Passive Resistance

Paralysis as Social Criticism in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal* and Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*.

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Abstract

This thesis deals with three feminist literary works from the twentieth century, spanning from the 1920s to the 1960s. The three works I will examine are Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal* (1928), and Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar (*1963). The central issue in this thesis will be mental illness, more specifically mental paralysis. I will argue that paralysis is a result of systematic oppression of women by patriarchal society, and that all three female protagonists in the literary works mentioned above are sufferers from this. Paralysis will be argued to be a symptom of the contemporary conditions in society, limiting and restraining the female population. This thesis will argue the respective authors' use of symbolism and metaphors to convey a message relating to the destructive powers of misogynistic society. I will examine the signs of paralysis in the female protagonists as well as their cause.

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Introduction

Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), depicts a day in the life of Clarissa Dalloway where she is planning her party on the outside, while experiencing unhappiness and tiredness on the inside. The exterior world in *Mrs. Dalloway* exists regardless of, almost in spite of the characters' inner life. Abiding society's expectations exteriorly, while experiencing a severe inner conflict regarding life and death represents a resistance towards the life she is given. The emphasis lies on the *given,* and not on the chosen because of the social circumstances Clarissa has been born into. Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal* (1928) depicts Helen Jones, representative of any young woman of the early twentieth century, living in an unhappy marriage and struggling with the impalpable thought of freedom. Unable to comply physically because of her psychological refusal to abide by society's force is what makes her character a heroine, but is also what condemns her to death. In Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963), Esther Greenwood protests against patriarchal society through attempting to break the gender-barrier of social and sexual norms, just to be broken down and reconstructed as an obedient citizen of misogynistic society.

Reading *Mrs. Dalloway* at a young age, I always loved the story's structure of having several things happening at the same time in different places and everyone observing the exterior life of others while being oblivious to the inner life of one another. It was only years later that I understood the importance of Clarissa's quiet exterior and her conflicted inner life. The modernist style of Virginia Woolf entails personal battles that happen within the individual, depicting the conflicted mind of characters like Clarissa Dalloway. Rereading it as an adult, the fact that Clarissa is able to express so much by doing so little spiked my interest in the field of mental illness in female characters in literature. The difference in the expressions of unhappiness and depression and its meaning literary fiction is something that has been a personal interest of mine for several years. The idea of mental paralysis developed further as I continued to read more about Virginia Woolf's and Sylvia Plath's life and fiction, getting the sense that something very important was being told in the quiet voices of their literary characters. A new way of understanding oppression and resistance against it opened up through reading *Mrs. Dalloway, Machinal* and *The Bell Jar*, all three representative of women's voices in a man's world.

This thesis aims to explore how representations of paralysis are used as social criticism in three feminist literary works. By examining how paralysis is portrayed in three different literary works from the early- and mid-twentieth century I will argue that paralysis is used as a feminist tool in criticism of patriarchal society and the systematic oppression of women. The works that will be the center of the argument in this thesis are Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal* (1928) and Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963). Paralysis is the term I have chosen to describe the symptomatic behavior of the female characters in these works. It holds concepts like loss of control and inability to act in the characters. Focus will be on the concept of mental paralysis but it will also cover its physical aspect. Physical paralysis is important in terms of both sexuality and ability to perform every-day tasks in the characters. This thesis will explore how Virginia Woolf, Sophie Treadwell and Sylvia Plath depict paralysis through their fictional characters as part of a modernist tradition of portraying the result of oppression of women by patriarchal society. I will argue that one of the most visible indicators of oppression of women in feminist literature can be passivity, paralysis, a loss of individual involvement and subjective participation in one's own life. I will argue this to be particularly visible in the characters of Clarissa Dalloway, Helen Jones and Esther Greenwood, all sufferers from oppression from patriarchal society and loss of agency resulting from this. The central question in this thesis will be; how is paralysis represented as a result of oppression, as well as the opposition against patriarchal oppression of women in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Machinal* and *The Bell Jar*? This thesis aims to give a representation of paralysis as social criticism and as the three female characters' expression of opposition.

This introduction will consist of three parts. First, I will introduce the aspect of Victorianism and what significance this era with its specific set of values means to the three literary works that will be considered here. Secondly, I will introduce the term *paralysis* and its intended use in this thesis, related to the Victorian diagnosis of hysteria. Thirdly, I will describe some historical aspects of how people have thought about and treated mental illness that will be relevant to the analysis in the following chapters.

Victorianism: Traditions of Oppression

In *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel* (2000), Nancy Armstrong asserts that "if eighteenth-century literature invented "femininity", then it is fair to say that Victorian fiction invented "femaleness"" (109). The term "femaleness" originates from the eighteenth-century literary tradition of using descriptions of femininity in order to ascertain a character's cultural esteem and to attract the right man. This literary feminine ideal was now in conflict with female nature in Victorian literature, "femaleness" being in conflict with the "real" female nature. Armstrong argues that what had earlier been considered as natural feminine behavior in the eighteenth century was now seen as repressed emotions and desires in the Victorian female (111-112). In Victorian fiction, a woman's value depended on her lack of sexual desire than on "the machinations propelled by desire that lead to her gratification" (111). Victorian literature therefore seems to represent the conflicted female that still struggled to uphold the unified exterior while actually experiencing confusion and suppressed emotions on the inside and that these were expressed subtly in Victorian literature.

Although the main theme of this thesis will not be the Victorian era itself, the period with its specific set of moral values and traditions is of importance to all three of the authors whose work will be discussed in this thesis. It can be argued that Virginia Woolf and Sophie Treadwell, both being born during the Victorian era, make symbolic use of Victorianism in order to express feminist views. As will be argued in the following chapters, Victorianism has a largely metaphorical presence in the literary fiction discussed here and is implied through sentences, objects and emotions in the characters. Sexuality is a part of the problem with the characters' individual freedom. Strict moral codes for sexual behavior in women are very much present in all three of the literary works considered here, and it therefore seems important to introduce the theme of Victorianism introductory to the following chapters.

Stanley Coben in "The Assault on Victorianism in the Twentieth Century" (1975) writes that it became almost a trend during the twenties to criticize Victorianism and the Victorian era, which is arguably also true for the literary works considered in this thesis. The term Victorianism will be used in a symbolical and metaphorical sense in this thesis, and reflects the values and traditions that the period is known for rather than the period itself. However, the reason for this criticism to become a trend at the time appears to be because old values continued to linger in an increasingly modernized world, not because these values were of the past. While daily life transformed economically, politically and socially, the restriction of women's individual value and personal freedom continued to exist.

The gendered differences in what was accepted sexuality in men and in women is part of what creates the tension within the characters in *Mrs. Dalloway, Machinal* and *The Bell Jar.*

Armstrong (2000) writes about the emergence of Sigmund Freud and psychoanalysis during the early twentieth century and the development of the idea that psychological emotions and trauma also had a physical effect on the body. Freud and his psychoanalysis came to the conclusion that psychological trauma, often sexual in nature, would reveal itself through acting “”like a foreign body” within the individual” (109). This idea of a “foreign body” within the individual appears to be part of the same idea that developed into modernism in the early twentieth century. Victorianism can almost be interpreted as the foreign body within the characters created by Woolf, Treadwell and Plath, as it represents outdated ideas about women. Authors like Virginia Woolf, Sophie Treadwell and their contemporaries were influenced by Freud and the theories of psychoanalysis and developed a new form of literary character with a complex inner life often in conflict with the exterior, as is seen in *Mrs. Dalloway*. While true femininity in Victorian fiction relied on the absence of sexual desire in the female, the literary works that will be discussed in this thesis appear to rely on exactly this in order to prove their characters’ individuality. Each one of the three fictional characters struggles with the element of sexuality and not wanting to repress it. The Victorian era is famous for its complicated relationship to sexuality, and this thesis will therefore be focused on it being a kind of shorthand for the surviving sexual paralysis that modernist writers both criticized and continued to embody.

In attempting to position myself in terms of older as well as more recent criticism concerning the literary works, in addition to the theme of mental illness and paralysis in literature, Victorianism appeared to have gained a profile in modernist writing as part of the problem for feminism. Seeing as Victorianism is popularly thought to represent restrictions for women created by nineteenth century men, particularly doctors with developing theories about the weak feminine physique and mentality, Victorianism does in some aspects represent patriarchy at its strongest. As it was obviously not the first era to uphold these values, it is possibly the best-documented historical period that did. The term oppression in the sense that it will be used in this thesis will therefore imply traditions and values stemming (though not exclusively) from Victorianism.

Another important element that link together Victorianism, the three literary works and the concept of paralysis, is the Victorian diagnosis of hysteria. The diagnosis did in many ways set the standard of the ideal femininity and what became known as failed femininity. Derritt Mason and Ela Przybylo in “Hysteria Manifest: Cultural Lives of a Great Disorder”

(2013) argue for the emergence of the feminist hysteric as a "figure of diagnosis and rebellion" (5). The article follows Showalter's argumentation about hysteria and the transformation and adaptability of the term itself through time. Mason and Pryzybylo argues that hysteria has come to mean not only one specific set of symptoms, but rather that it has grown to cover several fields of symptoms, that the old term has gained a wider meaning and now covers several cultural apparitions (6). Hysteria being seen as a kind of rebellion brings the discussion towards marriage constituting a large part of the problem. Oppression in this context does not only refer to the exclusion of women from public and political life, but also to the institution of marriage as severely limiting and unbeneficial for women during the early and mid-twentieth century. The female characters examined here in the context of paralysis are all representative of a generation of women in fear of marriage because it meant the end of individuality and personal freedom.

Mental Illness: the Agent of Patriarchy

As Appignanesi (2009) explains, women, doctors and mental illness have a history of their own linked to several historical developments through time. Simone de Beauvoir explored the terrain through *The Second Sex,* and proved that a particular period's definition of appropriate masculinity and femininity were closely linked to definitions of madness (Appignanesi, 7). The history of madness is also a history on nonconforming individuals not fitting in to the norms and morality of their contemporary society. R. A. Houston argues in "Madness and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century" (2002), that "madness" represents an ongoing war between the genders and the different social classes, meaning that it is as much a social product as it is a social construct (310). Women have constituted the majority of victims of misogynistic doctors and repressive asylums and this is the reason that madness became patriarchy's weapon against women. If madness is considered as a weapon against women, it is also a sign of their powerlessness. Shoshana Felman in "Madness and Philosophy or Literature's Reason" (1975), writes about madness being the story about the weak in society and that during mediaeval times, madness became society's outcasts, a role that had earlier been reserved for lepers (210-211).

According to Appignanesi (2009), hysteria was first characterized by “constant mobility, persistent agitation and inexhaustible loquacity” (125), and as something that took “prominence against the background of a society in rapid flux” (125). Later, as closer studies of the condition was performed, its symptoms expanded to including physical paralysis in limbs, as seen in the case of “Augustine” from 1875. Augustine became the classic example of hysteria and its symptoms as it had yet to be commonly known what these were at the time she became hospitalized.

Paralysis as a reaction against the limitations and suppression of women is something that has been widely explored during the second wave feminism starting in the 1960s, with feminist critics like Betty Friedan asking questions about why women were left out and what this ultimately did to them psychologically. The increasing number of unsatisfied housewives derives, according to Friedan, from the fact that women were being denied fulfilment of their human potential being pressured into early marriage and family-life by society. Based on these observations it is possible to suggest housewife depression or, as Friedan calls it “the problem that has no name” (2010), as a cultural construction. The issue of undermining the voices of women was not a new idea during the time that *Mrs. Dalloway* was written but it might be considered as one of the earliest portrayals of how patriarchal society leads to depression in women.

In relation to the time span between the literary works that will be the centre of argumentation in this thesis it is interesting to note the 1950s view of the twenties and thirties of women as the liberated and “emancipated girl” (Friedan, 42). The magazine *Look* published in 1956 an article describing the contemporary woman as far more feminine than those of the early twentieth century (42). She married younger and had more children than before, the housewife was on her way back into society after the working years of the war, and it is here that Friedan asserts that the depression of young women emerge. The fact is that Woolf and Treadwell might have faced a slightly different but still ominously similar problem to that of Sylvia Plath did forty years later. While one can argue that Victorianism held back the progress of women’s rights in the twenties, the re-emergence of the “feminine ideal” in the fifties created the same type of problems for a new generation of women. Women were again supposed to find their place within the confinement of the home, reintroducing old values into a modernized society.

The image of the fifties woman is described as follows by Friedan:

> Thus the logic of the feminine mystique re-defined the very nature of woman's problem. When a woman was seen as a human being of limitless human potential, equal to man, anything that kept her from realizing her full potential was a problem to be solved: barriers to higher education and political participation, discrimination or prejudice in law or morality. But now that woman is seen only in terms of her sexual role, the barriers to the realization of her full potential, the prejudices which denies her full participation in the world, are no longer problems. The only problems now are those that might disturb her adjustment as a housewife. (44)

The problem that grows out of this segregation and denial of women's potential is according to Friedan a vague, undefinable wish for something more than "washing dishes, ironing, punishing and praising the children" (44). Friedan's work, as it is presented in this thesis, is mainly considered as a contemporary primary source in order to reach a better understanding of early second wave feminist thought. As Jennifer Schessler writes:

> "The Feminine Mystique" remains a rich keyhole into the popular culture of the 1950s — even if, as scholars increasingly argue, that decade was far less monolithic in its stultifying conformism than Friedan's best seller suggested (Schessler, nytimes.com, "Criticisms of a Classic Abound", 2013).

Hysteria might be seen as the most relevant diagnosis to the argument of this thesis, as it has historically been seen as a "woman's disease". Hysteria also relates to other more recent diagnoses like neuroticism that entails similar symptoms to that of hysteria and that were perceived to be a feminine diagnosis from the early twentieth century up until the 1960s. As Elaine Showalter (1993) states: "Hysteria has been developed as a pejorative term for femininity in a duality that relegated the more honorable masculine form to another category" (292). Men suffering from hysteria were in the beginning seen as feminine or homosexuals and the illness therefore carried both shame and stigma for inflicted males. Showalter draws attention to the need to specify *male* hysteria while it has never been common to specify *feminine* hysteria as a signifier of the gendered divide in the field of mental illness. There seems to be a connection between the increasing amount of misogynistic literature appearing in the seventeenth century and the appearance of hysteria (293). Men suffering from hysteria were often thought to be those who "lead [a] sedentary or studious life" and those who

seemed to “grow pale over their books and papers” (293). During the eighteenth century, the nervous system became seen as feminine while the muscular system was masculine and doctors were therefore able to make a firm gender distinction between forms of nervous disorders (293). This meant that hysteria was not firmly assigned to women, while hypochondria were assigned to men. Hypochondriasis continued to be a masculine disease up until the nineteenth century when also this became stigmatized as a mental disorder.

In 1873 hysteria became known as neurasthenia, linked to stress caused by modernized society and described by George M. Beard as “impoverishment of nervous force” (Showalter, 294). Neurasthenia was the symptom of a society on the fast track and of people not being able to adapt fast enough. As Showalter asserts, neurasthenia became a badge of pride to nations considering themselves to be a part of the rapid modernization (294-295). Mental illness in the form of neurasthenia became a masculine disorder that proved racial and national superiority. While it could entail the same range and variety in symptoms as hysteria (there among tooth decay, headache, vertigo and blushing) and would inflict both men and women between the ages from fifteen to fifty, neurasthenia became the disease of the well off and the intellectuals (295). It became as Showalter argues, a reflection of the American romance with capitalism and “the identification of masculinity with money and property” (295). It is interesting to note the difference in the two diagnoses, where the masculine neurasthenia stemmed from overwork and unattainable ambitions, while the feminine hysteria (though not interpreted as such at the time) reflects a lack of agency and purpose. Both became a sign of high social status during the late nineteenth century but entailed widely different interpretations and social stigma. The history of women’s mental illness is one of oppression, appropriating passive behavior and helplessness to the female sufferer. Additionally, mental illness, in this case particularly hysteria, was a physical and biological fact in women. All women carried the potential for hysteria within them, as the illness originated from the womb. This is seen in contrast to the masculine sufferer who, by having too much agency became overwhelmed by society’s rapid flux and neurasthenia became a stress-related disease with an exterior source.

The gendered conflict between the masculine and the feminine, of agency and passiveness will be of importance to this thesis as it represents the issues the characters are faced with in patriarchal society. Mental illness has played an important role as a mean of oppression against women. It is a term that is both socially and culturally charged, with severe implications for the women and men who were, and still are diagnosed with different forms of mental illness.

Paralysis – Why Not Hysteria?

In choosing the theme for my thesis, my attention was initially drawn to that of the modern feminist literary use of hysteria as it is presented by Elaine Showalter in *Hysteria Beyond Freud* (1993). The implications of reclaiming a diagnosis that historically has been used *against* women in order to prove their unstable nature seemed interesting and highly relevant in reading and interpreting the works of modernist writers like Virginia Woolf as well as for Sophie Treadwell and Sylvia Plath. For some modern writers, hysteria has been claimed to be the first step towards feminism, hysteria working as a protolanguage of the body conveying messages that cannot be verbalized (Showalter, 286-287). Showalter asserts that hysteria became a "specifically feminine pathology that speaks to and against patriarchy" (286).

The link between hysteria and paralysis is to be found in the details of each literary work. The three works that I have chosen to examine in this thesis were selected because of their specific representation of paralysis, linked to, but not identical with hysteria. Mental paralysis as it is depicted in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Machinal* and *The Bell Jar* is similar to hysteria in that it has a physical dimension in the characters. It stretches beyond their thoughts and gains a physical reality, which represents the modernist style of using the female body to demonstrate social and cultural injustice. While madness and mental illness has since the dawn of psychoanalysis been thought of as symptomatic of physical abuse, I will explore mental paralysis as symptomatic of the psychological abuse of women by patriarchal society as it is represented in the three literary works. *Hysteria* is defined in the OED (*Oxford English Dictionary,* 12th ed. 2011) as:

> [E]xaggerated or uncontrollable emotion of excitement. An old-fashioned term for a psychological disorder characterized by conversion of psychological stress into physical symptoms or a change in self-awareness (such as selective amnesia)

The term hysteria derives from the Greek *hysterikos*, meaning "of the womb" (OED, 2011). By associating hysteria with a part of the female body, gendering a disease that implied failure of femininity, also meant depriving women of authority and rationality. By claiming that "mutability is characteristic of hysteria because it is characteristic of women" (Showalter, 286), misogyny succeeded in removing agency and liability from women.

The popular definition of hysteria is what caused my research to take a different turn and to become interested in the exact opposite of hysteria's "mutability", namely the passivity or paralysis of the female literary character. The basis that this thesis is constructed upon is the perception that Clarissa Dalloway, Helen Jones and Esther Greenwood are not hysterics but performing passive resistance against patriarchy through psychological (and to some extent physical) paralysis. Quietly refusing to conform instead of suffering from uncontrollable spasms, noisy or emotional displays (Showalter, 286-287), the minds and bodies of these three female characters are opposing the feminine ideal created by patriarchal society.

As Lisa Appignanesi argues in *Mad, Bad and Sad* (2009), symptoms of hysteria might sometimes be the loss of mobility in certain limbs, becoming physically paralyzed, as in Charcot's famous case of Augustine (127-129). Augustine was the first and most famous case where hysteria took its classic shape. Hysteria had earlier been characterized by constant mobility and dramatic convulsions in the sufferer (125). Through Augustine, paralysis became known as a symptom of the illness. A man called C. with whom she had lived for a time, had sexually abused her since she was only thirteen years old. She later discovered that her mother had had sexual relations with the same man and that she had given Augustine to him as a sort of proxy (127). After being drugged and raped by C., Augustine started having fits and violent convulsions, which caused her to end up in Charcot's care at his mental facility in 1875. It is interesting to note about the case of Augustine that her illness appears to have been directly brought on by the trauma of abuse. She gradually lost mobility in one of her arms, which after a while hung limp at her side (131). The psychological as well as the physical effects of abuse is visible through the case of Augustine and represents a development within the field of psychiatry. Her symptoms ranged between having violent convulsions, fainting fits and physical paralysis, and demonstrated the destructive effect abuse has on not only the mind but also on physical functions in the body. This particular link to hysteria is important to the literary works I have chosen to examine. The cause and effect of paralysis in the characters are similar to that of Augustine although only Helen Jones in *Machinal* is exposed directly to sexual abuse. Trauma need not be sexual, but can take the form of psychological oppression and the feeling of disempowerment and imprisonment, which all three characters experience.

Showalter argues that the "feminist romance with hysteria" (288) began in the wake of the women's liberation movement in the 1960s. While all three works that are considered here are dated several years before this decade, some of the arguments in this thesis will be based on the belief that Woolf, Treadwell and Plath were part of an early tradition of using mental illness as symptomatic of oppression. There is a visible difference between the two earliest

works, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Machinal,* from the fifties' novel *The Bell Jar*, where opposition has taken on a more clinical form. The result of patriarchal society's oppression in *The Bell Jar,* develops into mental illness and depression. Sylvia Plath being closer in time to second wave feminism than the other two authors and the differences in literary result is as interesting as the similarities.

Appignanesi writes (2009), "the escape into illness was the mirror image of rebellion" (102). She argues that cases of depression increased among the female part of the population during the industrial revolution as a direct result of "the contradictions of a time which demanded compliance and quiescence of the idealized feminine "while championing dynamism in the culture as a whole might drive a woman to action or the couch" (102). Mental paralysis as a form of rebellion has an important link to historical society and the kind of society depicted in all of the three works that will be discussed here. All three of the female characters examined here struggle with the resistance to conform to society's image of women's role and show similar forms of paralysis. Culture and individuality appears to be in conflict in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Machinal* and *The Bell Jar*. These literary works present women who in some way or other oppose the image of femininity created by society and what devastating results this might have on their lives. The conflict between the inner self against the external forces of patriarchy is central to each of the female characters that will be examined here. This thesis will therefore also set out to explore what forms these limitations take in the minds of women like Clarissa Dalloway, Helen Jones and Esther Greenwood as well as what are their expression.

