

Research Article

## Madness and Feminism: An Analysis of Women's Struggles in Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted*

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History	This paper explores the representation of mad women in literature through the lens of psychoanalytical feminism. It focuses on analyzing the decades-old patterns of female objectification through the male gaze, and their being ruled as 'mad' or 'psychotic' for demanding equal rights as men. Through the use of psychoanalytic feminism theory, the paper studies the literary works of the late 1800s and early 1900s. And in relation to the birth of the feminist movement; it demonstrates how within the literature of that period, more often than not women were depicted as mentally ill and condemned to mental hospitals and psychotic institutions in order to receive extremely harsh treatments for illnesses that they do not have. The analysis will be performed on two literary works, that have been selected and seen as fitting for the topic, and they are: <i>Jane Eyre</i> by Charlotte Bronte, and <i>Girl, Interrupted</i> by Susanna Kaysen. With the leading characters of these two novels being female, and extracted from society for being ill-fitting, they become the perfect examples for describing the main points of this paper.
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### 1. Introduction

While there certainly exist certain distinctions between females and males, whether they are rooted in biology or physical characteristics, the crux of the matter lies in the fact that despite their shared humanity and coexistence within the same global sphere, they are not accorded equal treatment. This divergence manifests in the form of dissimilar rights and privileges, highlighting an inequality that persists. A more profound comprehension of this situation can be gleaned by delving into the annals of feminist history (Wright & Owen, 2001).

The inception of the second wave of feminism was spurred by a demand for fundamental parity in rights for women. The underpinning theory of inequality embraced by these early feminists emanated from

liberal political philosophy, positing that all men were equally entitled to legal rights (Lorber, 2011). Noteworthy among these early efforts was Simone de Beauvoir's 1949 publication, *The Second Sex*, which contended that women, relegated as the second sex, subsisted in a perpetual state of subservience to men. This subjugation, De Beauvoir contended, was not biologically predetermined, but rather socially constructed, leading her to articulate that "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman ...; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature ... which is described as feminine" (Beauvoir, 2010, p. 267).

Even the most elemental rights eluded women, including the right to vote, financial autonomy, land ownership, inheritance, economic independence, medical certification, initiation of divorce, custody of children, and access to education (Lorber & Martin, 2012). The 19th century, spanning from the 1800s to the early 1900s, emerged as a transformative epoch in human history, marked by substantial shifts in social, political, technological, and cultural domains. It constituted a period of both significant advancements and innovation, as well as inherent challenges and incongruities. This era bore witness to notable strides in social and political reforms, aimed at rectifying social injustices and augmenting living conditions. The epoch experienced movements advocating for workers' rights, women's suffrage, and the abolition of slavery, all of which gained momentum (Sera-Shriar, 2018).

It might be tempting to perceive this gender inequality as an artifact confined to the past, anachronistic, and overshadowed by societal evolution and heightened awareness. However, even in contemporary times, gender-based disparities persist, and certain regions continue to cast a disparaging eye upon women more so than others. It remains pertinent to acknowledge that while these disparities endure, they have witnessed a discernible diminution thanks to the accomplishments borne from the feminist movement. Reflecting on the origins of feminism, one discerns that women were initially bereft of fundamental rights, existing at a legal status comparable to that of minors (Carden, 1974).

The present inquiry delves into the importance of psychoanalytical feminism in dissecting the depiction of mentally distressed women in two iconic literary works: Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted*. By investigating the intricate psychological dimensions of female characters and their encounters with mental instability, this study contributes to the literary domain by scrutinizing the portrayal of mentally troubled women from the vantage point of psychoanalytical feminism. Both *Jane Eyre* and *Girl, Interrupted*, are investigated through the internal landscapes of their female protagonists,

assessing their trials, aspirations, and psychological tumult. Through the prism of psychoanalysis, this investigation endeavors to illuminate the connection between gender, mental health, and societal expectations while aspiring to unveil the latent motivations, suppressed yearnings, and societal influences that mold the mental states of these characters. Ultimately, this analysis seeks to reveal hitherto overlooked psychological profundities and intricacies intrinsic to traditional interpretations.

