

**Not the Mad Woman in the Attic but the Cultural Critique:
Understanding the Organic Writing of Sylvia Plath Through
the Bell Jar**

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Abstract: This study analyzes the organic form of writing of Sylvia Plath that has been ignored by most of the Plath scholars. Although Plath achieved and maintained a unique and evolving style both in her poetry and prose, this unique style has been read under the misleading light of Plath's biography retold by different Plath scholars. Putting The Bell Jar at the center of the reading process, this study focuses on how Plath built an organic form of writing and also how it has been attempted by the establishment by some literary critics to remove all political connections from her entire body of work.

Key Words: Sylvia Plath, the Bell Jar, Organic Writing.

**Tavan Arasındaki Deli Kadın Değil Kültür Eleştirmeni: Sırça Fanus ile
Sylvia Plath'in Organik Yazma Biçiminin Açığa Çıkarılması**

Özet: Bu çalışma Sylvia Plath'in pek çok araştırmacı tarafından gözardı edilen organik yazma biçimini incelemektedir. Plath'in gerek şiirlerinde gerekse kısa öyküleri ve romanında geliştirmiştir olduğu yenilikçi yazma biçimini bitmek tükenmek bilmeyen yanlış otobiografiler ve bu otobiografilerin ışığında gelişen okuma biçimleri arasında kayboldur. Karanlıkta kalan bu yazma biçimini ise Plath'in eserlerinin incelenmesinde Sırça Fanus'un merkeze alınması ile açığa çıkarmaktadır. Plath'in organik yazma biçiminin incelenmesi sadece eserlerine yeni bir bakış açısı getirmekle kalmayıp aynı zamanda Plath'in reddedilen politik söyleminin var olduğunu ortaya çıkarılması açısından da önemlidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sylvia Plath, Sırça Fanus, Organik Yazma Biçimi.

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Apparently, the Plath myth,¹ which is a production of Plath industry², was intended to create a picture of Sylvia Plath framing a sick, mad woman who prepared for herself a tragic ending. However, the borders of this frame were not limited to that alone. The Plath industry's main attack against Sylvia Plath is not defining her works in terms of psychopathology, but in the attempt to take politics out of her works.³ Exemplified by the attempt to divide her works into two antagonistic camps; the invaluable works written before the *Ariel* poems, and *Ariel*, whose main motives are psychosis, destruction, anger and fear that inspire critics to reshape the psychotic Plath again and again. However, deciphering Sylvia Plath's life and the *Ariel* poems is not the only way to understand the structure of her work. Instead, the works written before the *Ariel* poems were the seeds of her successful *Ariel* poems. Therefore, ignoring Plath's work before *Ariel* is the worst way to approach her works, because the kernel of the creative process of Plath's works is hidden in *The Bell Jar*, which was Plath's grand project, the achievement, the work that she wanted most in her life. In relation, if one wants to decipher the writing process of Plath and the political motives of her works, one must take into account *The Bell Jar*. Through *The Bell Jar* it becomes patent that Sylvia Plath is not "the mad woman in the attic" but rather a master of cultural critique.⁴

- 1) The name Sylvia Plath has always been associated with schizophrenia, madness, trauma and ambiguity which form the kernel of "the Plath Myth." "The Plath Myth" starts reading the works of Plath with the suicide of Plath and ends with interpreting her entire works in terms of the psychotic nature of a schizoid poet. As Judith Kroll endorses, "Most readers of contemporary poetry in the English-speaking world are by now acquainted with the life and work of Sylvia Plath. But the particular renown she has posthumously won is not the success she intended and deserves. The reading of her work has been entangled in a fascination with her suicide and the broken marriage which preceded it, and such misreading is as widespread among her admirers as among her detractors; as literature. In these terms, the fact, for example, that she killed herself is irrelevant to the consideration of the meaning of her work; as literature, her poems would mean what they do even if she had not attempted suicide"(1).
- 2) The Plath industry, which is composed of various scholars and critiques, aims at re-creating the life story of Plath again and again through focusing on the key terms of "the Plath Myth" such as schizophrenia, madness and psychopathology.
- 3) As underlined by Robin Peel, "Critics have tended to take Plath's poetry out of the politics, but as Jacqueline Rose's feared, they have also "taken the politics out of the poems." The battle with the "Other" that is enacted in the later poems is seen primarily as a gender or personal battle, ignoring the political legacy of Cold War McCarthyism, in which the enemy is internalized, and the Other is within America as well as outside. The Rosenberg's execution, with which *The Bell Jar* opens, is merely the most obvious metaphor for the process in which public events work on the private imagination.(Peel, "Political" 40)
- 4) *Mad Woman in the Attic* is the work of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. The title has been widely used by feminist literary critiques. For further reading see *Mad Woman in the Attic. The Women Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination*. (New Haven: Yale Up, 2000).

