



## A World under Men's Duress: Gender Stereotyping, Patriarchy and Mental Turmoil in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* and Selected Poetry

Sadia Zahoor\*, Saima Manzoor\*\*

---

**ABSTRACT:** *This research article purports to examine Sylvia Plath's selected poetry and her only fiction prose The Bell Jar. The aesthetic bulk of literature provided by Plath enunciates to elevate the autonomy of repressed American women and the morbid reality of 1950's conformist American society, through her female characters. It examines Plath's selected poetry by extricating the oppressed female position in the society, who were in quest to devise their own identity away from the domains of misogynistic-identity. By exposing the women caught up in the throes against normative gender identity after Cold War, and its deleterious impacts on them. Hence, portraying the patriarchal constraints and gender stereotyping that became an obstacle to an iconic nineteen-year old Esther Greenwood's dreams under a symbolic "bell jar". This bell jar, indicates the stifling patriarchal constraints, where Esther is imprisoned under its glass dome. Eventually, aggravating her mental health, and leading her life towards desolation, emptiness and identity crisis.*

---

**Keywords:** Autonomy, conformist, misogynist-identity, gender stereotyping, patriarchy, mental health.

---

### Introduction

This research article outlines the stifling image of the American Women under men's duress through Plath's *The Bell Jar* and selected poetry such as, *Mirror*, *Lady Lazarus* and *Daddy*. Sylvia Plath is regarded a feminist as her work delineates the American conformist 1950's society and its deleterious consequences on women. Although, Plath did not slogged to write as feminist usually do, but she is represented a feminist as she has disclosed the women situation in her work. Rose (2016) contends that Plath is among the writers who were first to express her aguish against child rearing and patriarchy. Plath's artistic rendering of female characters and their subdued situation depicted in her work, makes her work an atypical piece for feminist criticism. This paper aims to present the patriarchy, gender stereotyping and mental turmoil in Plath's semi-autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar* and her

---

\* M.Phil Scholar Department of English Literature and Linguistics University of Balochistan Quetta

\*\* Associate Professor, Department of English Literature, University of Balochistan

selected poems. It articulates the bestial male-dominated patriarchal society. By portraying the American women who were unable to acquiesce the social norms, and inept to be as passive as the society expected them to be.

This paper aims to present the patriarchy, gender stereotyping and mental turmoil in Plath's semi-autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar* and her selected poems. It articulates the bestial male-dominated patriarchal society. By portraying the American women who were unable to acquiesce the social norms, and inept to be as passive as the society expected them to be. Esther Greenwood an educated girl, who is bestowed with high aptitude is unable to endure the society's pressures and to be under men's duress. She refuses to accept and follow the men made traditions like her mother and many other stereotypical women did, rather she yearns to be a famous poetess. Unfortunately, her dreams evanesces when she gets acquainted with the reality and the double standards of this patriarchal world. A society where there are no restrictions for men, but only for women.

This study also examines the psychological and mental turmoil of the American society after Cold War, by bringing forth the oppressive attitude of men which caused mental problems such as depression in American women particularly in Esther. The American society after Cold War expected a woman to be an ideal wife, mother and a domestic caregiver. The role implied to women was to be amenable as men expected them to be without any grievance. This ultimately, brought with it mental trauma among many educated women including Esther Greenwood who aspired to be as productive as men. By urging Esther towards identity crisis and splitting her between repugnant choices, it ensue masochistic attitude in her coercing her to commit suicide. For Esther, the best way to escape from this men's world is by taking her own life, she views death as an emancipation against male dominated society.

Plath's poetry discloses the inferior status of women in the American society. She displays women as a commodity of men. The poetess's rage and anger against tyrannical men such as her father and husband is depicted in *Daddy*. In the poem *Lady Lazarus*, Plath's hatred against men is obvious when she writes, "I want to eat men like air" (Line, 84). *Mirror* presents the female combat with the process of aging as the society cannot accept her with any flaw or blemish. In this research article, Plath's poetry and her fiction novel *The Bell Jar* is analyzed by highlighting patriarchy,

gender stereotyping and mental turmoil as an entrapment and suffocation for women leading them towards a catastrophic end.

### **Literature Review**

Sylvia Plath presents the role of 1950's American women through her semi-autobiographical novel and her poetry. *The Bell Jar* is the story of Plath herself, but in the disguise of Esther Greenwood. Plath's work is grounded on her own life experiences by exposing the subject concerns of feminists such as, repressed female ambitions, depression, themes of death, resurrection, gender stereotyping, patriarchy and misogyny. Rosi Smith (2008) writes that Plath and her protagonist namely, Esther Greenwood lived in an era where "... women were explicitly told that happiness could only be achieved through the enactment of a biological imperative, in a society in which all deviance was treated with suspicion" (Smith, 2008, p.34). The restrictions imposed on women brought with it many health complications in women. Smith (2008) also notices that these suppressed conditions curtailed the possibilities for women's progress and development. These conditions caused many women to display neuroticism that is also evident in Esther's psyche. Esther sees the stereotypical women around her and none of them presents a multifaceted identity in which Esther can recognize herself.