Furthermore, this investigation carries pertinence within the feminist realm by addressing the intersection of gender and mental health. The mentally distressed women in *Jane Eyre* and *Girl, Interrupted* navigate a patriarchal milieu that enforces rigid gender roles and expectations. Their experiences of mental instability mirror the manifold ways in which these societal pressures contribute to their emotional distress. By subjecting these narratives to feminist scrutiny, this research endeavors to unravel the impact of societal norms, repression, and the curtailment of agency on women's mental well-being. Such exploration will furnish fresh insights for the ongoing discourse surrounding gender inequality and mental health, underscoring the necessity for a feminist outlook to both comprehend and address these issues.

This study is poised to explore the phenomenon of objectification of women through the lens of the male gaze, propelling them to assume roles akin to madwomen, as commonly described. A conspicuous flaw in this scenario resides in the intrusion of the concepts of inequality and condescension towards the female gender even within the realm of literature. Even within the realm of fictitious, man-crafted narratives, a differential treatment of female characters relative to their male counterparts is observable.

One specific facet of this discourse pertains to the depiction of women in literary creations such as novels, novellas, and short stories. Evidently, female characters are often characterized as neurotic, feeble, and emotionally driven beings, lacking the fortitude to assume the mantle of the protagonist (Wirth-Cauchon, 2001). In stark contrast, male characters are cast as robust, capable, and authoritative figures who take center stage in the narrative, guiding the trajectory of the plot. This depiction is crafted to reflect the prevalent reality of the times, which clearly proclaimed male superiority and female subordination (Sanday, 1981). According to Plain and Sellers (2007), discussing feminist literary criticism, aptly noted that feminist writing endeavors to dismantle this hierarchy and reposition women from being objects to becoming subjects, instigating actions. During the era, women were relegated to "objects" while men were relegated to the "other." This era forced women into marriage and domesticity as their primary options. To underscore

the severity of this inequity, certain female authors employed a juxtaposition of Victorian and Modern women in their works, illustrating the stark contrast in societal treatment and, over time, the gradual empowerment of women to seize control of their lives, however incrementally. Virginia Woolf's literary works, particularly the short story "The Legacy" (1944), serve as a testament to this evolution. Another feminist icon, Louisa May Alcott, championed women's autonomy and the right to self-discovery (Elice, 2020).

Nevertheless, the challenge posed by the unequal and erroneous representation of women within literature transcends its surface implications. The deeper issue is that male writers, more so than their female counterparts, perpetrate these misrepresentations. This prompts speculation that there is a modicum of hostility and sexism present in the works of these male authors (Bartlett, 1995). One might even posit that these writers derive a sense of pride and superiority, bolstering their belief that they stand above society, motivating them to craft such denigrating portrayals of women. This phenomenon historically coincides with the advent of the second wave of feminism in the late 1960s.

## 1.2. Critical Review

Numerous scholarly inquiries such as Jacobus (1981) have investigated the depiction of mental disorders within literary works, particularly in the context of gender dynamics. One illustrative instance is Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's seminal work *The Madwoman in the Attic*, which scrutinizes the portrayal of female characters in nineteenth-century literature and their entwined association with mental instability. In a similar vein, Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady* comprises the historical construction of women's mental illness as a distinct affliction and examines its intricate societal underpinnings. Within the realm of female writers, scholars such as Benstock and Ferriss (1994) have pursued the correlation between madness and creative expression.