When interpretations of the works on Plath's poems, short stories, journals, and her novel are examined, the sharpest similarity is that all of them aim at removing politics not only from her entire work but also from her name. As a result, her works are rarely represented side by side with the word politics, nor politics associated with her name. Consequently, it is not a surprise that even *The Bell Jar*, of which the main discourse concerns the political traumas of Cold War America, has been strictly taken out of politics. The most obvious evidence of that kind of approach towards *The Bell Jar* can be seen in the reviews of the novel, and the literary criticism on both Plath and *The Bell Jar*, which immediately appeared in New York Times best-seller list. One of the best examples of that kind of attitude can be seen in A. Alvarez's work *The Writer's Voice*. He notes that while

...everyone knows about her broken marriage and despair and suicide, but how many of the thousands who have gobbled up her intensely autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar*, have ever bothered with her sardonic, unforgiving, yet curiously detached poems? Similarly, her husband Ted Hughes's *Birthday Letters* probably became a best-seller not because of the beauty and power of his language, but because people wanted the lowdown on his marriage to Plath.(114)

While Alvarez is right in the sense that her works have been repeatedly mired in her biography, he strictly separates *The Bell Jar* from the Ariel poems, just like other critics, (Butscher; 1976, Stevenson; 1989, West 1988) have done to *The Colossus*, *Crossing the Water*, *Winter Trees*, and *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*. The most tragic element is the fact that Alvarez cannot see the reality that the work he labels as intensely autobiographical, is a novel that has become an exemplary work for Plath's generation and is an intensely political novel.⁵ Like Alvarez, some other critics, such as Paul West, assume that, "a glamour of fatality hangs over the name of Sylvia Plath....It is a legend that solicits our desires for a heroism of sickness that can serve as emblem of the age, and many young readers take in Sylvia Plath's vibrations of despair as if they were the soul's own oxygen"(158). The dilemma lies under the fact that while Paul West associates Plath with madness in order to take her works out of politics, he also defines Plath as an emblem of the age. If so, how can one who wrote intensely autobiographical works turn out to be an emblem of her age? If her life and her works are so distant from the cultural, political, and social facets of her age, why then, would "many young readers take in Sylvia Plath's vibrations of despair as if they were the soul's own oxygen" (West 158). It is evident that removing the name Sylvia Plath from the cultural and social arena means taking political motives out of her works. However, although the Plath industry has defined *The Bell*

5) Paul Alexander states that "*The Bell Jar* became so popular that, when Bantam Books brought out an initial paperback edition in April 1972 – a run of 375,000 copies—it sold out that printing, plus a second and a third, in one month. In the mid-eighties, more than a decade and a half later, *The Bell Jar* paperback edition was selling some fifty thousand copies a year"(348).

Jar in terms of an apolitical form of work, even her creative process itself was intensely political, which was apparently a response to the limitations of her age.

Understanding the significance of *The Bell Jar* and deciphering the meaning of the text will also give the key to the writing style of Plath which is quite political. As Frederick Jameson emphasizes "...there is nothing that is not social and historical –indeed that everything is "in the last analysis political" (Unconscious 5). In relation with Jameson's crucial comment, it can be asserted that *The Bell Jar* is one of the most significant literary texts of twentieth-century American literature, which crystallizes the political, social, and psychological traumas and *facts* of Cold War America.