Reclaiming mental illness and using symptoms of these as a feminist literary aid is an important development within the modernist literary tradition. Feminism using terms that have been used against women as a means of oppression is of considerable value in order to gain a voice in both literature and society. The literary works considered here, are part of a tradition that portrays the destructive effect that patriarchy has on women while at the same time it creates a new kind of female character that opposes the traditional misogynistic ideal.

Chapter Outline

The following chapters contain the discussion of literary representations of paralysis in the literary works of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal* and Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*. The chapters are organized chronologically, meaning that chapter one will be dealing with Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, chapter two with Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal*, and chapter three with Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*. Finally, I will present a conclusion where the findings of each chapter will be summarized and the different works will be compared according to similarities and differences.

In the first chapter, I will discuss Clarissa Dalloway's paralysis and its relation to Victorian elements. Victorianism will be argued to have a unique presence in the Dalloway-house and hold specific meaning to Clarissa's paralysis. Physical elements, like her house and (the lack of) electricity are both important elements that will be important to the arguments in the first chapter. As will be clear in the other two chapters as well, sexuality, especially repressed sexuality carries significance in relation to Clarissa's unhappiness and her paralysis. The unanswered question about her sexual orientation adds to the mystery of Clarissa Dalloway and contributes to her character's complexity. Sexuality in relation to the institution of marriage and the difference of belonging to oneself and belonging to someone else are also important questions raised by the novel.

During Virginia Woolf's lifetime, Victorianism was still a near past and the ideal of the Victorian woman appears to have a strong presence in *Mrs. Dalloway.* The novel was published in 1925 and depicts as Jacob Littleton describes a "Europe of the early twentieth century [that] was characterized by a breakdown of traditional models" (1995:37). The contrasted relationship between privacy and public appearance and the perception of personality as something private, separate from politics and public culture (Littleton, 37) is an important aspect in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Clarissa struggles with the feeling of inadequacy in a dramatically transforming world. She is incapacitated by the weight of Victorian traditions while she at the same time feels overwhelmed by the inconsistency in her own emotions. Littleton draws attention to the pleasure Clarissa gets from physical, sensual existence (37) in which she feels truly alive. Within her own home, she appears to be numb and feels weighed down by the heaviness of the house.

Mrs. Dalloway is a novel which consists of several layers of social criticism, some more subtle that others. The war-symbolism is very visible throughout the novel and the horrific aftermath of the First World War is depicted through Septimus Warren Smith. Both

his and Clarissa's unhappiness are linked to the cultural void and the feeling of alienation. Littleton argues that the simplified patriotism of Clarissa's husband and of Lady Bruton symbolizes props used to cover the void of postwar society, whereas Clarissa is unable to accept any false protection against it. Unable to conform to society's expectations, *Mrs. Dalloway* depicts Clarissa Dalloway's rejections against the props used against the void in society, chatter and false agency.

The second chapter dealing with *Machinal* is somewhat different from *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Bell Jar*, seeing that it is a theatrical play based on a real murder case from 1927. The play depicts a mechanized society run by rich men where women are simply filling their function in the machinery. Helen Jones, the heroine of the story, murders her husband in order to be free. Legalized abuse, deprival of personal freedom and economical servitude is Helen's life before she chooses to act. Her paralysis in the beginning of the story is encompassing and when she finally gains agency and kills her husband, society condemns her to death. The harmful values of society are depicted through the media's ability to shape the public opinion and to create an image of a woman in order to sustain the values of patriarchal society.

Although *Machinal* is perceived to be Sophie Treadwell's most famous play, it was received with modest critical acclaim at the time it was introduced to the public (Currin, Allyson, 2010:7-8). Treadwell never compromised her own work to fit with the popular taste at the time she often received harsh criticism. *Machinal* was recognized as innovative and groundbreaking, but as Currin writes; "few actually liked the play" (7). Taken in consideration that most of the critics were male, a play about a young woman who kills her much older and inattentive husband was not likely to be a huge success at the time.

The Ruth Snyder case, a young woman and her lover who murdered her husband in seemingly cold blood inspired the play. Ruth Snyder was trialed and convicted of murder in 1927 and was executed in the electric chair in 1928. Most public conceptions of Ruth Snyder was that she was a woman of cold blood and the media portrayed her as a femme fatale "with a heart of dark matter" (Marshall, Jack, 2010:16). Several, more famous movie adaptations inspired by the Snyder case, like *Double Indemnity* (1944) and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946, 1981), have been directed by men. The women in these films, inspired by Ruth Snyder where also depicted as femme fatales, tired of their older husbands who did not have the energy or the personality to keep their wives interested. Different from the movie adaptations that portray the women as evil conspirers tricking their gullible lovers into helping them kill their husbands, Treadwell's play depicts an ordinary young woman caught in the brutal machinery that is modern civilization. Marshall writes that in *Machinal*, the lover is the

"unwitting catalyst that unlocks the murderess's rage" (18) and the murder of her husband is done in "spiritual defense" (18). The young woman in *Machinal*, Helen Jones, murders in order to obtain her freedom and her individuality, which she has been bereaved of through the machinery of marriage.

Sophie Treadwell wanted to portray the story of Ruth Snyder differently, regardless of her guilt and motive. *Machinal* appears to have been composed as a way of speaking out against patriarchy and the misogynistic way of portraying women. The story of a woman being trapped within a loveless marriage with no space of her own, constantly nagged by the sound of machinery is the image of the modern woman caught inside a society based on old patriarchal values. Helen is both the victim and the heroine of the story, seeing as she instinctively uses passive behavior as opposition against the forces of patriarchy. Treadwell did not write *Machinal* to be a popular success in the theatre but rather in the defense of women. Women like Ruth Snyder who was fabricated by the press into what the public wanted, namely a sinner, an anomaly and a danger to the institution of marriage.

In the third and final chapter, Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* will be discussed in relation to the concept of paralysis and control. I will look at paralysis and depression in the context of the transitional period of the 1950s with emphasis on second wave feminism's theory of educational limitations of women. *The Bell Jar* was published in 1963 under the pseudonym of Victoria Lucas posthumously after Sylvia Plath's suicide. It took another eight years before the novel became published in the US, mostly because of Aurelia Plath's wish not to have it published in the US at all. Sylvia Plath's mother feared that the book would seem ungrateful to the people who had helped their family through Sylvia Plath's early depression and even economically during her first suicide attempt in 1953 (Maloff, Saul, 1971).

Because of the close time-lapse between the novel's publication and Plath's suicide, most readings of *The Bell Jar* was a search for the autobiographical links between the life of Esther Greenwood and the author herself. This might have made the contemporary interpretations and appreciations of the work lack in the artistic interpretation of the novel, seeing as it was considered as part of a scandal. Several of the American reviews of the novel that came with the US publication seems almost resentful against Sylvia Plath and treats *The Bell Jar* as an dramatic but at the same time uneventful autobiography (see for example Saul Maloff, "Waiting for the Voice to Crack", 1971, or Robert Scholes, "Esther Came Back Like a Retreaded Tire", 1971). Several of these American reviews written by men seems to ignore the feminist value of the novel and the important message it conveys. Esther Greenwood being stuck beneath the bell jar is not only a tale about insanity and of being "patched,

retreaded, and approved for the road" again (Scholes, 1971). It is about being caught under the heavy foot of patriarchal society and represented a valuable protest against the traditional values of society ahead of its time.

This thesis will be dedicated to examine paralysis in *Mrs. Dalloway, Machinal* and *The Bell Jar*. I will argue that paralysis, as it is depicted in each literary work, is representative of symptoms of oppression and of female resistance towards misogynistic society.

Chapter I: Paralysis in Mrs. Dalloway: Sexuality and Compulsory Domesticity

> Then (she had felt it only this morning) there was the terror; the overwhelming incapacity, one's parents giving it into one's hands, this life, to be lived to the end, to be walked with serenely; there was in the depths of her heart an awful fear (Woolf, 2009:157).

Depression and paralysis play an important part when it comes to political and social criticism in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Clarissa Dalloway herself is in many ways a symbol of the destructive power of misogyny and could be considered from a perspective where the overall impact of patriarchal society is shown through one individual female character. Clarissa's depression assumes the form of paralysis throughout much of the novel and it appears to carry a significant amount of social and cultural symbolism underneath its superficial structure. Post-Victorian public perceptions of what have become characterised as typical for the Victorian era will be important to the main arguments in this chapter. The most important element being the perception of Victorianism as existing in the past with the complicating factor of being a near past. This particular era has later become known as a period with certain characteristic set of values, which become important in the context of *Mrs. Dalloway.* A certain Victorian way of perceiving oneself and the surrounding world will be further discussed in this chapter in relation to the failing identity and unhappiness of Clarissa Dalloway.

While it is clear that Clarissa struggles with the remnants from a serious physical illness, it may also be assumed that she suffers from some sort of depression. Her mood is heavy and she is consistently ambiguous about her thoughts concerning life and death. While it will not be discussed at any length in this thesis as to what the clinical nature of her mental health is, this chapter will explore her unhappiness in relation to paralysis. While it might be difficult to label Clarissa's mental health it is made clear that she is an unhappy woman. Clarissa's paralysis in the form of inability to express herself and to gain agency in her own life will therefore be argued to be the most defining part of her unhappiness and paralysis. The inevitable feeling of- as well as her fear of growing old will therefore also be central parts to the argument of this chapter. While Clarissa is unable to find any solace in life, there is also

something keeping her from reaching out to death. As will be argued in this chapter, time and more specifically the past, is of central importance in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Clarissa Dalloway has experienced both the old-fashioned, strict rules of the Victorian era as well as the rapidly changing atmosphere of the twentieth century. In some sense, this leaves her in some kind of cultural limbo, which mirrors her internal conflict. Existing somewhere in between now and then, life and death, happiness and unhappiness, while having the overhanging feeling that time is running out, is part of Clarissa Dalloway's sadness. She is unable to fit in but also unable to break out, and this is what defines her paralysis. The Victorian era represents the equivalent counterpart to the future, the past weighing Clarissa down and keeping her from moving on.

Mrs. Dalloway is written only a few years after the end of World War I at a time when the aftermath of the war and its irreparable damages on people and society might be considered as one of the most important aspects of the novel. The First World War represents the irreversible step towards a considerably different reality for many than what had gone before. *Mrs. Dalloway* is concerned about the inability to move forward as well as the impossibility of going back. As The First Word War may be seen as the most important point in the transition from the nineteenth century to the twentieth century, the Victorian era was the last period of what had gone before. The short timespan between the two periods viewed in contrast to their drastically marked difference is of great importance in the novel. Clarissa Dalloway, who is in her fifties, has experienced both the Victorian period as well as the Great War and we must assume that both have affected her character and behaviour considerably. The war represents a near past that has marked and closed off the borders between the before and the after. While much focus has been on the aspects of the First World War in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the significance of Victorian elements as in the sense of the past in the novel is something that has not been as widely explored by critics. The past is of great significance in *Mrs. Dalloway,* and Victorianism does therefore play an important part to the character of Clarissa and to the novel as a whole.

In discussing famous Victorians like Queen Victoria herself and the art critic John Ruskin, Shannon Forbes draws attention to their common denominator in way of thinking about human beings and identity as consistent and un-changeable. Forbes argues that Victorians saw themselves as self-contained and independent of social structure (Forbes, 2005:38) and that the Victorians appreciated personal values like being stable and unified in mind and body, idealizing the concept of being whole without conflict. Feeling torn or conflicted on the inside would therefore be considered an anomaly and an indicator of self-

destructiveness and even as demonic (Forbes, 2005:38). Forbes argues that Clarissa has chosen to perform the role of the "perfect hostess" as Mrs. Richard Dalloway in an attempt to restore her unified Victorian self (38-39). Her failure to comply on the inside seems to be what Forbes believes makes her unhappy and distorted. The comparison between conflicted Victorians to demonic elements as mentioned above stands in clear contrast to the development of psychoanalysis in the early twentieth century. Psychoanalysis relies on theories concerning the conflict within man and the different aspects of the human mind. This is also particularly visible in *Mrs. Dalloway*, seeing as Clarissa appears to be torn between the present and the past, how it is "supposed" to be and the reality of things. Memories are a big part of Clarissa's personality seeing as they constitute a large part of the novel and help the reader to a better understanding of her. Her memories and the act of remembering therefore play an important part in the novel in the context of the transitional period in which it takes place. The Victorian era represents a recent past in *Mrs. Dalloway* that Clarissa has been divided from but it still continues to contain some kind of psychic resonance for her.

Although the Victorian era officially ended with Queen Victoria's death in 1901, this chapter will argue that the constructed values and norms of Victorian society, especially in relation to women, still survived well into the twentieth century. This chapter will argue for the importance of Victorian elements in *Mrs. Dalloway* in relation to Clarissa's mental illness. It will also be argued that this mental illness takes the form of paralysis in Clarissa and causes her to be trapped in the past as well as in her current life. Clarissa may be seen as representative of the Victorian fear of conflicted personality as mentioned above and of a supressed inner self, causing a disruption of personality. Although her "state" is never directly referred to as being mentally ill, depression seems to be an underlying factor throughout the novel. She struggles with the fear of both life and death as well as the feeling of alienation from the life she leads. Having descended into a new century while being unable to transcend the old one leads to her paralysis.

Depression is directly encountered in *Mrs. Dalloway* through the character of Septimus Warren Smith. His case must have been one of Britain's first experiences with sufferers of shell shock. The ignorance and the lack of empathy in regards of mental illness are clearly shown through the maltreatment of Septimus. Treatment of individuals suffering from mental illness is thus another important underlying theme in *Mrs. Dalloway*. It is a field that has been touched by what might be considered Victorian values, theories and traditions. In the article "Virginia Woolf and The Case of Septimus Smith", Dr Bradshaw is argued to be the direct link between Clarissa and Septimus being one of the doctors they have both been

seeing (Thomson, 2004:63-64). Jean Thomson mentions Dr Bradshaw as the male power and professionalism that Virginia Woolf herself despised (64) and this personal portrayal of Dr Bradshaw made by the author makes him the most direct link to reality in the novel. Different from the patronizing approach of Dr Holmes who simply suggests that Septimus should man up and be active, Dr Bradshaw wants to send Septimus to a hospital where he must rest for six months without seeing other people. Dr Bradshaw seems to be in it for the money and sees good opportunities for people paying for inactivity and isolation in hopes of being cured. Dr Bradshaw becomes the embodiment of what might be considered patriarchal values, power over people's lives and money, both physical and active values belonging to the male universe. Woolf's contempt for Dr Bradshaw is visible through her descriptions of his character and the fact that he is the only one of the central characters in the novel who is exclusively described from the outside. We are never allowed inside Dr Bradshaw's mind, maybe to indicate the impossibility of the author to really understand men like him.

In the article "Clarissa's Attic: Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway Reconsidered" (1972), Shalom Rachman mentions Virginia Woolf's complicated relationship with doctors, as she herself had had her share of experience with different kinds of treatments in order to cure depression. Rachman presents an interpretation of Dr Bradshaw:

> Stands for her as a complex symbol of everything she detests and does not quite understand: cold scientific thinking, intellectualism, devotion of a religious nature, the accepted sense of proportion and almost all the ills that afflict human nature and society at large (Rachman, 1972:7).

In fact, as will be argues further in this chapter, "mind doctors" like Dr Bradshaw and Dr Holmes appear to be part of the Victorian tradition of treatments developed in order to cure mental illness closely related to the "rest cure" as it was invented in the late nineteenth century by Silas Weir Mitchell. The treatment was as the name indicates based on bedrest and "the cutting off of many hurtful influences" in order to regain self-control through reducing external stimuli to a bare minimum so as to not exhaust the nervous mind any further (Appignanesi, 2009:102). It is never clearly stated exactly what kind of treatment that has been prescribed to Clarissa by Dr Bradshaw. As a medical doctor, Bradshaw's focus is on Clarissa's physical health and her unnamed mental state appears to be perceived of as resulting from her heart condition. Nonetheless, Dr Bradshaw is not alone in his belief that mental illness is caused by physical ailments.

As Peter Walsh leaves after his visit with Clarissa, he seems to be blaming her strange and unrecognizable behaviour on her physical condition:

> Then, as the sound of St Margaret's languished, he thought, she has been ill, and the sound expressed languor and suffering. It was her heart, he remembered; and the sudden loudness of the final stroke tolled for death that surprised in the midst of life, Clarissa falling where she stood, in her drawing room (Woolf, 43).

It is interesting to note that although the protagonist in *Mrs. Dalloway* is Clarissa Dalloway, the characters possessing most agency throughout the novel are men. Peter Walsh is frustrated with the almost apathetic and indifferent state of Clarissa and the fact that she is no longer recognizable as the girl he seems to remember from they were younger. The same goes for Sally Seton, who will be discussed to a further extent later in this chapter. From being the idealized version described by Clarissa, she has also been reduced to a sort of paralysis. *Mrs. Dalloway* is in other words a gendered novel where the difference between agency and paralysis is significant and follows a gendered pattern. An example of this might be the contrasted treatments of Septimus and Clarissa. Although it is never directly stated that Clarissa sleeping in a separate bedroom in the attic was on the orders of Dr Bradshaw, one might assume that Richard had been influenced by him to do so: "For the House sat so long that Richard insisted, after her illness that she must sleep undisturbed" (27). Septimus on the other hand is constantly being pressured to be active: "Look, look, Septimus! She cried. For Dr Holmes had told her to make her husband (who had nothing whatever seriously the matter with him but was a little out of sorts) take an interest in things outside himself" (18).

While Clarissa is being encouraged to sleep alone and undisturbed, Septimus' experiences that agency is demanded from him and this is pointed out in the novel by the contrast to Clarissa's case where Lucrezia expressly wishes to have children with Septimus:

> But, Rezia said, she must have children. They had been married five years. […] But she must have a boy. She must have a son like Septimus, she said (75-76).

Clarissa's mental illness is believed to be directly derived from her poor physical health. She would therefore be a patient who potentially could be prescribed a cure similar to the Victorian "rest cures" and recommended inactivity. Appignanesi argues for the difficulty

created for women fighting for equality by the misogynist medical theories developed that specialized in nervous and mental illness and writes that: “The medical warnings against any activity that might change women’s domestic status, seen as a fact of God and nature, were deafening” (Appignanesi, 2009:106). She also mentions the increased belief in what was called “specialization of function” during the late nineteenth century (108), entailing that women were made for domesticity. Clarissa is obviously a part of this patriarchal tradition concerning not only the biological inclinations of being female, but also the social conceptions of what a woman is.

Septimus is the only male character that stands out from the pattern of male agency in the novel. Septimus’ wife Lucrezia is most insistent on him acting normally as she at several points during the novel reminds herself of Dr Holmes’ assurance of that there is nothing wrong with Septimus. According to Dr Holmes all Septimus needs is to be active for everything to go back to normal. Although Lucrezia seems to understand that there in fact *is* something seriously wrong with her husband, she continues to be in denial possibly because she, as a representative of society is not able to understand mental illness, especially if the sufferer is male. In this way, it is stated through the characters in the novel that prejudice and harmful gender-conceptions go both ways and further incapacitates individuals who are suffering from mental illness. Septimus is constantly being pushed towards agency and activity, which might be what finally leads him to perceive death as the only release. However, it might be the exact opposite that keeps Clarissa from doing the same. This is not to say that Clarissa’s passiveness and paralysis is positive in any way, it is still what keeps her from reaching any kind of conclusion. The difference of activity and inactivity in Septimus and Clarissa (especially seen in context of Septimus’ final act of suicide) might be seen as the most defining trait in both characters. Although being in a similar state of inactivity and apathy it is only in the end that Clarissa “finds” Septimus and realises that a connection must have existed between them. In the end, Septimus gains the agency they both need and his suicide feels as much as a relief to Clarissa as it must have seemed to Septimus.

Victorianism lingers between the lines of *Mrs. Dalloway*, the point being that these values and cultural rules of conduct and appearance have become so innate in Clarissa that she is the one who has to adapt to domesticity, marriage and motherhood in order to fulfil her purpose. Failing to do so would equal her failing as a woman and it is therefore possible to suggest that Clarissa’s enthusiasm regarding her party is at least partly a result of the restraints that have been forced on her by society and the identity that she has intentionally been moulded into. Unable to observe this herself in spite of claiming to be standing on the

"outside, looking on" (Woolf, 2009:7), Clarissa is not aware of her own marginalization, and it is therefore arguable that the enthusiasm she feels towards her party is carefully constructed by patriarchal society in order to limit women's participation in other fields. Misogynistic culture relies on the thought of women as lesser beings, existing only at the leisure of man and Clarissa's party might be considered as part of misogynistic philosophy; a female display created for observation and enjoyment for others than the creator herself. Clarissa's life, all of it presented in one single day, is defined by her trying to create the perfect feminine front for all to see. Clarissa is pretending to be the happy wife of the successful husband and the proud mother of a perfect daughter. Managing to keep the façade on the outside while failing to do so on the inside is what is most destructive about Clarissa's character.

Shannon Forbes argues that Clarissa performs the role of wife and hostess to a degree where it consumes her. In her attempt to equate herself with the Victorian ideal of a unified self, she ends up with no self (39). It might be arguable that Clarissa is consumed by her party in the end and that this is why the novel also ends here. By her being unable to achieve the Victorian self of the past, she ends up feeling a lack of fulfilment. Forbes also draws attention to the title of the novel as significant in relation to Clarissa's Victorian self. The singularity in the meaning of *Mrs. Dalloway* signifies Clarissa's strive towards unity. She is willing to attempt to identify with the role of wife and belonging to someone else completely in order to reach a unified self. The fear of being labelled by everyone else causes Clarissa to cast somewhat harsh judgement of others, something that becomes clearer at her party. Claiming that she herself would not label anyone else, she is (possibly unconsciously) preoccupied with the social status of others as well as her own public appearance. Vereen M. Bell and Vereen Bell mention in the article "Misreading "Mrs. Dalloway"" her cousin Ellie Henderson who appears at the party and who Clarissa continually avoids all evening because of her small income of only three hundred pounds a year (Bell, 2005:97). Ordinary people like Septimus and Rezia is of course not invited to Clarissa's party. Only the people that she considers to be worthy of mingling with (but not necessarily people she actually likes) are present, like Dr Bradshaw, Lady Bruton and Lady Bexborough. The strict social division that is so clearly portrayed in *Mrs. Dalloway* was part of a dying cultural tradition that persisted through the Victorian period but one that faded during the twentieth century. When meeting Sally and Peter again at her party it is clear that they have a changed perception of Clarissa. They see her as conventional, old fashioned and "hard" which does not coincide with Clarissa's own image of herself as someone without judgement. Clarissa judges Sally for marrying beneath her and Peter for falling in love with and Indian married woman. Clarissa is stuck in the past

and within the old-fashioned values, which causes her to become more isolated and lonely.