By leveraging psychoanalytic theories, Mitchell et al. (1982) construct a nexus encompassing literature, psychoanalysis, and feminism in their work *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*. Their analysis serves as a scaffolding to fathom the intricate psychosexual dynamics and power configurations inherent in the narratives of mad women. Further contributing to this discourse, Rigney's exploration titled *Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel* (1987) dissects the intersections of madness, sexuality, and feminist discourse within literary realms. This investigation sheds light on how the portrayal

of mentally disturbed women undermines conventional gender norms and challenges the oppressive structures contributing to their marginalization (Saar & Horvitz). From this perspective gender plays a key role in the division of men and women in terms of power relations and how women have been portrayed by the opposite gender (Fatah and Fatah, 2023). The aforementioned studies yield substantial insights into the representation of mentally afflicted women in literature and the consequential reflection and subversion of cultural norms and anticipations. By applying a psychoanalytic feminist framework to *Jane Eyre* and *Girl, Interrupted*, this study builds upon the existing scholarly canon, ushering in fresh viewpoints on the depiction of gender and mental illness within literary narratives.

## 2. Theoretical Frameworks

Within the realm of the male gaze's scrutiny of the concept of madness, psychoanalytic feminist literary analysts extend their examination to the portrayal of women as afflicted by madness in literature. The male gaze seems to be the key role in imposing power and masculinity through which the opposite gender – female – is constantly represented. A recurrent discovery emerges, indicating that the interpretation of a woman's madness diverges from that of a man's, often intertwined with considerations of gender, sexuality, and societal anticipations. Termed as "female madness," this phenomenon stems from the amalgamation of cultural, social, and familial pressures imposed upon women. Advocates of feminist psychoanalytic critique posit that the representation of mentally distressed women in literature reflects the prevailing anxieties permeating patriarchal societies and male-dominated cultures. Through a dissection of the depiction of women's madness in literary works, feminist psychoanalytical critics unravel intricate interconnections between gender, sexuality, mental disorders, and the existing power dynamics within society.

### 2.1. Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory

Simone de Beauvoir's seminal work, *The Second Sex* (1949), stands as a foundational cornerstone in feminist theory. Within this work, de Beauvoir contends that womanhood is a societal construct, tracing a historical trajectory where women have been positioned in relation to men, relegated to subordinate roles. Her theory of "The Other" accentuates the perception of women as the "Other," excluded from the male-centered discourse dominating Western culture. De Beauvoir critiques the notion of women's biologically ingrained inferiority vis-à-vis men, asserting that such beliefs derive from cultural conditioning. This body of work has played a pivotal role in challenging patriarchal constructs and advocating for women's self-

determination and agency. De Beauvoir's ideas hold pertinent relevance to the exploration of Mad Women within literature, providing a framework to comprehend the intersections of gender and power and their influence on the portrayal of women and mental illness.

## 2.2. Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis, as defined by Erdelyi (1985), encompasses a therapeutic approach designed to address mental disorders, rooted in psychoanalytic theory. This method underscores the significance of unconscious mental processes and is sometimes denoted as "depth psychology." This delineation underscores that psychoanalysis is informed by psychoanalytic theory, emphasizing the role of subconscious mental processes. The term "depth psychology" is frequently invoked due to its exploration of the profound layers of the psyche to apprehend the underlying elements contributing to psychological disorders (Separa, 2013).

The psychoanalytic framework revolves around a therapeutic alliance between the patient and the psychoanalyst. Via open dialogue, the patient is encouraged to candidly articulate their thoughts, emotions, memories, and dreams. The psychoanalyst, adopting a watchful stance, employs a range of methodologies to interpret and dissect the patient's revelations. This process serves to expose unconscious content, enabling a more profound comprehension of the patient's psychological landscape. In essence, psychoanalysis furnishes an exceptional vantage point on mental disorders through its focus on the hidden dimensions of the mind. Its aim is to bring concealed insights to the fore, nurturing self-awareness, ultimately fostering the resolution of psychological complexities and advancing mental well-being (Blustein, 2008).

Another succinct elucidation of Psychoanalysis, as articulated by Freud, contends that it is a method for medically treating patients afflicted by nervous disorders (Freud, 1916). To further elucidate this premise, Freud underscores that Psychoanalysis hinges upon the verbal exchange between patient and physician as the principal mode of engagement. The patient actively participates, divulging past experiences, current perceptions, grievances, desires, and emotions. In contrast, the physician adopts a receptive stance, endeavoring to steer the patient's cogitation, prompting recollection of pertinent details, influencing focus, providing clarifications, and meticulously observing the patient's reactions to foster comprehension or resistance.