In parallel with the Cold War ideology that was imposed on American culture, calling for a turning back towards home that meant turning back to the family in order to protect oneself from the so-called "enemy within," Plath always seemed to write about her family and her life which signifies much larger social and political influences of her culture. In an interview Peter Orr asks Plath, "Do your poems tend to now to come out of books rather than out of your own life?"(169). Plath's answer patently refutes the sole use of autobiography in her works. She responds,

No, no: I would not say that all. I think my poems immediately come out of the sensuous and emotional experiences I have, but I must say I cannot sympathize with these cries from the heart that are informed by nothing except a needle or a knife, or whatever it is. I believe that one should be able to control and manipulate experiences, even the most terrifying, like madness, being tortured, this sort of experience, and one should be able to manipulate these experiences with an informed and an intelligent mind. I think that personal experience is very important, but certainly it shouldn't be a kind of shut-box and mirror-looking, narcissistic experience. I believe it should be *relevant* to the larger things, the bigger things such as Hiroshima and Dachau and so on.(Orr 169-70)

Although *The Bell Jar* has always been separated from Plath's other works, as the critics have labeled it as a "potboiler" that solely focuses on the life story of Plath, the writing process of the novel illustrates the organic form of writing that Plath postulated as a counter attack against Cold War ideology,⁶ which was mainly imposed

6) As a result of the Cold War ideology, American women were forced to spend their lives at home in order to protect their children and their family from the communist threat. Actually, the enemy is within but it is not the "Red Scare" but the Cold War ideology that imposes containment as the only possible way to survive. In relation, it should be underlined that the containment is domestic more than political. Therefore traditional female occupations were strictly limited to nursing, and secretarial work. As a result, the captivated women in their cages, at home, lost their political and social voice. That's the reason why Plath, in most of her works, associates the female psyche with Hiroshima and the concentration camps which define the same pain that the socially castrated American women felt.

on women.⁷ She apparently wrote *The Bell Jar*, step by step, like placing each block carefully in order to construct a tower. At the end, the basis of this metaphoric tower turns into *The Bell Jar* and all other works are built upon it. A fine example of this enigmatic strategy is hidden in the ambiguity of the creation time line of the novel.

Although Hughes insisted on claiming that Plath wrote *The Bell Jar* sometime in 1960, other sources supply thoroughly different facts. Most of the critical studies on Plath quote Louis Ames's note on *The Bell Jar*. Judith Kroll in the notes page of her work gives the quotation of Louis Ames "It is probable that Sylvia already had a version of *The Bell Jar* in her trunks when in [in 1957] she returned to the States" (Ames 287).⁸ In addition, Aurelia Plath, in *The Letters Home*, underlines the fact that Sylvia did not share anything with her while she was drafting her novel. Last but not the least, Plath' journals indicate the fact that she did not share most of her works with Ted. Sylvia Plath writes in her journal, indicating her works, "DO NOT SHOW ANY TO TED"(J 467). All these prove that not only Ted but also Aurelia were unaware of the writing process of the novel. Therefore, trusting Hughes's claims on *The Bell Jar* that Plath wrote the novel sometime in 1960 proves impossible. In addition, the claims about *The Bell Jar* being regarded as a "potboiler" also turn out to be misguided. Furthermore, "Sylvia once described the *Bell Jar* as 'an autobiographical apprentice' work" (Harris 112). Plath also claimed that she wrote the novel in order to "free [herself] from the past" (Harris 112). The problematic point is that from the very first time that the critics have heard the voice of Plath, they have done so believing that *The Bell Jar* was an unimportant work for Plath, solely a potboiler. However, the voice they've heard is the wrong one as in her journals Plath writes "One reason I could keep up such a satisfactory letter-relationship with her while in England was we could both verbalize our desired image of ourselves in relation to each other..." (J 449). Furthermore, members of the Plath industry, such as Anne Stevenson, always highlight the different tones of her letters and journals.⁹ Therefore, how can they ignore the hollowness of Plath's defining *The Bell Jar* as a potboiler to her mother? As stated by Saul Melof,