Both Sally and Peter seems more informal and natural in their behaviour and thoughts like when for example Peter is sitting on the sofa with Sally:

> ‘But where is Clarissa?’ said Peter. He was sitting on the sofa with Sally. (After all these years he could not call her ‘Lady Rosseter’.) ‘Where’s the woman gone to?’ he asked. ‘Where’s Clarissa?’
> Sally supposed, and so did Peter for the matter of that, that there were people of importance, politicians, whom neither of them knew unless by sight in the picture papers, whom Clarissa had to be nice to, had to talk to. She was with them (158).

They seem to understand that Clarissa would prioritize talking to all the important politicians and their wives but at the same time, the reader is made aware of the differences between Clarissa and her friends. Both of her friends appear almost as if they are younger and definitely more modern than Clarissa is. Being locked within her own perceptions of people and social order contributes to her paralysis and leaves her isolated from reality and from having real relationships.

This chapter will therefore focus on Clarissa’s paralysis in *Mrs. Dalloway* and what form it acquires in the novel. Victorian elements are important in this context in relation to domesticity and sexuality as these terms where both of importance during this era specifically and to women in general. Victorian elements are present as will be argued in both her home and in Clarissa herself, persistently as a debilitating force that keeps her trapped in the past. Clarissa’s house, Sally Seton and Septimus all represent different aspects of the same paralysis apparent in Clarissa’s character throughout the novel. The Dalloway house, as will be further discussed in this thesis, carries significant importance in the novel in relation to domesticity, Victorian femininity and paralysis. Sally Seton represents the most sexual aspect of the novel in the sense that Clarissa was or might still be in love with her. Septimus, the poet who dies in the end does in many ways represent death in the novel. Death is always present in *Mrs. Dalloway* as something Clarissa fears but is contradictorily drawn to at the same time.

Victorianism at Home in the Dalloway House

The first time the reader is introduced to Clarissa, she is on her way out to buy flowers for her party that is taking place later that evening: “Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself” (Virginia Woolf, 2009:3). In the first page of the novel, Clarissa is exiting her home and into the streets of London in order to arrange the last preparations for her party. The moment she walks out on the street, she is overcome by a feeling of freedom and good humors. The flowers might just be an excuse to leave the house for a while and for the first few lines of the novel Clarissa appears to feel relieved. However, her thoughts follow her through the city, into the florist and on her way back home again. This is one of the most defining traits of Clarissa Dalloway; her mind is never still. Even so, she seems to see things about herself and others more clearly as long as she is outside. Her mood, appearance and actions are transformed when she again arrives back at the house. In her home is also where she has the least agency during the course of the novel. At the same moment as she exits the door of her home she describes a feeling of freedom and peacefulness that remains unprecedented throughout the rest of the novel: “And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning – fresh as if issued to children on a beach” (3). She also remembers bursting through the open doors of a house when she was eighteen and feeling “how fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning” (3). For Clarissa, a vague feeling that disrupts the beauty of each moment clouds every thought and leaves her unhappy. Thinking back on her younger days with her friends Sally Seton and Peter Walsh only seems to reinforce her current state of unhappiness as a constant feeling of loss. Clarissa’s character entails both the unhappiness that follows a restrained life that exists far from the vision she had for her future several years ago as well as the mental illness that is and maybe always has been a part of her. The moment she arrives back home after buying flowers and walking around town her entering the house is described as her being a nun returning to her duties:

> The hall of the house was cool as a vault. Mrs. Dalloway raised her hand to her eyes, and, as the maid shut the door to, and she heard the swish of Lucy’s skirts, she felt like a nun who has left the world and feels fold round her the familiar veils and the response to old devotions (25).

It is interesting to note that the place she feels the most alienated is within her own home. From the moment she arrives back home after having bought flowers learning that Lady Bruton has invited Richard for lunch and not her, sends Clarissa into a state of mourning:

> [S]he knew, and felt it, as she paused by the open staircase window which let in blinds flapping, dogs barking, let in, she thought, feeling herself suddenly shrivelled, aged, breastless, the grinding, blowing, flowering of the day, out of doors, out of the window, out of her body and brain which now failed, since Lady Bruton, whose lunch parties were said to be extraordinarily amusing, had not asked her (26).

Clarissa and Richard's daughter Elizabeth, does in many ways fill out the gaps that Clarissa has not been able to cover. The reader is expressly made aware of at several instances, especially during the party, what a beauty Elizabeth has turned into. She is also very affectionate towards her father and they seem to connect on a level that does not include Clarissa. Elizabeth appears almost to be harbouring some resentment towards her mother, maybe because of the distance between the two. As mentioned earlier, patriarchal culture will try to make the role of motherhood one of the most important ones (in addition to being a wife) in women's lives. Clarissa sees herself as failing as both a mother and a wife through a certain distance and a coldness she is not able to breach.

The difficulty of interpreting and grasping Clarissa's mental state is complicated by the fact that her psychological health is seen as a result of her bad physical health. She is described as having "grown very white since her illness" (3) and she is aware of "a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense (but that might be her heart, affected they said, by influenza)" (4). The issue of medical treatments and not being understood by doctors are made clear in the novel through both Clarissa and Septimus. The discrepancy of Clarissa's mind is made visible when she in just three pages transforms from feeling free and loving life (4) to expressing her fear of life and of being alive (7) which gives the reader a somewhat confusing image of her but at the same time is a vivid representation of her state of mind. One distinctive aspect of Clarissa's paralysis is the fact that she is constantly stuck between choices and decisions, mostly all-consuming ones like that between life and death. Unable to choose between the two she is left outside or in-between either one without being devoted to neither.

Virginia Woolf is often described as having a strained relationship towards Victorian traditions, which was a significant part of her childhood and youth. In the article "Reinventing Grief Work: Virginia Woolf's Feminist Representations of Mourning in Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse" (1995), Susan Bennett Smith draws attention to Victorian traditions of mourning and how *Mrs. Dalloway* represents the break between this and the new form of psychoanalytic "talk therapy" (Bennett Smith, 1995:1-3). Woolf describes her father's imposed "oriental gloom" in their Victorian home after her mother's death as excessive (3). The traditional form of Victorian mourning was to have a "darkened house" and receive sympathetic visits to commemorate the deceased (3). Bennett Smith writes that Woolf found her father's behaviour strange and unfamiliar, hinting at the artificiality of the ritual. In Sarah Burns' article, "Better for Haunts: Victorian Houses and the Modern Imagination" (2012), she argues why Victorian houses have almost automatically become associated with hauntings, death and anxiety in modern culture. Burns writes that these houses are often related to creating uneasy emotions in people and are closely connected to projecting imagery of hauntings, fear and death (Burns, 2012:2-4). Burns also argues that the Victorian houses have become symbols of the modern psyche (11), which is arguably also applicable to Clarissa's feelings towards her own home. The arguments of Burns' article seem both relevant and similar to the cultural symbol of the Victorian house and Clarissa's fear of death represented by her own house. There are no direct descriptions of the Dalloway house from the outside implying what style it is built in and one must of course take into consideration the fact that Victorian houses as the tall wooden structures that have become known as the American vision of hauntings and unpleasantness are not necessarily applicable to the home of Clarissa Dalloway. The Dalloway house in London is most likely not built in this architectural style, however, the link between women and houses, especially in this novel, cannot be ignored or underestimated. More importantly, Burns mentions the reason for Victorian houses being described as alive possessing human features:

> "Its face is pallid. Its windows are eyes with eyebrows raised to a point, window frames twisted… A fragment of ornament climbs like a lizard up the side wall" (6).

The most defining trait of Victorian houses that has become popularly known, is that they are haunted. If not literally, Burns article suggests that they possess the power of entering our minds and creating an unmentionable feeling of discomfort. She also describes the decorating

style that developed in the early twentieth century as leaning towards chaste and simplistic, much like the feeling Clarissa gets from inside her own house. “Ugliness” is a central term in Burns’ article used also by the contemporaries constructing Victorian houses at the time (6-7). There is also a certain “ugliness” to Clarissa’s house in the sense that she appears to be a prisoner inside her own home. While Clarissa does not feel at home in her house, pressing Victorian values are residing there instead. The recently ended American Civil war was thought to be the reason for the ugliness of the Victorian houses being built at the same time. They symbolised a national rot, systemic disease (6) and an irreversible change in America. Similarly, the Dalloway house might represent both a state of mourning and death pointing to the hitherto unprecedented loss of life claimed in the First World War. Clarissa’s home does in many ways represent her state of mind as a prisoner within a structure she cannot gain a foothold in. Burns argues that Victorian houses came to stand for something corrupted and unclean and this being part of the unpleasant feelings associated with them (8-9). Clarissa’s house appears to represent the culturally created image of the Victorian era and at the same time presenting the dysfunctionality of this. While Victorianism occupies the home of Clarissa, she is not able to find her place in it.

While Burns’ article focuses mainly on the houses built in one particular architectural style in North America during the Victorian era, the same imagery and symbolism are drawn in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Historically speaking, most London homes were built in stone after the great fire of London in 1666. The Dalloway home is additionally located relatively close to the city centre of London (Clarissa reaches Victoria Street in what appears to be a short walking distance and continues walking down Bond Street (Woolf, 2009:4-6). If one considers the practical aspects of building structure in London during the early twentieth century, it would be reasonable to assume that the Dalloway house was not physically equal to the houses built in the specific North American style mentioned in Sarah Burns’ article. Clarissa’s house is Victorian in the sense of the symbolism and associations connected to Victorian houses in the context Burns mentions in her article. The Dalloway house appears to be representative of several of the unpleasant and uncomfortable associations to the Victorian era.

Rachman draws attention to Clarissa’s attic room is of special significance in the novel, both as a space where Clarissa lets her thoughts wander but at the same time as a confined space where she feels herself approaching death. Burns described one of the Victorian houses mentioned in her article to be “[…] a turreted, Italo-Moorish pile with ivy-shrouded walls and a shadowy domesticity but alienation, secrets, betrayals, madwomen in

the attic" (Burns, 2012:14-15). This brings to mind the 1847 novel *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, where maybe the most famous madwoman in the attic is introduced. Bertha Mason represents madness itself stored away in a dark attic, concealed like any dark part of the human mind. Further research on Bertha in the Brontë attic reveals that Bertha's attic is no attic at all, but rather a third storey windowless room. In an article on the subject, Lucinda Matthews-Jones draws attention to this fact while remarking that the third storey room still carries the same function and feeling as that of an attic room (Matthews-Jones, 2015). Interestingly enough, Matthews-Jones mentions the attic room in *Jane Eyre* rather as a space where both Jane and Bertha experience their moments of freedom and release (Matthews-Jones, 2015). Nonetheless, there remains similarities between the Brontë third storey room where Bertha remains hidden and Clarissa's attic. The attic room, much the same as Bertha's room represents the storing of secrets and the subtle undertones of something else also residing in Clarissa's attic remains throughout the novel. The attic is where the reader is introduced to Clarissa's secrets and the only place she admits to feelings like her love for Sally Seton and where she secretly observes the old woman living next to them. Like Rachman writes in his article: "In the attic of her house we get a glimpse of the "attic" in her personality where her true being is locked up. It is here that her consciousness opens into depth and she has a moment of vision, a moment she is her true self." (Rachman, 1972:10) While Rachman is convinced that Clarissa's true nature is lesbian (10), it is complicated to wholly agree with placing Clarissa strictly within any kind of sexual orientation. While it remains true that she feels love towards Sally Seton and that she was or is still in love with her, she has also loved Peter Walsh and had what appear to be romantic feelings towards him as well. Nonetheless, Rachman makes an important point by stating that Clarissa's love for Sally is almost fully admitted and expressed as she resides in her attic on her own (10).

Elements in *Mrs. Dalloway* that might first appear to be mundane practicalities turn out to carry significant meaning as for example the passage in Clarissa's attic where "[t]he candle was half burnt down and she had read deep in Baron Marbot's *Memoirs*." (Woolf 2009:26-27) Although it is never specified at any point in the novel, one might be able to assume that the Dalloways have gotten electricity installed in their house. According to the Museum of Science and Industry centred in Liverpool, The Swan Electric Light Co. was established in 1881 and the first public electricity generator was installed in Surrey the same year (mosi.org.uk, 2001). Nevertheless, going more into detail about electricity in Britain in the early twentieth century, Gaby Hornsby writes: "Keeping just five bulbs going for a day would cost a week's wages for the average person – and in 1920 only 6% of British homes

were connected" (Hornsby, Gaby, "The Secret Life of the National Grid", BBC.com, 2010). Only by assuming that the Dalloways were in fact not part of the average population and that a larger percentage received electricity in their homes by 1923 could it be claimed that the Dalloway house ran on electricity.

If the Dalloways did have electricity, the attic would most likely not have been a priority and one might therefore assume that Clarissa's Victorian attic is made even more Victorian by the absence of electricity that later became synonymous with modernity. The thing about Clarissa is namely that she is not modern. She feels herself starting to become an old woman closing in on death, trying to reach acceptance while fighting it at the same time. Even her taste in literature proves to be old fashioned by the memoirs of Baron Marbot from the Napoleon war lying on her bedside table. Even if one did assume that the Dalloways had not installed electricity in their home as of yet, even Victorian houses had oil lamps that made light conditions a little better that just candle light. Victorian lighting also included chandeliers and wall-hanged lamps, even though these were mostly used on special occasions. Clarissa's attic has only the one candle standing on her bedside lighting up her room like a chamber. Another article about Victorian lighting also mentions that gas lamps were introduced towards the end of the period and the electrical lighting were also starting to appear in homes (Taylor, Jonathan, "Lightning in the Victorian Home", buildingconcervation.com, 2000). Without making any assumptions about whether the Dalloway house has electricity or not, the associations to the Victorian era is very apparent throughout, especially in Clarissa's attic.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Elizabeth Walls coins the term "domestic feminism" in the context of female modernist writers creating a new take on the Victorian woman from a feminist aspect:

> [T]he New Woman novels, enlivening reform rhetoric even while operating within the boundaries of conformist culture, created a new mode of activism for Victorian women that enabled them to proffer critique about marriage and society, although (and often sadly) from within the home. (Walls, 2002:229)

Walls argues that the new tradition of writing that appeared created a completely different image of women in a familiar domestic setting. One could argue that Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* takes part in this literary tradition by creating a portrayal of the unhappy woman trapped inside domesticity represented by the physical appearance of her home. Similar to the

image created by Sarah Burns of dark Victorian houses, Walls might be approaching a way of thinking about the home that became typical for the Victorians. She explains that these new novels followed a particular pattern where the protagonist often married the wrong man and makes an initially successful bid for freedom and then collapses into conformity (229). The modernist writers used the unhappy Victorian woman as a vessel in order to get their feminist point across, accentuating their constricted position in society and this new literary trend was according to Walls about devaluing the past as means of defining the future (230).

Victorianism appears to be especially at home in Clarissa's house while she is not. Stored away in the attic, a room that might be considered to be the least used of all rooms in a house, reflecting on her feeling of chastity preserved through marriage and childbirth and sleeping in a narrow bed; accentuating both her loneliness and her chastity. Clarissa is a woman trapped within Victorian values represented and residing within her own home. Caged within the domestic scene as so many other Victorian women based on their femininity and the convenience for patriarchal society. The Victorian era in itself has also come to represent an essentially strict period where the restrictions of women appeared to be more extensive than before or any time after. In this sense, it is possible to suggest that Clarissa's mental state is closely linked to the representations of the house as described by her.

The descriptions from novels about haunted Victorian houses mentioned by Burns in her article is in some way similar to Clarissa's descriptions of her own home. As Burns mentions specifically one description from a 1920s novel:

> […] [W]ith pink-daubed scent bottles and a petticoated pin-cushion on a marble slab uncomfortably like a gravestone. . . . The old linen smelled of the tomb. She was alone in this house, this strange still house, among the shadows of dead thoughts and haunting repressions. (Burns, 2012:8)

Gender, Sexuality and (not) Labelling Desire in Mrs. Dalloway

As Lisa Appignanesi (2009) argues, the female sexuality and biology gained further emphasis in medical research in regards to mental illness at the height of the Victorian era. Women's biology was perceived as a frail system of nerves linked to their reproductive organs and women's domestic sphere was transformed into a biological inevitability (105-106). This idea was linked to the development of the "reflex theory" in the 1830s. This particular theory

concerned the female nervous system and proposed that nervous connections running through the spine controlled all the other organs in the female body, “without the intervention of consciousness” (105). Failure in the nervous system could lead to breakdowns in the form of hysteria, spasms, jerks and palsies.

Quoting the physician Thomas Laycock, a devout follower of the “reflex theory”:

> “Woman as compared with man, is of the nervous temperament… Her nervous system is therefore more easily acted upon by all impressions, and more liable to all diseases of excitement.” (Appignanesi, 2009:105).

Considering what implications that were created through misogynistic theories like the “reflex theory” and the kind of view on women that was not necessarily new but that nonetheless became further developed and officially recognized in Victorian society, it is not difficult to imagine the consequences it must have had on women’s lives for the time to come. For women being diagnosed with frail physiology as well as an incontrollable psychology, inactivity became men’s solution to all kinds of female ailments that had up until recently been difficult to diagnose. Women were quite literally forced into a kind of paralysis within their own home, much like the way Clarissa’s mental paralysis is represented through hers.

It seems reasonable to assume that Clarissa is one of the many women that were prescribed bedrest in order to recover from mental illness that were thought to be a form of melancholia brought on by physical conditions and bad health. Although we are never told so expressly, Richard wanting her to sleep in a separate bedroom as well as her fragile state being pointed out several times might be pointing to the advisement of inactivity as a cure. The gender aspect of Victorian approaches towards mental illness as portrayed in *Mrs. Dalloway* is one of the most polarised aspects in the novel. While Clarissa’s fragile physical state is thought to have a certain mental effect as well, she is not given the same advice for recovery as Septimus is. Dr Holmes has told Septimus that in order to get over shell shock, which he condescendingly describes as being “in a funk” (78), and he recommends for Septimus to “Throw yourself into outside interests; take up some hobby” (78). While women like Clarissa is being forced into a state of paralysis, men similar to Septimus is being forced into agency. Septimus serves as an example of the problem of inequality in increasing social and cultural problems like mental illness, and especially in context of the dramatic increase that must have taken place after the First World War. Dr Holmes and Dr Bradshaw are representatives of destructive misogyny affecting men just as much as it affects women.

This point is painfully visible through the thoughts of Dr Holmes:

> He had actually talked of killing himself to his wife, quite a girl, a foreigner, wasn't she? Didn't that give her a very odd idea of English husbands? Didn't one owe perhaps a duty to one's wife? Wouldn't it be better to do something instead of lying in bed? (78)

Misogynistic theories developed the thought of the home as not only the culturally assigned place for women, but saw it as a necessity for women to stay home because of the unreliable connection between their minds and bodies. Clarissa describes her own chastity, "a virginity preserved through childbirth" (27) as part of her shortcomings as a woman and a wife. She is consistent in her self-reflection as cold, virginal and that "[s]he sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on" (7). Clarissa feels alienated in her own life, and in her role as wife and mother, she does not feel successful at neither. As she herself describes, she lacks "something central which permeated; something warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman, or of women together" (27). Clarissa describes herself as one standing on the outside looking in, unable to partake in the goings on in the world around her. Rachman argues that Clarissa's life is a sort of "non-life" from the view of society, but that this view leads to a misreading of Clarissa's character (Rachman, 1972:10). Her attic is where her true personality is locked up, according to Rachman and it is here the reader is let in on Clarissa's deepest secrets.

The Victorian home played the important part as the heart of most families as well as a central arena for social activity. There is a marked difference between Clarissa being outside her home, and her residing inside. Virginia Woolf appears to have intentionally created the Dalloway house as a symbol of captivity, depression and social failure. Although Clarissa has no obvious reason to feel the way she does, she is often overcome by the heavy weight of her feelings. Her home is in many ways the indicator of her paralysis and is an overwhelmingly large symbol of female depression. The link between the home as a cultural symbol and women is one that should not be overlooked when seen in context with *Mrs. Dalloway*. It is no coincidence that Septimus, created as Clarissa's double, is male and the one who ends up committing suicide at the very end of the novel. The fact that a man ends up taking action proves the state of female paralysis displayed in the novel. Septimus symbolically deprives Clarissa of the opportunity of taking her own life. This reading of Septimus' character is of course a gendered reading of the novel that relies on the symbolic value of male characters

seen in relation to Clarissa, but it is nonetheless an interesting view.

In order to argue for this kind of paralysis being present in *Mrs. Dalloway*, one must also look to Clarissa's debatable sexual orientation. Through Clarissa's feelings towards her former friend Sally, there are strong insinuations towards Clarissa possibly being gay. Her home where she lives with her husband and daughter will therefore come to represent a kind of forced lifestyle and sexual orientation and the bondage that society forces on women. Clarissa's home represents all the traditional female values created by society that contains the role of daughter, wife and mother; all of which she does not feel at home in. For women like Clarissa Dalloway, one day might appear similar to the next. The planning of a party on this particular night is what makes it stand out from other day and throughout the novel this is Clarissa's main occupation. Making sure that everything goes according to her plan while mental illness (in this case Septimus' not Clarissa's) ends up ruining her party carries a very pointed symbolism in relation to the theme of the novel. On the outside, Clarissa is a character that seems to be quite ordinary and normative in appearance and behaviour. Part of what makes her character so complex is her hidden personality that only comes forward at a few chosen scenes in the novel. By Clarissa's hidden personality it is most commonly referred by critics to her sexuality and questions surrounding her attraction to the three characters closest to Clarissa, namely her husband Richard, her former friend Sally Seton and Peter Walsh, the romantic interest from her youth. Peter Walsh is a factor that complicates the labelling of Clarissa Dalloway in the field of sexual orientation.

