

**THE DARK DOMAIN OF TWENTIETH CENTURY LITTERATEURS' SUICIDES:
A STUDY OF THE SELECT WORKS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF, ERNEST
HEMINGWAY, SYLVIA PLATH AND ANNE SEXTON**

(Thesis submitted to Nagaland University in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award
of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English)

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DECLARATION

I, **Rossy Kiho**, do hereby declare that the thesis entitled *The Dark Domain of Twentieth Century Litterateurs' Suicides: A Study of the Select Works of Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton* submitted to Nagaland University for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is my original work and the same has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree.

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She has successfully completed her research work within the stipulated time and the thesis is the outcome of her original investigation conducted during the period of her research.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At the outset, I thank the Almighty for the wisdom, strength and comfort showered on me during the course of my research and the subsequent successful completion of this thesis.

I would like to say a very big thank you to my supervisor Dr. I. Talisenla Imsong for the constant guidance, encouragement and dedication during the whole of my research work.

My deep appreciation goes out to the faculty of the Department of English, Nagaland University, for their support and assistance in the course of my study. I am also grateful to the evaluation team of my pre-submission seminar for the valuable inputs which were given to me.

I gratefully acknowledge my family and dear ones who supported me in every area throughout my research undertaking. I sincerely thank my friends with big hearts who were there always to support and help me.

Rossy Kiho

REFERENCE ABBREVIATIONS

1. <i>A Farewell to Arms</i>	: <i>FTA</i>
2. <i>Across the River and into the Trees</i>	: <i>ATRT</i>
3. <i>A Moveable Feast</i>	: <i>AMF</i>
4. <i>Death in the Afternoon</i>	: <i>DA</i>
5. <i>For Whom the Bell Tolls</i>	: <i>FWBT</i>
6. <i>Islands in the Stream</i>	: <i>ITS</i>
7. <i>The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway</i>	: <i>TCSSEH</i>
8. <i>The Essential Hemingway</i>	: <i>TEH</i>
9. <i>The Garden of Eden</i>	: <i>TGE</i>
10. <i>The Old Man and the Sea</i>	: <i>OMTS</i>
11. <i>Letters Home: Correspondence 1950-1963</i>	: <i>LH</i>
12. <i>The Colossus</i>	: <i>TC</i>
13. <i>The Collected Poems</i>	: <i>TCP</i>
14. <i>The Bell Jar</i>	: <i>BJ</i>
15. <i>Winter Trees</i>	: <i>WT</i>
16. <i>The Complete Poems</i>	: <i>CP</i>
17. <i>Jacob's Room</i>	: <i>JR</i>
18. <i>Mrs Dalloway</i>	: <i>MD</i>
19. <i>To the Lighthouse</i>	: <i>TL</i>
20. <i>The Voyage Out</i>	: <i>TVO</i>
21. <i>Selected Works of Virginia Woolf</i>	: <i>SWVW</i>

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Life and Works of Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway, Sylvia Plath and Anne

Sexton

This chapter deals with the life and works of Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. These four brilliant writers belong to the modern literary frame. While their works and their brilliance in executing them are appealing, there is a darker aspect in their personal lives attached to it which cast a shadow. Each of them had their own share of problems: battling mental illness, trauma and depression, and this was deepened by deeper personal problems from which they failed to come out and they all tragically took their own lives. While the main task of the study is to delve into the dark domain of their works, it was felt that a biographical study was first necessary. Thus, this chapter seeks to focus on their biographical details: their personal lives, their works, problems which became their personal demons, and trace the circumstances which led to the ultimate crisis of taking their own lives.

1.1.1. Virginia Woolf

Virginia Woolf is a major figure in the modernist movement, and an experimenter and innovator in novel writing. She is the author of those literary works which strongly contributed to the creation of the canon of the British modernist literature of the early twentieth century. Virginia Woolf was born Adeline Virginia Stephen in London on 25th January 1882 to Sir Leslie Stephen and his second wife Julia Duckworth, who was at that

time a widow with three children George, Stella and Gerald Duckworth by her first marriage to Herbert Duckworth. Leslie's first wife left behind a mentally retarded daughter named Laura Makepeace Stephen. During this second marriage, Leslie and Juliet had four children- Vanessa, Thoby, Virginia, and Adrian. Virginia's father was a notable historian, eminent literary critic and mountaineer. He was the editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, a work that would influence Virginia Woolf's later experimental biographies. Being a nervous and delicate child, Woolf was educated at home mainly by her parents in their literate and well-connected household at 22 Hyde Park Gate, Kensington. While Woolf received no formal education, she was raised in a cultured and literary atmosphere, learning from her father's extensive library and coming into contact with his friends, who were prominent writers of the era.

The young Virginia Woolf was so sensitive that even a slight disapproval or lack of appreciation by others gave her a severe mental jolt. Woolf inherited many good traits from her father including hard work and abilities as a writer, but she also inherited his pride, atheism and above all, a psychological disorder caused by chronic depression. Virginia's father was a man of strict intellectual honesty and had resigned his professorship at Cambridge University as he was unable to subscribe to the traditional religious faith. In fact, he was a religious sceptic and could even be considered an atheist. In *A Writer's Life*, Lyndall Gordon states that "Virginia was born at a turning-point in her father's career. 1882 was the year of the failure of *The Science of Ethics* in which Leslie Stephen had tried to prove that the 'good' had survival value for society, though not necessarily for the individual" (Gordon 25). His sense of failure made him indifferent to his children even and this could be one of the reasons for her mental breakdown.

Woolf's father's deterioration reached its peak immediately after Julia's death when what Virginia described as an 'Oriental' grief blinded him to his children's right to their own feelings and finally cut him off from their sympathies:

His daughter saw in him 'much of the stuff of a Hebrew prophet', filling the world with the terrible outbursts of woe. Virginia, aged thirteen, stretched out her arms to this man as he came stumbling from Julia's deathbed but he brushed impatiently past. This scene, imprinted for life on her memory, is emblematic of the emotional impasse which was to persist in their relations from 1895 until Leslie Stephen's death in 1904 (Gordon 27).

Chain deaths in Woolf's family had adverse effect on Woolf. Within a decade, Woolf lost four people from her own family. The sudden death of her mother in May 1895, when she was thirteen, was the beginning of Virginia's dark years. The lowest point came in the last months of 1897 with the death of her half-sister Stella, who had taken up the responsibility of the mother, leading to the first of her mental breakdowns. Woolf later "traced her mental fragility to her state of mind in 1897. Her mother's death, she said, had been a latent sorrow, not fully felt" (50). Woolf records in her memoirs regarding the effects of these deaths on her: "I shrink from the years 1897-1904- the seven unhappy years [...] Mother's death: Stella's death. I am not thinking of them. I am thinking of the stupid damage that their deaths inflicted'" (qtd. in Gordon 49). Woolf's helplessness in the face of death crushed her and it would later become a repeated dominating theme in her works. She records how Stella's death forced her emotions into being:

'I remember saying to myself this impossible thing had happened: - as if it were . . . against the law, horrible, as a treachery, a betrayal- the fact of death.

The blow, the second blow of death, struck on me tremulous, creased, sitting with my wings still stuck together, on the broken chrysalis' (50).

In spite of her father's tyrannical nature and demand for sympathy, Virginia still was attached to him and his death in 1904 provoked her most alarming collapse. She had a complete breakdown and was briefly institutionalized: this was the second of her severe breakdowns and she was twenty-two. She spent time recovering at her friend Violet Dickinson's place. That summer she threw herself out of the window but was nursed back within three months: this was her first attempt to commit suicide. The death of her brother Thoby Stephen in November 1906 from typhoid fever had a similar effect on her. She was close to him and his passing away had a tremendous effect on her. The effect was such that he would later be re-imagined as Jacob in her first experimental novel *Jacob's Room* (1922) and later as Percival in *The Waves* (1931).

Modern scholars have suggested that Woolf's breakdowns and subsequent recurring depressive periods were also influenced by the sexual abuse to which she and her sister were subjected by her half-brothers George and Gerald Duckworth which Woolf recalls in her autobiographical essays "A Sketch of the Past" and "22 Hyde Park Gate." When Virginia was barely six years old, Gerald assaulted her sexually. This was followed by George's interference about the time of her mother's death when she was thirteen. Gordon details that his embraces went beyond the "bounds of decency" which he masqueraded as brotherly affections: the "sinister kind of predator, the kind who masquerades as protector" (45). In "A Sketch of the Past" Woolf recalls:

There was a slab outside the dining room for standing dishes upon. Once when I was very small Gerald Duckworth lifted me into this, and as I sat there he began to explore my body. I can remember the feel of his hand going under

my clothes; going firmly and steadily lower and lower. I remember how I hoped that he would stop; how I stiffened and wriggled as his hand approached my private parts. But it did not stop [...] Though I have done my best to explain why I was ashamed of looking at my own face I have only been able to discover some possible reasons; there may be others [...] yet this is a simple incident; and it happened to me personally; and I have no motive for lying about it (*Moments of Being* 69).

Added by them was her being a witness to her father who eyed the next eldest daughter Vanessa after the death of Stella. And according to Woolf, it was Vanessa's cool unresponsiveness which "provoked unprecedented shows of 'violence' from their father" and recalls how she would watch in awe, adding, "Never have I felt such rage and such frustration. For not a word of my feeling could be expressed" (qtd. in Gordon 44). From outside the immediate family, Woolf recalls how her brother-in-law Jack Hills played on the emotions of Woolf and her sister. She recalls an unpleasant occasion of his turmoil a month after Stella's death:

He grips my hand in his. He groans. "It tears me asunder" he groaned. He was in agony. He gripped my hand to make his agony endurable; as if he were in physical torture. "But you can't understand" he broke off. "Yes, I can," I murmured. Subconsciously I knew that he meant that his sexual desires tore him asunder, together with his anguish at her loss (45).

Such incestuous interference scarred Woolf's very spirit and was enough to ensure her distaste of male sexuality throughout her life. Besides, her need for women's love pushed her into relationships with women in her life but on the whole it was encouraged by her growing distrust of men.

In the summer of 1910, Woolf experienced her first stay at a sanatorium at Burley, a private nursing home in Twickenham which specialised in patients with nervous disorders. Talking about her insanity, she joked, ““I feel my brains, like a pear, to see if its ripe; it will be exquisite by September”” (qtd. in Gordon 52). The experience was a horrendous one that the threat of which would later drive her to commit suicide. She despised the “phoney religious atmosphere,” the endless culmination of silent prayer and the staff “always wondering what God is up to” (52). Shut up in such a place, the inexplicable ugliness of the house and the atmosphere suffocated her, and she had later told her sister ““I shall soon have to jump out of the window”” (qtd. in Gordon 52) in order to escape from it. It is “incomprehensible” that, despite Woolf’s protests, her doctor, Sir George Savage, sent her back to the sanatorium in 1912 and again in 1913 when she sank once more into depression pushing her further to suicide attempts. On 9 September 1913, she saw two new doctors, in the morning Dr Maurice Wright and in the afternoon the distinguished Dr Henry Head, and both prescribed a return to sanatorium. Going home, she nearly died after taking an overdose of veronal. This was the longest of all her breakdowns. In October 1913 she was installed in George Duckworth’s house. It was unimaginable to make her once more the “helpless dependant of the man who epitomized sexual exploitation and social power” (53). Woolf relapsed in February 1915: she lost self-control became incoherent, sometimes screaming; she babbled wildly until she lapsed into a coma. During the depressive stage all her thoughts and emotions were the exact opposite of what they had been in the manic stage. She was in the depths of melancholia and despair; she scarcely spoke; refused to eat; refused to believe that she was ill and insisted that her condition was due to her own guilt and she tried to take away her own life.

After the death of their father and Virginia’s mental breakdown, Vanessa and Adrian sold 22 Hyde Park Gate and bought a house at 46 Gordon Square in Bloomsbury. It was a

literary district which later became famous as the locale of the Bloomsbury Group- a circle of writers, artists and intellectuals from the Bloomsbury district of London who were impatient with the conservative Edwardian society who met regularly to discuss new ideas. They soon became the focus of this group. It was an eclectic group and included novelist E.M. Forster, the historian Lytton Strachey, the economist John Maynard Keynes, and the art critics Clive Bell and Roger Fry. Virginia was not yet writing fiction, but contributed to reviews to the *Times Literary Supplement*, taught literature and composition at Morley College, and worked for the adult suffrage movement and a feminist group. It also proved to be of great importance to her because she married Leonard Woolf, whom she referred to as the 'penniless Jew,' an intellectual thinker in the Bloomsbury Group, on 10 August 1912. Despite his low material status, they shared a close bond. Virginia was thirty years old when she got married to this most rational among the Cambridge intellectuals. Shortly after marrying Leonard Woolf, she began to suffer from severe headaches, heard voices, and could neither sleep nor eat. The way Leonard cared for Virginia was overwhelming. He became a doctor, a nurse, a parent and a literary adviser to Virginia. He founded the Hogarth press together with Virginia which subsequently published her works along with works of T.S. Eliot, Laurens van der Post, and others. Leonard has often been charged for driving Virginia into a state of psychological imbalance.

Virginia began writing professionally in 1900. Though Virginia Woolf was a tireless writer of letters, diaries, reviews, criticism, essays and short stories, she was best known for her novels. Several years before marrying Leonard, Virginia had begun working on her first novel. The original title was *Melymbrosia*. After nine years and innumerable drafts, it was released in 1915 as *The Voyage Out*. She used the book to experiment with several literary tools, including compelling and unusual narrative perspectives, dream-states and free association prose.

In 1919, Virginia published *Night and Day*, a novel set in Edwardian England. Her third novel *Jacob's Room* was published in 1922. Based on her brother Thoby, it was considered a significant departure from her earlier novels with its modernist elements. That year, she met author, poet and landscape gardener Vita Sackville-West, the wife of the English diplomat Harold Nicolson. Virginia and Vita began a relationship that developed into a romantic affair. Although their affair eventually ended, they remained friends until Virginia's death.

In 1925, Woolf received rave reviews for *Mrs Dalloway*, her fourth novel. The mesmerizing story interweaved interior monologues and raised issues of feminism, mental illness and homosexuality in post-World War I England. Her 1928 novel, *To The Lighthouse*, was another critical success and considered revolutionary for its stream of consciousness storytelling. This novel examines the subtext of human relationships through the lives of the Ramsay family as they vacation on the Isle of Skye in Scotland.

Woolf found a literary muse in Sackville-West, the inspiration for her 1928 novel *Orlando*, which follows an English nobleman who mysteriously becomes a woman at the age of 30 and lives on for over three centuries of English history. In the novel, Virginia weaves Vita in and out of the centuries, tosses her from one sex to the other, plays with her, dresses her in furs, lace and emeralds, teases her, flirts with her, drops a veil of mist around her. The novel was a breakthrough for Woolf who received critical acclaim, as well as a newfound level of popularity.

Virginia pushed narrative boundaries in her next work, *The Waves* published in the year 1931, which she described as "a play-poem" written in the voices of six different characters. Woolf published *The Years*, the novel published in her lifetime in 1937, about a family's history over the course of a generation. Her last novel was *Between the Acts*,

published posthumously in 1941. The novel describes the mounting, performance, and audience of a play at a festival in a small village, just before the outbreak of the Second World War.

After completing the manuscript of her last novel *Between the Acts*, Virginia fell into a depression once again. The onset of the World War II, the destruction of her London home and the cool reception given to her biography all worsened her condition until she was unable to work. When Leonard enlisted in the Home Guard, he obtained the disapproval of Virginia. After World War II began, Woolf's diary was consumed with an obsession with death, a subject that figured more and more as her mood darkened. From July 1940, Leonard became increasingly concerned about the deterioration in Virginia's health. Her depression grew as the fear of madness enveloped her. On 28 March 1941, she loaded her pockets with stones and walked into the River Ouse at Rodmell, Sussex and was drowned. In her suicide note addressed to her husband, she wrote:

Dearest, I feel certain that I am going mad again. And I shan't recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and I can't concentrate. So I am doing what seems the best thing to do. You have given me the greatest possible happiness. You have been in every way all that anyone could be. I don't think two people could have been happier till this terrible disease came. I can't fight any longer. I know that I am spoiling your life, that without me you could work. And you will I know. You see I can't even write this properly. I can't read. What I want to say is I owe all the happiness of my life to you. You have been entirely patient with me and incredibly good. I want to say that- everybody says it. If anybody could have saved me it would have been you. Everything has gone from me but the certainty of your goodness. I can't go on spoiling your life

any longer. I don't think two people could have been happier than we have been ("Virginia Woolf's Suicide Note").

After Virginia's death, her diaries were edited and published in five volumes between 1977 and 1984 as *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. *The Letters of Virginia* appeared in six volumes from 1975 to 1980. She was a prolific essayist: she published about five hundred essays in periodicals and collections, beginning from 1905. She also published many works of nonfiction, including the two extended essays exploring the roles of women in history and society: *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938), where she examined the necessity for women to make a claim for their own life and literature. In *A Room of One's Own*, she sets forth the idea that "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (SWVW 561). Her works of literary criticism include *The Common Reader* (1925) and *The Second Common Reader* (1932).

No pat conclusions can be formed about Virginia Woolf's illness, but her writings help us to understand her attitude towards life, death and why her final fatal action was chosen by her. For Woolf, suicide was the ultimate way out and the best thing to do, as she mentions in her suicide note, in order to escape from the madness which she knew was returning once again.

1.1.2. Ernest Hemingway

Ernest Hemingway is one of the most famous authors who occupy a prominent place in the annals of American literary history in the twentieth century American fiction. By giving a realistic portrayal of the inter-war period with its disillusionment and disintegration of old values, Hemingway presents the predicament of the modern man. Many of his works are considered classics of American literature. He produced most of his works between the mid-1920s and the mid-1950s, and won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954. Ernest Miller

Hemingway was born on July 21, 1899 to Clarence Hemingway and Grace Hall Hemingway. While his mother encouraged him in the field of arts, his father instilled in him the love for hunting, fishing and camping skills and fostered what became a lifelong love of nature and the outdoors, forever instilling in him a passion for outdoor adventure and living in remote or isolated areas. Besides, he “may also have inherited from his father a genetic disposition to manic depression, for his father often had dark moods and spent occasional vacations away from his family in an effort to restore his mental health” (Tyler 2).

During his junior year he had a journalism class and wrote for the school newspaper, *The Trapeze*, and became its editor in his senior year. He also began writing short stories for *Tabula*, his high school’s literary magazine. Ernest’s parents wanted him to go to college; his father, in particular, had hoped that his son would follow in his footsteps by attending Oberlain College in Ohio and then going to medical school to become a doctor. At one time, Hemingway apparently intended to major in journalism at the University of Illinois, but he eventually went to work for *The Kansas City Star* as a club reporter in the fall of 1917.

“In the winter of 1917, the Red Cross asked for American volunteers to drive ambulances on the Italian front. Unable to join the armed forces because of a bad eye, Hemingway volunteered to serve with the Red Cross [...] as an ambulance driver” (Tyler 3). He spent only about three weeks as a driver in Italy before he was wounded in the leg by shrapnel on July 8, 1918, while passing out chocolate and cigarettes to Italian troops along the Piave River. Recuperating from his wounds in a hospital in Milan, Italy, Hemingway fell in love with Agnes von Kurowsky, a well-educated American nurse who was seven years older than him. He later drew on and embellished this romance in *A Farewell to Arms*. She urged Hemingway to go home and get a job, telling him they cannot get married until he could earn his living. He returned home, and soon afterward, Agnes wrote him to announce

her engagement to an Italian. After he returned to the United States, he spent some time in northern Michigan before taking a job at the *Toronto Star*.

It was in Chicago that Hemingway met Elizabeth Hadley Richardson, the woman who would become his first wife. The couple married and quickly moved to Paris in December 1921, where Hemingway worked as a foreign correspondent for the *Toronto Star*. Here, Hemingway soon became a key part of what Gertrude Stein would famously call ‘The Lost Generation.’ With Stein as his mentor, he associated with other American expatriate writers such as Ezra Pound, F. Scott Fitzgerald and his wife Zelda, Pablo Picasso and James Joyce. From these writers, he learned the discipline of his craft- the taut monosyllabic vocabulary, stark dialogue, and understated emotion that are the hallmarks of the Hemingway style.

Throughout their marriage, Hadley was unusually supportive of her husband’s literary career. She consistently and willingly subordinated her needs to his and participated with enthusiasm in the lifestyle he chose. In December 1922, Hemingway wrote to Hadley asking her to join him in Lausanne Switzerland, where he was covering an international conference for the *Toronto Star*, and he requested her to bring his manuscripts. When she arrived, she was crying too hard to talk to him. She had lost the suitcase filled with his manuscripts. It devastated him greatly. He could not believe she had lost all his stories, including the carbon copies. Of all the work he had completed, only “My Old Man” and “Up in Michigan,” which he had submitted to the *Cosmopolitan*, remained. This devastation permanently damaged his relationship with Hadley, and he recalled it bitterly in his *A Moveable Feast*.

In the summer of 1923, the Hemingways travelled to Spain where they attended the fiesta of San Fermin and it was here that Hemingway discovered the thrill of the Corrida or bullfighting. He wrote five vignettes about bullfighting and later on drew in these experiences

more extensively in *The Sun Also Rises* and *Death in the Afternoon*. Once back in Paris, Hemingway began to write seriously and completed eight stories in three months. In Paris, Hemingway and Hadley became friends with Pauline Pfeiffer, a 30 year old fashion reporter for *Paris Vogue*. Pauline first befriended Hadley and spent most of her time with the Hemingways. But she soon began an affair with Ernest. In October 1926, *The Sun Also Rises* was published, and Hemingway signed all of the profits from the book over to Hadley. They got divorced in January 1927, and Hemingway married Pfeiffer in May. Hemingway and Pauline's son Patrick was born on June 28, 1928. Pauline had a difficult delivery, which Hemingway fictionalised in *A Farewell to Arms*.

In the winter of 1928, Hemingway was in New York with his and Hadley's son Bumby, about to board a train to Florida, when he was handed a telegram informing him of his father's suicide. Returning to Oak Park, he learned that his always moody and sometimes depressive father, distraught over financial problems and diabetes, had shot himself. Hemingway was deeply wounded by the manner of his father's death, and suicide later became a more prominent theme in his writings. Ernest later blamed his father's death on his mother and criticized her for what he saw as her cruelty, egotism, and hypocrisy for the rest of his life. He realized how Hadley must have felt after her father's suicide and in 1903, he said that he would probably go the same way.

In 1929, Hemingway published *A Farewell to Arms* which established his stature as a major American writer. In Spain in mid-1929, Hemingway researched his next work, *Death in the Afternoon*, which was a study on bullfighting. In 1933 Hemingway began work on a short story, set in Havana, about Harry Morgan, a fishing guide who also smuggles rum into Prohibition-era America. The story, along with two others about Henry Morgan, eventually evolved into the novel *To Have and Have Not*, a brutal, depression-era story about money.

For two and a half years, Hemingway contributed essays to the *Esquire* magazine. In the late 1933 and early 1934, the Hemingways went to Africa. The trip inspired the nonfiction work *Green Hills of Africa* and two of Hemingway's short stories, "Snows of Kilimanjaro" and "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber."

In 1936, the North Atlantic News Alliance (NANA) offered to send Hemingway to Spain to report on the civil war, and Hemingway readily accepted. In Spain, Hemingway began a love affair with Martha Gellhorn, a 28-year-old professional journalist and writer. Although still married to Pauline, Hemingway lived with Martha Gellhorn for eighteen months. Pauline was reluctant to agree to a divorce but eventually gave in. Gellhorn married Hemingway in November of 1940. The following January the two writers left for Asia to cover the war between China and Japan, Martha for *Collier's* magazine and Ernest for a newspaper call *PM*.

Hemingway used his fishing boat, *Pilar*, to scout for German submarines in the Gulf of Mexico and gathered intelligence on Cubans who had supported the fascist government in Spain. Gellhorn found his activities ridiculous. The relationship between Gellhorn and Hemingway deteriorated rapidly. In London, Hemingway met journalist Mary Welsh, who wrote for both *Time* and *Life*. They quickly became lovers. Welsh completely gave up her career and married him on March 13, 1946. On June 17, Max Perkins died suddenly in New York and by August, Hemingway's health began to decline:

morose, overweight, and ears buzzing. From this point to his death, he was to fight a holding action against hypertension, diabetes, depression, paranoia, and perhaps hemochromatosis – many of the same problems that led to his father's suicide and would, years later, lead to his younger brother's suicide (Reynolds 43).

Hemingway soon began working for on a new novel, *The Sea*. Portions of it evolved into *Islands in the Stream* and *The Old Man and the Sea*. In 1948, Hemingway visited Venice for the first time, and there he met and fell in love with 18-year-old Adriana Ivancich. She called him “Papa” and he called her “Daughter.” Adriana, who apparently admired the writer but did not return his feelings, was the inspiration for the character of Renata in Hemingway’s novel *Across the River and Into the Trees*. Furious at the negative reviews the novel had, Hemingway wrote the draft of *The Old Man and the Sea* in eight weeks. The novella made Hemingway an international celebrity and won the Pulitzer Prize in May 1952.

In 1954, while in Africa, Hemingway was injured in two separate plane crashes. The first crash occurred at Murchison Falls when “the plane struck a telegraph wire and crash-landed [...] Soon afterward, the Hemingway party, bruised but alive, boarded another small plane, which crashed in flames on takeoff” (Reynolds 46). Newspapers worldwide reported about Hemingway’s death for to come out alive of the two crashes were beyond belief. Tyler records:

The second was particularly hard on Hemingway, who had to butt the door open with his head in order to escape from the burning aircraft. [It] left him with injuries to his kidneys, liver, shoulder, spinal cord, and intestines; impaired vision and hearing; and a concussion, his fourth in ten years (12).

Despite his injuries, Hemingway once accompanied Patrick and his wife on a fishing expedition. When a bushfire broke out, he was again injured, sustaining second degree burns on his legs, front torso, lips, left hand and right forearm. Months later in Venice, Mary reported to friends the full extent of Hemingway’s injuries: two cracked discs, a kidney and liver rupture, a dislocated shoulder and a broken skull. His health rapidly declined: he suffered from dangerously high blood pressure and struggled to keep his weight under

control; he drank more heavily than usual; his behaviour became increasingly erratic and outrageous; he became boastful, patronizing and pugnacious; he exaggerated and sometimes even lied outright about his war experiences. In 1954, Hemingway was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature but because of his poor health he could not travel to Sweden to receive it and he wrote a short piece to be read at the event.

In November of 1960, Hemingway was hospitalised at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, for psychological problems that included nightmares, insomnia, paranoia and depression. His hospitalization was kept a secret for much of his early eight-week stay because of the stigma then attached to mental illness. He was diagnosed with what was then called manic-depressive illness but is now known as bipolar mood disorder. Hemingway was also given a series of ten electroshock treatments. He seemed temporarily better after his hospital stay and tried to work on the book that later became *A Moveable Feast*. However one side effect of electroshock treatment is memory loss and it is speculated that losing his memory, even temporarily, would have been devastating to a writer who drew so extensively on his memory to create his fiction. Hemingway's inability to write after his electroshock treatment may ultimately have deepened his depression.

In 1959, Hemingway bought a home overlooking the Big Wood River, outside Ketchum, and left Cuba. He and Mary decided to leave Cuba after hearing the news that Castro wanted to nationalize property owned by Americans and other foreign nationals. On July 25, 1960, the Hemingways left Cuba for the last time, leaving art and manuscripts in a bank vault in Havana. After the Bay of Pigs Invasion in 1961, the Finca Vigia was expropriated by the Cuban government, complete with Hemingway's collection of four to six thousand books.

Hemingway was twice discovered alone with a shotgun, and on the way to hospital, where he was readmitted in April 1961 because of his suicidal behaviour, he tried to walk into the whirling propeller of the plane on the airport runway. To his wife's dismay, he was nevertheless released till the end of June. On July 2, 1961, he shot himself with a double-barreled shotgun in the foyer of his home in Ketchum, Idaho. Evidence now suggests that illness has a genetic component, and it seems likely that bipolar disorder runs in the Hemingway family. Two of his sons, Gregory and Patrick, and Gregory's daughter Lorian have all received electroshock treatments for mental illness. In addition to his father, one of his sisters, Ursula, and his brother, Leicester, killed themselves. Also, Hemingway's granddaughter, the actress Margaux Hemingway, committed suicide by taking an overdose of sleeping pills in 1996, making her the fifth person in four generations of her family to commit suicide.

After the death of Hemingway, Mary was able to retrieve some of the manuscripts from the Finca Vigia, although the house itself was confiscated by the Cuban government, along with Hemingway's fishing boat. Hemingway's original manuscripts and letters were later placed in the care of John Fitzgerald Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in Boston, where they remain today. Princeton, the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, the University of Virginia, and the Museo Hemingway at the Finca Vigia, also have smaller collections of Hemingway-related materials. Edited versions of several of unpublished manuscripts given to the Kennedy Library have been published posthumously, including *A Moveable Feast*, *Islands in the Stream*, *The Garden of Eden*, and *True at First Light*, all of which have become bestsellers.

The extent of Hemingway's influence is seen in tributes and echoes of his fiction in popular culture. He lived a life so rich and wrote about them in his works by sometimes fictionalising them which give the readers "a feeling of personal authenticity that it has often

been considered autobiographical” (Wagner-Martin 173). In 2012, Hemingway was inducted into the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame. Reynolds rightfully regards him as “a child of the twentieth century, born too late for the frontier and too soon for the outer space, leaving only that dark country within himself to explore” (48). His life as a writer was carried out on an “epic scale” and despite his “strenuous life,” he permanently embedded his rich writings in the American literary history.

1.1.3. Sylvia Plath

Sylvia Plath was born on October 27th 1932, to Otto Plath, a renowned Professor of German and a bee specialist at Boston University, and Aurelia Schober Plath. She spent most of her childhood years in Winthrop, a seaside town near Boston. While living in Winthrop, eight-year-old Plath published her first poem in the Boston Herald’s children’s section. At age eleven, Plath started keeping a journal.

In early childhood, Plath was the centre of her father’s attention and she gloried in being the family’s darling. Soon, her father’s health started deteriorating due to diabetes. He was diagnosed with advanced diabetes which required urgent amputation of one leg. However, the operation did not halt the progression of the disease and in November of 1940, he died. His death was a great blow to Plath. In *Letters Home*, her mother recalls how Plath had woodenly said “I’ll never speak to God again!” (25). For the young Plath who loved her father most dearly, his death was a sort of betrayal and it was not easy to bury the memories of her father. Her father irresistibly appears in her works again and again as a colossus of a sea or as a beekeeper. In her journal, Plath also ponders the biological, emotional and intellectual legacy of her father’s death.

Plath was a high-achieving A-grade student throughout her academic career. In addition to her academic strengths, she was “an accomplished artist, a burgeoning poet and

novelist and an inveterate diarist” (Gill 4). The summers of Sylvia’s high school and college years were spent in various temporary jobs including waitressing, babysitting and farm work, and in frantic dating. These were all experiences Sylvia relished because they served as the settings, plots and characters which she could use in her writings.

In 1950 Sylvia won a place at the prestigious Smith College, Northampton. This was a “fraught” time for her; it was a dream come true for her, yet it also “heralded a prolonged period of anxious self-examination” (Gill 4). She may have felt this pressure so much because:

her studies were funded by a package of grants and awards which included a contribution from Olive Higgins Prouty, a well-known novelist of the time (she emerges as Philomena Guinea in *The Bell Jar*). She was intensely hardworking and intensely concerned about her ability to make an academic and social success of her Smith years [...] she made huge demands of herself, was involved in energy-sapping extracurricular activities, worried about her grades in the sciences [...] and about her emotional and financial obligations (4).

Throughout her early years at Smith College, Sylvia continued to write and take on editorial responsibilities. During the summer after her third year at college in 1953, she was awarded a coveted position as a guest editor at *Mademoiselle* magazine, during which she spent a month in New York City. The experience was not what she had hoped it would be, and it became a downward spiral. She was furious at not being at a meeting the editor had arranged with Welsh poet Dylan Thomas- a writer whom she loved more than life itself. A few weeks later, she slashed her legs to see if she had enough courage to commit suicide. Many of the events that took place that summer were later used as an inspiration for her novel *The Bell Jar*. On

her return home, Sylvia was met with the news that she had been unsuccessful in her application for a place on a high level creative writing course. According to her mother, Sylvia blanched visibly at the news. This, coupled with emotional and physical exhaustion, and the prospect of a long and fruitful summer at home in Boston suburbs, seems to have been the final catalyst for her psychological breakdown. In *Letters Home*, her mother records:

[...] all her usual *joie de vivre* was absent [...] At home, she would sunbathe, always with a book but never reading it [...] She had no goal, she said. As she couldn't read with comprehension anymore, much less write creatively, what was she going to do with her life? She had injured her friends ["who supplied the germ of characterization"], "let down" her sponsors- she went on and on (123).

Plath's depression and suicidal tendencies went out of control around this time. One morning, her mother noticed "some partially healed gashes on her legs" and upon being questioned Plath replied, "I wanted to see if I had the guts!" and soon after grasping her mother's hands, she cried passionately, "Oh Mother, the world is so rotten! I want to die! Let's die together!" (LH 124). And after this, the long summer of seeking help for her problems began.

Following electroconvulsive therapy for depression, on 24th August 1953, Plath attempted suicide by taking sleeping pills which the doctor had asked her mother to administer to her each night. When her mother returned from the theatre with ominous apprehension, her worst fear came true: "Propped against a bowl of flowers on the dining-room table was a note in Sylvia's handwriting; "Have gone for a long walk. Will be home tomorrow"" (LH 125). Frantic searches for her by the family and the Boston police proved futile. It was only on the third day that her brother Warren heard her moaning from the basement. Coming to her senses, her first words were "Oh, no! [...] Oh, if I only could be a

freshman again. I so wanted to be a Smith woman” (125-126). Olive Higgins Prouty, who herself had suffered a breakdown then extended her help and this has been recorded in *The Bell Jar*.

Sylvia was hospitalised at McLean Hospital, where she received more electric and insulin shock treatment under the care of Dr. Ruth Beuscher - the Dr. Nolan of *The Bell Jar*. Plath seemed to make a good recovery and returned to college. In January 1955, she submitted her thesis, *The Magic Mirror: A Study of the Double in two of Dostoyevsky's Novels*, and in June graduated with highest honors.

In February 1956, Sylvia met Ted Hughes. They married in London just four months later on 16 June 1956, and then honeymooned in Benidorm before returning to Cambridge and London to study and write. In June 1957, Plath and Hughes moved to the US, and from September, Plath taught at Smith College, her alma mater. In the middle of 1958, the couple moved to Boston. Plath took a job as a receptionist and in the evening sat in on creative writing seminars given by Robert Lowell, which was attended by fellow writer Anne Sexton with whom she became a close friend. It was Sexton who showed her how to break through with the ‘taboo’ subjects and write from a more female perspective. Plath openly discussed her depression with Lowell and her suicide attempts with Sexton. Sexton recalls affectionately in her memoir: “Often, very often, Sylvia and I would talk at length about our first suicides; at length, in detail and in depth between the free potato chips” (qtd. in Gill 9).

The couple moved back to England in December 1959. Their daughter Frieda was born on April 1, 1960, and in October, Plath published her first collection of poetry *The Colossus*. Plath became pregnant again in 1961, but in February she miscarried and was subsequently hospitalised for appendicitis. Several of her poems address these events. In the months after her operation, she worked on the first draft of *The Bell Jar*. Later that year,

desperate for more room and for a break from the financial pressures of living in London and for time to write, she and Hughes bought a large dilapidated thatched house in the Devon village of North Tawton. In January 1962, Nicholas was born. To her mother, Plath wrote generally positive letters about the house and the neighbours. In her private sketches, she paints a different picture, despairing at the constant interruptions, the strange manners of the locals and the pressures to conform to village life (Gill 10-11).

By the summer of 1962, their marriage became seriously troubled. Hughes had begun a relationship with a mutual acquaintance, Assia Wevill. David and Assia Wevill had moved into the Hugheses' vacant London flat after they had left for Devon. The two couples had literary interests and acquaintances in common, and in May 1962, the Wevills met with them and it is believed that Assia and Ted started a relationship after this. In mid-July Plath intercepted a telephone call from a woman she identified as Assia which confirmed her suspicion about her husband. In June 1962, Plath's mother visited them and she painfully records in *Letters Home* that there was "anxiety in the air" before adding, "Ted had been seeing someone else, and Sylvia's jealousy was very intense" (458).

In September the couple separated. Unbeknownst to Plath, Hughes travelled to Spain after leaving his family in Ireland. Plath and the children returned to Devon; Hughes briefly returned to the family home in October, but only to pack his belongings and leave again for London. Plath's letters indicate how traumatised she was by these events. Nevertheless, this period proved unexpectedly fruitful in terms of the creativity and focus of her writing. She began writing the poems which were later to appear in *Ariel* (1965) and in *Winter Trees* (1971).

In December 1962, she returned alone to London with her children, and rented a flat – once owned by W.B. Yeats – at 23 Fitzroy Road. Alvarez paints a sad picture of Plath and the

children around Christmas that year: “Christmas decoration made it seem doubly forlorn, each seeming to repeat that she and the children would be alone over Christmas” (46), making her “loneliness and depression particularly hard to bear” in stark contrast to the jollity around her. In January 1963 *The Bell Jar* was published under the pseudonym *Victoria Lucas* which was met with critical indifference. The winter of 1962-1963 was one of the coldest in 100 years:

It was an unspeakable winter, the worst, they said in 150 years [...] The trains froze on the tracks, the abandoned trucks froze on the roads [...] Water pipes froze solid [...] The gas failed and candles, of course, were unobtainable. Nerves failed, and marriages crumbled. Finally the heart failed. It seemed the cold would never end. Nag, nag, nag (Alvarez 48).

Amidst this brutal winter, Plath and the children were holed up. The children were often sick and added to this “her sinuses were bad; there was still no telephone and no word from the psychotherapist; the weather continued monstrous. Illness, loneliness, depression and cold, combined with the demands of two small children, were too much for her” (50). Knowing she was at risk, Dr. John Horder visited her daily and tried to admit her to a hospital. When that failed, he arranged for a live-in nurse. The nurse was due to arrive at 9:00 in the morning of 11 February, 1963. On that fateful morning, Plath had gone up to the children’s room and placed a “plate of bread and butter and two mugs of milk in case they should wake up hungry” (Alvarez 52) and with firm determination she went ahead with her fatal plan: “she went back to the kitchen, sealed the door and window as best as she could with towels, opened the oven, laid her head on it and turned on the gas” (52).

Before her death, Plath tried several times to take her own life. On August 24, 1953, Plath overdosed on pills in the cellar of her mother’s home. In June 1962, Plath drove her car

off the side of the road, into the river. After the incident, she admitted to trying to commit suicide. On March 16, 2009, Nicholas Hughes, the son of Plath and Hughes, hanged himself at his home in Fairbanks, Alaska, after battling depression.

Plath was an avid writer and diarist from a very young age. By the time she was in the college, she had written over 50 short stories. The collections of poems and her lone novel *The Bell Jar* published during her life time gained her popularity and reaped glowing reviews. However, it was her 1965 collection *Ariel*, published posthumously, which essentially built her reputation. In 1971, the volumes *Winter Trees* and *Crossing the Water* were published in the UK. The *Collected Poems*, published in 1981, edited and introduced by Ted Hughes, contained poetry written from 1956 until her death. In 1963, after *The Bell Jar* was published, Plath began working on a work titled *Double Exposure*. This was never published and it disappeared around 1970. In 1977, *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*, a collection of short stories by Plath, was published.

Plath's letters were published in 1975 under the title *Letters Home: Correspondence 1950-1963*, edited and selected by her mother Aurelia Plath. Commentators have referred to it as a 'corrective' or 'antidote' to *The Bell Jar*. Her adult diaries, starting from 1950, were first published 1982 as *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*, edited by Frances McCullough, with Ted Hughes as the consulting editor. During the last years of his life, Ted Hughes worked on fuller publications of Plath's journals. In 1988, before his death, he unsealed the two journals which he had previously sealed, and passed the project onto his children Frieda and Nicholas, who passed it on to Karen V. Kukil. In 2000, *The Journals of Sylvia Plath: 1950-1962* and *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*, both edited by Karen V. Kukil were published.

Plath's maturity as a writer coincided with the rise of what has become known as the 'confessional poetry.' Her poems exhibit nightmarish quality: of imprisonment, suicide,

death, rage, despair, love, vengeance, love and autobiographical descriptions of mental illness. The more she wrote about death, the more fertile her imagination became. When she attempted suicides, it was no doubt a cry for help and when she killed herself, it was a “desperate attempt to exorcize the death she had summoned up in her poems” (Alvarez 53).

1.1.4. Anne Sexton

Anne Sexton was born Anne Gray Harvey on 9 November 1928 to Ralph and Mary Gray Staples Harvey. Her parents were socially active, “good looking, well-to-do, party-loving and self-indulgent” (Middlebrook 4). They were known to drink regularly and sometimes heavily, valuing their social engagements over their family responsibilities. Anne recalls how her parents would throw parties, have “kicked us upstairs until Daddy would come up and say, now turn on the charm- oh, how I used to dread it” (10). As a young child, Anne was attention-seeking and whatever was denied her in this factor, she got it from Nana: “Nana’s loneliness welcomed Anne’s neediness” (15).

Throughout Anne’s childhood, the person who offered a parent’s unconditional love was her beloved “twin,” Nana, her great-aunt, who moved to Wellesley to live with the Harveys when Anne was eleven. She arrived in the Harvey household in the midst of this family’s troubled period. Her bond with Nana lasted until she was about thirteen, when she became absorbed in attracting and teasing boys. One evening, Nana dramatically lost her hearing and further plunged into mental illness. Anne remembered Nana calling her horrible and disgusting names and once attacking her even with a nail file. One night, before Anne’s horrified eyes, Nana was carried off to a mental hospital. Electroshock therapy seemed to improve her condition, and she returned home. She died aged 66 in 1954. Her death was one of the greatest tragedies Anne experienced in life. Losing Nana meant losing the knowledge of who she was. Sexton was convinced that the only good person she had ever been was the

Anne that Nana loved. After her breakdown, she worried about ending up in a mental hospital like Nana. Anne always harboured guilt that she was the reason for Nana's breakdown:

Nana's rage took root in Sexton as a frightening symptom, which she described as a "tiny voice" in her head "shouting from far away," telling her she was awful, often taunting her to kill herself [I] should never have left Nana. She's never have gotten sick- then I'd always be just me." By logic, her illness was a form of loyalty to Nana, useless but compelling (Middlebrook 16).

In the summer of 1948, Anne fell in love with Alfred Muller Sexton II, nicknamed as Kayo Sexton, and they eloped. On 21 July 1953, Linda Gray Sexton was born. Two years after Linda's birth, they had a second daughter, Joyce Ladd Sexton, born on 4 August 1955. Anne's experience of motherhood had a negative impact on her mental health. Taking care of the two young children brought her on the brink of madness. "She had a hard time coping with the physical and psychological demands of Linda's babyhood; the addition of newborn Joyce to the household intensified her difficulties" (Middlebrook 31). She later described that she was going through terrible spells of depression. She was not just tired and low; she was agitated, disoriented, and subject to fits of feeling unreal. She decided to see Dr. Martha Brunner-Orne, the psychiatrist. The doctor diagnosed a postpartum depression, prescribed her medications and encouraged her to take up poetry as a therapy.

"Increasingly, Sexton became prone to episodes of blinding rage in which she would seize Linda and begin choking or slapping her [...] She felt she could not control these outbursts and was afraid she would kill her children" (Middlebrook 33). As the anniversary of Nana's death approached, her anxieties mounted to a crisis. One night, Kayo woke and found her sitting in the dark with pills in her hand. She had not taken the pills, yet her actions

were significant. From then on, she described her suicide attempts as means for getting back to the place where Nana was. Discussion of her family's history of mental illness made Sexton's parents see the importance of taking her symptoms seriously and she checked into Westwood Lodge for a stay of three weeks. Summer passed into autumn; Sexton's condition worsened. Before her twenty-eight birthday, she swallowed an overdose of barbiturates-Nembutal, which she called "kill-me" pills. Her deepening breakdown was hard on everyone, especially her husband and children. The fact is clear that Sexton's difficulties obviously had much to do with the early motherhood that was thrust upon her. When she wrote to her doctor in January 1957, she was sick and she needed treatment. And she began to release her "terrible energy" through writing.

During the early years of her career, Sexton experienced both personal tragedy and professional success. She checked herself in and out of mental institutions which she described as her "summer hotel" and later her "sealed hotel." When American newspapers briefly reported on February 12 1963 about the death of Sylvia Plath, Sexton's shock was personal. It saddened her deeply, but it also roused her own death wish. Deeply identifying with the act of her close friend, she metaphorically said that suicide was like a drug, "The person who takes drugs can't explain why they want to do it, there's no reality reason" (qtd. in Middlebrook 199) and that it is addicting. "Plath's suicide pulled her toward the stagnant pond of her old obsession with ritualized self-destruction" (200). She is recorded to have said, "Sylvia Plath's death disturbs me [...] Makes me want it too. She took something that was mine, *that* death was mine! Of course it was hers too. But we both swore off it, the way you swear off smoking" (200). In addition to Plath's death, Sexton's friend Ruth Soter's death impacted her as well. On the question of whether Ruth had died of heart attack or suicide, Sexton said "I would rather that she had killed herself [...] than to have died of heart attack" (217).

Sexton's many extra-marital affairs and casual relationships were not unknown to her husband. She had affairs with her psychiatrists, fans and men she met while on trips for work. And she would reflect those experiences in many of her poems. In the fall of 1966, Sexton had been carrying out two affairs, and one was her psychiatrist Dr. Zweizung. In November, when he reported that he had to break off the affair as his wife had found out about it, it shocked Sexton. On 9th November, on her birthday, she intentionally fell on the stairs and broke her hip. Sexton was not easy for Kayo to deal with. On her therapy session with Dr. Orne, Kayo details that he became the unwanted third party and that if he "interfered between her and her doctors, [he'd] have to pay the price of her breaking down. [...] Somebody was always paying the price of living with her. Always it was me" (qtd. in Middlebrook 370). When she asked for divorce from her husband, she thought she was doing the right thing. "She knew she depended on him for the stable home life that insured whatever psychological health she possessed and made her work possible" (254) but she also felt that her husband resisted the kind of changes that came to her with success and to all these she felt that divorce would bring a solution. But it proved her wrong, for she spiralled further into depression and suicidal tendencies. Her yearning for real love and attention from her friends, children and other companies did not materialize: Kayo was the only man who could offer her so much of love. In *The Divorce Papers*, Sexton deals at length with the theme of her marriage to Kayo, their divorce and the impact it had on her later on.

The last year of Sexton's life were shredded into different kinds of problems which were too much for her to bear. Feeling tormented when her lover Legler left her, Sexton was literally alone. Her daughters were away: Linda at Seattle and Joyce in a boarding school. When Joyce once arrived home, she found her mother in an awful state:

Sexton had begun having fugues again, falling suddenly into trancelike states from which it was hard to rouse her. Moreover, what she thought to be a sinus

infection turned out to be an abscess surrounding two teeth and reaching deep into the nasal cavity (Middelbrook 377).

Following this was repeated hospitalizations against her wishes; always in fear of the permanent one and ending up like her Nana. Always craving for attention and making repeated calls to her daughters, Sexton was truly alone. And the worst of it all was her art of writing poetry deserting her. The chief agent of it was her addiction to drinking. In combination with her feeling of loneliness, it proved lethal to her. She was becoming difficult to deal with: her caretakers left one after the other, her therapist terminated her therapy sessions and friends started avoiding her. “It was hard to be candid with her, because resistance to her demands was likely to trigger a suicide attempt” (392). In February 1974, Sexton had overdosed and was not discovered for more than a day. When she awoke, she coldly said “You won’t get another chance to save me” (qtd. in Middlebrook 392). As isolation became a daily affair, Sexton took refuge in strangers. In her lonesome state, “Anyone who would share a drink and a smoke at a nearby bar was a welcome companion” (394). As the fateful day approached, she met her two close friends Barbara Schwartz and Maxine Kumin. Kumin later recalled how she was blind to the deliberate plan of Sexton to carry forward her plan of taking her own life after waving her a final goodbye with some words which Kumin failed to catch. Reaching home, Sexton filled her glass with vodka, phoned her date to cancel their plan, took off her rings and dropped them into her big purse, put on her mother’s old fur coat, walked into her garage and closed the door behind her, climbed into the driver’s seat and turned on the ignition and asphyxiated herself. It was 4th October 1974. When she took her own life, it was of little surprise to everyone taking note of her suicidal obsessions. She indeed put her thoughts into action by choosing her own time, place and “fashionably” ended her life.

Sexton began writing seriously in 1957, publishing *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* in 1960, a collection that won her significant praise, and in 1962, she published *All My Pretty Ones*. With her next collection of poetry, *Live or Die* in 1966, for which she received the Pulitzer Prize in 1967, and *Love Poems* in 1969, she began exploring modes of surrealism, and she experimented with writing from the unconscious. In 1969, she was awarded Guggenheim Foundation grant to work for her play *Mercy Street*. Her 1971 collection of poetry *Transformations* include long poems narrated by a “middle-aged witch,” creating some comic moments and leading to some surprising conclusions that are not part of the original tales.

Sexton’s last poems increasingly concerned religious questions. Though her standing as a popular artist has obscured the originality of her struggles with spiritual themes, her most vital works are the ones based on these themes, namely *The Book of Folly* (1972) and *The Death Notebooks* (1974). Her poetry and her health had collapsed by the time she produced her last three books of poems, which were published posthumously: *The Awful Rowing Toward God* (1975), *45 Mercy Street* (1976), and *Words for Dr. Y.* (1978). *The Complete Poems* (1981) collected previously unpublished work, and *Selected Poems* followed in 1988. *Anne Sexton: A Self-Portrait in Letters* edited by Linda Sexton and Lois Ames, appeared in 1977.

Sexton is seen as the modern model of the confessional poet. She wrote openly about menstruation, abortion, masturbation, incest, adultery, and drug addiction at a time when the proprieties embraced none of these as proper topics for poetry. Against the background of a dark but intriguing lived life, she lives on as an outrageous but witty and bold writer of the twentieth century and lives on in the great canon of American literature.

1.2. Historical Overview of Suicidal British and American Writers

Besides Woolf, Hemingway, Plath and Sexton, a number of litterateurs have taken their own lives. English literature figures many famous writers who committed suicide. Thomas Chatterton (1752-1770), the marvellous boy, was an English poet whose precocious talents ended in suicide at the age of 17. It has been documented that, three days prior to his suicide, Chatterton had tumbled into a newly dug open grave in his path taking no notice of it. When his companion, in a jocular manner said that he was happy in assisting him to his resurrection, Chatterton replied he had been at war with the grave for some time. He travelled to London hoping to find financial recognition and make a living as a writer. But the literary world failed to recognise this genius before it was too late. He received only posthumous recognition. On 24 August, 1770 he poisoned himself by drinking arsenic, after tearing into fragments whatever literary remains were at hand.

Eustace Budgell (1686-1737), a lesser known writer, contributed to Addison's *The Spectator*, writing 37 numbers signed X. Accused of forging a will, he was disliked by many. Budgell was criticised by Alexander Pope in the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (1735) and in *The Dunciad*. He committed suicide by throwing himself out of a boat at London Bridge on May 4, 1737.

Bryan Stanley Johnson (1933-1973) was an English experimental novelist, poet and literary critic. His notable works include *Albert Angelo* (1964) and *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry* (1973). During his lifetime, he remained largely unknown to the wider reading public. But after his death he has a growing cult following. At the age of 40, increasingly depressed by his failure to succeed commercially and beset by family problems, he committed suicide by slitting his wrists on 13 November 1973.

Sarah Kane (1971-1999) is another famous figure. Her notable works include *Blasted* (1995), *Skin* (1995), *Crave* (1998) and *4.48 Psychosis* (2000). Kane struggled from depression for many years and was twice admitted voluntarily to the Maudsley Hospital, a British mental institute in South London. On February 20, 1999, 28 year old Kane committed suicide by hanging herself by her shoelaces in a bathroom at London's King's College Hospital.

The American literary scene has witnessed a number of famous writers who have taken their own lives. David Foster Wallace (1962-2008), writer of *Infinite Jest* (1996) and *The Pale King* (2011), is a prominent figure in this case. His biographer D. T. Max recounts Wallace getting romantically obsessed with Mary Karr, a writer, and even going to the extent of considering killing her husband. They had a tumultuous relationship: Wallace had once even tried to push her out of a moving car. He struggled with alcoholism, drug addiction and suicidal tendencies. He suffered from recurrent psychological depression, bouts of inappropriate sexual behaviour with his women students, and even stalking a woman of whom he was enamoured. He suffered from depression and took antidepressant medication for more than twenty years. When he started to suffer from side effects, he stopped taking his primary antidepressant drug phenelzine on his doctor's advice. The depression returned and he even underwent electroconvulsive therapy. On September 12, 2008, Wallace committed suicide by hanging himself from a rafter of his house.

Michael Dorris (1945-1997) was a novelist and scholar famous for his notable works *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water* (1987) and *The Broken Cord* (1989). His public image was damaged by charges against sexual misconduct put forward by his own daughters who even supported each other as witnesses. He committed suicide by swallowing three bottles of sleeping pills, downing vodka and suffocating himself by covering his head with plastic bag.