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- 7) As underlined by Christina Britzolaskis, "While the trauma, loss, and mourning work staged in the writing can never be entirely disentangled from the narrative of her life and death, it none the less exceeds the personalizations of biography"(148). For further reading see Christina Britzolaskis *Sylvia Plath and the Theatre of Mourning*. (Oxford: Carendon Press, 1999).
 - 8) For further reading on Lois Ames's claim see Lois Ames. Afterward. *The Bell Jar*. By Sylvia Plath. (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).
 - 9) Anne Stevenson, in her polemical Plath study, *Bitter Fame. A Life of Sylvia Plath*, compares and contrasts the different tones in Plath's letters to her mother and her journals. However, she does not do that comparison in order to decipher the reason of the difference, but to declare Plath as a schizoid women who did not get on well even with her mother. For further reading see Ann Stevenson. *Bitter Fame. A Life of Sylvia Plath*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989).

Nor can we take seriously her having referred to it as a ‘potboiler’ and therefore to be kept separate from her serious work: the oldest and most transparent of all writer’s dodges. All the evidence argues against it: as early as 1957 she had written a draft of the novel; she completed the final version on a Eugene Saxton Fund fellowship and felt toward its terms an urgent sense of commitment and obligation; the painstaking quality of the writing—but above all, its subject: her own pain and sickness, treated with literal fidelity, a journal done up as a novel, manifestly re-experienced, and not from any great distance of glowing health.(103).

The Bell Jar is apparently, Plath’s grand project, not a potboiler. It is not a surprise that, Plath defined her novel in terms of an attempt to free herself from the past, as she must have thought about her depiction of the socially blind mother in *The Bell Jar*, which also signifies Aurelia, just like most of the middle class mothers in Cold War America. While, it can be assumed that Plath’s journals are the most trustable sources to understand Plath’s desire to write not only a novel but also novels. On March 1, 1951, Plath writes to her mother,

Imagine one awestruck girl greeted me yesterday with, “I hear you’re writing a *novel*. I think that’s just wonderful!” Whereupon I felt like telling her I was my twin sister and never wrote a damn thing in my life. I’ve got to get to work if I’m to live up to my “reputation.” At least Olive Higgins Prouty can feel I really *do* write. Seems that scholarship was rather well chosen. Hope the dear is content (LH 67).

She always highlighted her desire to write a novel, she notes “O the desire to write a novel...”(J 375). Plath also highlights the difficult process of writing prose, she wishes, and “If only I could come to the novel...” (J 474). In addition, she wants to be original, Plath declares her strategy, which is; “Make your own style, don’t copy” (276). Perhaps signaling her future intentions for *The Bell Jar* Plath writes,

I could write a terrific novel. The tone is the problem. I’d like it to be serious, tragic, yet gay & rich & creative. I need a master, several masters. Lawrence, except in *Women in Love*, is too bare, too journalistic in his style. Henry James too elaborate, too calm & well mannered. Joyce Cary I like. I have that fresh, brazen, colloquial voice. Or J.D. Salinger. But that needs an “I” speaker which is so limiting. Or Jack Burden. I have time. I must tell myself I have time. (J 274-5).

Apparently, *The Bell Jar* was her grand project and she wished to write it more than anything else in life. If she had viewed it simply as a potboiler, an unsuccessful attempt, she wouldn’t have written another novel, which was the sequel of *The Bell Jar*. Plath wrote to her mother on March 4, 1962, “... I grind daily on the rough draft of my “novel”; I only

know that it will cover nine months and be a soul-search, American-girl-in-Cambridge, European vacations, etc." (LH 305). At that time, Plath was writing *Double Exposure* that was going to be the sequel of *The Bell Jar*.¹⁰

Her last novel also crystallizes the writing style of Plath in a clearer manner, because she informs the reader that her novels were written step by step and the completion of all the drafts, composed of different details, eventually came to form a whole novel. Indicating her third novel, Plath writes to her mother, "... shall try to draft this terrific second [third] novel that I'm dying to do" (LH 473). The number 'third' is significant as her journals prove the existence of her last novel, *Double Exposure*, which was destroyed by Hughes and Assia Wewill, and her second novel which was destroyed by Plath during the bonfire that was occurred after the phone incident. Therefore, if Plath had regarded *The Bell Jar* as a potboiler and herself as an unsuccessful novelist, she wouldn't have written any further novels, at least one of which was the sequel to *The Bell Jar*.¹¹ As a result of her correspondence with her mother and her journals, it becomes evident why the ending of *The Bell Jar* gives the reader the feeling that the novel does not actually end but will continue in another novel.

