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"The Angel vs the Monster: Dichotomization of Identity in *The Bell Jar*"

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**Abstract:** *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath, depicts the struggle of a woman in search of her own identity and her desire to liberate from the Angel vs Monster dichotomy imposed by society. Esther Greenwood is torn between her mother, who wants her to become an Angel and her vocation as a female writer, more compatible with the Monster. As she encounters different women who represent these archetypes in New York, Betsy and Doreen, her division of the self grows prominent in her life. This paper aims to undertake an analysis on Esther's struggle to find herself in this dichotomy and how the displacement that she suffers while failing to identify with neither of the binaries available is the main cause of her mental illness. Esther cannot be categorized as neither Angel or Monster, but still, society's fixation on erasing women's dichotomization of identity force her to choose between one of them. As there is no placement in society for a woman who does not complain with either one side or the other of the identity spectrum, Esther must leave the mental asylum as either a reformed Angel or a Monster in disguise in order to continue with her life, eliminating every trace of binarism in the female identity.

**Keywords:** patriarchy, division of the self, female identity, dichotomy, writer, mental institution.

**Yesica REBOLLAR CRESPO**

**The Angel vs the Monster: Dichotomization of Identity in *The Bell Jar***

**0. Introduction**

The dichotomized role of women has been highly rooted in society since the beginning of literature. Since then, women have suffered from an entrapment in one of two identities: Angel or Monster. From Pandora's box of terrors as the first woman on Earth for the Greeks; through Lilith, "both the first woman and the first monster" (Gilbert and Gubar 35) in Hebrew mythology; to the biggest religious influence in Western literature, Eve, and her fall from Paradise in Christianity. All these women in literary tradition have been downgraded from Angel and have embraced the female Monster in their confrontation with the conception of womanhood established by their male counterparts. Creation myths entailed the beginning of distrust in women in all forms; Pandora, Lilith and Eve serve as a warning for men of how dangerous a powerful and independent woman can be. The binary identity of Angel and Monster is a threat to a male-dominated society, a woman in search for her own identity is dangerous in a deeply rooted patriarchal society.

Further into modern literature, the struggle persists between this dichotomy as an incompatible binary opposition. When women embrace the role of the female writer taking a pen and writing for themselves, breaking apart from traditional depiction of the female gender seems impossible for them. Since the first moment that women began to write, a dilemma arose regarding the portrayal of womanhood in their own works. They were trapped between the depiction of their protagonists as one of two extremes, Angel or Monster. And not because of a lack of talent as to the imitation of past literary myths, but a social constraint engraved in both literature and society itself. For these women, writing did not transform into freedom and self-expression as a coping mechanism for liberation. Instead, their words became a mirror of their own perceptions in their works.

Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* depicts the continued struggle of the Angel vs the Monster through Esther Greenwood's desire to liberate herself from this binarism. Plath's protagonist is trapped between embracing one of them in her search for the female self as she struggles to find her place in society. Esther challenges the conviction that the self is "a unified and coherent being" (Bonds 50). The division of her identity suppresses Esther in the novel, as if she were suffocating, literally and figurately, under a bell jar. The same way the flame of a candle is extinguished under a lid, without oxygen, Esther Greenwood's desire for an identity of her own is suffocated under a glass. She must choose one of the two sides; otherwise, there is no other placement for her in society. This dichotomy is stunting to other female characters as well, dictating their fixed roles and restricting their ability to fully develop, unable to break free from patriarchal impositions and serving as role models, Angels and Monsters, to Esther Greenwood. Because the representations of what she could potentially be, she fails to "develop a consistent personality as she struggles to emulate other characters and to identify or communicate with them" (Pascual-Garrido 80). Esther is torn, within herself, between the roles

that two of her friends, Betsy and Doreen represent, leaving her without self-autonomy in a search for identity. The division of herself grows prominent in her life, leading her to depressions, of which her attempts to find an identity and heal the split division are an instance. The dilemma of identity for Esther is always between the embracement of one of the two roles: being an Angel fulfilling her role as a wife and a mother and therefore abandoning her career ambitions as an author; or being a Monster, whether in the form of a writer, imitating other female counterparts who are the opposite of the established role of womanhood or turning into a madwoman.