It would be considered a simplification of the novel to place Clarissa with certainty within any kind of definite sexual orientation without considering Clarissa's difficulty, not to mention her unwillingness to label herself. Throughout the novel, she is continually defining herself using contradictory terms. As she is afraid of labelling herself, she is also preoccupied with not judging others:

> She would not say of anyone in the world now that they were this or were that. She felt young; at the same time unspeakable aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on (7).

As was mentioned introductory to this chapter is that Clarissa seems unware of that she is in fact judging other people quite harshly. Throughout the novel, she does not name her illness, physical or mental (only that she has had trouble with her heart), nor does she label herself

through claiming affiliation to any sexual orientation. Clarissa's defiance against labels appears as an ironic twist in the novel, because she is of course as labelled as one can be. Clarissa's public appearance is that of stereotypical labels like wife, mother and upper class. However, she does not appear to acknowledge that she herself is labelled as well as everyone else because she feels alienated in all of the roles that have been prescribed for her. Even the title of the novel, *Mrs. Dalloway,* implies that Clarissa is not her own but rather that her existence is defined through her marriage to Richard. The institution of marriage might be interpreted as paralysis in the sense that Clarissa's individuality is removed, as she becomes just a part of someone else. In the first line of the novel, the reader is introduced to Clarissa as "Mrs. Dalloway". In the first scene inside the house, Clarissa is Mrs. Dalloway while the moment she steps outside, she transforms into Clarissa.

Her sexual orientation is of course one of the questions this novel leave unanswered in the end. If Clarissa was in fact gay, one might consider using the term "compulsory domesticity" as it is described by Axel Nissen in *Manly Love* (2009). This term is used in relation to gay men in the Victorian Era (Nissen, 2009:89), but it seems to also be applicable to gay women in the twentieth century. The actual meaning of "compulsory domesticity" is that even though men were allowed intimate male friends during their per-marital years as bachelors, they were expected to find a respectable woman to marry. Male – female relationships were obligatory, as is also the case for Clarissa. In contrast to the Victorian men that were allowed and even expected to experiment in their years before marriage, to Clarissa this becomes only unfulfilled desire.

According to Forbes, Clarissa's unhappiness resides within her failure to act according to her assigned Victorian roles. As mentioned earlier, Victorianism has a strong presence within the Dalloway house. What Forbes draws attention to is the patriarchal presence that surrounds Clarissa outside her home as well. Victorianism is linked to the authoritative patriarchal dominance in society, and in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the encompassing tolling of Big Ben stands as another patriarchal symbol (Forbes, 2005:41-42).

Big Ben is several times in the novel interrupting conversations or thoughts, as in the scene where Peter Walsh asks Clarissa whether she is truly happy:

> 'Tell me,' he said, seizing her by the shoulders. 'Are you happy, Clarissa? Does Richard-' The door opened. 'Here is my Elizabeth,' said Clarissa, emotionally, histrionically perhaps. 'How d'y do?' said Elizabeth coming forward. The sound of Big Ben striking the half-hour struck out between them with extraordinary vigour, as if a young man, strong, indifferent, inconsiderate, were swinging dumb-bells this way and that (40-41).

Elizabeth, the daughter of Clarissa and Richard, is the one who interrupts Peter and Clarissa. The product of their marriage interrupts Peter's question and the Big Ben tolls right after Elizabeth's entrance. Big Ben represents a male presence that is constantly surveying Clarissa and rewards her every time she acts the way she is supposed to according to patriarchal society. Big Ben being described as a "young man" does not immediately create Victorian associations but the point might rather be that Big Ben as representative of a masculine authoritative presence is timeless and constant in the lives of women, especially women like Clarissa. The male dominance of culture and society is therefore not something that is specific for the Victorian era or the times before the nineteenth century, it is still a contemporary fact. As Forbes writes:

> Every time Clarissa hears Big Ben she is reminded that the city validates and celebrates her decision to perform her chosen role. There is no need to doubt, Big Ben reminds Clarissa, because the dominating, powerful strikes—symbolic of London's strength and ability to provide for its inhabitants—will always protect one who abides by its male patriarchal values (42)

Big Ben is in this sense a male presence that hinders Clarissa's agency. If Elizabeth had not entered the room when she did and if Big Ben had not sounded when it did, Clarissa might have admitted her feelings of unhappiness to Peter. Big Ben is rewarding Clarissa's state of paralysis and in this way assuring that she remains in that state. While trying to reach the Victorian ideal of the unified self, Clarissa does in reality identify with the city she lives in (Forbes, 2005:39-41). While she identifies with the chaos and reality if the outdoors, she feels trapped inside her dark Victorian home. Forbes argues that the city represents a patriarchal presence that celebrates Clarissa's choice to be a wife and a mother and to play her role in

society where Big Ben works as the most important signifier (40-42).

Adrienne Rich's article "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1996) argues for the many ways women are forced into heterosexual marriages and discriminated in society both economically and sexually. While it remains true that society creates limitations and strict normative behaviour in women, Clarissa has married Richard, a kind man who in no way wishes to harm her. Richard might be Woolf's portrayal of how patriarchal society have corrupted even good men to believe in the hostile and incapacitating theories concerning women's biology and mental health. He believes the best for Clarissa is limiting her activity to a bare minimum and that she should be sleeping undisturbed and alone in the attic. This coincides with what was mentioned earlier from Appignanesi's book about misogynistic theories becoming mainstream and something "everyone" had faith in. While the novel contains misogynistic and delusional doctors like Dr Bradshaw and Dr Holmes, *Mrs. Dalloway* ventures even deeper into the image of organized patriarchy in society. While the doctors behind the creation and further support of theories like the "reflex theory" will always be the obvious villains, other more subtle characters like Richard as well as Sally Seton are securing its continuation. Rich argues that male power manifests itself through several different instances of oppression, the common denominator being compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1996:131-133). As a young girl, Clarissa and Sally promised never to marry, implying their knowledge of that it meant the end of their individuality and personal freedom. Clarissa's relationship with Sally appears to be not only about sexual or romantic love but also about sharing the preconditions that follows being born female:

> It was protective, on her side; sprang from a sense of being in league together, a presentiment of something that was bound to part them (they spoke of marriage always as a catastrophe), which led to this chivalry, this protective feeling which was much more on her side than Sally's (29).

If one were to argue for Clarissa being exclusively gay, the scene above is definitely one of the paragraphs in the novel that supports this theory. It could also be interpreted as Clarissa feeling responsible for Sally and wanting to protect her. Clarissa's desire appears to be ungendered; she feels love and desire towards individuals not specifically male or female. This becomes another reason for Clarissa's paralysis, the fact that she cannot be labelled according to sexual orientation leading to her feeling of being on the outside of everything,

looking in. Clarissa would literally be on the outside of gendered and labelled sexuality and unable to find her place. In the end, we find out that Sally is married and has an exaggerated number of sons. Her five sons would not have made the same impression on Clarissa nor on the reader, had the gender of Sally's children either been just girls or equally divided between both genders. In addition, Sally's pride in her family and her criticism of Clarissa makes her almost parodic towards the end of the novel:

> But then – well, she lived a very solitary life, in the wilds, Clarissa would say, among great merchants, great manufacturers, men, after all, who did things. She had done things too! 'I have five sons!' she told him (158).

Sally clearly admires action, especially in what she considers to be successful men. Her almost desperate declaration of having produced five sons, more (hopefully successful) men, makes it clear to us that she is painfully aware of the fact that her only task is to produce children. Both she and Clarissa have become what they promised each other that they would never be. Clearly, marriage meant the end of one era and the start of a new, more constricting one to Sally and Clarissa. Paralysis is to be found innate in the institution of marriage in *Mrs. Dalloway* and enforced by the symbolism and imagery created by the home and the planning of the party. At several points towards the end of the novel, Sally makes observations of different men and measures them according to their success and subsequently also their level of activity. Sally appears to admire and envy male agency that she herself has been deprived of. Despite the very physically demanding task of giving birth, although she does not admit it to herself, she is left in a culturally created state of paralysis without any real agency. Sally Seton does in this aspect become the exaggerated and almost frightening image of misogynistic portrayal of femininity, as Adrienne Rich writes that: "sexualisation of the woman is part of the job" (133). Sally is in some ways representative of Clarissa's youth, of the ideas and aspirations of her young self. When Sally has been reduced to her biological function in adulthood, it is like seeing Clarissa's best memories fade away with the realization of the impossibility of the individualistic perspectives of her youth. The reader is initially introduced to the young, open-minded and free-spirited Sally who to Clarissa represents life and optimism. At Clarissa's party, we are presented with a completely transformed version of Sally. She has changed her name as well as her personality, which was exactly what they feared would happen as young girls. After the scenes with Sally at her party, Clarissa appears

even more detached than before which might imply that she has finally come to terms with her own unhappiness and descends into an even deeper state of paralysis. The final presentation of Sally is also the end of the reader's communication with Clarissa.

Based on wat has been already argued for, concerning what was considered to be feminine traits and social norms in society, that part of Clarissa's unhappiness originates in her own failure as a woman. Her hidden sexuality implied through her feelings for Sally, as mentioned above, could of course suggest that Clarissa is a lesbian. In the eyes of most of her contemporaries, this would make her an anomaly and imply something was wrong with her. In addition to these speculations, there is also her distant relationship to her daughter, Elisabeth. *Mrs. Dalloway* explores the stereotypical parts womanhood like being a wife and mother, which women like Clarissa use to measure their own degree of success as women. She feels that she has failed as a wife because of her coldness and distance towards her husband, as well as her shortcomings as a mother through failing in communicating and acquiring closeness with her daughter.

Although one can never reach any definite conclusion as to whether Clarissa really is a lesbian, bisexual or completely on the outside of any sexual labels, it is safe to say that Sally represents the most sexual aspect of *Mrs. Dalloway*. Brenda S. Helt argues for Woolf's reluctance towards labelling sexuality and desire. According to Helt, desire and sexuality were two separate entities that existed independently from each other and that women feeling desire towards other women were natural and did not necessarily mean labelling them as lesbians or bisexuals (Helt, 2010:131-133). In this context it is also important to note that bisexuality as a term describing individuals that are sexually attracted to both men and women did not really exist until the 1960s (131). If Woolf did view desire as something detached from sexuality Clarissa need not be labelled as neither homosexual or heterosexual, but rather as feeling desire towards both male and female individuals. What appears to be the main issue about Clarissa's sexuality is that she has not been able to act on any of her desires. The desire she feels towards Sally and the feelings she had for Peter does not in any way match the way she feels about Richard. He is described as a kind and caring man but nothing more. To Clarissa he represents the acceptable choice and the institution of marriage. This is why she feels that her virginity has been preserved through marriage and childbirth (27): her lack of participation (agency) and desire in her own life.

The only time Clarissa becomes sensual is when she is thinking about Sally and their shared memories, although it seems like Sally have forgotten or repressed these when they meet again. To Clarissa, the memories are still very clear and her affection for Sally has never

dimmed even though she has come to terms with them just as memories. For Clarissa, Sally is life, joy and freedom and it is therefore a very strong symbolism in Sally's five sons and her cool and judgemental assessment of the people surrounding her at Clarissa's party. Peter is Clarissa's only old friend that has stayed the same during all the years they spent apart. Coming home from India, he finds Clarissa sitting in her bedroom mending her dress and he appears to be agitated by the scene:

> Here she is mending her dress; mending her dress as usual, he thought; here's she been sitting all the time I've been in India; mending her dress; playing about; going to parties; running to the House and back and all that, he thought, growing more and more irritated, and more and more agitated, for there's nothing in the world so bad for some women as marriage [.] (35)

The imagery of male agency is again represented through Peter, noticing Clarissa's paralysis and how marriage has changed her. Clarissa's two friends from her youth appear to now have become manifestations of Clarissa's internal conflict. Sally has lost agency and become the embodiment of paralysis while Peter represents agency and activity, seeing what marriage (not necessarily bad marriage) can do to certain women. In some ways, Clarissa is responsible for at least part of her own unhappiness. Peter and Clarissa seem to have had a romantic affair many years ago and they still have feelings or each other. However, Clarissa chose not to marry Peter because he was socially beneath her. This does not necessarily mean that Clarissa would have had a happier life with Peter, but her unhappiness is in a sense represented by the roads not taken and by her constantly wondering what could have been. Thoughts of experiences she could have had and choices she did not make is clearly something that bothers her later in life. For Clarissa thinking back on her life is realizing her own paralysis through social and cultural restraints that effectively narrows down her choices. Her lack of experience with sexuality, romance and life in general is a big contributor to her grief. Clarissa's feeling of being old and the fact that she is an old-fashioned woman permanently stranded in the past also contributes to her restricted life.

In "Socialization in Mrs. Dalloway" (1972), Margaret Blanchard argues that Woolf created strict divisions in space and time in *Mrs. Dalloway* to emphasis the difference and difficulties in communication between people (Blanchard, 1972:296). The cultural divide is especially visible in *Mrs. Dalloway* if one were to look at the aspect of social class. Septimus and Clarissa, different and separated by class and gender are unified in the end by Clarissa's

realisation of Septimus' depression. By her understanding that he also shared the unhappiness she is enveloped by, Woolf might be emphasising her own understanding of social class and patriarchal society. Blanchard draws attention to the fact that Woolf at this time was of the opinion that women belonged to another class altogether and was particularly occupied by the thought of socialization and interaction (295-296).

The isolation of women is altogether very visibly in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Clarissa is treated almost like a child by her husband, making her inability to act according to her own devotions defining of her paralysis. Sexuality and sensuality is to Clarissa something that has to be concealed and not acted upon. This is why her attic is the only place she dares to admit to her feelings for Sally as well as contemplating her unfulfilled desire. Her marriage to Richard and her giving birth to Elizabeth are the only things in her life that appears to have left no mark on her memory. While it would be the essence of her Victorian self, wishing to be unified and complete according to cultural standards, it is not part of her real self. Not labelling Clarissa Dalloway in the field of sexual orientation seems important to the interpretation of her character and the novel as a whole because Woolf herself did not believe in labelling desire.

Representations of Death in Mrs. Dalloway

Throughout the novel, Clarissa constantly contemplates death; she fears it but is at the same time unable to find peace in life. The Dalloway house is at several points in the novel described using wording that invokes images of death. From the cold air in the hall to Clarissa's dark and lonely attic room, her home represents what she fears the most. After Clarissa's illness, a heart condition apparently brought on by influenza, Richard had decided that Clarissa should sleep in a separate bedroom in order to rest undisturbed. This room is described almost like tomb, a dark attic containing symbols of death like the narrowing of her bed and the half burnt down candle by her bedside (Woolf, 2009:26-27). Considering the conflicting relationship between paralysis and agency in *Mrs. Dalloway* the importance of Big Ben is underlined by its chiming every quarter of an hour throughout the novel, marking the unrelenting passing of time moving towards the end of life. To Clarissa, having ambivalent feelings toward life and death, Big Ben is a welcome sound to her when saving her from her conversation with Peter Walsh and being pushed towards agency: "The sound of Big Ben striking the half-hour struck out between them with extraordinary vigour" (41). The same moment as the bell tolls, Elizabeth, the product of Clarissa's marriage to Richard enters the

room as to stress the finality of Clarissa's choice. Big Ben also works as a reminder of what time she has left and of death closing in on her: "There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable" (4). Later it tolls to remind Peter Walsh of death the same moment as he thinks about Clarissa's fragile heart: "It was her heart, he remembered; and the sudden loudness of the final stroke tolled fir death that surprised in the midst of life, Clarissa falling where she stood, in her drawing room" (43). Big Ben represents the agency that Clarissa lacks. It is male presence that is constantly overlooking her and encouraging her right choices and residing over her life. It is therefore also one of the most important symbols of death in the novel. Clarissa is constantly reminded of the temporality of life and of death approaching, overshadowing everything else.

Clarissa's depression is mainly visible through her own thoughts around the concept of life and death and her sometimes subtle inclinations towards ending her own life and embracing death which is most clearly stated towards the end when she hears about Septimus' death. Clarissa has also been watching her next-door neighbor, an old woman living alone reflecting Clarissa's feeling of loneliness and that of being alone. In the same paragraph as she learns about Septimus' suicide, the old woman next door turns out her lights. The death of Septimus therefore also represents a certain death in Clarissa's life, whether she has been made aware of the possibility of committing suicide or if Septimus' action has initiated feelings of relief in her as well. This is also the same scene where Clarissa has her most clear visualization of death:

> The clock began striking. The young man had killed himself; but she did not pity him; with the clock striking the hour, one, two, three, she did not pity him, with all this going on. There! The old lady had put out her light! The whole house was dark now with this going on, she repeated, and the words came to her, Fear no more the heat of the sun (158).

As will be discussed in a later chapter concerning the theatrical play, *Machinal* by Sophie Treadwell, death plays an important part in relation to paralysis. Death can be perceived to be the only solution or the only action that carries enough weight to transcend paralysis. The thought of Septimus working as Clarissa's "active" double is also underlined by the fact that Septimus is pictured outside for the most part of the novel. The only times he appears to be inside is during his consultations with Dr Holmes. Clarissa being confined inside a lot of the time defines her paralysis, while Septimus' being outside represents agency. The way he

chooses to commit suicide is also of importance in relation to this aspect. Apparently, he has thrown himself out of a window. Septimus has killed himself by exiting a building, most likely his own home. As mentioned earlier, the home is depicted as feeling like a prison or a grave to Clarissa and as representative of death and paralysis. By throwing himself out of a window, one might therefore say that Septimus has literally transcended paralysis. The strong connection between the home and captivity in *Mrs. Dalloway* is further emphasised through the final act of Septimus. Physically escaping what has become a cultural symbol of captivity in this novel stands as a clear statement to Clarissa and the reader at the end. Clarissa admires Septimus' act and realises that the two of them must have felt similarly. Both Septimus and Clarissa have the same feeling of being trapped within a social structure they do not feel at home in neither are they able to adjust to it. Their homes are also their prisons trying to conform them and force them to act according to society's expectations.

In the last paragraphs of the novel, the news about Septimus' suicide spread among the guests at Clarissa's party. At first, Clarissa appears to be frightened by aspect of death following her even at the night of her party: "Oh! thought Clarissa, in the middle of my party, here's death, she thought" (156). At her first knowledge of Septimus' death as a suicide, Clarissa's thoughts are almost envious and imagining the event of death initiates a feeling very similar to adrenaline:

> Always her body went through it, when she was told, first, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then suffocation and blackness (156).

Clarissa's paralysis stems from her inability to choose between life and death. She fears and admires both while she is unable to perform either. Rachman argues that Clarissa's life is a kind of "non-life" because of her incapacitating fear of life and of living (Rachman, 1972:10). Being in her fifties, she feels her life is already half spent; her physical age parallels her mental state, as somewhere in between life and death. Clarissa feels a certain relief and sense of freedom through Septimus' suicide almost as if she is vicariously experiencing death through him.

Towards the end of the novel, as Clarissa has decided to fulfil her given role in patriarchal society as a wife, mother and hostess, she experiences a sort of happiness that might be equated with the relief of giving up on something and gaining acceptance. Enabled by Septimus' death, Clarissa is again thrown back into uncertainty and questioning life and death. Septimus' suicide does in some way seem to make it impossible for Clarissa to consider the same fate. While she once again starts to wonder whether it is better to live or die, one gets the impression that she has accepted that she cannot follow the same path and Septimus' agency does therefore ensure Clarissa's paralysis. In this sense, Clarissa's paralysis largely consists of not being able to escape life.

In Jean Thomson description of Septimus in "Virginia Woolf and The Case of Septimus Smith" (2004) he is created as a representation of the Unknown Soldier. The severe trauma that many soldiers returned back home with, kept them from entering back into their own lives afterwards. Septimus is one of these soldiers who, while he managed to survive the war he does not survive coming back home. Throughout the novel, we are acquainted with a deeply unhappy man who no longer is able to settle back into everyday life. It makes for a strong statement that depression finally kills Septimus in the end, not the war in which he participated. Although the novel is characterized by the irrevocable passing of time, the connection between Septimus, Clarissa and death is a timeless aspect of this story. Transcending paralysis through experiencing and embracing death is what differentiates the two characters while at the same time revealing their connection. Failing to transcend her own paralysis, Clarissa still receives some kind of gratification through Septimus' death and realising that unhappiness and depression is not exclusive to her. Death is the first real communication of the novel and the single instant where Clarissa comes alive. She admires Septimus' defiance and single-purposed action, and admiration that is similar to that of her wanting to reach the Victorian ideal of unity mentioned earlier in this chapter. Clarissa admires being able to dedicate one's whole being to one sole purpose, which in this case is suicide:

> A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death (156).

According to Clarissa, Septimus has evaded time and reached what she calls the "centre". Death represents unity and transcendence of paralysis and depression to Clarissa, a way to escape the chaos and conflicted reality of life. In contrast to Clarissa, Septimus has refused to give in to the pressures of society that wants to mould him into an acceptable individual. Throughout the novel, communication is lacking on every level. There is no understanding between the doctors and patients, between husbands and wives or between friends. Clarissa and Septimus are alone within themselves. The tragedy of this is shown through Septimus' death, the fact that he saw no other way of communicating with the people around him than to take his own life. Death is therefore the only element in the novel that appears not to be connected to paralysis. Paralysis intervenes on every other aspect connected to Clarissa and Septimus right up until the end where something changes for the both of them.