It can be assumed that *The Bell Jar* is Plath's grand project, giving inspiration to her entire work.¹² The most apparent example of that are the poems in the *Colossus* and the enigmatic voice in *The Bell Jar* and in the journals. "The Manor Garden," "Two Views

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- 10) The outline of the *Double Exposure* can be seen in Plath's 1962 short story "Mothers" in which the protagonist is Esther, just like the protagonist of *The Bell Jar*. However, in parallel with Plath's drafts of her second novel, in the "Mothers" Esther is married and she is associated with marriage and motherhood which are the central themes of *Double Exposure*. For further reading see Sylvia Plath. *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams. Short Stories, Prose, and Diary Excerpts*. Ed. Ted Hughes. (New York, Harper Perennial, 2000).
 - 11) Plath biographers Ronald Hayman and Paul Alexander claim that Plath destroyed the sequel of *The Bell Jar*. On the other side, many Plath biographers claim that Plath destroyed a novel which would be dedicated to Hughes and the novel was about a successful marriage. The claim that the sequel of *The Bell Jar* is the last novel destroyed by Hughes, as the subject of the novel was the trauma that Plath experienced throughout her marriage. The subject seems to be easily adapted to the last pages of *The Bell Jar* because the reader knows that Esther has already married and she has a baby. However, after she leaves the asylum, the reader gets curious about what will happen to her as a married wife. It is not difficult to surmise that Esther will probably face a traumatic marriage like her entire generation, as throughout *The Bell Jar* Esther criticizes marriage as a problematic institution.
 - 12) Linda Wagner Martin comments that "The *Bell Jar* has repeatedly been banned and taken out of secondary school libraries in the 1980s and 1990s suggests that Plath's approach to sexual topics was ahead of its time, and our own. Her deference to the established literary conventions, in what she could not write about sexual experience, suggests that she understood all too well what her role as a woman writer was to be" (95). For further reading see Linda Wagner Martin, *The Bell Jar. A Novel of the Fifties*. (New York: Twayne, 1992).

of a Cadaver Room,” “Night Shift,” “The Eye-mote,” “Hard Castle Crags,” “Departure,” “The Colossus,” “Medallion,” and various other poems have direct references to *The Bell Jar* in relation to the metaphors and motives Plath uses in *The Colossus* which act like a bridge to decipher the political tone of her novel. Apparently, Plath was inspired by the draft of *The Bell Jar*, whose political motives and metaphors have a direct parallelism with *The Colossus*. After the creation of *The Colossus* the next step was *Crossing the Water*. While *The Colossus* derived its origin from *The Bell Jar*, *Crossing the Water* adds a new stepping stone to reach the *Ariel* poems. That is the reason why Tracy Brain endorses,

The conclusion that these difficulties lead me to is this: reading Plath doesn't mean reading her only once. When editing and interpreting Plath's texts, and trying to establish any sort of Plath "canon," there is a way of reading that comes back to the poem or story or novel again and again, experimenting with different versions and orders and connections. Reading Plath involves a long-term relationship with her work and its multiple, indeterminate versions. ("Unstable" 35)¹³

