminist criticism. Betty Friedan who is considered a pioneer figure of feminism, explained the second problem of American women faced in the 50s in her book titled *The Feminine Mystique*. In the book she said, American women feel that there is something wrong with them but they cannot figure out what is. This can be compared with *The Bell Jar* where Esther says, “I knew there was something wrong with me that summer” (Plath 1). Esther also does not know what that something is. Friedan calls this “something” as “the problem that has no name”. Friedan argued that women cannot explain the reason for their disappointment. They just realize that something is not okay. The thought of not being okay makes them restless. Friedan also talks about the pressure women feel to get married early and start a family. She believed not all women find those important but society alienates them if they disagree with expected gender roles (Ghandeharion et al. 2). Similar thoughts can be found in the novel where Esther expresses her lack of interest in starting a family. She said,

It would mean getting up at seven and cooking him eggs and bacon and toast and coffee and dawdling about in my nightgown and curlers after he'd left for work to wash up the dirty plates and make the bed, and then when he came home after a lively, fascinating day he'd expect a big dinner, and I'd spend the evening washing up even more dirty plates till I fell into bed, utterly exhausted (Plath 44).

The third wave of feminism criticized the definition of femininity that described middle-class white people. The novel depicts the ideas of the third wave of feminism by questioning beauty standards and unrealistic expectations of beauty in women by society. The novel also questioned domesticity where Esther showed no interest in serving a man. She says, "I hated the idea of serving men in any way" (Plath 40). She wants to prioritize her career over marriage which is against the contemporary gender role of a woman. The third wave of feminism was questioning such social expectations as well. It encouraged women to build their own identity regardless of social expectations just as Esther did. However, it cost her mental illness, alienation from society and family, mockery from her partner. Esther did not conform to the social expectations and norms that were contrasting her own desires and path.

In brief, *The Bell Jar* questions and in some cases challenges the social norms about marriage, women empowerment, childbirth, double standards in sexual relationships, treatment of mentally ill women, and the concept of beauty in women; that depict the contemporary society of America.

Chapter 06

Comparative analysis of the two texts

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and *The Bell Jar* both challenge social expectations and norms. However, their approaches and social expectations from the protagonists differ significantly according to their social background and gender. Nonetheless, both novels represent the world of the modern period when the world was going through constant change with the help of technology and industrialization.

While war and religious movements were one of the main concerns of the 20th century, women were not expected to take part in political and religious conflicts. Their main expected duty was to maintain the household and children. This practice is reflected in the novels as well. While the novel did not uphold a lot of social norms, some natural consequences of the practiced norms have been depicted occasionally. For example, Esther is not much bothered about the war. Her naivety is expressed through the following statement - "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" (Plath 43). Esther was not expected to have a stand in politics by society. On the contrary, Stephen was expected to support Ireland and Catholicism which he did not confront anyway.

Additionally, even though the social values of both novels are similar in many points, Stephen and Esther have different political and social backgrounds. *Portrait* reflects the critical condition of a nation fighting for home rule and identity. Resources and facilities were limited in Ireland due to the famine it went through in the mid-19th century. A significant part of the novel depicts the political and national influence of Ireland on the protagonist's life. On the contrary,

The Bell Jar represents the life of an ambitious American woman in the mid-20th century. The 20th century has witnessed two of the world wars of history. Yet the political influence of that on women's lives has not been portrayed much in the novel. Regardless, due to the war, women realized their potential to work outside the home.

The male gaze in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* shows the role of women in creating desire through the perspective of Stephen Dedalus. British feminist Laura Mulvey developed the term 'male gaze' in 1975. She believed most of the films (if not all) are seen from the perspective of heterosexual men. The same goes for literature. In the novel, women are hardly seen from their perspectives. Eileen Vance, Emma Clery, few unnamed prostitutes- these women are portrayed as objects for Stephen to observe, desire, and interpret. They inspired him to create art and explore life in need of creating art (Gaikwad 1). Therefore, the novel objectified women through the male gaze. The women Stephen desired are shown as objects of sin from which Stephen tried to come out. He says, "His sin, which had covered him from the sight of God, had led him nearer to the refuge of sinners" (Joyce 96). Here, sinners are indicated towards the prostitutes he meets while traveling with his father for business purposes. However, in *The Bell Jar*, men are shown as patriarchal and dominant where Esther could not see herself fitting in.

Moreover, Esther speaks about her concern for women in general. The novel shows women's struggle in society due to gender role expectations along with an ambitious artistic woman's struggle. On the other hand, the novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is more about the struggle of a specific man between his unique thoughts and societal expectations. The novel hardly depicted any generalized consequences of social pressure.

Furthermore, marriage and having a family were expected to be women's ultimate goals and fulfillment in life. In the case of men, marriage and family were expected to be a part of their

lives. Their main contribution in life was to serve the country. If a man wants to pursue a life different than that, then he had to face the difficulties related to work, religion and politics, unlike Esther Greenwood from *The Bell Jar*. Both Esther and Stephen wanted to pursue an artistic career, nonconforming social expectations of them to be a traditional housewife or priesthood. Education for women has been given very little importance in society.