## 2.3. Psychoanalytic Feminism

This theory posits an oppressive paradigm wherein men possess an inherent psychological inclination to subject women. This compulsion for male dominance and women's acquiescence to subjugation is rooted

deep within the human psyche. This strand of feminism seeks to illuminate the development of our psychological lives to gain insight into the mechanisms of women's oppression (Heenen-Wolff, 2007). The depiction of women exhibiting signs of madness in literature has garnered considerable attention from scholars and feminists alike. Nevertheless, the endeavor to define such women proves intricate and multifaceted, particularly when factoring in the influence of patriarchy and societal expectations shaping their behavior. Psychoanalytic examinations of these characters can provide illumination into their motivations and the underlying psychological determinants. It is, however, paramount to exercise prudence concerning the historical application of mental illness diagnoses as instruments of women's oppression. Consequently, any exploration into portrayals of mad women in literature mandates a nuanced approach, mindful of the social and cultural milieus in which these portrayals emerged and were consumed (McRobbie, 2008). The traditional link between femininity and madness encompasses a range of manifestations—madness, lunacy, hysteria, irrationality, anger, and fury. These terms, still prevalent in contemporary society, are often wielded to undermine women, manifesting through implicit or overt means. Such employment contributes to the devaluation, dismissal, and negation of women's encounters (Haralu, 2021).

#### **2.4. Gaze**

The concept of the gaze suggests that our internal thoughts and feelings are affected when we become aware of how others are looking at us. This awareness often leads us to change how we look, speak, behave, and present ourselves. Exploring the gaze has been a focus in different cultural settings, like media (TV, ads), art (paintings, sculptures), and graphic storytelling (comics) over the past few decades. In situations where women feel they're being constantly scrutinized and evaluated based mainly on their physical appearance, especially through the perceived perspective of heterosexual men, this examination is often labeled as "the male gaze". Moreover, gaze seems to play the key role in constructing power through the act of observation (Moe, 2015; Fatah 2021).

### **3. Results and Discussions**

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, Victorian women found themselves ensnared within stringent social and cultural norms, which imposed considerable constraints on their freedoms and prospects (Tosh, 2008). The extent of their treatment diverged based on social class, resulting in varying degrees of subjugation and disparate access to resources and advantages. Nevertheless, pervasive themes and conventions

characterized women's treatment throughout this era. Women encountered a scarcity of educational opportunities, were relegated to domestic roles, confronted limited legal rights, grappled with stringent social confines, and faced severely restricted employment avenues (Harper, 2022).

The treatment of Victorian women reverberated with profound and enduring consequences that not only molded their lives but also steered the trajectory of women's rights and gender dynamics. The consequences encompassed restricted opportunities, gender disparities, repression, and the indelible imprints on mental health (Poovey, 1986). It is pivotal to acknowledge that within the framework of the adverse outcomes of women's treatment during the Victorian era, resilience, and resistance took root, gradually eroding the edifice of gender inequality. Women's endeavors and progress during this period laid the groundwork for the evolution of women's rights, broadened horizons, and the ongoing pursuit of gender parity.

Men's objectification of women harbors the potential to shape women's experiences of mental health challenges and exacerbate their labeling as "mad" or "mentally ill." This correlation is deeply intertwined with feminist theory, which scrutinizes the interplay among gender, power, and mental well-being. The act of objectifying women reduces them to mere objects catering solely to male desire, rendering their agency, intellect, and individuality inconsequential. The ramifications of this phenomenon on women's mental well-being are multifaceted. Societal pressures persistently enforcing adherence to beauty standards, with a predominant emphasis on physical allure, can yield detrimental consequences, including body dissatisfaction, eroded self-esteem, and the emergence of eating disorders (Kontou, 2013).