Hunter S. Thompson (1937- 2005), known chiefly for his book *Hell's Angels* (1967), was an American journalist and author, and the founder of gonzo journalism. He was a lifelong abuser of alcohol and used illegal drugs and was known for his love of firearms. After a bout of health problems, he committed suicide at the age of 67 on February 20, 2005. He had wished for his ashes to be fired out from cannon and accordingly it was carried out in a ceremony funded by his actor friend Johnny Depp.

John Berryman (1914-1972) is a notable figure in American literature and a key figure in the Confessional school of poetry. His father's suicide when he was just eleven had a tremendous negative impact on him and the subject shadows majorly in his work *The Dream Songs*. After a life-long battle with intoxicants, depression and suicidal tendencies, Berryman committed suicide by jumping off the Washington Avenue Bridge between St. Paul and Minneapolis on January 7, 1972.

William Inge (1913-1973), an American playwright and novelist committed suicide by carbon monoxide poisoning on June 10, 1973, at the age of 60. Mentally ill and depressed most of the time, he lived a secluded life with his sister who said she had no idea why he was so depressed all the time. Few days before his suicide, on June 2, 1973, he was admitted to a medical centre for treatment of overdose of barbiturates. The following day, he had signed out by himself after getting into a disagreement with a doctor.

Hart Crane (1899-1932) was a well-known twentieth-century American poet chiefly known for his famous work *The Bridge* (1930). It was an ambitious work where he sought to write in the vein of T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* (1922). Plagued with chains of problems both in his personal life and family, Crane suffered from depression. Seeking solace in alcohol and sexual relationships was his way of trying to shun himself from his problems. When his work *The Bridge* failed to garner reviews as expected by him, he was thrown further into

depression. On April 27, 1932, Hart Crane jumped overboard into the Gulf of Mexico. His body was never recovered. He was only 32.

1.3. Objective and Significance of the study

Apart from the notable names mentioned and discussed, the literary world has witnessed a number of writers who resorted to suicide considering it as the ultimate way out. This distressing phenomenon is connected with a number of issues and reasons which each of them faced. Literature is the mirror of life, and there is no doubt that trails of the writers' personal issues and problems get reflected in their works. Delving deep into the obsessions reflected in their works in a way introduce the readers into the dark domain in which they lived. For the present study, Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton- the notable figures of the twentieth century writers, have been chosen from among them. A close study has been done on the dark biographical study of the four authors and in the following chapters, an attempt will be made to bring out the dark themes and the reflection of the autobiographical elements in their works. Besides, the narrative techniques employed by them will be discussed. Finally, an attempt will be made to link some notable reasons as to why they chose suicide as the final way out, and this will be aided by the application of the psychological and sociological theories of suicide. This will be done with an aim to contribute to the field of literature, particularly in the critical study of the four chosen authors.

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CHAPTER 2: SUICIDE: HISTORY AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Suicide, the act of intentionally causing one's own death, has been a constant factor in human history. This strange and distressing phenomenon is as old as humanity. The term 'suicide' is itself controversial and not simple. It has evoked an astonishingly wide range of reactions- anger, sympathy, rejections, moral and religious condemnation. There are various factors which contribute to it. Suicide is no more a taboo subject as it used to be in the past. As a research subject, suicide has become big. At present it even has its own name, 'suicidology,' which was coined by Edwin S. Shneidman who famously coined the other term 'psychache' in connection to suicide.

The *Oxford Dictionary* (2001) defines suicide as "the action of killing oneself deliberately." It is the act of voluntarily taking one's own life. The word "suicide" is derived from the Latin words *sui* meaning "of oneself" and *caedere* meaning "to slay." The terminology of the word suicide appeared late. The word was first mentioned in Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici*, written in 1635, and published in 1642. Earlier, the phrases used to indicate the act were 'self-murder,' 'self-destruction,' 'self-killing,' 'self-homicide,' 'self-slaughter' – all expressions reflecting the association with murder.

2.1. History of Suicide

History has witnessed a number of the 'never appealing' case of suicide. It has been both condemned and praised by various societies. Brutus, a great politician of the late Roman Republic, who took a leading role in the assassination of Julius Caesar, committed

suicide after being defeated jointly by Augustus and Antony in the Battle of Philippi. It is said that John Wilkes, the infamous assassin of Abraham Lincoln, claimed to be inspired by Brutus.

Cleopatra VII Philopator, the Egyptian queen, famous in history and drama as the lover of Julius Caesar and later the wife of Mark Antony, committed suicide. It is popularly held that she allowed an asp to bite and poison her to death. This beautiful, brilliant and well-educated queen was a diplomat, naval commander, administrator, linguist, and medical author. Her romantic liaisons and military alliances with the Roman leaders Julius Caesar and Mark Antony, coupled with her supposed exotic beauty and powers of seduction, earned her an enduring place in history and popular myth.

In connection to Cleopatra is the famous suicide of Mark Antony. Antony was a Roman politician and general who played a critical role in the transformation of the Roman Republic from an oligarchy into the autocratic Roman Empire. Though married to Octavia, Octavian's sister, he started a romantic liaison with Cleopatra VII. Octavian, for political reasons, being unable to declare war on Antony, declared it instead on Cleopatra. The joint forces of Cleopatra and Antony were defeated in the famous Battle of Actium. In 30 B.C., upon hearing that Cleopatra was dead, he stabbed himself to death.

Adolf Hitler, the leader of the Nazi Germany and initiator of fascist policies that led to World War II which led to the genocide known as the Holocaust, committed suicide with his wife Eva Braun on April 30, 1945 by shooting himself with his service pistol.

The literary canon has witnessed a number of writers who have committed suicide. A number of novelists, poets and dramatists have contemplated suicide and courted it in their own lives. Literary artists have always been drawn towards the subject of suicide and death. A number of writers have battled with the problem of grief, pain, stress, mental illness and

depression. Unable to psychologically deal with them, a number of writers have found suicide as an escape from the harsh conditions they found themselves trapped in. For this class of writers, the written word was their solace and the vehicle of expressing their haunting horrors and emotions.

Writing in 1601, the Elizabethan lawyer Fulbecke records that the suicide victim was drawn by a horse to the place of punishment and shame where he was hanged on a gibbet, and none would take the body down except the magistrate. "In other words, the suicide was as low as the lowest criminal" (Alvarez 64). Another instance was the burial of a person who committed suicide. The site chosen was usually a crossroad which was also a place for public execution. A stone was placed over the dead man's face to prevent its ghost from rising and haunting the living. In England the bodies of unclaimed and destitute suicides were used in the schools of anatomy for dissection.

In France, the corpse was hanged by the feet, dragged through the street on a hurdle, burned, thrown on the public garbage heap. At Metz, each suicide was put in a barrel and floated down the Moselle away from the places he might wish to haunt. In Danzig, the corpse was not allowed to leave by the door; instead it was lowered by pulleys from the window; the window-frame was subsequently burned. Even in the civilized Athens of Plato, the suicide was buried outside the city and away from other graves; his self-murdering hand was cut off and buried apart (64-65).

In France, before the Revolution, the properties of a person who committed suicide were confiscated and his memory was defamed. In Europe, a suicide who was a noble lost his nobility and was declared a commoner. His escutcheons were broken, his woods cut, and his castles demolished. All these meant that suicide was equated with murder.

Contrary to these practices, in some warrior societies, whose gods were those of violence and bravery, suicide was often looked upon as something great. In African tribes, there was a custom where the warriors and slaves put themselves to death when their king died in order to live with him in paradise. “The Iglulik Eskimos and the inhabitants of the Marquesas Islands believed that a violent death was the passport to paradise” (Alvarez 73). And the ancient Scythians considered suicide as an honour and the best way out “when they became too old for their nomadic way of life; thereby saving the younger members of the tribe both the trouble and the guilt of killing them (73). For the Vikings whose paradise was Valhalla, the greatest honour and the surest qualification was death in battle, next best was suicide. Those who died peacefully in their sleep were excluded from Valhalla. To them, “suicide was probably seen as an alternative to living on. The self-determined death was preferred over living in shame” (Nagel 48).

In history, cases of mass suicides have been witnessed. In India, a mass suicide among Hindu women known as *Jauhar* was carried out. It was prevalent especially in the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries wherein the women, in order to avoid being captured by the enemies would burn themselves up along with their children and valuables in massive fires. A similar practice was witnessed during the Turkish rule of Greece when women threw themselves and their children over the cliffs in order to avoid capture. In Germany, during the Nazi regime, cases of mass suicide were rampant. Reacting to the loss of war, many high ranking Nazi officers killed themselves like their leader Hitler: “By May 8, the day Nazi Germany unconditionally surrender[ed], thousands of ordinary German men, women and children had killed themselves in a national wave of suicides” (“‘Promise me You’ll Shoot Yourself’: Nazi Germany’s Suicide Wave”). Instances of racial suicide are also traced in history:

the Tasmanian aborigines died out not just because they were hunted like kangaroos for an afternoon's sport, but also because a world in which this could happen was intolerable to them; so they committed suicide as a race by refusing to breed. [...] hundreds of Jews put themselves to death at Masada, rather than to submit to the Roman legions" (Alvarez 75).

More extreme still, the native inhabitants of the New World killed themselves in thousands rather than endure the harsh treatment they received at the hands of the Spaniards, their conquerors. When Emperor Charles V brought forty slaves from the Gulf of Mexico, thirty-nine of them starved themselves to death. In another incident, a whole cargo of slaves in the hold of a Spanish galleon hanged themselves by squatting or in kneeling position. In the West Indies, four thousand men and countless women and children died by jumping from cliffs or by killing each other.

The toleration for suicide began with the Greeks. In Thebes and Athens, suicide was not against the law, but those who killed themselves were denied funeral rites. The Greeks believed that life was given by the gods, however it was also held that life was not sacred in all its forms. Though beliefs about suicide varied considerably in ancient Greece, suicide was considered a respectable option. It was generally regarded as not wrong in itself. Cases of suicide are seen in Greek literature: Oedipus' mother Jocasta's suicide is made to seem praiseworthy; suicide of the sphinx, because of a great loss suffered by it; when Oedipus solves the riddle, the daughters of Orion, Menippe and Metioche, committing suicide in order to end a plague; Erigone hanging herself from grief when she discovers the murdered body of her father Ikarios; Leukakas jumping off a rock in order to avoid being raped by Apollo;

When the Delphic oracle announced that Lacedaemonians would capture Athens if they did not kill the Athenian king, the reigning monarch Codrus

entered the enemy camp in disguise, picked a quarrel with a soldier and allows himself to be slaughtered (Alvarez 76-77).

All these suicides have one quality in common: “a certain nobility of motive” (77). The ancient Greeks took their own lives only for the best possible reasons: grief, high patriotic principle or to avoid dishonor.

Compared to the Greeks, the Romans were more tolerant of suicide. In ancient Rome, there was usually no prohibition of suicide for citizens. However, it was forbidden for slaves and soldiers: the former for economic reasons and the latter for patriotic reasons. For them, suicide was equal to desertion. In their eyes, suicide was not morally evil. In Roman law, “the crime of suicide was strictly economic. It was an offence neither against morality nor religion, only against the capital investments of the slave-owning class or the treasury of the State” (83). The Romans did not consider life as a gift from the gods, therefore there was no moral conflict in bringing one’s own life to an end. For them, suicide was preferable to disgrace. The suicide of Lucretia or Lucrece, an ancient Roman woman who played a vital role in the transition of the Roman government from the Roman kingdom to the Roman Republic, very well illustrates this attitude. After she was raped by the Etruscan king’s son, she gathered her family around her informing them of what had happened to her, and kills herself.

In the Middle ages, the church was faced by an army of martyrs. The act of martyrdom, which was once fiercely desired, became fiercely hated. They were no longer martyrs of God, but were called martyrs of Satan. Suicide became a crime as well as a sin and was often punished additionally by confiscation of property and refusal of consecrated burial ground of the corpse. Louis XIV of France issued a criminal ordinance where the suicide’s body was drawn through the streets, face down, and then hung or thrown on a garbage heap.

Despite the fact that suicide was unequivocally a mortal sin, superstitions that had submerged re-emerged. The corpse of a suicide was buried at a busy crossroads- to confuse the spirit, pinned down, thus preventing the spirit from emerging to bother the living.

2.1.1. Philosophers' Views on Suicide

A number of philosophers have given their views regarding suicide: some rejecting the act and some in support of it. In *Phaedo*, Plato uses the simile of man as the property of the gods. He puts forth the idea that the gods get angry when a man commits suicide just as a master will get angry when his slave commits the act; and that a man ought not to kill himself because he possesses no actual ownership of his soul. But he made three exceptions: when legally ordered by the state, for painful and incurable disease and when one is compelled to it by the occurrence of some intolerable misfortune. Plato was of the view that if life itself became immoderate, then suicide became a rational, justifiable act. Painful disease or intolerable constraints were sufficient reasons to depart.

Like Plato, Aristotle too believed that suicide was wrong except under some circumstances, though in a more austere way. He had a curiously cool and detached attitude to the problem of suicide. In *Ethics*, Aristotle opines, "to die to escape from poverty or love or anything painful is not the mark of a brave man, but rather of a coward" (qtd. in Leenars 135). He was against suicide not because we belong to God, but to the state. To him, suicide weakens the state economically by depriving it of a 'useful' citizen. It was an act or social irresponsibility.

Pythagoras argued that since humans were the slaves and soldiers of God, they had no right to leave the world without His permission. For the Pythagoreans, to depart from one's guard or station in life without the order of one's commander (God) was forbidden. They condemned suicide, not because the act was inherently evil, but because they believed that

the body and the soul were governed by numerical sequences whose harmony would be disturbed if one committed suicide. They rejected suicide because according to them life itself was a discipline of the gods.

The Epicurean view on suicide was reversed to Plato's. Whereas Plato found suicide justifiable when external conditions were intolerable, the Epicureans made the choice of suicide an internal process. They view that there is nothing bad about death, and we are wrong to loathe it. Suicide was a voluntary assertion of freedom. It was a matter of whether they would like death to come to them or they themselves would go to death.

The Stoic school of philosophy considered suicide as the most reasonable way out; that it was permissible, especially if one had an incurable disease. For the Stoics, the ideal was vaguer, more dignified; that of life in accordance with nature. When it no longer seemed to be so, then death came as a rational choice befitting a rational nature. Thus Zeno, the founder of the school, is said to have hanged himself out of irritation when he stumbled and wrenched his finger; he was ninety-eight. His successor Cleanthes, when ordered to starve as a cure for gumboil starved himself to death. Within two days the gumboil was better and he was put back to a normal diet, but he refused as he had advanced so far on his journey towards death, and would not retreat. The Stoics saw fate as a powerful force controlling human destinies. Death was inevitable, and they considered suicide as a way of gaining control over death. "When the inner compulsion became intolerable the question was no longer whether or not one should kill oneself but how to do so with the greatest dignity, bravery and style" (Alvarez 79-80).

2.1.2. Religious Views on Suicide

Every religion rejects the act of suicide but similarity of the act prevails. In Judaism, every means is used to excuse suicide: that the person was not in his right mind, or that it

might have been a kind of repentance after the person performed some deadly act. In addition, mass suicide has had a long standing history in Judaism. In 73 CE, 960 strong Jewish community at Masada collectively committed suicide rather than to be captured by the Romans. Each man killed his own wife and children, then the men killed each other and the last man killed himself. But Judaism as a religion on the whole rejects and condemns suicide. Suicides are frowned upon and do not receive funeral and mourning rites.

Extremists of Islam or the militant groups carry out martyrdom operations to fulfill the obligation of *jihad*, and a minority of Muslims in Muslim-majority countries also expresses their support for suicidal martyrdom. But on the whole, Islam considers suicide forbidden and that suicide bombing is equally forbidden. The Quran instructs that a man must not kill himself. And the prohibition of suicide has also been mentioned in the statements of hadith where it says that a person who commits suicide by throttling or stabbing himself keep on doing the act in hell.

The Hindu *suttee* or Sati is a kind of suicide where the bereaved wife burns herself in the funeral pyre of her husband. Though some people have recently done the same, it is officially banned. Hinduism also accepts man's right to end one's life through fasting termed as *Prayopavesa*. But this is strictly restricted to old age yogis who have no more reason to go on. These are some of the tolerances, but Hinduism as a religion does not spiritually accept suicide. It is considered as a violation to the code of *ahimsa* (non-violence).

Seppuku sometimes referred to as *hara-kiri* is a form of Japanese or Buddhist ritual suicide by disembowelment. It was originally reserved for a samurai who voluntarily chose to die with honor rather than fall into the hands of the enemies or as a capital punishment for a samurai who had committed serious offences. Buddhism strongly believes in the doctrine of karma. It believes that all people experience suffering at some point of life, which originates

from the negative deeds of the past (karma). But whatever kind of suffering it maybe, suicide is not advocated. The first precept of Buddhism is to refrain from the destruction of life, including oneself, thus making suicide a negative act; counteracting to the path of enlightenment.

The church itself had its difficulty in rationalizing the ban on suicide, since neither the Old nor the New Testament of the Bible directly prohibits it. Cases of suicide are recorded in the Old Testament- Samson, Saul, Abimelech and Achitophel, and in the New Testament there is the suicide of Judas Iscariot, the greatest criminal. All these cases are recorded blankly. On the suicide of Judas Iscariot, theologians asserted that he was more damned for killing himself than for betraying Christ. In the first years of the church, suicide was a neutral subject that even the death of Jesus was considered by Tertullian as a kind of suicide. John Donne comments in *Biathanatos*, the first formal defence of suicide in English: ““Our blessed Saviour...chose that way for our Redemption to sacrifice his life, and profuse his blood”” (qtd. in Alvarez 69). Christianity, which began as a religion of the poor and rejected, took to a kind of suicide, that is, martyrdom. “The Romans may have fed Christians to the lions for sport, but they were not prepared for the fact that the Christians welcomed the animals as instruments of the glory and salvation” (84). Death was viewed as the gateway to heaven; that death released them into eternal glory. Even the most stoical Romans committed suicide as the last resort and when life became intolerable. But for the primitive Christians, life itself was intolerable. Only in death did they find the way to heavenly bliss. Christian teaching was at first a powerful incitement to suicide. It was only in the sixth century AD that the Church spoke out against suicide. The biblical authority for rejecting suicide was the sixth of the Ten Commandments: “Thou shalt not kill.” A person who commits suicide breaks the commandment of God and thus became a murderer. To take one’s own life was to reject the divine will of God. “Since life itself is the gift from God, to reject it is to reject Him and to

frustrate His will; to kill His image is to kill Him- which means a one-way ticket to eternal damnation” (Alvarez 69-70).

2.1.3. Depiction and Outlook Towards Suicide

The act of suicide and the reaction to it has been vast in writings and in literature. Many have given their thoughts regarding this subject often held as a taboo. In the 14th century, when Dante was writing the epic poem *Divine Comedy*, the Catholic Church regarded it as equivalent to murder mainly basing on one of the Commandments “Thou shall not kill”; that it rejected God’s gift of life. He did not question the orthodox treatment towards the act of suicide but devoted one of the “gimmest cantos of the *Inferno*” to the subject:

In the seventh circle, below the burning heretics and the murderers stewing in their river of hot blood is a dark, pathless wood where the souls of suicides grow for eternity in the shape of warped poisonous thorns. The harpies, with their great wings and feathered bellies, human faces and clawed feet, nest in these stunted trees and pick at their leaves. [...] When Dante, frightened and uncomprehending, breaks off a twig, the trunk turns dark with blood and cries out, ‘Why doest thou tear me?’ [...] The tree harbours the soul of Piero delle Vigne [...] Accused of treason, publicly disgraced, blinded and imprisoned, Piero had dashed out his brains against the walls of his cell sixteen years before Dante was born. He explains to the poet that when the soul violently tears itself from its body, it is thrown into the terrible wood [where it grows] into a thorn tree. Then the harpies make their nests in its branches and tear at the leaves, endlessly repeating the violence the soul has inflicted on itself. At the day of the judgement, when bodies are and souls are reunited, the bodies of

suicides will hang from the branches of these trees, since divine justice will not bestow again on their owners the bodies they have wilfully thrown away (Alvarez 167-168).

Here, Dante understands the anguish of Piero and tries to emphasize his virtuousness but he also rejects the act. Dante clears the name of Piero and the charges of treason made against him but at the same time damns him to an eternity of pain.

Though many religious people still considered suicide as something extremely wicked, cruel and satanic, attitudes towards suicide began to change slowly during the Renaissance 16th century. This period was marked by the philosophical and literary investigation of suicide. It was during this period that the traditional Christian view began to be challenged, at first obliquely but gradually with increasing boldness. Michel Montaigne, one of the most significant philosophers of the French Renaissance, in his essay “A Custom of the Isle of Cea” explores positive justifications for suicide. His defence of suicide was based on classical notions of free will. According to him, death is a remedy against all evils and that it should be sought instead of being feared; and that life depends on the will of other people but death on oneself. He legalizes suicide, and that is for people who have lost purpose and meaning. He is the most prominent of the era to question the Christian position on suicide which emphasizes on the heinousness of it.

Sir Thomas More in his *Utopia* (1516) allows suicide as a kind of voluntary euthanasia. He considers suicide as a pious and holy action. He opines that a person suffering from diseases can free himself from the bitterness of life, for through death alone, he can put an end to torture. Francis Bacon, an English Renaissance era author, does not distinguish between death by suicide and death from natural causes. For him, a corpse is a corpse. All that matters is the dignity of the act, a certain stylishness in dying.

When Shakespeare was writing his great tragedies, there was a transitional period in Renaissance theatre. Suicide was reacquiring the dignity and honour of its Roman past, but had not lost its medieval connotations of shame and despair. Thus Shakespeare, like Bacon, remains neutral in the subject of suicide. Hamlet's famous 'To be or not to be' soliloquy is often interpreted as his musings on suicide. His speech is notably free from the common language of religious despair which is associated with Christian suicide. Shakespeare uses suicide in many of his plays. In fact he used the subject of suicide much more than any of his other contemporaries. There is a mention of thirteen suicides in his plays: two in *Romeo and Juliet*, one in *Julius Caesar*, one in *Othello*, one in *Hamlet*, one in *Macbeth*, one in *King Lear* and five in *Anthony and Cleopatra*. In *Othello*, Alvarez comments, "the sin of Othello's suicide weighs not at all; what matters is its tragic inevitability and the degree to which it heightens his heroic stature." (176). In *Anthony and Cleopatra*, Cleopatra's suicide is glamorized:

Bravest at the last,
She leveled at our purpose and, being royal,
Took her own way (273).

In 1608, John Donne brought out the first modern defenses of suicide in English from a religious perspective in his work *Biathanatos*. The opening years of the seventeenth century were the low-point of Donne's life. His secret marriage to Anne More in 1601 stopped short a career which had previously been gathering brilliant momentum. His young wife's enraged father had Donne thrown briefly into prison and dismissed him from his post as private secretary to the Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal. It was during this time that a kind of suicidal damp permeated his life. He had written about the subject because he himself was constantly tempted to do it. He takes a peculiarly modern line in justifying suicide and admits to his own temptation to it. It is interpreted that *Biathanatos* was an attempt by Donne to overcome

temptation of suicide. In its Preface, he confessed to a perennial temptation committing it. He undertakes an exhaustive analysis of both secular and religious argumentation against suicide, and argues that suicide is not so naturally sin, that it may never be otherwise. He argues that suicide is justified when, like submission to martyrdom, it is done with charity, done for the glory of God. According to him, Christ himself, in not merely allowing himself to be crucified but in voluntarily emitting his last breath on the cross, was in fact a suicide. However, he also argues that because suicide is so likely to be committed for self-interested reasons rather than for the glory of God, it is appropriate for both civil and canon law to prohibit it. For Donne, suicide seems not to have the question of choice or action but of mood, something indistinct but pervasive like rain. When he wrote *Biathanatos* he was doing more than the inconsistencies of the Church's ruling against suicide, and far more than wilfully and ostentatiously defending a heretical paradox. Donne had an obsession with death and this never disappeared. He continually harped on death in his sermons, divine poems and the macabre drama of his last weeks. He is known to have risen from his death-bed to preach his last and greatest sermon *Death's Duell*. Alvarez points out about Donne in *The Savage God*:

He had his portrait painted in his winding-sheet, eyes closed, hands crossed. This picture of himself as a corpse was then hung by his bed where he could contemplate it for the fifteen days of life which were left to him. His last act was to settle himself into the position in which he would be buried, almost as though he wanted to know in advance what it felt like to be dead (180).

Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) is a book that takes a medical view of voluntary death. Burton is said to have hanged himself in his chambers at Christ's Church to fulfil his own astrological predictions about the date of his death. In the section 'Prognostics of Melancholy,' Burton raises his opinion that suicide is the outcome of

melancholy. He maintains that people kill themselves because their lives have become intolerable: “These unhappy men are born to misery, past all hope of recovery, incurable sick; the longer they live, the worse they are; and death alone must ease them” (Burton 355).

Where Christian theology understood suicide as an affair between the devil and the individual sinner, the 17th and 18th centuries Enlightenment philosophers tended to conceive suicide in secular terms; that it resulted from the facts about individuals, their natural psychologies, and their particular social settings. The debate on the rights and wrongs of suicide continued as fiercely as ever but now the pious traditionalists had tougher opponents to fulminate against. Montesquieu, Voltaire and Hume, as well as lesser figures like Alberto Radicati, Count of Passerano, began a rational approach to suicide. There was a moral revolution: suicide had been removed from the world of taboo and installed in the realm of manners. Edicts against suicide which were transferred bodily from canon law to civil law during the Reformation now seemed uncivilized and stupid. For the eighteenth-century rationalists, it was both absurd and presumptuous to inflate a trivial private act into a monstrous crime. Montesquieu, in *The Persian Letters* (1721), questions through his character why one is not free to part with the gift of life which ceases to give pleasure. He gave a special meaning to the idea of a social contract which he used to defend suicide on the ground that no individual ever made an agreement to be born, so he had the right to end his life.

David Hume in his essay “Of Suicide” strongly advocates the idea of suicide. It is here that he brings forth his famous quote “the life of a man is of no greater importance to the universe than that of an oyster” (Hume 28). According to him, the act of suicide was not a crime as it affected no one but that it was potentially to the advantage of the individual. Every individual has a natural fear for death, so when a person kills himself, it is only after rational and careful consideration, for continued existence in pain and misery is worse than death.

Cesare Beccaria in “Of Suicide” from his most influential work *Of Crimes and Punishments* (1764) argues that if killing is sometimes justified, then suicide may be also. To punish the “insensible dead body” of a person who has taken his own life is equal to “scourging a statue,” and moreover the act of the dead man does no harm to society; “He who kills himself does a less injury to society than he who quits his country forever” (Beccaria 30).

The traditional combination of genius and melancholy which had so preoccupied the Renaissance was transformed by the Romantics into the Siamese twins of genius and premature death. For the young Romantics, death was a great consoler and inspirer; they made suicide fashionable. For the young poets, novelists, dramatists, painters, great lovers and members of countless Suicide Clubs, to die by one’s own hand was a short and sure way to fame. The suicide of Thomas Chatterton, a victim of Grub Street and snobbery, remains the most famous of all literary suicides. Chatterton’s tragedy is one of waste, a terrible loss of talent, vitality and promise. The Romantics transformed him into the symbol of the doomed poet. Wordsworth called him “the marvellous Boy, / The sleepless Soul that perished in his pride” (22). The Romantics, in their heyday, established the idea that “suicide was one of the many prices to be paid for genius [...] Suicide has permeated western culture like a dye that cannot be washed out. Suicide did not disappear from the arts; instead, it became part of their fabric” (Alvarez 235). Once suicide was accepted as a common fact of society, something that people often did without hesitation, it became a common property of art. And it was only in this era that the religious penalties for suicide were finally abandoned.

As the nineteenth century wore on, the ideal of death also collapsed. “[As] the power of religion weakened, the power of suicide grew” (Alvarez 238). Suicide and thoughts about it were replaced by more sexually associated activities like homosexuality, incest and sado-masochism. The twentieth century was steeped in symptoms of despair and depression. The

central theme that dominated half of literature was death. In the Middle ages, the obsession with death was with an eye for after-life, but the modern preoccupation with death was without an after-life.. Confirmed in his belief that no God exists for him, Kirilov in *The Possessed* (1872) by Dostoevsky, shoots himself. He commits what the author calls, a logical suicide.

A major development of the era was Charles Darwin's book *On the Origin of Species* (1859). The theory of evolution set forth the idea that every being on the earth evolved from an earlier form. Thus the idea set in that if life was not given by God, then it was not a crime to give it up. This rational view was hacked by modern psychiatry at the end of the nineteenth century by Sigmund Freud through his invention of psychoanalysis. It was only during the nineteenth century when discussions on suicide began to be focussed on the factors that influenced the phenomenon of suicide- social or psychological causes. While suicide as a moral problem still remained under discussion in theology, the problem of social responsibility was not as important in the social sciences where the subject was seen as being manipulated by social and psychological factors beyond his/her control. This change from a moral perspective to a causal one can be seen as a removal of individual responsibility, as the person who has committed suicide cannot be considered guilty as long as either the societal or the psychological factors are responsible for his or her gesture.

2.2. Psychoanalytic and Sociological Theories of Suicide

A number of psychologists have given their own theories as to why a person becomes suicidal or chooses the act. Understanding of suicide has been an important aim of psychoanalysis since its beginning. The first important psychological insight into suicide came from Sigmund Freud, an Austrian neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis. In April 1910, the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society held a symposium to discuss suicide, where

Adler, Sadger, Stekel and Freud himself exchanged views. The meeting ended inconclusively: Freud suggested that suicide would not be understood until more was known about the intricate process of mourning and melancholia.

Five years after the symposium on suicide, Freud wrote *Mourning and Melancholia* not published until the year 1917. In this paper, he formulated dynamics of melancholic depression and of suicide. The essay “analyses the ways in which people react to the death of a loved one, or the loss of a cherished idea” (Thurschwell 89). It also gives the idea that “suicide is simply displaced hostility” (Alvarez 126). Two themes are expressed: one with the structure of the psyche; the other with the problem of sadism and masochism, that lead towards the concept of what Freud later called the death instinct.

A normal state of mourning involves serious distress and depression but it heals with time. It is a painful process but this normal mourner comes to terms with it with a realization that “the loved object really exists no longer in the outside world is gradually compensated for by its establishment within the ego as something loved, loving and strengthening” (Alvarez 127). Melancholia however, involves a complicated psychic process which is more difficult to come to terms with:

The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment (Freud 244).

The way a melancholic takes pleasure is “self-tormenting” is identified with “sadism” and “it is this sadism that solves the riddle of the tendency to suicide” (Freud 252). In discussing about Freud’s key idea, Thurschwell opined:

melancholics harboured unconscious ambivalent feelings towards the lost object [...] The loss is taken on to the self – it is as if a part of the self has died along with the person to whom that part of the self was attached [...] Melancholics feel responsible for the death of the object; they feel they have physically murdered the other person (90-91).

The melancholics believe that:

whatever had been lost, by death or separation or rejection, had somehow been murdered by him. It therefore returns as an internal persecutor, punishing, seeking revenge and expiation. Sylvia Plath put this clearly and without shuffling in the poem on her dead father, 'Daddy' [...] She is both the guilty woman who has committed murder and the innocent victim fed upon by vampires. This is the vicious circle of melancholia, in which a man may take his own life partly to atone for his fantasied guilt for the death of someone he loves, and partly because he feels the dead person lives on inside him, crying out, like Hamlet's father, for revenge (Alvarez 127).

In the year 1920, Freud published *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that marked a turning point in his theoretical approach. In this essay he went beyond the simple pleasure principle, developing his theory of drives with the addition of the death drive which is also often referred to as *Thanatos*. He stated that the self-hatred seen in depression originated in anger toward a love object, anger that the person turned back on himself. He regarded suicide as the ultimate form of this phenomenon, and doubted that there would be a suicide without the earlier repressed desire to kill someone else. Freud begins with a theory that the course of mental events is automatically regulated by the pleasure principle with a strong tendency toward the pleasure principle. Freud then proceeds to look for evidence of unsuspected forces

‘beyond’ the pleasure principle. He found exceptions to the universal power which was beyond the pleasure principle – situations which the pleasure principle cannot cope adequately with. He puts forward this idea with the theory of ‘repetition compulsion’ - a psychological phenomenon in which a person repeats traumatic event or circumstances over and over again. Repetition turns each new situation into an old one, which we may have already experienced and so know how to handle. On the subject of repetition, he postulated four examples: his grandson’s ‘fort-da’ game, repetitive dreams of shell-shocked soldiers which seemed to replay their near-death experiences without actually helping them to master the situation – without making them in any sense healthier because of those dreams, the pattern of self-injuring behaviour that can be traced through the lives of certain people, and the tendency of many patients in psycho-analysis to act out over and over again unpleasant experiences of their childhood. He questioned himself if there was a possibility that repetition could be a psychic end in itself; something that went against what human beings want, either consciously or unconsciously.

In a controversial formulation, Freud came up with what he called *death drive* to try to explain these diversions from the pleasure principle which were not meant to delay pleasure to conform to the needs of reality. Death and pleasure finally come to be associated. “Although our own deaths may be a goal of the self-destructive urge, in reality the deaths we experience are never our own – they are the deaths of our family members, friends, loved ones which we must negotiate” (Thurschwell 88-89). Death instinct drives people to death so that they can have real peace. Death alone can get rid of a person’s tensions and struggles. Freud’s theory states that death instinct exists in almost everyone’s subconscious. It is an irresistible instinctive power in human beings’ consciousness. Presence of death instinct in the consciousness maybe disagreeable to some people. There is no doubt that a person’s instinct to live is stronger than the death instinct. However, if they examine their flashes of

idea in their consciousness, it will be found that just like the life instinct, their desire for death is also something very strong, for “the aim of all life is death” (Baral 34).

After Freud, the next significant development in the study of suicide arose from the work of Melanie Klein famously known for her object relations theory. Klein sees life and death instincts at work in the human condition. Her Instinct Theory is about two primary instincts of nature- *Eros* and *Thanatos*. The infant is seen as coming into the world with life and death instincts. Love is the manifestation of the life instinct and hate is the manifestation of the death instinct. From the beginning of life, the infant experiences both creative and destructive instincts and tries to deal with them by denying and separating them by expelling or projecting them into the outside world, or by bringing them together through introjections. Klein took up Freud’s views on instincts from his writings. In keeping up with Freud, she considered life and death instincts as key in the functions and development of the ego. In Klein’s view, primary anxiety arises from the workings of the death instinct and is an unconscious fear of annihilation.

Klein states that suicide is a result of paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions. In the paranoid-schizoid position, there is an annihilatory anxiety as well as the “fear of loss of the good object due to destructiveness of the bad object. One tends to attack the bad object to protect oneself from annihilation or in order to protect the good object” (Ronningstam et al. 150). Whereas in depressive position, the fear of the ego from losing an object leads to depressive anxiety and this leads to the feeling of guilt over the sadistic fantasies. And thus:

guilt feelings demand reparation and attempts to undo real or imaginary consequences of aggressive fantasies. However, in more pathological cases, guilt can lead to feelings of badness and beliefs about being destructive towards others in general and toward the good object in particular. Suicide

might follow as an attempt to cleanse the world and prevent its destruction (150).

Karl Augustus Menninger took up Freud's later elaboration of death instinct and explained the reasons why a person committed suicide by fusing the idea of the life and death instincts. "While various degrees of instinctual defusion manifest themselves in various forms of physical and mental illness, suicide constitutes the most extreme manifestation of death instinct" (Ronningstam et al. 150). According to him, there were three main reasons for suicide: the wish to kill which arises from the feelings of hate or the desire to take revenge; the wish to be killed arising out of guilt and masochistic feelings; and a wish to die which arises out of depression and feelings of hopelessness. The wish to die includes the longing to die and makes a person preoccupied with the essence of death and dying.

Carl Gustav Jung considered suicide as something that destroyed harmony between the conscious and the subconscious mind based on repressed aggressive impulses. He frequently used letters as means of communication with the outside world for sharing his views, correcting misinterpretations if any or expanding his views. In his letters, he had dealt with the subject of suicide at large. According to him, the act of suicide is a denial of the self; that it is wasteful. In one of his letters dated 10 July, 1946, he states:

The idea of suicide, understandable as it is, does not seem commendable to me. We live in order to gain the greatest possible amount of spiritual development and self-awareness. As long as life is possible, even if only in a minimal degree, you should hang onto it, in order to scoop it up for the purpose for the purpose of conscious development. To interrupt life before its time is to bring to a standstill an experiment which we have not set up. We

have found ourselves in the midst of it and must carry it through to the end (Jung “The Ethics of Suicide”).

To Jung, suicide was not an answer. He considered life as an interlude in a long story. He felt that our lives are not ours to take; that there is something beyond this life on earth. Later on, he changes his view and states that suicide should be left to the free choice of an individual. In his letter dated 25th July 1946 he states:

Anything that seems to be wrong to us can be right under certain circumstances over which we have no control and then end of which we do not understand. If Kristine Mann had committed suicide under the stress of unbearable pain, I should have thought this was the right thing. As it was not the case, I think it was in her stars to undergo such a cruel agony for reasons that escape our understanding (Jung “The Ethics of Suicide”).

Edwin S. Shneidman, was an American clinical psychologist, suicidologist and thanatologist, wrote twenty books on suicide and its prevention. According to him, suicide was caused by ‘psychache’ which refers to hurt, anguish, soreness, aching, psychological pain in the psyche, the mind; it is a psychological pain. Suicide occurs when the psychache is deemed by that person to be unbearable. All affective states- rage, hostility, depression, shame, guilt, hopelessness, etc. are relevant to suicide only as they related to unbearable psychological pain. He sticks to the idea that there is no suicide without psychache. ““There is a great deal of psychological pain in the world without suicide,” said Shneidman “But there is no suicide without a great deal of psychological pain”” (qtd. in Chaudhury et al. 4). All the negative emotions serve as the foundation of self-destructive behavior. According to Shneidman, suicide was not a random act, and adds that it acts as an answer to a person suffering or faced with an insoluble problem or unbearable dilemma. It is preferable to a set of dreaded circumstances and emotional distress which a person fears more than death.

Importantly, Shneidman also suggests that suicide arises from frustrated psychological needs. People with high standards and expectations are especially vulnerable to ideas of suicide when progress towards their goals is suddenly frustrated. They attribute their failures to their own shortcomings and view themselves as worthless, incompetent or unlovable. In predicting suicidal behaviour, a person's feeling of hopelessness should be considered as more important than other negative emotions. For, the suicidal person is convinced that absolutely nothing can be done to improve his or her situation. He also adds that people who take their own lives have talked to people about it and made suicidal gestures suggesting their lethal intentions.

Sociologists have also discussed at length and come up with theories with regard to suicide. The sociologists hold that the "idiosyncratic features and peculiar disorders of individual personality alone cannot account for the causes of self-destruction" (Wallis 61), that the act is "intimately related to gross-structural disfunctioning reflected in social disorganization, social isolation, excessive individuation, anonymity and rootlessness" (62).

The first notable personality is Emile Durkheim. In 1897, he published his path breaking study on suicide called *Suicide* which became a classic text in Sociology. The question was no longer the morality of the act but the social conditions which produce such despair. While agreeing that modernity was one of the rising causes of suicide, Durkheim took a more analytical view on suicide. He argued that suicide results from society's strength or weakness of control over the individual. In his battle to pierce the defences of moral indignation which surrounded suicide, he insisted that suicide could be classified into four types- egoistic, altruistic, anomic and fatalistic.

Egoistic suicide occurs when an individual is not properly integrated into society but is, instead, thrown to one's own resources. This give rise to meaninglessness, apathy, melancholy, and depression- thus leading to rise in suicide. Hence, Protestantism, with its

emphasis on free will and grace, tends to encourage suicide more than the Catholic Church. Similarly, the old pattern of family life- grandparents, parents and children all living intensely under one roof, protected each other from self-destruction, whereas the modern disintegration of family life- children scattered and parents divorced- encourages them.

Opposite to egoistic suicide is altruistic suicide. It occurs when an individual is so completely absorbed in the group that its goals and its identity become his. They even sacrifice their own life out of a sense of duty to others. The tribe or religion or group has such a massive cohesion that each member is willing to sacrifice his life for the sake of his beliefs- like this Hindus who threw themselves under the wheels of the Jaggernaut; or for the good of the cause- like the Communists who confessed to imaginary crimes during the Moscow show trials of the late thirties; or simply to save his friend survive- like Captain Oates.

Anomic suicide on the other hand, is the result of a change in a man's social position so sudden that he is unable to cope with his new situation. Great, unexpected wealth or great, unexpected poverty, a searing divorce or even a death in the family can thrust a man into a world where his old habits are no longer adequate. Instead of his society being too harshly structured, it seems no longer structured at all. He kills himself because, for better or worse, his accustomed world has been destroyed and he is lost.

Fatalistic suicide occurs when a person is excessively regulated. It is the opposite of anomic suicide, and occurs in societies so oppressive their inhabitants would rather die than live on. It is the suicide of persons pitilessly blocked and passions choked by oppressive discipline.

Durkheim's fourfold typology of suicide thus arises in social structures. The broad effect of his masterpiece was to insist that suicide was not an irredeemable moral crime but a

fact of society. At the pessimistic worst, it was a social disease which could be cured by social means:

Of all kinds of action that a man can commit it would surely seem to be the case that of taking his own life was supremely an individual one. When a man puts a gun on his temple and pulls the trigger one would surely suppose that he is acting from purely individual motives which he alone has experienced, and that his act can therefore only be explained in individual terms. Durkheim maintained, however, that even in this highly individualistic sphere, it was still demonstrable that the incidence of suicide in society was a 'social fact', not just an individual one, and that it could only be explained by considering the conditions, characteristics, and constraining pressures of the social milieu of society within which it took place (Fletcher 370).

Jack Douglas in his book *The Social Meanings of Suicide* (1967) opines that there are a number of reasons why people commit suicide. When a person commits the act, normally, it may be considered as irrational and come to the conclusion that a person took his own life because he was depressed or mentally ill. But he is of the view that a person does it as he sees death as a way of transforming the soul to another world. Thus, the end of the action is to die in order to live or get eternal life; to achieve fellow-feeling; take revenge by committing the act and blaming another person for the grievous action; escape from the responsibilities that come with life; or take his or her own life after killing another person.

Thomas Masaryk, in his work *Suicide and the Meaning of Civilization* (1881), considers that the main basis of morality in a society is religion. "A decrease of religiosity deregulates the social organism, makes people feel unhappy and increases social disorganization" (Bradatan 420). According to him, it is religion that makes life coherent as it

offers a “structured way of thinking” (420). Modern education focused too much on the intellect and not enough on the spiritual side, which he called ‘half-education.’ “Without a structured and satisfactory perspective on life, people are more likely to take their lives and develop mental sicknesses” (420). He came to the conclusion that in correlation with physical, psychological and social characteristics, the low degree of religiosity is the “real cause” of suicide.

Immanuel Kant has contributed immensely to the study of suicide from the moralistic point of view. In his notable works “The Critique of Practical Reason” and “Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals,” he held that human life was sacred in itself. And, to “terminate it voluntarily was to follow a principle of self love- a principle unfit as a universal law of nature and therefore immoral” (Wallis 18). In “The Metaphysical Principles of Virtue,” Kant gives his opinion that since man is a social animal, he, as an animal being, should preserve himself in the nature of an animal. He terms suicide as self-murder and something absurd, and that in killing himself, he commits murder. In addition, he adds that a person may be regarded as a murderer when she commits suicide in a pregnant state. In taking his own life, a person fails in his duty as a parent to a child, to his spouse, family, citizens, government, and finally to God, for he rejects the greatest gift of God. When a person was granted this precious life, it was left to him to preserve it, and thus in forsaking it, he degrades the humanity in him. In “Lectures on Ethics,” Kant becomes flexible in his outlook towards suicide and gives his argument that while one must not take his own life, “one must be prepared to give life up in order to have lives honorably and ‘not disgrace the dignity of humanity’” (Kant “The Ethics of Suicide Digital Archive”).

The history of suicide, religious and philosophical views and outlook towards it has been diverse. It was treated as a taboo subject and even at present, outlook towards it is held in a similar way. It is no doubt a complicated subject and fully understanding it becomes an

impossibility. The subject itself is so sensitive that even the psychoanalysts feel reluctant to expose their materials for further reading in this area, and the bottom-line of its difficulty lies in the fact that “the patient who succeeds in killing himself represents for his analyst an unequivocal failure” (Alvarez 123). But, the theories regarding suicide give us a glimmer of light to understand partially the reasons why people resort to such an act. They lay bare to us that the processes which lead a man to take his own life are at least as complex and difficult as those by which he continues to live. They help us to untangle the motives and the deep ambiguity of the wish to die but they say little about what it means to be suicidal, and how it feels. The world of suicide is a closed one with its own irresistible logic, superstitions and omens. “The logic of suicide is different. It is like the unanswerable logic of a nightmare, or like the science-fiction fantasy of being projected suddenly into another dimension: everything makes sense and follows its own strict rules; yet, at the same time, everything is also different, perverted, upside-down” (Alvarez 144). But whatever sane reasons people may bring out in support of suicide, the act can never be considered as a case that is appealing. Suicide is devastating. Its effects on the family members and loved ones can have severe and far-reaching consequences. The feelings for the death of a loved one is tremendous, but when the death is brought about by suicide, the feelings are additional: guilt for not preventing the suicide, anger or resentment towards a person who committed such an act, distress over unresolved issues, and a feeling of failure.

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CHAPTER 3: THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF AND ERNEST HEMINGWAY

Virginia Woolf and Ernest Hemingway are two towering figures in Literature. They both belong to the twentieth century and lived in the era the two World Wars. Apart from the glittering successes they both achieved in their field as writers, they were faced with problems and issues that encompassed their personal lives. The twentieth century literary world was shaken when these two brilliant writers took their own lives and left a void. From their biographical study, so much of negativity encircling their personal lives was discerned. Taking a closer look at them, this chapter seeks to make a thematic analysis of their selected works while trying to track the autobiographical details found in them. A close study will be done on suicide and suicidal tendencies, death, mental illness, impact of war, depression, isolation and other dark elements which shadow their brilliant works.

3.1. Virginia Woolf

Virginia Woolf, an eminent litterateur of the modernist era, lived so full a life as a writer. This celebrated innovative novelist was aware of herself as a ‘modern’ and the vast number of her writings spray different colors of her intellectuality. She herself holds that her writings are records of her most cherished experiences: “‘I wonder’, she asked herself, ‘whether I ... deal ... in autobiography & call it fiction?’” (qtd. in Gordon 6). Woolf holds her memories close to her heart and sketches them in her works by way of altercation when

the need arises, as a writer. The number and chains of deaths in her family, starting from her mother's, had a destructive effect on her mental health:

Julia's death in 1895 was closely followed in 1897 by that of Stella, her daughter by an earlier marriage, and then by the deaths of Leslie Stephen in 1904 and a son, Thoby, in 1906. That decade of deaths sealed off Virginia's youth and divided it sharply from the rest of her life. 'So many horrors', she said, 'were pressed to our eyes.' The dead haunted her imagination" (Gordon 4).

Carrying the burden of these sad losses was added by Woolf's record of being sexually harassed by her half-brother Gerald. For this sensitive soul, chronic sadness gave way to mental depression which became a lifelong battle, coupled with her fear of when the next bout of madness or mental breakdown will be. Against this dark side of Woolf's life, there is beauty in her mental illness: in it we discern the birth of literary genius. She admits that writing was the only thing that kept her afloat. When fighting against her demon and trying to find meaning in her illness failed, she saw death as the short way out and 'less painful' in bringing an end to end the mania.

3.1.1. Autobiographical Elements in the Works of Virginia Woolf

To get a deeper understanding of Virginia Woolf's dark world in relation to her works, an autobiographical study is necessary. And so much of it can be discerned: her experiences, feelings and outlook. She holds her memories close to her heart and sketches them in her works by way of altercation when the need arises as a writer. And her works, indeed, highlight her own persona, her experiences, feelings of loss and obsessions.

Woolf's first novel *The Voyage Out* (1915) is highly autobiographical. The novel centers on the life of a young woman Rachel Vinrace who is raised in cloistered propriety by two maiden aunts, and details the voyage undertaken by her along with family and close ones a ship named *Euphrosyne*. The journey follows the mind of the tragic heroine, her illness and subsequent death. Rachel is not an exact self-portrait of Virginia, but she drew many details from her own experiences. It is here that Woolf first adopted her theory of applying biography to fiction. Many characters in the novel echo real life characters in the life of Virginia Woolf. In *Virginia Woolf: A Writer's Life*, Lyndall Gordon mentions that Terence Hewet is given an exact background of Woolf's brother-in-law Clive Bell; Rachel's beautiful aunt Helen Ambrose is modeled after her sister Vanessa Bell; Helen's husband Mr. Ridley Ambrose, the scholarly editor who takes interest in taking long walks has obvious traits of Leslie Stephen, her father. And Rachel's resemblance to Virginia is striking as Gordon writes:

The Voyage Out- [includes] not only the superficial details of her travels to Portugal and Greece in 1905 and 1906, but her knowledge of death and mental suffering, and her strange unfolding through a home education. The heroine, Rachel Vinrace, is a young woman of twenty-four who gazes from a ship into the dim recesses of the sea as into a mirror of an unfathomable self. Down there lie the black ribs of wrecked ships and the 'great white monsters of the lower waters'. Rachel feels 'like a fish at the bottom of the sea.' She is surfacing slowly in the course of the novel and then dies before her shape is clear (97).

When Virginia Woolf suffered from bouts of madness, she would stop eating and even loathe the presence of her husband. The same is seen in the novel when Rachel feels that the

presence of Terence, her love, is disturbing her: “it troubled her when people tried to disturb her loneliness; she wished to be alone. She wished for nothing else in the world” (*TVO* 369). Thus, Virginia Woolf’s experience of madness became a fable of Rachel, the submerged woman. It is not her power to rid off the madness in her. Her state of mind is shrouded by madness; it envelopes her when she tries to come out of her suffocation. She gets stuck in the sticky pool and sinks deeper and deeper until she meets her end.

Woolf’s third novel *Jacob’s Room* (1922) is a fictional biography centering on the life of Jacob Flanders. The novel traces the growth of Jacob from childhood at Scarborough, his university years in Cambridge, his relationships with women, his trip to Greece where he falls in love with a married woman named Sandra Wentworth Williams and his subsequent death as a young man in the First World War. Jacob’s personality and his life emerge through the sketches of other people who were connected to him. Thus his character is unfolded through the inner monologues of the people who have come across him. This includes his mother Elizabeth Flanders, his brothers Archer and John, Captain Barfoot, Andrew Llyod, Timmy Durrant, Clara Durrant, Mrs. Durrant, Fanny Elmer, Julia Eliot, Florinda, Sandra Wentworth Williams, etc. The burst of the young Flanders from a small boy to a young man is cut short by the long hands of death brought about by war: “the novel begins, as it ends, with sorrow” (Handley 110). Taking note of all these details, it is impossible to keep Woolf’s brother Thoby out of the picture. The novel *Jacob’s Room* is indeed a tribute to Woolf’s brother Thoby. In the novel she immortalizes him, for Jacob is modeled closely after him. “Like Thoby, Jacob spent part of his childhood at the seashore, went to Cambridge University, lived in Bloomsbury, traveled to Greece, and died an early death” (Bazin and Lauter 15): Thoby had caught typhoid while traveling in Greece and died shortly thereafter. Woolf felt the public losses in war at the deepest level because she herself had felt so much when she experienced chains of domestic losses.

Mrs Dalloway (1925), set in the postwar England June 1923, details a day in the life of Clarissa Dalloway, the protagonist of the novel. Clarissa bears striking resemblance to Woolf. She is presented as a high-society woman who is preparing to host an evening party at her house. The novel details her day's events and at the same time connects her past through the stream of consciousness technique. The present novel is often used as a document for feminist study: the title *Mrs Dalloway* refers to Clarissa's married surname; to the fact that she is identified with Richard Dalloway, the socially esteemed, rich, and well connected man; who Clarissa is has a lot to do with the fact that she is the 'wife' of Richard Dalloway. Woolf has employed a lot of her personal experiences in the present novel and some autobiographical traits are highlighted in the character of Clarissa and Septimus Warren Smith. The novel, as Woolf stated, was an outcome of her idea of balancing contradictory attitudes to society: "I adumbrate here a study of insanity & suicide: the world seen by the sane & the insane side by side" (qtd. in Gordon 190).

The opening lines of *Mrs Dalloway* give us a peep into the mind of Clarissa. The reader is informed that Clarissa has been suffering from an illness whose nature is never either identified or named. In fact, the narrator affirms only in brackets that her heart has been affected by influenza:

For having lived in Westminster- how many years now? Over twenty- one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; suspense (but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza) before Big Ben strikes (MD 10).

Clarissa's soul has to fight against a metaphorical "brutal monster" which has been growing increasingly strong since her illness. This monster stirs a powerful hatred that it provokes in

her a physical pain in her spine and makes “all pleasure in beauty, in friendship, in being well, in being loved and making her home delightful rock, quiver, and bend as if indeed there were a monster grubbing at the root” (*MD* 18-19).

In *Mrs Dalloway*, Septimus Warren Smith is the double of Clarissa, and Clarissa is the alter ego of Virginia Woolf. Septimus is a reflection of the author’s own mental instability, and he is the dark double that commits suicide in the novel. The suicide of the “mad, past-ridden Septimus in *Mrs Dalloway* are fictional versions of the self that was potentially creative, potentially distorted, and always threatened with extinction” (Gordon 8). He is among one of her most autobiographical characters whose fluctuating moods of manic depression resonates Woolf’s own experience.