Not only the contemporary social pressure but also the writers of the modern period had influence on forming the thinking style and writing structure of new writers. As an example, when Sylvia Plath was a university student, she read a lot of James Joyce's writings and mentioned him in many of her writings. She wanted to take her thesis topic based on James Joyce's writings. Early in 1953, Plath began reading Joyce. In 1956, Plath wrote a letter to her mother from Cambridge where she talked about Joyce saying, "The important thing is the aesthetic form given to my chaotic experience, which is, as it was for James Joyce, my kind of religion, and as necessary for me is [sic] the absolution of the printed word as the confession and absolution of a Catholic in church" (Bramer 3). Additionally, the novels- *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *The Bell Jar* have significant similarities in both cases of story and writing style. Both Stephan and Esther want to pursue a life as writers and refuge to confront social norms and expectations. Memory plays a significant role in *The Bell Jar* to express the artistic knowledge of Esther during her mental breakdown and nostalgic vision of Stephen's travel to the past from childhood and Clongowes in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, depicting the development of character over time (Gourley 713-715). Overall, it can be argued that contemporary writers influence new writers as well.

Even though both novels challenge social norms, Esther's rebellion is more internal than external. In comparison, Stephen's rebellion is external. Throughout the novel, Esther has an

introspective nature where she talks and analyses her thoughts all alone. She hardly shared any of her thoughts with anyone. She feared losing her mind. All the social expectations lowered Esther's self-esteem and abruptly ended her ambitious personality. It becomes difficult for her to live the life she wants going against society. As a result, she broke down mentally and physically. In contrast, Stephen was more vocal about his rebellion. He often discussed his ideas and beliefs with his companion. Hence, his rebellion was external. He was strong enough to stick to his ideology and leave Ireland to fulfill his artistic needs. This also depicts the fact that Stephen has reached the post-conventional stage of moral development whereas Esther Greenwood from *The Bell Jar* still struggles between the conventional and post-conventional stages of moral development where non-confronting society seems difficult for her yet she cannot accept confronting either.

In short, both Esther and Stephen from *The Bell Jar* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* try to pursue a life as a writer while challenging traditional norms and beliefs. Yet, due to their expected gender roles, both had different barriers and circumstances. While *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* questions nationalism, religious boundaries, literary writing style; *The Bell Jar* questions marriage, women empowerment, childbirth, double standards in sexual relationships, treatment of mentally ill women. Both novels follow individualism and highlight the inner conflict of the protagonists related to their surroundings.

Chapter 07

Conclusion

Literature and language have always been a way of expressing thoughts and experiences of life. Yet every period of literature has some common characteristics influenced by contemporary history. The literature of the modern period challenged and questioned the social norms and expectations that the Victorian period embraced. Writings of the modern period did not hesitate to question any existing values and beliefs including religion, supernatural power, nationalism, gender roles, traditional writing style and so on. Such drift occurred for various historical reasons such as industrialization, religious movements, world wars, and natural disasters which led humans to question existing values.

For having different gender roles, men and women faced different consequences of the incidents that took place in the 19th to 20th century. Some gender roles are natural such as women giving birth and men having comparatively stronger structures but some gender roles are socially constructed. For example, the definition of femininity is socially constructed. Women were expected to be feminine, give birth, and nurture families while men were expected to go to war and take part in political and religious affairs. Men are expected to be the providers and women as the nurturers of the family. Before the modern era, almost every of the mentioned gender roles were specific and any difference was not taken normally. However, the consequences of such strict gender roles were often displeasing and that can be comprehended through the analysis of these two novels.

Through the analysis discussed in this paper based on the novels- *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *The Bell Jar*, one can comprehend the non-conformity that emerged through

literature in the modern period occurred due to drastic changes in the world with the help of technology and industrialization. The novels are semi-autobiographical, depicting a valid portion of the authors' lives. Both authors challenged contemporary values and questioned their consequences through the novels. Joyce questioned Irish nationalism, Catholicism, expected lifestyle and career, the traditional way of writing literature and so on. Joyce also did not shy away from depicting the natural adulthood of a teenage boy having his first sexual experience regardless of social barriers. Joyce showed that even though there are rules and norms, humans are attracted to forbidden acts. The main character Stephen listened to himself and left Ireland to pursue a writer's career. Joyce's challenge to society was very personal yet the character Stephen showed it externally. Stephen did not hesitate to share his different ideology with his family and friends.

On the contrary, Esther's rebellion in *The Bell Jar* was internal. She hardly shared her different thoughts with anyone in the novel. Through the novel, Sylvia Plath questions the traditional gender role of women. She denied women's ultimate goal of being a mother and having a family. The novel speaks for career-oriented women of America in the 60s in general rather than being very personal. Women seeking a career as a writer was seen as blasphemy. Esther felt trapped inside a bell jar for seeking different things in life than society wanted her to have. She alienated herself and gradually got depressed and developed insomnia. Plath also questions the mental health treatment of women during that time and people's behavior towards mentally suffering women. The novel portrayed the issues of the second and third wave of feminism where the definition of femininity was questioned and the career rights of women were promoted.

To conclude, the protagonist of both novels challenged their social norms, values and gender roles and opposed them in given situations. Their difficulties and challenges were different. Esther had to resist the social expectation of getting married and having a family. Stephen had no

such pressure but he had the pressure to join the Irish movement and pursue a life of priesthood. Both of them wanted to be a writer and in both cases, family and society did not support much. Stephen questioned the forced nationalism put upon the generation saying they should not carry the burden of their ancestors' deeds. On the other hand, Esther had shown little to no concern about the world wars America had gone through in the contemporary years. This shows that though the novels were challenging social norms and beliefs, the characters were facing the consequences of such practices. Changes in social norms and values take time to place and the modern period of literature has a great influence in bringing changes in social norms and values.

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