Reading Clarissa: Understanding Paralysis

In an attempt to more or less conclude the discussion regarding the representation of paralysis in *Mrs. Dalloway* it is tempting to say that there is no clear interpretation to be reached concerning the character of Clarissa Dalloway. Bell writes that if one were to reach any unambiguous interpretation of the novel, it would be false (Bell, 2005:93-94). Much like Clarissa feels about herself it is difficult to label her in any way. It would be a simplification of Clarissa's complex character to state with certainty that she chooses life or death in the end. The uncertainty one is left with is the truest reflection of the novel that one could hope for. Clarissa's life and person *is* uncertainty and continually appearing to have several choices while being disabled into mental paralysis. Bell mentions that Woolf as a narrator gives the reader little or no guidance regarding what to make of Clarissa (Bell, 2005:94), and as an intentional effect, it is very successful. Clarissa's paralysis lies in the indecisiveness of every aspect of her life. As mentioned early on in this chapter about the Victorian's strive towards having a unified and un-conflicted self is clearly part of Clarissa's struggle. Septimus seems to achieve this through choosing death, giving himself to that one final act. Clarissa's admiration of his suicide, so to speak, is not necessarily about death in itself but about being able to conduct a unified act and being completely committed to it. Not being conflicted appears to be the ideal to Clarissa and the conclusion is therefore a dismal one because she we leave her in the same uncertainty that we were initially introduced to. It is impossible for her to reach unity because what she tries to be on the outside is not coherent with her inside.

Like every other aspect of the novel, its timing is not arbitrary either and contributes to the full image of the novel. Being set in the transitional period between the end of the Victorian era and the end of the First World War where nothing may ever be the same again there is conflict on every level of the novel. Clarissa Dalloway is therefore a character that is not even at home in the novel. In the end, the reader is left without answers as to what Clarissa's future looks like. We are also stuck in a sense, in the same uncertainty that Clarissa has suffered much of her life: whether she should choose life or death. Clarissa's Victorian self is still disappointed in the end as she is still torn and depressed. She is left struggling with the past while having to find her place in a future she seems unable to picture for herself.

Chapter II: Hysteria, Paralysis and Violence - Oppression and Passive Resistance in Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal*

> YOUNG WOMAN. No! No! Don't touch me – touch me!
> *They take her and put her down in the chair, cut a patch from her hair.*
> I will not be submitted – this indignity! No! I will not be submitted! – Leave me alone! Oh my God am I never to be let alone! Always to have to submit – to submit! No more – not now – I'm going to die – I won't submit! Not now! (Treadwell, 1993:79)

Sophie Treadwell was working as an American journalist and playwright during the 1920s when she developed an interest in the trial against Ruth Snyder, a woman in her thirties who was arrested and tried for the murder of her husband Albert Snyder in New York in 1927. Ruth Snyder became the first woman to be executed in the electric chair in the state of New York. What appears to have sparked Treadwell's interest in the trial, which today also appears to be conspicuous, is the media's scarcely nuanced approach to the case and the biased relationship they forged between the public and the murder trial. In the article "Treadwell's Neologism: "Machinal"" (1992), Ginger Strand quotes paragraphs from national newspapers from the time of the real murder trial in 1927. One of the news articles that are mentioned asks the question of what makes Mrs. Snyder different from other dissatisfied wives killing their "heavily insured husbands" (164). Contemporary society struggled to find a different motive, apart from an economical one, for a wife to kill her husband. The news articles continue to speculate in how the lack of any interests outside the home may have led to her unhappiness and ultimately the murder of her husband. However, as Strand points out, sympathy does not equate with understanding (165), and the newspapers treated the case more like a theatrical outbreak by Mrs. Snyder rather than an act of desperation. The case against Ruth Snyder was hardly a very good one either in that the only defense made on her behalf was that she was without agency at the time of the murder, as her attorney claimed: "Woman is just as God intended her to be" (166). Claiming that she had no agency and therefore no responsibility for her actions was considered Ruth Snyder's best chance of gaining any sympathy from the judge and jury. Either way, any plead for insanity or just plain gendered weakness were rejected and both Ruth and her lover Judd Gray later confessed to the murder

and were both executed on the same day in 1927.

Recent media references to the crime reveal that attitudes towards the famous trial has not changed all that much in the last eighty years or so. A web article in Time Magazine from April 2014 about the state of Tennessee’s upcoming vote to reinstate the electric chair as a form of capital punishment brings up the case of Ruth Snyder in modern time (Campbell, Erica, time.com, 2014). Overall, it does not look good for Ruth Snyder that she and her lover Judd Gray supposedly took out an insurance policy for 48 000 dollars on Albert Snyder before the murder and that they planned the event meticulously in order to get away with the deed. An article by Danielle Schneider, “On this day in NY history: Lurid Snyder-Gray murder case inspired the movie Double Indemnity” from 2010 also brings up the Snyder-trial:

> Infamous lovers Ruth Snyder and Judd Gray were in Sing Sing Prison’s death row in Ossining, NY, about to be executed by electric chair for the brutal murder of Albert Snyder, Ruth's wealthy husband, who they had bludgeoned and garrotted for his $48,000 life insurance policy
> (Schneider, examiner.com, 2010).

Daily News’ article “Ruthless Ruth” (Krajicek, David J., nydailynews.com, 2008) paints a similar picture of the two lovers their scheme and the murder, and it seems fairly uncomplicated to assume that the more recent articles have all been inspired by the contemporary press covering the trial at the time. Two paragraphs stood out from all three of the articles mentioned above about the murder on Albert Snyder, both statements collected at the time of the trial. First, that is was a "cheap crime involving cheap people" and the second was description of Ruth Snyder’s physical appearance made by a newspaperman by the name of Damon Runyon: “a chilly looking blonde with frosty eyes and one of those marble, you-bet-you-will chins.”

Treadwell wrote *Machinal* the year after the murder trial, inspired by the events. Reading the play with the knowledge that it is based on the Ruth Snyder-case, the conflicting images of the fragile young woman, Helen and the media’s portrayal of Ruth Snyder becomes immediately apparent. Helen is a young housewife who ends up murdering her husband. She is portrayed as a fragile and hopeless young woman (any woman) (Treadwell, 11) who displays the feeling of helplessness of women in married life during the nineteen twenties in a unique way. Helen’s husband, George Jones is portrayed as an uncaring predatory male centering his attention on Helen and pressures her into marrying him through his consistent

advances. The image of Helen and Ruth appears to be incompatible in every way insomuch that if *Machinal* was written as a defense of Ruth Snyder it appears to be far-fetched and excessive. This is why *Machinal* might not be intended as a play specifically about Ruth Snyder's case but rather that it works on a higher lever as social criticism against larger forces of society in general. The uniqueness of the play is represented through this unity between the macrocosms displaying the faults of society while at the same time paying considerable notice to the smallest detail. The constant sounds of machines throughout the scenes in the play, the construction of the characters and their transformation, or the lack of, all contributes to both personal involvement and a critical view of society's treatment of its female population as children without authority of their own.

The title of the play is related to the allegedly money-motivated murder on Albert Snyder. In the article "Murder as Social Criticism" (1997) Catherine Nickerson argues that the kind of murders that were committed for economic prospects were a sign of the prosperous time of the early twentieth century (Nickerson, 1997:748-749). The trial of Ruth Snyder would therefore become a typical sign of the age. *Machinal* is therefore a complex work that consists of several underlying messages and interpretations of the industrialized and increasingly globalized world. Excluded from so many arenas, Helen is the example of the result this kind of marginalization brings with it.

Machinal depicts the problem of femininity and that of being a woman in a man's world. As Ginger Strand about the real murder trial of Ruth Snyder: "Thus, the case was constructed along the classic virgin/whore opposition: if Ruth Snyder was guilty, she was an evil temptress; if she was not guilty, she was a tragic victim with no will of her own." (Strand, 1992:166) the problem of femininity would therefore reflect the ambivalence in society in relation to women and violence. Helen represents the result of institutionalized oppression in society, a feminist image of the patriarchal decomposition of the female population. The image of Helen as the broken woman might be the most important element to the play as it represents the feminist movement that was initiated during the early twentieth century: namely that of using misogynistic ideas of feminine weakness as a weapon against oppression. Elaine Showalter (1993) argues for feminists use of the Victorian medical condition known as hysteria as a tool in social criticism. She argues that feminists reclaimed the diagnosis in order to recycle the term and use it to front the women's cause. Feminist writers started using hysteria in the early twentieth century in order to prove the result of systematic oppression of women through time (Showalter, 1993:286).

Agency and passivity are portrayed in the extremes in *Machinal* with Helen at the center. Making meaning of both of these elements are crucial in order to be able to interpret the feminist message behind the play and through Helen, one is able to feel the stress and agony she feels as a woman. Having to make choices where one excludes the other is Helen's problem but realizing that she in fact does not have any choice at all is her downfall. Being encouraged/forced to marry an unsympathetic man by her mother who is supposed to be her most important female role model is very telling as to how deeply set misogyny is at this time and in this world. Experiencing paralysis and ultimately transcending it but in a way that precludes the opportunity of living a life in freedom is the problem depicted in *Machinal.*

This chapter will explore the oppositions between paralysis and agency in the context of depression and acts of violence. It will also cover the topic of why Helen's actions assume the form they do in the play as well as how paralysis is used to represent the result of cultural oppression. Sophie Treadwell's use of expressionistic techniques like the sounds of electricity and machinery throughout will also be argued as important elements to a feminist reading of the play. The tradition of using what had earlier been considered to be gendered weaknesses as a tool in conveying social criticism is something that has been very consciously used in *Machinal* by reflecting the physical effects of oppression in the main character. This chapter will also argue for Treadwell's use of the feminist technique of reclaiming mental illness, depression and paralysis as symptomatic of historic oppression.

Ruth Snyder: "The Marble Woman" Versus "The Bloody Blonde": the Defense of the Housewife and the Condemning of the Modern Sinner

Reading about the trial of Ruth Snyder in the article "Murder by Design: Famous Murders and American Culture Patterns of the 1920's" (1984), Stephen Conroy presents matter-of-factly the case of a young, bored housewife and her lover murdering her thirteen years older husband in cold blood. She had apparently tried to murder her husband on several occasions before without success and the media made easy work of portraying Ruth Snyder as a cold-blooded woman with egotistic motifs. This kind of unilateral view on the case is what Treadwell used as her inspiration for *Machinal*. The press covering the trial had the power to sway the public and chose, as will be argued later in this chapter, to portray Ruth Snyder as the cold-hearted murderess. This type of story has gradually started to resemble a cliché

where the bored and unappreciated wife finally has enough and kills her husband. According to Conroy, this is the how it was manufactured by the media during the time of Ruth Snyder's trial (Conroy, 1984:49-51). The tales of the brutal murder did of course captivate the media as well as the public and Ruth Snyder appears to have been portrayed almost like a femme fatale who strangled and beat her husband to death (51).

In an article written by Jessie Ramey "The Bloody Blonde and the Marble Woman: Gender and Power in the Case of Ruth Snyder" (2004), the issue of media's control over the trial and the ambiguity of Ruth Snyder's character is again emphasized. Ramey describes two contradictory characterizations of Snyder, one called "the Bloody Blonde", where her gender is emphasized as Snyder being an evil temptress that she has to be executed regardless of her gender as a warning to other women. The public, both men and women, expressed the fear of that murdering husbands might become a trend if Ruth Snyder was not made an example of (Ramey, 2004:631-32). In the other public portrayal of Snyder, the media masculinized her and she was portrayed as "the Marble Woman", a sexual aggressor without femininity (627). Ramey draws attention to that this was up until now a rare case where the public had to reconsider the meaning of gender by visualizing Snyder as either a modern, fun-loving young flapper or as the traditional housewife. The realization of the incompatibility of the two created an ambiguous and complicated case. The specific period of the Snyder case and the society featured in *Machinal* portrays the magnitude of the transformations in women's position in society and the complications that followed.

The Ruth Snyder-Case and Machinal

The image presented of Ruth Snyder is very different from the portrayal of Helen in Machinal, who is tentative, shy and anxious and ends up murdering her husband in desperation at the end. It seems important to separate the real Snyder-case from the fictional tale of Machinal. It would be considered simplistic to interpret Machinal as Ruth Snyder's case told from the inside and one should read Machinal not a defense for Snyder but rather as social criticism on a larger scale. This is not to say that Ruth Snyder is not a part of the picture of female oppression and mistreatment presented by the play, just that it is necessary to keep the two separate.

The complicating factors of a society going through rapid transformations from the Victorian housewife, to the modern, liberated woman created additional friction at the time of Ruth Snyder's trial. Both men and women feared the modern woman demanding a change in their own situation. Ramey considers this to be one of the complicating factors related to Ruth Snyder's murder trial, interpreting whether Ruth was too emotional or not emotional enough and whether she lacked sexuality or had too much (Ramey, 2004:627). The ambiguity of the period pictured in *Machinal* might be what creates new and more drastic expressions of protest. Newspapers at the time used the Snyder trial as argumentation for the deconstruction of patriarchal control in society and the ruin of traditional family- and gender-values.

Ramey argues that language in and of itself as well as in the way it was exploited by the media at the time functioned as a "crucial locus of gender and power" (627). This is also one of the most important interpretative instruments in the critical reading of *Machinal*. Language in the play is working as part of a social and cultural machinery contributing to the alienation of women while at the same time forcing them to exist within these frames. The words uttered, or rather the words that are *not* uttered in *Machinal* are therefore of importance seeing as Helen is unable to make herself understood through speech. Through the way that the lines in *Machinal* are constructed, the power of language is clearly visible although subtle throughout the play. Ramey mentions the shift from public executions to executions in death chambers as important to the shift of public impact. From ca, 1890 people were no longer able to witness executions of criminals and the balance of power therefore shifted from witnessing the physical punishment for crimes to the media's build-up of murder trials. Written language used to describe the condemned and their trial became the main source of information and moral guidance as in the case of Ruth Snyder (Ramey, 2004:627-628). Similar to the way the public media's language "repulsed any challenges to the dominant hierarchies of class and gender" (630), so does society's machinery condemn Helen to lose.

While Ruth Snyder had tried to get away with murder by covering it up to look like a burglary, Helen appears to act on instinct, having no plan as to what to do next. In the real case of Ruth Snyder and the fictional case of Helen Jones, their main defense is their lack of agency and their fragile minds. Female paralysis appears therefore in this case to be both a physical as well as a mental state forced onto women by society both as their only defense but also as their compromising weakness. Girls that are being groomed into being wives and mothers from the day they are born, as Helen seems to be an example of, are left without any other kind of impulses than the few they are allowed. Helen is anxious, depressed and experiences paralysis even before she is married knowing that there are no options. She

knows the intended course of her life and she becomes paralyzed by the lack of opportunity and escape. In a way, her paralysis does also work as her only defense against patriarchy, acting as a silent protest in order to avoid the determinism of society. Not being able to physically resist she chooses to not cooperate either by avoiding any action as far as possible. After meeting her lover for the first time, the idea of gaining freedom and escape is introduced to Helen. Her lover, Richard Roe, tells her the story of how he escaped Mexican bandidos by killing one of them with a glass bottle filled with pebbles. Not even this idea leading up to her concluding agency does she develop on her own but it is rather reached through a story told by a man.

In *Machinal* the world presented to the audience is one of modernity, machinery and cynical distance from reality, while Helen commits murder in a most manual, brutal and physical way. She could have chosen easier options like poison, a gun or even hired someone else to do it for her; still she chooses to kill her husband with a glass bottle. This form of protest appears to represent both the oppression of women and the relatively rapid industrialization of society. In addition, it is a very “unfeminine” way to commit murder and underlines the fact that gender roles were in transition at the time. The murder of her husband is Helen’s transcendence, the moment where she is finally able to break out for just a brief moment before patriarchy again seizes her. The end is important for some of the same reasons that the murder is to the play’s function as social critique. Surrounded by almost exclusively men, except for a prison matron, in the final hours of her life she is still opposing their control while her futile attempt of understanding is consistently ignored. Her strongest reaction is seen when the barber enter her cell to shave her head to prepare her for the electric chair. She tries to refuse this final humiliation and intrusion on her person and it brings to mind the similar preparations for electric shock therapy:

> MATRON. The rule.
> JAILER. Regulations.
> BARBERS. Routine.
> YOUNG WOMAN. No! No! Don’t touch me – touch me!
> *They take her and put her down in the chair, cut a patch from her hair.*
> I will not be submitted – this indignity! No! I will not be submitted! – Leave me alone! Oh my God am I never to be let alone! Always to have to submit – to submit! No more – not now – I’m going to die – I won’t submit! Not now!
> BARBER (*finishing cutting a patch from her hair*). You’ll submit, my lady. Right to the end, you’ll submit! There, and a neat job too. (78-79)

After the murder of her husband, Helen's paralysis has been lifted and she is able to fight the forces trying to make her submit. Her futile attempt to avoid the barbers only goes to show the encompassing control society has over its public and especially the women. Right up until the end of her life, Helen is forced to submit, to obey the laws of patriarchy.

(re)Claiming Hysteria

According to Lisa Appignanesi, hysteria first became known as condition of the poor and only later, around the late nineteenth century it became the "choice diagnosis of a fiercely republican *belle époque*" (Appignanesi, 2008:125). This "new hysteria" thrived within a society that was in rapid flux, with trains connecting city with country and industrialization contributing to a globalization unlike anything that had gone before (125). The struggle between the church and an increasingly secularized society also contributed to the rise of hysteria as a fashionable illness. Much like the virgin/whore opposition, women suffering from mental illness were according to the church possessed by demons, while secularists wanting to remove mentally ill women from the grasp of the church therefore rationalized their symptoms as being those of hysteria. The French republican Jules Ferry said in a speech in 1870, "Women must belong to science, or else they will belong to the church" (Appignanesi, 2008:125). Mentally ill women were important to control for both the church and the secularists. Diagnosing them with hysteria and thereby claiming them in the name of science became an important strategy for the secularists, hysteria became known as a "woman's disease" (Showalter, 1993:286) inflicting the exclusively feminine parts of the body but still being a mental condition without any physically traceable symptoms.

Much of the control over women's roles and psychosexual potential had up until this point been with the church, and while the more influential emancipation of women happened after the First World War, according to Appignanesi, hysteria suited the women at the time:

> It described a sexualized madness full of contradictions, one which could play all feminine parts and take on a dizzying variety of symptoms, though none of them had any real detectable base in the body. It was a partial madness which could in attacks mimic both epilepsy and ecstatic saintliness (Appignanesi, 2008:126).

The transforming society also changed the role of women, from being exclusively confined to the home their position now shifted to a middle ground. In the earliest years of the twentieth century, women's position transformed, meaning that while they no longer exclusively confined within the home sphere, they were still largely excluded from the public world. According to Appignanesi (2009), the surge of hysterical women during this period characterized by its ambiguity became both a sign of the times and a reaction to the relatively rapid transformation in women's position in society. This description also seems applicable to Helen who has the mentality of a modern woman but set in a society where old values and traditions still lingers in its structure. She seems to have developed a subconscious understanding of the wrongness of her situation while society is still prohibiting upheaval of the old structure. The combination of a "modern minded" woman and an old fashioned, oppressive society seems to be what has provoked Helen's paralysis. The lack of options as well as personal freedom seems to have forced her into a state of apathy and anxiety where she is unable to break out of the pattern of oppression.

Elaine Showalter has argued hysteria as something that is closely connected to the female biology and that in modern times has been linked to feminist theory concerning patriarchal society:

> Feminist understanding of hysteria has been influenced by work in semiotics and discourse theory, seeing hysteria as a specifically feminine protolanguage, communicating through the body messages that cannot be verbalized. For some writers, hysteria has been claimed as the first step on the road to feminism, a special feminine pathology that speaks to and against patriarchy (Showalter, 1993:286).

According to Showalter, feminists have reclaimed the term hysteria and its biological implications using it as a tool in social criticism. Hysteria has become a symptom of the oppression of women. This does of course stand in clear contrast to the earlier misogynistic definitions of hysteria and its causes. The Victorian physician Edward Tilt is supposed to have said that mutability was typical of hysteria because it was also characteristic of women (Showalter, 1993:286). Hysteria was classified as a type of mania defined by among other things "constant mobility" and "persistent agitation" (Appignanesi, 2008:125). Appignanesi writes "The hysteric could be paralysed when awake, but perfectly mobile when 'asleep'"

(126). According to Appignanesi, the hysterical woman in her hypnotized, paralyzed and mute state became a parody of the Victorian feminine ideal of the passive, angelic and desirable woman (126).

Thoughts and theories around hysteria, its causes and symptoms changed somewhat with the emergence of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. Hysteria now became the linguistic and physical protest against "the law of the Father" (Showalter, 1993:288). Helen does not have any real father who is present or even mentioned in the play. The absence of a biological father only works to strengthen the effect of the symbolic Father. Hysteria as the "daughter's disease" is therefore the feminist interpretation of hysteria according to psychoanalysis and Helen thus becomes the disobeying daughter struggling against the rules of the Father:

> YOUNG WOMAN (*her calm shattered*). Father, Father! Why was I born?
> PRIEST. I came forth from the Father and have come into the world – I leave the world and go into the Father.
> YOUNG WOMAN (*weeping*). Submit! Submit! Is nothing mine?
> The hair on my head! The very hair on my head -
> PRIEST. Praise God.
> YOUNG WOMAN. Am I never to be let alone! Never to have peace! When I'm dead, won't I have peace?
> PRIEST. Ye shall indeed drink of my cup.
> YOUNG WOMAN. Won't I have peace tomorrow?
> PRIEST. I shall raise Him up at the last day.
> YOUNG WOMAN. Tomorrow! Father! Where shall I be tomorrow?
> PRIEST. Behold the hour cometh. Yea, is now come. Ye shall be scattered every man to his own.
> YOUNG WOMAN. In Hell! Father! Will I be in Hell!
> PRIEST. I am the Resurrection and the Life. (79)

Helen is portrayed as a passive woman without agency, her behavior being symptomatic of hysteria. She becomes the image of the prostrate woman broken down by patriarchy showing physical reactions like paralysis, angst and depression. Helen's husband seems to find her behavior attractive in its innocent anxiety.