Born into the late Victorian intellectual aristocratic family, Woolf was raised in a cultured and literary atmosphere. She was a member of Bloomsbury Group- a gathering of writers, artists, and intellectuals, who met regularly to discuss new ideas. In *Mrs Dalloway* we find one similar gathering; of the party Clarissa is going to host on that particular evening. Her world consists of glittering surfaces, such as fine fashion, parties and high society, but as she moves through that world she probes beneath those surfaces in search of deeper meaning, and she has done it truly well through her use of the stream of consciousness technique. During her life, Woolf consulted at least twelve doctors, from the Victorian era to the shell shock of World War I, the emerging medical trends for treating the insane. Woolf also included frustratingly impersonal doctor types in Bradshaw and Holmes that reflected doctors she had visited throughout the years. Her attack on doctors in the novel has been “connected with her experiences at the hands of Dr Savage and his colleague Sir William Gull” (Jouve 251). Woolf frequently heard the medical terms used for mental breakdown and she incorporated such language in her present novel. With the character Septimus, Woolf

combined her doctor's terminology with her own unstable state of mind. Lyndall Gordon, in her book *A Writer's Life*, presents the chain of deaths in Woolf's family, her nervous breakdown, mood swings, madness and illness, and her eventual suicide. On March 28, 1941, Woolf filled her pockets with rocks and walked into the River Ouse behind her house never to emerge alive. Mental illness took a toll on this gifted writer, and it is evident from her suicide note to her husband Leonard Woolf: "Dearest, I feel certain that I am going mad again. I feel we can't go through those terrible times. And I shan't recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and I can't concentrate. So I am doing what seems the best thing to do" ("Virginia Woolf's suicide note").

Woolf's husband and close friends compared her periods of insanity to a manic depression quite similar to the episodes experienced by Septimus. Woolf commented that in writing the novel *Mrs Dalloway*, she had so many ideas: that she wanted to give life and death, sanity and insanity; and that she wanted to criticize the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense. Her creation Septimus no doubt mirrors her own symptoms. Like Woolf, he experiences guilt for not grieving the loss of a loved one sufficiently; "he is haunted by the dead person, seeing and talking with him during his periods of mental illness" (Bazin and Lauter 17).

Virginia Woolf spent many of her childhood summers at St Ives which housed the Talland House where the Leslie family retreated to in the summer for ten years. This square house which was situated on a hill was not a luxury, but from here one got a "perfect view across the bay to Godrevy lighthouse" (Gordon 12). This idyllic place, which Leslie Stephen described as 'a pocket paradise' (qtd. in Gordon 13), held many fond memories of Woolf's own family and close ones and it formed the "base" of the novel *To the Lighthouse* (1927). She relives her happiest memories of her walks to Trencrom whence she saw both the coasts

of Cornwall, on one side St Michael's Mount and on the other St Ives Bay. It recalls the odd memory that struck Woolf's mind: her younger brother Adrian had not been allowed to go on an expedition to the lighthouse in 1892 which was of great disappointment. The novel follows suit when James feels disheartened after the trip to the lighthouse gets cancelled. Mrs. Ramsay bears such close semblance with Julia Stephen that Vanessa commented it was painful to see their mother raised from the dead. The untidy and shabby Talland House was often overrun with guests and in the novel, the Ramsays' trip accompanied are by a number of friends and colleagues. The other characters which are drawn from real-life are Mr. Ramsay, Mr. Carmichael, Minta Doyle, etc. When Woolf lost her mother at thirteen, she was plunged into gloom and the same happened to her father Leslie, and in the novel, Mr. Ramsay becomes the same and indulges in self pity. In the summer of 1894, after the death of their parents, Woolf and her siblings returned to the place as did the Ramsay family together with their father Mr. Ramsay: for Woolf, it was a pilgrimage and the memories of it gave way to the present elegiac novel.

In particular, *To the Lighthouse* captures Woolf's emotions of the unhappiest years of her life, between the years of 1895 and 1904. In fictionalizing the portrait of her father through Mr. Ramsay, Woolf has thrown some light on the dark side of Leslie Stephen. Following the death of her mother, Woolf and her siblings became victims of the mood swings, negative outcomes of depression and the "remorseless 'gale' of their father's sighs" (Gordon 24). The young Virginia Woolf who was previously more attached to the father as compared to her siblings became emotionally divided on seeing Vanessa and Adrian, being furiously attached to their dead mother, turning into "hardened rebels" against the father. For the outsiders, Leslie Stephen was the same old "gentleman of exquisite gentility and physical and mental distinction" (24), but for the close people at home, he was unbearably ill-tempered and moody and emotionally volatile, affecting their very being; he was a "spare,

desolate stake” who was oddly blind to the feelings of the children; they became the scapegoats of his temper and he earned the brand of “an ogre who devoured women” (21) from them.

The Bloomsbury Group, a small group of intellectuals in London in the twentieth century of which Woolf was a prominent figure, had immense impact on the life and writings of this gifted writer. Her Bloomsbury friends were important to her not only for their intellectual influence on her but also because they created an atmosphere of mental freedom. This group of friends became a “rudimentary source” and appeared in her 1931 novel *The Waves*. She explores the relation of six friends who form a “lifelong coterie”: Bernard is believed to be inspired by her author friend E.M. Forster, T.S. Eliot as Louis, Lytton Strachey as Neville, Mary Hutchinson as Jinny, her sister Vanessa Bell as Susan, her brother Thoby Stephen as Percival- who never speaks in the novel but is ever present in the conversations and soliloquies of the “voices”, and Rhoda who is always anxiety-ridden, depressed and on the look-out for solitude bears striking resemblance to Woolf herself:

Through Rhoda, Virginia Woolf explored a hidden side to her own mind. Rhoda is obsessed with mortality from childhood, when she rocks her petals, to middle age when she hovers on the verge of suicide and then, as Bernard abruptly reports in the final episode, one day simply leaps (Gordon 232).

In *Jacob's Room*, Woolf tried to deduce Jacob from his room and people who were in close contact with him, and in the present novel, in a similar way Woolf tries to bring Percival to life through his friends. Woolf and her sister Vanessa married Thoby's own friends Leonard Woolf and Clive Bell and in the novel there is a striking resemblance to this. Thoby died young and though he was physically absent, he remained the “presiding genius of Bloomsbury” and in *The Waves*, “the dead, magnificent Percival remains the focus for the

lives of his six friends” (Gordon 125). Woolf and her sister never completely got over their beloved brother. Woolf is recorded to have said to her sister, “‘I had him so much in my mind’ [...] ‘I have a dumb rage still at not his being with us’” (qtd. in Gordon 125). Thoby, a silent and reserved person was always the handsome and most distinguished looking boy in the school and the same is reflected in the character of Percival.

The waves is without doubt the most experimental of Woolf’s novels. Against the backdrop of the mighty universe, the sea and the sun, Woolf has successfully tackled in tracing the lives from childhood to middle age of the characters Bernard, Susan, Neville, Louis, Jinny and Rhoda. For the sensitive Woolf who was deeply affected by her brother Thoby’s death, continues with his caricature in the present novel. Besides, she has beautifully sketched a replica of her mind and nature through a very sensitive character named Rhoda. Deeply concerned with the course of human life in its intense fragility, Woolf she successfully highlights in *The Waves* the “strangeness” and “infinite oddity of the human position” (203).

In analyzing the autobiographical elements found in the works of Woolf’s, it is seen that she has felt deeply about the workings of her own mind; of her fearful inhibition of madness; of the deep impact the deaths of her family had on her; and how she held the memories, family, friends and dear ones close to her heart. “An autobiography [...] is not a biography since no self can write his or her biography” but “the autobiographical text in spite of and even by creating fiction presents truth, the truth of the self that reveals itself in the presentation of the fiction of his or her life” (Flohr 5), and in connection to Woolf, it can be said that she has presented a fragment of herself though fiction.

3.1.2. Thematic Analysis of the Works of Virginia Woolf

Woolf has dealt at large with the themes which encompass her dark world. For a person like Woolf who battled lifelong depression, attempted suicides, had suicidal tendencies and suffered from mental illness added by bitter personal experiences, it was impossible to sweep off the negativity that surrounded her when she put her creative writing into force. Together with all these problems attached to her, war and its effects had a huge toll on the sensitive Woolf. Taking all these into account, this section analyzes the dark major themes of Woolf's works.

3.1.2.1. Death and Suicide

The themes of death and suicide haunt the novels of Woolf. Her first novel *The Voyage Out* records the central character Rachel Vinrace taking a voyage and within a short number of days, the long hands of death snatch her away from her beloveds. Through the mind's eye of Helen Ambrose, we get a glimpse of the vulnerability of Rachel which sets the tone for the novel's tragedy. As Rachel lay sleeping, Helen considers her aesthetically: "lying unprotected she looked somehow like a victim dropped from the claws of a bird of prey, but considered as a woman" (*TVO* 31). At eleven she lost her mother and she still cannot seem to shake it off, for the memories of her and her funeral come flooding back. Even the smell of flowers makes her remember that awful day when her mother was buried: the memory of "the little hall at Richmond laden with flowers on the day of her mother's funeral, smelling so strong that now any flower-scent brought back the sickly horrible sensation" (29). On seeing her Aunt Lucy arranging flowers in the drawing-room, she tells her, "I don't like the smell of broom; it reminds me of funerals" (29).

The subject of death makes a sinister entry into the novel from the first chapter. As Rachel arranges the cutlery on the table- foreshadowing her own 'death', opines Wussow-

she overhears a casual mention of the inevitability of death in the conversation between a man and a woman: ““On a dark night one would fall down these stairs head foremost,” to which a woman’s voice added, “And be killed”” (6). Then there is Mr. Pepper who is afraid his rheumatism will lead him to an early death, and in connection to this, he reports to Mr. Ambrose about the death of Jenkinson of Peterhouse.

Hewet’s intermittent fear of death becomes visible as soon as Rachel tells him about her aching head. A normal person will ward this off without making it an issue, but for Hewet this was fearsome: ‘his sense of dismay and catastrophe were almost physically painful; all round him he seemed to hear the shiver of broken glass which, as it fell to earth, left him sitting in the open air’ (*TVO* 348-349).

With death inching closer, Rachel becomes oblivious to Hewet’s affection and in her hallucination she becomes oblivious to the affections of her lover. When he kisses her, she opens her eyes only to see “an old woman slicing a man’s head off with a knife” (*TVO* 361). The presence of the nurse adds to her misery. As this nurse plays cards by the bedside of the disturbed, fragile and sick Rachel, she becomes an image of horror, brutality and death. The sight of the nurse frightened her for there was something inexplicably sinister about her. As the terrified Rachel cried out in horror, the nurse laid down her cards and came by her bed and chillingly said: “Not asleep yet? Let me make you comfortable” (*TVO* 352). With her “cold hands” she arranges the bedclothes and the body of Rachel staring down at her for “an enormous length of time” and tells her to lie still. Instead of making her comfortable, as would a nurse, the presence of her nurse has a horrendous effect on Rachel. Her presence stiffens her and she does not leave her sight but merges with the shadow on the ceiling and she fixes her eyes “eternally” on her. Added to this is the ominous comment from the nurse that there is no hope for Rachel as she fell ill in the month of May and “Things seem to go

wrong in May” (*TVO* 366). Rachel fights to keep her tormentors away. She “fell into a deep pool of sticky water, which eventually closed over her head [...] While all her tormentors thought that she was dead, she was not dead but curled up at the bottom of the sea” (*TVO* 363). It is her mind which creates this terrible space and the horrible creatures exist within her and she dies losing this frightening battle. Life was a hard business where to exist, “one needs a rhinoceros skin- & that one has not got” (qtd in. Gordon 51). The ship carrying Rachel Vinrace with its “rich cargo of hope and despair, its moments of recognition and understanding alternating with anger and frustration” (Spalding xix) gives way to death, an imposing figure, to a triumphing end.

Jacob’s Room does not give any description about the scene of Jacob’s death but the whole novel circles around it. There is an ever-present hint of death in the novel. When it opens, the first scene that greets us is the sad and tear-filled eyes of Betty Flanders. Her letters to Captain Barfoot are “many-paged” and “tear-stained”. The memory of her dead husband Seabrook made her cry and “made all the dahlias in her garden undulate in red waves and flashed the glass house in her eyes, and spangled the kitchen with bright knives, and made Mrs. Jarvis, the rector’s wife, think at church, while the hymn-tune played” (*JR* 2).

The imagery of death is strongly presented through the attraction of Jacob to a skull. As a young boy, Jacob is drawn towards a skull on the beach which was lying among the black sticks and straw under the hill. It was “a whole skull- perhaps a cow’s skull, a skull, perhaps, with the teeth in it” (*JR* 4). His mother begs him to keep the “horrid” thing away but he does not pay heed. She tries to wrangle it away from his hands but he “ducked down and picked up the sheep’s jaw, which was loose” (4). Later on as he lay asleep, the skull is seen lying at his feet with its big yellow teeth. And years later, the skull is still seen hanging in his room, hung above the bedroom door. Then there is the image of the “death’s-head moth” (17)

which Rebecca, the maid, caught in the kitchen. The bone imagery continues: there are the “little bones lying on the turf with the sun beating on them” (18) and the Roman skeletons in the Yorkshire moor. The death of Jacob is augured by the “bright knives” formed by the tears in his mother’s eyes. One cannot help but agree with Gordon when she writes: “Like Hamlet, Jacob is destined to contemplate mortality before his time” (169). Death comes to anyone at any time but the nature of Jacob’s death is heart-wrenching. He is forced to meet the nature of mortality at a very young age and before his time.

Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* consists of a frivolous party, but death is a constant undercurrent to the characters’ thoughts and actions. The obvious example is that of Septimus’ inner dialogue where he sees himself as a godlike figure who has gone from “life to death.” His obsession to death is so intense that it obliterates his very existence. “The dead literally visit him and he has auditory hallucinations similar to Virginia Woolf’s, of birds singing in Greek ‘of life beyond a river where the dead walk’” (Gordon 196). Even five years after the end of war, he cannot get over the death of his dead comrades, especially Evans, his commanding officer; he finds himself mentally locked to them.

Peter Walsh fears growing old and dying, so is Clarissa. She repeatedly quotes from Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*, a passage about the comfort of death: “Fear no more the heat o’ the sun/ Nor the furious winter’s rages” (MD 15) This line is from a funeral song that celebrates death as a comfort after a difficult life. Middle-aged Clarissa has experienced the deaths of her father, mother, and sister and has lived through the calamity of war and she believes that living even one day is dangerous.

In addition, the subject of suicide is dealt at large. Septimus Warren Smith is a suicidal character. When he is asked to be admitted in the mental hospital, he sees suicide as the only way out. He threatens to commit suicide and this terrifies his wife Lucrezia. For him,

the world holds no meaning anymore. He hears voices and speaks aloud with his friend, Evans, who died during the war. The thought of going through treatments and to be locked up in a hospital coupled with his insanity drives him towards the only option or solution, and that is suicide. When he hears Dr. Holmes coming up the stairs to take him away, he ruminates that neither Holmes nor Bradshaw would get him. Many ideas of what to use and what to do cross his mind: he considers Mrs. Filmer's "nice clean bread knife with "Bread" carved on the handle"; thinks of using gas fire to gas himself to death; or the razors to slice himself up. He says that it was the doctors who drove him to suicide; that "it was their idea of tragedy, not his or Rezia's [...] Holmes and Bradshaw like that sort of thing" (*MD* 161).

At the momentary period of sanity he regrets for the deed he is going to commit: "He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot" (*MD* 161). As if he is satisfied for avenging something, he stares at Dr. Holmes and cries, "I'll give to you!" then he flings himself vigorously down through the window. Septimus finds an outlet and a freedom from the shackles of his mind and controls over his own fate by killing himself. This Septimus, the fictional madman is aware that "'a naked soul looking at emptiness has its independence' and he has 'the desire to test it further', if necessary by death" (qtd. in Gordon 53), and he triumphs.

The death of Septimus has a tremendous effect on Clarissa. During the party, she is informed of suicide of her double by Lady Bradshaw. She becomes extremely involved in his death. So overwhelmed is she, by the news, that she withdraws into a room to be alone. She realizes that his suicide is an expression of freedom: Septimus is released from his situation; he is free from men such as Doctor Bradshaw who make one's body and soul miserable. Clarissa does not pity him but instead she feels happy that he committed suicide to end his problem:

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 [...] She felt somehow very much like him- the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown away while they went on living (*MD* 199-200).

In the elegiac novel *To the Lighthouse*, the theme of death is a major one. It is concerned with remembering the dead. There is a deep sense of gloom and sadness that permeates the novel. Deeply engrossed in her work, Mrs. Ramsay thinks about her blessed life but all of a sudden, thoughts about the inevitability of death strike her. Death and destruction go hand in hand: they are the “ghostly roll of drums [which] remorselessly beat the measure of life” (*TL* 22). She adds that this sound “which had been obscured and concealed under the other sounds suddenly thundered hollow in her ears and made her look up with an impulse of terror” (22). After the conviction that life will come to an end for everyone, Woolf questions:

How could any Lord have made this world? [...] With her mind she had always seized the fact that there is no reason, order, justice: but suffering, death, the poor. There was no treachery too base for the world to commit; she knew that. No happiness lasted; she knew that (71).

In ‘Time Passes,’ Woolf alludes to the death of her mother, sister and brother in the death of the characters of Mrs. Ramsay, Prue and Andrew. The section seems to be “the silent requiem for the dead” (Aytac and Memmedova 80) as it opens with darkness, symbolizing death. There is complete silence and when someone laughed aloud, it was as if he was “sharing a joke with nothingness” (*TL* 136). Winter, often associated with death, comes and it seems to lengthen. The death of the central character Mrs. Ramsay is announced in a cold manner through the action of Mr. Ramsay: “[Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark

morning stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out remained empty]" (138). With her death, even the house seems to be dead with the locked doors, cracked woods and nature tuning in with the windy nights. In the empty and desolate house, "one by one the lamps were all extinguished" (135), and similarly, we learn about the other deaths. Andrew has died in the war and Prue Ramsay died in summer due to some illness connected with childbirth. There is a detached tone in the way the deaths are announced and this makes the subject more poignant.

The third section 'The Lighthouse' looks more like a memorial for the death and this is constructed through Lily Briscoe, the painter. She cannot let go of the memory of Mrs. Ramsay and many times she calls her name aloud. That fine morning, returning to the house after ten years, the absence left by Mrs. Ramsay was heavily felt. Without her, the place and the house was a total stranger to Lily. In agony she cries out for her as if Mrs. Ramsay would return if she shouted loud enough. Looking at her painting, she was surprised to find that she could not see it: "Her eyes were full of hot liquid [...] "Mrs. Ramsay!" she said aloud, "Mrs. Ramsay!" The tears ran down her face" (TL 191). The sixth chapter of the third section presents a strong imagery of death. Like the mutilated fish, happy existence on this earth is an impossibility. *To the Lighthouse* continues with the imagery of death brought about by the skull of the beast which was introduced in *Jacob's Room*.

Like Jacob in *Jacob's Room* who is dead but has a compelling force over the entire novel. Percival, in his death, has the same effect in *The Waves*. When the novel opens, the waves roll towards the shore and the reader is greeted with the voices of children who wake up at dawn and looks as though they are walking towards the world, but very soon one realizes that the quick passage of time and age in the life of the characters is a quick surge towards death. Already a pessimist and a depressed person, Rhoda sees the futility of her

efforts which will prove to be meaningless in the end; she has the “strongest sense of the inevitability of death” (Gordon 208). The entire characters tune in with the thought of Bernard who says that death is something “inescapable in our lot.”

Percival is dead and he does not say anything in the novel but his ever-present persona is domineering. Twice, the group of friends comes together and it is because of Percival. On the occasion of his impending departure to India, the group dines together and the voices are full of foreboding of his impending death in the strange Oriental. The imagery of decay and death form the farewell notes of his friends. Bernard perceives Percival riding in “flea-bitten mare” amidst the “ramshackle pagodas”, fragile and decayed buildings and “strange sour smells” (SWVW 697). Rhoda envisions him unbeknown and “like a stone fallen into a pond round which minnows swarm” in the strange land which is the “outermost parts of the earth” filled with “pale shadows” where the vulture feeds on some “bloated carcass” (SWVW 698). And it is here that Percival comes riding on the same decaying mare. Rhoda’s last words in the closing lines of the fourth section “‘peaked clouds’ [...] ‘voyage over a sky dark like polished whalebone’” blend with the cries of Neville for Percival’s impending absence from his life: “Now the agony begins; now the horror has seized me with its fangs” (SWVW 702) and prepares us for the news of Percival’s death.

Two deaths occur in *The Waves*, but it is the death of Percival which greatly affects all the characters and each responds differently to it. It is in their response that we get a glimpse of Woolf’s own attitude towards it. Neville jerks us with the news of Percival’s death: “‘He is dead,’ [...] ‘He fell. His horse tripped. He was thrown’” (SWVW 705). His death affects Neville the most for Percival was his beloved. The thought that Percival died among unknown men and was buried in loneliness and silence wrenches his heart. He cries out to his dead beloved asking him to come back even in the form of torture for it would

mean his presence: “I press you to me. Come, pain, feed on me. Bury your fangs in my flesh. Tear me asunder. I sob, I sob” (705). He could not come to terms with his beloved’s death that he takes shelter from one lover to another but in vain. Bernard is amazed at the early passing of his friend and he is lost between two extreme feelings as a friend and father in the face of death:

I do not know which is sorry, which is joy. My son is born, Percival is dead. I am upheld by pillars, shored up on either side by stark emotions; but which is sorrow, which is joy? I ask, and do not know, only that I need silence, and to be alone and to go out, and to save one hour to consider what has happened to my world, what death has done to my world (706).

Bernard then conducts the funeral service for Percival before a blue madonna in the Italian room of the National Gallery. This is joined by Rhoda in her own personal funeral for Percival: she picks violet flowers and offers to it to him. Surprisingly, she makes it seem like her own funeral which she conducts for herself. She twines his funeral to hers: “On the bare ground I will pick violets and bind them together and offer them to Percival, something given him by me. Look now at what Percival has given me” (709). His death affects this sensitive and lonely Rhoda to the point where she begins to mourn and wish for death:

Reckless and random the cars race and roar and hunt us to death like bloodhounds. I am alone in a hostile world. The human face is hideous. This is to my liking. I want publicity and violence and to be dashed like a stone on the rocks [...] I am sick of prettiness; I am sick of privacy. I ride rough waters and shall sink with no one to save me (709).

For her, Percival's death gives her the conviction of her thought that life is futile and meaningless. Her thoughts have a dark underlying reference to her suicidal thoughts and soon we come to know that she has committed suicide.

All the characters have strong feelings towards death, but it is Rhoda who bears the closest affinity to it. She hates the very fact that she is alive. In disgust she cries out, "Oh, life, how have I dreaded you'" (SWVW 730). She can be literally considered as a living dead, for she fails even in the capacity to love and be loved. Her relationship with Louis goes wrong for this very reason: "I left Louis; I feared embraces" (731). She yearns for death like no other creations of Virginia Woolf's characters. She rehearses suicide in her imagination as she climbs a Spanish hill. She "suppose[s] that this mule-back is my bed and that I lie dying. There is only a thin sheet between me now and the infinite depths" (731). Her imagination continues:

Beneath us lie the lights of the herring fleet. The cliffs vanish. Rippling small, rippling grey, innumerable waves spread beneath us. I touch nothing. I see nothing. We may sink and settle on the waves. The sea will drum in my ears. The white petals will be darkened with sea water. They will float for a moment and then sink. Rolling me over the waves will shoulder me under. Everything falls in a tremendous shower, dissolving me (731).

Then, in the monologue of Bernard we soon come to know that she has committed suicide. This is conveyed to the reader in a casual manner: "the figure of Rhoda, always so furtive, always with fear in her eyes, always seeking some pillar in the desert, to find which she had gone; she had killed herself" (767). In death, she finds an outlet to something she had always wanted. "Death, for Rhoda, is not the enemy it is for Bernard or Percival. It is a natural return to the immortal sea from which, in the rhythms of her imagination, she has never strayed"

(Gordon 217). He continues in his rumination about life: “One life. There. It is over. Gone out” (742). The last section of the novel shows the disturbed and depressed Bernard finding it hard to part with the memories of his close friends who are dead and remembering his other friends: “All had their rapture; their common feeling with death; something that stood them in stead. Thus I visited each of my friends in turn, trying, with fumbling fingers, to prise open their locked caskets” (760).

Bernard considers death as his enemy and he wants to be brave and face it but in vain, for it is his fear of it that drives him to his obsession with death. The concluding lines of the novel run with thoughts of it:

What enemy do we now perceive advancing against us, you whom I ride now, as we stand pawing this stretch of pavement? It is death. Death is the enemy. It is death against whom I ride with my spear couched and my hair flying back like a young man's, like Percival's, when he galloped in India. I strike spurs into my horse. Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death! (775)

For Woolf, the conviction that death is inevitable, that it is part of life added more meaning to her works. Woolf herself admitted to her constant thoughts about death: “If it were not for the divine goodness of L. how many times I should be thinking of death” (qtd. in Wagner ix). In the first place, it was the chain of deaths in her family which provoked her mental illness and turned for the worse. And she has connected this problem beautifully with the theme of death which is largely portrayed through her characters. In part, the theme of suicide has found a strong resonance and Woolf partially showers her thought that suicide is sometimes a reasonable way out. It is not a sign of weakness but a logical choice if a person were to be placed in those characters' situation.

3.1.2.2. War

The fact that war had a deep impact on Woolf is strongly highlighted in her works. The subject of war, its effect and the fear psychosis it creates in the mind of people, find its way in her novels. “War inspired horror in Virginia Woolf” (Bazin and Lauter 2) and this can be agreed to when the theme of war is analyzed. Her first novel *The Voyage Out* is on the whole the voyage of Rachel to a new destination, the experiences that she gains in the process and her eventual death. But the theme of war does not fail to sneak in, and a momentary presence of it is fearsome. The novel indeed displays Woolf’s interest in the subject of war and here lies the fact that she was deeply affected by the destruction brought by war. In the fourth chapter the imposing destructive image of war creating fear psychosis in the minds of the characters is clearly visible. The sight of the warships brings premonitions of danger about the dark journey the Ambroses are to undertake and the effect of it is overpowering: “two sinister grey vessels, low in the water, and bald as bone, one closely following the other with the look of eyeless beasts seeking their prey” (*TVO* 66). It is these “images of military machinery [which] add to the ominous threat of violence lurking beneath the semblance of stability” (Wussow 103) in *The Voyage Out*. The presence of the warships have a domineering effect on the group that they start talking “naturally” only after the ships are no longer sighted. Helen Ambrose, the mouthpiece of Virginia Woolf, sadly ponders over the futility of war: “it seemed wrong to her to keep sailors as to keep a Zoo, and that as for dying on a battle-field, surely it was time we ceased to praise courage” (*TVO* 66). There is a deep meaning attached to this thought of Woolf. In it, we find the outlook of Woolf towards war and the meaninglessness of it.

In *Jacob’s Room*, Woolf for the first time makes a close identification between her grief and her families and friends who lost their lives to war, the historical tragedy. “Woolf

transforms her memorial for her brother into one for all the young men killed in World War I giving Jacob the last name of Flanders and having him die in war” (Bazin and Lauter 15). “Where the war dehumanizes and leaves vacancies, the narrator wants to give a life and a body to Jacob; but where the war appropriates, the narrator is distanced and even powerless if she is not to reinscribe war’s treatment of human beings as objects” (Handley 111). War is the source of sorrow in the novel; it is this that causes extraordinary sadness. In the novel, Woolf demonstrates her point that it is these social forces and structures of power which shape the reality to some extent. Amidst the force of war, it becomes vain for Jacob to escape. Woolf suggests about the frightening number of the death of young men, the “millions whom no one has ever known in any cataclysm” (Handley 130), when she presents the sorrowful death of Jacob, a representative young man whom the readers have come to care deeply about. In him, she depicts the tragedy of war, and in Mrs. Flanders, the tragedy of raising a son till adulthood to have him killed in war. It is the effect of war which creates the emotional impact in the novel. It is only in the last chapter of the novel that we get to know the death of Jacob and it creates an emptiness felt by a mother who has lost a son fighting for his country. Amidst the confusion, Woolf is able to create the tragic impact of war on the dear ones:

A harsh and unhappy voice cried something unintelligible. And then suddenly all the leaves seemed to raise themselves.

“Jacob! Jacob!” cried Bonamy, standing by the window. The leaves sank down again.

“Such confusion everywhere!” cried Betty Flanders, bursting open the bedroom door.

Bonamy turned away from the window.

“What am I to do with these, Mr. Bonamy?”

She held out a pair of Jacob’s old shoes (*JR* 178-179).

The death of Jacob in war depicts the senselessness of it. It disrupts his life and wastes all the bright possibilities “preventing him from taking his unexpected place in a world” (Schaefer 135).

The opening of *Mrs Dalloway* sets the tone of postwar English life. The effect of war is demonstrated in the psyche and expressions of almost all the characters; the social blemishes of it deface the summer scene of June 1923. The word “war” looms over the novel and in the opening pages, Woolf ironically writes:

For it was the middle of June. The War was over, except for someone like Mrs Foxcroft at the Embassy last night eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed [...] or Lady Bexborough who opened a bazaar, they said, with the telegram in hands, John, her favorite, killed (*MD* 10-11).

“Virginia Woolf makes Septimus the basis for criticism of the medical and psychiatric professions’ response to the war” (Schaefer 144). In detail, Woolf deals with the effect of four years of brutalization of war on a soldier who is “suffering the delayed guilt of insensibility” (Gordon 164). “Wounds left by personal and societal tragedies caused pain for both Woolf and her character long after the events had occurred” (Bazin and Lauter 18). Septimus, a veteran of World War I, suffers from shell shock and is lost within his mind; he becomes clinically insane; and suffers psychologically from the horrors of war. The brutality of war is planted at the heart of civilization: “men trapped in mines, lunatics out for an airing on London streets’ (qtd. in Schaefer). The death and memory of his friend Evans led to his madness and subsequent suicide. He has retreated into his private world and, even if the war is over, the sounds of it remain in the unconscious. The war might be over for others, but it had certainly not ended for people like Septimus who have to bear its terrible consequences.

In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf introduces the destructive effect on human emotions brought by war. Minow-Pinkney opines about war in *To the Lighthouse*: “What is literally destroying the house is rain, rats and wind, but what is figuratively destroying it is the First World War” (qtd. in Bazin and Lauter 20). The deterioration is furthered by war when Woolf puts forward her concept of the contribution of man to nature in bringing about destruction and death, the agent being war: “Did Nature supplement what man advanced? Did she complete what he began? With equal complacency she saw his misery, his meanness, and his torture” (TL 144). In this vast universe, the question of what difference a death or a war would make in the overall scheme of things, but “from the perspective of loved ones, the grieving is both poignant and lasting” (Bazin and Lauter 21). “Death is unimportant only to the extent that the individual life is unimportant” (21) though cosmic irony offers no consolation to the one grieving for the lost ones. In brackets, Woolf announces the death of Andrew increasing the painfulness of his death in war which seems totally a waste: “[A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully was, instantaneous]” (TL 144). The way Woolf casually mentions about the nature of Andrew’s death in the war makes it more poignant. For the Ramsay family, the death of Andrew leaves a big void, and the fact that he is one among the many young men who were instantly blown up to bits in the war leaves a big echo in the question of how the effect will be in the homes of the many families from where those young soldiers come.

3.1.2.3. Mental Illness

It is no secret that Virginia Woolf’s life was marred by madness: she heard voices which spoke to her alone; the voices which “told her to do ‘all kinds of things’” (Gordon 57). She heard the birds talking in Greek; “King Edward VII defiling the language”; and she heard

“the voice of her mother” (57). And it was the fear of this dreadful disease returning which drove her to take her own life. *The Voyage Out* was written during the time Woolf was undergoing intense pain and experiencing an era of madness:

None of her novels was composed and seen through publication in the midst of such pain. Louise DeSalvo argues that the writing of *The Voyage Out* was implicated in her uncontrollable distress, noting that each time Woolf wrote or tried to revise Rachel’s death scene, ‘she herself went mad and once tried to commit suicide’ (Raitt 34).

Rachel is tormented by a terrible dream in the end of the fifth chapter. She dreams that she is walking down a long tunnel which becomes narrower as she walks. At length, the tunnel opened and “became a vault.” She becomes trapped in the suffocating closure of bricks “meeting her wherever she turned” and she found herself “alone with the little deformed man who squatted on the floor gibbering, with long nails. His face was pitted and like the face of an animal” (*TVO* 75). She dared not move as she lay motionless, “cold as death” and woke up crying. The “horror” failed to go at once and she felt pursued. “All night long barbarian men harassed the ship; they came scuffling down the passages, and stopped to snuffle at her door. She could not sleep again” (75).

A sick and bed-ridden Rachel suffers from nightmares in the closing chapters of the novel. She sees strange things, not knowing clearly what she saw. Even the sight of the doctor with “hairy hands” disturbs her mind. The presence of the nurse makes Rachel’s nightmare worse. The very sight of the nurse frightens her and it is she, the nurse, who keeps coming back to make her “still”. In the nurse, the image of the deformed little man comes back to Rachel. To get rid of her sight, she shuts her eyes, but she “found herself walking through a tunnel under the Thames, where there were little deformed women sitting in

archways playing cards, which the bricks of which the wall was made oozed with damp, which collected into drops and slid down the wall” (*TVO* 353). In her delirious state, Rachel tries to keep her composure and act normal by making an effort to remember certain facts. But her madness gets in her way and this is seen in the conversation between her and her love:

“You see, there they go, rolling off the edge of the hill,” she said suddenly.

“Rolling, Rachel? What do you see rolling? There’s nothing rolling.”

“The old woman with the knife,” she replied, not speaking to Terrence in particular, and looking past him. As she appeared to be looking at a vase on the shelf opposite, he rose and took it down (*TVO* 354).

Woolf’s firsthand experience with madness made her capable of dealing in depth with a situation of madness like Rachel’s. There is no artificiality or exaggeration in the way she deals with the theme and the reader is able to identify closely with the honest and real situation of a mentally ill person.

The themes of mental illness, trauma, insanity and depression plague *Mrs. Dalloway*. Insanity was close to Woolf’s past and present. Woolf rejected her idea of killing Clarissa in the end in favour of a ‘dark double’ who would take that act upon himself. In one of her letters, Woolf had written that she had to complete the character of Clarissa with the character of Septimus. Clarissa’s half-conscious withering is reflected in Septimus’ madness and “spiritual sickness.” Woolf’s fictional suicidal character Septimus suffers from mental isolation. Through him Woolf has demonstrated the cost of insanity, and it is through his character that Woolf demonstrates the most terrifying experiences of madness she herself knew, that is to lose communication with the world outside one’s mind:

Septimus Warren Smith feels like a ‘relic straying on the edge of the world, this outcast who gazed back at the inhabited regions, who lay like a drowned sailor, on the shore of the world’. This is what ‘breakdown’ meant to her, not so much collapse (Septimus deliberately enacts collapse as a distress signal), but thought so rapid that language, the main route of communication, became incoherent. Here, if anywhere, is the link between Virginia Woolf’s madness and creativity (Gordon 56-57).

While Woolf was writing the mad scene in Regent’s Park, she noted, “‘I find I write it by clinging as tight to fact as I can’” (qtd. in Dick 56), and indeed one can identify with the harrowing time a mad person goes through. In this scene, Rezia asks him to look and notice real things in the park to distract his mind, but what he sees are only frightening distortions and he starts to hallucinate. Towards the end of the novel, when Dr. Holmes arrives to take him away to the hospital, Septimus recovers and comes into contact with reality for a moment. So many sane ideas of taking his own life strike him, but he rejects them all and flings himself violently down through the window to Mrs. Filmer’s area railings.

Septimus suffers from the effects of emotional repression. Five years after the war, he feels that he has “committed a crime against humanity, the crime of not feeling” (Schaefer 144). The doctors, instead of helping him release his emotions of unshed tears treat him the opposite:

[they] offer him bromides and inane advice or they order him to go to one of their homes for rest, to “lie in bed in a beautiful house in the country” and to be visited by a doctor once a week. Septimus’ maddest fears are validated when he finds himself treated like a criminal who can be incarcerated by those who uphold society’s standards for civilized behavior (144).

Yet, he is not the only character who shows the psychological outcomes of trauma. Clarissa's memory of her illness provokes in her feelings of fear and anger. She sleeps badly and irregularly, therefore, she needs a separate room in order not to be disturbed and have complete rest.

In *The Waves*, Woolf has greatly dealt with the theme of mental illness with the introduction of Rhoda's character. Rhoda, the "nymph of the fountain who is always wet [with tears]," suffers immensely from mental isolation. She represents mental illness from the very beginning and prone to suicide. Like Septimus in *Mrs Dalloway*, she is always scared of losing her mind. Woolf had first-hand experience of what it felt to become mad. In her severe bouts, she experienced thoughts running so rapidly that language itself became incoherent. It is recorded that while writing the final pages of *The Waves*, Woolf "felt the proximity of madness as her thoughts flew ahead and her reason stumbled after" (Gordon 57). In one of her diary entry, she had recorded about her experience:

I wrote the words O Death fifteen minutes ago, having reeled across the last ten pages with some moments of such intensity& intoxication that I seemed only to stumble after my own voice, or almost, after some sort of speaker (as when I was mad). I was almost afraid, remembering the voices that used to fly ahead (qtd. in Gordon 57).

Rhoda is the very embodiment of illness itself. She has the inability to communicate and blend in with the people around her. The way she perceives things make her a timid and fragile creature and excessively sensitive to the world around her. She feels so low about herself and she would rather live an oblivion-state-like existence. From the very beginning of the novel, Rhoda the dreamer presents herself as "foam", a fragmentary entity: "I am broken into separate pieces; I am no longer one" (SWVW 683). The mental illness of Rhoda is not

trauma-based as is seen with the other characters, but rather it is her own problem. Her problem is that “her mind continuously wants to separate from her body” (Demery 56).

3.1.2.4. Loneliness and Isolation

Many characters of Virginia Woolf's novels suffer from loneliness and depression. Rachel in *The Voyage Out* is a lonely figure. Preferring to be left to herself always, she finds it difficult to get on with companies. We cannot help but agree with Rachel's friend Evelyn when she comments that Rachel seemed to have been brought and lived in a garden. Like Woolf, Rachel had not undergone a formal education but had been taught at home without company and even as a twenty-four year old woman she chooses to stay confined in her own cocoon. All the time she remains aloof. She does not even respond to Clarissa, on seeing the warships, when she excitedly squeezes her hand and says “Aren't you glad to be English!” (TVO 66). She continues to behave the same later on during lunch time and it has Helen Ambrose wondering why Rachel sat “silent, looked so queer and flushed” (66).

The Waves deals largely with lonely figures like Rhoda and Bernard. Rhoda is the epitome of a lonely and isolated figure and she herself is largely to be blamed. From childhood she has a very low self-esteem and prefers to be left alone. In the second section, her soliloquy runs:

That is my face [...] in the looking-glass behind Susan's shoulder – that is my face. But I will duck behind her to hide it, for I am not here. I have no face. Other people have faces; Susan and Jinny have faces; they are here. Their world is the real world. [...] They say Yes, they say No; whereas I shift and change and am seen through in the second. If they meet a housemaid she looks at them without laughing. But she laughs at me. They know what to say if

spoken to. They laugh really; they get angry really; while I have to look first and do what other people do when they have done it (SWVW 653).

The feeling of meaninglessness in this life is seen in the outlook of the other character Bernard. He says that he is forever alone and is destroyed by loneliness. For him, human existence on this earth is no more than a pebble “flicked off accidentally from the face of the sun and that there is no life in the abysses of space” (SWVW 740). Becoming advanced in age and the next stage being an old man, Bernard lives in isolation and loneliness and is beleaguered by the knowledge of his impending death. There is hopelessness in his vision of the future: “Life has destroyed me. No echo comes when I speak, no varied words. This is more truly death than the death of friends, than the death of youth” (768-769).

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa is portrayed as a lonely and frustrated woman whose life is shaped by the ideological moral and conventional factors. Clarissa’s relationship with her husband is not successful. She chooses an attic room as a refuge from the traditional female role. In addition, the dark picture of a patriarchal society is portrayed through Septimus-Rezia relationship. He married Rezia because he could not stay alone at night. By bringing his wife to England, he makes her feel alone and suffering in silence, an alien in a foreign country. She becomes a war bride who is:

a symbol of male triumph, power, egotism, and romanticism. She suffers from loneliness, anxiety and horror. Worse, she cannot express her anger, frustration, and depression because she is oppressed as a woman and a foreigner. Lucrezia has nobody to tell her agony except her husband, who finally feels nothing for her pain and commits suicide (Usui 151-152).

The agony that Lucrezia feels is heart-wrenching. Even her wedding ring slips because she has grown so thin. She feels lonely but it remains suppressed. The only person she has is her

husband but we are told that Septimus married her without loving her; he had lied to her; and seduced her. She tells her mad husband: “I am so unhappy” (*MD* 79). She is not a native speaker of the English language. She speaks just simple English and thus much of her feelings remain unspoken; there is no inclusion of deep emotional content. And to top all these she shares all the “terror, isolation and vision” (Usui 157), and all the negative emotions of her husband. The main cause of Septimus’ mental illness is due to his inability to respond to the death of the person he loved the most in the world. Similarly, “Virginia could not forgive herself this frozen time that followed her mother’s death, and this was one source of her sickness” (Gordon 46). She has traced her mental fragility to her mother’s death which had been a latent sorrow, not fully felt.

“Life escapes; and perhaps without life nothing else is worth while” (Woolf 159), and Woolf tried to make her life as a writer worthwhile. She lives on as a dominating figure in literature, but that does not hide the fact of her dark world, which no doubt was inherently present in her works, as is seen in the thematic analysis of her works. In “Modern Fiction,” Woolf presents her famous quote: “Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end” (Woolf 160). Life comes with its own package of ups and downs but it is this that brings out the real meaning of our very existence and this continues as long as life exists, to the very end. And by suffusing her fears, obsessions and experiences, Woolf has indeed beautifully captured it all in her portraits as a writer.

3.2. Ernest Hemingway

Ernest Hemingway- “a rugged macho figure called Papa with a signature white beard” (Donaldson 1), lived a life so rich with full of captivating experiences which strongly resonates in his works. Hemingway’s writings reflect the darker side of society. Many of his

characters live in a world where they see no beauty in it, but the wrong and terrible, where one must live with dignity in “a world that is racked with violence and loss” (Tyler 25). His wartime experiences help suggest why his writings emphasize physical and psychological violence and the need for courage. Ishteyaque Shams, in his study of Hemingway’s major novels, opines:

Perhaps all the people who had actually participated in war, or had been its victims in one way or another, were, quite understandably, disenchanted with life because of its horrors and brutalities. However, far more than physical injury, war had caused a kind of psychological crisis and moral degradation on account of which the post-war period was one of delicate and difficult adjustment with the realities of life (26-27).

Hemingway presents the nature of man’s existence in his fiction. He sets man against the background of his world to examine his state from various points of view. Man exists in a world that is desperately trying to break him. In order to present the predicament of man, he uses dark and pessimistic subjects as his major themes. There is an existential struggle between man and the hostile and deterministic forces. The nature of the individual’s existence in relation to the world made Hemingway conceive his protagonists as “alienated individuals fighting a losing battle against the odds of life with courage, endurance and will as their only weapons” (Balakrishnan “The Crucified Matador – A Study of Ernest Hemingway’s Major Themes”). For the Hemingway hero, in fighting a perpetual battle against the infinite forces, stoical endurance rather than slavish submission, death rather than humiliation, are the cardinal virtues and self-defining choices.

3.2.1. Autobiographical Elements in the Works of Ernest Hemingway

Hemingway’s youngest son, Gregory H. Hemingway, recalls in his personal memoir *Papa* (1976) that his father had everything: he was handsome as a movie star in his youth,

with an attraction for women one would not believe unless one saw it; he was extremely sensitive, energetic, supremely imaginative with tremendous common sense; and the good luck to survive a major wound with the knowledge of what the edge of nothingness was like. He battled alcoholism, went through three divorces, suffered from mental illness and self destructiveness. It was from this rich reservoir that he drew many of his characters and used as a background for his settings.

Hemingway's debut novel *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) is probably his most autobiographical work. Set in post World War I Europe, the novel captures the angst of the age and Jake Barnes, a thirty-four year-old war veteran who has sustained a wound that makes him sexually maimed. The plot of this novel is based on real events and its characters are thinly disguised versions of real people. The characters are based on the friends of Ernest and Hadley Hemingway whom they met in Paris during the 1920s, and the events resemble those of the summer of 1925, when Hemingway and his real-life expatriate friends travelled from Montparnasse to Pamplona to attend the fiesta of San Fermin. It was this third visit to the fiesta that provided the background for *The Sun Also Rises*. By the time the novel was published, Hemingway had already separated from Hadley and started a relationship with Pauline Pfeiffer. In the earlier existing draft of the novel, Hemingway had used the real names of his friends including Hem and Hadley, who figured as central characters, but later on, he changed the names:

the seductive barfly from Great Britain, Duff Twysden – with whom Ernest had flirted brazenly in Pamplona – became Brett Ashley; her bisexual companion, Pat Guthrie, became Mike Campbell; Hemingway's fishing pals Don Stewart and Bill Smith Gorton; and pugnacious Harold Loeb became first Gerald and then Robert Cohn. "Hem" became (curiously) the impotent Jake Barnes, and perhaps most revealingly, Hadley vanished from the narrative

altogether [...] the deletion of Hadley unmistakably prefigures Hemingway's separation from his first wife a year later (Kennedy 200).

Pieced together through the writings of Duff's contemporaries, she was a twice-divorced Englishwoman, "bright and beautiful, with a boy's haircut, who was going through a divorce" (Nagel 89) notoriously known for her heavy drinking and gambling. She swept men off their feet with her looks, wit and artistic sensitivity. With all these traits, she played her cards so well that it was difficult for men not to fall in love with her. It is no wonder that she came to witness the bullfight with two lovers in tow. Duff's entrance into Hemingway's life came at the opportune time: he was trying to get a professional breakthrough and desperately needed a good material to make his debut as a novelist. And Duff became his perfect femme fatale and anti-heroine. On hearing about the news of Duff's death, Hemingway is reported to have said, "Brett died in New Mexico. Call her Lady Duff Twysden if you like, but I can only think of her as Brett" (Blume "The Untold Story of the Woman Who Inspired Hemingway to Write *The Sun Also Rises*").

Hemingway was giving the finishing touches to the novel when Pauline Pfeiffer, his second wife, got admitted to the hospital for delivery. Pauline underwent a caesarean section while Hemingway was writing the scene about Catherine Barkley's childbirth. Because *The Sun Also Rises* was a *roman à clef*, readers assumed that *A Farewell to Arms* was another installment in Hemingway's thinly veiled autobiography. Though Hemingway was never present as a soldier in the Caporetto retreat, he gives a magnificent account of the Italian retreat from the German attack in Book III of the novel. During this retreat, Hemingway was serving as a club reporter in Kansas City. He read accounts of it in the newspapers and spoke of it with the veterans. He had fair knowledge of it and described it so accurately that his Italian readers would think he had been really present during this national embarrassment. Other minor autobiographical details include Kitty Cannell, a Paris-based fashion

correspondent who became Helen Ferguson, and the unnamed priest was based on Don Giuseppe Bianchi, the priest of the 69th and 70th regiments of the Brigata Ancona.

A Farewell to Arms (1929), Hemingway's first bestseller and regarded as "the premier American war novel from that debacle" (Reynolds 31) set against the backdrop of World War I, throws considerable light on the events in the life of Hemingway. On the night of July 8, 1918, barely a month in the war zone, young Hemingway was blown up by an Austrian trench mortar. He was not yet nineteen. All that summer and fall he recovered from his leg wounds in the Milan Red Cross hospital, where his nurse was Agnes von Kurowsky, an attractive young American woman eight years his senior. He embellished this experience in the novel:

Jim Gamble, a captain who befriended Hemingway during his service with the Red Cross, offered to pay for Hemingway to travel with him for a year. Agnes, uncomfortable with the idea, urged Hemingway to go home and get a job, telling him that they could not get married until he could earn his living. He returned home and soon afterward, Agnes wrote him to announce her engagement to an Italian (Tyler 3).

Hemingway loosely based the novel's major events on his own wounding and his abortive romance with Agnes who gave up on their romance citing that she was too old for him. He gave his war wound and his nurse to Frederic Henry; to his fictional nurse, he gives his second wife's pregnancy. From his first marriage with Hadley Richardson, he takes their good times at Chamby in Switzerland when the roads were iron-hard and they were deeply in love. In the early Twenties, Hemingway had gone to Switzerland and enjoyed the rare privilege of having with him a woman whom he loved. The visit has something to do with the idyllic scenery described and the times spent there in the novel:

We lived in a brown wooden house in the pine trees on the side of the mountains and at night there was frost so that there was thin ice over the two pitchers on the dresser in the morning [...] Sitting up in bed eating breakfast we could see the lake and the mountains across the lake on the French side. There was snow on the tops of the mountains and the lake was a gay steel-blue.

Outside, in front of the chalet a road went up the mountain [...] the road climbed steadily through the forest and up and around the mountain to where there were meadows at the edge of the woods looking across the valley. The valley was deep and there was a stream at the bottom that flowed down into the lake and when the wind blew across the valley you could hear the stream in the rocks [...] Sometimes we went off the road and on a path through the pine forest. The floor of the forest was soft to walk on; the frost did not harden as it did the road. But we did not mind the hardness of the road (FTA 257).

The Spanish Civil War, like the First World War, had a profound impact on Hemingway. It provided him his material for a number of his works. In 1936, the North Atlantic News Alliance (NANA) offered to send Hemingway to Spain to report on the civil war and Hemingway readily accepted it. To Hemingway, the First World War seemed senseless, yet this time, he championed the cause of the Republicans. It was during this travel that he met Martha Gellhorn, a fellow reporter who would later become his third wife, and started a relationship with her though still married to Pauline. Reporting the war and travelling through Spain formed the basis of his highly regarded work *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940). He credited her with having inspired him to write the novel and dedicated it to her.

Martha comprised the qualities – courage, independence, and political engagement – that greatly enamored Hemingway. Her job caused her to leave Hemingway on lengthy assignments as a roving war correspondent. These long absences made Hemingway aware of his emotional dependence on her:

In a sense, the novel confronts the fear of emasculation, the fear of powerlessness and of loss; loss of identity, of courage, of sexuality, of (pro) creativity, of life itself. Throughout the novel, the characters speak of *cojones* – Spanish for “balls” – and of what befalls the man who loses them [...] the danger of emasculation comes from the mannish woman who challenges the man’s sexual and artistic authority” (Sanderson 187).

After being exposed to war from an early age, Hemingway himself wrote in 1942 that he hated it profoundly. Robert Jordan “rises to the call of duty and has a passionate commitment to the cause of liberty, but the artist in him almost always recoils at the horrors and sufferings of war” (Hamid 15).

Strong autobiographical elements run in the novel in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Hemingway’s father Clarence Hemingway killed himself with his father’s revolver in 1928. Seriously ill with diabetes and heart disease, suffering from financial problems and depressed, “placed a Smith & Wesson pistol against his right temple and permanently put out the light” (Reynolds 113). In chapter 30 of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Robert ruminates on his father’s suicide in a similar fashion: “Remember Grandfather’s Smith and Wesson. It was single action, officer’s model .32 caliber [...] your father had shot himself with this pistol” (FWBT 348-349). He feels ashamed of his father for having married a woman who bullied him. He feels that it was cowardly of his father to have done that act, but realizes that he does not really know what problems his father was going through when he committed the act. He despises suicide and thinks, “You have to be awfully occupied with yourself to do a thing like

that” (350). But he also admits that he would prefer suicide to being captured and tortured by the enemies. Rena Sanderson, in “Hemingway and Gender History” recalls that Hemingway’s father’s suicide in 1928 “bitterly reminded him of the failure of his parents’ marriage, a failure Hemingway blamed on his mother’s bullying and on his father’s inability to stand up to her” (Sanderson 182). Hemingway stated flatly that his mother, coupled with financial problems, drove his father to commit suicide. After his father’s death, in a letter to his mother-in-law Mary Pfeiffer, he is recorded to have said that he would probably go the same way, and became more preoccupied with the theme of violence in his writings.

In the novel, Pilar resembles Gertrude Stein, a friend of Hemingway who later on became his rival. She resembles Stein in her possible lesbian inclinations, making her a potential sexual rival to Jordan for Maria’s favours. Just as Hemingway respected Stein for her strength as a writer, Jordan respects Pilar’s power as a teller of tales. That Hemingway had Stein in mind while writing his present novel becomes all the more clear when he makes use of a famous line written by Stein which goes “a rose is a rose is arose.” In chapter 24 of the novel during a breakfast scene, Agustin is seen bantering with Jordan about the offensive odour of onions. Jordan jokingly says that an onion is like a rose except for its odour:

Robert Jordan grinned at him with his mouth full.

‘Like the rose,’ he said. ‘Mighty like the rose. A rose is a rose is an onion.’

‘Thy onions are affecting thy brain,’ Agustin said. ‘Take care.’

‘An onion is an onion is an onion,’ Robert Jordan said cheerily and, he thought, a stone is a stein is a rock is a boulder is a pebble’ (TEH 299).