In *Crossing the Water*, “Finisterre,” “Face Lift,” “Insomniac,” “In Plaster,” “The Surgeon at 2 A.M.,” “Mirror,” and various other poems seem as if they are part of *The Bell Jar*, and symbols such as “silver,” “moon,” “clinic,” “surgeon” are not only the central metaphors of Cold War America but also of *The Bell Jar*. In addition to these books of poems *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams* is a significant work that not only illustrates the powerful impact of *The Bell Jar* on Plath, but also the organic form of writing. “Superman and Paula Brown’s New Snowsuit” (1955), opens with a sentence that has a similar tone to *The Bell Jar*. The story opens with “The year the war began ...” (JP 281). In addition, “The Wishing Box” (1956) Plath’s character Agnes Higgins reminds the reader of “Elly Higginbottom” in *The Bell Jar*. “The Shadow’s” (1956) character is “Mr. Greenbloom” (JP 145), whose surname resembles that of Esther Greenwood. Furthermore, in a 1962 story “Mothers” the protagonist is “Esther” just like in *The Bell Jar*. As Melody Zajdel implies,

What is interesting to the reader in of these twenty stories is the consistency with which Plath dealt with the same materials and themes throughout her fiction. Hughes indicates that Plath ‘launched herself into

13) In relation with Tracy Brain's comments, it can be assumed that Plath's writing style is close to palimpsest writing. Palimpsest is a manuscript on which more than one text can be written, it is also a canvas that can be reused. In relation, through palimpsest writing, Plath used the outline of *The Bell Jar* as a palimpsest, as a canvas that can be reused, on which she created many works. Through focusing on palimpsest writing, reading Plath's works in terms of intertextuality gains significance.

The Bell Jar in 1960.' But at least four stories mentioned above, written between 1954, and 1959, deal with some of the same material (246).

Last but not the least, the voice of the journals has an immediate connection with Esther Greenwood, while Esther's friends and the people that compose her social milieu also have a direct parallel with Sylvia's. Especially Esther's discourse on the portrayal of women in Cold War America is supported by the discourse in the voice of the journals. Therefore, while the political symbols and motives mainly derive their sources from the draft of *The Bell Jar*, Plath's journals are also one of the most significant sources for all of them. Interestingly, *The Bell Jar* does not only take nourishment from Plath's poems and short stories, but also gives inspiration to other works. As Rose insists "... Plath may be censored but, as we have seen, she also censors, transforms and endlessly rewrites herself" (Rose, "Haunting" 104). That is the reason why Plath mentions to her mother about a letter she wrote, while she was at McLean. Although she never sent it to her friend, she kept it. As she informs, "I never sent this. However, I kept it as a record of how I felt about things at the time, looking back at last summer" (LH 129).¹⁴ It is evident that, Plath kept her journals and letters so carefully because by keeping them as records, she had the chance of looking back again and again in order to build new experiences that gave inspiration to new works.

Finally, Plath's secret project, *The Bell Jar*, gave birth to various poems and short stories and the final steps were *Ariel* and *Winter Trees* in which the political motives are intensified.¹⁵ As mentioned by Robin Peel,

Sylvia Plath's final poetry provides similarly explicit glimpses of a Cold War and nuclear war awareness, as in "Fever 103" with its ghostly images of "tradition" and "Hiroshima ash." She learned to see America better from the global perspective offered by her later experience. But this awareness, though deliberately disguised or concealed in most of her imaginative work, had been part of her consciousness since childhood. As a twelve-year-old, Plath recorded in her diary the news of dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Five years later she coauthored a published article protesting the decision of the United States to continue research into nuclear weapons. Later she corresponded with her admirer Eddie Cohen, whose long letters expressed anxieties about international events (Peel, "Political" 40).

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- 14) At the beginning of *The Bell Jar* "summer" is also defined in terms of entrapment and suffocation.
- 15) As Paul Alexander comments, "*Ariel* sold in unprecedented numbers, more than a half-million copies, and turned out to be one of the all-time-best-selling volumes of poetry. (343-344).

The political voice of Plath is again supported by an organic form of writing as Tracy Brain underlines,

the Ariel collection and the texts written during its composition need to be thought of as connected, as longer works, clusters and sequences composed of two or more texts, rather than as numerous individual ones ... "Morning Song" ..."Barren Women" ... "Heavy Women" ... "February 22) all operate through references to statues, museums, and paintings. Together, they form a sort of rehearsal for the radio play Plath was to write a year later, *Three Women*¹⁶...(Brain, "Unstable" 21).