This entrapment causes Esther to be alienated from herself in a constant dilemma until she finally embraces one category or the other, eradicating the binarism from her identity. This paper aims to demonstrate how this widely explored binary opposition in female identity plays a key role in the development and struggles of Sylvia Plath's character Esther Greenwood in *The Bell Jar*. Esther's unstable identity stresses the difficulty labelling a woman between such extreme sides of the female spectrum. Esther cannot be placed between Angel or Monster despite her attempts to imitate the different archetypes of these categories that she encounters during her life. Her displacement in society, as well as her identity crises, are rooted in a binarism engendered by society's fixation in determining women as one or the other. From the early religious influence of Eve as the Monster and her female counterpart Mary as the Angel to Victorian categorization of woman as whether "The Angel in the House" or "The Fallen Woman," women have always been entrapped in this binary opposition. In the end, her otherness—as she fails to fit either categories—forces Esther to choose between the Angel or the Monster, with no other possibility in between, and leads her into madness.

### **1. Division of the Self as a Female Writer**

Esther Greenwood's search for identity in *The Bell Jar* starts with her first encounter with the real world, when she is selected for a desirable summer internship at *Mademoiselle*, a magazine in New York City. While working there she tries to meet the magazine expectations and cultivate her creativity. But because she is both a woman and a writer, her struggle between this Angel vs Monster dichotomy is Her texts are worthless, and not because she lacks value as an author, but rather as a rejection of the female writer rooted in society. Women are not supposed to be creative, or have their own thoughts and opinions, neither author any of their productions. Instead, the female writer is encouraged to copy what it is already in existence, that is, reproducing the only acceptable works in a patriarchal world: the ones written by men and only men. Esther must fulfil her role as an Angel, serving men and praising their words. During her internship in the magazine, she is encouraged to follow the expected role of womanhood rather than to find a voice as a writer through her articles. The Angel woman cannot be an author, because she is not supposed to have anything to tell, that is why Esther's ambitions as a writer must be suppressed. She ought to be subjected under the control of the patriarchal rule.

The Monster woman cannot be an author either because of the negative connotations of her role, Esther as a writer represents the same dangers for society as Pandora, Lilith, and Eve: a woman who is aware of the power of her words and a woman who makes free and

rational use of them, discarding men's opinions. To Esther, writing is a way of asserting her own identity, her creative process allows her to "rebel against the values and practices of a dominant culture and to assume an empowered position of political agency in the world." (Krizanich 397). Rebellion in a patriarchal society through literary vocation is a recurrent tope in literary criticism, in *The Madwoman in the Attic the Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, Gilbert and Gubar elevate Harold Bloom's Freudian theory of literary genealogy. Bloom denominated the phenomenon that the creator suffers "anxiety of influence" (Gilbert and Gubar 48), meaning that any writer assumes the priority of their predecessors over their own work.

Gilbert and Gubar point out the male dominance of this term and propose a feminist counterpoint: "anxiety of authorship" (49), by which women realize that they cannot write because they will never become a precursor and that desire of pursuing writing as a literary career will only be the beginning of their destruction. Esther's aspirations crash when she perceives her limitations in patriarchal culture as she realizes she cannot be a writer in the world she lives. She notices early how she "was supposed to be having the time of [her] life" (Plath 2). But she was not having fun at all, she was not even "steering anything, not even [herself]" (3). Her life as an employee has just begun, but it is meaningless in the magazine. At university she excelled in grades and prizes, but in the working world she is not only being denied recognition because of her gender, but also job opportunities. She feels neglected and impotent, her grades and efforts mean nothing outside the academic life. She experiments the same realization working for the magazine, her ambitions to become a writer are frustrated and not because her lack of talent, but rather because of her gender. Esther knows the magazine expects nothing from her, not to grow as a woman in New York, nor to develop her creative writing. She cannot avoid being disappointed with her expectations:

I just bumped from my hotel to work and to parties and from parties to my hotel and back to work like a numb trolleybus. I guess I should have been exited 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 hulla-baloo. (Plath 3)

She knows that the internship will only teach her how to be an Angel in the future, reduced to a closed sphere related to women's last beauty trends and fashion. The only compatible topic to write about as a woman an author is the definition of womanhood. She can only write about how to dress as an acceptable woman, how to cook as the perfect wife and how to look presentable in the eyes of men. She must be an accomplice of this imposed role and must set the standard stereotypes that other women must follow in order to perform as a functional woman in society. This sudden realization of reality acts as the first conflict she must face when it comes to the assertion of her identity. "The reason a woman has greater problems becoming an artist is because she has greater problems becoming a self" (Budick 872). Esther is not allowed to write about whatever she wants in order to be an independent artist, she is denied the opportunity of taking her own decisions, first in her career, and later in her personal life. Her career frustration starts to make her feel dead inside, depriving her of inspiration.

As her motivation and literary career starts to fall, her mother encourages her even more to discard her writing aspirations and to pursue a career as a shorthand writer, the same profession that her mother chose in the past. Ms Greenwood portrays the perfect Angel woman that Esther finds the most conflicting within her life. Esther, as a young woman, feels hopeless in the search of an identity she can relate to. Amidst this feeling of alienation, she is still able to assert some degree of self-definition based on a firm negation to comply with the gender and social roles embodied by the Angel. She lacks a defined identity and but there are certain things that she firmly rejects without hesitation, and the idea of working for men—which is glorified by her mother—is one of them: “[She] hated the idea of serving men in any way. [She] wanted to dictate [her] own thrilling letters” (Plath 83). She did not want to be another messenger of patriarchy, she wanted to write her own story.

Following her mother’s wishes mean the death of the unborn artist for Esther; she hates the idea of becoming a shorthand writer under the commands of a man. However, being a selfless angel, to lack a self means to live a “life that has no story, [...] a death-in-life” (Gilbert and Gubar 25). As her literary career intertwines increasingly with the servitude of men, something that she totally rejected from the beginning, she decides to hold into the opposite side of the spectrum, the Monster. Virginia Woolf claims in her essay “Professions for women” that “killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a female writer” (110). To kill her Angel side, Esther has to associate herself with the Other. She must reject society’s expectations of womanhood as the Angel in order to be embrace otherness and a possible Monster identity. This implies a constant struggle between her aspirations as a writer—which drift her away from her mother—to other female roles that she encounters in her internship in the magazine. However, all of them are so opposite from the other, that it is difficult for her to escape either of the binaries.

## **2. The Struggle of Female Identity: Becoming an Angel or a Monster**

Sylvia Plath exemplifies the dilemma of Angel vs Monster with other two young women in the life of Esther: Doreen and Betsy. The Angel version is represented by Betsy, described as a girl “out of those ‘P.Q.’s wife wears B.H. Weagge’ adds” with a “blonde ponytail and Sweetheart-of-Stigma-Chi smile” (Plath 7). She is the perfect future American housewife; she becomes the cover girl for advertisements in the magazine as an example of a young girl of her time. She embodies the patriarchal female stereotype, what the male-dominated society wants every woman in the nation to look like. She works for men in the magazine but also for all men in the country whose wives read and look up to the magazine. Betsy’s job is not being a creative writer, but rather a role-model to young girls who will perform the role of the housewife in the future. In the magazine, Esther will be encouraged to be the same, an actress portraying an ideal of femininity for a patriarchal society instead of a writer. Betsy also attends all the internship activities in the magazine and motivates Esther to participate too, trying to distance Esther from her female counterpart in the other side of the spectrum, Doreen: “Betsy was asking me to do things with her and the other girls as if she were trying to save me in some way. She never asked Doreen” (Plath 7).