Sanderson opines that not content with reducing Stein’s famous remark about a rose to an onion, Hemingway diminishes his woman rival “from an imposing boulder to a tiny pebble” (188). This recalls to one’s mind an incident in the past when Hemingway’s *Green Hills of Africa* was objected by Scribner’s citing his direct attacks on Stein, Hemingway

wrote a fuming letter to Max Perkins, revealed in *Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters* (1981): “What would you like to put in place of bitch? Fat bitch? Lousy bitch? Old Bitch? Lesbian Bitch?” (qtd. in Sanderson 184). He added that there was no modifying adjective to replace the word ‘bitch,’ and that if anyone was ever a bitch, certainly Stein was a bitch.

From September 1948 through April 1949, Ernest and Mary lived in Italy. While in Italy, “between duck hunting in the Venetian marshes and skiing in the Dolomites, Hemingway met and became infatuated with an eighteen-year-old Venetian beauty, Adriana Ivancich” (Reynolds 44). In this strange relationship, she addressed him as “Papa,” and to him she was his “Daughter.” At fifty-one, Hemingway was sicker than most knew, and eleven years without a successful novel, he felt like he had reached the end of his career. By the end of April, Hemingway started framing device for his novel *Across the River and into the Trees* (1950). In 1950, when Hemingway published *Across the River and into the Trees*, it was his first novel in ten years.

The storyline follows Colonel Richard Cantwell, a battered fifty-year old American veteran of two world wars. Colonel “Buck” Lanham, Hemingway’s friend, was the model for Colonel Cantwell in the novel. Dying of a heart disease, he falls in love with in love with Renata, a nineteen-year-old Italian countess, and spends his last days in Venice with her, obsessively recalling the loss of half of his regiment. Cantwell is an embittered, war-scarred man and old enough to be Renata’s father, but he is overwhelmed by the selflessness and the freshness of the love she is offering. She is presented as a beautiful girl:

a girl you could recognize if it was much darker than it was at this hour [...] she came into the room, shining in her youth and tall striding beauty, and the carelessness of the wind had made of her hair. She had pale, almost olive colored skin, a profile that could break your, or anyone else’s heart, and her dark hair, of an alive texture, hung down over her shoulders (ATRT 57).

During a three-day stay in Venice, Cantwell eats, drinks, and makes love to his countess. As he is leaving Venice, he suffers the last in a series of heart attacks and dies. For thirty years, Venice society had known that Renata was modeled after Adriana. When she started a relationship with Hemingway, he was forty-nine and she was just shy of nineteen. To spare her reputation, Hemingway forbade the publication of the novel in Italy for ten years.

Islands in the Stream (1970) is the first of the posthumous works of Hemingway. It is divided into three parts: Bimini, Cuba and At Sea. Originally *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952) was a part of this novel, but the negative reviews garnered by *Across the River and into the Trees* propelled Hemingway to publish *The Old Man and the Sea* separately in 1952. The novella restored Hemingway's reputation, but its separate publication left *Islands in the Stream* without its original ending. This largely autobiographical novel encompasses three stories to illustrate different stages in the life of its main character Thomas Hudson. Hemingway began the novel as the study of a writer, Roger Hancock, and his relationships with his former wives and his three children. During the early composition of the work, "Hemingway reduced the character of Roger to that of a supporting character, changed his surname from Hancock to Davis, and created a new character who is the father of the three boys originally envisioned as Roger's children (Fleming 131). Thomas Hudson is a painter rather than a writer, but he shares the problem common to all artists of splitting energy and attention between his role as lover, father and husband. Robert E. Fleming, in his "Hemingway's Late Fiction: Breaking New grounds," takes note of Carlos Baker who maintains that if "Thomas Hudson represents a narcissistic and idealized picture of Hemingway's own life at middle age, Roger suggests the dark self that Hemingway might have feared he had become" (134).

The first section of the novel titled "Bimini" follows the twice-divorced Thomas Hudson. He recalls an earlier life during which he loved various women, married at least two

of them, begot three children, fought in a war, and travelled the world. In chapter 2, he lets the reader know that his eldest son – Tom - is from his first marriage, and the two younger sons- David and Andrew – are from his second marriage. They no doubt correspond to his sons: John Hadley Nicanor Hemingway, nicknamed as Bumby, from his first marriage to Elizabeth Hadley Richardson; and Patrick Hemingway and Gregory Hemingway from his second marriage to Pauline Pfeiffer. Hadley Richardson was no doubt the one true love of Hemingway. In the novel he describes about her and questions himself why he left her, “But why did I ever leave Tom’s mother in the first place? You’d better not think about that, he told himself. That is one thing you had better not think about” (*ITS* 5). He spends much of the novel regretting his divorce from his first wife.

Another interesting autobiographical thread that runs in the novel is that of the character of Andrew modeled after his youngest son Gregory, who had a fall-out with his father Hemingway. Greg married against Hemingway’s wishes and had problems with the law in connection with illegal drugs eventually leading to his arrest, and causing further estrangement with his father. This led Hemingway to lash out viciously at Pauline in a phone call, which many believe is the reason behind Pauline’s death of acute shock which she suffered and later died at the operating table. In the novel, in comparison to his description of the other two older boys, Andrew is described in a darker tone:

He was a devil too, and devilled both his older brothers, and he had a dark side to him that nobody except Thomas Hudson could ever understand. Neither of them thought about this except that they recognized it in each other and knew it was bad and the man respected it and understood the boy’s having it [...] He was a boy born to be quite wicked who was being very good and he carried his wickedness around with him transmuted into a sort of teasing gaiety. But he

was a bad boy and the others knew it and he knew it. He was just being good while his badness grew inside him (*ITS* 51).

Hemingway's *The Garden of Eden* (1986), an incomplete posthumous novel, is his most experimental and innovative work. The novel is an unusual Hemingway story of a husband and wife falling in love with the same woman. Robert E. Fleming, analyzing *The Garden of Eden*, in "Hemingway's Late Fiction: Breaking New Ground" states:

Like David, Hemingway was a rising but penniless author when he married Pauline in 1927. When he first began the novel just after World War II, Hemingway was first engaged and then newly married to his fourth wife Mary, a petite woman, whose name is given to the third member of the Garden triangle, Marita, or "little Mary." The manuscript novel multiplied the autobiographical elements. Nick and Barbara Sheldon are near-photographic recreations of Hemingway and Hadley as they appeared during the early 1920s, and Andy Murray is closely modeled on John Dos Passos (Fleming 141-142).

A prominent autobiographical element in the novel is twined with the three main characters in the novel: David Bourne, an American writer, his wife Catherine and Marita nicknamed as "Heiress." The novel is an account of Hemingway's honeymoon with his second wife Pauline at Le Grau-du-Roi in 1927. There is a certain resemblance to the relationship between Hemingway, his first wife Hadley and Pauline. In the early 1920s, Hemingway and Hadley became friends with Pauline Pfeiffer. Pauline first befriended Hadley and spent most of her time with the Hemingways, playing the good caretaker of Bumby. But she soon began an affair with Hemingway and the rest is history. This is justified in *A Moveable Feast* (1964), a memoir by Hemingway. In the last chapter titled as "There is Never Any End to Paris," Hemingway bitterly recalls the beginning of his relationship with the rich Pauline:

We had been infiltrated by another rich using the oldest trick there is. It is that an unmarried young woman becomes the temporary best friend of another young woman who is married, goes to live with the husband and wife and then unknowingly, innocently and unrelentingly sets out to marry the husband. When the husband is a writer and doing difficult work so that he is occupied much of the time and is not a good companion or partner to his wife for a big part of the day, the arrangement has advantages until you know how it works out (125).

In another incident, Hemingway recalls through David of how he lost his works. When Catherine told him that she had burned his works, he had not believed her because he felt that no human being would do such a thing. But, suddenly frightened, searches his room and discovers that she had also burned the notebooks containing his African short stories: when he opened the big Vuitton suitcase, the “pile of cahiers that the stories had been written in was gone” (*TGE* 218). This deliberate act of destruction carried out by Catherine recalls Hadley’s accidental loss of Hemingway’s own early manuscripts in 1922. She had lost all his stories including the carbon copies. Hemingway bitterly recalls this incident in *A Movable Feast* in the chapter titled “Hunger Was Good Discipline.” Hemingway recalls: “I had never seen anyone hurt by a thing other than death or unbearable suffering except Hadley when she told me about the things being gone” (*AMF* 43). Only his works “My Old Man” and “Up in Michigan,” which he had submitted to *Cosmopolitan*, remained. He told her that “it was all right and not to worry” (43), but he was devastated by the loss, which “permanently damaged his relationship with Hadley” (Tyler 6).

In 1936, Hemingway first published a short story “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” in *Esquire* magazine which was republished together with the other short stories twice and at present it is included in *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway: The Finca Vigia*

Edition (1987). Hemingway travelled to Africa twice, in the 1930s and 1950s. It is known that his safari to Africa became the basis of his non-fiction work *Green Hills of Africa* (1935) and inspired him to write his well-known present story. His safari was extraordinarily successful, but a severe case of amoebic dysentery cut his stay short and required that he be flown out to Nairobi for several days of treatment before he could resume hunting. “The experience of waiting all day in miserable health for the plane to arrive perhaps inspired ‘The Snows of Kilimanjaro’” (Tyler 94). In his essay “The Art of the Short Story,” he claimed to have been inspired to write the story after a wealthy woman invited him to travel to Africa at her expense. It is speculated that the woman in the story was a blue-blooded member of New York’s High society Helen Hay Whitney, the rich widow of a financier Payne Whitney. On his return from African safari, when asked about what his next plan was, Hemingway replied that he wanted to make enough money to go back to Africa and learn something about lions. Hay Whitney is assumed to have invited Hemingway to tea and made an alluring offer: she wanted to foot the bill for his trip to Africa as long as she could go along, to which he had politely declined. In a letter addressed to his close friend Colonel Charles “Buck” Lanham, Hemingway wrote that the story is about what he thought of the ‘very rich’; and a study of what would have become or happened had he accepted the offer.

Hemingway’s autobiographical story “Fathers and Sons” in the collection *Winner Take Nothing* (1933) chronicles a trip which the narrator Nicholas Adams takes with his young son. Hunting for quail as his own father had taught him, Nick starts to think about his father and this way it becomes a meditative story. In the opening lines of the story, Nick notices the heavy trees and meditates that they “are a part of your heart if it is your town and you have walked under them, but that are only too heavy, that shut out the sun and that dampen the houses for a stranger” (*The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*). According to Tyler: “Hemingway’s metaphor suggests that Nick believes that he has repaired

the emotional damage caused by his father's suicide and can safely pass through his memories of his father. Like those small-town trees, although they might seem dark and depressing to anyone else" (90). He recalls how he had a troubled relationship with his father and tries to emotionally come to terms with harsh memories and his anguish over his father's eventual suicide. Nick tries to remember only the good times but he uncontrollably is haunted by his father's memory. He sadly recalls how, in anger, he had secretly aimed a gun at his father and thought about killing him and remembers the sick sense of remorse he felt afterwards. His father had once betrayed him by beating him over an incident of used underwear. He had given Nick his underwear which had become too small for him. Nick could not bring himself to use it and had put it under two stones at a creek, later told his father he had lost it and was whipped for lying. Like his father had betrayed him, at present Nick too betrays his son by incompletely answering his questions about sex because it makes him uncomfortable. The relationships among three generations and the coincidences are worth noting. Johnston opines, "Despite the detour sign and the flashing red lights, despite the warning signals from the past, Nicholas Adams, figuratively speaking, is going down the same street, the same road, as did his father" (qtd. in Tyler 92).

With these observations, it can be said that Hemingway's writings partially are an extension of his experiences. He has incorporated his personal relationships, hardships, his very personality and outlook towards life, his troubled life and experiences- both positive and bitter ones and allowed the readers to get a partial view into his troubled life in a fictitious form.

3.2.2. Thematic Analysis of the Works of Ernest Hemingway

Hemingway's writings echo longings and frustrations, the horror, fear and the futility of human existence in a world that is desperately trying to break him. This awareness of the futility of human existence makes him to deal largely with the darker themes. Hemingway's

heroes exhibit the principles of honor, courage and endurance and display qualities that really make a man. But sometimes, these heroes have suicidal tendencies and the others find suicide as the way out of their problems which is too much to bear. Living in the era of the two Great World Wars, Hemingway was clearly affected by it and the fact remains that he was directly involved in the consequences of it. He was also carried away by the obsession of the twentieth century writers: of death, depression, meaninglessness, alienation, etc. Hemingway, the macho man, expresses his feeling about the necessity of dealing with the problems of life with stoicism and the beauty that lies in never giving up in the face of difficulties. But despite this positive outlook, his works deal at large with the negativity and bring out his existence in a literally dark world. And this section details the prominent dark themes in his select works.

3.2.2.1. Death and Suicide

Suicide ran in the Hemingway family. This famous American family has this dark side attached to them. Ernest's father Clarence Hemingway shot himself in 1928, his sister Ursula and brother Leicester also killed themselves, and his granddaughter Margaux died of drug overdose. Three generations of the Hemingways suffered from depression or manic depression. Taking note of this phenomenon, it is impossible to read the works of Hemingway without analyzing them from this point of view.

Hemingway has an obsession with the theme of death and it permeates his works. There is a near constant presence of death, "either in the form of death itself, the knowledge of the inevitability of death, or the futility of fleeing death" (Sabharwal 95). He probed the nature of death deeply and it is no wonder that he decided when death would arrive to him rather than wait for death by blowing his head off.

The pathetic condition of human beings from the existentialist point of view is the inevitability of death; that death is the only certainty in life. *A Farewell to Arms* opens and

closes with an image of death and throughout the novel looms the overshadowing presence of death. Death occurs so much that this moment is no longer seen as significant. The ending of the first chapter in the novel is ironic: “At the start of winter came the permanent rain and with the rain came the cholera. But it was checked and in the end only seven thousand died of it in the army” (*FTA* 4). Hemingway’s indignation towards the Great War is convincing when he makes the amount of seven thousand deaths as something minimal.

Through the use of the rain as symbol of death, Hemingway prepares the reader for the impending death of Catherine and of Henry going back alone to his hotel in the rain at the end of the novel. Catherine has done nothing to deserve her untimely death, but the beauty of it is her stoical acceptance of death. She says that she is going to die and that she hates it, but she strongly says that she is not afraid of it. It is death which comes in between the blissful and deservingly-happy life of the two lovers. It is death which comes at an importune time to separate Henry from Catherine who is the source of his happiness after he bids farewell to arms.

In *For Whom the Bell Tolls* suicide is a dominant subject. Hemingway stoically presents the subject of suicide and makes his characters choose it as the alternative way out when all hope is lost. In the second chapter of the novel, when Pablo asks Robert about how Kashkin died, Robert replies, “He was captured and he killed himself [...] He was wounded and he did not want to be a prisoner” (*FWBT* 23). Though it is learned afterwards that Robert killed Kashkin as the latter was too wounded to be moved, his answer lays bare his own attitude of how he will respond to a given situation. Chapter Six recalls a conversation between Maria and Robert. When Robert tells Maria that his father is dead, she wants to know how:

‘Can one ask how he died?’

‘He shot himself.’

‘To avoid being tortured?’ the woman asked.

‘Yes,’ Robert Jordan said. ‘To avoid being tortured.’

Maria looked at him with tears in her eyes. ‘My father,’ she said, ‘could not obtain a weapon. Oh, I am very glad that your father had the good fortune to obtain a weapon’ (70).

El Sordo, a well-weathered man and leader of a guerrilla band operating near Pablo’s, who seems tough as a nail would prefer death over being held captive by the enemies. While exchanging fire with the fascists, he gets hit in the calf of his legs and in two places in his left arm. Writhing in pain, he starts wishing for death: “*Hay que tomar la muerte como si fuera aspirina,*’ which means, ‘You will have to take death as an aspirin’” (318).

Pondering over the fate of El Sordo and his men, and also being worried as Andres had not returned even after three hours after he had gone to deliver the message to Golz, he starts to think about his father’s suicide. He remembers his grandfather’s pistol and how his father had taken his own life with it. He himself feels an impending doom. Though he says that his father was a coward to commit such a deed, he adds that he had not been in his father’s own shoes and knew not what problems he was going through. In the last chapter, as Robert lies wounded, he starts to think about taking his own life. He considers instant death as “luck”; that taking a long time to die hurts and humiliates one. He writhes in pain, but his conscience does not allow him to take his own life. He says, “I don’t want to do that business that my father did” (*FWBT* 488). But not being able to bear the pain, he says “Maybe I’ll just do it now. I guess I’m not awfully good at pain” (488). As he stoically waits, while waiting for his imminent death, to inflict casualties to the fascists to slow down their progress, we get a peep into his conscience. Though he is against suicide and comments that a person has to be fully occupied to do something like that, he cannot help but think about it. Robert prefers death over capture. He is ready to commit suicide in order to avoid capture:

if I pass out or anything like that I am no good at all and if they bring me to they will ask me a lot of questions and do things and all and that is no good.

It's much best not to have them do those things. So why wouldn't it be all right to just do it now and then the whole thing would be over with? (488)

With war in the background, death permeates the novel and the characters have sane consciousness of it. Everyone seems to have a sane knowledge about their impending death at any time. Pilar knows that their future is uncertain and she says that they are all going to die “quick enough here without useless voyages” (309). Robert knows that he may not survive when he does the job of blowing up the bridge. And by the end of the novel we see Robert, leg shattered in a fall from a horse, waiting with his gun to ambush the fascist cavalry led by Lieutenant Berrendo. Deeply wounded and left to die, he sees the wisdom of making a sacrifice by inflicting some casualties to his enemies to buy time for his men including Maria to escape.

Islands in the Stream is shadowed by the theme of death. The first part of the novel ends with Tom receiving a telegram that David and Andrew, the two younger boys were killed in a car accident with their mother. Hudson, like any other Hemingway macho man seems to take the message in a cold way but the reality is that it strikes him hard. He says that the end of the world does not come in presumed outlines, but it comes with “one of the island boys bringing a radio message up the road from the local post office” (*ITS* 190) carrying the sad news. Afterwards while sailing to Cuba to be with his only surviving son Tom, Hudson feels literally empty. He is of the opinion that hell is not something that normally is described by “Dante or any other of the great hell-describers,” but hell could be a “comfortable, pleasant and well-loved ship taking you towards a country that you had always sailed for with anticipation” (192). After the death of his sons, Hudson is not the same person anymore. He feels that this feeling of loss is something that cannot be cured by anesthesia or any other

thing but can be cured only by death. Time can cure it, but he adds again that if time has the ability to cure his feelings, then it was not true sorrow. Towards the end of the second book, Hudson is paid a surprise visit by his first wife and in her conversation we learn that the eldest son Tom Jr. was shot down by a flak ship while flying with the RAF. To lessen the idea of his tragic death, he informs her that his chute did not burn. To kill his loneliness, he spends time with a whore named Honest Lil and talking with his cat Boise. He admits that “he did not know what he would do if Boise should be killed” (202). In the face of his losses, including the departure of his wife from him, he takes the decision to serve his country by patrolling for Nazis in the Caribbean.

In the chief event of the second book where his first wife asks him if Tom is dead, he answers that he is. She makes a mental note that Hudson too is going to follow suit like his sons. Hudson makes a mental note that he must not think about his sons and it shows that he is clearly depressed. ““Cuba” ends with premonitions of Hudson’s death. His first wife has good reason to assume that he will be killed at sea” (Fleming 138). The book ends with Hudson reflecting that he has lost his sons, his love and his honor. Now, all that is left for him to sustain is his duty. And this duty will direct him towards a fatal battle where he will lose his life. And indeed, in the last book “At Sea,” his approaching death becomes more prominent. As Hudson and his crew search for the U-boat crew, the contact with the radio gets lost. Finally when the message does come through, Hudson is told to continue searching westward carefully, which is “on the symbolic level an allusion to his lifelong journey toward death” (Fleming 139), pushing him capriciously towards his enemies. Hudson and his men are ambushed by the Germans. Heroically, Hudson continues to give orders despite his wound. It is only when the Germans are all killed that he finally realizes that he is dying.

Islands in the Stream is also haunted by the theme of suicide. Many instances in the novel look like the harbingers of Hemingway’s final action of ending his life. In a

conversation with Tom, Roger mentions that the woman he was seeing the last time had killed herself. When Tom insists that Roger would never kill himself, he answers that suicide can seem logical in the right circumstances. When he loses his sons, he imagines himself eating Torpex, a highly explosive powder, for breakfast. Lil, a whore, talks candidly about the ways the Cubans commit suicide: “Sometimes people in Cuba commit suicide by eating phosphorous from the heads of matches” (274), by eating shoe dye, or the girls, who have been crossed in love, “commit suicide by pouring alcohol on themselves and setting themselves on fire” (274). And in a conversation with Ara, Hudson agrees that wanting to commit suicide is “not an uncommon feeling” (346) when Ara says that he had wanted to kill himself sometimes.

“The Snows of Kilimanjaro” focuses on Harry, a writer who is dying of gangrene. He is stranded the camp together with a woman, the widowed Helen. A bearing in their truck’s engine had burnt out and they wait for an evacuation plane from Nairobi. His condition makes him irritable and he talks about his impending death in a sarcastic manner which upsets the woman. In a way Harry blames himself and feels that he had destroyed his talents but he feels that the woman is to be blamed. He blames her “bloody money” (3), calls her a “rich bitch” and “destroyer of his talent” (9). He blames her money because had she not been a rich woman, he would not have undertaken the trip and landed in the present condition. He feels that he has wasted his talents and that “he would never write the things that he had saved to write until he knew enough to write them well” (3). The things he would never get to write are presented in italics which come in the form of poetic flashbacks. The story was written when Hemingway when the author was young and in total control of his talent and youth, yet he was able to place himself in a position which he really feared may happen, and which really happened. In a way, coincidentally, he was able to foresee his doom: the

inability to make use of his talent as a writer, which remains for everyone to be seen that it was a last straw for this talented writer.

The imminent presence of death in the story “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” is overwhelming. Harry painfully waits for his impending death which is fated to happen as a result of gangrene. The epigraph carries an image of a “frozen carcass of a leopard” (1) and the awful, putrid stench of Harry’s dying flesh at once strikes a chord of the powerful presence of death. In the very opening of the story, Harry talks about death: “‘The marvelous thing is that it’s painless,’ he said. ‘That’s how you know when it starts’” (1). His deplorable state is made all the more pathetic with the image of the birds, the symbols of death: “the huge filthy birds sat, their naked heads sunk in the hunched feathers” (2) waiting for him to die and feast on him. He smells death on his leg and helplessly resigns to his fate.

Hemingway’s preoccupation with suicide far extends in the short story ‘Indian Camp’ in the collection of short stories *In Our Time* (1925). The young Nick goes with his father, a country doctor, to an Indian camp to deliver a pregnant woman of her baby. Dr. Adams is good in his profession as a doctor but callous. He fails to respect the human dignity and feelings of the woman and her husband. The Indian husband who has been immobilized by an axe wound is forced to watch as the doctor performs the caesarean section with a jackknife. When the woman screams out of pain, the young Nick asks his father to give her something to stop her screams, but the father coldly replies: “her screams are not important. I don’t hear them because they are not important” (TEH 299). On hearing this, the husband in the upper bunk rolled over against the wall. It is ironical that the physical and emotional pains felt by the Indian husband and wife are not important but the entry of the successful operation, that too with a jack-knife, without anesthesia and sewing it up with nine-foot tapered gut leaders, in the medical journal is what matters. After the impromptu operation, when the doctor pulled the blanket from the Indian’s head, his face was laid towards the wall. Unable to withstand

the screams and pain felt by his wife and the coldness of the doctor the man had committed suicide and the scene is bloody: “His throat had been cut from ear to ear. The blood had flowed down into a pool where his body sagged the bunk. His head rested on his left arm. The open razor lay, edge up, in the blankets” (300).

The story certainly shows Hemingway’s early fascination with the theme of suicide. Coming into close contact with the ritual and experiences the young Nick has ever known, he is dumbfounded, but what pricks him is not about the birth of a new born but the question of death and why the Indian man committed suicide:

‘Why did he kill himself, Daddy?’

‘I don’t know, Nick. He couldn’t stand things I guess.’

‘Do many men kill themselves, Daddy?’

‘Not very many, Nick.’

‘Do many women?’

‘Hardly ever.’

‘Don’t they ever?’

‘Oh, yes. They do sometimes’ (*TEH* 301).

“A Clean Well Lighted Place” in *Men Without Women* (1927) presents a sorry figure of a suicidal and deaf old man suffering from loneliness and isolation. He is assumed to be about eighty years old and the conversations of the two waiters let the readers know that the old man had tried to commit suicide the previous week in despair. He had “hung himself with a rope” but his niece had cut him down for “fear of his soul” (*TEH* 422). When the younger waiter grumbles for not being able to go home early because of the old man and cruelly says that the old man should have killed himself the previous week; that he can buy a bottle drink and have it at home, the older waiter responds that he stays up late because he is lonely and has no one to go back home to. With age comes loneliness, and the old man’s attempted

suicide indicates his willingness to escape from it. The common perception held of old age is wisdom that comes with age, but the story throws a realistic portrait of loneliness that comes with old age. There is a yearning to feel wanted and to be a part of the world. In the case of the deaf old man in the story, to escape from loneliness he would like to get drunk and be in the clean, well-lighted place in the midst of people, and he would go to the extent of even taking away his own life to escape from it.

“The Killers” features two criminals, Al and Max, who enter a diner in search of their target Ole Andreson, a Swedish prizefighter who apparently double-crossed the mob. The two rowdy killers, dressed in black overcoats and gloves are representatives of death. When Anderson fails to show up, the killers leave in the darkness of the night. What is catchy about this simple story is the fact that, among the characters, Nick is the only one who is disturbed by the whole incident and Andreson’s passivity and resignation shown in the face of his impending death. Hemingway’s idea of the inevitability of death certainly revolves around Anderson’s resignation to his impending death shown by his passive fatalism. “Ole Andreson knows that his death is inevitable, therefore he might as well just sit and wait for death to catch up to him” (“The Theme of Death in the Selected Works of Ernest Hemingway”). He knows that he cannot escape from the killers, the representatives of death, and essentially waits for his death to occur.

“The Capital of the World” (1938) details the tragic end of Paco, a young waiter at a restaurant named Luarca. Living in an environment full of bullfighters, Paco too dreams of becoming a bullfighter one day completely unaware that his death is around the corner. After dining hours are over and everyone has left, Paco and Enrique, the dishwasher start talking about bullfighting wherein Enrique comments that bullfighting is dangerous and even he would be scared. Paco strongly responds that he is not, to which Enrique becomes all the more cynical. When Paco insists that they try it out, Enrique comes up with a dangerous idea

of tying two pointed knives on the legs of a chair and assuming it to be the horns of a bull. Paco at first bravely dodges it but the weight of the chair makes Enrique makes a mistake of miscalculating his footsteps and steps forward his left foot two inches far too long piercing his femoral artery. Hemingway's fascination with bullfighting and death runs in the story. Paco lives in a world full of illusion, and like a typical Hemingway hero, he would rather face danger and death than to face humiliation.

It can be stated that Hemingway's obsession with the theme of death and suicide had far-reaching consequences. From the works discussed and analyzed, we get a clear-cut idea that there is an essence of fatalistic heroism in the way he depicts his characters. And this can be attributed to the workings of his mind. Keeping in mind the way Hemingway took his own life rather than face his situation from where he saw no hope left, his depiction of the characters in his works discussed are a reinforcement of his attitude in facing death.

3.2.2.2. War

The theme of war is dealt with at large in Hemingway's novels. Hemingway held his war experiences close to his heart and demonstrated throughout his life and his writings a keen interest in war. His first novel *The Sun Also Rises* depicts real life events and incidents about his experiences in war and the aftermath of it. Hemingway wrote this novel after the World War I and the characters seem to be reeling under the ill-effects of war. The narrator and protagonist of *The Sun Also Rises* is a wounded man. Thirty-four year-old Jake Barnes, a veteran of World War I has sustained a wound that makes him sexually maimed. When Jake, the injured character in the novel, says "I got hurt in the war" (TEH 13) there is deeper indication to it though his injury is not mentioned exactly, for it caused him his love, Lady Brett Ashley. In the profane nature of the modern world, Jake becomes the "tragedy of his

own generation inescapably imprisoned in history, irredeemably lost in the profane time of the aftermath of the war” (Josephs 231).

Jake “lost more than he deserved in World War I” (Nagel 105). When Count Mippipopolous shows them the marks on his back by arrow wounds he sustained as a young man, Brett turns to Jake and says, “I told you he was one of us”- “us” presumably being those scarred by war. As Georgette tells Jake, “Everybody’s sick. I am sick, too”(TEH 12), she literally uses the word “sick” to mean that she has a venereal disease, but her words suggest that Hemingway sees much of his generation as “sick.”

The characters of *The Sun Also Rises* belong to Hemingway’s circle and the actions and based on real events. Jake Barnes, the narrator, resembles Hemingway in many ways. In December 1920, Hemingway moved with his wife to Paris where he served as a foreign correspondent for the *Toronto Star*, and in the novel Barnes is presented as an expatriate American journalist working in Paris. Hemingway served as an ambulance driver in World War I and it was here that he received a major wound which nearly let him get his legs amputated. Barnes too is presented as a World War I veteran who served as a U.S. Navy pilot on the Italian front. The wound he received in the war rendered him impotent and incapable of consummating his love for Lady Brett Ashley. Like Hemingway, Barnes is presented as having a mastery over trout fishing and has love for bullfighting. Cayetano Ordonez, a bullfighter who fought under the name Nino de la Palma, had once presented Hadley with the ear of a bull, which she has left behind, unceremoniously, in a drawer in her hotel room. This is recalled when Brett is given the bull’s ear. While leaving Pamplona, Brett forgets to take the ear which she had stuffed in the back of a dresser drawer. Hemingway is said to have been enchanted and infatuated with Duff, so is Barnes with Brett. He had once got into a jealous brawl with Loeb, Duff’s lover, causing a permanent strain on their friendship. This incident is recalled in the novel when Barnes gets into a fistfight with Cohn. Although

Hemingway and Loeb shook hands and apologized, the emotions were tense. Though the fiesta had been ruined and their friendship would never remain the same again, it was in these events and feelings that Hemingway found the subject for his first novel.

A Farewell to Arms continues with a major theme of war like *The Sun Also Rises*. The novel opens with images of guns, bombs and diseases and people's indifferent attitude towards it. By the use of war as the background, Hemingway touches on the darker aspects of death, disillusionment, decline of religion and morality, nada and a world which does not rhyme anymore. The hero Frederic Henry himself does not believe in giving up his life for a cause he does not believe in and shows the futility and desperation of war. When Henry returns from the front, Rinaldi tells him that ever since he left them, they had nothing but "frostbites, chilblains, jaundice, gonorrhea, self-inflicted wounds, pneumonia." As the novel progresses, war gets bigger and bloodier. Hemingway heaps more ugly sides of the war through the conversation between Henry and Passini about the war: Passini says "There is nothing worse than war" (*FTA* 47), to which Henry replies "Defeat is worse" (47). When Passini says that at least with defeat they get to get home, Henry realistically replies, "They come after you. They take your home. They take your sisters" (47). War affects everyone inhumanely and "The famous Caporetto Retreat in the novel presents a detailed and vivid account of the chaotic situation of the war when civilians also get involved" (Aslam 103).

In Book I, Chapter 9, Henry and his mates get hit by a trench mortar shell. The brutality of it is seen after Henry discovers his injury: "My legs felt warm and wet and my shoes were wet and warm inside. I knew that I was hit and leaned over and put my hand on my knee. My knee wasn't there. My hand went in and my knee was down on my shen" (*FTA* 52). He is lifted to an ambulance where there were others stretchers slid into the sling above him. As the ambulance climbed the road, the injured man above him started to hemorrhage, and the experience in the dark desensitizes him as a human:

The stream kept on. In the dark I could not see where it came from the canvas overhead. I tried to move sideways so that it did not fall on me. Where it had run down under my shirt it was warm and sticky. I was cold and my leg hurt so that it made me sick. After a while the stream from the stretcher above lessened and started to drip again and I heard and felt the canvas above move as the man on the stretcher settled more comfortably.

‘How is he?’ the Englishman called back. ‘We’re almost up.’

‘He’s dead I think,’ I said.

The drops fell very slowly, as they fell from the icicle after the sun has gone. It was cold in the car in the night as the road climbed. At the post on the top they took the stretcher out and put another in and we went on (57).

Everybody in the war is tired of it. The priest says that he hates the war and feels that there is no ending to it, Rinaldi says he depressed by it and that it is killing him. Henry does not believe in anything anymore, and he says that he only believes in sleep now meaning he believes in nothingness.

The Spanish Civil War was often seen as representing democracy’s last chance to oppose European fascism so as to avert World War II and thus the stakes were very high. The events of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* take place during the three days of the end of May 1937. The idea of the futility of war is seen in the useless military exploits of Robert and the other characters fighting against the Fascist forces. Robert deeply ponders and is of the opinion that blowing up the bridge “can be the turning point on which the future of the human race can turn” (*FWBT* 46). Hemingway presents the theme of war in the novel and it is wholly found in an ironic comment by an enemy officer, Lieutenant Berrendo, who notes “What a bad thing war is” (333). One of the losses of war is the death of good human beings like Jordan and his enemy Berrendo. “It is clear that in the moment after the end of the novel these two

men who should have been brothers instead will kill and be killed by each other” (Svoboda 165).

The tragedy about war is that it is not the soldiers who are to be blamed but the authority and the orders that they receive. When Robert says to the old man Anselmo that he does not like to kill animals, Anselmo says that he feels the opposite way, and that is, he does not like to kill men. Robert replies that no one feels that way except those who are “disturbed in the head” (*FWBT* 42). But he adds that he feels nothing when he kills out of compulsion; when he does it for a cause. This tragic idea about war is further extended by a deep thinking of Anselmo about the fascists. Watching the smoke billowing out of the fascists’ camp, Anselmo thinks that the fascists will be feeling so warm but the thought strikes him that they are going to be killed the next night. He broods: “I have watched them all day and they are the same men that we are” (201). He wonders if he could walk up to their camp but he knows that they are ordered to check the travellers and ask to see their papers. He adds “It is only orders that come between us. Those men are not fascists. I call them so, but they are not. They are poor men as we are” (201). He wishes that they could win the war without shooting anybody.

Even the powerful and strong Pilar has this uncontrollable fear about the war. When the sound of an aeroplane was heard overhead, the whole group becomes restless. After it disappears, Robert is surprised to see the sweat on Pilar’s forehead. She had been biting her lower lip between her teeth. She says that everybody has fear for something and admits that for her, they are the aeroplanes and she says that they are in the “same caldron” (*FWBT* 310). Apart from his duty as a detonator, the personal question that Robert Jordan faces is “whether it is possible in three days for a person to live a life as full and meaningful as one might ordinarily live in the biblical threescore years and ten” (Svoboda 163). He feels that his inhumane duties “are necessary orders that are no fault of yours” (*FWBT* 46).

The most horrific encounter with the war-scarred characters includes the detailed recounts of Maria's harsh experiences. This beautiful nineteen-year-old Spanish woman had witnessed the murder of her parents, killed when her father, then the Mayor, refused to renounce the Republic. Her accounts include heart-wrenching bitter experiences about the war: tied up in a long line consisting of girls and women, she had witnessed her parents being shot in front of her; then she and the rest were taken to a barbershop where both of her long braids were cut and in action blood dripped from the cut on her ear; she was struck by the braids across her face and then the braids were shoved into her mouth to gag her. Up till then, she was too shocked to even cry but it was the jaunting laughter from the men and her reflection in the mirror which showed her state that made her cry. She says, "I could not believe as I saw it done and I cried and I cried but I could not look away from the horror that my face made with the mouth open and the braids tied in it" (*FWBT* 366). Her pathetic state reaches its heights with the reaction of her best friend: "when she saw me she did not recognize me, and then she recognized me, and she screamed, and I could hear her screaming all the time they were shoving me across the square (366). She then mentions about how she had become a victim of a cruel gang-rape by the fascists. Through Pilar, we learn that she had been deeply traumatized and was unable to talk or stop crying and she winced at everyone's touch.

Hemingway's war texts which begin with an "enthusiastic response to the call of their country, typically became dominated by images of alienation, dislocation and even madness-motifs of literary modernism" (Tyler 72). Bitterness, hopelessness, and even mental breakdowns were evidently not unusual. Hemingway might not have replicated the experience of those who lived during the war-torn years of the first half of the twentieth century, but it offers the truth about those wars as near as we come by it. Regarding the

meaninglessness of war, Svoboda can be rightfully agreed too when he states about the ending of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*:

It is clear that in the moment after the ending of the novel these two men who should have been brothers instead will kill and be killed by each other- a bitter loss of war, which Hemingway denounces irrespective of the right or wrong of political movements or causes (165).

3.2.2.3. The Dark World of Hemingway

For the disillusioned men and women in the world of Hemingway's works the very meaning of their existence is questioned. Many of his characters suffer from depression, loneliness, depression and meaninglessness. Their world is a dark one in the absence of morality. They suffer from irreligiosity, existential angst and take pleasure in momentary happiness. Belief in themselves and God failed them and they led disillusioned lives. They were always in search of anything meaningful and they always succumbed to drugs or alcohol, or sought out adventures to give life some temporary meaning.

In *The Sun Also Rises*, the whole group of expatriates attending the fiesta belongs to the lost generation suffering from existential angst. Scarce of moral values, they live a hedonistic lifestyle and seem to be disenchanted with life. They are nihilistic in their attitude and discard every form of respectability by indulging in acts of calculated bravado, drinking, bullfighting and immoral exploits of sexuality. Jake seems to serve as pimp of his love Brett and Brett exploits her sexuality with at least three men in the novel. After her lover dies, Brett keeps chains of lovers and she sees nothing immoral in it. Besides, images of emptiness, loss and decay abound in the novel. They have lost traditional religious values. Jake is Roman Catholic. When Bill asks him if he is really a Catholic, Jake responds with the word "technically" (TEH 124). When Jake visits the cathedral in Pamplona to pray, his mind

wanders so much that he refers to himself as a “rotten Catholic” (97). He says that he is “pretty religious” (209) when Brett tells him he has a “hell of a biblical name” referring to his given name of Jacob. Disillusioned and suffering from existential crisis, these expatriates’ only solace is to take momentary pleasure in joining the festival, enjoying the moment for they know not what will happen the next day when the sun rises.

A similar theme of irreligiosity is found in the *A Farewell to Arms*. Rinaldi, Henry and Count Greffi do not believe in God. They seem to have no religious attachment in their lives at all. Hemingway’s hero Henry is disillusioned and feels that his world is meaningless embodying “nada.” When the baby dies, Henry says, “I had no religion but I knew he ought to have been baptized” (289). In the conversation between Henry and the priest in Chapter 11, Henry gives us an idea that he understood religion but he did not love God:

‘You understand but you do not love God.’

‘No.’

‘You do not love Him at all?’ he asked.

‘I am afraid of Him in the night sometimes.’

‘You should love Him.’

‘I don’t love much’ (*FTA* 66).

Catherine’s statement that Henry is her religion reaches the climax of this theme. When Henry says that he wants to marry her for her sake she replies in an atheistic tone:

“There’s no way to be married except by church or state. We are married privately. You see, darling, it would mean everything to me if I had any religion. But I haven’t any religion... You’re my religion. You’re all I’ve got” (*FTA* 104).

And in the end when the knowledge of her death becomes inevitable and Henry asks her if she would like him to call a priest, she replies that she does not want anyone but him.

In *A Farewell to Arms*, Henry believes that life holds no meaning. Even the heroine Catherine Barkley holds that life has become meaningless after losing her fiancé in the war; she tells Henry that her fiancé was blown up to bits in the battle on the Somme. Henry saw no meaning in falling in love and he admits “God knows I had not wanted to fall in love with her. I had not wanted to fall in love with anyone” (FTA 85). Finally when he thought he had found a meaning in life through Catherine, she dies at childbirth. And the last lines of the novel portray the miserable state of Henry who has lost the only meaning in his life. He goes in to the hospital room to say the final goodbye to the lifeless body of Catherine: “But after I had got them out and shut the door and turned off the light it wasn’t any good. It was like saying good-bye to a statue. After a while I went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain” (293). Henry is left alone once again in a state of hopelessness, meaninglessness and nothingness.

Hemingway’s later novel *The Garden of Eden* presents disturbed and unconventional characters. Its title is an allusion to the biblical story of Adam and Eve. “Certainly Hemingway casts Catherine as both Eve and the serpent. She is the temptress who destroys the couple’s happiness in the paradise of their honeymoon” (Tyler 153). David addresses her as “Devil” and she herself says that she is the destructive type. As her skin becomes darker, she becomes more closely associated with a Satan, the Prince of Darkness. Even the colonel says that Catherine is the darkest white girl he had ever seen. David even compares her to a goat, “recalling the cloven hooves associated with the medieval figure of a Devil” (153).

Despite the dark side of Catherine, we get an idea that she is not wholly sane, because no sane woman will behave in such a reckless manner. Catherine seems to be mentally unstable, and she echoes Hemingway’s friend Fitzgerald’s wife Zelda who experienced “repeated episodes of mental illness characterized by hallucinations, depressions, self-destructive behaviour, and suicide attempts and was frequently hospitalized for psychiatric

care” (Tyler 150). Catherine too is jealous of her husband David’s works and suffers from depression. David seems to give more time to his writing instead of his wife Catherine even when her madness threatens to end in suicide. She reacts by “becoming increasingly hostile to David’s writing, finally burning his manuscripts while he is absent” (Fleming 141).

Given to sexual experimentation and emotional scenes, she is an artist thwarted by her mental instability and inability to create. Like Catherine, Hemingway too destroyed his own marriages and was suicidal. In Book Two, when David tells the Colonel that he had married Catherine Hill, the man informs David that he knew her father. He adds: “Very odd type. Killed himself in a car. His wife too” (*TGE* 61). Towards the end of the novel, when Catherine proposes to take their Bugati, David convinces her to take the train instead. He does this because he knew that she was emotionally down, and also by remembering that her father killed himself. The manuscript version of *The Garden of Eden* does not correspond with the ending of the published version. In one ending, Catherine comes back to David after staying at a Swiss sanatorium. “The couple agree that they will commit suicide if Catherine’s madness returns” (qtd. in Tyler 148).

The world of Hemingway is a world of pervasive gloom. The breaking of man is symbolized by the wound, physical or psychological, which renders him a physical or emotional cripple. This wound occurs in all his fictions. Nick Adams in *In Our Time* is wounded in the knee, Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises* is emasculated by war, Frederic Henry in *A Farewell to Arms* is again wounded in the knee at the Italian front in WWI, Henry Morgan loses his arm in *To Have and Have Not*, Robert Jordan’s leg is crushed in *For Whom The Bell Tolls*, and finally we have the wounds of Santiago is seen in *The Old Man and the Sea*.

Hemingway, together with his characters, seemed to have literally lost their way after being so disillusioned with the effects of the War. Putnam, in his article “Hemingway on War

and its aftermath,” quotes Nadine Gordimer who described Hemingway’s motivation to return to Europe as an expatriate; that “Hemingway never really came home again.” Jake Barnes, the American World War I veteran in *The Sun Also Rises*, remains back in Europe, joining his compatriots and revels through Paris and Spain. Many regard the novel as “Hemingway’s portrait of a generation that has lost its way, restlessly seeking meaning in the postwar world” (Putnam “Hemingway on War and Its Aftermath”).

3.2.2.4. Nada, Lost Generation and Code Hero

The term *Nada* is a Spanish word meaning nothingness. In the world of Hemingway, the characters live in a world of despair and meaninglessness. The Hemingway Hero is aware of death and the restlessness involved while waiting for it. He is a sleepless man brooding upon the chaos and confusion of the world surrounding him. Frederic Henry in *A Farewell to Arms* is disillusioned as he lives in the world of violence, death, destruction and war and his thoughts in the following paragraph attaches the very meaning of Nada to it:

If people bring so much courage to this world the world had to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them. The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry (*FTA* 222).

Frederic Henry cannot sleep and he drinks too much in secret. He is a restless man who stays awake at night and sleeps during the day. Night is a difficult time for him because the darkness of the night symbolizes death to him. After he flees from war, we think that his disillusionment is complete. He and Catherine flee to the idyllic mountains of Switzerland,

but in their Eden-like sanctuary, nada creeps in, and Catherine dies at childbirth. And at the end once again Henry is left with another shock leaving him all alone, walking back to his hotel in “the rain.” The lovers cannot escape the arms of fate and they fail in their futile attempt to do so.

In *The Sun Also Rises*, Jake’s wound has rendered him ineffectual and impotent and hence Jake cannot sleep with lights off. He cannot face the darkness of night which resembles nada and hence is troubled at night, leaves Brett alone in his sitting room and lies down having a bad time. The Spanish Civil War in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* represents nada with all its elements of death, evil and darkness. The Fascist bombers symbolize the forces of evil that annihilate life and hence they represent symbolically Nada. The high mountain sanctuary of Sierra de Guadarramas is like a clean well-lighted place. The guerrillas live here in primitive conditions protected from the fear of annihilation by Fascism. Here the weather is soothing, calm and clear and Hemingway creates a kind of idyll in the midst of war” (Mohanty 108). It was in this idyllic place that Maria, raped and ruined by the Fascists, is restored to life and sanity by Robert. However, this place in the mountains is not a permanent refuge against nada. And Robert, Pablo and El Sordo’s guerrilla band are doomed in the end.

In “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place,” the old man embodies the very meaning of nada. Isolated and lonely, he goes to the clean and well lighted café to kill his loneliness and be in the company of strangers at least. The older waiter is obsessed with the idea of nothingness and like the old man, he is also a depressed person. And in his inner monologue, he fully understands the problem of the old man. When he interprets The Lord’s Prayer, he can only add the word nada to it thus heightening the meaning of the word nothingness attached to it:

Our *nada* who art in *nada*, *nada* be thy name thy kingdom *nada* thy will be
nada in *nada* as it is in *nada*. Give us this *nada* our daily *nada* and *nada* us
 our *nada* as we *nada* our *nadas* and *nada* us not into *nada* but deliver us from

nada; pues nada. Hail nothing full of nothing, nothing is with thee. He smiled and stood before a bar with a shining steam pressure coffee machine (*TEH* 424).

In his masterpiece *The Old Man and the Sea*, Hemingway treats the theme of nada in a more explicit manner. Here the struggle between man and nature is obvious in the setting of the fiction. The Gulf Stream with its giant marlin and sharks symbolize the forces of nature. The old Cuban fisherman Santiago symbolizes the human race. Santiago alone battles against the hostile forces of nature. “The very fact that Santiago is all alone in the Gulf Stream signifies the lonely struggle every man has to fight against the dark, hostile force, viz. Nada in his own psyche represented by the sharks” (Mohanty 110).

In 1952 Philip Young, a Hemingway scholar, brought out his book *Ernest Hemingway* wherein he analyzed the works of Hemingway by relying on the Freudian concept of repetition compulsion to make a connection between Hemingway’s repeated characterization of a familiar Hemingway hero. It was here that he defined the Hemingway code hero: a code hero is “made of the controls of honor and courage which in a life of tension and pain make a man a man and distinguish him from people who follow random impulses” (qtd. in Tyler 29). The code hero differs from the normal heroes. He is called the code hero because he represents a code of living properly in the world which is full of violence, disorder and misery; he is the symbol of the principles of honour, courage and endurance and it is this which makes him “a man”; it enables him to conduct himself well even in the losing battle by showing grace even under pressure.

The characters of Hemingway belong to the Lost Generation. The “Lost Generation” was the generation that came of age during World War I. This generation includes writers who came of age during the war such as Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, T.S.Eliot, James Joyce, William Faulkner and Franz Kafka. It refers to the period of post war feelings in

which the authors and people felt that there was no more hope left for the world. The term is generally applied to those who actively participated in the First World War and as a consequence of this had realized that life was meaningless after witnessing so much of death and destruction. It describes the disillusioned young men who survived the War. It defines the loss of morality and the aimlessness in the lives of soldiers. The War destroyed their idea of goodness. For many who went to the war and experienced death, they returned physically and mentally damaged. The faith that had once given them hope and helped them before the war had been destroyed by the countless number of deaths. It was a movement to try to recover from the experiences and this portion of writers tried to counter it by displaying the experiences of war.

Hemingway can be considered as the emblem of the “Lost Generation.” Though the phrase was coined by Gertrude Stein, the concept regarding its meaning was popularized by Hemingway. Its genesis is formed in Hemingway’s recollection in *A Movable Feast*. Hemingway recalls how Stein, in recounting a story of a young boy who was told by the garage owner that he belonged to a lost generation when he failed to repair a car in time, told him: “That is what you are. That’s what you all are [...] All of you young people who served in the war. You are a lost generation” (18). She adds that they drink themselves to death and have no respect for anything. For this ‘Lost Generation,’ life held no meaning for them. And Hemingway created the Code Hero to represent these men. He focused his novels around code heroes who struggle with the mixture of their tragic faults and their surrounding environment. The Code Hero always exhibits some form of physical wound that serves as his tragic flaw and the weakness of his characters. Hemingway defined the Code Hero as a man who lives correctly, following the ideals of honor, courage and endurance in a world that is sometimes chaotic, often stressful and always painful.

The Sun Also Rises is a perfect example of it, for Hemingway has exactly depicted the real meaning of lost generation in this novel. Here, Jake “got hurt in the war” maiming him sexually and costing him his love Brett; when Count Mippipopolous shows the marks on his back by arrow wounds he sustained in war, Brett turns to Jake and says, “I told you he was one of us” (*TEH* 49), “us” presumably being those scarred by war; as Georgette, the prostitute, tells Jake, “Everybody’s sick. I am sick, too” (*TEH* 12), she literally uses the word “sick” to mean that she has a venereal disease, but her words suggest that Hemingway sees much of his generation as “sick”; or Jake has the “hell of a biblical name” Jacob, as Brett tells him, but when he is asked if he is really a Catholic by Bill, he responds that he is, technically and refers to himself as a rotten Catholic.

A Code Hero must never show his emotions; showing emotions and having a commitment to women shows weakness. In the end, the hero will always lose because we are all mortal, but the true measure is how he faces death and defeat. Thus, Jake Barnes loses Brett, the woman he loves; Henry loses Catherine; and Robert waits for his impending death which he cannot escape from.

Santiago of *The Old Man and the Sea* can be considered as the finest of the Hemingway code heroes. His “repeated confrontations with danger and the many mutilating wounds” (Donaldson 12) does not pull him down but he is ever ready for more action and struggle. Though he is an “old” man who has lost the youthful vigor and strength, he does not give up but is full of optimism; in his struggle against the giant marlin he tells himself that it is “silly not to hope” (*OMTS* 39). It is by way of his behavior while being destroyed; it is his manner of losing the battle that he wins the moral victory and becomes the symbol of endurance and perseverance.

Hemingway lived a life so rich and adventurous with the glittering laurels brought to him by his extensive canon of brilliant writings. However tragic his ending might have been, the rich legacy that he left behind relives him in American literature. In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in 1954, for which he could not attend because of his poor health, Hemingway sent a note to be read on his behalf. He stated, “Writing, at its best, is a lonely life [...] A writer should write what he has to say and not speak it” (Popova “Work Alone: Ernest Hemingway’s 1954 Nobel Acceptance Speech”). And this partially sums up what Hemingway has dutifully followed in his writings: leaving behind a trail of what he really wanted to convey carrying with it multitudinous meanings.

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CHAPTER 4: THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF SYLVIA PLATH AND ANNE SEXTON

Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton are two prominent writers of the twentieth century in American literature. Tagged with the genre of confessional poets, these two writers openly show their dark world in all honesty. Interlinking Plath and Sexton is not something new. Taking their own lives at a very young age came as a surprise, and this act of theirs garnered more interest from the literary world and readers. So much of similarities can be discerned if we take a closer view into the confessional works of these two friends. Both Plath and Sexton suffered from bouts of depression, checked into mental hospitals, went through harrowing treatments, suffered marital problems which furthered their depression, experienced fits of madness, had frustrating problems with domestic affairs, had suicidal tendencies and they both committed suicide at a very young age during the peak of their careers. Taking these into consideration, this chapter attempts to discover the dark domain of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton who led very similar lives till their respective end. A close study will be done on the autobiographical elements found in their works, their obsession with death, suicidal tendencies, their struggle with madness, depression, domestic issues and their addictions.

4.1. Sylvia Plath

Sylvia Plath's works can be considered as a reflection of who she really was, for the central experience of confessional poetry is a psychological one. Her notable poetry collections include *The Colossus and Other Poems* (1960), *Ariel* (1965) *Crossing the Water*

(1971), *Winter Trees* (1971) and her only prose piece is *The Bell Jar* (1963) which is often read as an autobiographical document. Her earlier works are lyrical and intense and bring out real life experiences and give a glimpse of her later works. Plath used confessional writing as a therapy and soon after her suicide attempts, the following works became darker in tone and melancholic.

The Colossus (1960) is the only collection of poetry which Sylvia Plath published during her lifetime. A common thread runs in the poems of this collection, and that is to find life in death. She tries hard to find the life-force in nature, and in doing it, she deals at length with the subject of death. She uses natural images in a dark tone and shows her natural attraction towards death and suicide. Death becomes an omnipresent figure and becomes a dominant theme.

