

Sylvia Plath's novel, *The Bell Jar*, is clearly written by a masterful writer. It captures a powerful portrayal of depression through the utilization of its poetic language and accurate analogies. The novel encapsulates what life was, and arguable still is, like for a young ambitious woman navigating the excessively patriarchal world of the 1950s, while also allowing its audience to bear witness to Plath's trauma story through the voice of Esther.

Trauma, in the simplest of terms, is a normal response to abnormal circumstances. Trauma, in the context of this study, does not exclusively refer to a physical wound inflicted onto the body. The trauma that is being focused on in this study is not a physical wound that can just be bandaged up or an experience that can be eradicated, but an emotional wound brought forward by the experience and reexperiencing of traumatic events that must be worked through in order to heal but does not come with a step-by-step guide. Furthermore, trauma does not occur exclusively as a result of blatant and single acts of violation but also to repetitive insidious violations that build into the traumatic wound. Many from vast and seemingly differing fields have studied trauma and have attempted to understand how a person can become trapped within its ceaseless vortex that keeps the past ever present and real, while also keeping them in a perpetual state of both knowing and not knowing. While no one discipline can claim ownership of trauma, those who are in feminist-trauma studies, those who occupy feminine bodies, and those who study Sylvia Plath may gain a distinctive understanding of the correlation between gender and trauma. In addition, such study enables us to see how heteronormative, patriarchal enforcement of gender roles and the imposition of gendered scripts have historically played a significant part in exacerbating, if not outright causing, said trauma in the process of policing women's behavior.

Trauma must be worked through and witnessed in order to be processed and eventually healed. In other words, it must be pulled forward and acknowledged by not only the one responding to trauma but also by others who are compassionate and are willing to listen. The internal turmoil must be externalized, so it has opportunity to be reorganized and processed, to give way for the trauma to be properly internalized in such a way that is helpful and healing. This process seems to be true not only on the individual level but also on the societal scale. If there is to be a hope in improving the lives of victims of trauma, of women, and of all who struggle with mental health, then their experiences must be witnessed and acknowledged. Only then is there a chance of holding patriarchy accountable, of loosening the suppressive grip of gender expectations, and of providing treatment that empowers and heals patients rather than overpower and control them. One way of doing so is to study, analyze, and discuss said issues as well as examples where they have been represented, such as has been done in this study in revisiting *The Bell Jar*.

This particular study involved revisiting Sylvia Plath's novel *The Bell Jar* and reading sections from Cathy Caruth's text *Listening to Trauma: Conversations with Leaders in the Theory and Treatment of Catastrophic Experience*. The research conducted builds from prior work from a seminar course that involved reading interdisciplinary work by trauma theorists every week over the course of a semester while discussing trauma, feminism, and Sylvia Plath. Earlier work in previous women's, gender, and sexuality studies has aided in understanding concepts related to feminist theory and gender roles and expectations and how those affect all genders. The value of a feminist approach lies in its emphasis on knowing and appreciating all perspectives, as well as in our understanding of trauma and its role in the lives of women specifically. Additionally, this research utilized knowledge and concepts learned in previous psychology courses, which included a counseling course that discussed many concepts that relate to trauma studies, such as the importance of the interviewer witnessing the story that the interviewee needs to tell as well as the role of the listener as necessary in helping to process and organize said story in a way that leads to healing.



Beneath The Bell Jar

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