This suggests an angelic agenda on Betsy's part, she perfectly fits the Angel role in society and tries to lure Esther to her side before it is too late, before Doreen gets her first. Doreen is aware of Esther's polarized identity and her ambiguity towards one or the other, but she still sees hope in her. Doreen has fully embraced the Monster and cannot be saved, but a possibility is still present for Esther. At some point she even makes a list of all the socially accepted "feminine" activities in a patriarchal society that she cannot do: "I began with cooking. [...] I didn't know shorthand either. [...] I was a terrible dancer. I couldn't carry a tune. I had no sense of balance. [...] I couldn't ride a horse" (Plath 83—84). Betsy fills the Angel role in society because she has the inclination and the skills to be this type of woman. Esther has neither the determination nor the skills to become this modern ideal of an American wife. That is why she could never find identification with Betsy and the Angel, totally rejecting this side of the binary female identity. Becoming a woman like Betsy is the thing Esther least wants, she associates her with her mother and her expectations of her. Esther is aware of the limitations of choosing this path, and she decides that she was not settling for male servitude before, and she is not going to do it now either.

On the contrary, Doreen is a Monster incarnation of Pandora, Lilith, and Eve in the same person. She is sexually active, a seducer and a threat to humankind. There is some level of freedom suggested in a seductive woman like Doreen. Not only does she rebel against the traditional role of women, but she also does the opposite of what she should be doing in the magazine. Doreen skips the internship events to go out at night, to drink and to spend time with random men without caring about her safety. However, as much as Doreen seems to act independently, she suffers from another patriarchal role, the objectification of her body. She is serving men in the same way, she just seeks their approval, dresses and gets out to meet them, and she becomes a victim of the male gaze and even physical violence. Doreen needs male acceptance in order to assert her own identity and value herself as a human being, and that allows men to exert power over her.

This power that men hold against women applies to Esther as well, she cannot value herself as a writer because she depends on male predecessors to recognise her work. Both Doreen and Esther are prisoners of male power, as much as they want to be independent, they still rely on their male counterparts as they seek for their approval. In the case of Doreen, the male gaze exacerbates her situation, since the power that men exert over her is related with her physical appearance, making her a victim of male predators while she just needs reaffirmation of her body as a method of asserting her own persona. Even Esther comments how men "keep staring at [Doreen] the way people stare at the great white macaw in the zoo, waiting for it to say something human" (Plath 12). Doreen seems free, but she is not, men only further objectify her while she plays the other role available for her, the Monster. Doreen is an example of how a woman who cannot identify herself as an Angel can only be a Monster, with no other alternative in between. When Esther has clearly rejected Betsy and her mother and what they represent as the Angel, she is forced to seek identification with Doreen and the other side of the identity spectrum. While Esther felt that Betsy was "trying to save her in some way" (7), with Doreen she felt "wise and cynical as all hell" (9).

For Esther, disappointed enough with the magazine and the imposed expectation of being an Angel, apart from suffering from a crisis as a writer, Doreen is the only option

available. Since only one of the binaries can remain, she can only seek to become the Monster. However, Esther is not satisfied with Doreen either, she is too extreme and wild for her and the realization of the danger that entails being close to Doreen makes her reject the Monster too:

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. (Plath 32).

Even when Esther is with Doreen, she feels out of place, "melting into the shadows like the negative of a person [she] had never seen before" (11). As Boyer puts it, Esther is "underrepresented and depersonalized [...] unrecognizable to herself" (201) when she compares herself with Doreen. She fails to find identification with Doreen and the Monster too. After spending a day with the Monster, Esther washes the role away of herself, recoiling towards the Angel once again, as she purifies herself in a water ritual:

All that liquor and those sticky kisses I saw and the dirt that settled on my skin on the way back it is turning into something pure. The longer I lay there in the clear hot water the purer I felt, and when I stepped out at last and grabbed myself in one of the big, soft white hotel bath towels I felt pure and sweet as a new baby. (Plath 22)

