

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

Having analyzed the portrayal of the protagonists in The Bell Jar and Eleven Minutes in the previous chapters, I would like to draw some conclusions. In my opinion, both The Bell Jar by Sylvia Plath and Eleven Minutes by Paulo Coelho are worth-reading novels and they depict two interesting and exceptional female protagonists. The first novel, The Bell Jar, is like an autobiographical novel because the story is based on Plath's life experiences. Despite the fact that it is an autobiographical novel, the protagonist's absurd mind, depression, suicide attempts and characteristics are still interesting to be analyzed. The second novel, Eleven Minutes, depicts an unusual character as the protagonist who is a prostitute named Maria.

Both Esther and Maria have some similarities. They are described as young single women who are cynical—Esther is cynical about her life and society, whereas Maria has cynical ideas about love and life. Other similarities between them are that their characteristics develop in the course of the stories. Both of them are inadvertently in the process of self-development, and sexuality plays an important role to help them there.

Another similarity between them is the societies where they live in. Both societies give bad effects to the protagonists' lives and characteristics. In The Bell Jar, the society is not so beneficial for women and there are gender inequalities here and there. In Eleven Minutes, although Paulo Coelho does not specify the situation of the society, it is obvious that men are superior to women. Esther gets depressed by her society's expectations. Meanwhile, Maria's society dictates her to live in a standardized life, which makes her frustrated and cynical.

In addition to their similarities, Esther and Maria also have some differences. For Esther, her sexual issue is simpler than Maria's and it happens once only, in which she loses her virginity. As for Maria, she has lots of sexual experiences starting from her teen age years until finally she becomes a prostitute. Esther's sexual encounter, however, is not based on love. She loses her virginity with a stranger, for what she concerns the most is that her action will be a symbol of her rebellion towards society, whereas Maria regains her happiness by having a love-based sexual relationship.

Sexuality for Esther is a symbol for freedom and empowerment of her own life and body as the society where she lives in is a double standard one and strictly forbids women from having a sexual relationship before marriage, while, for Maria, her sexual experiences are the representations of her milestones during her path in her character development. They are divided into three milestones. Each milestone marks the changes and developments of her characteristics.

Their self-developments are different. For Esther, in the beginning, she is described as someone who is not satisfied and unhappy with her life. Eventually, Esther's characteristics start to develop after she undergoes the sexual

encounter— her life turning point. Afterwards, she is about to embark on having good qualities in herself and planning to establish her life. As for Maria, who is depicted as a happy girl in the beginning, loses the happiness while growing up. Her way of finding happiness is like a U-turn, which means she traces back to the stage when she feels content with love and life. Moreover, her characteristics gradually develop and change during her long span of sexual experiences.

Plath's intention creating Esther as the protagonist is to show that a person's characteristics and abilities could be developed after breaking the most important rule in society that bonds her, which concerns of not having sexual relationship before marriage. Maria, however, is intended to prove that self-development can also be regained by having experienced various sexual experiences. While Esther's sexual experience is like a key that opens the lock of freedom and herself, Maria's sexual experiences are like milestones that bring her to find her true self and happiness.

Plath and Coelho based their protagonists on real people. Plath created Esther Greenwood as her duplicate as it is commonly known that Esther's circumstances are quite similar to Plath's, whereas Coelho, who did not get the idea to create Maria character from his own life record, added some elements to the book that leads to Maria's not simply being the biography of the real prostitute. Nevertheless, I am convinced the two protagonists are relevant to real life. In reality, there might be people like Esther, who excellently accomplish great academic achievement in life but still do not know yet what they will want to be and ended in depressions, or people like Maria, who are just in search of

new adventures and choose what is considered the wrong way of living by her society.

Surprisingly, after months of my profound analysis of Maria and Esther characters, I understand and agree with their unusual and different choices of how they live their lives. Both of them use sexuality— something that is taboo and prohibited in their societies—as a helping tool for their self-development. Regardless of the sexual issues they have, I believe that in order to achieve freedom and happiness, one might do atypical deeds that are not included in the ways of living the standardized life which makes him or her unhappy and frustrating. Hence, I can comprehend their decision to use sexuality.