Crossing the Water (1971) contains poems which were written mostly after the publication of *The Colossus* and before the composition of the poems in *Ariel* (1965). They were written in the exceptionally creative transitional period of Plath's artistry in the years between 1960 and 1961. The period when Plath wrote these poems were the most unhappy years and, naturally, they comprise details of her "doom-laden chthonic journey" (Kendall 32). As the title of the volume itself indicates, these years were a transitional period in her life, both in her personal disturbed family life and her poetic career. With her two children in tow, she was dealing with the breakdown of her marriage with her husband Ted Hughes who was involved in an extramarital affair with her own friend. Feeling both helpless and hopeless, she was on the brink of madness and attempted a number of suicides. "*Crossing the Water* offers a succession of transitions or 'crossings,' from one country to another, one persona to another, one generation to another – and even backwards, as in the move from age to infancy in 'Face Lift,' and from being to nothingness" (Gill 43).

Winter Trees (1971) is another posthumous collection of poetry by Sylvia Plath. Along with *Crossing the Water*, this volume reveals the poet's remarkable development in the later years of her life: from the birth of her second child Nicholas in January 1962 till her death in February 1963. In July 1962, Plath discovered Hughes' affair with Assia Wevill and the couple separated in September. In December, Plath returned alone to Devon, London with her two children in search for a new life. But the pangs of motherhood, failing health, her depression returning as a result of her bitter separation from her husband and the worst weather London had ever encountered in a hundred years time scarred her: this could be termed as the darkest period of Plath's life. But this was a period of great creative productivity and her greatest poems were composed during this period. The present collection of *Winter Trees* comprises of eighteen short poems and a long, dramatic poem titled "Three Women," dealing with the darker themes as discussed in the earlier collections of *The Colossus* and *Crossing the Water*.

Ariel (1965) was the second collection of poetry by Sylvia Plath published posthumously by her husband Ted Hughes. This collection includes poems written by Plath in between the publication of *The Colossus* (1960) and her death on 11 February 1963. The 1965 collection published by Hughes was somewhat different from the choice of poems Plath had originally planned to publish when she left them in a "black ring-binder at her death." Hughes omitted and included some poems and this reordering of the *Ariel* poems created outrage in the literary world added by Hughes' destruction of Plath's journals recording the last weeks of her life. Jacqueline Rose points out in *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* (1991) that Hughes intentionally removed the poems which were directed at him; that "the whole process has been in the service of self-interest, where 'interest' means unequivocally the interest of the man" (71). Jo Gill in *The Cambridge Introduction to Sylvia Plath* records Hughes' 1995 interview with the *Paris Review*, clarifying why he edited Plath's originally planned

sequence. He explains that he removed some poems which “he considered, at the time, too painful and uncomfortable for surviving family and friends” (52). In the 1981 *Collected Poems*, for which she won posthumously the Pulitzer Prize 1982, Hughes gave a list of the original selection sequence of the *Ariel* poems just as Plath had left behind. In 2005, Plath’s daughter Frieda Hughes published *Ariel: The Restored Edition* following exactly the arrangement of the manuscript just as her mother left it. Despite all these complexities, the fact remains that *Ariel* catapulted Sylvia Plath to stardom. It is her magnum opus and in it rests the poems which made Plath a household name. The *Ariel* collection indeed includes the best of Plath’s poems and she was right she wrote to her mother on 16th October 1962: “I am writing the best poems of my life; they will make my name” (*LH* 468).

4.1.1. Death

From Plath’s earliest collection *The Colossus*, death is treated as a major subject. The opening poem “The Manor Garden” presents a strong imagery of death. The speaker is aware of the cycle of life and death and it affects both the pregnant speaker and the unborn child. As the day of the unborn child approaches, the “Incense of death” becomes strong, for she knows about the inevitability of death; the birth of the child is threatened by death and decomposition. As the baby develops in her womb, its impending natural death and decay fills her with dread.

The title of the following poem “Two Views of a Cadaver Room” itself carries an image of death. It is autobiographical, for it recalls Plath’s experience with her boyfriend Dick Norton at Harvard: Plath had spent the night watching the cadavers being dissected and the rows of jars with fetuses chronologically showing its development. The poem carries an image of four cadavers which look “black as burnt turkey” (*TC* 5). The speaker continues to watch in disgust as the head caves in and a “sallow piece of string held it together.”

Death is a prominent theme of the poem “Blue Moles.” It is a record of two dead moles found in the pebbled rut:

Shapeless as flung gloves, a few feet apart-
 Blue suede a dog or fox has chewed.
 One, by himself, seemed pitiable enough,
 Little victim unearthed by some large creature
 From his orbit under the elm root.

The second carcass makes a duel of the affair (*TC* 49).

The speaker then addresses them as “Blind twins bitten by bad nature.” The present poem too presents nature as an authoritative figure against which man is incapable of fighting.

“The Colossus,” the title poem of *The Colossus*, metaphorically presents a woman dealing with emotional damage caused by the death of her father. The loss has deeply scarred her psyche. She is well aware of the unhealthy nature of her situation but she just cannot stop doing it. Similar to this poem is “Point Shirley.” Here, it throws an image of the speaker’s dead grandmother whom the speaker stubbornly refuses to forget or let go. The poem may have been prompted by Plath’s visit to this New England coast. Her grandmother is dead, yet the house still firmly stands. In “All the Dead Dears,” death is the culprit which snatches the dear and near ones from a family. The “hag hands” of her mother, grandmother and great grandmother haul the speaker in to the world of the dead.

“Medallion” speaks about the speaker’s awareness of how death will be like:

The bronze snake lay in the sun
 Inert as a shoelace; dead (*TC* 61).

Besides, she talks about the frightening realities of death: inertness, loss of color and hardness. In a similar fashion, in “Moonrise,” the speaker is once again obsessed with the idea of death and how a corpse will be like:

A body of whiteness

Rots, and smells of rot under its headstone

Though the body walk out in clean linen (*TC* 64).

She discusses about the rotting body and the maggots fattening themselves as they feed on the human body. When she adds “I smell that whiteness here, beneath the stones” (65) it may be an indication that she is so close to her own death that she can even smell it. Whiteness is often associated with death and the speaker seems to be obsessed with it. When she says, “White: it is a complexion of the mind” it is an illustration of her identifying with death; when her mind can only think of death.

Plath’s gaze seems to be always fixed on dead creatures, and the same happens in “Mussel Hunter at Rock Harbor.” The poet goes to collect fish-bait and gets carried away in the world of fishes and animals, away from any human activity. Deeply concentrating on things around her, she once again is awed by the mystery of nature and the cycle of life and death. The thought and awareness of death does not escape:

High on the airy thatching

Of the dense grasses I found

The husk of a fiddler-crab,

Intact, strangely strayed above

His world of mud-green color

And innards bleached and blown off (*TC* 71-72).

Even in the midst of the live crabs, the presence of the dead ones does not escape from Plath. Strangely enough, she begins to introspect deeper and wonders if they died “recluse” or by “suicide” or were killed by “Columbus crab.” The speaker then presents the unpleasant images of the dead crabs:

The crab-face, etched and set there,

Grimaced as skulls grimace: it
 Had an Oriental look,
 A samurai death mask done
 On a tiger tooth, less for
 Art's sake than God's. Far from sea-
 Where red-freckled crab-backs, claws
 And whole crabs, dead, their soggy
 Bellies pallid and upturned (*TC* 72).

“Sculptor” juxtaposes the brevity of life against the eternity of art. We, the living, are not in control of our lives; we are not in control over when death will come to us. The sculptor and the artist are both outlived by art and thus art becomes superior to them, and this idea finds a reflection in the following lines:

Dwarfing us. Our bodies flicker
 Toward extinction in those eyes (*TC* 79).

The title poem “Crossing the Water” of the volume *Crossing the Water* gives a sinister idea of crossing life over to death on a “black boat.” The poem opens with a dark and sinister setting:

Black lake, black boat, two black, cut-paper people.
 Where do the black trees go that drink here?
 Their shadows must cover Canada (*CW* 6).

Black represents death, despair and depression of the fragile, paper-like speaker. Plath has entered a domain where “everything has been contaminated with the same sinister blackness” (Kendall 82). She is lost in this dark and wide space. Area wise, Canada is the second largest country, and when she wonders where the black trees disappear after drinking up the water from the lake, she answers herself that their shadow must cover Canada: this shows the

expanse of her sadness. As she crosses the lake in the presence of her silent companion, the “spirit of blackness,” the round and flat leaves of the water flowers give only “dark advice” to her and they “do not wish us to hurry.” The speaker stands for the whole lot of the “astounded souls”, and the poem ends with the stars, the “expressionless sirens” tempting the speaker to “destroy herself, or to be ‘blinded’ like the pianist in ‘Little Fugue’” (Kendall 83).

The speaker in “I am Vertical” is unhappy with her present state of being, that is the awareness that she is not immortal. The first line of the poem “But I would rather be horizontal” is in total contrast with the title of the poem. She compares her state with the trees and flowers:

Compared with me, a tree is immortal

And a flower-head not tall, but more startling,

And I want the one’s longevity and the other’s daring (CW 18).

She deals with the theme of death in this poem too but, comparatively, there is no urgency about it. She feels that she is inadequate and will be pleased only when she arrives on her final day, lying down and engaging in a direct conversation with the sky:

And I shall be useful when I lie down finally:

Then the trees may touch me for once, and the flowers have time for me (CW 18).

The poem “Last Words,” written on 21st October, is an imagination of Plath’s ideal burial. Death is feared by everyone, even Plath. But plagued by problems, the subject was both haunting and mesmerizing for her. In the present poem, she candidly talks about what she wants once she is dead; she wants a grand and gorgeous burial. Straight away she mentions what type of coffin she wants:

I do not want a plain box, I want a sarcophagus

With tigery stripes, and a face on it (CW 55).

We get an image of a mummy, an expensive process of preserving a body after death. With such an extravagant burial, she imagines if ‘they’ will wonder if she was an important person and starts thinking whether she should “sugar and preserve” her days like fruits as a preparation for her impending death, for:

My mirror is clouding over—

A few more breaths, and it will reflect nothing at all.

The flowers and the faces whiten to a sheet (*CW* 55).

When her “feet grow cold” and she is wrapped in bandages and perfumes with her cut heart stored up, she would like her “copper cooking pots” and “rouge pots” to be placed beside her. It will be dark when she is buried, but the brightness of the things around her will shine sweeter than goddess Ishtar, and in a way it serves as a consolation to her. Death is inevitable and everyone will face it, but like every human being, Plath does not want to disappear into oblivion: she wants to be remembered and to feel special.

Winter is traditionally associated with death and in comparing herself to the winter trees in “Winter Trees,” Plath hints at her obsession with death. Plath’s usual association of history with corpses find a place even in the present poem. She describes the trees as “Waist-deep in history.” There is an “otherworldliness”; something spiritual about the winter trees, but this is carried forward to an ominous and pessimistic ending with the “ringdoves chanting, but easing nothing” (*WT* 3).

Death is a prominent theme of “Childless Woman.” It is a poem about blood, funeral and corpses. Like a childless woman, there is an emptiness that pervades the speaker. Unable to procreate, she feels that she has failed to fulfill life’s purpose. Her body is akin to an “ivory.” Her image in the mirror reveals a literally dead woman because of the fact that she cannot produce life in the form of a child:

Loyal to my image

Uttering nothing but blood-

Taste it, dark red!

And my forest

My funeral

And this hill and this

Gleaming with the mouths of corpses (*WT* 8).

“Mary’s Song” is one of the holocaust poems of Plath. Here, the imagery of death is very prominent. As the speaker burns the lamb in oven’s fire, the memory of the burning of the Jews come flashing in her mind: “The oven’s fire becomes ‘The same fire’ which burns the ‘tallow heretics’ and ousts the Jews, all perpetrated in the name of Christianity” (Kendall 125).

The Blessed Virgin Mother Mary, the symbol of comfort, is once again presented in a negative light. She asserts that there is no hope for her and her child in the concluding lines:

This holocaust I walk in,

O golden child the world will kill and eat (*WT* 34).

Death, in the form of the holocaust imagery, does not have an end: the Jews and the “tallow heretics” do not “die”. Like the bitter memory of the holocaust the Jews experienced, the idea of death does not escape her mind. She admits, “Grey birds obsess my heart.” There is no escape from the holocaust and the memory will continue to haunt the victims and the future generations. Plath identifies herself with the Jews:

The Jews have become kin, the latest victims in the devouring cycles of destruction. Plath’s theology leaves her with the conclusion that the vast panorama of human history- from the doomed Christ-child, to the burning of heretics, to the extermination camps, to the space race, to her own life and the

lives of her children- consists of variations on one unifying theme: holocaust
(Kendall 127).

In “Getting There,” the speaker searches for a recovered sense of self through death and rebirth. Shedding her skin at the end of the poem, she steps out from the “black car of Lethe” new as a newborn baby. The title suggests the speaker of the poem travelling towards a destination. The destination is a small place after crossing Russia and at present she is on a train whose “gigantic gorilla interior” wheels appall her. The imagery of holocaust becomes prominent once again. As she, literally, drags her body together with the men whose “blood still pumps forward” accompanied by “unending cries,” the reader gets a glimpse of her desire to reach her destination:

How far is it?

How far is it now? (*Ariel* 35)

She complains against the obstacles that are stopping her from reaching the place swiftly. The journey is a rigorous one and a thought of suicide strikes her, but she overcomes it: “I cannot undo myself.”

“A Birthday Present” is a sinister and disturbing poem which hauntingly records Plath’s desire for death and her irresistible pull towards suicide. In the poem, the birthday present is not a beautifully packed gift but something “ugly” hidden behind the veil. It stands for the symbol of death. The speaker is really attracted towards it but shuns it after making different assumptions what the gift could be:

I do not want much of a present, anyway, this year.

After all I am alive only by accident.

I would have killed myself gladly that time any possible way (*Ariel* 42).

But her curiosity makes it impossible for her to stay away from it. She asks for it saying that she does not “mind what it is”; that she is “ready for enormity”. She assures that she will

meet death discreetly and she wants it so much that only death hidden behind the veil can give it to her:

Only let down the veil, the veil, the veil.

If it were death

I would admire the deep gravity of it, its timeless eyes (*Ariel* 44).

The speaker then realizes that only she can give the gift of death by taking her own life, and when that happens, peacefulness will come over her.

Similarly, “Tulips” continues with the speaker ever ready to face death. It is a critically acclaimed poem of Plath written on 18th March 1961 after being hospitalized for appendectomy:

Originally titled “Sick Room Tulips” and then “Tulips in Hospital,” the work literally explores the persona’s anger and guilt when her husband brings flowers into her peaceful, quiet, stark white hospital room. The invasion of the red breathing tulips into her intimate privacy seems more than the recovering woman can bear (Wagner–Martin 64).

When she is greeted with the tulips, they seem to take away her very oxygen. Instead of the flowers, she would prefer to be gifted with death:

I didn't want any flowers, I only wanted

To lie with my hands turned up and be utterly empty.

How free it is, you have no idea how free

The peacefulness is so big it dazes you,

And it asks nothing, a name tag, a few trinkets.

It is what the dead close on (*Ariel* 13).

Plath's obsession with death is prominent in "Berck-Plage." Berck-Plage is the name of a beach on the coast of Normandy which Plath had visited in 1961. Ted Hughes, in the supplementary notes of the *Complete Poems* mentions about Berck-Plage, "a large hospital for mutilated war veterans and accident victims" (293) and comments on the present poem as a horror-filled poem which reflects the deep fear of death in Plath's psyche. The death of her neighbor Percy Key in the following year inspired Plath to write this poem. The poem presents an "unmitigated malaise and funereal gloom" (Folsom "Death and Rebirth in Sylvia Plath's Berck-Plage") and is filled with depressing scenes of death, grotesque and fragmented images of mutilated bodies. The depressing scene of the poem is similar to the idea of Eliot's wasteland. She once again brings out the hypocrisies of the church represented by the priest:

Is it any wonder he puts on dark glasses?

Is it any wonder he affects a black cassock? (*Ariel* 22)

She does not find the priest as a symbol of holiness but that of a "vessel," a "tarred fabric, sorry and dull." The speaker sees death in everything. Darkness or the color black is associated with death and this sinister idea greets us everywhere in the poem:

This black boot has no mercy for anybody.

Why should it, it is the hearse of a dead foot (*Ariel* 23).

"Berck-Plage" sums up the image of Plath's utter feeling of alienation. "The speaker represents herself as part failed elegist, part voyeur, whose 'heart' is 'too small' to 'bandage' the 'terrible faults' of this landscape of death and mutilation" (Britzolakis 210).

"Elm" presents the speaker being terrified of death and destruction. The imagery of death is very strongly present in the poem. She feels intimidated and bares to the reader her fear of it:

I am terrified by this dark thing

That sleeps in me;

All day I feel its soft, feathery turnings, its malignity (*Ariel* 18).

Death is one major theme of “The Moon and the Yew Tree.” The speaker’s preoccupation with death can be seen in the lines:

Separated from my house by a row of headstones,

I simply cannot see where there is to get to (*Ariel* 40).

She finds no feeling of connection with God. Death preoccupies her mind and she finds no purpose in life nor an outlet from this preoccupation. Plath then gives a description of the “terribly upset” moon which drags the sea like a “sad crime” and sadly admits, “I live here.” In the last stanza, the yew tree leaves a message of death: “And the message of the yew tree is blackness- the blackness and silence” (*Ariel* 41).

Jacqueline Rose in *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* quotes the American *Time* magazine in 1966 about Plath’s poem “Daddy”: “Within a week of her death, intellectual London was hunched over copies of a strange and terrible poem she had written during the last sick slide toward suicide. ‘Daddy’ was its title” (223). “Daddy” is a direct reference to an absent father of the speaker. The supplementary notes of *The Complete Poems* record Plath reading for the BBC and commenting on the poem: “‘Here is a poem spoken by a girl with an Electra complex. Her father died while she thought he was God. Her case is complicated by the fact that her father was also a Nazi and her mother very possibly part Jewish. In the daughter the two strains marry and paralyze each other—she has to act out the awful little allegory once over before she is free of it’” (293). The speaker says that for thirty years she had been living in the memory of her father and wishes to shake it off. The second stanza runs, “Daddy, I have had to kill you. / You died before I had time.” The greatness of her father in her memory is equaled to God, a corpse so large that his grey toe touches San Francisco and his head lies in the “freakish Atlantic.” She could not accept his death and until now she used to pray for him to “recover” and come back.

“Little Fugue” carries the theme of death and the speaker’s obsession with the memory of her father like “Daddy.” The black yew tree representing death is a prominent image of the poem which shows the memory of her dead father deeply engraved in her heart. After his death, there was only silence, a “Great silence of another order.” She was just a seven year old girl who knew nothing. She remembers only the physical aspects of him: “one leg, and a Prussian mind,” blue eyes and carrying a briefcase of tangerines. Then the idea of death breaks in: “Death opened, like a black [yew] tree, blackly” and the idea obsesses her. She is attracted to it but at the moment she must “survive the while” which no doubt tunes in with the dark biographical premonition of Plath’s end.

In “Totem,” Plath discusses about the inevitability of death; that it will come to everyone. The poem becomes “a recitation of various kinds of killings that seem to take place in Smithfield. The killings go beyond hog butchery, however, and include the killings of children as well as the rabbits that have become Plath’s own totem for innocence” (Wagner-Martin 103). Death becomes inescapable as it comes to everyone with its “many sticks.”

The word ‘paralytic’ refers to a person who has lost the capability to voluntarily control parts of the body and the poem “Paralytic” deals with the speaker who is in a state of paralysis. This maybe alluded to Plath’s madness or the bouts of depression she suffered which led her to suicide attempts, or it may also be a reference to her present state of depression which has come back as a result of her personal problems. The poem opens with the speaker being tired of her present state: “It happens. Will it go on?” She is in a dead-like situation: her mind is a “rock”; she feels like a “dead egg”; she cannot talk; and even her fingers have lost the capability to grip. Near equal to death, she wants to stop living, but her lungs would not let her:

My god the iron lung

That loves me, pumps

My two
 Dust bags in and out,
 Will not let me relapse (*Ariel* 73).

The poem ends with the speaker wanting to die, asking “nothing of life.”

“Kindness,” written a week before Plath’s suicide, is a poem where this virtue of kindness is personified as a woman called “Dame Kindness” who helps the speaker in her chores and helping to care for the children. It is Dame Kindness who asserts in her conversation with the speaker that sugar or sweetness can cure everything; that it is a “necessary fluid.” It is these “crystals” which can serve as a “poultice” by soothing her pain and the hurts she is experiencing. The speaker would have quit her life had Dame Kindness not been kind enough to bless her with the gift of her two children who are the “two roses” to the speaker. Accounting the blessings around the speaker, she ought to be contented but that is not the case. For, she is a poet and her emotions automatically get reflected in her writing, and this is mirrored in the famous lines of the present poem:

The blood jet is poetry,
 There is no stopping it (*Ariel* 78).

The “blood jet” of Plath had by now almost entirely drained her body, and this later poem represents poetry as “violent, vital and uncontrollable, a sign of vibrant life but also the ebbing of that life: a blood jet which cannot be stopped leads eventually to death” (Kendall 189-190).

“Contusion” is one of the last three poems written by Plath on 4th February 1963. The word contusion means a wound or a bruise, and in the poem, it does not refer to the physical injury but the inner-being of the speaker. This idea highlights the emptiness of the speaker who is now a ‘living dead.’ She likens herself to a dead fly on a vast wall which looks like a “doom mark.” For the speaker, the very meaning of her existence is becoming something

incomprehensible. The earlier poems of *Ariel* which often had the urgency of the speaker to go through rebirth in order to have a new beginning has waned and now all she does is give up. There is no life or vitality in this late poem:

The heart shuts,
The sea slides back,
The mirrors are sheeted (*Ariel* 79).

“Edge” is the last documented poem written by Plath. Plath here does not hide the fact that she is already prepared for death. It is heart-wrenching to picture the gloom and negativity that surrounded her mind on her last days. She has no life left in her and she stoically accepts death as the only way out. She has done whatever she could to hang on to life but that ran out and now her dead body lies in perfection:

The woman is perfected.

Her dead

Body wears the smile of accomplishment (*Ariel* 80).

The given lines no doubt connect the dots of Plath’s apparent finality. The deathly calm of “Edge” is overwhelming. Bringing an end to her own life was important, a “Greek necessity.” Now, lying in her “toga” or flowing dress, her bare feet seem to say: “We have come so far, it is over.” The final crisis of her life is over and she has “‘accomplished’ what she set out to do, find a mystical unity with the spiritual world, and she has thereby finally escaped – by journeying to the edge of the known world – that world that so increasingly frustrated her, and her writerly ambition” (Wagner-Martin 105). The persona in the poem not only takes her own life but even her children’s who seem to have been poisoned by the mother after drinking poison given by the mother, and this is followed by the imagery of death in the form of rose petals whose sweet fragrance is replaced by the word “odour.” The “moon,” a

frequent visitor in her *Ariel* poems which is a symbol of death, makes a final visit but this time it views the already dead speaker and coldly says:

She is used to this sort of thing.

Her blacks crackle and drag (*Ariel* 80).

The moon serves as the mouthpiece of Plath in the final words written by her. It is no surprise that she took her own life to finally reach the ultimate end.

“Words” is the closing poem of *Ariel*. The sense of desolation is overpoweringly present in it. Words are weapons and they can be deadly like axes. Words or poetry can be broken down and they echo like the horses leave after galloping away and this is similar to the mark that the axes leave after cutting a tree. For Plath who underwent a harrowingly sad life as a poet found writing poetry as an escape to her emotions and fears. Her thoughts found an escape but the writer failed to; the fatal stars failed her miserably. The freedom she achieved through poetry proved to be short-lived and illusory. “‘Words’ therefore offers both a commentary on the working of metaphor in Plath’s late work, and a compelling account of helpless resignation before a malign and implacable fate” (Kendall 207).

4.1.2. Suicide

Plath’s obsession with suicide and her thirst for it is vastly presented in her works. From her earliest poetry, the theme of suicide is prominent. Written in 1959, the poem “Suicide off egg Rock” traces Plath’s mental breakdown in the summer of 1953 and her first suicide attempt. “The poem records the death of an alter ego, who chooses Plath’s own road not taken; her death wish is imaginatively fulfilled” (Kendall 14). The “He” in the poem successfully commits suicide. He escapes from the unpleasantness of the world:

Gas tanks, factory stacks- that landscape

Of imperfections his bowels were part of (*TC* 35).

For this lonely man, there was no “pit of shadow to crawl into.” His action may seem cowardly, but Plath insists on the idea that many factors might have pushed the man to commit the act. He fears that he will be forgotten but persuades himself again that life, after all, is meaningless and hopes to rediscover his lost world of happiness. There seems to be an eternal fear for death, for death does not take away his fear for it. It beats like an old tattoo “I am, I am, I am” (36).

“Lorelei” opens with the speaker toying with the idea of committing suicide and deciding against it at the same time:

It is no night to drown in:

A full moon, river lapsing

Black beneath bland mirror-sheen (*TC* 22).

In the poem “Full Fathom Five,” the speaker directly addresses to the menacing looking, a colossal figure old man. He is too immense for her to fathom or even understand and she understands his dangerous watery life. But she admits she would “breathe water” to join him:

Father, this thick air is murderous.

I would breathe water (*TC* 48).

In other words, she would commit suicide.

“A Life” is partly a rumination of Plath’s stay and recovery at a hospital after attempting suicide by taking sleeping pills in the year 1953. She creates a disturbing image of a woman “dragging her shadow in a circle/ About a bald, hospital saucer” (*CW* 45). The woman looks blank like a moon and a “sheet of blank paper” and looks like she has suffered a “sort of private blitzkrieg.” This isolated being lives quietly and has no contact with the outside world:

With no attachments, like a foetus in a bottle,

The obsolete house, the sea, flattened to a picture

She has one too many dimensions to enter.

Grief and anger, exorcized,

Leave her alone now (*CW* 46).

The speaker would like the woman to be left alone. She speaks out against the sterility of the hospital which has washed away every feeling of the woman. Her suicide attempts were a result of her disturbed emotions, but these feelings at least made her feel humane. Now, its absence leaves her empty, lonely and without any individuality of her own. The poem ends with the speaker only fearful of a future which looks bleak like a “grey seagull.” She knows that she will eventually die though her attempt to end her life was thwarted. In an attempt to cure her mental illness, she underwent electroshock treatment, but this inhuman treatment spiraled into more suicide attempts, and the ending of the poem reinforces this fact.

“Sheep in Fog,” one of the last poems of Plath, gives strong overtones of the theme of suicide. The concluding stanza gives a terrifying picture of the suicidal thought running in the mind of the speaker:

They threaten

To let me through to a heaven

Starless and fatherless, a dark water (*Ariel* 5).

The speaker’s utter feeling of desolation is giving in to thoughts about taking her own life. “No one forces her: the threat lies only in the possibility that she might be allowed, at last, to arrive where she wants to be. Whatever has been stopping her until now may not stop her for much longer” (Kendall 191).

“Lady Lazarus” is poem which has become synonymous with the name of Sylvia Plath. The title alludes to a biblical story wherein Jesus performed the miracle of bringing

back Lazarus of Bethany to life four days after his death. The poem straight away starts off with the subject of suicide:

I have done it again.

One year in every ten

I manage it- (*Ariel* 8).

It is impossible to read the poem without considering the biographical details of Plath. She was thirty years old when she wrote this poem and the above lines indicate that she tries to die in every decade, thus it is now time for her to attempt her third suicide. She connects the number of deaths that she faces to the myth of the cats which face nine deaths:

I am only thirty.

And like the cat I have nine times to die.

This is Number Three (*Ariel* 8).

As a grown up woman, her body has altered when she last attempted suicide but she admits:

I may be skin and bone,

Nevertheless, I am the same, identical woman.

The first time it happened I was ten.

It was an accident.

The second time I meant

To last it out and not come back at all (*Ariel* 9).

The above incidents are explicitly autobiographical: they refer to her swimming accident when she was ten years old and her suicide attempt on 24th August 1953 when she overdosed on sleeping pills.

For Plath, the way of taking one's own life is an art. And the poem contains her famous lines:

Dying

Is an art, like everything else.

I do it exceptionally well.

I do it so it feels like hell.

I do it so it feels real.

I guess you could say I've a call (*Ariel* 9).

Every time she tries to die, she comes back to life with the cheers of the people around her: “A miracle!” (10). She now considers her doctors as her “enemy” and refers to them as “Herr” because they bring her back to life, thus becoming the symbol of oppression. She refers to the doctors in a mocking tone in the following lines:

So, so, Herr Doktor.

So, Herr Enemy.

I am your opus,

I am your valuable,

The pure gold baby

That melts to a shriek.

I turn and burn.

Do not think I underestimate your great concern (10).

She then warns the doctors who for her are both “God” and “Lucifer”; that they will not succeed as this time it is her “Number Three”:

Herr God, Herr Lucifer

Beware

Beware.

Out of the ash

I rise with my red hair

And I eat men like air (*Ariel* 11).

This time, there is no way for the doctors to revive her because her plan now is to eat the doctors; meaning they have no way to revive her when she attempts suicide. She brings in the allusion of the Phoenix bird in Greek mythology and likens herself to it. With flaming red hair she will rise and eat the men, the doctors and thus take control over her own life.

Plath communicates her outrage, depression and anger through the vivid yet dark imageries of holocaust. The speaker turns herself into a man-eating demon which comes to life once again with “a badge of daemonic genius and a flag of vengeance” (Britzolakis 155). Lady Lazarus or Plath is a “woman who readily defies death to taunt the society that would contain, and constrain her” (Wagner-Martin 111).

In “Daddy,” Plath describes her father as a “black man” who broke her “pretty red heart in two” and confesses about her suicide attempts:

I was ten when they buried you.

At twenty I tried to die

And get back, back, back to you.

I thought even the bones would do.

But they pulled me out of the sack,

And they stuck me together with glue (*Ariel* 50).

Sticking back to life with glue was not going to last for the speaker. The speaker then metaphorically kills the memory of her father by making a “model of a man with Meinkampf look,” marrying and killing him after seven years which interestingly is a reference to her

husband of seven years, Ted Hughes. She then turns him into a vampire and ruthlessly says that he had been drinking her blood for a year.

Frieda Hughes in an article puts her explanatory lines regarding the misconceptions about her mother Sylvia Plath's two greatest poems:

I saw poems such as 'Lady Lazarus' and 'Daddy' dissected over and over, the moment that my mother wrote them being applied to her whole life, to her whole person, as if they were the total sum of her experience (Hughes "Foreword to Ariel: The Restored Edition").

But the biographical details of Plath and the contents of the two poems make it hard for the reader to turn a blind eye.

The Bell Jar (1963), Plath's only full-length prose, published a few weeks before her suicide is as an autobiographical document for getting a peep into her troubled soul. It is an undeniable fact that the novel traces the descent of Plath into depression; lay bare her battle with mental illness, frequent suicidal attempts and the dark speckled problems: the metaphorical bell jars. The dictionary defines a bell jar as a bell-shaped glass for protecting item; a laboratory equipment for preserving specimens and a repository for holding precious stones. But to the protagonist of the novel, Esther Greenwood, the bell jar with its suffocating air represents a maddening confinement where she finds herself trapped, alone, helpless and hopeless, while the whole world stares at her, indifferent to her inner struggles.

Esther's suicidal depression gives way to a calculative and numerous suicide attempts. In carrying out the act, she contemplates that she should carefully choose the right number of storeys to jump to make sure that she is dead when she hits the bottom; that, in order to disembowel oneself one should carefully use two sharp knives to ensure that the knives do not get stuck in the clothes. After the shock treatment, she has in her pocket a box containing nineteen Gillette blades. In the morning, she slashes the calf of her leg and watches with deep

thrill when the blood wells up at the lip of the slash. Lying down with Cal, she wants to get an idea out from him about how to commit suicide, and further questions him what he would resort to if he wants to commit the act of suicide. She feels that drowning oneself is the kindest way to die so thinks of swimming far out until she is too tired to swim back. Esther next tries to hang herself: with a silk cord dangling around her neck, she tries to find a place to fasten it but finding none, she tries to pull the cord tight. But in the end, she admits that her body had all the little tricks to stop her from succeeding.

Esther presents a sorry picture when she goes to visit her father's grave with an armful of azaleas, and howls her loss into the cold salt rain. She does not understand why she is crying so hard, but years of emotional guilt coupled with her depression gives way. Coming back home, she rushes to her mother's room for the bottle of pills and overdoses on it. After her rebellious stint at a hospital she is shifted to another private one. On her way she decides to jump out of the car to the water from the bridge while crossing it, but her plan is foiled by the presence of her mother and brother seated on both of her sides. She feels suffocated: "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" (*BJ* 178). It was this bell jar that stopped her from an escape into freedom: death.

For Esther, ending her life is not an issue at all. She tells Doctor Nolan that she will kill herself if she is electrocuted again. But with assurance from her doctor she undergoes the treatment again. Esther seems to have recovered, but her friend Joan Gilling, her double commits suicide. It looks like Joan is the double of Esther. They are about the same age, they both have mental problems, undergo treatment in the same hospital, dated the same man and both see Mrs. Willard as an epitome of a perfect woman. During Joan's funeral, Esther seems to remind herself that she is alive by listening to the old brag of her heart "I am, I am, I am" (*BJ* 233).

At the end of the novel, Esther seems to have recovered but there is a pessimistic tone of depression returning to her: “How did I know that someday – at college, in Europe, somewhere, anywhere – the bell jar, with its stifling distortions, wouldn’t descend again?” (*BJ* 230) The bell jar did descend: for Esther’s creator Sylvia Plath, her alter ego tragically took her own life unable to cope with the stifling distortions. *The Bell Jar* is no doubt an autobiographical work, and this is reaffirmed by A. Alvarez in his book *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide* (1971) wherein he recounts what Plath confided in him. He reports that Plath spoke of her novel as “an autobiographical apprentice-work which she had to write in order to free herself from her past” (37). Like any dutiful wife and mother, before her final action, this suicidal heroine had checked on her children’s room and “left a plate of bread and butter and two mugs of milk, in case they should wake hungry” (52). Siding with Plath, he gives a piece of his mind: “the myth of Sylvia as a passive victim is a total perversion of the woman she was” (55). To have such a shallow view about this enormously gifted writer would be to miss the courage with which she was able to turn disaster into art.

4.1.3. Loneliness and Isolation

Having gone through bitter experiences in her life, Plath does not hide the fact that she lived in loneliness and isolation. “Parliament Hill Fields,” Plath’s first 1961 poem, expresses the speaker’s feeling of extreme distress after losing someone she dearly loved. Kendall quotes Plath’s description of the poem in the BBC radio: “The speaker here is caught between the old and the new year, between the grief caused by the loss of a child (miscarriage) and the joy aroused by the knowledge of an older child safe at home” (37). The poem is believed to have been written a week after Plath suffered a miscarriage in her second pregnancy, and this idea is reinforced by the speaker’s mention of the dead baby’s sister which no doubt is a reference to Frieda Hughes, Plath’s daughter. As a woman, it was a

devastating time for her and it added to the depression she suffered for years. The opening stanza speaks volumes about a mother who has suffered a loss. No person around her knows what she is really going through. She feels empty and cries her heart out for the lost child:

The round sky goes on minding its business.

Your absence is inconspicuous;

Nobody can tell what I lack (CW 11).

Her tears filled to the brim, she feels isolated and is welcomed only by silence “after silence”. Her rational mind reminds her that it is pointless to grieve and mourn for her lost baby, but she finds it incapable to let it go:

I suppose it’s pointless to think of you at all.

Already your doll grip lets go (CW 11).

In “Widow,” we can feel the emptiness of Plath when she refers to herself, widow-like, as a “vacant estate.” She is like a compassionate tree which bends in, in “loneliness” and in “mourning.” Among the green and fresh landscape, she is only like a shadow, a black hole cut out from the rest, strongly emphasizing Plath’s longing for love and feeling of loneliness and rejection. In a similar fashion, in “Sleep in the Mojave Desert,” Plath places her emotions of isolation and stagnation at the core. The discomfort of her situation makes her feel isolated from the rest of the world.

The opening poem of *Winter Trees* “Winter Trees,” written on 26th November 1962, presents a sad picture of the speaker. The poem opens with the speaker’s mind overflowing with past memories and her vision is blurred by her “wet” eyes that she fails to clearly see the trees. The poem becomes a personal outcry and an outrage to vent her anger. She is jealous of the trees who know nothing about “abortions” or “bitchery” which is a clear indication of the tumult in her personal life.

Disappointment and sadness are the themes central to “The Moon and the Yew Tree.” The speaker presents a sombre and sad picture as she walks about outside her house. Even the “grasses unload their griefs” on her feet as if she was their God.

“Sheep in fog” is a dark and foreboding poem dealing with the speaker’s utter isolation and feeling of loneliness. It opens with nature tuning in with the people around the speaker and regarding her “sadly.” There is nothing bright in the things around her and gloomily she says, “All morning the/ Morning has been blackening.” The depth of her loneliness makes the sight of the far fields heart-melting.

What is this, this face

So murderous in its strangle of branches? (*Ariel* 18)

The last stanza of the poem is a dark revelation: it “announce[s] a disintegration and hallucinatory defacement of the speaking subject” (Britzolakis 108). The apostrophe turns to incantation like a “primitive ritual”:

It petrifies the will. These are the isolate, slow faults

That kill, that kill, that kill (*Ariel* 18).

The theory that Plath suffered from Electra complex can find a concrete reason in the above lines. “The poet who had been pulled desiring and resisting down to her dead father re-emerges ‘inhabited’ by a terrifying, murderous voice which, in the coming months, will regularly ‘flap out’ to kill what it loves” (Kendall 88).

“The Bee Meeting” deals with the theme of isolation, alienation and loneliness of the speaker. The speaker’s sleeveless summery dress stands in stark contrast with the villagers who have protective clothing against the sting of the bees. Feeling so alienated, she asks, “does nobody love me?” The speaker feels so sensitive to every small details and this can be attributed to the lack of love from people around her. She feels for the old queen bee which does not show herself to the villagers and pities it for the fact that it still has another more

year to live. The poem ends with the image of a coffin, a “long white box” in the grove and the speaker questioning herself “why am I cold.”

“The Arrival of the Bee Box” takes a step further ahead in theme by dealing with the internal chaos and confusion in the mind of the poet. The bee box looks like a coffin and is locked because it is dangerous. As she peeps in, all she can see is darkness and nothing else. The normal buzzing of the bees sound horrible and frightening to the speaker and they symbolize her inner fury. “Putting the fear in cage is not going to help in any way. The only way to tackle fear is to release it and face it with aggression” (Devi 130). They do not seem like bees but a “box of maniacs” which she would sent back without even feeding them for she does not care if they die of hunger.

In the final poem of the bee-sequence “Wintering,” the speaker identifies herself with the bees:

The bees are all women,

Maids and the long royal lady.

They have got rid of the men (*Ariel* 64).

On an autobiographical note, it can be considered as Plath freeing herself from the toxic marriage and looking forward to the following spring season. But, the questions which the speaker raises in the concluding stanza are ominous. She wonders if the bees will survive for another year, just like her.

4.1.4. Domestic Themes

Plath deals at length about the realities of domestic life in her poetry and fuses them with her own experiences as a wife and mother besides adding the difficulties of being a woman. Her earlier poetry “The Disquieting Muses” complains about the failure of the parents to bring up the children in a happy environment and ensuring them of a happy

childhood. The poem may be considered autobiographical by examining the relationship between the mother and the daughter and taking into consideration the father teaching the child song to the child, the same song Plath's father used to teach them. It opens with the speaker questioning the mother why she could not invite her "illbred aunt" and "disfigured and unearthly cousin" to her christening, for they have sent the sinister looking muses at her stead, on the left side of her crib:

I wonder
Whether you saw them, whether you said
Words to rid me of those three ladies
Nodding by night around my bed,
Mouthless, eyeless, with stitched bald head (TC 58).

The usual function of the muses is to guide, but in the poem they become the evil mothers and become the source of dark forces in the life of the speaker. To look at the poem from another point of view, it may be the speaker's inability to appreciate the beauty around her because of the overpowering presence of her artistic talents which she fed more. By the end of the poem, the speaker succumbs to the negative world of the sinister and disturbing witches.

"The Beekeeper's Daughter" is autobiographical. It is noteworthy that the poem explores the father-daughter relationship. Plath's father Otto Plath published a study on bees *Bumble Bees and Their Ways* in 1934 and Plath too had a keen interest in it. The poem projects the Electra complex in Plath's relationship with her father. Plath wrote the bee poems when her marriage was breaking up and the poems serve as a mirror to Plath's troubled emotions in her incapability as a perfect mother or "queen bee." She feels that she is neglected by her father who treats her as if she is absent from his life:

You move among the many-breasted hives,

My heart under your foot, sister of a stone (*TC* 73).

She continues with her feeling that she never got the attention a daughter deserved from a father:

Father, bridegroom, in this Easter egg
Under the coronal of sugar roses

The queen bee marries the winter of your year (74).

“Widow,” a depressing poem, illustrates an eerie situation of the speaker who considers herself as a widow though her husband is still alive. The term “widow” is used for a woman whose husband is dead. But in the poem the idea is figurative, not literal. The thought is provoked by the speaker’s unhappy relationship that she shares with her husband. Throughout the poem, the speaker’s tone towards her husband is spiteful, and it reaches its climax in the third stanza when she likens herself to a widow spider, also known as black widow spiders, which have an unusual behavior of eating up the male after mating:

Widow. The bitter spider sits
And sits in the center of her loveless spokes.
Death is the dress she wears, her hat and collar.
The moth-face of her husband, moonwhite and ill,
Circles her like a prey she'd love to kill (*CW* 30).

An autobiographical element can be traced keeping in mind the infidelity of Plath’s husband. And the following stanza brings in more autobiographical overtones. Ted Hughes wrote a number of love letters to Plath throughout their relationship and, at present, the speaker would like to get the same love she received in the past but to no avail:

A second time, to have him near again -
A paper image to lay against her heart

The way she laid his letters, till they grew warm

And seemed to give her warmth, like a live skin.

But it is she who is paper now, warmed by no one (CW 30).

The problems that come along with motherhood greatly affected Sylvia Plath. In a way they were a therapy and a source of consolation to her, but the demands of being a single mother took a heavy toll on her. "Stopped Dead" was written on 19th October 1962 and the poem reflects an agitated single mother finding it difficult to balance motherhood and her mental turmoil. In anger she shoots off harsh words:

We're here on a visit,

With a goddam baby screaming off some where.

There's always a bloody baby in the air.

I'd call it a sunset, but

Whoever heard a sunset yowl like that? (WT 16)

In Aurelia Plath's record of her daughter's letters dated 16th January 1963, she admits how the babies are a "constant demand" coming within the fray of "the streamroller of decisions and responsibilities" (LH 495).

"Morning Song," the first poem of *Ariel*, introduces the birth of a child but what is supposed to be a moment of joy has a note of wry detachment of a mother from the baby. There is a sense of alienation to the new situation in the way the mother refers to the baby as a "fat gold watch," a "new statue" in a "drafty museum" whose nakedness shadow their safety. The theme of loneliness once again seeps in "The Night Dances." In the midst of the troubles, the gift of her child, with his "small breath" falls like "blessings" through the "black amnesias of heaven."

"Lesbos" gives a psychological insight into the mind of Plath. It once again brings out the agony of being mentally weak and having to deal with the negative realities of being a

mother: the “stink of fat and baby crap”, the “smog of cooking,” the “smog of hell” and the difficulties of caring for her two young children. It is not surprising when she “suggests to her friend, the poet-persona, that she get rid of both her kittens and her small daughter” (Wagner-Martin 100). In her journal of April 1962, there is a confession of her desire to escape from motherhood for some time being: “This is the need I have, in my 30th year --- to unclutch the sticky loving fingers of babies & treat myself to myself and my husband alone for a bit. To purge myself of sour milk, urinous nappies, bits of lint and the loving slovenliness of motherhood” (Kukil *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*). The speaker is no doubt a neurotic, embittered, defiant and narcissistic figure. Unable to stand the tantrums of the elder child, she wonders:

Why she is schizophrenic,

Her face red and white, a panic (WT 28).

Plath tells her poet-persona that if the child can get so “mad” at two, “She’ll cut her throat at ten.” Besides, the pet kittens “crap and puke and cry” adding to the cries of the “bastard” girl. All along, the other woman has been complaining about her problems, but the speaker says that they are not comparable to hers: “You have one baby, I have two.” Besides, she has to take sleeping pills to which she has become addicted: “I’m doped and thick from my last sleeping pill.” In a way, these domestic problems became impossible for Plath to keep at bay or to maintain her “desire to be ‘a triple-threat woman: wife, writer and teacher’” (Britzolakis 127).

“Three Women: A Poem for Three Voices” written in March 1962 is a semi-autobiographical verse play dealing with the incidents Plath experienced. Gill quotes Middlebrook in his book *The Cambridge Introduction to Sylvia Plath*: “three voices may well be semi-conscious emanations of Plath’s disquiet regarding the emotional figuration that had developed after her own miscarriage and the birth of Nicholas” (qtd. in Gill 71). It deals with

the pangs of motherhood. Set in a maternity ward at a hospital, it is a poem consisting of three women: a wife, a secretary and a girl, all caught in a different predicament commonly faced by women. The speaker places herself in three different situations. In their respective monologues, they each tell about their own experiences of pregnancy. The first voice is that of the woman who gives birth to a son and can be considered as a complete woman in comparison to the other two women. In her, we find the continuation of life, but the process of her giving birth is a painful one and is symbolic of isolation and death. Bringing a child into the world is a “miracle” but she finds the process to be a “cruel” one:

I am dragged by the horses, the iron hooves.

I last. I last it out. I accomplish a work.

Dark tunnel, through which hurtle the visitations,

The visitations, the manifestations, the startled faces.

I am the center of an atrocity.

What pains, what sorrows must I be mothering ?

Can such innocence kill and kill ? It milks my life (WT 40-41).

She has given birth to a child but she feels intimidated by the destructive forces.

The second voice belongs to a working woman, a secretary who has a miscarriage and in her we find the center of Plath's outpouring of grief. In her feeling of being an incomplete woman, she becomes the epitome of loneliness, emptiness and isolation. She speaks out against the male authority, coldness and indifference toward the fragile nature of women:

When I first saw it, the small red seep, I did not believe it.

I watched the men walk about me in the office. They were so flat!

There was something about them like cardboard, and now I had caught it,

That flat, flat, flatness from which ideas, destructions,

Bulldozers, guillotines, white chambers of shrieks proceed,

Endlessly proceed— (WT 35)

This second voice satirically declares that men are “so jealous of anything that is not flat” and speaks out against the “faceless faces of important men” whom she minds.

After the miscarriage, she sadly tells that she carries the “little emptiness” inside her. Around her are “empty schoolrooms” and “empty churches” and she sadly exclaims, “How winter fills my soul!” She looks around her in envy as “the world conceives.” The theme of death becomes prominent in her voice when she says that she only creates “corpses” in contrast to the first woman speaker.

The third voice is that of a college girl who is pregnant with an unplanned baby:

I wasn't ready. The white clouds rearing

Aside were dragging me in four directions.

I wasn't ready.

I had no reverence.

I thought I could deny the consequence—

But it was too late for that. It was too late, and the face

Went on shaping itself with love, as if I was ready (WT 37).

The last of the above lines shows the woman devoid of the natural motherly love. This is further illustrated by the line: “I should have murdered this, that murders me” (39). Thereafter, she puts up the newly born baby girl for adoption. But towards the end of the poem, the loneliness and emptiness similar to that of the second voice seep in despite her thought that there is beauty in having no “attachments.” There is a void in her and she feels “vulnerable suddenly.” She adds:

I am a wound walking out of hospital.

I am a wound that they are letting go.

I leave my health behind. I leave someone

Who would adhere to me: I undo her fingers like bandages: I go (*WT* 44).

Later on, she feels empty and wonders what is it that she misses:

What is it I miss?

Shall I ever find it, whatever it is? (*WT* 47)

“Child,” written two weeks prior to Plath’s suicide, captures the speaker’s angst, unhappiness and depression and is an obvious reference to her child Nicholas who was just about a year old. With a tone of guilt, the mother wishes she could offer the kind of world her beautiful child deserves. In wishing good things for the child, her unspoken anxiety becomes more profound. There are the many happier worlds that her child deserves: with beautiful “colour and ducks,” exciting world of animals, the “zoo of the new,” and appealing plants like “April snowdrop” and “Indian pipe.” She says that the “clear eye” of the child “should be” greeted with “grand and classical” sights and not the devastating, dark, troublesome and confusing world brought about by her:

Not this troublous

Wringing of hands, this dark

Ceiling without a star (*WT* 4).

In “By Candlelight,” the speaker addresses her child, her “small love.” Though the child is oblivious to the pains of the speaker, it is its presence that serves as a consolation. It is like a small candle which is enough to brighten the speaker in the dark, cold and lonely night. Similar to this poem, “For a Fatherless Son” deals with the speaker talking to a baby boy who is unaware of the absence of his father. Written on 26th September 1962, some days after Plath’s separation from her husband, this moving poem is an obvious reference to her son Nicholas. She tells the baby:

You will be aware of an absence, presently,

Growing beside you, like a tree,

A death tree (WT 27).

The dead tree metaphorically stands for the absence of the father in the life of the child. It brings out the speaker's feeling of betrayal and abandonment. The second stanza once again brings in Plath's consciousness about the child's situation to hers:

But right now you are dumb.

And I love your stupidity,

The blind mirror of it. I look in

And find no face but my own (WT 27).

In the child she sees her own reflection, and she fears for the child's future because she knows what it is like to grow up without a father. But for the time being she is, in a way, happy and feels blessed because the child's smile is "found money" for her.

"Ariel," the title poem of *Ariel* is Plath's enigmatic poem written on 27th October 1962. Ariel was the "name of the horse on which she rode, at a riding school on Dartmoor, in Devonshire" (TCP 294). The name also has a connection with the Shakespeare's androgynous spirit in *The Tempest*. On an autobiographical note, the poem metaphorically can be considered as Plath's ritual of finding the artist in her and riding towards it in the early hours of the morning in the last months of her life. The poem opens with the speaker on a horse waiting for the break of dawn. She describes herself as "God's lioness" and feels that she is becoming one with the horse as she rides towards the rising sun. As she rides, the "Nigger-eye[d]" berries cast dark hooks and "something else" tries to haul her up in the air. The strength of it is described as "thighs", "hair" and "flakes from my heels." As she tries to fully give in her capabilities, metaphorically as a writer, she is brought back to reality when she hears the cry of her child:

The child's cry

Melts in the wall

And I
 Am the arrow,
 The dew that flies
 Suicidal, at one with the drive
 Into the red
 Eye, the cauldron of morning (*Ariel* 29).

Plath's desperation to shed her old self in the wake of the breakdown of her marriage is clearly reflected in her later poems. It was only in shedding her old self that she would be able to put the past behind her and strive forward in all its freshness.

4.1.5. The Dark World of Plath

The life of Plath was plagued by many negative aspects and their effects on her find their way in her poetry. Her battle with mental illness and depression and the experiences of it becomes a major theme. Her poems present strong imagery of doom, despair and hopelessness, feeling of loss and problems so heavy that even faith in God and belief in Him seems to have waned.

The opening poem "Wuthering Heights" of *Crossing the Water* strikes the cord for the darker themes which would follow in the rest of the poems. The poem is the same title that Emily Bronte used for her novel. Plath had spent some time in West Yorkshire, the windswept moors, and they inspired her coupled with her personal mood. The speaker of the poem expresses her personal feeling of isolation and identifies herself with the wild and destructive landscape around her:

I can feel it trying
 To funnel my heat away.
 If I pay the roots of the heather

Too close attention, they will invite me
 To whiten my bones among them (CW 3).

Throughout the poem, Plath deals with the imagery of depression and her battle with it. The whole poem presents only a dark and somber picture. Only in the concluding lines, we get a gleam of light but it seems to be limited to only a “small change.” The poem deals with the speaker’s feeling of loneliness: she considers the sheep to be more fortunate, for she seem to be lost in the dark surroundings around her, while:

The sheep know where they are,
 Browsing in their dirty wool-clouds,
 Grey as the weather (CW 3).

She has no power to control over her depressed mind which is like the turbulent wild nature around her. Her affinity with the environment around her is an acknowledgement of a death wish. She finds a connection of her depressed mental state with the tumultuous nature around her. She recognizes “she may be more at home amidst a destructive landscape than in the apparent safety of a domestic interior” (Kendall 43).

“The Hanging Man” written on 27th June 1960 is clearly a reliving of the electroshock treatment which she underwent for her depression. Her fear for the recurring depression is the central theme of this short poem. She gives a horrid image of how a person’s hair is tangled by some god-like power and is “sizzled” by the volts like a desert prophet. The effect of losing memory after the treatment is seen in the line, “A world of bald white days in a shadeless socket” (*Ariel* 65). “To close, and to end the speculation about suicide that dominates “All the Dead Dears,” [Plath] announces in an assured voice, “If he were I, he would do what I did”” (Wagner-Martin 62-63).

“Hardcastle Crag” shows Plath’s fear for an inevitable doom. The speaker is aware of the dominant nature in the “dark” surroundings and her feet force her back to the village

quickly. “A Winter Ship” too presents a vague sense of doom in the mind of the speaker. And this falls in tune with the dark pictorial images of “Mushrooms.”

The feeling of emptiness is carried forward in the poem “Barren Woman.” A woman without a child of her own is compared to a “museum without statues”: just as an empty museum cannot function normally, a barren woman also fails to fulfill her sole purpose in life, that is, as a woman.