In the scene where they are on the first night of their honeymoon and Helen is trying to avoid physical contact with her husband he interprets her anxiety as modesty and nervousness while he does not seem to care particularly about why she acts the way she does:

> HUSBAND. We can talk here – I'll tell you all about myself. Go along now. (YOUNG WOMAN *goes toward bathroom door. Gets bag*.) Where are you going?
> YOUNG WOMAN. In here.
> HUSBAND. I thought you'd want to wash up.
> YOUNG WOMAN. I just want to – get ready.
> HUSBAND. You don't have to go in there to take your clothes off!
> YOUNG WOMAN. I want to.
> HUSBAND. What for?
> YOUNG WOMAN. I always do.
> HUSBAND. What?
> YOUNG WOMAN. Undress by myself.
> HUSBAND. You've never been married till now – have you?
> (*Laughs*.) Or have you been putting something over on me?
> YOUNG WOMAN. No. (24)

In the hospital scene, where Helen has just given birth to a daughter, she is being patronized and laughed at by her husband, the nurse and the hospital doctor who are all minimizing what appears to be signs of severe depression:

> DOCTOR. How's the little lady today? (Crosses to bed.)
> NURSE. She's better, Doctor.
> DOCTOR. Of course she's better! She's all right – aren't you?
> (YOUNG WOMAN does not respond.) What's the matter?
> Can't you talk? (Drops her hand. Takes chart.)
> NURSE. She's a little weak yet, Doctor.
> DOCTOR (at chart). Milk hasn't come in yet?
> NURSE. No, Doctor.
> DOCTOR. Put the child to breast. (YOUNG WOMAN – 'No – no'! – Riveting machine.) No? Don't you want to nurse your baby? (YOUNG WOMAN signs 'No'.) Why not? (No response.) These modern neurotic women, eh, Doctor? What are we going to do with 'em? (YOUNG DOCTOR laughs. NURSE smiles.) Bring the baby! (Treadwell, 1993:29)

Neurotic appears to be a term that is used lightly and humorously by the doctors surrounding Helen. Not to mention their unsurprised reaction to a new mother showing severe signs of depression. The sound of machines can also be heard in this scene contributing to the underlying mood of cold industrialism that is present in all chapters of life. The process of giving birth, of producing people, is mechanized in the play in which the woman is just a necessary part of the production. The bringing together of the Victorian element of the "typical" hysteric condition with the cold industry of modernism works well in order to emphasize the maltreatment of women in both. Helen is out of place, always present but never seen. Throughout the play, her role is recognized simply as "young woman" which brings to mind the fact that she is just one of millions of women playing the same role in life. Every character in the play are named after their function in society, Helen's boss becoming her husband, Helen's mother being only mentioned as just that and her coworkers are named after their job description, not by name. Helen as "young woman" remains constant throughout implying that she, contrary to the definition of hysteria is anything but mobile. She remains unchanged because she is unable to adapt or resign into her given role. She remains "young woman" even after she gets married and even after she becomes a mother. She is restless while at the same time incapable of changing her own position.

As was mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Ruth Snyder's lawyers tried to get her off death penalty by trying to portray her as insane at the time of the murder and even to blame it on the simple fact that she was a woman (Strand, 1992:165-67). One might assume that her lawyers also represented the public opinion at least to some degree at the time and her gender made Ruth Snyder's trial somewhat more complicated that other criminal cases involving men. Claiming that Ruth was guilty would also mean approving of her agency and that this was a crime committed by a mentally sane and calculating woman. The trial of Helen in *Machinal* shows the hypocrisy of patriarchal society where the woman is seen as weak and innocent until she poses a threat to the system. In the trial of Helen, all present in the scene are described as performing their duties mechanically, uncaring (Treadwell, 1993:60).

Helen's defense attempts to make her appear like the perfect image of womanhood: a devoted daughter, wife and mother. He also draws attention to the traditional values present in Helen's home:

> LAWYER FOR DEFENSE. Your husband's bed – that was also your bed, was it not, Mrs. Jones?
> YOUNG WOMAN. Yes.
> LAWYER FOR DEFENSE. You hadn't the modern idea of separate beds, had you, Mrs. Jones? (64)

Helen seems prepared to deny every allegation the prosecution has against her up until the point where an affidavit is produced, signed by her lover Richard Roe. As the prosecutor reads the affidavit out loud to the courtroom, describing the nature of their relationship, Helen admits to the crime to keep the prosecutor from reading any further. Her infidelity has been exposed and her lover has betrayed her. Beyond this point Helen only utters moans during the rest of the trial. Her ability to speak disappears again as she is consumed by the ultimate loss of her independence and her life.

"Somebody" – Predatory Males and Loss of Agency

Helen is treated as if she were a child from the beginning of the play. To her mother she will always be the daughter, a child she has to guide and mold into society's vision of femininity. Talking to her mother about the man in the office who has been pursuing her and sexually harassing her, Helen's mother makes it clear that she cannot refuse a marriage proposal from such a successful man. The prospect of an economically safe future for the both of them weighs heavier than any independent wish for Helen's life. Mr. Jones, the man who ends up becoming Helen's husband also treats her condescendingly like a poor, lesser creature in need of constant guidance and support. Similar to the short story from 1892, *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, where the female protagonist is "babied" as a cure for her depression, her condition actually worsens until she loses control. Helen has been incapacitated by society represented in part by her mother and her husband up to a point where she is left paralyzed. Her paralysis is made visible through her constant need for

someone to help her perform any task. At several points in the play, she cries out for "somebody" to help her, like in the office after her meeting with Mr. Jones understanding that he is out to pursue her:

> YOUNG WOMAN. My machine's out of order.
> STENOGRAPHER. Well, fix it!
> YOUNG WOMAN. I can't – got to get somebody.
> STENOGRAPHER. Somebody! Somebody! Always Somebody!
> Here, sort the mail, then! (Treadwell, 1993:9)

Helen's character is consistent in being unable to act and do things on her own. Reaching out for somebody to take pity on her and help her while receiving no understanding and not being heard is her frustration in every scene of the play. Again on her honeymoon on the first evening in the hotel room with her husband:

> YOUNG WOMAN (crying out). Ma! Ma! I want my mother!
> HUSBAND. I thought you were glad to get away from her.
> YOUNG WOMAN. I want her now – I want somebody.
> HUSBAND. You got me, haven't you?
> YOUNG WOMAN. Somebody – somebody – (Treadwell, 1993:26)

This "somebody" that Helen is in need of is apparently someone she has never had. It is the reflection of her need for protection seeing as she feels exposed, almost childlike to a "grownup" patriarchal world. Creating the image of a childlike woman being physically desired by her husband as an adult leaves the feeling of something perverted, resembling abuse:

> HUSBAND (sitting). Then come here and give us a kiss. (He puts her on his knee.) That's the girlie. (He bends her head down, and kisses her along the back of her neck.) Like that? (She tries to get to her feet.) Say – stay there! What you moving for? – You know – you got to learn to relax, little girl – (Dancers go off. Dim lights. Pinches her above knee.) Say, what you got under there? (23)

After the birth of her daughter, Helen appears to experience something similar to postpartum depression and is more apathetic than ever in her response. The fact that she gave birth to a girl seems to worsen her state of depression, as she knows that she will have a similar life to hers. Her husband condescendingly states that he knows everything she has been through as he was standing outside her door the whole time. He continues to say that she needs to "brace up" and "face the music" (Treadwell, 1993:28). Much like Septimus in *Mrs. Dalloway*, everyone around her, nurses and doctors alike, ignores Helen's symptoms and she is being treated like a child that is just being stubborn. Addressed as "the little lady" by the hospital doctor and the nurse constantly assuring everyone of how well she is doing, Helen's cries for help are once again not being heard.

Both her mother and Mr. Jones treat Helen like a child and they continue to inform her of what is appropriate or necessary for her to do at any given time. When trying to reach out to her mother for help regarding the intimidating advances of her boss, she is commanded to eat her potato and be grateful for everything she has (14-15). Her mother does not once stop to listen to her daughter and the audience is simultaneously introduced to a woman speaking to her child in the same manner as Helen is by her mother. The origins of Helen's anxiety and unhappiness is the fact that the people around her are constantly disempowering her. She is being overrun by other people's ideas and conceptions of what her life is supposed to be like and what is the natural way for her to act. The recurring image of Helen as a child, experiencing both disciplining and abuse, brings to mind Ramey's argument concerning "the law of the Father" and psychoanalysis.

As written in the introduction to the play, the character of Helen or "young woman" is possibly meant to be representative of women during the early twentieth century (Treadwell 11). Feeling the pressures of society and patriarchal culture, she is left anxious and paralyzed by the prospect of her future. Her coworkers in the office of Mr. George H. Jones knows that he has taken an interest in Helen and as he reminds his employees before Helen enters the office: "Tell Miss A. the early bird catches the worm." (5). This predatory imagery of the bird catching the worm is at once revealed to the reader and to the audience; Helen is the victim of Mr. Jones' urges, defenseless against the approaches of her employer. After she has been called into Mr. Jones' office and has returned to her desk, she sits there with her hands in her lap unable to get any work done. As her colleagues comment on her inefficiency, Helen states, "My machine is out of order" (9). As the stenographer suggests that she could fix it herself, she says, "I can't – got to get somebody" (9). Helen is incapacitated to a degree where she is not physically functioning properly. Helen is not, as far as we know, physically ill. The

reasons for her paralysis and anxiety appear to be stemming from pressures she is exposed to on the outside.

Society, Patriarchy and the Sound of Machinery

Already in the first scene of *Machinal,* the audience is introduced to the mechanized world of business as the play starts in the midst of a busy office. The employees are not mentioned by name at any point but rather recognized by their work tasks. The telephone girl, the stenographer, the adding clerk and the filing clerk are all performing their duties both mechanically and uninvolved. This is made clear through the descriptive notions of their actions like the adding clerk by his adding machine counting "in the monotonous voice of his monotonous thoughts" (Treadwell, 1993:2). Everything in the world surrounding Helen is part of the machinery that is breaking her down.

The title of the play, *Machinal*, is a term that could be said to mirror the intended chain of events that Helen is supposed give in to and participate in. The play appears to convey the message that society lays a claim on the lives of women from beginning to end. The very particular and restricting structure of first being born a daughter and later becoming a wife and mother. Refusing or failing to participate in the traditional norms of society creates Helen's feeling of alienation and leads to the disruption of her mental health. The word "machinal" reflects thoughts of the masculine world of mechanics and technology, a field where women are not allowed. The title could also hint towards Helen's life and the lives of women in general being predestined and attuned like a machinery of patriarchal creation whose intentional role is as a necessary cogwheel in a man's world.

Machinal can at some points be compared to the science fiction genre where one imagines robots and machines gaining a mind of their own in order to control human kind. Helen is the cogwheel in the machinery that does not function according to plan. She has been placed inside a machinery as a tiny part of a complete system that involves controlling the lives of women. Paralysis being her first reaction, refusing to cooperate but at the same time not obviously rebelling against society. At the point where she murders her husband, a part of the machinery has gone awry. She is malfunctioning because she refuses to be only a small part of something so large and destructive as misogynistic culture and patriarchal society. Paralysis created by a system that might not solely be the work of the male gender since it is thoroughly and diligently followed by women like Helen's mother and the Telephone Girl.

Women being prepared to live out their part of the machinery is as much a part of the problem as the men forcing them to.

The consistent theme of *Machinal* is the industrialized world and the gradual replacement of manual labor with machines. Helen has a problem with machinery and our attention is drawn to the fact that her life as intended by society is in itself a machinery. She is being broken down as a result of her failure to exist as a part of the machinery. Helen's mother works as an example of the industrialization of women in that she is constantly engaging in domestic duties. While eating dinner with her daughter, she is unable to lead a conversation as she is already preoccupied with feeding her child:

> YOUNG WOMAN. Ma – I want to talk to you.
> MOTHER. Aren't you eating a potato?
> YOUNG WOMAN. No.
> MOTHER. Why not?
> YOUNG WOMAN. I don't want one.
> MOTHER. That's no reason. Here! Take one.
> YOUNG WOMAN. I don't want it.
> MOTHER. Potatoes goes with stew – here!
> YOUNG WOMAN. Ma, I don't want it!
> MOTHER. Want it! Take it! (Treadwell, 1993:13).

Later, during the same meal, her mother takes out the trash and doing the dishes right away. Only when Helen mentions that there is a man who wants to marry her does her mother sits down to listen. Her mother also believes that falling in love and being in love are both silly notions. Love, according to Helen's mother, has nothing to do with marriage: "MOTHER. Love! – what does that amount to! Will it clothe you? Will it feed you? Will it pay the bills?" (17) In the background of the scene where Helen is discussing love and marriage with her mother, other events are playing out in the background: a young boy asking a girl to sneak out and a woman asking her husband to stay home. Helen's mother represents the industrialization of women's life and of marriage where everyone has their separate tasks. As soon as she learns that the man in question is her Mr. Jones, the Vice-President, the only question on her mind is how soon they are going to get married. Knowing that this man is rich is everything Helen's mother needs in order to know that he will be a great match for her daughter.

Electricity in the form of for example electric pianos (33) and buzzers (1, 13) are found in several scenes of the play and might remind one of the fate of Ruth Snyder and what is to become the same end for Helen Jones. Different from how electricity, technology and machines are often perceived, they are not the signifier of advance and positive development in *Machinal*. Rather they represent the crushing effect of patriarchal society on the female population. The only instance in the play that does not contain the presence of the sounds of machines is during the scene called “Intimate”. Here the only sounds to be hear are “a hand organ; footbeats, of passing feet” (45). This is the scene where Helen and her lover are alone in his apartment, talking to each other. The irregularity of this scene with its consistent and natural dialogue, its laughter and romance makes it different from all the other scenes. This is not an intended part of the social machinery and therefore the sounds indicating its churning is not present. Katherine Weiss writes that the institutions of motherhood, maternity, work and domestic life was all mechanic (Weiss, 2006:6). Weiss uses the term “life machine” which destroys creativity and independent thought leaving women like Helen to be broken down by mechanized society. Weiss argues that the fact that electric shock therapy was sometimes used in order to release excessive energy in women suffering from neurosis or hysteria (8-9). The world around Helen therefore functions like electric shock treatment (9), constantly gnawing at her energy and leaving her paralyzed.

As Ginger Strand writes in her article “Treadwell’s Neologism: “Machinal””, that the structure of the play is outlined by Helen’s alienation from each role that is imposed on her by patriarchal society (Strand, 1992:164), like that of daughter, wife and mother. Marginalization in and of itself may be seen as the cultural creation of patriarchal society where women are forced into narrow roles and become restricted. In this particular story, paralysis happens within the frame of marginalization where intended roles are forced on the protagonist and Helen serves as the example of women being deprived of individual freedom. Throughout the play, Helen is unable to perform any kind of task, even what we consider fundamental for human development, namely the conveying of meaning through language. She appears to be constantly out of breath and exhausted by not being heard nor understood. Every communication in the play is unilateral and imposed on Helen by the other characters. This is yet another part of the title mirrored in the play: the loss of human language in a world of machines and technology.

Making a Sinner: Helen Jones and the Rules of Femininity

As a letter to the Court of Appeals signed by “The Public” demanded that Ruth Snyder must be executed and “made an example of” (Ramey, 2004:631), society in *Machinal* also demands that Helen suffer for her sins. “The Public” demanded that Snyder be electrocuted in the certain knowledge that if she were not, other women would do the same. The power structure in society is made visible through this appeal to the justice system to preserve the balance of power between genders. The “weaker sex” must be kept in control, whether it happens through the diagnosis of specific feminine diseases or through the public discipline of public press. The opposition between the modern woman starting to emerge from the suffragist movement and the pushing towards an equal rights amendment, and the traditional woman dependent on a man to care and support her is what most clearly defines Helen’s suffering in *Machinal*. Both the internal and the external conflict of this are represented through the elements of hysteria like Helens inability to speak and her paralysis, and the violent act of murder she commits. In Ruth Snyder’s case, the murder she committed becomes the signifier of modernity to the opposition trying to preserve the old gender system, as an act of a modern woman. Domestic violence is the result of the emancipation of women and this is also the case for Helen. This conflict in itself is shown through the character of Helen and her paralysis broken only by her act of violence in the end.

Machinal represents the incompatibility of the image of femininity created by patriarchal society and the increasing frustration of alienated women seeking a way out of their culturally created captivity. This is why the painful story of “every woman” is told through Helen in *Machinal:* a small piece caught in the big cogwheel of society’s machinery. Paralysis in *Machinal* partially takes the form of absence of language from Helen’s point of view, her anxiety evoked in every situation and her utter inability to act on her own behalf. At the same time, the ambivalence between paralysis and agency is brought to a high note as Helen murders her husband in a brutal and the most physical way possible: by filling a glass bottle full of small stones and crushing it against her husband’s head while he sleeps. In the moment of killing, Helen finally regains control and is able to step out of her passive role. Similarly to what was argued in the first chapter about Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, death appears to be the only option in order to transcend paralysis. In Helen’s case, it is not necessarily her own death that is needed, just *a* death, the death of her captor. Rather than the justice system being the main issue of the play the systematic and inherent victimization of

women in society is the issue represented through Helen and her paralysis. *Machinal* portrays a society that has adopted modernity only externally while its internal structure is still shaped by misogynistic traditions and values. *Machinal* proves that there is no room for women in a society where men set the rules of femininity. Helen's paralysis and anxiety is symptomatic of the frustration of not fitting into this mold and where other women have chosen mental illness as their way out as argued by Showalter, Helen chooses murder as a final attempt "to get free".

Chapter III: Paralysis and Control in The Bell Jar

> And I knew that in spite of all the roses and kisses and restaurant dinners a man showered on a woman before he married her, what he secretly wanted when the wedding service ended was for her to flatten out underneath his feet like Mrs. Willard's kitchen mat. (Sylvia Plath, 1963:80)

The Bell Jar was written as Sylvia Plath's only novel, finished only weeks before her suicide. Partially based on her own life, it portrays the college experience of young women in the 1950s as well as the severe depression of the main character, Esther Greenwood. The novel has come to represent everything that is wrong with society's treatment of women during the mid-twentieth century and is an important contribution in the field of mental illness in literature.

Esther Greenwood wins a scholarship and moves to New York for one summer during the 1950s. Here she encounters the cynical and artificial world of advertising as well as being acquainted with what appears to be almost like a sexual hunting ground of males versus females. Predatory males and passive females is what greets Esther on her first trip away from home. The girls Esther observes upon her arrival in New York appears according to her as bored and biding their time until they get married:

> These girls looked awfully bored to me. I saw them on the sun-roof, yawning and painting their nails and trying to keep up their Bermuda tans, and they seemed bored as hell (4)

Female passiveness continues to be a pattern in *The Bell Jar*, which Esther does not feel at home in. Esther feels jealousy towards the girls coming from wealthy families, having every opportunity but not exploring any of these. Esther feels like the outcast who tries to escape the pattern everyone else seems so comfortable with. In the first few pages of the novel, Esther is presented as a somewhat insecure and modest girl desperate to fit in with her new environment and to make friends. Much like Helen in *Machinal*, one might describe Esther as "an ordinary young woman, any woman" (Treadwell, 1993:11). She appears confused as to how to behave, always looking for the right reaction to different scenarios. Esther struggles

with the uneven balance of her life as a woman. Wanting to make academic success while being aware of the impossibility of being someone's wife and having her own career at the same time. The mid twentieth century is marked by the 1950s being a specifically critical moment in the transition in women's role in society from housewives to career women. Women like Esther were faced with the impossible choice between what appeared to them like a lonely life having a career, or finding a husband and choosing the traditional domestic life like their mothers before them. This chapter will focus on female paralysis as society's norm regarding women's behaviour. Additionally, it will argue how Esther's attempt to break the pattern leads to her paralysis. Observing the passiveness in the women around her, she tries to accomplish as much as possible but is continually corrected by a patriarchal force. This chapter will therefore argue that society punishes Esther for her agency and forces her into a passive role.

The Bell Jar contains several instances of strong symbolism throughout, starting with Esther's initial fascination with the electrocution of the Rosenbergs. Almost as if Plath picked up where Sophie Treadwell left off relating electricity to the female body and the physical death, electricity comes to mean the death of individuality and ambition for Esther. Electricity is an important theme in *The Bell Jar*, not only in relation to Esther's treatment for depression but also because of all it signifies in relation to the literal and symbolical electrification of the female body. Electricity becomes patriarchy's way of controlling women physically as well as mentally to enforce conformity. Electricity in relation to society and the natural world, as opposing women's biology and women's rights will be discussed in this chapter as one of the major themes of *The Bell Jar* understood both literally and metaphorically.

In the famous feminist work, *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan writes famously about the young women of the mid-twentieth century who became maybe the most famous generation of homemakers suffering from depression and of "the problem that has no name" (Friedan, 2011:11). "The problem that has no name" is what Friedan sees as the phenomenon that represents the main cause of depression in American housewives.

Friedan argues that the problem stemmed from the fact that women who were introduced to education in their late teens and early twenties were not able to fully adjust to all of this being taken away from them the moment they got married:

> If a woman had a problem in the 1950's and 1960's, she knew that something must be wrong with her marriage, or with herself. Other women were satisfied with their lives, she thought. What kind of a woman was she if she did not feel this mysterious fulfilment waxing the kitchen floor? (Friedan, 2010:8)

According to Friedan, "the problem that has no name" consisted of women who were introduced to intellectual pursuit and independency but later denied it at an early age as they got married. If a woman continued her education, she was considered a social outcast and became masculinized and undesirable (8-10). Esther's depression seems at least partly to stem from her own certainty of this. She has been introduced to a life she knows is not compatible with the traditional married life of women at the time. Watching her life, identity and possibilities slip away under the idea of marriage is what causes her to feel unhappy and unfulfilled:

> This seemed a dreary and wasted life for a girl with fifteen years of straight A's, but I knew that's what marriage was like, because cook and clean and wash was just what Buddy Willard's mother did from morning till night, and she was the wife of a university professor and had been a private school teacher herself. (Plath, 1963:80).