The image of Doreen getting drunk in front of her triggers Esther, which is when she decides to separate herself from Doreen. Esther thought that drifting away from one side of the dichotomized identity meant a direct identification with the other. Being an Angel does not let her become an author and an independent woman, but being a Monster neither, it is only going to destroy her dignity as a human being. Doreen does not represent empowerment for Esther anymore, but rather a disrespect for her physical and moral integrity. Being with Doreen felt more denigrating and filthier than following Betsy. Esther states: "I decided that 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" (25). In the end it is the essence of Betsy what comforts her in that moment. Esther suffers from a lack of identity and rejection of both sides of the spectrum. Betsy still haunts her in her mind, "everything she said was like a secret voice speaking straight out of my own bones" (8). She does not want to be deceived by Betsy into fully embracing the Angel again. Because of this, she could not lock the door that night, "I couldn't lock it. I couldn't quite bring myself to do that" (25), she could not shut completely the Monster out from her identity either. She has completed the circle by leaving Doreen, and returned to Betsy, but she has rejected that path before. So, what is left for her if it is not one identity or the other?

### **3. Rejection of the Female Dichotomy**

Esther fluctuates back and forth between the two roles in her search for identity. This is when her identity crisis begins, stemming from this binary opposition, she learns that there is no "self" for a woman in a patriarchal society. She "fails to see women as her role models, yet she is desperate to find the ideal person with whom she can willingly identify" (Sakane 31). She refuses to identify with any woman in her life, nor her mother and Betsy, nor Doreen, since they represent totally extreme sides of the self. Esther's identity cannot be described as white or black, with nothing in between, she seeks for the perfect balance of the two roles. She is neither an Angel or a Monster, she is something that has no name nor place in a patriarchal world, because there is not a third option in the identity spectrum for a woman. She expresses her anxiety towards this lack of balance in her life with her description of the fig tree:

I saw my life branching out before me like the green fig tree in the story. From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future beckoned and winked. One fig was a husband and a happy home and children, and another fig was a famous poet, and another fig was a brilliant professor, and another fig was Ee Gee, the amazing editor, [...] and beyond and above these figs were many more figs I couldn't quite make out. (Plath 85)

Esther is aware of the incompatibility of this dichotomy, her anxiety over the future is depicted with many figs in front of her, every one of them represent a different outcome. She is alienated, holding herself against society and against her future. She knows that in the society in which she lives, it is not possible to desire more than one fig. Greed is Esther's sin, and it derives from a previous sentiment of frustration due to everything that society has deprived her from. Esther is conflicted with what she desires and with what she is allowed to desire. She represents the incarnation of a modern Eve who is confronted with a fruit tree against humankind as well. In this case, society is being merciful with Esther, as she is allowed to pick one fig, but just one. At this point, that fig will determine her future forever, even when the thought of having access to one of them is simply not enough for her anymore:

I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this big tree, starving to death, just because I couldn't make up my mind which of the figs I would choose. I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing the rest, and, as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and, one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet. (85)

Esther was an intelligent person since she was young: she was a brilliant college student with the aspirations of becoming an author, "[She] was good at winning scholarships and prizes" (84), she is capable of taking a decision. She knows what she wants in life, and what she rejects, and yet, she seems incapable of choosing one future. Her anxiety over these roles does not come from an indecisiveness towards which to choose, but rather from her rejection of both of them at the same time. Because choosing one, would force her either to be Betsy and the Angel, or Doreen and the Monster. In the end, her future is reduced to two figs, and