In the poem “The Stones,” the speaker finds herself trapped in a stone-like situation. “In the poem, “The Stones,” the threat of a mental breakdown is no more a possibility but a fact” (“The Enchanting Verses Literary Review”). The poem opens with the speaker situated in a hospital, a place where people come to find a cure:

This is the city where men are mended.

I lie on a great anvil (*TC* 82).

The speaker strongly states that external medication can never fully cure a mentally ill person. Metaphorically, the grafters refer to the doctors who feel that they have mended the ill persons with their “delicate hammers”, but they have not done it in reality. In fact, the hospital is only a “city of spare parts” and it has failed to mend her. Plath’s strong words of negativity which she chooses for the ending of this collection are significant. The poem is a part of *The Colossus* and maybe considered as the beginning of the dark and poignant themes of her later poetry.

The name Finisterre is a reference to a department in north easternmost part of Brittany in France and the term means ‘land’s end.’ The poem “Finisterre” thus is suggestive of the idea of death or the end of a journey. Standing on the edge of an “admonitory” cliff is strongly suggestive of her mental breakdown. Plath repeatedly uses the colors black and white in her poetry and often compares herself to a blank sheet of paper. The sea imagery is often introduced to display her troubled mind. She has a sea of troubles in her mind which

seem to wait to drown her. And her usage of the colors black and white become prominent in this poem. The picture she presents is a frightening one. The “land’s end” is cramped in nothingness and even the cliffs look “Black” and “Admonitory”; it admonishes of the dangers lurking below. The turbulent sea which seems to have “no bottom” is a reflection of the speaker’s own troubled mind. The “gloomy” waters, she imagines, are filled with “Leftover soldiers from old, messy wars.” The sound the sea makes becomes a “doom-noise”; it becomes only an endless struggle which only “bruise the rocks out of existence” without any hope of escaping the watery graves:

They go up without hope, like sighs.

I walk among them, and they stuff my mouth with cotton.

When they free me, I am beaded with tears (*CW 7*).

In the third stanza, the presentation of the image of the Virgin Mary instills hope in the reader but this is short-lived. “Our Lady of the Shipwrecked” turns a deaf ear to peasant woman. She is remote and impervious to the woman’s prayers:

A marble sailor kneels at her foot distractedly, and at his foot

A peasant woman in black

Is praying to the monument of the sailor praying.

Our Lady of the Shipwrecked is three times life size,

Her lips sweet with divinity.

She does not hear what the sailor or the peasant is saying-

She is in love with the beautiful formlessness of the sea (*CW 7*).

The sea imagery is a reflection of the poet’s troubled mind. She does not find an outlet from her perilous state of mind and even her faith of finding solace in her Christian belief is surprisingly displaced.

“Insomniac” is a poem with the speaker suffering from sleep disorder. Plath uses this grave condition to connect with the reader about the problem of insomnia which is personified in the poem as a “He.” She gives us an understanding of the horrors of not being able to sleep. Plath “envision[s] night as interminable hours of unbearable solitude” (Lenae “Sylvia Plath’s ‘Insomniac’”). This mania has become so intricately connected with her that she has become immune even to the sleeping pills in colors of red, purple and blue:

Now the pills are worn-out and silly, like classical gods.

Their poppy-sleepy colours do him so good (CW 13).

This chronic malady posed a serious problem to the speaker. But it was also an outcome of her artistic mind which was always in different “flicker of situations”; in other words, she had created her own prison. Her persistent thinking has both a blessing and a curse.

In her state of anger and dissatisfaction, Plath fleetingly brings in the themes of betrayal and writes about her disturbing urges to take revenge. “The Rabbit Catcher” metaphorically presents the male as a brutal and authoritative male. However physically weak and vulnerable the fairer sex is, she in the end embodies courage and virtues in women. In “Gigolo,” Plath turns a male person into a male prostitute. It is a direct attack on her husband for deserting her. She turns him into a fetish gigolo. In “Purdah” too there is a similar tone in the way she victimizes the male character. This purdah-clad woman sits “cross-legged, enigmatical”. There is a dark side about her in the way she identifies herself as the “indefatigable cousin” of the moon. A purdah is a thin veil used by a woman in certain Hindu and Muslim societies to screen women from men and strangers and it also is a symbol of servitude. However, in the present poem, the “reader becomes the sole audience, witness to a spectacle which is both sexual and murderous” (Kendall 166). This woman, traditionally a symbol of helplessness turns into a lioness as soon as the bridegroom is about to take the last step. The choice of her language is an admonition of awaits:

And at his next step

I shall unloose

I shall unloose- (WT 11)

There is an indication that this fatal woman is about to give way to a demonic activity. “‘Purdah’ is poised in the moment preceding the denouement of its own narrative: the breaking of purdah, the unleashing of revenge, the shattering of the illusion created by language and the abrogation of formal control” (Britzolakis 130). The last two lines “the shriek in the bath, / The cloak of holes” is an allusion to Clytemnestra, who kills her husband, Agamemnon, in the bath. She is believed to have repeatedly stabbed him through a cloak which she had thrown over him. Britzolakis once again states, “The male-created images and representations which imprisoned the speaker in a state of ‘purdah’ are converted into a form of symbolic revenge, culminating in the invocation of the husband-murderer” (130).

Like the woman in “Purdah,” in “Stopped Dead” a “vengeful and possibly insane speaker plots an unspecified act of foul play against her male counterpart in a car accident” (Britzolakis 125). The car hung over the “dead drop” cliff creates a lip-biting situation, but the speaker looks poised and fearless. She identifies herself with the paranoid instability of Hamlet’s character. Her uncle, seated beside her, has passed out cold and she questions him coldly if he considers her as Hamlet who killed his uncle:

Who do you think I am,

Uncle, uncle?

Sad Hamlet, with a knife?

Where do you stash your life? (WT 16)

She fearlessly says that she can carry off the bloody act like a “rich pretty girl” with no fear for long hands of law.

The theme of betrayal in love is the dominant theme of “The Couriers.” From the opening of the poem, the speaker hints at a number of things which she cannot trust:

The word of a snail on the plate of a leaf?

It is not mine. Do not accept it.

Acetic acid in a sealed tin ?

Do not accept it. It is not genuine (*Ariel* 4).

The third stanza fully constructs the theme of betrayal in the way the speaker refers to the lover who gives her a “ring of gold with the sun in it.” The promises were all “lies” and the ring came accompanied with “grief.” Just as no season is permanent, the love she received from her husband was like a passing “season.” She asserts that the feeling of love is temporary and that even if it lasts it has an ending anyway and the agent is none other than death.

“The Munich Mannequins” has strong autobiographical overtones. Plath ascribes the qualities of the mannequin to Assia Wevil, the woman her husband left her for. “The poem becomes more autobiographical as she assigns a German cast to the beautiful, heartless barren woman” (Wagner-Martin 103) who is none other than Hughes’ German lover.

“Lyonnesse” is a dark poem in which the speaker suffers from alienation and existential crisis. This lioness, a homophone of Lyonnesse, presents a negative image of God; that He is an impotent and amnesiac God. In a popular Arthurian legend, Lyonnesse was a country which was drowned by the sea off the coast of Cornwall. In the present poem Plath makes use of the occurrence and blames God for it:

It never occurred that they had been forgot,

That the big God

Had lazily closed one eye and let them slip (*WT* 23).

God became oblivious to his creations and turned away from them when they needed Him most. For Plath, the sinking of *Lyonnesse* becomes the symbol of loss, desertion and loneliness. The feeling of loss prevails throughout the poem and on a deeper note, the female-being lioness being deserted by a male God-like being has an indication of the speaker being deserted by her mate. When she presents God as vacuous, we cannot help but reflect on the questions left behind by Plath.

Like “*Lyonnesse*” and “*Sheep in Fog*,” “*Elm*” shows the disturbed mental state of the speaker. The “she” in the poem identifies herself with the elm tree which is personified. The elm tree suggests that the bad dreams of the speaker burden her with her own demons, and in doing this the speaker lets us know about her own faults in contributing to her depression. She has suffered the “atrocities of sunsets” and “scorched to the root”; she is breaking up to “pieces” and they “fly about like clubs.” But she hints that it is the power over which she cannot control:

A wind of such violence

Will tolerate no bystanding (*Ariel* 17).

The poem captures the very low point of Plath’s depression and the absence of real love in her life intensifies her focus on death. Without love, one feels empty and cold and the line “Love is a shadow” brings out the inner emptiness of the speaker. In a literally dark world of Plath or the speaker, “inhabited by a cry,” she looks for “something to love.” She then questions if it is because of the absence of real love that is tormenting her: “Is it for such I agitate my heart?” The speaker knows how it feels to be depressed; she knows the “bottom” of it and now she is incapable of more knowledge about it. The speaker may try to evade the dark thoughts disturbing her psyche, but they envelop her:

In “*Mystic*,” she questions “Once one has seen God, what is the remedy?” (*WT* 19).

In a letter to Richard Sassoon she confides “I talk to God, but the sky is empty” (*Kukil* n.

pag.). She lost her father at a tender age of eight and her mother Plath saying that she will never speak to God again and that she considers herself as a “pagan-Unitarian.” This atheistic quality in Plath reaches its climax in the poem when she, in her feeling of bitterness, likens the mind of God to the “real Tabula Rasa.” Christianity believes in the omniscience of God; that He is all-knowing. But in the poem, Plath turns God into Tabula rasa: the belief that ideas and conceptions come only with experience. “This God who masturbates (his ego) in the void is neglectful; he closes his eyes on the history of the world, wipes out the memory of its violence” (Rose 147).

“Years” carries forward Plath’s “declaration of nihilism” (Britzolakis 185). She creates an image of God dressed in a “vacuous black” and says, “O God, I am not like you.” She declares that eternity “bores” her and she never wanted it in the first place. What she is interested in is “the piston in motion” before which she crumbles, and in the words of Britzolakis, it is the “embrace of the phallic ‘pistons’” (185).

4.1.5.1. Esther greenwood as the Representative of Plath’s Dark World

Esther Greenwood, a young girl from Boston, gains a summer internship to New York as a guest editor at a prominent magazine. Like Esther, during the summer of 1953, Plath spent a month in New York City as a guest editor for a magazine, *Mademoiselle*. Her experience was not what she had expected and her downward spiral to suicidal depression is chronicled in the present novel. The tone of depression seeps in from the early lines of the novel when she presents the electrocution of the Rosenbergs. Esther ominously feels that something is really wrong with her and she ponders: “I knew something was wrong with me that summer, because all I could think about was the Rosenbergs” (*BJ* 2). For a girl of her age, with all her achievements, she was supposed to be the envy of any other girl, having the time of her life and “steering New York like her own private car” (*BJ* 2). The problem was that she was not

steering herself: she only felt like a “numb trolley-bus” and “very empty.” Instead of making use of her opportunities, she lets it run through her fingers. She gets embroiled in the problem which she finds incapable to fight against; the problem over which she cannot control.

Esther has an obsession about death. Mentioning about the electrocution of the Rosenbergs foreshadows her obsession with it and this is further incorporated by her use of the word “cadavers.” She is proud of herself for holding the ability of watching gruesome things without any emotions. She watches the fetuses preserved in the jars without any emotions and she does not even wince on seeing blood oozing out from the woman who is giving birth and says she “could watch something like that every day” (*BJ* 63).

Esther had kept herself pure for her boyfriend Buddy and she expected the same from him. But he lets her down by confessing that he had “gone to bed” with a waitress “a couple of times for the rest of the summer” (*BJ* 66). This is one of the reasons for her depression because she says that she tried to keep her head above water after this knowledge. Esther prefers to be left alone with her own thoughts and the knowledge of the person she is becoming makes her feel more tired and sad. She sadly admits: “The silence depressed me. It wasn’t the silence of silence. It was my own silence” (*BJ* 17). Despite all her achievements, Esther has an inferiority complex. Watching her friend Doreen happy in the company of a male friend, she admits that she felt lonelier as she was the “only extra person in the room” (*BJ* 15). She feels like a ‘nobody’ and compares herself to a “small black dot against all those red and white rugs and that pine-panelling” and feels herself getting “smaller and smaller and lonelier and lonelier” (*BJ* 15). By the end of her stay in New York, Esther falls into suicidal depression. She feels that the era of her winning scholarships was coming to an end, the only thing she was good at and the idea terrifies her.

Esther’s perfectionist attitude is one of the reasons for her depression. “Esther’s competitive nature and her will to succeed become frustrated, not satisfied, by her conspicuous

achievements” (Kendall 52). When her mother informs her that she had failed to make it to a writing course at Harvard, coupled with her already depressed state, she “slunk” lower and lower and chains of suicide attempts follow. She becomes an insomniac, shuts herself from things around her, does not take bath or change her clothes and crawls between the mattress which felt “dark and safe” (*BJ* 119).

Doctor Nolan speaks for the whole set of psychiatrists when she calmly tells Esther that she should consider all her experiences as a bad dream. But Esther repeats: “A bad dream. I remembered everything” (*BJ* 227). She remembers everything. All her past experiences come flooding back and she says, “Maybe forgetfulness, like a kind snow, should numb and cover them. But they were part of me. They were my landscape” (*BJ* 227). In a literal sense, Esther can forget all about it if she jumps into Lethe, the river of forgetfulness in Greek mythology. But her problem is something that she cannot get over with. It is lodged within her being and is already a part of her.

The fact that Plath’s fruitful and short-lived life was stunted by the problems that enveloped her throughout her life and it invokes a feeling of loss to the readers. The way she took her life attracted so much of attention after her death. *The Bell Jar* became the text of Plath’s own life and *Ariel* put her into the fore, for it constitutes the most popular of her poems. Even at present, Plath remains as one of the most celebrated poets of American literature. Her works have become important sources for feminist studies. Her confessional writings do tell so much about the ‘human’ she was and the dark world which enveloped her.

4.2. Anne Sexton

Anne Sexton’s poetry can be considered as a representative of herself, reflecting her torments her poems are confessional, confronting to no set rules, and they deal with subjects like menstruation, motherhood, human body, suicidal tendencies, drug addictions and

sexuality, which are regarded as taboo subjects. Her works *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* (1960), *All My Pretty Ones* (1962), *Live or Die* (1964), *The Death Notebooks* (1974) and *The Awful Rowing Toward God* (1975) reveal to the readers horrifying details of her personal experiences. Her *Love Poems* (1969), *Transformations* (1971) and *The Book of Folly* (1972) contain subjects of religion, social frauds, anti-woman themes, violence, incest, abortion, drug addiction, neurosis, insanity and sexually explicit ideas. No wonder, as advised by her doctor, she started writing in order to use it as a therapy. She put her mind into paper and used it as a medium to express her experiences, obsessions, emotions and feelings. Thus Sexton's poetry abound in the themes of death, mental illness, suicide and suicidal tendencies, depression, addictions and her own personal demons.

4.2.1. Death

Anne Sexton, in her lifetime, witnessed a number of deaths around her: Nana in 1954, her mother in March 1959, father in June 1959, her father-in-law in 1960, her close friend Maxine Kumin's father in 1962, her friend Sylvia Plath in 1963 and sister-in-law Joan Sexton in 1969. Besides, the death of her other close acquaintances greatly impacted her. Sexton has recorded that she was tired of all the deaths around her, and coupled with her own personal demons, they had profound impact on her.

The theme of death is strongly present in the poems of Anne Sexton. "The Truth the Dead Know" is an elegy on Sexton's dead parents. It records the personal pain of losing her mother to cancer and her father to hemorrhage. She re-lives the double tragedy in her life. The loss is haunting for her and she records her feeling of helplessness. She painfully confesses "I am tired of being brave" (49). Numerous times in her poetry, she blames herself for her mother's short life. The memory of her mother: her life, sickness and death are relived in the concluding poem of *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* "The Division of Parts." Sexton

never got over the death of her parents, especially her mother, and they continue to reappear in her poetry. Sexton also fails to shake off the memory of her dead father and many poems allude to him. In “Divorce, Thy Name is Woman” she talks about her effort to “divorce” him:

I am still divorcing him,
Adding up the crimes
Of how he came to me,
How he left me (*CP* 545).

In “The Papa and Mama Dance,” Sexton creates an imaginary brother and tells him to dance with their mother. She does this in order to get complete affection of her father. Similarly, in “The Moss of His Skin,” the speaker mentions about her wish to get the attention of her father away from her mother:

It was only important
to smile and hold still,
to lie down beside him
and to rest awhile, to be folded up together
as if he were silk,
to sink from the eyes of mother
and not to talk (*CP* 26).

“The Double Image” Sexton drops the idea of the inevitable cyclic nature of life and death; of regeneration. It is only through the death of her mother that her daughter Joyce can live and grow. It is interesting to note that Sexton connects the birth of her daughter and the newly found bond shared between a mother and a daughter with the image of her dying mother and her detachment from her:

You call me mother and I remember my mother again,
somewhere in greater Boston, dying (*CP* 41).

What the poet wants to convey is that in order to let someone live, someone has to die. Thus her mother dies in order to let the granddaughter live. “If Anne lived like an angry guest in her mother’s house, Joyce came ‘like an awkward guest’” (Padmanabhan 129).

The 1962 collection of poetry *All my Pretty Ones*, vastly contain the subject of death with partial allusions to guilty feelings in her. It is a dedication to all the “pretty” and special people in her life whom she lost to death. In 1954 when she lost both her parents within a short span of time, it was a painfully difficult time for her. She partially blamed herself for the death of her mother whose death she feels was hastened because of her (Sexton) suicide attempts. In this collection, she turns away from religion to the comforts of drugs and the conviction that death is the only way out.

The collection commences with the subject of her dead father titled “And One for My Dame.” The following poems are tinged with personal experiences. The loss of her teacher John Holmes, who died on June 22, 1962, is penned in “Somewhere in Africa.” She starts off with reminding Holmes of the “prayers and psalms” that he never said. In an atheistic tone, she wishes God to be “some tribal female” taking care of Holmes in his sickness.

In “The Starry Night” the speaker is fearless of death. For Sexton, religion has become only a way to extreme emotional desperation. She presents a dark surrounding in the midst of which she would choose to die:

Oh starry starry night! This is how

I want to die (*CP* 53).

It is in such an atmosphere where she would rush to “to split” from her present life. “The Operation”, written after the death of her mother presents Sexton’s sane consciousness of death and the vulnerability of man. At the same time, Sexton also gives a comment on the predicament of humans, the ever-present universal sane consciousness that one can never defeat the eternal fear of losing the person one loves.

“A Curse Against Elegies” shows Sexton cursing her obsession to death, that she is “tired of all the dead” and her wish to distance herself away from it. The “curse” in the title is directed towards her own poetry. “The Abortion” is a lament for someone “who should have been born.” “In Deep Museum” is a poem where Sexton situates herself as being dead and wondering whether she is in hell:

If this is hell, then hell could not be much,
neither as special nor as ugly as I was told (*CP* 64).

“Old” recollects the beginning of the death-dream inside Sexton:

and now I think that death is starting.

Death starts like a dream (*CP* 69).

The speaker remembers the time she and her sister were out walking. She does not like her flowing mind and her thoughts to be disturbed by her sister and she cries out to her to leave her alone with her thoughts, “Can’t you see I’m dreaming?” (69) But interestingly the poem ends with her conviction that her fear is, but only a thought: “In a dream you are never eighty” (69).

The poem “Sylvia’s Death” depicts Sexton’s preoccupation with death. With a tone of regret, Sexton comments how she had thought they had both outgrown their desire to die. The desire they talked of in their long chatty hours while they downed their sorrows with dry martinis. They saw a cure to their problems in death, and in connection talked of suicide with several motives. She questions how Plath could betray her by carrying her motive forward alone. Personification of death of the form of a boy and the “sleepy drummer” in the poem shows Sexton’s lust for death. The news of Plath’s death leaves in her a “terrible taste” of salt which is no doubt the taste of her own tears. Plath’s death saddened Sexton, but it also roused her own death wish.

In “Menstruation at Forty,” Sexton wishes for death:

In two days it will be my birthday
 and as always the earth is done with its harvest.
 This time I haunt for death,
 the night I lean toward
 the night I want (*CP* 137).

The concluding poem of the collection *Live or Die* “Live” looks optimistic and seems to reaffirm her will to live for the sake of his “dearest three”: her husband, and two daughters. She has become sober and soothed herself from the guilt of her leaning towards death:

Well, death’s been here
 for a long time-
 it has a hell of a lot
 to do with hell (*CP* 167).

She asks herself if life is something that is to be played with. She makes a choice between life and death:

Today life opened inside me like an egg
 and there inside
 after considerable digging
 I found the answer (*CP* 168).

She finds a fresh answer and sees beauty in her blessings:

a husband straight as a redwood,
 two daughters, two sea urchins,
 picking roses off my hackles (*CP* 168).

And finally she says:

I say *Live, Live* because of the sun,

The dream, the excitable gift (*CP* 170).

This optimism towards life is short-lived, for the poems that follow in *The Death Notebooks* (1974) become darker in tone and picture. They are her ultimate investigation of the subject of mortality. The epigraph, taken from Ernest Hemingway's memoir *A Movable Feast* speaks volumes: "Look, you con man, make a living out of your death" (346). Holding an occupation as a poet, her goal to make a living out of her obsession for death becomes clear.

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The opening poem "Gods" starts off with Sexton spiritually empty and finding no solace from any religion to her troubled self. "For Mr. Death Who Stands With His Door Open" is a poem which centers on Sexton's imagination of the final event, that is death. This Mr. Death always has his door open and is always the eternal seducer. Her imagination is not about thoughts of suicide, of wish for death but her imagination of the necessary preparations on that final day. She knows and is aware how fast time passes, and the impossibility of bringing back the lost wasted time: "Time was when time had time enough" (351). Mr. Death is presented as a handsome actor, who she assumes she will be too excited to meet:

Mr. Death, you actor, you have many masks.
Once you were sleek, a kind of Valentino
with my father's bathtub gin in your flask (*CP* 352).

Sexton recalls the time when the handsome Mr. Death had tempted and attracted her towards him:

Next, Mr. Death, you held out the bait
during my first decline, they say,
telling that suicide baby to celebrate
her own going in her own puppet play.
I went out popping pills and crying adieu
In my own death camp with my own little Jew (*CP* 352).

As time lapsed, Mr. Death has become fat with “beer belly” hanging. But Sexton has no option to get rid of this suitor. She knows she will be compelled to give in to it. It seems to have come of age and succeeded in making a reality of the meaning of his name:

Mr. Death, when you came to the ovens it was short
and to the drowning man you were likewise kind,
and the nicest of all to the baby I had to abort (*CP* 352).

Sexton is envious of the baby who was never born, and she also hints at the suicide of Sylvia Plath who placed her head in the oven and tragically took her own life; and her fellow twentieth century author John Berryman who killed himself by jumping into the Mississippi River.

Death is something inevitable. It comes to everyone, but the way it arrives is different. Death is something private, personal and peculiarly one's own. In the poem “The Death Baby,” a poem divided into six parts, Sexton tries to explore death and to know her own. Firstly, she tries to explore it in dreams; her death, as a baby in the dreams of his elder sister. The imagery is sickening. She is a bone at the “dogs’ party” who loved her until she was gone. The second death is a fantasy, the vision of a doll's death. Her “Dy-dee Doll” died twice: once when she snapped her head off and on another occasion it melted while trying to get warm, thus dying in “all her rubber wisdom.” ‘Seven Times’ is a lesson she learned when she attempted death a number of times:

I died seven times
in seven ways
letting death give me a sign,
letting death place his mark on my forehead,
crossed over, crossed over (*CP* 356).

‘Madonna’ is about her mother’s death. ‘Max’ is an interesting part wherein the speaker and her sister or fellow writer aims to have an upper hand over death. They made a pact to “beat death down with a stick”, to build their death just as a carpenter does and they vow not to be polite when death comes with its hood. The cancer that grew in the stomach of her mother gave Sexton the title ‘Baby’ to the last section. There is no escape route for anyone when the final day comes, but the way one chooses the time and place makes one more powerful than death. The poem closes with the image of the speaker asking for the death baby to be handed over to her:

It is time.
Hand me the death baby
and there will be
that final rocking (*CP* 359).

The Awful Rowing Toward God (1975), one of the carefully planned collection among Sexton’s wish to be published after her death, continues with the theme of death but links it more with a Christian philosophy. She knows that she was no saint during her life and she questions if God will accept her, the Ms. Dog as she calls herself, by forgiving her. These poems were written during the last years of Sexton. The opening poem “Rowing” starts off with the speaker having utmost faith in God that He will get rid of the “rat” inside her and embrace her with His two hands. She courageously prepares to face death in a stoic manner in the poem “Courage.” When old age ends with its natural conclusion and the bargain with the calendar gets over, she will stride out without making any fuss:

when death opens the back door
you’ll put on your carpet slippers
and stride out (*CP* 426).

The ever present sane consciousness of death is materialized in the poem “After Auschwitz.” A person is always under the watchful eyes of death:

And death looks on with a casual eye
and picks at the dirt under his fingernail (*CP* 433).

The last poem in this collection “The Rowing Endeth” situates the speaker playing poker with God. Holding a royal straight flush, she thinks she is the winner but unexpectedly God wins because He holds five aces. Though defeated, she does not feel bad but instead gives out a hearty laughter and is happy for her opponent’s win:

Dearest dealer,
I with my royal straight flush,
love you so for your wild card,
that untamable, eternal, gut-driven *ha-ha*
and lucky love (*CP* 474).

The awful rowing toward God had ended and finally surrendering herself to God, she feels glad about it.

Words for Dr. Y (1978), a posthumously published work, contain important poems which Sexton had been actively planning. Her daughter Linda Gray Sexton notes about the personal content of the poems, and indeed, the contents include intimate details of Sexton. Dated January 1, 1962, Sexton addresses to Dr. Y.:

I begin again, Dr. Y.,
this neverland journal,
full of my own sense of filth.
Why else keep a journal, if not
to examine your own filth? (*CP* 564)

Sexton raves about her addiction to death:

Death,
 I need my little addiction to you.
 I need that tiny voice who,
 even as I rise from the sea,
 all woman, all there,
 says kill me, kill me (*CP* 562).

Sexton needs death so much that she feels she has to be addicted to death.

4.2.2. Suicide

Sexton does not hide the fact that she was a suicidal person and she deals with the theme at length in her poetry. The theme of suicide is raved at length in Sexton's poetry. Openly, Sexton mentions many times about her suicide attempts in her poetry. She lays bare her desire to die but does it in a fashionable way. Maxine Kumin, in her forward to *The Complete Poems* of Anne Sexton, writes: "no other American poet in our time has cried aloud publicly so many private details" (xix). The literary world is aware of the fact that Sexton was a suicidal person. On November 9, 1956, on her birthday she attempted suicide and this was the first of the several episodes which were to follow till her death. In the spring of 1974, she took an overdose of sleeping pills and bitterly remonstrated for the failed suicide attempt, and vowed never to let anyone know her intent when she next undertakes the act. And about six months later, this proved to be the case. Her poems abound with the fact of this autobiographical element. In the last stanza of "Suicide Note" from *Live or Die*, Sexton openly declares about her previous suicide attempts:

I know that I have died before-
 once in November, once in June (*CP* 159).

Once again, in "Wanting to Die," she talks about it:

Twice I have so simply declared myself,
 have possessed the enemy, eaten the enemy,
 have taken on his craft, his magic (*CP* 143).

In her very autobiographical poem “Sylvia’s Death”- written on February 17, 1963, a week after Plath’s death, Sexton envies Plath and calls her a thief for stealing her idea she had always wanted. In the poem “The Double Image” as well, Sexton writes that she chose “two times” to “kill” herself in the first “mewling months” when Joyce first came. She mentions about her second suicide attempt when Joyce was still a baby:

I missed your babyhood,
 tried a second suicide,
 tried the sealed hotel a second year (*CP* 39).

After openly declaring about her suicide attempts, she hints that she does not like the idea that she has been saved by the doctor:

I pretended I was dead until the white men pumped the poison out,
 putting me armless and washed through the rigamarole
 of talking boxes and the electric bed (*CP* 36).

It is in this poem that she relives the fact that her mother never forgave her for her suicide attempts. In a rebellious manner, she records what she felt when her mother told her that it was she who gave her cancer: “as if my dying had eaten inside of her.” Sexton was told that she could not be forgiven for her terrible act of trying to take her own life and her mother never did. In a playful tone, she refers to the last time she checked out of the mental hospital, a “graduate of the mental cases.”

The earlier poetry collections of Sexton deal with the dark themes that have been discussed, but they are not so heavy as compared to the later poetry. In her 1966 collection of poems *Live or Die*, Sexton uses the theme of suicide at length. It is here that she confronts her

suicidal impulse in a stark manner. This anthology is a composition of fierce and honestly intimate autobiographical elements. Sexton herself gives a note about the present collection as poems which look like “a fever chart for a bad case of melancholy” (Sexton 94).

The tragic irony of Sexton writing about her friend Sylvia Plath’s suicide, which she followed suit after some years, is contained in her dark poem “Sylvia’s Death.” The poem is a direct reference to Plath. Accounting Plath’s tedious domestic life Sexton mentions how Plath’s life seemed to be trapped in the four corners of her house like a “dead box of stones and spoons” and taking care of her two children who were like two meteors wandering loose in the tiny playroom. In remorse, Sexton asks Plath where she has gone after sending Sexton a letter about her domestic affairs of raising potatoes and keeping bees. Sexton sees Plath as a close confidante with similar problems of arduous domestic life, dealing with depression and suicidal tendencies. She gets jealous of Plath and calls her a thief for stealing her own motive of committing suicide:

Thief!-
how did you crawl into,
crawl down alone
into the death I wanted so badly and for so long (*CP* 126).

“Death always wins when it eventually comes, but this time it did not collect both lives; it took one to leave the other to suffer the bitterness of envy alone” (Madi and Neimneh 140).

The poem “Suicide Note” speaks volumes from the title itself. The two epigraphs are also highly indicative of the subject of the poem. She openly declares that she is not afraid of death or to take her own life, and opines that it is all a matter of personal choice. The poem starts off with Sexton’s obvious choice for suicide had she been given an option. She begins the poem expressing that it is better not to be born:

Better (someone said)

not to be born
 and far better
 not to be born twice (*CP* 156).

Christianity rejects the act of taking one's own life and the poet seems to be aware of its implications; that she will "sink with hundreds of others" into "hell." But she does not seem to mind it. She says:

I will enter death
 like someone's lost optical lens (*CP* 157).

Sexton makes use of a biblical allusion of Jesus walking into Jerusalem "in search of death" before he grew old. In a form of mystical union with Christ, Sexton declares about her attempts to die intentionally. Sexton seems to dread the idea of old age hitting her when her "blood colored" mouth will lose its youthfulness. Convicted of the knowledge that everyone will face death one day or the other, Sexton would rather choose her own way:

But surely you know that everyone has a death,
 his own death,
 waiting for him.
 So I will go now
 without old age or disease,
 wildly or accurately,
 knowing my best route (*CP* 158).

Sexton wants to escape from life's share of burden and she finds death as the route of escape. She does not hate the idea of life, but the knowledge of that inevitable day makes her feel that choosing her own moment and the way she wants to die lets her have the upper hand over death. In doing it, she will evade will long struggle with old age and disease. In fact, she considers death as the better route.

“Wanting to die” is an outstanding poem dealing with suicide and it can be considered as a document of Sexton’s outlook towards it. In 1946, as Dr. Orne left for Philadelphia, Sexton met her new psychiatrist with whom she blended so well instantly. Around this time Sexton had read a play by Arthur Miller, *After the Fall*, and seemed to be fascinated by his use of the theme of suicide. Enthusiastically, she had written to Wilder, “Miller’s play really gets me [...] the suicide stuff, etc” (Middlebrook 215). The subject and idea of suicide seemed to be in her veins around this time and a few days later, she sent a poem to Wilder titled “Wanting to Die.” It is supposed to be an answer to Wilder’s question as to why the subject of suicide attracted her so much. The poem is a document of Sexton’s idea of suicide. It puts into memorable imagery the state of mind that makes sense of Sexton’s declaration that suicide is addicting.

Like the critics had suggested, reading the present poem and going through the anguish and intimacy of the present confessional lines are like going through her personal hell. It is clear that Sexton had attempted and thought about suicide so many times that she has lost count of it: “Since you ask, most days I cannot remember” (CP 142). She feels that the very reason why she is alive has no meaning; her “voyage” seems to be “unmarked” by anything. Her life is empty and without purpose, and thus the desire, the “lust” to die never stops returning. It is highly indicative that the speaker had attempted a number of suicides which she refers to as an “unnamable lust.”

Sexton believes that every human’s existence on this earth has a reason and purpose, but she feels that the very reason of her existence on earth has been defeated by her desire to die. She metaphorically digs deep into the very reason of suicidal persons. She makes use of an image of a carpenter whose main focus is the tools “which” are to be used in building something, not the reason “why” they are being built. To put it in the words of Alvarez in *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide*, “When the inner compulsion became intolerable the

question was no longer whether or not one should kill oneself but how to do so with the greatest dignity, bravery and style” (79-80).

Similarly, suicidal people are interested in the way one chooses to die rather than why they are doing it:

But suicides have a special language.

Like carpenters they want to know *which tools*.

They never ask *why build* (CP 142).

The poem gives a beautiful demonstration that suicide is an act of creation, and a personal building designed by oneself. The carpenter is the speaker who represents a suicidal person. When she uses the word “enemy” referring it to suicide, it clearly discerns her knowledge that suicide is a malicious thought, but she cannot resist the magical charm it has on her. In the end, the speaker blames death for her obsession; that it waits for her year after year to empty her breath, then candidly goes on to say that death through suicide can occur any time and at any place, leaving behind only unspoken words and unfinished businesses.

Sexton’s obsession with death and wanting to kill herself seems to reach its climax in the poem “The Addict”:

With capsules in my palms each night,

eight at a time from sweet pharmaceutical bottles

I make arrangements for a pint-sized journey.

I’m the queen of this condition (CP 165).

When she begins to be referred to as an addict, she retorts:

Don’t they know

that I promised to die! (CP 165)

The poem openly declares Sexton’s addiction to sleeping pills along with the promise she makes to herself, that is to kill herself. She admits:

Yes, I admit

it has gotten to be a bit of a habit- (*CP* 165).

The colors of the pills are pretty in pink, orange, green and white “goodnights.” She admits that she is “becoming something of a chemical mixture.” However hard she may try to beat the addiction, it feels like impossibility. For, she says “I like them more than I like me.” She feels like she is already married to it; a war where she has planted a bomb in herself. Though she has promised to bring about her own death and seem to be flirting with it, at the same time she cannot help but feel pulled by the life which seems to be worth living for. While taking the eight pills one by one, she considers it as a kind of “ceremony.” After the pills start taking effect, she feels numbness following:

Fee-fi-fo-fum-

Now I’m borrowed.

Now I’m numb (*CP* 166).

“Riding the Elevator into the Sky” mirrors the personality of Sexton. The poem documents the warning from the fireman that one should not book a room over the fifth floor in any hotel in New York because no man will climb up the ladder beyond the fifth floor to save another man if any untoward incidents happen. But Sexton does not hide the fact that many times she has crossed the warning limit:

Many times I’ve gone past

The fifth floor,

Cranking upward (*CP* 427).

There is that ever-present little voice pressing her to kill herself in *Words for Dr. Y*. Death is irresistible to her and she feels the need to have death breathing over her. In the poems dated June 6, 1967, Sexton jots down about the little voices in her head. Among them, voice number four tells her:

I am the razor. I am so humble
 In your little white medicine chest.
 I am alert. My language is a thin whine.
 Have you ever thought, my single one,
 that your hands are thorns to be cut to the quick? (*CP* 571-572)

“The Death King” is a testimony of Sexton’s idea that death by one’s own hands will solve the fear of the mortality. Like “Wanting to Die” Sexton once again mentions that she has hired a carpenter to build and design her own coffin. She opines that death “will be the end of fear and the fear of dying” (*CP* 587).

4.2.3. Sexton and Her ‘Nana’

Anne Sexton came from a socially active family and her childhood recounts the affection she received more from her great-aunt Nana instead of her parents, whose hands were full with outside affairs rather than being real parents to the children. During her early formative years, her closest confidante was not her sisters or parents but her great beloved aunt Anna Ladd Dingley. In one of her letters, Sexton writes, “My Nana went crazy when I was thirteen... At the time I blamed myself for her going because she lived with our family and was my only true friend” (qtd. in Awasthi 30). It was unbearable for Sexton to see her comforter being plagued with mental illness which declined after she lost her hearing in 1941 and undergo electroshock treatments. Towards the end of Nana’s life, Sexton had a bit of fallout with her brought about by her problem with her drinking-addict father forcing her out of her home. Nana’s subsequent death in 1954 was one of the greatest tragedies Anne experienced in her life. She was a mother and friend to her. She was convinced that the only good person she had ever been was the Anne that nana loved. The guilt she felt for not reciprocating the equal love she received from her aunt haunted her till the end of her life.

Nana appears in a number of Sexton's poems. In her 1971 collection of poems *Transformations*, Nana appears in the form of Mother Gothel in the poem "Rapunzel." The poem with its strong overtone of lesbian relationship between a "young" girl and an "old aunt" typically presents the young Sexton and her aunt Nana. The "mother-me-do" old aunt is protective towards Rapunzel and treasures her "beyond all things." As she grew up, a prince comes by and hearing her sing in loneliness pierces his heart like a "valentine." The young lovers' plan to escape is discovered and Rapunzel is punished by Mother Gothel. Her long hair is cut to her ears and she is taken into the forest to repent. This takes us back to Sexton's teenage years when she had shared with Nana about her first kiss with a boy. "The kiss was a social triumph, but later, during her treatment for psychological problems, she associated it with Nana's breakdown, condensing the three years of Nana's deterioration into a few nightmarish images" (Middlebrook 17). The impact of Nana on Sexton reaches its height in the poem "The Hex" in the 1972 collection of poetry *The Book of Folly*. The word hex means to bewitch or cast a spell and Sexton seems to be bewitched by Nana:

Everytime I get happy
the Nana-hex comes through (CP 313).

Sexton had clamorous guilts over Nana. She often felt possessed by Nana's vengeful spirit which haunted her in the form of voices and the terrible fates which were beyond her control and in this poem she calls it "the Nana-hex." In a chapter titled "The Nana-Hex" in Middlebrook's biography on Anne, one of her letters written to Dr. Orne mentions about the voices of Nana attacking her and she wishing it would just go away: "Nana, how can I let go. Oh why won't you let go of me Nana, with your voice in my head?" The poem records the negative impact the Nana-hex has on things around the speaker:

Birds turn into plumber's tools,
a sonnet turns into a dirty joke,

a wind turns into a tracheotomy,
 a boat turns into a corpse,
 a ribbon turns into a noose,
 all for the Nana-song,
 sour notes calling out in her madness (*CP* 313).

In “Elizabeth Gone” Sexton craves for the presence of Nana who is now already dead. She does not want to believe that her aunt is dead, but when she is handed over her ash and bones she cannot help but only yearn to have a look of Nana.

For the disturbed Sexton, it is recorded that she failed to establish a healthy relationship with her mother. Though the death of her mother was a blow to her and became a subject of many of her poems, she never fully had a whole mother-daughter relationship with her mother. Instead, Sexton never really got over the death of Nana. The love and affection she received from Nana could replace no one’s.

4.2.4. Mental Illness and Depression

Taking a tour through the works of Anne Sexton, there lie the underlying fact that she battled with depression, mental illness and madness. Her breakdown first started during her early years of motherhood. Looking after her two infants brought her to the brink of madness. When Linda was about two years old and her second child Joyce was some few months old, Sexton broke down into a terrible spell of depression. She was diagnosed with postpartum depression. Medication, together with talking about her problems, helped her so much, but her depression took for the worst five months after she started her treatment. Her biography records her reaching the point where she was scared she would kill her own children out of blinding rage. Her depression hit the worst point and her attempted suicide on 9th November 1956 would be the first of the many suicide attempts which would follow. Taking the advice

of her doctor to pour out her problems through written words, she started writing and it came, sort of, to her rescue. And her confessions indeed record her problems.

Bedlam was a famous lunatic hospital in London, and the fact that Sexton started writing poetry on the insistence of her psychiatrist have a strong semblance to naming her first collection of poetry *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* (1960). The collection records many of Sexton's experiences of madness, depression and frustration. She tackles the theme with her own personal experiences which adds to it a distinct style. Her poems about mental illness and depression carry so much of personal details: her obsession, her wounded psyche, her fears and griefs.

The opening poem of *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* "You, Doctor Martin" situates the speaker in a mental hospital and outpours her personal sickness. She calls herself the "queen of the mental hospital" and a laughing bee on a stalk of "death." She mentions her psychiatrist Doctor Martin walking into her world of madness after having his breakfast. It was her madness that got her strapped in the "antiseptic tunnel." As if in a trance, they talk to themselves. The poem gives a picture of the speaker engaged in two activities in the "madhouse": one either sleeps or cries. Here, she drops the hint that she is unhappy in the mental hospital for there are "no knives for cutting your throat."

"Music Swims Back to Me" opens with the speaker being confused with her way home. The question "Wait Mister. Which way is home?" presents her confused mind. The "private institution" situated on a hill is not a happy place for the speaker to be. She is sick for home as "everyone here was crazy"; and she has been wanting to get out of the place ever since they admitted her on the night of a cold November month. The poem "Her Kind" presents a "possessed witch" who is "out of mind" and her very character screams madness. "Noon Walk on the Asylum Lawn" paints a picture of an insecure and sad speaker on a warm summer day in the compounds of an asylum. The speaker seems to be terrified of the

atmosphere around her and she tries to find solace in by remembering lines from the Bible: “though I walk through the valley of the shadow,” she “will fear no evil.” And “Lullaby” extends further into the life of a mentally ill speaker in a mental hospital at Bedlam. Against the backdrop of a gloomy building with “faded curtains,” the speaker is handed the evening pills by the nurse:

My sleeping pill is white.
It is a splendid pearl;
it floats me out of myself,
my stung skin as alien
as a loose bolt of cloth (*CP* 29).

As she drifts off to sleep in an unconscious state, she feels like a piece of cloth. For this depressed speaker, the drug serves as an escape from reality. “Ringing the Bells” is a projection of a mental ward wherein the speaker with several other mad women rings the bells handed to them in the weekly music lessons. These “crazy ladies” who “mind by instinct” are like the “bees caught in the wrong hive.”

“For John Who Begg Me Not To Enquire Further” records the personal feelings of the depressed Sexton finding hope that her writings, the “narrow diary of my mind,” will find a connection with someone undergoing the same personal hell she is going through. She once again situates herself in the asylum staring at the “cracked” image of herself. For her, speaking her mind out through poetry is an outlet and it serves as a relief, for:

It is a small thing
to rage in your bowl (*CP* 34)

Her poetry is not perfect or inspiring, because it is a mirror image to her disturbed mind, but in it she finds a kind of order:

Not that it was beautiful,

but that I found some order there (*CP* 35).

“The Double Image” portrays a guilt-ridden mother who could not take care of her own daughter while being hospitalized for depression and madness:

And I remember
 mostly the three autumns you did not live here.
 They said I’d never get you back again.
 I tell you what you’ll never really know:
 all the medical hypothesis
 That explained my brain will never be true as these
 Struck leaves letting go (*CP* 35).

Addressing her daughter, Sexton lays bare the pain that she feels as a mother for not performing her duty, but while doing it she brings out to the reader the pain and mental turmoil of her treatment for madness and subsequent hospitalizations.

“Flee on Your Donkey” of *Live or Die* illustrates the disturbed speaker being forced back into “the scene of the disordered senses” because there was no other place to flee to. Clutching only a pack of cigarettes, she checks herself in:

I signed myself in where a stranger
 puts the inked-in X’s-
 for this is a mental hospital,
 not a child’s game (*CP* 98).

It is a place where the alcoholics arrive with his “golf clubs” and the “suicide arrives with extra pills sewn” into their clothes. She came with the belief that the doctors would tell her who she was. In her state of madness, she becomes a stranger to herself.

“For the Year of the Insane” was a poem written when Sexton was recuperating after undergoing electroshock treatment for her mental problems. It is written in the form of a

prayer to mother Mary. With a heavy heart she says that she does not even know how to say the prayer, but she really wants to find solace and she cries out for help as she is “submerged” in her own “madness.” “Self in 1958” opens with the speaker asking “What is reality?” Trapped in the body of a doll-like woman, the speaker depicts a woman fed up fitting in to domestic imprisonment. It is a maddening confinement and she wants to escape from the madness surrounding it. The poem also echoes the role of the domestic problems which also triggered and contributed to the maddening downward spiral of Sexton. “The Addict” illustrates the speaker battling with depression where she is both the “sleepmonger” and “deathmonger”. She is addicted to pills and however hard she tries, they are “stubborn as hell, they won’t let go.”

In her signature poem “Her Kind” she honestly describes herself. She likens herself to a “possessed witch” who haunts the black air at night dreaming evil. She says, “A woman like that is not a woman, quite” (15) but admits that is her kind. Like the “I” in the poem, Sexton is an independent, disobedient, daring woman and lives in a carefree manner. The actions of the “I” in the poem are not pleasant and behaves differently from the rest of the so called normal women in society. This mysterious character blatantly says in the end of the poem:

A woman like that is not ashamed to die.

I have been her kind (*CP* 16).

The Book of Folly opens with “The Ambition Bird” and introduces an insomniac who, at “3:15 A.M.” is wide awake sipping cocoa. The poem “Oh” presents the speaker annoyed with death who bugs her like a “stubborn” insomnia. But she knows that in death she will find a solution:

I would lie down

with them and lift my madness

off like a wig (*CP* 303).

In “Anna Who Was Mad,” the speaker questions herself if it was she who permitted herself to go “insane.” She tries to understand herself and asks for a report on the present condition of her soul. She questions if it was herself who dragged herself to the door of the “moustached psychiatrist” who dragged her out like a golf cart. The following poem “The Hex” continues with the theme of madness. The speaker declares that in her present state of madness, no drug is a cure. She finds no solace in drinking brandy and taking Librium, a medicine for treating anxiety and insomnia, only makes her feel like a “dead snow queen.”

From the thematic analysis, we get a clear idea of the amount of Sexton’s obsession with death and suicide wherein she constantly wavers between death and suicide. Her troubled life and tormenting experiences at sanatoriums, her lifelong battle with depression, mental illness, addiction to drugs and a recklessly lived life all contributed to her very disturbed persona. Failure in love and marriage, need for love, loneliness and anxieties contributed extensively to her problem of depression and subsequent obsession with death. With all these problems, additional demands of domestic responsibilities triggered numerous suicidal attempts. Her attempted suicides were practice sessions for her final successful death. Sexton chose to take her own life because she was afraid of death coming to her and committing suicide was her way of triumphing over the inevitable death. On the question of Sexton’s place in American literature, she has “secured a place for herself as a feminist poet, as she writes about women’s psyche, their struggle with their own thoughts and dilemmas, their steadfastness regarding certain things in their life and their agony and emotions” (Dasgupta and Sharma 116).

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CHAPTER 5: MYRIAD OF NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN WOOLF ET AL.

This chapter attempts to explore the myriad of narrative techniques used by Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. The distinctive techniques used by each of these writers will be taken into account. With reference to Virginia Woolf, the stream of consciousness technique used by her has become exemplary and this will be studied closely in connection with her psyche. Secondly, Hemingway's art of narration has harvested a signature writing style for him. His simplicity in writing, his theory of omission or Iceberg Theory welcomes the readers into his world. It is in the communication among the characters in short, declarative sentences which bring out volumes of thoughts which can be studied in connection to the mind of Hemingway. Thirdly, in-depth study will be done on the confessional modes adopted by Plath and Sexton in their poetry. The word 'confession' itself means admittance of the speaker pertaining to his/her own experiences, feelings or the inner workings of their mind. Thus, its nature is mainly autobiographical. In their modes of confessions they mostly highlight on the taboo subjects and their unusual state of mind, thus unmasking to the readers the pain or experiences buried deep in their psyche with utmost sincerity.

5.1. Stream of Consciousness Technique in the Novels of Virginia Woolf

The phrase 'stream of consciousness' was first introduced by William James in his book *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) to explain his idea of the stream of thought in the mind of a person. The individual's experiences play a vital role in the writings of an author.

“Remembrance is like direct feeling; its object is suffused with a warmth and intimacy to which no object of mere conception ever attains” (James 525). And importantly, what the author or the character strongly feels about is the crux of the stream of consciousness technique: “The universal conscious fact is not ‘feelings and thoughts exist,’ but ‘I think’ and ‘I feel’” (qtd. in James 499). William James aptly coins and explains the term ‘stream of consciousness’ narrative technique in the following words:

Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as ‘chain’ or ‘train’ do not describe it fitly as it presents itself in the first instance. It is nothing jointed; it flows. A ‘river’ or a ‘stream’ are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. *In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life* (526).

M.H. Abrams, in simple language, explains the stream of consciousness as:

an unbroken flow of perceptions, thoughts, and feelings in the waking mind [...] the name [is] applied specifically to a mode of narration that undertakes to reproduce , without a narrator’s intervention, the full spectrum and continuous flow of a character’s mental process in which sense perceptions mingle with conscious and half-conscious thoughts, memories, expectations, feelings, and random associations (298-299).

Woolf has rightly adopted this idea of the stream of consciousness technique and shares her opinion on it in her essay “Modern Fiction” published in the year 1921. She arranges her thoughts about it in the following way:

Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions— trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with

the sharpness of steel [...] Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? (Woolf 160-161)

In using the stream of consciousness technique in the modernist era in Literature, Woolf is a pioneer. She totally rejected “emphasis on incident, external description, and straightforward narrative [and was] none the less concerned with the realities of life. But for her the realities were inward and spiritual rather outward and material” (Albert 517). For her, it was necessary to release from the fetters the “psychic world of imprisoned impressions and thoughts unexpressed by the lack of an appropriate language and technique” (Sudipta 32). Her outstanding works like *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs Dalloway* have become epochal when citing examples to explain this technique. In delving deep into the mind of the characters, the reader gets a peep into the psyche of their creator, for she writes her deepest thoughts without any restraint or mental barriers. Releasing her thoughts and feelings through writing was a therapy for her. Autobiographical characters like Mrs Dalloway, Rhoda and Lily Briscoe no doubt are linked with the mentally ill psyche of Woolf. Mental sicknesses of Woolf’s characters are made worse by external factors like war, death of loved ones and personal problems.

5.1.1. The Voyage Out

From her first novel *The Voyage Out* itself, Woolf started off with her attempt to stress on the conscience of her characters. Here, Woolf “struggled to find a voice and style that would balance social critique and a nuanced portrayal of the vicissitudes of

consciousness” (Domestico “The Voyage Out”). The title itself may be referred to the voyage undertaken by Woolf into the unknown terrains of the psyche of the characters created by her. Terence Hewet looks like her mouthpiece when she puts her wish of writing about silence, or the psyche, of the people that they do not talk about: ““I want to write a novel about Silence,” he said; “the things people don’t say. But the difficulty is immense”” (*TVO* 229).

In the dualistic journey undertaken- a physical one when they disembark at a coastal village where Rachel finally meets her end and an inner personal journey, Woolf pays more attention on the inner space of Rachel. The reader undertakes a voyage into the mind of Rachel and hints on the idea that life is a meaningless voyage. The sensitive Rachel, who bears much resemblance to her creator- losing her mother at a very young age and growing up with an extremely busy father, is passive in nature and this is the outcome of her upbringing. She takes in every detail about her: “Rachel seemed to see and hear a little of everything, much as a river feels the twigs that fall into it and sees the sky above” (*TVO* 276). As a lonely individual, she finds it difficult to blend in socially, but at the same time she finds no peace and tranquility even in solitude.

On a fine morning, sitting in the arm-chair, Rachel ruminates about life and the meaninglessness of it:

And life, what was that? It was only a light passing over the surface and vanishing, as in time she would vanish, though the furniture in the room would remain. Her dissolution became so complete that she could not raise her finger anymore, and sat perfectly still, listening and looking always at the same spot. It became stranger and stranger. She was overcome with awe that things should exist at all.... She forgot that she had any fingers to raise.... The things that existed were so immense and so desolate.... She continued to be

conscious of these vast masses of substance for a long stretch of time, the clock still ticking in the midst of the universal silence (*TVO* 127).

It is here that she completely realizes about the fact of her own existence. Only the reader visualizes the inner emptiness of Rachel; the emptiness which is unseen by any living soul. As she lay sick and delirious, “sometimes seeing darkness, sometimes light, while every now and then someone turned her over at the bottom of the sea” (*TVO* 363). Her passivity reaches the zenith when even the nurse, her caretaker, becomes a sinister looking woman holding the cards of destiny. Rachel tries to come out of her cocoon and blend in with the society but fails miserably, and thus death becomes a source of release for her. The peace that one attains with death is echoed in the stream of consciousness of Terence Hewet as he sits by the dying Rachel:

An immense feeling of peace came over Terence [...] His mind began to work naturally again and with great ease. The longer he sat there the more profoundly was he conscious of the peace invading every corner of his soul [...] he seemed to be Rachel as well as himself; and then he listened again; no, she has ceased to breathe. So much the better – this was death. It was nothing; it was to cease to breathe. It was happiness, it was perfect happiness (*TVO* 376).