The intended female role as it is perceived and portrayed in *The Bell Jar* is therefore that of paralysis. The society described in Plath's diary and the society depicted in *The Bell Jar* contains a duality as well as an ambiguity that seems impossible for women to assimilate. Similar to Plath's own struggle with the conflicting roles of women, Esther also finds it difficult to understand how to incorporate all sides of herself and womanhood into the accepted mould of society. She constantly feels torn between what she perceives as the right and wrong behaviour, represented by her two friends Betsy and Doreen. Esther has conflicting opinions about Betsy who is "always asking me to do things with her and the other girls as if

she were trying to save me in some way" (6) and Doreen who is "like a secret voice speaking straight out of my own bones" (7). Betsy and Doreen are both representative of different female ideals created by patriarchal society and Esther is unable to rely on either one. Esther's story is one that is mainly characterized by choices, or rather the illusion of having several options. Betsy and Doreen will be argued as representative of two of these choices Esther is confronted with in *The Bell Jar*. One representing safety and traditional values and the other one representing sensuality and danger only proves to Esther that her life consists of choosing a side, where one by necessity excludes the other. Esther has the opportunity and talent needed to make a career for herself. She enjoys reading and writing poetry but the happiness she acquires from this is corrupted by society telling her that real fortune is finding a husband. Society's happiness does not equal Esther's happiness. However, Esther finds herself fighting an impossible battle against the forces of patriarchy that is telling her that individualism and marriage are incompatible.

Food in relation to Esther's mental illness is of special importance in the novel, seeing as it is the catalyst of her breakdown as well as of her mental state. Several instances relating to food or the ritual of feeding function as metaphors or symbols as part of the deeper structure and will be argued to be of central importance to the portrayals of paralysis in the novel. The transformation in Esther might be seen in context of her appetite as well as her ability to control her intake of food. The gaining and stabilization of weight is a central issue to Esther in relation to her mental health. Her weight being the only aspect of her life that she feels in control of is therefore of special importance to the loss of control as she is admitted to hospital.

Paralysis is present already in the title of the novel, a bell jar being Esther's own envisioning of her mental illness. Being a captive within society as well as within one's own mind. Esther feels a helplessness and isolation that brings on the feeling of existing within a bell jar:

> I knew I should be grateful to Mrs Guinea, only I couldn't feel a thing. If Mrs Guinea had given me a ticket to Europe, or a round-the-world cruise, it wouldn't have made one scrap of difference to me, because wherever I sat […] I would be sitting under the same glass bell jar, stewing in my own sour air. […] I sank back in the grey, plush seat and closed my eyes. The air of the bell jar wadded round me and I couldn't stir. (178)

The symbolic meaning of the bell jar remains central throughout the novel but is best explained towards the end after Esther has gone through several treatments with electric shock. The sensation of existing within a sterile isolated and not to mention limited area, is central to the understanding of Esther's depression. The significant transformation of her life that is depicted in *The Bell Jar* contains the experience of feeling paralysed by having too many choices, to the knowledge that she has none at all. The three symbolic elements that has so far been mentioned, electricity, food and the bell jar all seem to have an overarching aim; namely that of combining the physical female body with the symbolic image of control. Fear of electricity or fear of harm and death is the ultimate indicator of Esther's disempowerment. Esther's appetite for food will be argued to be of symbolic value in that it indicates her hunger for control and opportunity. Food and Esther's eating habits therefore becomes and indicator of both physical and mental health. The bell jar contains both of the other elements seeing as it is representative of patriarchal control and the limitations created for women. All three of these elements will be of central importance to this chapter, especially in relation to how they are linked to Esther's paralysis and depression.

Marriage and the Loss of Self

The Bell Jar is the only novel discussed in this thesis where a diagnosis of depression is conclusive and is more or less mentioned by name. Esther is herself aware of what exactly is making her unhappy as well as knowing that there is no way to escape. One of the central themes in *The Bell Jar* is loss. While Esther at several points makes it clear to herself and to the people around her that she has no intention to marry, we already know from beginning of the novel that Esther has had a baby and settled down. In this way, the reader knows early on that Esther has already lost. This is first implied in one of the first pages of the novel where she is reminiscing back to her time in New York: "I use the lipsticks now and then, and last week I cut the plastic starfish off the sunglasses case for the baby to play with." (Plath, 1963:3) Marriage is the equivalent of the sacrifice of individual freedom and the understanding of the fact that she belongs to someone. Married life is a passive life and has therefore come to symbolise paralysis and death to Esther. *The Bell Jar* presents a clear link between the tension between women's fight for individual freedom and the restraints of marriage, where the exclusiveness of both have a destructive effect on women like Esther.

In “Dividing Work, Sharing Work, and In-Between: Marriage Patterns and Depression” (1983), a study on the new kinds of marriages that grew out of the 1960s in relation to depression in both men and women argues for the development within the institution of marriage. The authors of the article, Catherine Ross, John Mirowsky and Joan Huber, claim that there are two types of marriages in existence in the 1980s, namely “complementary marriages” and “parallel marriages”. The latter proved to have the lowest number of depression inside the marriage (Ross, Mirowsky, Huber, 1983:809). What the article exemplifies as “complementary marriage” is clearly the case in *Mrs. Dalloway*, where the lady of the house is not supposed to be employed outside the home. The couple performs interdependent but different tasks (809) which creates a larger gap between the husband and wife. As the article states, these two types of marriage represent a transition in western society where there is a significant transformation of both men and women which is a complex process on both sides. The emergence of the working wife meant that she no longer could dedicate her entire day to home arrangements and childcare. This brings up the second form of marriages mentioned by the article, namely “parallel marriage”. The article states that in marriages where the husband approved of his wife working, there were less frequency of depression. The same went for marriages where both the husband and the wife contributed at home (809). Married couples who were both employed outside the home and shared the responsibility of housework and childcare resulted in both parties being happier. As the increasing need for labour force brought more women into employment than before, attitudes also started transforming (810). The article mentions a survey concerning the public attitude towards married women also being employed (even if her husband has economic means to support her). In 1938, 21 percent of the respondents approved of married women working, increasing until 1970 when approval had grown to 60 percent (810).

Advertising and magazines play a central role in *The Bell Jar*. At the same time as these magazines were trying to engage women in their individual interests and ambitions, society’s rules of femininity still gained momentum by constantly reminding women where their place actually were. Esther Greenwood lives in a society where inherent norms of women’s position is starting to transform but is still in the initial phase. Her depression starts to emerge after she has left her mother’s home after she got an internship at New York Fashion Magazine. Smith’s article argues the duality of the messages that were extended to women through magazines during the 1950s contributed to confusion among young American women. At the same time as these magazines were advertising and encouraging women to explore the world and receive education, they were also advertising the ideal of the housewife

whose domain were in the home (Smith, 2010:4-5). One might argue that these magazines seemingly created by women for women might function as a representative example of patriarchal control, where the old traditions struggle against new opportunities for women.

Although Esther hates the idea of getting married, she is not able to picture a different future for herself. Making the impossible choice between a culturally created institution she knows will be the end of her and what she considers to be a lonely life as a career woman is what tears Esther apart. As much as she claims to "[hate] the idea of serving men in any way" (72) she is still a product of her own time. She wants men to like her but still cannot settle on the idea of belonging to one of them. The fact that she has several options while an invisible force tries to force her to choose the "right one" appears to her as disruptive and confusing. Society's norms and her own individuality are fighting a battle, which is also the case of depressed housewives according to Betty Friedan (Friedan, 1963:58-59). Esther's "problem", so to speak, is that she wants to be everything. She wants to pursue her career while at the same time envisioning the family life she knows is incompatible with the former.

During the course of the novel, Esther appears to become convinced that her reluctance to get married was what was actually wrong with her to start with. At the beginning of the novel as she revisits her young her days in New York and her ultimate breakdown Esther has been persuaded into believing that electric shock therapy has made her "all right again" (3). Esther has been conformed into society's image of femininity and surrendered to the image of married life as being the "right" life. The institution of marriage in itself is the great enemy of the story and Esther the representation of women being broken down by the system. What one might call the "problem" of the transitional period in women's role that was in its initiative phase in the mid-twentieth century is therefore of significant importance to the understanding of Esther and *The Bell Jar*. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, society had developed an ambiguous image of what women's role really was. Plath appears to be underlining the importance of not downplaying the frustrating and destructive effect that this hypocrisy had on women. Esther struggles with the impossible choice between her individuality and her ambition versus the encompassing societal norm of marriage.

Manifestations of Paralysis in The Bell Jar

Esther's paralysis in *The Bell Jar* takes on strong forms on several levels all relating to what Esther herself sees as important aspects of her femininity, like sexuality and food (feeding, weight). Already from one of the first pages of the novel, her feeling of paralysis is made apparent to the reader:

> Only I wasn't steering anything, not even myself. I just bumped from my hotel to work and to parties and from parties to my hotel and back to work like a numb trolley-bus. I guess I should have been 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 hullabaloo. (Plath, 1963:2-3)

Unlike how she perceives many of the other girls to be, Esther is not satisfied with the thought of going to college with the sole purpose to find a husband and then start a completely different life as someone's wife. The most evident issue in the surface structure of the novel, which is also the argument brought forth by Friedan, is the pretence of academic ambition that is introduced to young women. The real function of college in *The Bell Jar,* and what Plath mentions in her own diary (see Plath on marriage, 2000:21,88,93), is to find a suitable husband and resign to a life within the home. Rebecca Myers-Spiers (1999) writes about her own encounter with a mental institution as a teenager, expecting to meet understanding and constructive treatment, "But one thing that never crossed my mind is that I would [l]ose all identity, personality, and control over my life once I stepped through those doors" (Myers-Spiers, 1999:6). Treatment of the mentally ill is of special concern in *The Bell Jar*, as the hospital Esther is committed into comes to represent the oppression of patriarchal society. The electric shock therapy represents death to Esther, the death of her individuality being replaced by conformity. The physical aspect of electric shock therapy that summons paralysis in a literal form is significant in relation to Esther's loss of control.

Patriarchal control has a very physical presence in *The Bell Jar* shown through severe physical effects on Esther's body. One of the first instances of physical injury is when she goes skiing with Buddy Willard and he persuades her to ski downhill towards him. The skiing scene appears to contain several metaphors, among others some sort of sexual innuendo that

portrays both patriarchal force as well as sexual predatory males as Buddy tells Esther exactly what to do and she automatically obeys:

> It never occurred to me to say no.
> I wrapped my fingers around the rough, bruising snake of a rope that slithered through them, and went up.
> But the rope dragged me, wobbling and balancing, so rapidly I couldn't hope to dissociate myself from it half-way. There was a skier in front of me and a skier behind me, and I'd have been knocked over and stuck full of skis and poles the minute I let go, and I didn't want to make trouble, so I hung quietly on. (92)

Not daring to disobey and not wanting to cause any disturbance in the system, she hangs quietly on to the top of the hill. If she veers from the path her future is unsafe not guaranteed. As she reaches the top, it might be the thought that she might die that brings her the motivation needed to ski downhill towards Buddy:

> The thought that I might kill myself formed in my mind coolly as a tree or a flower. I measured the distance to Buddy with my eye. […] Edging to the rim of the hilltop, I dug the spikes of my poles into the snow and pushed myself into a flight I knew I couldn't stop by skill or any belated access of will. (92-93)

The beauty she sees in death derives from the felt certainty of it being the only way to avoid skiing right into the arms of Buddy. Esther pushes herself of the edge of the slope knowing that she is unable to stop at will nor by skill. The thrill of having no control but at the same time being responsible for her own agency brings her an unprecedented happiness and a rush of adrenaline. Her aim is set on the bright end of the hill, the scenery passing her like the insides of a tunnel summons up an image of death.

Still, Esther does not die but falls and breaks her leg, which somehow appears to please Buddy:

> A dispassionate white sun shone at the summit of the sky. I wanted to hone myself on it till I grew saintly and thin and essential as the blade of a knife.
> 'I'm going up,' I said. 'I'm going to do it again.'
> 'No, you're not.'
> A queer, satisfied expression came over Buddy's face.
> 'No, you're not,' he repeated with a final smile. 'Your leg's broken in two places. You'll be stuck in a cast for months.' (94)

Esther's attempt at gaining agency, possibly also attempted suicide fails, and becoming physically incapacitated and paralysed is her punishment. Buddy is pleased by her injury, possibly hoping for her to be more reliant and dependent on him. As time goes on it gets increasingly difficult for Esther to perform any kind of physical task:

> It was becoming more and more difficult for me to decide to do anything in those last days. When I eventually *did* decide to do something, such as packing a suitcase, I only dragged all my grubby, expensive clothes out of the bureau and the closet and spread them on the chairs and the bed and the floor and then sat and stared at them, utterly perplexed. (100)

Each round of electric shock treatment is also a punishment for Esther although she unable to grasp what she has done wrong. Society is correcting her behaviour and lack of conformity and making her into a passive, but cooperative citizen. She grows increasingly apathetic and loses the ability to act. Both Doctor Gordon and Esther's mother seems to believe that depression is something she has chosen deliberately and is therefore also something she can decide to be or not. Esther is assigned agency that she does not have and is ultimately denied any chance of getting better.

After her first session, Esther states that she does not want to go back to that hospital again and her mother happily interprets her statement as Esther deciding to be all right and that mental illness is only for a certain kind of people:

> ‘I’m through with Doctor Gordon,’ I said, after we had left Dodo and her black wagon behind the pines. ‘You can call him up and tell him I’m not coming next week.’ My mother smiled. ‘I knew my baby wasn’t like that.’ I looked at her. ‘Like what?’ ‘Like those awful people at that hospital.’ She paused. ‘I knew you would decide to be all right again.’ (140)

Esther feels time closing in on her and that the time for making important decisions is nearer than ever. Unlike all her scholarship friends who appear to have clear ideas of what they want to do later in life, Esther finds it impossible to choose. The contrast between her friends Doreen and Betsy represents different ends of the “feminine scale”. While the innocent Betsy imagines herself as becoming a farmer’s wife, the rebellious Doreen has no particular idea of what to do in the future (Plath, 1963:100). Esther holds the middle ground between the two, just as she imagines herself sleeping underneath the fig tree, the meeting point of two lovers (52). Living under the illusion of having different choices seems to be more devastating to Esther than if she was unaware of the opportunities. Esther symbolically holding the middle ground is important on several levels, relating also the transitional period of the fifties mentioned above. Constantly existing in the middle, in some sort of personal limbo, Esther is torn between opportunities she can envision but not grasp.

Her paralysis seems to reach its peak when she returns back home for the summer and declines the offer from her friend Jody to move to Cambridge. Despaired over the fact that she was not admitted to the writing course she had applied to, Esther is uncertain of what to do next and unable to make any decisions. After she has told Jody to give her place in the apartment at Cambridge and hung up, she changes her mind but does not manage to make herself pick up the phone and call back. She is not responding physically to her own intentions of reaching out her arm towards the receiver to call Jody back. The first morning after her return back home, she is woken up by the sound of a stroller outside her bedroom window. A woman from her neighbourhood is outside, pushing a pram while the older children are clinging to her skirt. Esther is reminded of what she now is starting to perceive as an unavoidable future of marriage and children that is quite literally closing in on her. She phones the admittance office of summer school and cancels all her arrangements as well as

declining to sign up for other classes. However, it cannot be said that Esther herself is controlling her actions. She "listened to the zombie voice leaving a message that Miss Esther Greenwood was cancelling all arrangements to come to summer school" (115) and appears to be no longer in control of her own actions.

During Esther's sessions with doctor Gordon, he asks her condescendingly what she "thinks is wrong" (124), without acknowledging that her depression is real. The darkest part of her depression and paralysis is arrived at when Esther loses the ability to read and write. Her individuality as well as all her hopes for the future lies in her ambition to become a poet. Language is freedom to Esther and as E. Miller Budick writes in "The Feminist Discourse of Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar" (1987), Plath uses language to front the feminist cause (Budick, 1987:872-73). After arriving back home, it is not only her artistic vein that disappears but also the basic skill of reading and writing. She is unable to write her thesis, her novel and even to write a letter to Doreen. Her mother trying to persuade her to learn shorthand, which would mean not using words and letters at all, implies yet another step away from Esther's ambition and individuality. It also hints at Esther not wanting "to serve men in any way" (72), as shorthand would mean taking down the words of others, most likely the words of men. As Budick argues in his article, language represents femininity and feminism in *The Bell Jar*, while other mathematical subjects like chemistry and physics represents male dominance and patriarchal control. Esther describes how she loathes subjects at her college like chemistry, maths and physics mostly because it reduces language to numbers, letters and signs. Every time she attended physics class, her "mind went dead" (32), her body responding with an almost physical reluctance to mathematical subjects. Misogyny is visible through her professor Mr Manzi using a book he has written specifically to teach physics to college girls (32). Mr Manzi writes "scorpion-lettered formulas" on the blackboard with his "special red chalk" (33), producing images of the male predator and, as Budick writes:

> And like the "scorpion" shape of Mr. Manzi's letters (and later the "mosquito" sound of his voice), their potency is phallic, a sting that may not impregnate but wound (Mr. Manzi writes with "special red chalk," associating his writing with blood and perhaps foreshadowing Esther's haemorrhage after her first sexual encounter) (Budick, 1987:874).

Her hatred for Natural science and mathematics is also reflected in the title of the novel. A bell jar is used in natural science for the close study of an object and for the preservation of it. Esther feels like an object of science, something that is of interest but that is not considered as an individual. For the female gender, it would mean the objectification of women and their exclusion from decision-making in relation to their own lives. For Esther, the bell jar is representative of her depression and paralysis as being physically restricted from having agency.

Sexual Morality and the Sting of Patriarchy

Sex and sexuality is one of the major themes in *The Bell Jar*. Esther appears to be very self-conscious and aware of the unfair structure of society. Paralysis stands in clear context to predatory males and oppression of female agency. Esther feels incapacitated from the moment she arrives New York and feels out of control. The feeling of paralysis is partially stemming from the fact that she does not know how she should behave or what she should want. Seen in relation to sexual morality, Doreen and Betsy might be seen as the most important representatives of two extremes to Esther. Doreen is the sensual, beautiful and sexual. She is also very seductive and persuasive when it comes to talking Esther into doing things she knows she should not do:

> I guess one of my troubles was Doreen. I'd never known a girl like Doreen before. Doreen came from a society girls' college down South and had bright white hair standing out in a cotton fluff round her head and blue eyes like transparent agate marbles, hard and polished and just about indestructible, and a mouth set in a sort of perpetual sneer. I don't mean a nasty sneer, but an amused, mysterious sneer, as if all the people around her were pretty silly and she could tell some good jokes on them if she wanted to. (4)

Doreen represents the forbidden but nonetheless a culturally created image of a woman as a sexual object. For one, she is always convincing Esther to follow her instead of being with the rest of the group. This makes Esther feel isolated when she decides that she wants nothing more to do with Doreen. Secondly, Esther's description of Doreen's nightgown brings allusions to electricity or electric shock, the one thing that frightens Esther the most:

> That was another thing – the rest of us had starched cotton summer nighties and quilted housecoats, or maybe terry-towel robes that doubled as beachcoats, but Doreen wore these full-length nylon and lace jobs you could half see through, and dressing-gowns the colour of sin, that stuck to her by some kind of electricity. (5)

Doreen also functions as a signifier of Esther's sexuality and sensuality, forbidden feelings for women and therefore frightening as well as intriguing at the same time. Doreen is false in the way she conducts herself around other people, and especially men. *The Bell Jar* is set in a world of advertising and Doreen is representative of one end of the scale of femininity, the advertised portrayal of women as attractive and sensual but also as passive. Agency and action is the destroyer of femininity as well as of the power balance between the genders. This is proven through Doreen who appears to be strong and independent, but who becomes all the more different when interacting with men. In the scene where the two of them are sitting in a cab on their way to an event, a man in cowboy boots approaches them. Esther is surprised by the change in Doreen's behaviour:

> 'And what, may I ask, are two nice girls like you doing all alone in a cab on a nice day like this?' He had a big, wide, tooth-paste-ad smile. 'We're on our way to a party,' I blurted, since Doreen had gone suddenly dumb as a post and was fiddling in a blasé way with her white lace pocket-book cover. (8)

What this scene illustrates, is that women may be approached at any time, and Doreen has the "expected" feminine reaction to the advances of a man. Sex and sexuality are both dirty words in the society depicted in *The Bell Jar*, and there appears to be some sort of natural punishment for being a woman in touch with her sexuality. After her sexual debut, Esther is haemorrhaging in her abdomen. She appears to believe at some level that she is being punished for having premarital sex and this works as another step towards her breakdown.

She has yet again been punished for her agency and been strictly corrected for attempting to break out of the old gender-structure. Irwin, the man she sleeps with, is a professor of mathematics, the very subject Esther hates. Esther's sexual debut brings to mind her physics professor Mr Manzi and the sharp scorpion-like sting of formulas and letters on the blackboard. While Esther expects an almost magical transformation within herself to happen, she is surprised by the unforeseen sensation: "[…] all I felt was a sharp, startlingly bad pain. 'It hurts,' I said. 'Is it supposed to hurt?' Irwin didn't say anything. Then he said, 'Sometimes it hurts.'"(218). One could say that she has been metaphorically stung by patriarchy and starts haemorrhaging as punishment for her disobedience.

At a party Doreen brings her to, Esther meets Marco. Or rather, she is dealt *to* Marco who she describes as "the woman hater" (102). He clearly shows his distaste for women and mistreats Esther the whole evening without her being able to do anything about it. She must simply deal with what she realises is a reality for women. As he throws her to the ground and tries to rape her, Esther is faced directly with the obstacle of paralysis and thinks to herself that "If I just lie here and do nothing it will happen." (104). The moment when he calls her a slut, Esther regains her strength and is able to get out from underneath him. However, there appears to be a moment there where Esther contemplates the option of just letting "it" happen. Her sexuality as well as her relationship to sex is shaped by the misogyny of society. For women like Esther, sex is something that is done to them, almost a passive act of submission. This is illustrated through Esther's own encounters with sexuality. Her unfortunate experiences just goes to show the prevailing forces of misogynistic society punishing women for claiming agency.