she does not want either of them. The otherness that she experiments derives from a sense of alienation from her desire, two figs are not enough for Esther. Gayle Whittier argues that society and social conventions is what disables Esther's ability to integrate her self-image as a woman (130). Is because of social conventions that she is forced to embrace either one side or the other, society has her trapped between fragmented identities, and she is unable to escape that dichotomy in her self-assertion process. Since society refuses to accept her alienation, Esther questions her self-image, doubting the conception of woman that she had in mind. Esther despises both selves, Angel and Monster, once she has experimented both, but she is unable to control this dichotomy imposed by society. The experience of being pushed between Doreen and Betsy constantly makes her realize her powerlessness in life, the possibilities in front of her are not suitable for what she wants to become anymore. It is in part from this sense of self as a living paradox that Esther grows increasingly depressed" (130). At first, she struggles between designated roles back and forth, but with her return home, the bell jar closes even more with her complete loss of creativity and autonomy of her own identity. According to Sakane, "the otherness that Esther upholds for self-protection has become a cause of her physical as well as mental dysfunction" (35). This alienation of the self prevents Esther from being a normal functional being; she has nothing to hold onto now that she has rejected her two possibilities in society. While she struggles with self-assertion, she stops being able to connect words and their meaning anymore:

Lifting the pages of the book, I let them fan slowly by my eyes. Words, dimly familiar but twisted all awry, like faces in a funhouse mirror, red past, leaving no impression on the glassy surface of my brain. The letters grew barbs and rams' horns. I watched them separate, each from the other, and jiggle up and down in a silly way. Then they associated themselves in fantastic untranslatable shapes, like Arabic or Chinese. (Plath 139)

Before her mental breakdown she was a girl capable of writing "what the leaves looked like in autumn" (44), but after returning home she is not even able to understand written English properly. In order to deal with this patriarchal split of identity, she must "kill the angel's necessary opposite and double, the 'monster' in the house" (Gilbert and Gubar 17). She aims to kill both Angel and Monster, with her suicide attempt she will be free from this dichotomy of identity. During all her stages in life she is forced by society—and even by herself—to belong somewhere. When Buddy calls Esther neurotic, she replies in a way that explains her entire search for identity: "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" (Plath 104). Esther fully embraces the "neurotic" concept now that she does not have another category to fit into. Bundtzen draws attention to Plath's description of women in her poetry, she highlights how Plath characterizes a woman's identity as a human being with "the great and terrible gift of being reborn. The only trouble is, she has to die first" (Bundtzen 34). Esther's failed suicide attempt leaves her without the possibility of easing this dichotomy, leaving her destiny to the hands of male-dominated society. After she tried to kill herself, her body comes to life easily, but her mind, which gave

her the strength to search and fight for her identity, comes back to life disembodied, leaving her defenceless. When she looks at her own reflection in the mirror while being in the hospital, she is confronted with the person that she has become, to the extent that she does not even recognise herself anymore:

At first, I didn't see what the trouble was. It wasn't a mirror at all, but a picture. You couldn't tell whether the person in the picture was a man or a woman, because their hair was shaved off and sprouted in bristly chicken-feather tufts all over their head. One side of the person's face was purple. [...] The person's mouth was pale brown with a rose-coloured sore at either corner. (Plath 197)

She drops the mirror physically and metaphorically as well, since her mind is shattered and full of broken pieces too. Since Esther is not able to search for her identity anymore, someone must do it for her. The mental institution in which she is shortly put into is the perfect place to turn Monsters into Angels. Some of the patients of the asylum are not even Monsters, but if they do not fit the Angel category, they are forced to become mad women to fit the other role instead. Women must be controlled, voluntarily or not, and it is easier for society to justify the control and exertion of power over women if they are mad; in a dichotomized society, every diverted version of a woman fits the Monster category. Getting carried away by madness is the final embracement of the Monster for Esther, forcibly imposed by society rather than appointed by herself. The world she lives in determines that she has become a Monster, and not even Esther can fight back in her mental state. Her forced admittance in the mental asylum was a standard procedure for a Monster in a patriarchal world. She needs to be 'cured' by suffering a brainwashing process in order to make her fit the Angel and the perfect housewife role in this crucial moment. This has terrible consequences for her, considering the vulnerable mental state that she is in. Esther will be shaped into an Angel in the mental asylum, as the only form of identity acceptable as a woman.