He feels glad that they have attained perfect mystical union which would not have been possible while they lived. Unconsciously, he says aloud, “No two people have ever been so happy as we have been. No one has ever loved as we have loved” (*TVO* 376) clearly echoing the suicide note of Virginia Woolf addressed to her beloved husband wherein she states, “I don’t think two people could have been happier than we have been” (“Virginia Woolf’s Handwritten Suicide Note: A Painful and Poignant Farewell (1941)”).

Virginia Woolf's idea about the insignificance of the life of an individual in this vast universe; that life is only a passing phase is given the final thrust in the comical reaction of Mrs. Paley:

"[...] Miss Vinrace has died of fever," Susan informed her gently. She could not speak of death loudly or even in her usual voice, so that Mrs. Paley did not catch a word. Arthur came to her rescue.

"Miss Vinrace is dead," he said very distinctly.

"[...] "Eh?"

"Miss Vinrace is dead," he repeated. It was only by stiffening all the muscles round his mouth that he could prevent himself from bursting into laughter, and force himself to repeat for the third time, "Miss Vinrace.... She's dead."

"[...] She sat vague-eyed for at least a minute before she realized what Arthur meant.

"Dead?" she said vaguely. "Miss Vinrace dead? Dear me.... that's very sad. But I don't at the moment remember which she was. We seem to have made so many new acquaintances here" (TVO 385).

Rachel meets with death at a very young age and the agent is the fatal disease over which she was too weak to fight against. Similarly, Jacob in *Jacob's Room* dies at a very young age at war. When the novel opens, Jacob is already dead but it is through the consciousness and memories of his close ones that the readers collect his memory bit by bit and this is connected aptly by the presence of his room which was once his life space. His blooming and promising life is cut short by something meaningless as "man-made" war. And it is through this that Virginia Woolf projects her "horror for modern warfare which is the mechanism that destroys

the fragile tender seed of man's individuality impeding his complete transaction with society" (Sudipta 66).

The novel opens with Woolf's idea that life is fragile and this is presented through the psyche of Betty Flanders. Whatever we come to know about Jacob is brought through the consciousness of the other characters and they come in subtle hints. And Woolf hints this narrative idea in the lines which fall in *Jacob's Room*: "It is no use trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done" (*JR* 26).

The central character Jacob is remembered to have been a persona with deep-rooted thoughts: "His real self was like the chimney and the unseen waves were his inner being, his imperceptible sadness unperceived by anyone" (Sudipta 73). The beautiful hidden depth of Jacob is seen in the following passage:

No doubt if this were Italy, Greece or even the shores of Spain, sadness would be routed by strangeness and excitement and the nudge of a classical education. But eh Cornish hills have stark chimneys standing on them, and, somehow or other, loveliness is infernally sad. Yes, the chimneys and the coastguard stations and the little bays with the waves breaking unseen by anyone make one remember the overpowering sorrow. And what can this sorrow be?

It is brewed by the earth itself. It comes from the houses on the coast. We start transparent, and then the cloud thickens. All history backs our pane of glass. To escape is vain (*JR* 45).

Even at a very young age, there is something about him which evokes a sense that he does not like company and unknown faces repel him. When he is first introduced to the reader,

through his eyes we see an “enormous man and a woman” stretched out “entirely rigid, side by side” (*JR* 3). As he stared at them for some time, their sight began to terrorize him and he runs off from them. In fear, he fails to decipher a huge rock in front of him, thinks it is his nanny and cries out to her for comfort in fear. And he grows up with the same nature in him. Watching Jacob being carried away with his own thoughts, Timmy Durrant guesses some things which might have triggered the gloom in Jacob, but afterwards he admits, “But whether this is the right interpretation of Jacob’s gloom as he sat naked, in the sun, looking at the Land’s End, it is impossible to say; for he never spoke a word [...] No matter. There are things that can’t be said” (*JR* 45-46). He reflects Woolf’s sad outlook towards life in his rumination: “It’s not the catastrophes, murders, deaths, diseases that age and kill us; it’s the way people look and laugh and run up the steps of omnibuses” (*JR* 80) without any problem to pull them down.

5.1.2. Mrs Dalloway

Mrs Dalloway, the epochal example of stream of consciousness technique, deals with a day in the life of a high-class London society woman Clarissa Dalloway. Though the present action falls into just one day, the psychological time takes us back to Clarissa’s childhood at Bourton and her past experiences and they are perfectly linked with the present actions. It is the presence of the past that gives a deeper view into who Clarissa is and thus makes her mind very close to us. Through her mind we get introduced to the other characters in the novel except for the sub-plot characters formed by Septimus Warren Smith and his wife. The interest of the novel lies not in the plot or actions but in the consciousness of the characters and creates a powerfully psychological authentic effect. It shows the psychological state of Clarissa and connects it with Septimus Warren Smith. Septimus represents the pessimistic side of Woolf. What is so attractive about the narrative technique in *Mrs*

Dalloway is the way Woolf blends the day-long preparation of Clarissa for the party she is going to host in the evening and the madness and eventual suicide committed by Septimus.

The opening lines of *Mrs Dalloway* give a perfect introduction of the consciousness of Clarissa, her “ominous premonition” (DiBattista 142), and also keep in check the darkness that is to evade the end of the novel:

What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her, when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn, feeling as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was to happen (*MD* 9).

Outwardly, Clarissa looks poised and happy, but in her interior monologues we come to know about the mental exhaustion, unhappiness and emptiness about her, added by her regret in leaving her old lover Peter Walsh. As she goes out to buy flowers, the familiar sights take her back to the past and she remembers some words which he had said. She ruminates, “He must have said it at breakfast one morning when she had gone out on the terrace” (9). And later on remembers how they had broken up and how she had cried in the bedroom. She thought she was doing the right thing: “she had to break with him or they would have been destroyed, both of them ruined” (14). She still loves him so much that she gets angry at him for not being happy, “his whole life had been a failure. It made her angry still” (14). Her world may be colourful, but deep beneath, she is ever in search of deeper meaning that she seems to emotionally connect well with people: “Her only gift was knowing people almost by instinct, she thought, walking on” (15).

Who Clarissa is is significantly brought out by her contrasting personality with Septimus:

Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith are like alter egos of one another. Although their lives never really intersect, they run parallel to one another throughout the novel [...] It is through contrast, especially with the character of Septimus Smith, that the significance of Clarissa Dalloway's character is rendered. [...] Clarissa is sane; Septimus is not. Clarissa is full of life; Septimus lives a kind of death-in-life. Clarissa is creative; Septimus cannot find expression in his writing. But, possibly the deepest root of the difference between them is the fact that Clarissa is able to lose herself, and Septimus holds tightly to the control of his own ego (Kuhlamann 30).

Woolf precisely explores the consciousness of the mentally ill Septimus. He is a nervous wreck when we first see him. Watching the car, he feels that the "world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames" and adds, "It is I who am blocking the way" (*MD* 21). He feels the weight of the world upon his shoulder and hallucinates. In his state of madness, he sees his friend Evans waving at him:

There was his hand; there the dead. White things were assembling behind the railings opposite. But he dared not look. Evans was behind the railings!

'What are you saying?' said Rezia suddenly, sitting down by him. Interrupted again! She was always interrupting (*MD* 31).

Peter Walsh gets connected to Septimus through the ambulance carrying the body of the dead Septimus which passes by him. As readers, with the knowledge of Septimus' suicide, we find a note of detachment in his thought:

One of the triumphs of civilization, Peter Walsh thought. It is one of the triumphs of civilization, as the light high bell of the ambulance sounded. Swiftly, cleanly the ambulance sped to the hospital, having picked up instantly, humanely, some poor devil; some one hit on the head, struck down by disease, knocked over perhaps a minute or so ago at one of these crossings, as might happen to oneself. That was civilization (*MD* 163).

But, it is in this that Woolf beautifully captures his mind, as would any person, and emotionally connects him with the character of Septimus.

The emotional connection of Clarissa and Septimus is brought through Mrs. William Bradshaw who announces the death of Septimus, her husband's patient, in Clarissa's party. Clarissa reacts to it angrily in her thought: "Oh! thought Clarissa, in the middle of my party, here's death, she thought" (*MD* 197). She is angry that the Bradshaws brought death into her party but after sometime she wonders how the man had killed himself:

He had killed himself- but how? Always her body went through it first, when she was told, 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 a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. So she saw it. But why had he done it? And the Bradshaws talked of it at her party! (197)

From the beginning of the novel, the striking of the Big Ben pulls the cords of the consciousness of the different characters together, thus keeping in track the actions taking place in their lives within the sphere of the novel. It is with this tool that she keeps chaos and confusion out of the naturally complex psyche of human beings. Woolf brilliantly connects

the threads together by continuing with this unifying aspect by giving a view into the mind of Clarissa:

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 these going on [...] The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. But she must go back. She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter. And she came in from the little room (*MD* 200).

5.1.3. To the Lighthouse

“In *Mrs Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf has perfected her technique considerably and whatever little imperfection remains, she eliminates it in her next novel, *To the Lighthouse*” (Singh 149). *To the Lighthouse* is a classic example of stream of consciousness technique: written as thoughts and monologues, there is little dialogue and almost no action. Clearly divided into three parts- ‘The Window,’ ‘Time Passes’ and ‘The Lighthouse,’ the novel is set on two days ten years apart; set apart by the middle section ‘Time Passes.’ ‘The Window’ introduces the characters and the central symbol is held by the lighthouse and their plan to go to it the next day if the weather permits. In ‘Time Passes,’ Woolf reports about the happenings of the ten years between ‘The Window’ and ‘The Lighthouse.’ In ‘The Window,’ mostly through the consciousness of Lily Briscoe, on a fresh morning after a period of ten years they go to visit the lighthouse. And laying more stress on the psyche of her characters, Woolf has closely studied the perceptions of her characters and through them analyses in general the human perceptions and relationships.

In *To the Lighthouse*, plot, action, character and thought are drowned in the stream of consciousness. Like *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf has brilliantly manipulated the concept of time with remarkable skill. The clock-time is strictly limited and this permits the reader to move

freely in the consciousness of Mrs. Ramsay or Lily Briscoe or any other character. Through the characters' thoughts, we get to know them and the other characters as well: the depicted consciousness of Mrs. Ramsay enables us to understand Mr. Ramsay, James, Lily Briscoe or Charles Tansley. In the same way, the consciousness of Lily Briscoe reveals to us the finer shades of Mr. Ramsay's personality or the odd and maladjusted personality of Charles Tansley.

The second part 'Time Passes' is made up of ten sections and it covers a period of ten years. In brief sketches Woolf reports about the characters' actions- all factual details are reported to the reader through parentheses. Mrs. Ramsay's death is reported by the absence of her that Mr. Ramsay feels in his lonely nights: "[...] but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty" (TL 138). Prue Ramsay is given away by her father to marriage and later we are informed of her death due to some illness connected with childbirth. Andrew Ramsay dies in the war from a shell explosion bringing instantaneous death to him. Mr. Carmichael becomes a celebrated poet while the other characters go on living, and the section ends with Lily Briscoe "stirring in her sleep". She then awakes: "Her eyes opened wide. Here she was again, she thought, sitting bold upright in bed. Awake" (TL 153). Going into the final section 'The Lighthouse,' there is a hollow in it because of the absence of Mrs. Ramsay, but she continues to have an overpowering presence from the memories of her which are aroused in the consciousness of the other characters.

The beauty that lies in silence is one of the chief narrative tools that Woolf has employed in her novels and, in *To the Lighthouse*, this has been captured beautifully. In the end of the first section 'The Window' the "intimate exchange between husband and wife is

played out in silence” (DiBattista 143); there is a silent but beautiful emotional connection between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay:

And what then? For she felt that he was still looking at her, but that his look had changed. He wanted something- wanted the thing she always found it so difficult to give him; wanted her to tell him that she loved him [...] she knew that he had turned his head as she turned; he was watching her. She knew that he was thinking, You are more beautiful than ever. And she felt herself very beautiful. Will you not tell me just for once that you love me? He was thinking that [...] But she could not do it; she could not say it. Then, knowing that he was watching her, instead of saying anything she turned, holding her stocking, and looked at him. And as she looked at him she began to smile, for though she had not said a word, he knew, of course he knew, that she loved him. He could not deny it. And smiling she looked out of the window and said (thinking to herself, Nothing on earth can equal this happiness)-

“Yes, you were right. It’s going to be wet tomorrow. She had not said it: yet he knew. And she looked at him smiling (*TL* 132-133).

This tool is carried forward in the end of the novel wherein Lily and Carmichael think about the same thing even without speaking to each other. Lily has been wondering if Mr. Ramsay had reached the lighthouse and she says aloud, ““He must have reached,” [...] feeling suddenly completely tired out” (*TL* 219). Then the old Mr. Carmichael:

[...] suring up, puffing slightly [...] shading his eyes with his hand [says]: “They will have landed,” and she felt that she had been right. They had not needed to speak. They had been thinking the same things and he had answered her without her asking him anything (*TL* 219).

5.1.4. The Waves

Woolf carries forward her interest in exploring the psyche of the characters in *The Waves*. It is in this novel that she branches out the stream-of-consciousness technique further by employing the internal monologue of the individual-consciousness through the use of soliloquy. The novel can be classed into a prose-poem where the group-consciousness of the six characters interact and complement each other. Like *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves* too similarly follows the simple progress of a day, with Bernard, Susan, Rhoda, Neville, Jinny and Louis lying happily at dawn or the beginning of the novel and get withered with age by dusk or the end of the novel. Here, the waves control the structure of the novel just as Big Ben controls the time scheme of *Mrs Dalloway*. Just as Jacob in *Jacob's Room*, though dead, is the fulcrum of the novel, Percival is also focal point of *The Waves* in absentia.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf has discussed at length about the capacity of the human mind. She states:

The mind is certainly a very mysterious organ [...] the mind has so great a power of concentrating at any point at any moment that it seems to have no single state of being. It can separate itself from the people in the street [...] and think of itself as apart from them, at an upper window looking down at them. Or it can think with other people spontaneously, as, for instance, in a crowd waiting to hear some piece of news read out [...] Clearly the mind is always altering its focus, and bringing the world into different perspectives (SWVW 619).

In *The Waves*, Woolf showcases the strength of the human mind by getting into the intricate details of the characters. In nine sections, these characters are linked by impersonal interludes

describing the ebb and flow of the tide in the course of a day. The “voices” of the six characters synchronize with the continuous rhythm of the tide which “bring the six to the shores of existence and suck them back afterwards” (Gordon 204).

“The soliloquies [of the characters] flow like a river, literally projecting the stream-of-consciousness” (Sudipta 154), and Woolf successfully projects the inner psychological complexities which are imperceptible to us. In the deepest sense, *The Waves* is thus a novel of silence; of the things which are normally left unsaid. Whatever the characters utter is not connected to the discourse of the others, nor is there a reaction. Thus the whole novel remains a silent soliloquy: the utterances of each of the characters are assumed as inaudible and remain as a consideration of what they would have thought or said. The opening section of the novel is a solid catch of the narrative technique, as discussed, employed wholly in *The Waves* by Woolf:

‘I see a ring,’ said Bernard, ‘hanging above me. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light.’

‘I see a slab of pale yellow,’ said Susan, ‘spreading away until it meets a purple stripe.’

‘I hear a sound,’ said Rhoda, ‘sheep, chirp; cheep, chirp; going up and down.’

‘I see a globe,’ said Neville, ‘hanging down in a drop against the enormous flanks of some hill.’

‘I see a crimson tassel,’ said Jinny, ‘twisted with gold threads.’

‘I hear something stamping,’ said Louis. ‘A great beast’s foot is chained. It stamps, and stamps, and stamps’ (SWVW 636).

Jean Guignet is of the opinion that Woolf is identified in all the six characters of *The Waves*:

She is in love with words, like Bernard: in love with books, like Neville: a lover of action, like Louis: like Susane feminine, earthly, nature loving: like Jinny sensual and sociable; like Rhoda hypersensitive and solitary—must one anticipate and say that like Rhoda she was to kill herself? (qtd. in Mulas 78)

Woolf had an inherent vision of projecting life-death duality in her writings and through Rhoda she finds a connection. She cries out, “‘Oh, life, how I have dreaded you,’ [...] ‘oh, human beings, how I have hated you!’” (SWVW 730). With little self-confidence she tries to reconcile with life though she dreads her very existence. But failing to compromise, she chooses death by drowning and meets with it exactly like she had wished for:

I touch nothing. I see nothing. We may sink and settle on the waves. The sea will drum my ears. The white petals will be darkened with sea water. They will float for a moment and then sink. Rolling me over the waves will shoulder me under. Everything falls in a tremendous shower, dissolving me (SWVW 731).

The defeat of Rhoda’s own conscience; of the importance of the life force, or the will to live gives a fatal blow as the novel ends; adding sadness to the death of Percival. It is her death which adds to the final sad soliloquy of Bernard wherein he defies death. He assaults death courageously when he says that he will fling himself, like the waves, “unvanquished and unyielding” against Death, but it is “useless,” for man’s existence is absurd: “like the wave, he rises only to fall” (Mulas 92).

In a letter addressed to Lytton Strachey in 1916, Woolf mentioned that in her novels, she hopes “to give the feeling of a vast tumult of life, as various and disorderly as possible, which should be cut short for a moment by death, and go on again- and the whole was to have a sort of pattern, and be somehow controlled” (qtd. in Sudipta 30). And in the present novel,

the death of Percival serves as a tumult but at the same time serves as the unifying factor in the narrative as well as the characters. And later, the death of Rhoda gives a deeper meaning to his final soliloquy. This is seen even in the previous novels *Jacob's Room*, *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs Dalloway*. It is death which sublimates all differences and it is its awareness which gives fulfillment to the artist; it is the perception of life and death which fills the precincts of the artist's heart.

As an experimenter, Woolf has indeed attained complete success in the method of exploring the psyche of human beings, particularly through the stream of consciousness technique by fusing the philosophies she held on dearly in life. She broke away from the traditional form of writing and infused in them what she thought was important, stressing on the importance of the human consciousness. But it would be too narrow to think that Woolf considered perfect form, plot and characterization of the novel as something artificial. For, in Virginia Woolf's works, "form is inseparable from the content, rather [it is] a part and parcel of it" (Singh 161). Beginning her voyage in writing novels in *The Voyage Out* and thereafter, Woolf has successfully experimented and explored the method of stream of consciousness technique and gave fresh breath to this literary writing genre.

5.2. Ernest Hemingway's Art of Narration

Ernest Hemingway is a giant literary figure in American literature, especially when it comes to forging his distinctive styles of narration. In particular, his use of short, declarative sentences and introduction of what he famously termed as Iceberg theory or theory of omission. It is a known fact that his terseness and perfection in writing owes a lot to his experience as a journalist at the *Kansas City Star* from October 1917 to April 1918: "Hemingway himself told an interviewer on the *Star* he learned how to write simple declarative sentences, a skill that would be helpful to any young writer" (Tyler 15). Besides

popularizing these styles of writing, Hemingway's art of narration is myriad. He is known for his concepts of nada, code hero and lost generation which are found in abundance in his rich amount of writings, and he uses the tools of irony, symbolism, repetition, etc which give a deeper meaning in his narratives to what he wants to convey.

5.2.1. Vignettes of Hemingway's Narrative Techniques in his Major Works

Hemingway firmly believes that it is not the duty of the author to tell his readers what emotion he must experience but to describe only the action and leave the rest to the reader. If the author rightly describes the actions, the reader will definitely feel the right emotions. This is the end of writing in short declarative sentences and Hemingway has mastered in this technique. In *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway gives a perfect portrayal of the surroundings in short declarative sentences. In the opening chapters, Hemingway beautifully joins these sentences with the use of the connective "and" and meets the end of this technique:

The next year there were many victories. The mountain that was beyond the valley and the hillside where the chestnut forest grew was captured and there were victories beyond the plain on the plateau to the south and we crossed the river in August and lived in a house in Gorizia that had a fountain and many thick shady trees in a walled garden and a wisteria vine purple on the side of the house. Now the fighting was in the next mountain beyond and was not a mile away. The town was very nice and our house was very fine (*FTA* 5).

With great skill, Hemingway has used the tool of irony at large in the novel. The opening chapter ends with the narrator highlighting that with the winter came the permanent rain which brought cholera with it, and there seems to be something positive when we learn that it was checked but sadly it is ironically told that "only seven thousand died of it in the army" (*FTA* 4).

Rain is used as a symbol of disaster in the novel. When Catherine expresses about her fear for it, Henry comforts her saying that it is all nonsense, but the narrative gives a different and ominous answer: “She was crying. I comforted her and she stopped crying. But outside it kept on raining” (*FTA* 114). And the ending of the novel rightly proves the ominous sentence to be true as Henry leaves the dead body of Catherine in the hospital and “walked back to the hotel in the rain” (293).

The use of repetition is prominent in the novel. It reinforces the meaning of what is being said or felt. In the last chapter, an incoherent but fervent prayer said by Frederic Henry for his wife Catherine is notable:

Don't let her die. Oh, God, please don't let her die. I'll do anything for you if you won't let her die. Please, please, please, dear God, don't let her die. Dear God, don't let her die. Please, please, please don't let her die. God please make her not die. I'll do anything you say if you don't let her die. You took the baby but don't let her die. That was all right but don't let her die. Please, please, dear God, don't let her die (*FTA* 291).

The love shared between Henry and Catherine has almost something religious about it. She is so in love with him that she already considers herself married to him:

‘[...] What good would it do to marry now? We're really married. I couldn't be any more married.’

‘I only wanted to for you.’

‘There isn't any me. I'm you. Don't make up a separate me.’

[...]

‘[...] You're my religion. You're all I've got.’

‘All right. But I’ll marry you the day you say’ (*FTA* 103-104).

So in love with Henry, she identifies herself with him. There is terseness in their conversation but with a deep meaning attached to them. She says to him ‘I want what you want. There isn’t any me any more. Just what you want’ (*FTA* 96). And in the conversation between Henry and the priest, Hemingway brings out the deep universality of meaning attached to love in a beautiful way:

‘You do not love [God] at all?’ he asked.

‘I am afraid of Him in the night sometimes.’

‘You should love Him.’

‘I don’t love much.’

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘You do. What you tell me about in the nights. That is not love. That is only passion and lust. When you love you wish to do things for. You wish to sacrifice for. You wish to serve.’

‘I don’t love.’

‘You will. I know you will. Then you will be happy’ (*FTA* 66).

Often used as a perfect example for the explanation of the themes that come under the phrase “Lost Generation,” *The Sun Also Rises* is a rich reservoir for understanding the richness of Hemingway’s art of narration. Written in the first person by the narrator Jake Barnes who is also a character, he narrates sometimes in an exaggerated dramatization and sometimes he manipulates and describes the characters according to his own views. Written in retrospection, Jake Barnes recounts the events after everything had happened and that leaves him room to judge the characters according to his own whims. None of the characters exist in the present and they live only in the memory of Jake. Thus, he is “free to relate

incidents and conversations, people and places, as he chooses” (Nagel 90). Following the confessional mode, the novel looks like “an attempt to come to terms with what has happened, how his relationships have changed, what remains to give him the strength to get on with his life” (90).

The novel starts with a detailed description of Robert Cohn, as Jake knows him, with a tinge of irony:

Robert Cohn was once middleweight boxing champion of Princeton. Do not think that I am very much impressed by that as a boxing title, but it meant a lot to Cohn. He cared nothing for boxing, in fact he disliked it, but learned it painfully and thoroughly to counteract the feeling of inferiority and shyness he had felt on being treated as a Jew at Princeton (*TEH* 3).

P.G. Rama Rao in his study *Ernest Hemingway: A Study in Narrative Technique* opines about the narrative technique of the whole novel:

The ironic tone, which is evident in the description of Robert Cohn in the first chapter and can be seen running through the whole novel as an undertone making itself audible enough from time to time, reveals a kind of objectivity which the narrator brings to his story. This is only “a kind of objectivity,” because it is still limited by the fact that the first-person narrator can never be free from egoism and projects only one point of view, which is his own, however mellowed and dispassionate it may be. He has the advantage of making a favourable impression on the readers and of winning their sympathy, sometimes at the expense of other characters (170).

The protagonist Jake Barnes is an impotent World War I veteran who “got hurt in the war” (*TEH* 13). Hemingway gives hints about the condition of Jake in the opening novels which remain unclear until later. In the end of the second chapter he tells the readers about his “rotten habit of picturing the bedroom scenes” (*TEH* 10-11) of his friends. When he says to Brett, “besides, what happened to me is supposed to be funny” (*TEH* 21), the reader grabs the fact that it is not, for it is this problem that forbids him from having a normal relationship with Brett though he loves her. Not getting the emotional fulfillment from Jake, Brett sleeps with other men. In the end of the novel, when she says to Jake in the car, ““Oh, Jake’ [...] ‘we could have had such a damned good time together’” he replies, “‘Yes’ [...] ‘Isn’t it pretty to think so?’” (*TEH* 202). The readers are left to deeply introspect and one of the common answers maybe finding an ironic undertone in it. For, even if he were to have a normal relationship with Brett, there might have been other difficulties as well, judging by the character of Brett.

Hemingway’s technique of making use of economy of language in writing short declarative sentences is seen in the following paragraph as we take a ride with the narrator in the in the bus from Pamplona to Burguete:

The bus climbed steadily up the road. The country was barren and rocks stuck up through the clay. There was no grass beside the road. Looking back we could see the country spread out below. Far back the fields were squares of green and brown in the hillsides. Making the horizon were the brown mountains. They were strangely shaped. As we climbed higher the horizon kept changing. As the bus ground slowly up the road we could see other mountains coming up in the south. Then the road came over the crest, flattened out and went into a forest (*TEH* 86-87).

For Whom the Bell Tolls is written in the third person narrative mode. Interior monologue is used to a greater advantage in the novel. Robert Jordan's inner monologues are worth noting:

And that is not the way to think, he told himself, and there is not you, and there are no people that things must not happen to. Neither you nor this old man is anything. You are instruments to do your duty. There are necessary orders that are no fault of yours and there is a bridge and that bridge can be the point on which the future of the human race can turn. As it can turn on everything that happens in this war. You have only one thing to do and you must do it. Only one thing, hell, he thought. If it were one thing it was easy. Stop worrying, you windy bastard, he said to himself. Think about something else (*FWBT* 46-47).

Robert's thoughts in the above paragraph bring to light his character and outlook towards life and at the same time reveal vanity of war through irony. Robert's inner monologues also bring out the psychological tension in him as he lay on the ground waiting for the final ambush:

He lay there behind the pine tree, with the submachine gun across his left forearm, and he never looked at the sentry box again until, long after it seemed that it was never coming, that nothing could happen on such a lovely late May morning, he heard the sudden, clustered, thudding of the bombs.

As he heard the bombs, the first humping noise of them, before the echo of them came back in thunder from the mountain, Robert Jordan drew in a long breath and lifted the submachine gun from where it lay. His arm felt stiff from its weight and his fingers were heavy with reluctance (*FWBT* 451).

The Old Man and the Sea (1952) is a triumph of Hemingway's art of narration and for which he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1953 and the Nobel Prize in Literature 1954. The novella is written in the first person narrative and concerns an old Cuban fisherman. Like *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, here too, Hemingway's narration finds an increasing use of interior monologue which proves to be more effective. It is also considered as an example of Hemingway's Iceberg theory in writing- of the importance of the deeper implication the writing has on the reader. What looks like a simple story becomes a symbol of the archetypal experience of human beings. The opening of the novel straight away gives a glimpse of the theme of the novella that is to follow; that man may be beaten but not defeated:

He was an old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream and he had gone eighty-four days now without taking a fish. In the first forty days a boy had been with him. But after forty days without a fish the boy's parents had told him that the old man was now definitely and finally *salao*, which is the worst form of unlucky, and the boy had gone at their orders in another boat which caught three good fish the first week. It made the boy sad to see the old man come in each day with his skiff empty and he always went down to help him carry either the coiled lines or the gaff and harpoon and the sail that was furled around the mast. The sail was patched with flour sacks and, furled, it looked like the flag of permanent defeat (*OMTS* 1).

The use of interior monologue is used at length. Completely drained out and tired of holding on to the fish, he thinks:

I wish he'd sleep and I could sleep and dream about the lions, he thought. Why are the lions the main thing that is left? Don't think, old man, he said to

himself, Rest gently now against the wood and think of nothing. He is working. Work as little as you can (*OMTS* 25).

The old man, out all alone in the vast sea, talks to himself and speaks his mind aloud which also shows his state of mind. And the following passages depict it:

“Unless sharks come,” he said aloud. “If sharks come, God pity him and me” (*OMTS* 25).

“But you have not slept yet, old man,” he said aloud. “It is half a day and a night and now another day and you have not slept. You must devise a way so that you sleep a little if he is quiet and steady. If you do not sleep you might become unclear in the head.”

I’m clear enough in the head, he thought. Too clear. I am as clear as the stars that are my brothers. Still I must sleep. They sleep and the moon and the sun sleep and even the ocean sleeps sometimes on certain days when there is no current and a flat calm (*OMTS* 28-29).

Whenever Santiago talks aloud or thinks something, it is not judged by the narrator but is left to the reader to sink in. There are many instances of it in the novella: “No one should be alone in their old age, he thought. But it is unavoidable” (17). There is a deeper indication when the old man speaks his mind aloud, ““Fish,” he said, “I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends”” (19). And “But man is not made for defeat,” [...]. “A man can be destroyed but not defeated” (38) has a deep meaning and moreover it can be connected with the central theme of the novella. And the poignancy that lies underneath in the conversation between the waiter and the tourist, regarding the skeletal remains of the huge marlin, is noteworthy:

“What’s that?” she asked a waiter and pointed to the long backbone of the great fish that was now just garbage waiting to go out with the tide.

“Tiburón,” the waiter said. “Shark.” He was meaning to explain what had happened.

“I didn’t know sharks had such handsome, beautifully formed tails.”

“I didn’t either,” her male companion said (48).

5.2.1.1. Iceberg Theory in Miniature in “Old Man at the Bridge”

In *Death in the Afternoon*, Hemingway explains about his principle of the iceberg theory:

If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water (*DA* Ch 16).

He is of the opinion that a writer must only highlight the necessary and leave the rest to the reader to interpret or understand the text. What the writer gives is like the ice floating upon the water while the symbolism and meaning lie unseen beneath. His short story “Old Man at the Bridge” is a perfect example of his iceberg theory or theory of omission which is applied in his narratives. It is told in the first person narrative by a soldier and together with him we encounter an old man sitting near a busy and crowded bridge. Noticing that the old man does not move from his spot, the narrator casually talks to him:

“Where do you come from?” I asked him.

“From San Carlos,” he said, and smiled.

That was his native town and so it gave him pleasure to mention it and he smiled (*TCSSEH* n. pag.).

The old man further reports that he used to take care of animals until he left San Carlos and mentions the various animals among which the cat, he says, will be the only animal which will be able to take care of itself. As the narrator leaves the spot, he urges the old man to also get up and try to walk. The old man obeys him and goes away talking dully to someone else that he used to take care of animals. Thereafter the story ends with the following:

There was nothing to do about him. It was Easter Sunday and the Fascists were advancing toward the Ebro. It was a gray overcast day with a low ceiling so their planes were not up. That and the fact that cats know how to look after themselves was all the good luck that old man would ever have (*TCSSEH* n. pag.).

The narrator's knowledge that this "was all the good luck that old man would ever have" clearly indicates that the old man has died. Without the narrator directly reporting the death of the old man, the underlying fact of his passing away becomes clear to the reader.

5.2.2. Open-Endedness in Hemingway's Narratives

Hemingway extends his technique of iceberg narrative by employing many of his works open-ended, thus leaving the audience to give their own ending or to guess the continuing actions for themselves: *The Old Man and the Sea* ends with Santiago falling asleep with his face down and dreaming about the lions; Henry goes back to his hotel in the rain leaving the dead body of Catherine in the hospital in *A Farewell to Arms*; *For Whom the Bell Tolls* ends with Robert Jordan amidst the pine needle floor of the forest with a beating heart carefully watching his target Lieutenant Berrendo and waiting for him to come to the

“sunlit place”; and Jake and Brett riding in Madrid in a taxi with the traffic policeman directing their vehicle in *The Sun Also Rises*.

It may be noted that Hemingway started his career as a writer by writing short stories and here lies his belief in the technique of less is more. He appeals to the reader through his mastery of the use of various literary devices. Besides fashioning his own styles of writing and popularizing them, he has contributed immensely to the craft of writing in the modern literary frame.

5.3. Confessional Modes of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton

Confessional poetry, also known as Confessionalism, is a type of narrative and lyric verse which deals with the “facts and intimate mental and physical experiences of the poet’s own life” (Abrams 45) which emerged in the United States in the mid-twentieth century. Considered as a type of narrative in revolt against Eliot’s impersonal theory of poetry, confessional poetry “reveals private or clinical matters about [the poet], including sexual experiences, mental anguish and illness, experiment with drugs, and suicidal impulses” (45). The ‘I’ in confessional poetry is the poet who expresses his/her repressed feelings to the reader. As has been stated that confessional poetry is largely autobiographical, it is mainly based on experiences. But to take a step further, not only the experiences but whatever the author feels strongly about gets expressed in their writing and that can be accounted for in their poetry which are branded as ‘confessional.’ The present poets Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton are the prominent figures of this school of poetry. In their works, they have confessed intimate details about their personal life, taboo experiences and the demons they fought against throughout their lives, hinting at the impending tragedy that awaited the literary world. For them, writing was a therapy where they found release of personal anguish, anger, despair, their feelings of emptiness and darkness. Considering their confessions about their

obsessions with death, furthered by their inability to cope with their mental problems, it was no surprise when they both tragically committed suicide.

5.3.1. Confessional Modes of Sylvia Plath

Sylvia Plath's poetry was influenced greatly by her mental illness, depression, her father's death, pangs of motherhood, her husband's infidelity and the failure of her marriage which was the final straw. It was these problems which pulled in dark external forces like her obsession with death and suicidal impulses. Her poetry "comes back again and again, like the receding waves of the sea, to her life and its happenings: be they as banal as a neighbour's death, or, as excruciatingly internal as the cracking up of the Self" (Majumdar 13).

To make a close study of Sylvia Plath's poetry, it would be appropriate to start with the first jolt in her life which came with the death of her father who passed away just about a week after Plath's eighth birthday. "The death of the father whom she hero-worshipped gave such a cruel jolt to her entire equilibrium that she was to go back again and again in her adult life to this centre of agony with fury, hate, sad retrospection, vengeance and intense suffering through her poetry" (Majumdar 17). The death left a permanent scar in Plath for she considered it as an ultimate betrayal. When she was informed about the death of her father, she coldly responded that she would never speak to God again, and instead of mourning, in a muffled voice she said: "I want to go to school" (*LH* 25). The first record of Plath's poetry was the one written when she was fourteen. The poem was titled "I Thought That I Could Not Be Hurt" and it contained so much of tragic undertones:

I thought that I could not be hurt;

I thought that I must surely be

impervious to suffering-

immune to mental pain

or agony (*LH* 33).

She feels deeply about the frailty of human heart which can either sing or weep. In a somber tone, she talks about her world which has turned gray where darkness has wiped away her joy. A record of a poem which Plath wrote some years later speak volumes about why she is obsessed with writing:

You ask me why I spend my life writing?

Do I find entertainment?

Is it worthwhile?

Above all does it pay?

If not, then, is there a reason? . . .

I write only because

There is a voice within me

That will not be still (*LH* 34-35).

The fact that Plath had unresolved psychological trauma regarding the death of her father has invited a number of writers to connect the psychological theory of Electra complex with some of her prominent works. She harbored resentment against her father and felt that his death was an ultimate betrayal; he died when Plath thought he was God. Plath had vigorously studied the writings of Freud and Jung with an aim to do doctorate in psychology and she found a real connection between her own experiences and their theories. She recorded in one of her journal entries that in thinking about analyzing the works of Freud and Jung, she became the “victim, rather than the analyst” (qtd. in Kendall 151). These psychologists confirmed what Plath already knew. She was the victim of Electra complex.

5.3.1.1. Electra Complex

Plath's father's early death made her incapable of moving forward; "her selfhood is confined within a compulsion to repeat [...] She is unable to move beyond the self" (Kendall 152-153). Her obsession with Death the Almighty became deeply engrained in her and it was the only way to join her father and also to get rid of the weary demands of life. The speaker gets stuck in the barb wire snare of communication with her father in "Daddy":

I could never talk to you.

The tongue stuck in my jaw.

It stuck in a barb wire snare.

Ich, ich, ich, ich,

I could hardly speak (*Ariel* 48-49).

The speaker confesses that she tried to die many times in order to get back to the dead father but unable to do so, she tries to kill the memory of him. She feels the need to kill her father repeatedly in order to make him a thing of the past. Plath thus has to imaginatively disinter him and destroy him whole by driving a stake through his heart.

"Electra on Azalea Path" is the earliest record of Plath's confession about struggle with the memory of her father and the effect it had on her psyche. However hard Plath may try to evade the memory of her father, it always keeps coming back to her. The poem is about the speaker Electra who goes to visit her father's grave after a period of twenty years. Plath alludes to the history of Electra in Greek mythology, and in doing it she fuses the character with the persona, who no doubt is Plath, for so much of autobiographical elements can be traced. Plath confesses that for so long she had assumed that her father's memory was dead; or that she thought her father "never existed" (*CP* 116). She confesses that she had always

thought she was not guilty for not having shed tears when he passed away, but that was not the case, for one day she woke up near her father's gravestone:

The day I woke, I woke on Churchyard Hill.

I found your name, I found your bones and all

Enlisted in a cramped necropolis (*CP* 117).

Plath confesses in her journal about the void her father left in her when he died. She "Felt cheated" and when she finally reached the grave she felt an unnatural urge: "My temptation to dig him up. To prove he existed and really was dead. How far gone would he be? No trees, no peace, his headstone jammed up against the body on the other side." (qtd. in *CP* 89). She recalls how her mother had told her comfortingly that he "died like any man" (*CP* 117), but she questions: "How shall I age into that state of mind?" admitting that she is "the ghost of an infamous suicide, / My own blue razor rusting in my throat" (*CP* 117). The disturbed speaker fondly comes to her father's grave after years of neglect to make sure of his presence or the idea that he really existed.

5.3.1.2. Pangs of Womanhood

Motherhood had a deep impact on Plath: both in a negative and positive way. She confesses the intimate details about her experiences with regard to pregnancy, miscarriage and the pangs of motherhood. Motherhood is what makes a woman naturally whole, but in most of Plath's works, it is seldom considered as a blessed state, especially with the fact that it affected her career as a writer. There is an estrangement and a lack of restriction in the way she confesses about the sensitiveness with regard to motherhood.

In 1959, Plath was told by her doctor that she had temporarily become infertile. This was a beginning of a period of depression in her life. She confessed her feelings about it in a number of her works. The poem "Barren Woman" alludes to the emptiness felt by an

‘incomplete’ woman. In 1961, Plath suffered a miscarriage during her second pregnancy and this was a devastating experience for her and she alludes a number of her poems to this event. “Parliament Hill Fields” presents a speaker who cries out for her lost baby knowing fully well that it is useless to mourn and rave. What she is really going through is oblivious to the people around her. In “Three Women: A Poem for Three Voices,” Plath records the same feeling experienced by the second voice. In envy, she looks around in envy as other women seemed to conceive. She feels the same emptiness and loneliness after losing her baby. In anger, she lashes out at the cold “men” who remain numb to her real feelings. With deep sadness, she likens her state to a desolate “winter” season. The poem “Childless Woman” records the feelings of any woman without the ability to procreate would feel. With this inability, the speaker is equal to being dead.

As if the pangs that partly come with being a woman were not enough, Plath underwent a bitter experience of having to deal with an unfaithful husband and the consequent separation from him leaving her a single mother with two infant babies to care for. For the chronically depressed Plath, this was a time of great difficulty. It partly became a curse for her and she hid none of it in her confessions. “Stopped Dead,” written at the peak of this dark episode in her life, deals with her difficulty in balancing motherhood and her mentally depressed state. She lays bare her annoyance with the constant demand of motherhood when she complains that there is always a “goddam” and “bloody baby” whose screams fill the “air” (WT 16). Similarly in “Lesbos,” the speaker who is a single mother complains about the arduous task of having to care for the two children. In addition to it, her medication makes her feel lethargic; and the cries of her children irritate her mood. Her husband is still alive but she is forced to care for the two infant children alone. She thus likens herself to a widow in “Widow.” And in “For a Fatherless Son,” she repeats the similar

idea by talking to the infant about his father who is more like a dead tree growing up beside him.

In utmost openness, Plath deals with the subject of giving birth and the pain that comes with it. The first voice in “Three Women” talks about how it feels to give birth to a baby: that she feels like she is dragged by two horses which tear her by pulling from two opposite directions. It is a “cruel” experience for her and it seems to milk out her very life.

5.3.1.3. Plath’s Confessions of her Dark World

Even in Plath’s early years, there was a kind of urgency in her to always take a leap further. There was a need to explore herself both spiritually and psychologically. Her early poetry was filled with a theme of searching for something meaningful and always on the edge of her unfathomable psyche; indulging in self-mutilation, torture, sin, hatred and nihilism. And later on, with her marriage on the rocks, miscarriage experience, infertility, motherhood, appendectomy and personal problems all formed a blinding terrible rage in her and ultimately formed a sum total of absolute negation

For the confessional Plath who had gone through so much, putting on different masks to show her mind, death through suicide became the ultimate choice. As she inched closer to death, with chronic despair her poetry became more ferocious and the last poems brought a tone of calm and submissiveness that one achieved through death. Poetry became her oxygen and her “insufferable agonies [were transformed] into perfect pieces of art” (Majumdar 111).

The dark nature of Plath could be discerned from her early poetry. “Medallion,” “The Disquieting Muses,” “Stones,” “All the Dead Dears,” etc all have the forceful and energetic stamp of Plath’s dark writing style sealed on them. There was an infinite rage in her: she wanted to be an arrow riding on the horse in “Ariel,” or riding the engine which killed the

track in “Getting There,” or journeying through the waters in “Crossing the water.” Her desolate life is no different than two cut papers rowing aimlessly in the vast and dark waters. Attributing blackness to everything around her, she likens herself to the doomed waters. She found herself tuning with the rough nature represented in poems like “Parliament Hill Fields,” “Wuthering Heights,” “Hardcastle Crag,” “Finisterre,” etc. There is urgency in her to get liberated from her tortuous self and this can be tracked in poems like “Facelift,” “In Palster” and “Stones.”

Experiences of motherhood and being a single mother in Plath’s last years found a way in her confessions. Poems written for her daughter and son are heart-melting. Though speckled with the harsh side of being a mother, they abound in her love for them and her knowledge that they deserved a better and happier childhood. In her last days, her babies were the only source of her fleeting happiness. Their smiles were like “found money” to her. Her impending knowledge of self-killing haunted her mind. And her poetry became tales of a saddened mother who knows that before long, her beloved children will be abandoned when she dies. To her daughter she addresses the poems “Magi,” “You’re,” “Candles” and “Morning Song,” and to her son, “Brasilia,” “Nick and the Candlestick,” “The Night Dances,” “For a Fatherless Son,” “Balloons,” “Thalidomide” and “Child.”

Plath talks about her mental illness in poems like “Lyonesse,” “Elm” and “Sheep in Fog.” The reader tags along with her in to recesses of her mind which are vacant, foggy and gloomy. In spite of the strong outward persona that she carried about, inwardly she was weak and she needed a wise human being to cry to and share her problems, but finding none, she undertook writing as a refuge. Plath is chronicled to have written to a close confidante, “I need a father. I need a mother. I need some older, wiser being to cry to. I talk to God, but the sky is empty” (qtd. in Majumdar 35). Far away from her mother and friends, she was left

alone in agony with the terrible ordeal in her personal life. This cast an obvious inevitable dark shadow in her poetry and she took a plunge into it with icy fierceness. In defiance, she created characters she wanted to be. The woman in “Purdah” is a dangerous lioness shrieking in the bath with cloak of holes.

Love was the only way out of her alienation, emptiness and entrapment but she does not find it. In the end it becomes an endless circle of imprisonment from which she fails to break free. Feeling hopeless, she starts to lose faith even in God. She reaches the point of total nihilism, for she fails to find refuge even in religion. In “Mystic” she questions what the remedy is once one has found God. In “Years,” she announces that eternity will bore her.

Thoughts of suicide began to occur repeatedly and they got reflected in her writings. “Lorelei,” “Suicide off Egg Rock,” “Full Fathom Five,” “I am Vertical,” “Widow,” “Lady Lazarus,” etc all deal with her issue of obsession with suicide. For Plath, it was a source of freedom. Her air of determination that she would succeed in her third attempt die in “Lady Lazarus,” is chilling. She would commit the act because it feels so real and like hell.

As the artist in her became perfected day by day, even the craftsmanship became a mirror to her disturbed psyche. There was no room left for logically-written narration. Words became short gasps, cut out perfectly to fit in to her feelings of blood-smeared hurt. Like a woman on the mission for vengeance, she is determined to get what she wanted. There is no romantic longing for love, affection or protection she so much needed. As she realized day by day of the reality of her empty and lonely life, she became restless with hate, rage and helplessness. She wanted no pity from the reader, but to only lay bare her emptiness and the reason why it is necessary to put in action what she had been writing about and to accomplish her goal.

Plath has finally come to an understanding of the fate that awaited her. Nothing mattered anymore and she seems to have found peace at last. Even her cut hand in “Cut” becomes a sort of a gateway into an interesting imagination. In “Contusion,” Plath shows that she is in perfect control and ready to meet her end as “The sea slides back, / The mirrors are sheeted” (*Ariel* 79). There are hints of Plath taking her own life but they come in detached tone; they are not frightening or painful anymore, but only mature calmness about it and fulfillment of some sort. She is now sure of her goal and she knows she is going to gain it. Meeting death in an artistic way becomes her obsession. In her earlier poems, perfection was about beauty in life and how one would go at lengths to achieve it, but now she has found the ultimate perfection:

The woman is perfected

Her dead

Body wears the smile of accomplishment (*Ariel* 80).

Plath, the woman is “perfected” to take the final plunge into the death she so badly needed. Pondering over death while sitting on the edge of her life, she makes the ultimate choice of taking her own life and she does it in perfection.

Charting her progress through stiff death terror and unresolving doubts [...] we come to the fiercely beautiful lyrics of her last poems where racing against wind in search of release and transcendence, she takes our breath away. All her decadence and ambivalence, negation and alienation seem to be necessary to instigate her in taking plunges in her bottomless psyche (Majumdar 163).

In finding writing as a powerful vehicle, ironically they became a creation for her ‘sad undoing’ at the end. The artist in her became an unconscious and irresistible downward pull towards the ultimate that is taking her own life. “From the bottom of the pool, fixed stars /

Govern a life” (*Ariel* 81) and she willingly resigned to her fate in utmost perfection. On February 11, 1963, Plath carefully sealed the rooms between the kitchen and the room where the children were sleeping and deliberately committed suicide by placing her head in the oven with the gas on.

5.3.1.4. *The Bell Jar*: A Confession

For Sylvia Plath, the girl with golden achievements, her early life seemed to be all about chasing her dreams with the thirst to excel. Referred to as an anxious over achiever, she was brilliantly successful in everything she attempted. From writing, painting, in studies, playing basketball or serving as a scout guide, winning prizes, scholarships and collecting honours effortlessly, Plath seemed to be a natural winner. She kept up with her successes so “beautifully tidied up that not tremor of the dark self was visible” (Majumdar 19) in her early years. But taking a deep insight into this goal-oriented drive towards success, there was something dark lurking. Despite all her achievements, she felt empty, dull and void when left alone. As she grew, she became a troubled self with doubts and problems. This smart, intelligent, fashionable and outgoing girl was a loner. Underneath the glossy achievements, there was a total void and meaninglessness lurking. There was a dual personality about her. Underneath the jubilant, extrovert girl, lay the “extremely tenuous pressure she was subjected to” (Majumdar 20). Daughter of a single parent, Plath had to cross hurdles to win scholarships and prizes to make up for the financial constraints. By doing it, she was helping her mother indirectly. She was trying to repay her hardworking mother with brilliant successes. But as she grew up, she started to build resentment against her mother while her grief for the absent-father and her failure to mourn his death continued to grow and they deeply had an impact on her personal life and automatically got reflected in her poetry: time failed to heal, instead it continued to sustain. As for scholarships she earned, she always felt

indebted and she secretly hated the fact of it. And in her autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar*, she “pilloried” her benefactors and even drags in her mother. They all failed to understand the weariness, pressure and tension Plath had to cope with as she tried to keep up with the bubbly personality she maintained on the outside. Her forte was writing poetry and in it she carefully brought in capabilities of using syntax, imagery, diction and fusing them with her troublesome personal life. Nobody knew her better than herself, and crossing the established pattern of the social taboos and traditional values, she released her inhibitions, experiences, turmoil, pressure of the society, and her true self in her confessional poems and the lone prose piece *The Bell Jar*.

The Bell Jar, published a few weeks before Plath’s suicide, is a semi-autobiographical document where she confesses about her outlook towards marriage, motherhood and issues related to being a woman in a patriarchal society. The novel abounds with images of babies, infants, fetuses, birthing mothers and hymeneal blood. The ‘I’ in the novel, that is Esther Greenwood, bears striking resemblance to Plath and through her, Plath lashes out against society and men. In her conversation with Doctor Nolan, Esther questions: “What does a woman see in a woman that she can’t see in a man?” and she gets the reply, “tenderness” (*BJ* 210). She fully agrees with her doctor about it. Esther has strong anti-marriage sentiments. And it stems from her critical outlook towards the male-dominated society. She imagines herself being a wife and mother, but she cannot fathom the idea of having to shoulder the lot reserved for women: the daily chores and the task of taking care of the family in a traditionally expected role placed for women. She confesses with sincerity about her dislike for it and it reaches to the point where her outlook towards marriage becomes a part of the mechanical existence. Directly, she confesses that “Children made [her] sick” (*BJ* 113).

In all earnestness, Esther makes her point clear with regard to why she does not like babies. What she can only imagine about babies is the “mingling of Pabulum and sour milk and salt-cod-stinky diapers” which made her feel “sorrowful and tender” (*BJ* 212). Amazed with herself in the way the idea of babies repel her, she questions herself why she is so “unmaternal,” and with sincerity she admits, “If I had to wait on a baby all day, I would go mad” (*BJ* 213).

Esther’s strong dislike for marriage results from her distrust of men. And its genesis is formed from a distasteful experience with her then boyfriend Buddy Willard. She had kept herself pure and she expected the same from Buddy but he lets her down when confesses that he had “gone to bed” with a waitress “a couple of times for the rest of the summer” (*BJ* 66). From then on she built a negative emotion towards men from which she never recovers. Esther detests the general expectation from society to keep themselves pure and rebelliously states: “I couldn’t stand the idea of women having to lead a single life and a man being able to have a double life, one pure and one not” (*BJ* 77). Buddy’s mother looks like a perfect epitome of being a woman and a mother, but Esther declines to be one, for she finds the role of Buddy’s mother too castrating. For Esther, marriage and motherhood is literally a mutilation of one’s own self: “when you were married and had children it was like being brainwashed, and afterwards you went about numb as a slave in some private, totalitarian state” (*BJ* 81). In a cynical way, Esther speaks out against the usual outlook towards marriage: “What a man wants is a mate and what a woman wants is infinite security [...] What a man is is an arrow into the future and what a woman is is the place the arrow shoots off from” (*BJ* 67). Then, very clearly she states her reason why she does not want to get married: “That’s one of the reasons I never wanted to get married. The last thing I wanted was infinite security and to be the place the arrow shoots off from” (*BJ* 79).

Similar to the theme of some of her poems which revolve around her leaning towards her father, *The Bell Jar* presents Esther maintaining a sour relationship with her mother. The assumption that Plath had issues with her mother is augmented by Aurelia Plath when she states about the “indifference” (*LH* 25) of her own daughter towards her which began soon after the death of Otto Plath. She confides to the reader that her mother always makes her feel she is wrongly blamed. In an irritated tone, Esther tags her mother as the worst and says, “She never scolded me, but kept begging me, with a sorrowful face , to tell her what she had done wrong” (*BJ* 195). On her birthday, when her mother brings roses for her, she dumps them into the bin; and on another occasion, when she is all set to go home after her treatment, Doctor Nolan warns her about the indifferent way people may look at her and immediately her mother’s face floats to her mind.

In *The Bell Jar*, Plath opens up about how it feels to be mentally ill; the stigma that is attached to it; and the gruesome and harrowing treatment a person has to undergo in order to overcome it. Written in the first person narrative, we get first-hand information of how it feels to be mentally ill and depressed. For the iconic young Esther, life spirals down because of the mental illness which suffocates her and her psyche. The bell jar metaphorically represents the psychological suffocation and turmoil of Esther, with the whole world callously looking in at her. Plath’s knowledge of electroconvulsive treatment which is meted out to the mentally ill persons remains engrained in her psyche. She herself had experienced the inhumane experience of electrocution and knows exactly how it feels to be burned alive all along the nerves. Her fear for it becomes obvious when she mentions about the Rosenbergs who were electrocuted. For Plath, it was better to die than to live and suffer with the pain and stigma of mental illness. Thus she considers the Rosenbergs as lucky and thrice she mentions that she is so happy the Rosenbergs are going to die.