Among the *Ariel* poems, especially, "Thalidomide," "The Applicant," "Barren Women," "Lady Lazarus," "Tulips," "A Secret," "Elm," and "The Detective" she directly refers to the Cold War years that come to the surface as emblems of fear and anger. This time Plath's landscape is not only the United States but also Britain where she could interpret her country from a different perspective. Therefore, while *The Bell Jar* and some stories in *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams* define the anxieties of Cold War America, the *Ariel* poems intensify the fear and anger towards the political atmosphere that caused an unstable world. As mentioned by Robin Peel, "There is fear in *The Bell Jar*, but is disguised by the wonderfully mordant humor of the narrator. In the later *Ariel* poems, there is also fear, and humor, and a rich anger" ("Back" 46).

In relation to the *Ariel* poems, and *Winter Trees*, there might have been parallelism between *Ariel*, *Winter Trees*, and *Double Exposure*, (Plath's final and unpublished novel) because just like the writing process of *The Bell Jar*, which triggered the creation of *Johnny Panic*, The Colossus, and *Crossing the Water*, Plath must have built her last novel side by side with the *Ariel* poems and her radio play, and other poems in *The Winter Trees*. In *The Winter Trees*, "Apprehensions," "The Courage of Shutting Up," and her radio play *Three Women*, written for the BBC, are the most obvious works that illustrate the identical voice of her previous works, and especially the one in *The Bell Jar*.¹⁷

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- 16) Plath's representation of the female body, not only in her poems but only in novel and short stories, which is the signifier of female psychology, can also be seen in the paintings Plath did as she was at Smith College. In addition to her literary career, she was also very successful at painting. After studying the Archives of Plath at Smith and Lily Library at Indiana University, Kathleen Connors states, "Pictures Plath made at Smith College, however, continued to focus primarily on representations of women. Perhaps the most common subject of her childhood and teen artwork, Plath's fascination with the female body is evident in all genres of her artwork, from her early diary doodles of film star glam-girls to her last dated visual piece in the archives, a 1960 collage of newspaper cuttings that places a shapely woman in a bathing suit within commodity culture and militarism of Eisenhower's America." (72).
- 17) Plath writes in her journal, "I shall write a complete fantasy life of tearful-joyful stories for women – tremulous with all varieties of emotion (J 413). She managed to do this, as not only

In conclusion, it is clear that *The Bell Jar* is the kernel of Plath's creative power and also is the literary work that gave inspiration to the *Ariel* poems. It is not a surprise that the critics who have labeled Plath as a schizophrenic woman also labeled Esther Greenwood as mad. Apparently, the Plath industry have tended to associate Plath with Esther Greenwood in *The Bell Jar*, who is also read in terms of her schizophrenic voice rather than her political discourse. However,

To label Esther as "schizophrenic" and leave it at that does not take us very far. For Sylvia Plath's focus in *The Bell Jar* is not on mental illness per se, but on the relationship of Esther's private psychosis to her larger social situation. Indeed, her dilemma seems to have a great deal to do with being a woman in a society whose guidelines for women she can neither accept nor reject. (Perloff, "Ritual" 511).

Therefore, if Esther Greenwood is also regarded as an extension of Plath in order to degrade the literary power of the work, the critics unconsciously give the greatest power to Esther as a woman. If she is Plath, it is impossible to separate her from politics as Plath, who studied both at Smith and Cambridge, one of the most prestigious institutions in the world, both as an instructor and a student at the peak of the Cold War years, and who deeply experienced the fears of the Cold War and the possibility of Nuclear War as a mother and a writer, can't have closed her eyes to the realities of her social and political milieu. It cannot be emphasized enough that she was never simply "the mad woman in the attic" but rather a master of cultural critique.

in *The Bell Jar*, but also in *Three Women* she reflects the portrayal of female figures from various perspectives. Koren Yahuda and Eliat Negev's work, *Lover of Unreason. Asia Wevill, Sylvia Plath's Rival and Ted Hughes's Doomed Love* highlights that her last novel, which was destroyed by Hughes and Wevill, focused on the female life. However, this time the trauma of marriage was portrayed. Therefore the journey of Esther Greenwood might have been continued in *The Double Exposure*.

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