Food and Weight: Paralysis and Control in *The Bell Jar*

> I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig-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 all the rest. (Plath, 1963:73)

While thinking about her future and her options in life, Esther imagines these to be figs growing on a tree. Her future imagined as food represents the element of control that is most important to her. Wanting to have (eat) them all but not being able to implies Esther's loss of control over her choices and her future.

As Caroline J. Smith argues (2010), Esther is always metaphorically hungry (3). She is hungry for everything she knows she cannot have if she gets married and follow the rules of patriarchy. Esther hungers for an education and an independent life of experience while her mental health is weighed down by the culturally created limitations for her gender. She is also always physically hungry, greedily wanting to claim as much good food for herself as possible. Always extremely preoccupied with food, it also becomes her focus at the *Ladies' Day* banquet:

> I had bowed my head and secretly eyed the position of the bowls of caviar. One bowl was set strategically between me and Doreen's empty chair. I figured the girl across from me couldn't reach it because of the mountainous centrepiece of marzipan fruit, and Betsy, on my right, would be too nice to ask me to share it with her if I just kept it out of the way with my elbow by my bread-and-butter plate. Besides, another bowl of caviar sat a little way to the right of the girl next to Betsy, and she could eat that. (24)

Food is to Esther the possibility of having it all and not having to make a choice. She also makes a point out of mentioning that she can eat however much she wants and whatever she wants without gaining any weight (with one exception, hinting at her future hospitalization) (22). Esther wanting to control food reflects her wish to break the rules set up by society and the area of food and feeding appears to be the only one where she is able to do so. Her stagnant weight also works as a signifier for her paralysis. However much she tries to control and consume, her position does not change. This is not to say that Esther wishes to put on

weight, which does not appear to be the case. The inability to gain weight remains a part of her paralysis without her being conscious of it. Later on, she encounters an overweight friend of Buddy Willard that awakens her disgust, and some time after that she discovers that Buddy has gained weight during his treatment for tuberculosis. The transformability in the male body in contrast to the female only goes to show the importance of male agency in terms of patriarchal control. Male agency in contrast to female passivity or paralysis is made visible through Esther's inability to change anything through the only medium she knows how to control, namely food. Remembering her grandfather who worked at a country club brings back good memories for Esther, and she specifically remembers his playful promise to give her all the caviar she could eat (24). Although this is a positive memory for Esther, it still implies patriarchal control through the allowance of food if she complies with the social structure.

Weight in relation to food is an important aspect to Esther in terms of the image she has of herself. In the skiing-episode where she falls and breaks her leg, she wishes to lie still in the sun and becoming "saintly and thin and essential as the blade of a knife." (94) Esther combines the imagery of being skinny and that of being her true self. Being thin equals peace within herself and control over her life. At the hospital, food is no longer about enjoyment for Esther but rather about survival. Loss of appetite but still feeling the need to eat and control her food is one of the only things Esther still cares for. Esther starts gaining weight for the first time in ten years after she is transferred to a different hospital and regularly injected with insulin as part of her treatment. Her body starts reminding her of pregnancy, possibly hinting at her recovery towards being "all right" again:

> Just grew fatter and fatter. Already filled in the too-big clothes my mother had bought, and when I peered down at my plump stomach and my broad hips I thought it was a good thing Mrs Guinea hadn't seen me like this, because I looked just as if I were going to have a baby. (184)

Getting married and having children does not at any point appear to be neither a positive image to Esther nor something she is planning to do. Esther's weight is working against her and her body is being forced towards being "all right" while her mind remains the same.

While at the hospital, food becomes the signifier of hope and progress, seeing as those receiving electroshock does not get his or her breakfast at the same time as everyone else. The morning where Esther does not receive her breakfast, she panics knowing that her doctor has betrayed her. That morning is when she receives her first electric shock treatment at the new hospital. At first she refuses, hides and gets very upset about the broken promise of her doctor who had promised to inform Esther if she was about to receive electroshock. In the end, she submits; hope being gone as well as her food. Not surprisingly, food and weight is related to Esther and society's image of femininity and the feminine ideal. Gary M. Leonard (1992) argues that Esther's fight against the feminization of her desires is what leads to her breakdown and attempted suicide. He mentions the photoshoot-scene at *Ladies Day* where the girls are photographed portraying what they want for their future. As Esther mentions her wish to become a poet, Jay Cee cuts off a single rose from her own hat and gives it to Esther. Esther starting to cry uncontrollably is according to Leonard a sign of her rejection of the feminization of her dreams and ambitions (63-64). Afterwards, she picks up her compact mirror and starts to apply makeup, her face reminding her of someone "peering from the grating of a prison cell after a prolonged beating" (98) implying her realization that there is no way out for her. As Leonard's article implies, Esther's body might be her worst enemy. Eating as much as she wants without gaining weight, trying to cover up her face in makeup without being able to hide her sorrow and the fact that she has to "ambush" her body in order to commit suicide:

> But each time I would get the cord so tight I could feel a rushing in my ears and a flush of blood in my face my hands would weaken and let go, and I would be all right again. Then I saw that my body had all sorts of little tricks, such as making my hands go limp at the crucial second, which would save it, time and again, whereas if I had the whole say, I would be dead in a flash.
> I would simply have to ambush it with whatever sense I had left, or it would trap me in its stupid cage for fifty years without any sense at all. (152-53)

Esther is fighting a battle against her own body. Her body apparently wanting to conform and be the feminine ideal and holding Esther captive. After her return back home from New York Esther is again, according to Leonard, trying to rebel against her feminine body by not showering, washing her hair or changing her clothes (67). In terms of paralysis, one might say that Esther has quite a lot of agency at times but for the most part, her protest is still passive.

First, she is attempting to gain as much agency as possible in order to free herself. Taking several college classes, getting straight A's and eating as much as possible when possible. Later on, her protest transforms into the stagnant and passive form mentioned above. Neglecting her personal hygiene as well as losing the ability to read and write.

Electricity and Electroshock: Death and Treatment

On the first page of the novel Esther is thinking about the electrocution of the Rosenbergs and how the thought of electrocution scares her:

> I'm stupid about executions. The idea of being electrocuted makes me sick, and that's all there was to read in the papers […] It had nothing to do with me, but I couldn't help wondering what it would be like, being burned alive all along your nerves. (Plath, 1963:1)

Being written in hindsight of her experience with electric shock therapy, one can imagine that her associations comes from while she appears to either be in denial or have repressed the memories of her own experience.

There are several images of death in relation to electric shock and paralysis throughout. On the first page of the novel, the obvious link between death and electric shock is Esther thinking about the execution of the Rosenbergs that happened the same summer as she had her breakdown. Electrocution is the equivalent of death and danger to Esther. The electricity connected to Doreen's being is therefore a signifier of danger; of something forbidden, that Esther knows to be bad. Driving to and from her first session of electrotherapy, their neighbour Dodo is driving Esther and her mother in her black car. The car carries an obvious resemblance to that of a hearse with its black upholstery and black exterior (140). The strong symbolism of the hearse-like car driving Esther to and from her electric shock treatment emphasises Esther's own associations to electricity. Electricity also symbolises the death of individuality in *The Bell Jar*. Already from the beginning, Esther fears electricity, or getting electric shock because she knows it means death. It is something that exposes people unwillingly to a physical punishment that either has a lethal outcome or alters the brain permanently.

Lisa Appignanesi (2009) writes that electricity was used as treatment for mental illness from the nineteenth century. Initially it was used as part of an experimental process in order to provoke the symptoms of hysteria in the patient before it became considered a treatment for mental illness (136). Electricity therefore functions as an important element in relation to Esther's depression and paralysis. Rather than actually being a treatment for depression, it is in reality a way to conform women like Esther. The ambiguity shaping within the society depicted in *The Bell Jar* is also reflected in the fact that electricity, which represents modernity, is used against "modern women" like Esther to maintain traditional gender roles. It is also interesting to note what Katherine Weiss writes in the article "Sophie Treadwell's "Machinal": Electrifying the Female Body" (2006), that the electric chair was invented roughly at the same time as electric shock therapy became a popular treatment for mental illness in the late nineteenth century (Weiss, 2006:8-9). Electric shock therapy was used in some cases to release women's "excessive pent up energy" (9). Esther's treatment with electric shock therapy could therefore be interpreted as a direct way of draining her of agency where conforming equals being paralysed/passive.

Finally yet importantly in the context of electricity and modernity, it seems central to mention Esther's last name being Greenwood. Wood being something that does not lead electricity might symbolise the fact that Esther, and women in general are not compatible with patriarchal control and misogynistic society. This, in addition to her fondness for botany might hint at the feminine ideal of women being related to nature, coexisting with the natural elements and therefore feeling all the more estranged from culturally created forces. The theme of electricity would be considered as part of the natural sciences, the subject Esther hates above all others. Her dislike of subjects like physics and chemistry might be foreshadowing her electric shock treatment and patriarchy using science to oppress women. It therefore becomes not only a physical force but also one that has severe mental impact. One might say that it is the electric shock therapy that confines Esther within the bell jar. The fact that she has gotten married and had a baby implies that she stays within the confinements of patriarchal control for the rest of her life, lost to herself. The presence of electricity throughout the novel represents the scope of patriarchal control that is always lurking at the edges. Esther's fear of electricity, both in the context of the capital punishment of the Rosenbergs (1), the forbidden sensuality of Doreen (5) and later her own electroshock-treatments represents her paralysis and trauma.

Life Within the Bell Jar: The Fate of Esther Greenwood

The message of *The Bell Jar* remains an important one to this day. Esther loses in the end and takes us back to the beginning of the novel where she has a baby to whom she donates her last memorabilia from the days before her illness. Esther's battle against society is over and she remains within the bubble of patriarchal control where she is a passive and emotionally distant image of femininity. Her youthful ambitions to become a poet and of self-realization are destroyed by the force of conformity created by society. Her breakdown is the signifier of her rebellion but also of her failure. Being hospitalized, she is first broken down by her food being supervised and her gaining weight. Both implies that control has been completely removed from Esther and she is ready to be rebuilt as a wife and mother.

The novel asks the question of how it is possible for patriarchal society to remain in control over women's lives and bodies in the way it does and continues to do without any serious questions being asked, mostly by women themselves. Esther struggles to remain in control of her own agency but is repeatedly punished by society, resulting in psychological strain gaining a physical reality. Controlling simple but important elements like food and additional physical treatment of the body like electric shock and isolation has an enormous effect on Esther and is part of the forceful conforming of women resisting misogyny. The moral of Esther's story is that female agency is always punished. She is chastised for attempting to take control over her own actions, even if it is an attempt to commit suicide. The basic choice of life itself is taken away from Esther and she is instead being forces into conformity and to performing her female duties as a wife and mother.

Marriage is one of the main themes of the novel and remains the sign of defeat until the end. Already from the first pages of *The Bell Jar*, the reader knows that Esther loses in the end. It signifies the hopelessness of women's situation in patriarchal society. The forceful pressure created between both genders contributes to the continued limitation and the symbolic imprisonment of women. One might divide Esther into two different pieces, one before her electric shock treatment and one after. Before her treatment, she is full of ambition, desperation and decisiveness. She is determined not to get married because she knows what it would mean to her individuality. The Electric shock treatment she receives can be interpreted almost as a brainwashing to insure her paralysis. If one assumes the control over treatment of the mentally ill lies with patriarchy, electroshock may be considered as patriarchy's way of ensuring cooperativeness and conformity.

The importance of symbolism and metaphors is something that should not be underestimated in *The Bell Jar*. From the title being an image of mental illness to language being representative of the female body, the novel contains plenty of important feminist messages. Electricity, like in both *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Machinal* is also here elementary for the understanding of paralysis in the protagonist. Electricity as a force of patriarchy used against women as a weapon to edify conformity is one of the most powerful messages in *The Bell Jar* and remains as a red thread throughout the novel.

Food and weight is another important element of individual control. From being the only element that she can control completely by herself to becoming yet another element of control exercised on her. Her weight remaining static might also work as a signifier of her paralysis. Esther believes that she is in control over food and feeding, while in reality this is also out of her control. The fact that there are several overweight male characters in the novel emphasises the male agency and the female passivity. Buddy Willard being able to both gain and lose weight implies patriarchal control.

Paralysis in *The Bell Jar* is visible through Esther's continued attempts at gaining agency. The severe physical punishment she receives after each attempt is gradually forcing her into a passive state. Breaking her leg skiing and haemorrhaging after her sexual debut are among the most visible signs of patriarchal control in the novel. Esther giving up is the outcome of the story and she relapses into a state of paralysis, which is considered as being "all right". Neurotic is the term used in the novel to describe Esther's frustration with the impossibility of having the freedom to choose more than one option in life:

> 'Neurotic, ha!' I let out a scornful laugh. 'If neurotic is wanting two mutually exclusive things at one and the same time, then I'm neurotic as hell. I'll be flying back and forth between one mutually exclusive thing and another for the rest of my days.' (89-90)

Conclusion

The three literary works that have been examined here all use the concept of female paralysis to express symptoms of the oppression of women in patriarchal society. In Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway,* paralysis is represented in relation to certain Victorian elements. These are subtle but essential elements like the inside of the Dalloway house and electricity (or the lack thereof) as well as Clarissa's contrasted state of mind within and outside the house which proves her lack of agency. In Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal*, paralysis is represented through the character of Helen Jones and her increasing inability to act. Her loss of speech and ability to perform basic physical tasks all contribute to the image of a broken woman. Helen is an example of the destructive power of misogynistic society. In Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, paralysis has taken form within a diagnosis of depression. The modern woman of the 1950s, Esther is fighting a battle against her own biology, where her body has come to represent the feminine ideal created by patriarchal society. Paralysis in *The Bell Jar* represents a more direct opposition to oppression than in the first two literary works. Esther is more deliberately fighting against the conformity of patriarchal society by refusing to act. Neglecting personal hygiene and losing the ability to perform her two biggest passions in life, namely to read and write, goes to show that her mind is in opposition against her body.

In the introduction to this thesis, I set out to examine these literary works and their representations of female paralysis in relation to oppression of women. *Mrs. Dalloway, Machinal* and *The Bell Jar* together span over 30 years of history and it has therefore been important to observe the cases of paralysis in all three works and to examine them according to their historical and cultural context. The conclusion of this thesis will be dedicated to the discussion of similarities and differences in the representations of paralysis in the three female characters.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Victorianism has a looming presence in the Dalloway home as well as within Clarissa herself. Victorianism in *Mrs. Dalloway* is not representative of the period in itself but rather by the moral and sexual values popularized at the time of Queen Victoria's reign. It represents a patriarchal system of oppressive values and traditions that continue to linger well into the twentieth century. Modernist writers used this in order to convey a message of resistance against misogynistic ideals use a cultural construct that similar to the feminist use of hysteria. Clarissa feels a distance to the world around her, but also to her inner self. She is resisting not only the outer pressure on women to be the feminine ideal, but also an element within herself that I suggest is best described as Victorianism. Her attic is

representative of repressed emotions and thoughts, and keeps her bound to a life in which she is not comfortable. Clarissa does not feel at home in her house nor in her own body, and therefore represents the alienating effect that patriarchal society has on women.

In *Machinal*, published only three years after *Mrs. Dalloway*, paralysis takes on a more physical form than it does within Clarissa Dalloway. Helen Jones feels incapacitated by the overwhelming idea that she is meant to spend her life in unhappiness. The physical dimension of paralysis is portrayed through Helen's inability to perform simple everyday tasks. Traditional perceptions of hysteria entails the element of irrationality as something innate in women, and Helen appears as both irrational and hysterical to the people around her. Being utterly victimized by society brings her no sympathy or mercy when Helen in the end receives society's punishment for attempting to gain agency. Helen's passivity represents resistance towards patriarchal society and the act of killing her husband is her attempt to be free. Being confined and punished by society reflects hopelessness in women's situation at the time the play was published. *Machinal* depicts a society that feels threatened by the disobedient female, trying to demonize her by masculinizing her agency, as in the case of Ruth Snyder. Agency being considered as an unfeminine trait is visible through the brutal way Helen chooses to murder her husband, as opposed to how other murder methods might be considered to be more "feminine". Helen's single act during the play of killing her husband with a glass bottle is therefore representative of how women's agency is attacked and punished by society.

In *The Bell Jar,* unhappiness and paralysis has been assigned a diagnosis and a treatment. Esther Greenwood is exposed to the pressure on women of her generation to be "everything" and the hypocrisy of society, sending out mixed messages to women. Still, while Esther attempts to achieve everything, from perfect grades to having a date every Saturday night, she is denied having any real control over her life which ultimately leads to her depression. Esther's frustration over the inequality between the genders leads to her paralysis, ultimately being unable to do what she loves the most, namely writing. Her dreams of becoming a poet are struck down by society's expectations of what a woman is supposed to be Similar to *Machinal*, Esther's attempt of gaining agency and control is also punished, only in Esther's case her body is what is punishing her. Like Helen, Esther's resistance towards patriarchy leads to her being treated as something broken that has to be reprogrammed in order to fill her function in society.

Misogyny is so deeply set in the societies portrayed in *Mrs. Dalloway, Machinal and The Bell Jar* that female agency is not rewarded with freedom, but rather with more restraints and even death. The question of freedom from oppression is largely one of sexuality. For Clarissa, it is the unanswered question of her sexual orientation. Lesbian or not, she does not have the option to choose her own way. Helen is chosen by a much older man, and feels obligated to marry him because of his economic power, which she needs to support herself and her mother. She dreams of marrying someone for love and of having children with curly hair, neither of which she can obtain within a society where gender and power correlates. For Esther it is about women's sexuality being equal to men's, not being ruled by puritan sexual norms that are one-sided. She is nonetheless punished for stepping out of bounds by hemorrhaging after her sexual debut.

While both Clarissa and Esther contemplate suicide, Esther is the only one out of the two who actually attempts to end her own life. Interestingly enough, Helen is the only one who dies in the end, her life being the last thing that is forcefully taken away from her. Caroline Smith at one point argues that Esther's anxiety stems from her fear of being deemed unacceptable by other women because of her inability to perform "feminine" tasks like cooking (Smith, 2010:12). In my opinion, this kind of anxiety could also be ascribed to Clarissa and Helen. In this sense, the lives of Clarissa, Helen and Esther are about observing and being observed, and being found wanting. Margaret Blanchard writes that women's economic dependence on first their fathers and later their husbands makes them dependent on men's attitudes and values (Blanchard, 1972:288), meaning that Clarissa, Helen and Esther are representative of women resisting a system based on patriarchal objectification of women. As mentioned earlier in the article by Caroline Smith about women's magazines in the 1950s, these magazines were also coloured by ambiguity in relation to women's supposed roles versus their individual opportunities. *Mrs. Dalloway, Machinal* and *The Bell Jar* are about the struggle of women caught in a system of male values. Blanchard's article presents the possibility that female neurosis has its basis in women's dependency on men, and that disagreeing with the male set of values and interests would be to threaten their own financial security (Blanchard, 1972:288).

In spite of clear differences between the literary works discussed here and their treatment of paralysis, certain motifs, elements and themes, recur in all three. Electricity is a central element in the literary works discussed in this thesis. It represents a patriarchal force that has a constant presence in the lives of Clarissa, Helen and Esther. To Clarissa it represents the past, old traditions and Victorianism holding her back and forcing her to exist

within the frames of patriarchy. To Helen it is the final submission, a freedom granted her only through society's force. To Esther, electricity represents a combination of images of death, sexuality and of conformity. While Clarissa's lack of electricity represents her being "held back" in a past with old ideals and traditions, electricity represents modernity and the coming of the twentieth century. Modernity itself entails various changes in the role of women in society and in *Machinal* and *The Bell Jar,* electricity represents capital punishment as well as the sanction of society. Electricity ultimately represents coercion and oppression in its physical form and influences the lives of all three female characters discussed here.

Language is another important element in all three literary works in relation to oppression. Silencing the voices of women in order to keep them under the restraints of patriarchal control is essential to the understanding of modernist writing and to the literary works discussed in this thesis. Clarissa's voice exists only in her mind, letting her thoughts run free only in the privacy of her attic room. Helen's paralysis renders her unable to express herself, to be heard and to be understood. For Esther it is, as mentioned earlier, the loss of the ability to perform her art of choice. She is at first unable to compose full written sentences which later develops to her being unable to write simple words or letters. All three of the characters' issues with language works as a metaphor for the muting of women's voices.

However, the literary works that have been at the centre of this thesis are in themselves representative of women reclaiming a voice of their own and using it to portray the result of oppression. These works represent the gendered battle between women and the "patriarchal machine" (Weiss, 2006:11). All three characters end up submitting in one way or another. Clarissa, maybe intended to die, goes on living. Helen resumes her battle time and again after being forced to submit and breaks down after the final humiliation of having her hair shaved off. Esther submits to electric shock therapy and becomes "all right" again. Common for all three women is their perception of death being the release of oppression and paralysis. The final sting of patriarchy though, is that while death is forced on Helen, it is likewise denied to Clarissa and Esther. Clarissa Dalloway, Helen Jones and Esther Greenwood embody paralysis as both a physical and mental resistance against the restrictions of women's personal freedom. Consequently, I would argue that the literary representation of female paralysis is an important and powerful tool against the unequal gendered divide in society. Modernism and feminism working together to create a new generation of female literary characters whose symptoms of oppression are made visible by their minds and bodies refusing to conform. The irony of each one depicting a female character who has lost her voice used in order to regain the female voice is what makes each one of these authors

invaluable to the feminist cause in literature. The voices of paralysis are silent in *Mrs. Dalloway, Machinal and The Bell Jar*, but their message is to be read loud and clear.

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