The experience of objectification can potentially precipitate internalized self-objectification, where women adopt an external gaze towards themselves, fostering self-objectifying thoughts and behaviors. This internalized self-objectification exacts an impact on mental health by amplifying self-consciousness, impairing cognitive function, and fostering detachment from one's authentic self. The portrayal of women as "mad" or "mentally ill" transcends recent decades and finds historical underpinnings in literary works of earlier epochs. Greek poet Hesiod's narrative surrounding Pandora and the Judeo-Christian tale of Eve spotlight the attribution of blame to women as sources of evil, seeding lasting perceptions that have permeated societal, medical, and literary narratives. Such narratives have left an indelible mark on the perception of women's psychological nature and societal roles (Diamond, 1996). The interconnection between objectification and the labeling of women as "mad" or "mentally ill" finds resonance in the "madwoman trope."



This trope encapsulates the portrayal of women as mentally unstable or irrational when they confront societal norms or assert their agency. This trope has served as a mechanism to pathologize and marginalize women who resist objectification, challenge oppression, or assert their autonomy. Feminist scholars shed light on the historical fusion of gendered power dynamics with the construction of madness and mental illness, working to subdue and silence women (Dushkewich, 2022). Heroines' outbursts within literary works hold profound implications. Spacks (2022) asserts that these outbursts can be attributed to the inherent desires and needs those women, like all beings, possess. This desire for self-realization and acknowledgment hinges on language, a right denied to women during the Victorian era. The denial of education engendered an absence of self-awareness, leaving women numb, oblivious, and disconnected. This void served the interests of men, fostering their supremacy and relegating women to subservient roles. Within the context of a repressive patriarchal framework, women have historically been depicted as silent, absent entities, deprived of communication. However, the journey of self-discovery and self-recovery empowers women to reclaim their identities and liberate themselves from the clutches of male dominance. This transformative odyssey allows women to blur the boundaries imposed by male discourse, infusing their fantasies into reality and redefining their own experiences (Barrett, 2015).

The accumulated evidence underscores the prevailing view that women, both in reality and fiction, continue to confront a subordinate status compared to men, particularly evident in contexts where they are diagnosed with mental health issues. The denial of agency in medical decisions and the withholding of information about one's own health represents a violation of human rights. Principles of medical ethics, as outlined by the American Medical Association (AMA), emphasize the importance of informed consent and communication (Montagu, 1999). This systematic deprivation of agency contributes to the emergence of outbursts and resistance among mistreated and marginalized women. These patterns mirror the experiences depicted in reality and literary representations. Overall, this collective evidence amplifies the persisting notion of women's inferiority and their systematic disenfranchisement, which perpetuate the perception of women as property or dependents, rather than autonomous beings.

The landscape of literary analysis has long been enriched by the intricate relationships between literature, social context, and the portrayal of characters. Within this framework, the work of Haralu (2021)

serves as a gateway to investigate the complex interplay of feminism, madness, and gender norms as depicted in Charlotte Bronte's enduring novel, *Jane Eyre*.

Bronte's authorship of *Jane Eyre* coincided with the emergence of the first wave of feminism, a backdrop that Hill (2001) underscores. However, despite the temporal proximity, the narrative brims with discernible feminist undercurrents, resonating with women's anger and rebellion against prevailing norms. Central to this narrative is the protagonist, Jane, who grapples with the intricate challenge of harmonizing personal values and independence with societal expectations, including her romantic aspirations. Her journey encapsulates the disillusionment experienced by Victorian women, a sentiment that significantly contributed to the emergence of the first wave of feminism.

Intricately intertwined with this examination of madness and feminism is the gendered enigma that envelops Bertha's portrayal. Drawing from Dushkewich (2022) analysis, Bertha deviates from the preceding archetype of madwomen crafted by male authors. Instead of embodying delicacy and docility, she emerges as a character marked by traits such as passion, anger, and even violence—attributes that have historically been associated with masculinity. This paradoxical representation deepens the exploration into the concept of femininity, exposing the complex relationship between gender norms and madness.