The clearest example of this slow process is Valerie, another female patient in the asylum who is in the process of becoming an Angel out of a Monster. Valerie has been lobotomized, physically and metaphorically as well. The two marks around her forehead are the physical scars of such an invasive procedure, but also the metaphorical indication that her "horns" as an incarnation of a female devil are gone. Esther notices this, and states that Valerie seemed to have "started to sprout horns, but cut them off" (Plath 217). Valerie was successfully brainwashed into an Angel, being removed of her monstrous "horns," and with them, the condition from which she suffered is gone too: her anger. Valerie confesses: "I am not angry anymore. Before, I was always angry" (217). Valerie's anger represented her identity as a Monster, as she did not comply with her role as Angel in society, she is forced by the same to become a madwoman, and therefore, to embrace the Monster. Like Valerie's metaphorical horns, Esther's started to "sprout" the creativity of a writer and started questioning the dichotomization of identity as the rule for women categorization. The best way to embrace the Angel role for Esther is being induced to another invasive procedure like Valerie to deprive her of her creativity as a writer and her anxiety towards her role in society, which are the main causes feeding the Monster. Esther is administered with Electroconvulsive

Therapy (ECT) with the goal of erasing her intelligence, her passion as a writer and her identity conflict. As a sane woman, she will not suffer from it anymore, since the role of the Monster will be completely erased from her mind. Her only fate is reduced to or remain permanently in the mental asylum and die as a Monster or reinsert in society as a reformed Angel.

#### 4. Conclusion

While being in the asylum, Esther realises soon after that any women who believe to be intelligent, those with some ambition in life further than what society expects of them, will eventually be sent to an institution. They will be considered Monsters in the eyes of patriarchy and reinserted back in society as Angels if they do not die as madwomen in the process. "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" (Plath 268). In the end, both Angels studying in college and Monsters in the mental institution are meant to feel suffocated under the same bell jar eventually, because they all live in the same oppressive society. For the female college student, the realization that she will be expected to stop her academic career when she finds a husband will come at some point. And, for the female patient in the mental institution, she will experiment the same process. Whether she is mentally ill or not is not important, but rather her capacity to reinsert in society as an obedient and diligent wife. Every female deviation from what is considered acceptable in the Angel pattern will be eventually forcibly converted back in order to fit in that classification of female identity.

Regarding Esther's identity, this paper has deducted that it suffers the same fate: the complete eradication of its binarism and the final embracement of one of the two categories of the self. In her quest for a definition of womanhood during the novel, Esther reaffirms herself with the chant "I am I am I am" (Plath 142), this self-assertion is a representation of her life-long struggle and a later foreshadowing of her final definition of womanhood. This new persona can never be achieved with the existence of a dichotomy. Therefore, she embraces the "I am" as an Angel or as a Monster in the end, proving that in a patriarchal society, this fixed categorization of women is the only conceivable way to have a place in the community for the female gender. *The Bell Jar* may not have a definite ending for Esther, but her story is testimony enough to the struggle of a woman trapped between a dichotomy of identities. After her experience as a Monster in the mental institution, she learned that choosing one fig or the other would not matter, since both extremes of the spectrum of identity have adverse consequences for women. She stops struggling with this dichotomization of identity and embraces a reborn version of herself. With the help of the mental institution and Dr Nolan she forges a new identity, and from that moment onwards, Esther stops looking for identification in other women. After the mental institution, when she looks back on the past months of her life, she refers to the present as a time "when I was all right again" (4). However, was Esther all right again after all? Whether she forced herself to fully embrace the Angel, complaining with society's expectations or if she pretended to be "all right" as a disguised Monster in order to be free again it is not clear in the end of the novel. But, regardless of this uncertainty, she had to accept to be one or the other, erasing the possibility left for another split of binary

oppositions. Esther intentionally chooses one or the other when she leaves the institution and is determined to embrace one of them as her final identity. In that sense, society was victorious in the end, because they were successful enough to suppress the dichotomization of the female identity in Esther, something that the male-dominated world has ever been so keen to eliminate.

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