Esther finds it difficult to click well with people at social gatherings. Even in the midst of people, she feels like “a hole in the ground [...] getting smaller and smaller and lonelier and lonelier” (*BJ* 15). She would cry uncontrollably for days for minor reasons. For the mentally ill Esther with straight A’s record in academics, it felt like a punch in her stomach when she failed to make it to a writing course at Harvard. As she neared her home while returning from New York, she slunk lower and lower. Medication fails to “work” for her. Mentally ill and depressed, Esther is soon moved to electroshock treatment by Doctor Gordon, a psychiatrist, when she reports that she had not slept for a fortnight, could neither write nor swallow. Unable to comprehend why she deserved the treatment, Esther sadly says: “I wondered what terrible thing it was that I had done” (*BJ* 138).

With honesty, Plath details about the symptoms of her mental illness:

I hadn’t washed [my clothes] in my three weeks at home. The sweaty cotton gave off a sour but friendly smell.

I hadn’t washed my hair for three weeks, either.

I hadn’t slept for seven nights.

[...]

The reason I hadn’t washed my clothes or my hair was because it seemed so silly (*BJ* 122-123).

The same picture of “Electra on Azalea Path” is repeated in *The Bell Jar* when the depressed Esther Greenwood comes to the same spot. Like Electra who remained somewhat oblivious to her father’s death and absence, Esther too admits:

[my father] had died in hospital, so the graveyard and even his death, had always seemed unreal to me.

I had a great yearning, lately, to pay my father back for all the years of neglect, and start tending his grave. I had always been my father's favourite, and it seemed fitting I should take on a mourning my mother had never bothered with (*BJ* 159).

On finding the grave of her father, Esther arranges the "rainy armful of azaleas" she had picked to adorn his grave. She starts crying uncontrollably sitting down in the sopping grass, and howled her loss into the "cold salt rain." She admits: "I couldn't understand why I was crying so hard. Then I remembered that I had never cried for my father's death" (*BJ* 161). The speaker once again stresses on the detached way her mother had behaved when her father died:

My mother hadn't cried either. She had just smiled and said what a merciful thing it was for him he had died, because if her had lived he would have been crippled and an invalid for life, and he couldn't have stood that, he would rather have died than had that happen (*BJ* 161).

Plath's repetition compulsion regarding the death of her father and her inability to accept it drives her further towards her attempt to unify with her dead father. "Her father's death was the dead-end of the tunnel from where there was no escape. And her husband's desertion was the world's end to her" (Majumdar 130). And thereon, her determination to become one with her father became her sole aim. Besides, in other poems like "The Colossus," Lady Lazarus, the bee poems, etc, the image of her father keeps coming in. This can be connected with Freud's theory of repetition compulsion in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* wherein he explains that repressed feelings become the essential part of a person and there is a compulsion to repeat it. Plath's practice of repetition becomes a mysterious force which overpowers her pleasure principle; she takes pleasure in repeating the most painful

experiences. Her compulsion to repeat it becomes instinctual, and that is the ‘death instinct’ or Thanatos.

For the too-ambitious and topnotch achiever Esther or Plath’s persona, with her already mental illness, her failure to make it to a writing course at Harvard proves to be the breaking point of her life. From that very day her suicidal depression becomes a downward spiral. She could not accept failure and the thought of suicide became her last resort, both in real-life and writings. Plath’s persona was no more a happy “Smith girl” but a young woman who seemed to have lost all the joys of her life. On 24th August, 1953, Plath tried to commit suicide by taking sleeping pills. Meticulously, she planned everything well: collecting the pills, writing a suicide note to burying herself under the porch of her house. In her unconscious state, she had groaned and her brother chanced to hear it. She was rushed to the hospital and thereon, psychological treatment became her lifelong friend. She received electrotherapy on more than one occasion and it left a terrible scar in her psyche. She discussed about her disgust for it in *The Bell Jar*, and it became one of the reasons of her suicidal tendencies. For the chronically depressed Esther, Plath alter ego, the thought of suicide is never far away. She is Plath’s mouthpiece and when she admits that the bell jar would descend again one fine day, we can without doubt connect it with the ultimate action of Plath taking her own life.

5.3.2. Confessional Modes of Anne Sexton

Anne Sexton is an intimately honest confessional poet with a record of a rare personality. Skimpily educated, it is an awe that she rose up to the status of a Professor in Boston University where she taught the art of writing poetry. In her lifetime, she enjoyed the glory brought to her by her poems. In the Preface to Sexton’s biography, Middlebrook records Plath as a rare performer:

Anne Sexton liked to arrive about ten minutes late for her own performances: let the crowd work up a little anticipation. She would saunter to the podium, light a cigarette, kick off her shoes, and in a throaty voice say, “I’m going to read a poem that tells you what kind of a poet I am, what kind of a woman I am, so if you don’t like it you can leave.” Then she would launch into her signature poem, “Her Kind”: “I have gone out, a possessed witch . . . A woman like that is misunderstood . . . I have been her kind.”

What kind of woman was she? Spirited, good-looking; tall and lean as a fashion model; a suburban housewife who called herself Ms. Dog; a daughter, a mother; a New England WASP; like Emily Dickinson, “half-crack’d.” And what kind of poet? Intimate; confessional; comic; insistently, disruptively female; a word wizard; a performance artist; a crowd pleaser. Those were some of the things you could learn during her first fifteen minutes onstage (Middlebrook xix).

Her lifelong friend, Maxine Kumin records about Sexton:

Her parents, she was convinced, had not wanted her to be born. Her sisters, she alleged, competed against and won out over her. Her teachers, unable to rouse the slumbering intelligence from its hiding place, treated her with impatience and anger. Anne’s counterphobic response to rejection and admonishment was always to defy, dare, press, contravene. Thus the frightened little girl became a flamboyant and provocative woman (xxii).

For this disturbed poet, it was “poetry that kept [her] alive” (xxiii).

When reading a confessional poem, one should not search too much for factual accuracy because it is not a versified autobiography, but in the case of Anne Sexton, she makes her confessions so brutally honest bearing striking resemblances to her actual life and experiences. “If the themes of insanity, suicide, marital discord and incest had been hidden from society, Sexton tackled these themes vigorously and forced people to acknowledge them” (Gupta 143). She wrote about her mental breakdowns, attempted suicides and her obsession with it, her abortion, menstruation, uterus, and explicitly sexual themes which are considered taboo subjects. Everything in her life became her sources for poetry. Actual people around her in real life, her aunt, parents, sisters, daughters, doctors and friends became her subjects: “Her own self, of course, was at the centre – she, the haunter of asylums, she was the woman’s body which menstruated, which had a uterus in it with potential babies in it who were allowed to be born sometimes but had to be ‘gone’ at others” (Padmanabhan 125). To her poetry, there was a mixed response: there was a combination of appreciation and outrage and disgust; people like her teacher John Holmes told her not to write about personal poems like the experiences of the mad house. But she candidly gave the opinion that poetry “should hurt a person into a new awareness” (Padmanabhan 126) awaken and communicate, just as she was awakened by writers like Snodgrass and Saul Bellow. “Sexton’s life ended in suicide that was the act of a lonely and despairing alcoholic, but it might have ended silently and much earlier if she had not, almost miraculously, found something else profoundly important to do with it” (Middlebrook xx-xxi), and that was writing poetry. Sexton began writing poetry when she was a suicidal woman, with two young children in tow and dealing with psychiatric treatment, thus linking her creative impulse with madness in her. It was this treatment and encouragement by her doctor that she began writing which she called her awakening. Writing poetry was her true calling and she had said, “When I’m writing, I know I’m doing the thing I was born to do” (qtd. in Middlebrook 3).

5.3.2.1. Electra Complex and Incest

Anne Sexton shares about the impact his father made in her life. Her father Ralph Churchill Harvey was a wool businessman who hardly had time for his family. In “And One for my Dame”, Sexton drops hints about the absent-father. As a businessman, he was often away and left her in loneliness and built in her an inferiority complex. When Sexton’s father died, her husband Alfred Muller Sexton took over the work of her father and thus got into the same shoes of a businessman who was often away from home, leaving Sexton alone. And these experiences made Sexton a victim of Electra complex:

“Before marriage, the narrator seems to struggle with the highways for her father; after marriage, she still appears to contend with the highways for her husband. To a considerable degree, the highway is a symbol of her love rival, and the narrator is seemingly destined to be separated from her father and husband” (Chung 95).

Centering on her father in “The Moss of His Skin,” Sexton tells the reader that her sisters will never know about how lying “by the moss of his skin,” they will never know about her closeness with her father, of how she holds to her “daddy like an old stone tree” all to herself (*CP* 27), and this knowledge gives her much happiness. To get her father’s attention all by herself, she has to get rid of the other women around him, including even his sisters. A similar idea is found in “All My Pretty Ones” when Sexton details the death of her father and his plan to remarry within a month’s time of his wife’s death. The news had shattered Sexton and she had cried on his fat shoulder, and how three days later he had died. She knew that she would never be free of her connection with her father: “Now I fold you down, my drunkard, my navigator, / my first lost keeper, to love or to look at later” (*CP* 51). With sexual implications, she ends the poem with a kiss on her father’s face:

Only in this hoarded span will love persevere.

Whether you are pretty or not, I outlive you,

bend down my strange face to yours and forgive you (*CP* 51).

In “Papa and Mama Dance,” Sexton fulfils her desire of unifying with her father by asking her imaginary brother to dance with the mother, thus gaining the complete attention of her father. Sexton throws strong overtones of her inability to forget her daddy in “Divorce, Thy Name is Woman.” In the fairytale-like poem “Briar Rose”, the relation between the father and daughter is much more than a bond normally shared between a father and daughter. Each night the king or father bit the hem of his daughter’s gown to keep her safe, keeping in check every male in the court. When she wakes up after a hundred years’ sleep with a kiss by the prince, she can only call out her father: “she woke up crying: Daddy! Daddy!” (*CP* 293), and this continues. The kiss of her prince fails to awaken the sexual consciousness in her, for she is so deeply conjoined literally with her father.

The theme of incest continues to flow in “Briar Rose.” Every time Briar Rose awoke from sleep, she would start calling for her daddy. All seemed well when she married the prince “except for the fear- / the fear of sleep” (*CP* 293), because her dad was the only person who came to flashed in her mind when she opens her eyes after being “kissed [...] on the mouth]” (294). The concluding portion of the poem exacts what Sexton has recounted in her therapeutical sessions:

Each night I am nailed into place

and I forget who I am.

Daddy?

That's another kind of prison.

It's not the prince at all,

but my father
 drunkenly bent over my bed,
 circling the abyss like a shark,
 my father thick upon me
 like some sleeping jellyfish.
 What voyage this, little girl?
 This coming out of prison?
 God help —
 this life after death? (*CP* 294-295)

In her therapy, Sexton had made an association between the name Elizabeth and “a little bitch” in a trance. Her father is recorded to have used those angry words to the little girl: “She also associated this phrase with a night, recalled several times in trance at widely spaced intervals, when her father came into her bedroom and fondled her sexually” (Middlebrook 56). In a conversation between Sexton and her doctor, she reveals intimate details about unpleasant happenings of incest:

A.S.: Father comes in drunk; wakes me up, saying ‘I just wanted to see where you were – your sister [Jane] is out letting someone feel her.’ And he says it again. Sits on a bed, takes a bottle out of his pocket and drinks. I asked where Mommy was: gone to bed and locked the door. He says, “Do you like me?”

Dr.: What side of the bed is he sitting on?

A.S.: [Points with finger.] He asks me if anybody ever felt me. I don’t know what that means. I lay down and cuddle with Nana. I know that this isn’t good, I shouldn’t.

Dr.: Shouldn’t what?

A.S.: He is holding me. He says to press up against him, sort of wriggles and asks if I like it. And it feels good.

Dr.: Does he say you are a good girl?

A.S.: He puts his hand on me and asks if I – if I ever do this and did I ever do it.

Dr.: What did you tell him?

A.S.: [Shakes head.] He kissed me on the lips and he started to leave and I held on and didn't want him to go. Then he came back, left his bottle on the table (56).

The question of Sexton's experience of "erotic fondling" as a memory or fantasy maybe puzzling, but the memories that arose while she was writing poetry "fit the clinical picture of a woman who has undergone sexual trauma" (Middlebrook 57). Sexton revives an incestuous theme once again in "The Death of the Fathers" by recounting how the dance with her father at her cousin's wedding went extreme. She recounts how her father her father danced like "two birds on fire" without saying even a word. Her innocent dance is perverted by a sexual image:

You danced with me never saying a word.

Instead the serpent spoke as you held me close.

The serpent, that mocker, woke up and pressed against me

like a great god and we bent together

like two lonely swans (*CP* 324).

5.3.2.2. Sexton's Confessions of her Dark World

In May 1960, Sexton discovered that she was pregnant. Fearing that it was not the baby of her husband, she went through an illegal abortion. It had haunted her and she

confesses it in her poems. In “The Abortion” her guilty conscience after deliberately getting rid of the baby does not allow her a peaceful mind. The opening line “*Somebody who should have been born is gone*” (CP 61) portray an intense feeling of pain. She changes her shoes and drove southward, and this is symbolical. She wants to carry on with her life as if nothing happened but it becomes impossible. And again when she makes a mention of Rumpelstiltskin, an imp in the German fairytale who asks for the lady’s child in exchange for the spun gold and for which the lady is willing to give anything but not the child, we immediately sense her feeling of love and loss for the lost baby. Sexton thought she was being logical when she committed the act but the fact was that she would always feel like a murderer.

Even while being married to Kayo Sexton was not faithful to him. She had affairs with many other men including her doctors and carried them out carelessly. Kayo was well aware of her infidelities. Referring to her conversations over the phone with Dr. Zweizung, Kayo admitted, “I would overhear her talking on the phone. She wasn’t particularly careful” (qtd. in Middlebrook 370). The next noted relationship was with a married family man Philip Legler with whom Sexton madly fell in love. When he left her, Sexton was miserable and around this time, her psychiatrist had taken three months leave. This was added by the affection of her eyesight by an “abscess surrounding [her] two teeth and reaching deep into the nasal cavity” (Middlebrook 377). In the midst of these happening, she wrote the poems which are mostly part of her 1969 collection *Love Poems*. The Ms. Dog, as she called herself, alluded in many of her poems these experiences. In “The Touch,” the speaker says that for months, her body and inhibitions lay dormant until “they all became history” when his hand “found” hers, and “Life rushed to my fingers like a blood clot” (CP 174). In “The Kiss,” Sexton once again talks about the way the lover turned her on by kissing her on the mouth which was “once [...] a boat, quite wooden / and with no business” and badly in “need of

some paint" (*CP* 174). And in "The Breast" she goes to the extent of saying that her body rightfully belonged to the lover even then:

It is not that I am cattle to be eaten.
It is not that I am some sort of street.
But your hands found me like an architect.

Jugful of milk! It was yours years ago
when I lived in the valley of my bones,
bones dumb in the swamp (*CP* 175).

When she had a week-long fling with Robert Clawson in Long Island, she told him that she lay awake writing "The Kiss," "The Touch," and "The Breast" for him moving him to tears. But what he did not know was that these "love poems [...] had been written in Weston a week or so earlier to another man" (Middlebrook 257-258). Similarly, her poems "The Interrogation of the Man of Many Hearts," "That Day," "In Celebration of My Uterus," "The Nude Swim," "Song for a Red Nightgown," "Loving the Killer," "For My Lover Returning to His Wife," etc. all allude to her affairs with men.

5.3.2.3. Celebration of Womanhood

Sexton deals with the subjects of the female body in utter friendliness in her poetry. In openness, Sexton discusses about the way a woman responds to the touch of a man in "The Kiss." Before the man touched her, her "body was useless" but now her body shoots off like "electric bolts. / Zing! A resurrection!" (*CP* 174). Her feelings were dormant but now he had "hoisted her" and "rigged her" and her nerves are now "turned on." A similar theme is carried out in "When Man Enters Woman":

When man
 enters woman,
 like the surf biting the shore,
 again and again,
 and the woman opens her mouth in pleasure
 and her teeth gleam
 like the alphabet (*CP* 428).

Sexton deals with the subject of the female body in “The Breast.” She continues with the theme in “In Celebration of My Uterus” where she embraces her very womanhood. Sexton confesses about the female sexuality in “The Ballad of the Lonely Masturbator.” In the poem, she mentions seven times “At night, alone, I marry the bed” (*CP* 198). She feels jealous of the other lovers who are embracing each other unlike the ‘lonely’ her:

The boys and girls are one tonight.
 They unbutton blouses. They unzip flies.
 They take off shoes. They turn off the light.
 The glimmering creatures are full of lies.
 They are eating each other. They are overfed.
 At night, alone, I marry the bed (*CP* 199).

Sexton talks about “That red disease” in “Menstruation at Forty” in all honesty. She mentions about how her two days have “gone in blood” and how this goes by “year after year.”

5.3.2.4. Motherhood and Divorce

For the sensitive Sexton who suffered from hysteria, motherhood proved to push her to the breaking point. She suffered from postpartum depression. Looking after them during their infancy and the physical and psychological demands brought her on the brink of

madness. Even the slightest provocation from the actions of the children pushed her to blinding rages where she would go to the extent of slapping and choking the children. In a typed letter to Dr. Orne, Sexton admitted, “my feeling for my children does not surpass my desire to be free of their demands upon my emotions” (Middlebrook 36-37). She herself feared she would kill the children and had confided of her fear to the family who were quick to help but failed to completely take care of her problem. The demands of motherhood brought so much of anxiety to her. Middlebrook recalls an incident of Sexton being pushed to the extremes of taking her own life by a slight provocation brought by the demands of motherhood: “Kayo had fallen asleep on the couch after supper, and singlehandedly she had finally got the children to bed. Feeling absurdly alone and desperate, she resolved to kill herself” (33). She had to undergo treatment and while she was away, her daughters were brought up by her mother-in-law Billie. Then, as she progressed as a writer, she became more distant from them however hard she tried to balance her work and fitting in to the role of a mother. In “Little Girl, My String Bean, My Lovely Woman,” the speaker looks at her daughter Linda in awe feeling so proud as she grows in beauty and grace. To Sexton, “women are born twice” and as she witnessed Linda being reborn into a woman, she pensively says, “If I could have watched you grow/ as a magical mother might.” In “The Double Image” Sexton relives the fact that she had been away from her daughters for three years. She would be away from them for so long that in her hysteria she would fear of losing them. In the poem she admits:

And I remember

mostly the three autumns you did not live here.

They said I'd never see you back again (*CP* 35).

Referring to her younger daughter Joyce, Sexton sadly writes:

why did I let you grow
 in another place. You did not know my voice
 when I came back to call (*CP* 36).

In agony, she cries out about how she came from the asylum, a “graduate of the mental cases,” and missed her childhood:

I missed your babyhood,
 tried a second suicide,
 tried the sealed hotel a second year (*CP* 39).

It breaks her heart to be fully aware that instead of her taking care of them, the young children were the one being always careful not to bring more havoc in the life of their disturbed mother:

And this was my worst guilt; you could not cure
 Nor soothe it. I made you to find me (*CP* 42).

Sexton thought she was doing the right thing when she sought divorce from Kayo, but it was a tragic move. And the effects of it are recorded at large in *The Divorce Papers*. The fact remains that Kayo was the only person in Anne Sexton’s world to take care of and understand her demons. When she announced of her decision to get a divorce from him, he had told her, “You are crazy. You don’t know what you’re doing” (qtd. in Middlebrook 371), and it proved right indeed. After the divorce, at the initial stage she was surrounded by her friends, fans, and people who willingly kept her company. But as months rolled on they became bored and fed up of her; her personality disorder and being too needy pushed them away. Even her children kept her at a distance and in the first place they were unhappy with their mother at the way she was treating their father. With Joy already away to a boarding school, Sexton was left alone. In tearful states she would call up her daughter Linda begging

her to come home for “family time” to which she refused. To this Linda recalls as a hard but necessary decision. Middlebrook quotes Linda, “I didn’t want to support the *sickness* anymore. I was angry with her for all the years of hysteria” (379). The effects of the divorce took a huge toll on her:

By the time of her divorce hearing on 5 November, she wished she had never undertaken the separation: broken by losses, she recognized how the routines of family life had upheld a sense of security that she had confused with inward strength (Middlebrook 379).

Sexton records about the fateful day in “The Break Away”:

There sit two deaths on November 5th, 1973.
 Let one be forgotten –
 Bury it! Wall it up!
 But let me not forget the man
 of my child-like flowers
 though he sinks into the fog of Lake Superior,
 he remains (*CP* 525).

Sexton knew that the divorce was literally killing them both. As she went ahead with the divorce in the court she felt like she was “drowning a little” but kept on “swimming” “among the pillows and stones of the breakwater” (*CP* 524). In the poem “Divorce,” she admits that she is the one who “killed” their lives and “axed off each head.” She fails to shrug off the memories:

I have killed all the good things,
 But they are too stubborn for me.

They hang on.

The little words of companionship

have crawled into their graves (*CP* 512-513).

She wonders how the deep love that she had for him could have waned. She thinks back about how she loved him “then” but now “wherever [she] look they are on fire” (*CP* 513). As she lay alone, she admits the love she still anchors for him:

and my love stays bitterly glowing,

spasms of it will not sleep,

and I am helpless and thirsty and need shade

but there is no one to cover me -

not even God (*CP* 513).

In “Where It Was At Back Then,” she writes:

Husband,

last night I dreamt

they cut off your hands and feet.

Husband,

you whispered to me,

Now we are both incomplete (*CP* 509).

In “The Wedlock,” Sexton sadly writes how now she is utterly left alone to deal with her nightmares: “When I shout *help* in my dream / you do not fold me in like a slipper its foot” (*CP* 510). She misses him and in “Walking Alone” admits:

I lust for your smile,

spread open like an old flower,

and your eyes, blue moons,

and your chin, even Nazi, ever stubborn,
 and what can I do with this memory? (*CP* 514)

In her depressed state, she longs for him but wonders if they were ever meant to be together
 and questions the validity of the presence of God in their married life:

And I don't know,
 don't know,
 if we belong together or apart,
 except that my soul lingers over the skin of you
 and I wonder if I'm ruining all we had,
 and had not,
 by making this break,
 this torn wedding ring,
 this wrenched life
 this God who is only half a God,
 having separated the resurrection
 from the glory,
 having ripped the cross off Jesus
 and left only the nails (*CP* 515).

She describes herself as the "love killer" in "Killing the Love." She has murdered the music
 that they both thought so special of by pushing the "knives" into the marriage that "created
 two into one." Now her life seems to be over and she wonders:

When a life is over,
 the one you were living for,
 where do you go? (*CP* 530)

Deeply regretting the divorce, she admits the truth in “The Inventory of Goodbye”:

Propaganda time is over.
 I sit here on the spike of truth.
 No one to hate except the slim fish of memory
 that slides in and out of my brain (*CP* 532).

In loneliness, she ponders over how she had let the love slip through her fingers in “The Lost Lie.” Once upon a time, “love begot love” but at present life was different:

But today I roam the dead house,
 a frozen kitchen, a bedroom
 like a gas chamber.
 The bed itself is an operating table
 where my dreams slice me into pieces (*CP* 533).

5.3.2.5. Madness and Suicide

No other confessional poet comes close to Anne Sexton when connected with the issue of madness. Right from her childhood, there was something strange about Sexton. Rightfully she refers to the mental asylums as her summer hotel to which she pays frequent visits. In all earnestness, Sexton gives sane explanation to her own madness in the following lines:

“I was trying my damndest to lead a conventional life, for that is how I was brought up, and it was what my husband wanted of me. But one can’t build white little picket fences to keep nightmares out. The surface cracked when I

was about twenty-eight. I had a psychotic break and tried to kill myself” (qtd. in Middlebrook 35).

In the fall of 1958, Sexton had befriended John Holmes attending his poetry course. While helping her in coming up with the title of her poetry collection which she was revising to publish, he had advised her sending her a commentary. He expressed his view regarding the taboo subjects she deals with, especially the times which she dwelled in the mental hospital saying:

It bothers me that you use poetry this way. It’s all a release for you, but what is it for anyone else except a spectacle of someone experiencing release? [...] Don’t publish it in a book. You’ll certainly outgrow it, and become another person, then this record will haunt and hurt you. It will even haunt and hurt your children, years from now (Middlebrook 98).

To this, Sexton wrote a befitting poem “For John, Who Begs Me Not to Enquire Further”, answering and giving reasons as to why the release was important to her. It was also a defense for the whole set of the genre of her poetry. Referring to her poetry, the poem runs:

Not that it was beautiful,
but that, in the end, there was
a certain sense of order there;
something worth learning
in that narrow diary of my mind,
in the commonplaces of the asylum
where the cracked mirror
or my own selfish death

outstared me (*CP* 34).

And Sexton continued to deal with the subject of mental illness, treatment for it and the places associated with it in many of her poems like “Unknown Girl in the Maternity Ward”, “Her Kind,” “The Double Image,” “The Division of Parts,” “Noon Walk on the Asylum Lawn,” etc.

It was not a surprise when Anne Sexton committed suicide. It was with a suicide attempt that she was first advised to put her emotions and feelings into writing; to use it as a therapy. Thus, from the first collection of poetry till the end, the theme of suicide and her obsession with death haunted it. The way she flirted with death throughout her life got reflected in her poetry and the literary world was not blind to it. In all honesty, she introduces herself in “Her Kind”; of the kind of person she is. She says that a woman like her is “not ashamed to die” (*CP* 16). And boldly, she goes on with the flow in many of her poems. For her, it is an “unnameable lust” and this death “will be the end of fear / and the fear of dying” (*CP* 587). At length she confesses about her addiction to the idea “Wanting to Die,” “Sylvia’s Death,” “The Truth the Dead Know,” “The Addict,” “Suicide Note,” etc. With the problems coming from every angle in Sexton’s life, the fact that suicidal attempts were intractably linked to her life became more prominent as she neared her end. The worst of all these problems was “her gift [of writing poetry] deserting her” (Middlebrook 379). She was not writing poetry anymore but writing “anguished appeals” for attention. This was mostly triggered by her drinking habit which was becoming lethal to her art. In loneliness, she was drinking morning, noon and night. “Alcohol helped generate the curves of feeling on which her poetry lifted its wings, but it dropped her too, into depression, remorse, sleeplessness, paranoia” (Middlebrook 380) and quarrelling, throwing tantrums and making boozy phone calls became her daily routine, forcing even her doctors to quit. The last nine months of Sexton’s life seemed like a “time-lapse photograph of a house collapsing in an earthquake”

(Middlebrook 381). But however bad and ill Sexton felt, she took her teaching job at Boston University seriously. Eric Edwards, her student recalls a conversation with Sexton about suicide, a subject she was giving much thought to even in sane situations: “She told me that the way to kill yourself would be in the garage with the car engine running. [...] I asked, ‘Why is that the best way?’ And she said, ‘It’s painless, it’s quick, it’s sure’” (qtd. in Middlebrook 387). When reading her poems to the public or performing, she would jokingly say that she is reading from her posthumous works. As months wore on, she sank deeper into her addictions and making multiple suicide attempts by taking sleeping pills. She knew she was hurting the people around her, as she admits that “Worse than dying in many ways is feeling that one is hurting people (395).

On 3rd October 1974, the day before she committed suicide she met Barbara Schwartz. Schwartz recalls that Sexton’s leaving of her cigarettes and lighter tugged behind the bowl daisies in her office aroused apprehension in her, for “Anne Sexton without cigarettes was unthinkable” (Middlebrook 396). As for Kumin, their last meeting was a sad one. Kumin, Sexton’s real close friend was going to be away for long with her husband and it was a blow to Sexton’s fragile state. Sadly, Kumin recalls, “She was extremely generous and giving, loving. And when she was ready [to kill herself], she kept it a dark secret” (qtd. in Middlebrook 396). As Sexton drove away, she “called something, but Kumin didn’t quite catch it. It was a most considerate farewell” (396). As Sexton drove home, her mind was already made up. Kumin’s premonition regarding Sexton’s suicide: “I feel certain she would have succeeded in committing suicide” (xxiv), was to come true. She wrote no notes or talked to no one. She only called up her date for the evening to change the hour of their meeting. She was of the view that suicide was the best route and she would better “go now/ without old age or disease/ wildly or accurately” (*CP* 158). On 4th October 1974, she ended her life

deliberately and it was not a surprise when she asphyxiated herself to death, bringing the created fatal actions of her poetry to life:

She stripped her fingers of rings, dropping them into her big purse, and from the closet she took her mother's old fur coat. Though it was a sunny afternoon a chill was in the air [...] Fresh glass of vodka in hand, Sexton let herself into the garage and closed the doors behind her. She climbed into the driver's seat of her old red Cougar [...] She turned on the ignition and turned on the radio (Middlebrook 395).

The way Sexton ritualistically ended her life falls in tune with her unique personality. For a writer whose suicide attempts lost count; whose addiction to sleeping pills was known to everyone close to her; and whose heedless ways were characteristic of her own personality, the fatal ending awaiting her did not come as a surprise. Sexton was not concerned about "why" (*CP* 142) she should not commit the act, but her concern was how she should creatively meet death in a quick and painless manner. She put her confessions into action when she tragically put an end to her own life.

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CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This present study *The Dark Domain of Twentieth Century Litterateurs' Suicides: A Study of the Select Works of Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton* set out with the formation of the following hypotheses:

1. To study the events that led to their suicide.
2. To bring out the autobiographical elements in their works.
3. To lay bare the internal and external conflicts in the lives of these writers which find a reflection in their works.
4. To evaluate what types of craftsmanship are employed in their works.
5. To delve out the prominent common themes found in the works of these writers.
6. To make a connection between suicide and artistic skills; and the downward pull of the creative unconscious towards suicide.

And the research has formed ample conclusions to them.

In the biographical study of Woolf, Hemingway, Plath and Sexton, so much have been found with regard to the events that led to their suicides. Virginia Woolf was plagued by mental illness, depression and madness throughout her life. These problems were added by the chain deaths of her close ones within a decade, and not forgetting the sexual abuse from

her half-brothers. For a person like Woolf who had attempted suicides when madness enveloped her, it was not surprising that she took her own life for fear that the horrendous madness was returning. Woolf has clearly mentioned in her suicide note that taking her own life was the best way to avoid the terrible disease which was enveloping her once again and she had no strength left to fight it any longer. Ernest Hemingway lived a life so adventurous and a fully-lived life as a writer, enjoying the accolades that brought him fame and wealth during his lifetime. But the later and final years of his life placed him in difficulties with regard to his health which were a result of both internal and external factors. He suffered from hypertension, diabetes, depression and paranoia. And the 1954 fatal accidents which he suffered from the two separate plane crashes had severe effect on him. This was added by a bushfire accident which rendered him second degree burns on his body. All these problems contributed to his psychological problems pushing him to a series of electroshock treatments which directly became the reason for his memory loss. For a writer who depends on memory as a source, its loss was frustrating. It led to further depression and suicidal tendencies and attempts became constant and finally he took his own life. Sylvia Plath, an all-time achiever from early life, flirted with death, suicidal tendencies and attempts. This history took shape in the form of her lone novel *The Bell Jar*. The novel bore such close resemblance to her life that she published it under the name "Victoria Lucas" some weeks before her suicide. Adversely affected by the death of her father, Plath was never able to reconcile with it. With her already fragile mental state, the betrayal of her husband and the difficulties that came with balancing her work and her children pushed her towards her final fatal action. Anne Sexton is remembered for her prominence in the genre of confessional poetry in American literature but it comes attached with her openness about her obsession with death and countless suicidal tendencies. Sexton never hid the fact that she wanted to end her life. Suffering from depression, Sexton lost control in her intake of sleeping pills and her constant

flirtation with death landed her in mental asylums and problems in her personal relationships with close ones in her life. Faced with personal crisis and depression; falling out with her therapists; sickness and loneliness, nothing seemed to be going right in her life and Sexton finally succeeded in taking her own life like the way she had always wanted to.

All the four authors have showered their autobiographical details in their works. *The Voyage Out*, *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs Dalloway*, *to the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* by Woolf are highly autobiographical. She had dealt at large with her personal experiences which she deeply felt about. Similarly, Hemingway too has detailed his personal history and experiences in his fictional works. Notable works include *The Sun Also Rises*, *A Farewell to Arms*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *The Garden of Eden*, *Islands in the Stream* and multiple short stories. And the two confessional poets Plath and Sexton have detailed their personal lives, experiences and other intimate subjects which they faced in their works. Plath's *The Bell Jar* is an autobiographical novel and her poetry reflects so much of her autobiographical details. Sexton's poetry is largely autobiographical, for she took to writing as a therapy and put all her intimate feelings and experiences into words.

All the four authors faced personal strifes which came in different bitter packages and they have written about them. They were all inflicted by mental illness, depression and were obsessed with death and had suicidal tendencies, but these problems were added to by other external factors. For Woolf, the chain deaths, sexual interference and war greatly affected her. Hemingway's near-death experiences added to his already declining health and the aftermath of war had direct impact on his mental health. Plath's experience of betrayal, pangs of single parenthood and loneliness affected her. Sexton had many external issues: she never got over the death of Nana; the bitter aftermath of divorce from Mayo; having to deal with loneliness and sicknesses while depression plagued her.

When it comes to the usage of the stream of consciousness technique, Woolf is a gigantic figure. She has tactfully used the technique to write what she felt was important. She explored the human psyche successfully through her characters. She wrote about what people never speak about and by doing it, she has partially thrown open to the readers her own psyche. Hemingway has contributed a lot in the field of narrative techniques to be employed in writing. His iceberg theory or theory of omission, open-endedness, short declarative sentences and the usage of the concepts of *nada*, lost generation and code hero enrich his writings. Plath and Sexton fully explored the use of confessionalism in their writings and used it as a vehicle for expressing their deepest scars, experiences, fears, obsessions and what they strongly felt about. For them, it was a therapy and through it they found a release of all their personal anguishes, despair and feelings.

In analyzing the themes of the four selected writers, so much of similarities in their usage of dark themes were delved out. So much of autobiographical elements were discerned in their works. The common prominent dark themes found are: death, suicide, suicidal tendencies, war, mental illness, loneliness, depression, isolation and personal problems and affairs.

It is often held that among others, Woolf, Hemingway, Plath and Sexton were all victimized by their own creative and artistic process. Hemingway's heroes are macho men and many of them are not afraid of death and the author himself became like some of his creations. Writing was his life, and when this was obstructed by his failing mental health, added by the disintegration of his memory after electrocution and other despairing factors, he chose death as an ultimate way out. Like the stoics, he chose death as the reasonable way out. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, in her autobiography, wrote, "When all usefulness is over, when one is assured of imminent death, it is the simplest of human rights to choose a quick and easy death in place of a slow and horrible one" ("The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman"),

and this thought can aptly be connected with the action of Hemingway. Woolf's experiences with mental illness, bouts of depression, mental asylums and electrocution scarred her and the fear of the same experiences drove her towards her suicide. She steps into the shoes of Septimus, for whom she had felt glad when he killed himself. Her characters welcome death as something natural and in addition to this, Woolf herself felt that death was better than to live with madness, and she directly mentioned about it in her suicide note. She saw death as the only source of freedom from mental illness. In analyzing the works of Plath, it can be said that she put into action what she had been writing about in her poetry. As she inched closer to her final day, her poetry reflects that she cared not for attention, affection or love anymore, but only showed signs of accomplishment and she seemed to have found peace at last. Her last documented poem "Edge," gives a picture of a "perfected" (*Ariel* 80) woman with her two children and she wears a smile of accomplishment. Everything is set in order. She has toiled and felt crushed; she is used to this sort of thing and so even the moon should not feel sad about her as it looks down from the somber night. Through her words or poetry, her emotions found an escape, but Plath the writer failed to. "From the bottom of the pool, fixed stars/ Govern a life" (*Ariel* 81); her fatal stars failed her and she helplessly resigned to her fate. Sexton boldly puts forth in her poetry that a lunatic woman like her is not ashamed to die. Suicidal people are like the carpenters who do not ask "why build" but instead ask "which tools" (*CP* 142) and indeed Sexton successfully took her own life in an artistic way. To her student in Boston University, Sexton had said that the easiest way to kill oneself would be in the garage with the car engine running and when asked why, Sexton replied that it was quick, painless and sure.

All the four authors can be connected to Shneidman's theory of 'psychache' which refers to psychological pain; that without psychache there is no suicide. All the negative emotions suffered by them served as a foundation of their self-destructive behavior. Woolf's

psychological pain came from the bouts of madness which she suffered. Woolf is seen in the form of her characters Rachel, Rhoda and Septimus. They all suffer from great psychological pain and ironically, they all face death in the novels. Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* is known for its idea of endurance and the beauty that lies in never giving up. And one may question why ironically, the creator of Santiago shot himself to death. Taking into account Hemingway's problems which plagued him in the last decades of his life, definitely, his psychological pain was too much for him to bear. A number of Plath's poetry shows the psychological pain of the speaker. Her heavy and unstable mind becomes obvious to the reader through her usage of haunting words and dark imagery. She breaks up in "pieces that fly about like clubs" (*Ariel* 17) and she admits how terrified she is about the "dark thing" (18) that sleeps in her. The pain that she feels is unbearable for her and she can feel suicidal feelings hammering on her. The extent of her identification with the state of nature reaches its peak in poetry like "Wuthering Heights" where she explains the state of her psyche; that if she pays closer attention to the heath around her, the roots would surely invite her bones among them. Sexton's battle and her dealings with psychological pain are reflected in her honest writings. Apart from the dark themes which she deals with, the theme of incest and its documentation in her biography is a direct contribution to her psychological pain. They mercilessly tormented her psyche and served too as an inspiration and foundation for her poetry. The topics that she chose for her poetry were more like debuts considering the period in which she lived but it was only through them she was able to express her deep emotions which haunted her psyche. No wonder, Sexton asked her readers to talk to her poems if they really wanted to understand her.

Freud's idea of repressed emotions and melancholia, wherein a person harbors ambivalent feelings towards the lost object, maybe applied to Woolf, Plath and Sexton. When Woolf lost her mother at the age of thirteen, she failed to undergo a normal mourning period.

She herself admits how the after-effects of the death of her mother afflicted her gravely. Her mother's death had been a latent sorrow not fully felt and the result was that she reeled under it throughout her life. In *Mrs Dalloway*, Septimus suffers from the after-effects of war and most importantly he harbors guilt over the death of his dear friend Evans. When Evans was killed, "Septimus, far from showing any emotion or recognising that here was the end of a friendship, congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonable" (MD 95-96). But those repressed emotions affected him after he became shell-shocked. In his state of madness, he sees Evans approaching him from among the parted branches. He feels terrified and begs him, "For God's sake don't come!" (78). Like Woolf, Plath suffered from melancholia brought about by the death of her father. The scene where Esther Greenwood mourns at the grave of her father in *The Bell Jar* depicts Plath herself mourning for the loss of her beloved father. As she howls and cries for her father in the cold salt rain, she admits how she had coldly accepted his death, and failed to properly mourn. *Letters Home* records how Plath, a young eight year old girl, had repressed her emotions when her father died. The fact that even her mother never really bothered to properly mourn or visit his graveyard pains her. In the later years and even as a grown up woman, she had never been able to accept his death. This idea recurs in her famous poems "Daddy" and "Electra on Azalea Path." It can be agreed that Plath suffered from Electra complex taking into account her inability to move away from the memories of her father. She feels that she needs to kill her father repeatedly "Daddy" in order to make him a thing of the past, but fails. Her obsession with death stems from her yearning to join her father while getting rid of her problems at the same time. In analyzing Sexton's works, some of her poems deeply have connection with the theory of Electra complex. Notable ones are "Briar Rose," "Papa and Mama Dance" and "The Death of the Fathers."

Unlike Woolf and Plath who had problems letting go of their parent, Sexton suffered from the guilt of not having loved and cared for Nana. It was from Nana that she received unconditional love and not her parents. Sexton had a fall-out with her and this was followed by Nana's mental illness from which she never recovered. Sexton often blamed herself for Nana's mental illness and her subsequent death before Sexton could repay her back was the greatest of the guilt Sexton was to harbor throughout her life.

Shneidman holds a theory that people with high standards and expectations become prone to suicide when their goal is frustrated. Esther Greenwood in *The Bell Jar* fits into this theory. Like Plath, Esther is a brilliant and intelligent girl. Always an achiever and making a record of straight A's, her goal of making it to a writing course in Harvard becomes suddenly frustrated by the cold news broken by her mother that she had failed to make it. From then on, she "slunk" lower and lower and made a point to herself that "it was very important not to be recognized" (*BJ* 110). Emile Durkheim in his book *Suicide* mentions about the four kinds of suicide from a sociological point of view. One among them is egoistic suicide which occurs when an individual is left to one's own resources and fails to properly integrate into society. This happens to Esther and she broadly paves her way to melancholy and depression. She prefers to be left alone and the idea of the person she is becoming makes her feel more sad and lonely. Her inferiority complex, despite her achievements and good looks, makes her feel difficult to fit in. She always feels inadequate, a nobody and admits to feeling like a small black dot on a wide wall around her.

Masaryk's view in *Suicide and the Meaning of Civilization* that the low degree of religiosity is the real cause of suicide maybe applied to some extent on Hemingway, Woolf and Plath, for there is extreme irreligiosity in some of their works. In Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, the war-stricken characters live in a world without morality. Frederic Henry understands religion but fails to abide by it, while Catherine says that she has no

religion except Henry. The characters in *The Sun Also Rises* live in a world of utter religious sterility. There is no morality attached to many of them and this gives way to their disillusioned lives. And “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” presents a spiritually empty character who finds no meaning in his life and thus has no reason to continue living. Woolf, an important figure of the Bloomsbury group was also in defiance against God: “As befits a Modernist microcosm, Bloomsbury generally derided religion, especially Christianity” (Streufert 23). She deplored the hypocrisy of the Church and reporting to her sister about her experience at a sanatorium in Twickenham, she expressed how she “abhorred the phoney religious atmosphere- the staff ‘always wondering what God is up to’” (Gordon 52). In *Mrs Dalloway*, the stream of consciousness of Clarissa runs, “not for a moment did she believe in God” (MD 36); Clarissa like her creator Woolf, does not believe in God. In *The Voyage Out*, Rachel is laughed at when she says that she believes in a “personal God” (TVO 148). Later, Rachel is seen rejecting the Christian religion in which she had earlier believed in. In the midst of the congregation, she becomes acutely uncomfortable, “All around her were people pretending to feel what they did not feel” (242) and instantly “rejected all that she had implicitly believed” (243). Coming to Plath, her disillusionment with religion is seen vastly in many of her poems. In “Brasilia” she refers to God as a person who eats “people like rays” (WT 5) and asks Him to spare her children. Plath’s conflict between “maternal love and Christianity” (Kendall 124) is most startlingly portrayed in the poem “Mary’s song.” In “Thalidomide,” Plath substitutes God for Satan; she threatens god in ‘Lady Lazarus’; presents an indifferent God in “Finisterre” and in “Years” she states that eternity “bores” her and she “never wanted it” (Ariel 68). In *The Bell Jar*, Plath puts her thoughts to the following words:

I knew that Catholics thought killing yourself was an awful sin. But perhaps, if this was so, they might have a good way to persuade me out of it.

Of course, I didn't believe in life after death or the virgin birth or the Inquisition or the infallibility of that little monkey-faced Pope or anything (*BJ* 158).

Plath questions the greatness of God by asking in "Mystic": "Once one has seen God, what is the remedy?" (*WT* 19), and questions His validity in a letter to Richard Sassoon saying, "I talk to God, but the sky is empty" (Kukil n. pag.).

Freud is of the view that like the life instinct, the desire for death is also something very strong and this is strikingly reflected in the works of all the four authors. Each of the four authors have their own valid reasons for taking their own lives but the presence of the death instinct found in their works is striking. Woolf displays her idea of the imminence of death in *The Voyage Out*. Happiness is brought to a sudden halt in the novel by the death of Rachel. Besides, Hewet too has an intermittent fear of death. But Woolf, while giving her view about the pointlessness and imminence of death, shows her obsession with death. And this continues in *The Waves* and *Jacob's Room* wherein she uses the death of her brother Thoby as the subject for the two respective novels. The end of *The Waves* closes with Woolf challenging death: "Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death!" (*SWW* 775), but it hints at her obsession to this mighty inevitable and death. The fact that the death instinct is strongly present in Woolf is brought out through the caricature of Septimus in *Mrs Dalloway*. This madman's view towards death as a way out is a summation of Woolf's own outlook towards it. In a similar fashion, Hemingway too shows the same outlook through his characters. The desire for death is seen in characters like Kashkin and El Sordo in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Robert too stoically waits for his obvious death in the hands of his enemies. His preference for death over capture shows his creator's outlook towards death and his sane consciousness about it. In addition to this, in *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway throws vast images of death in war's landscape. In *Islands in the Stream*, Roger

holds an opinion that sometimes suicide can be seen as a logical way out, and through Lil, instances of how to commit suicide are hinted at length. Hemingway's obsession with death extends far into his short stories like "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," "Indian Camp," "The Capital of the World," etc. The presence of the death instinct in Plath's poetry is strong. Through the use of diverse imageries as well as direct references, she deals with the subject of death and hints at her obsession to it. Notable poems include "Berck-Plage," "Tulips," "Elm," "Daddy," "Contusion," "Lady Lazarus," "A Life," etc. Plath is conscious of the brevity of life and of the cycle of life and death and she depicts it in her notable poems like "The Manor Garden," "Mussel Hunter at Rock Harbor," "Totem," etc. In "Last Words," Plath unveils her mind of how she wants her dead body to be treated. Her thirst for death is reflected in poems like "Kindness," "Sheep in Fog," "A Birthday Present," etc. And her last documented poem "Edge" speaks volumes of her satisfaction over her preparedness for death. In "Lady Lazarus," her yearning for death is told in a brutal manner and she adds that the way one dies depicts the kind of an artist the person is. And she considers herself as a great artist in that sphere:

Dying

Is an art, like everything else.

I do it exceptionally well (*Ariel* 9).

The death instinct and the strong drive of it in Plath reaches its climax in her autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar*. Plath directly details her outlook towards death and suicide and as to why it is impossible for a suicidally depressed person like Esther Greenwood to completely shed the death instinct in her. Besides, the theory of repetition compulsion can aptly be connected with Plath. Her inability to accept the death of her father drives her towards her attempts to unify with her father through death. She takes pleasure in repeating her most painful experience and that is the loss of her father, and in due course of time, it becomes instinctual.

This can be connected with Sexton in the way she relives her aunt Nana in her poetry. From the discourse on Sexton's poetry, it is evident that Sexton saw death as a way of reuniting with Nana, the only person who gave her unconditional love in her lifetime. Besides, she repeats the subject of her father, his death and the incestuous relationship with him. For Sexton, dealing with these subjects were her way of trying to shed off and repaying for the guilt she harbored, but ironically, the yearning for it pushed her towards another extreme and that was her thirst for death. Poems which deal with these subjects include "Papa and Mama Dance," "Divorce, Thy Name is Woman," "The Moss of His Skin," "The Double Image," "And One for my Dame," etc. Sexton flirted with death and suicide throughout her life and she hides no fact of her addiction to the subject. Her addiction to the subject of death and her yearning for it is seen in her great poems "Sylvia's Death," "Wanting to Die," "Suicide Note," "For Mr. Death Who Stands With His Door Open," "The Rowing Endedth," "The Addict," "The Death King," etc.

To link mental illness and suicide, all the four authors may be taken as perfect examples. From their biographical studies, it is clearly discerned that mental illness played a pivotal role in each of their tragic endings. Their writings depict a number of mentally ill and depressed characters. To mention, Woolf's characters Rachel, Rhoda, Septimus, Lucrezia, etc; Hemingway's characters Maria, the old man in "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," Catherine Bourne, Harry, etc; Plath's Esther Greenwood and a number of poems like "A Birthday Present," "Insomniac," "Lyonnesse," "Sheep in Fog," "Elm," "Crossing the Water," etc; and Sexton's poetry include "You, Doctor Martin," "Her Kind," "The Addict," "Music Swims Back to Me," "Noon Walk on the Asylum Lawn," "For John Who Begs Me Not to Enquire Further," "Flee on Your Donkey," "For the Year of the Insane," etc.

Taking into account the biographical details of Woolf, Hemingway, Plath and Sexton, the idea that there is a genetic link to depression and suicide can be agreed to. Many studies

through surveys have shown that a person who has lost his nearest relative or family member to suicide are likely to consider the act when things get complex. The study and the belief that people who have committed suicide have attempted it prove to be true in the case of all the four authors. Negative life events, anguish, suicidal thoughts, hopelessness, perfectionist attitudes and other multitudinous factors contributed to their problems, but the presence of the genetic disposition cannot be ruled out. “Genetics is not destiny [...] The odds are still very much against you having this happening to another relative” (qtd. in Landou “Suicidal Behaviour May Run in Families”) is indeed applicable to them.

Firstly, to track Woolf’s family history, her paternal grandfather James Stephen suffered from mental illness, depression and madness and died in an asylum; both her parents suffered from depression; her half-sister Laura spent most of her life in a sanatorium; while her siblings Thoby, Vanessa and Adrian all suffered from manic disorders. Thus, Woolf’s mental illness, madness and depression have genetic links to it. With her already inherited problems, childhood trauma and chain deaths in the family played major roles in worsening Woolf’s illness, madness and suicidal tendencies leading to repeated hospitalizations, and her much dreaded rest cure therapies. A week before her suicide, Woolf is recorded to have had attempted to drown herself: “One evening, she arrived home soaking wet after a failed suicide attempt. According to Leonard, she looked ill and shaken but she told him that she had slipped into a dyke” (“Virginia Woolf, Neuroprogression, and Bipolar Disorder”). Her desire for death and her flirtation with it came from the conviction that it was the only way to end all manias in her life.

The fact that suicide cases and depression ran in the Hemingway family is no secret to the literary world and this has been dealt with in the documentary “Running from Crazy” authored by his granddaughter Mariel Hemingway. When it comes to the genetic link in these matters, Hemingway cannot be shunned. His father Clarence shot himself like Ernest

Hemingway; his sister Ursula and brother Leicester killed themselves; and his grand-daughter Margaux Hemingway overdosed on drugs. In addition, his sons Gregory and Patrick, and Gregory's daughter Lorian have all received electroshock treatments for mental illness. To connect these genetic links with Hemingway, his outlook towards the subject in his letters and discussions speak volumes in regard to his tragic action. In his personal correspondence with Gertrude Stein in 1923, he wrote, "I understood for the first time how men can commit suicide simply because of too many things in business piling up ahead of them that they can't get through" (qtd. in Martin 358). And to Ezra Pound he wrote, "Me I like life very much. So much it will be a big disgust when have to shoot myself. Maybe pretty soon I guess although will arrange to be shot in order not to have bad effect on kids" (358) and even admitted on an occasion how he spent his time on hunting and killing animals and fishes in order to stop himself from taking his own life. When he started losing his memory due to electroshock treatment, he fell deeper into depression:

He lost the ability to write, breaking down in tears when he could not summon words. It may have been that the years of alcohol abuse and cumulative traumatic brain injury led to cognitive impairment that, combined with depression, robbed him of his skill in writing. Regardless of the precise etiology, "That one gift which had meant everything had now deserted him" (Martin 359).

For Hemingway, the final era of depression, sickness, hospitalizations and memory loss pushed him towards suicidal attempts. He chose the act of taking his own life as a readily available option and the only way out of his misery of being both physically and mentally battered- an outcome of both personal and genetic disposition.

Sylvia Plath's suicide came as a shock to the literary world, for she took her own life during the peak of her career as a writer. External forces in her personal life served as a final

catalyst, but Plath's fight with life-long depression and suicidal tendencies is a known fact. Her biography details about bright career as a student as well as her stints of taking up editorial responsibilities and as a fashion model. But despite all these, her life was marred by psychological breakdowns. All the details are recorded in her autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar* and many of her poetry. And when it comes to the subject of genetic link in depression and suicide, Plath's family cannot be shunned too. Her son Nicholas Hughes hanged himself on March 16, 2009. The New York Times reported of his death thus:

Nicholas Hughes, the son of the poet and novelist Sylvia Plath and the British Poet Laureate Ted Hughes, killed himself at his home in Alaska, nearly a half-century after his mother and stepmother took their own lives, according to a statement from his sister (O'Connor "Son of Sylvia Plath Commits Suicide").

Nicholas' sister Frieda and close aides reported that Nicholas, like his mother, had battled with depression for long but never thought he would take the extreme step.

Anne Sexton suffered from depression throughout her life and the number of times she attempted suicide is uncountable. From childhood, Sexton had a typical personality. She was "chronically messy, fidgety, and loud" (Middlebrook 9) and she felt herself "locked in the wrong house" (8). But depression ran in the family. Sexton's paternal grandfather Louis Harvey suffered from nervous breakdown and later when Anne Sexton suffered the same, the memory of Louis' breakdown influenced Sexton's father's concern for her. Later in life, Ralph himself suffered from a mental breakdown added by his addiction to drinks. And Anne's aunt Nana's breakdown had the most serious impact on her. As a fifteen year old girl, Sexton records: "My father was drinking every minute, Nana was going crazy, my grandfather was crazy, Jane was having a baby" (16). And finally Nana's death was a blow to Sexton and she never got over it. When Sexton committed suicide, her sister Frances was

profoundly affected and she failed to get over it too. At the age of sixty-nine, she shot herself to death.

Going deep into the complexities of the writings of the four authors in the present study *The Dark Domain of Twentieth Century Litterateurs' Suicides: A Study of the Select Works of Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton* has proven that all the four authors chose suicide as the way out to their problems and they hinted at large about it in their works. Writing was their life, and their writings reflect the dark world in which they lived in. Suffering from psychache, repressed emotions and melancholia, their desire for death became a reality and partially, they all tragically became victims of their own creative processes. Apart from their respective personal problems, genetic links also contributed to their final act.

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