The ongoing tension between feminist literary critique and the thematic portrayal of madness becomes a focal point, as highlighted by Beattie (2015). Bertha Mason, characterized as a quintessential madwoman, continues to be a conduit for feminist criticism. Her embodiment of the intricate intersection between madness and femininity ignites debates that underscore the central role of madness within the broader feminist discourse. Verma (2019) insights shine a light on the power dynamics at play. Verma points to the influence of patriarchal society in bestowing Rochester with the authority to label and confine Bertha as a mad woman. This sheds light on the pervasive societal inclination to brand women who challenge or transgress patriarchal norms as "mad," an act that reinforces established hierarchies. In a unique examination, Ara (2021) injects the discourse with a racial dimension. While lauding "*Jane Eyre*" for its anticipation of feminist themes, Ara brings to the forefront a problematic element—Bertha's portrayal as non-white. This portrayal raises concerns about the intersection of racial injustice and gender inequality, uncovering a complex interplay of biases that shape character representation.

The scholarly journey continues with Bhawar (2021) meticulous exploration into the intricacies of Bertha's portrayal. Despite Bronte's efforts to present Bertha as mentally unstable, compelling evidence to support her madness remains elusive. Bhawar critiques Bronte's portrayal, contending that the language used degrades and dehumanizes Bertha. The study questions the very foundations of her madness, attributing it to years of isolation and confinement. Shifting the lens, Panahi et al. (2020) inquiry probes the feminist nature of Jane Eyre. This debate centers on the marriage between Jane and Rochester and Bronte's treatment of Bertha's portrayal as a madwoman, bringing into focus the complexity of character dynamics within the feminist discourse. Moreover, Wróbel Best (2015) introduces a symbolic perspective, interpreting Bertha Rochester as a conduit for the defiance and compassion that Jane embodies within a male-dominated society. Bertha's actions challenge established gender norms, advocating for love and freedom while confronting prevailing expectations.

In synthesis, this literature review has journeyed through the intricate layers of Jane Eyre, unraveled by scholars who explore the confluence of feminism, madness, and gender norms. Through diverse lenses, these scholars shed light on the enduring relevance of Bronte's work and the complex interplay between character representation and societal constructs.

Susanna Kaysen's literary work, *Girl, Interrupted*, presents yet another prominent character depicted as mentally disturbed and mad. To initiate an analysis of this literary piece, an examination of its title and its genesis is necessary. Antolin (2020) asserts that the title of Kaysen's memoir draws from Johannes Vermeer's renowned painting "Girl Interrupted at Her Music". In a discreet revelation, Kaysen divulges that she has truncated and punctuated the title with a comma between "Girl" and "Interrupted" to conceal its full significance. This device serves to convey her disrupted identity, reflecting the disruption she experienced in her life at the age of seventeen, encompassing the violence inherent in that interruption.

Kelly (2023) in autobiographical studies, contends that Kaysen's work presents an exploration of life poised on the fringes between sanity and illness, the definitions of which are socially constructed. White characterizes Kaysen's memoir as an act of "discursive resistance". In a recent analysis published in the *International Journal of English*, Vincent (2021) characterizes the leading female protagonist in "Girl, Interrupted" as vibrant, possessing an authentic spirit and zeal. However, she is often marginalized and misunderstood by her surroundings. Vincent delineates the character's irritability, disturbed mind, insomnia,

and abrupt sexual relationships, attributes that evade her comprehension. Vincent draws parallels between the character's experiences and Kaysen's own journey through mental instability. Despite the challenges, Kaysen's subsequent achievements as a published author counter any claims of incapability (Augustine, 2021).

Da Silva (2014) points out that the term "crazy," commonly used to signify negativity, has historically stigmatized women through a lens of "common sense." This prejudice dates back to the sixteenth century when women were frequently confined within madhouses and royal towers by their husbands. Chesler's perspective aligns, asserting that madness is perceived as a shameful, menacing affliction that requires societal protection from its disruptive discourse. Kaysen's journey to her hospitalization is marked by consent, as she was neither deemed sufficiently "crazy" nor young to be hospitalized without her agreement. This underscores the necessity of her cooperation in the institutional process (Couser, 1999).

Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted* goes beyond the confinement of mental experiences to demonstrate their tangible impact on one's physical reality. Lighthart (2020) highlights the interpretation how Kaysen's work encapsulates the intersection of mental and physical realms in shaping individual lives. Moreover, the full scope of Susanna's condition, including her psychological evaluation, eludes her until 25 years after her hospitalization. The realization of her diagnosis's broad application underscores the medical community's inclination to use the diagnosis as a means of managing individuals whose lifestyles challenge societal norms (Couser, 1999).

In conclusion, the treatment of women throughout history, the ramifications of objectification on mental health, the themes of resistance and identity in literature, and the violation of women's agency underscore the ongoing struggle for gender equality, mental health advocacy, and the acknowledgment of women's inherent autonomy and worth.

The novel *Jane Eyre* features a notable excerpt, voiced by the protagonist herself within the confines of Thornfield Hall – the residence of Edward F. Rochester, a prominent male character. Jane's articulation of her longing for equality and freedom underscores that her experience is emblematic of the broader reality faced by Victorian women. She contends that women, akin to men, possess comparable emotions and intellectual faculties. Her yearning for opportunities and agency resounds as a prevailing theme within the novel, mirroring the veracity of Victorian women's lives (Beattie, 1996).

(Felman, 1975) argues that the concept of madness, suggesting it reflects the devaluation of the female role or an outright rejection of prescribed gender stereotypes. The portrayal of madness in women and men becomes a prism through which societal dynamics and gender norms are illuminated. *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte emerges as a cornerstone of the first wave of feminism in the late 1800s. It singularly unravels the flagrant inequalities and injustices that pervaded the lives of Victorian women across diverse socio-economic backgrounds and ages. The oppressive circumstances of the time kindled women's resistance, culminating in the emergence of the Feminist movement (Caminero-Santangelo, 2003). Examining Bronte's work through the psychoanalytic feminist lens, one unearths its profound exploration of the Victorian society's constraints, women's roles, and the quest for personal identity. Jane's odyssey, encompassing her external struggles and inner self-discovery, encapsulates fundamental concepts concerning gender dynamics, power, and psychological evolution. Sipahutar et al. (2021) underscore that *Jane Eyre* embodies liberal feminism as she endeavors to establish herself as an independent woman, aligning with the objectives of the first wave of feminism that aimed to secure gender equality and equitable rights. Ligaard (2022) echoes this sentiment, stating that Jane's actions within the Victorian context symbolize a woman's fight for her rights, independence, and true love, thereby aligning with feminist ideals.

Psychoanalytic feminism theory accentuates the sway of repressed desires and the unconscious on individual behavior and identity. Jane's early life experiences, marred by maltreatment, result in the internalization of societal norms and the suppression of her aspirations. These latent desires manifest in her relationships, particularly her connection with Mr. Rochester, and her ongoing struggle to assert herself. Margaret Fuller, a prominent feminist contemporary of Bronte, advocated for gender equality and self-reliance. Her work "Woman in the Nineteenth Century" epitomized the call for equal rights, contributing to the burgeoning feminist movement. Bronte's artistry effectively encapsulates the latent resistance and defiance harbored by women of the time, transforming it into a potent potion of strength and courage. This portrayal resonates with readers, inspiring them to demand their rightful rights without succumbing to societal expectations (Morton, 1933). Bronte's portrayal of a resilient heroine defying societal norms serves as a beacon of empowerment. The author masterfully captures the undercurrents of anger and resistance that permeated the lives of women in that era. Through her vivid character depiction, Bronte urges women to unapologetically claim their rights, advocating for a life devoid of subjugation. Her portrayal evokes the

spirit of activism and empowers women to confront challenges head-on, reflecting the genuine experiences of women of the time (Cole, 2010). Upon extensive examination of Susanna Kaysen's autobiographical novel, it becomes apparent that the work provides a robust framework for the exploration of gender inequality and Feminism. Over the years, educators, scholars, students, feminist activists, and researchers have delved into Kaysen's literary offering to dissect the social limitations and unequal rights that characterized the lives of men and women in the Victorian era. One notable study by Gilmore and Marshall (2019) posits that the portrayal of feminine adolescence and the lack of understanding surrounding girlhood resonates profoundly with young women, contributing to the text's popularity.

Helstein (2007), in an autobiographical resistance, states that the insights of an autobiography specialist in Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body. She contends that autobiographical strategies serve as platforms for the expression of resistance. Lindsey Clouse, in an article published on Collider in April of this year, addresses the portrayal of mentally ill characters in literary and cinematic works. She highlights how certain narratives depict mentally ill characters as malevolent figures, perpetuating the misconception that individuals with mental illnesses are inherently dangerous. This notion is exemplified in works like "Split," "Glass," and "Joker".

However, *Girl, Interrupted* deviates from this trope and challenges the perception of mental illness. Kaysen adeptly presents victims of mental illness as precisely that – victims. Dushkewich (2022) emphasizes Kaysen's achievement in portraying characters like Susanna, Lisa, and Daisy as victims of poorly diagnosed and treated mental illnesses. This portrayal aligns with the reality that those with mental illnesses are more likely to be victims of abuse than perpetrators. The researcher further highlights the lack of agency and control women often experience in their medical care. The patients at Claymoore, the setting of the story, are not informed of their diagnoses or medications, and the system relegates them to a position of powerlessness. This exposes the systemic issue of treating individuals with mental illnesses as problems rather than individuals deserving of autonomy in their treatment decisions.

Addressing the historical association of madness with the female gender, Felman (1975) discuss the notion of Women and Madness. The article critiques the historical association of hysteria, linked etymologically to the uterus, with women, and notes the correlation between women and madness in sociological statistics. Saputra and Limanta (2014) believe that Women and Madness underscores the overrepresentation

of women in psychiatric patient roles compared to men, surpassing the expected representation based on their proportion in the general population. illustrate the connection between inhumane treatment and emotional distress. They discuss how harsh and unjust punishments, as well as the overall harsh living conditions, can diminish an individual's will to live. This results in a cascade of negative emotions and behaviors, ultimately leading to a sense of despair. This complex web of circumstances signifies a chain reaction. Victorian women's subjugation led to resistance and uprising, which was often misconstrued as madness. With men holding power and authority, women were subjected to unwarranted confinement in mental hospitals. These environments, rife with abuse and inhumane treatment, further exacerbated mental distress, potentially leading to suicide. Susanna's experiences echo this pattern, as her confinement in an oppressive environment contributes to her emotional decline.

#### **4. Conclusions**

In conclusion, this study delves into the portrayal of mentally unstable women in literature through the perspective of psychoanalytic feminism. By closely examining a range of literary works alongside the primary novels, "Jane Eyre" and "Girl, Interrupted," the research illustrates how these characters encapsulate societal and cultural concerns intertwined with female sexuality and autonomy. Employing Freudian principles and other related concepts, the analysis exposes the entrenched patriarchal frameworks that suppress women's agency and stifle their aspirations. This investigation holds significance within the realm of psychoanalytic feminism by illuminating the potential of literature to challenge prevailing narratives and amplify marginalized voices. By recasting the "insane" woman as a transformative figure, these narratives counter the conventional portrayal of women as passive objects subjected to male desires. Moreover, this scrutiny encourages readers to contemplate the interplay of madness with gender, authority, and self-identity. Given the present socio-political climate, this subject remains pertinent as women persist in their struggle for equity and contest the systemic violence that impinges upon them. The analysis of mad women's representation in literature aids in unraveling the intricate layers of female subjectivity and the molding influence of societal conventions and expectations. Ultimately, this study underscores the capacity of psychoanalytic feminism to offer fresh perspectives on how gender and mental illness are depicted in literary works, as well as its applicability to broader dialogues concerning equity and parity. In doing so, it underscores the potential of psychoanalytic feminism to contribute novel insights to the discourse surrounding

the depiction of gender and mental health in literature and its wider implications for discussions on social justice and gender equity.

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