Pinkie (2011) claims that Esther finds difficulty in assimilating herself in a society with expectations of "femininity". Plath's *The Bell Jar* is the reiteration of Friedan Betty's idea of "the problem with no name". Esther Greenwood's struggle is a complicated problem to name. *The Bell Jar* portrays gender stereotyping as "... psychological and nearly impossible" (Pinkie, 2011, p.4). Tsank (2010) notices that Esther inner turmoil is due to the chaos of the outside world. *The Bell Jar* outlines Esther mental illness and her acuity about the world around her. *The Bell Jar* links the ubiquitous psychiatric problems in 1950's American society with societal trends and issues prevalent in that era.

Pelt (2015) contends that Esther's act of disposal of her wardrobe highlights the preliminary to her nervous breakdown. Esther is unable to fashion a viable personal and professional self that encompasses elements of multiple "feminine" identities not because of her mental illness, but due to the clash between the wardrobes of various identities with each other. Pelt (2015) reads *The Bell Jar* from the lens of fashion by highlighting not only, Esther identity crisis, mental illness and recovery, but also the contemporary American sartorial practices. Pelt writes that:

“In *The Bell Jar* Plath recognizes the fashion’s ambivalent qualities it presents “a protagonist who tries but fails to resolve her individual “identity ambivalences” through fashion” (Pelt, 2015, p.14).

Ghandeharion Bozorgian, & Sabbagh (2015) believe that in first nine chapters of *The Bell Jar*, during Esther’s stay at New York she refers to different advertisements several times. “During this time, the significance of fashion and advertisements is obvious since Esther describes the world around her in terms of advertisements” (Ghandeharion, Bozorgian, & Sabbagh 2015, p.68). Esther presents the fakeness of New York fashion and glamour. Gujarjgan (2011) contends this fakeness of New York glamour is quite obvious in the scene of photoshoot, where the girls are not having a photoshoot with their boy-friends, but with the prompts hired for the occasion. Ghandeharion, Bozorgian & Sabbagh (2015) claims that throughout the novel, Esther is in a conflict between accepting the norms or to deny them. Esther is stuck between two choices; her aspirations for being an independent woman and a wish to be a wife and a mother. Gujarjgan (2011) believes Esther is paralyzed, not due to many opportunities provided to her, but due to the lack of opportunities provided to an artistic middle-class young girl. She is unable to assimilate with standard female roles prescribed to wife and a mother. “The story of Esther is a coming-of-age novel in which the stereotypes of character formation that accord with the American myth are challenged”. (Gujarjgan, 2011, P.113).

Plath began to write confessional poetry as a psychiatric-therapy for herself. Pupos (2013) analyzes that Plath through her confessional poems, speaks up against the taboos that women were incapable to break in the 1950’s. Plath has attempted to write countless poems. Her poetry is regarded as confessional by aiming to share her own personal life experiences. Tanu and Gupta (2014) writes that: “Plath’s poetry provides a wider spectrum. She is concerned not only about her own self-body and mind, but also all those who are suppressed by the powerful elements of the world” (Tanu and Gupta, 2014, p.48). In *Daddy* the speaker compares herself with the Jews driven to concentration camps by the Nazis. While in *Lady Lazarus* Plath points out the physical exploitation of women in the patriarchal society.

Valizade (2017) believes Plath’s *Mirror* is a poem that is filled with mysticism. Plath’s *Mirror* is mystical as it comprises of words such as “god” and “mediate” that clearly refers to mysticism. “The mirror meditates, thinks, as it is a tool to reach a mystic state” (Valizade, 2017, p.164). Plath’s *Mirror* points her struggles and conflict

within the male dominated society. Bahmany (2015) writes that Plath through her poetry, her depiction of mirror and finally, through her writing, expresses herself.

### **Research Methodology**

The present research is qualitative content analysis research in nature. It provides textual analysis of chosen work of Sylvia Plath. Content analysis is a technique, used in a research to make replicable and accurate references by inferring the text used for the research. Content analysis is also the close reading of text. This content analysis technique is to be used, in order to explore the major themes of Plath's work principally, female emancipation in 1950's with reference to American society. The methodology to be used will be descriptive, analytical and interpretive. This research article will include the textual analysis of mentioned work of Plath i.e. *Daddy, Lady Lazarus, Mirror and The Bell Jar*.

The present study will deconstruct the oppression, subjection of women in the American society after Cold War. The status of women will be deconstructed through the theory of feminism laying emphasis on Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. The term feminism was coined by *Martha Lear* in March 1963 in the New York Times magazine. Feminist movement has become one of the prominent phenomenon today pointing that Women are treated discriminatively as compared to men. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A vindication of the rights women* (1792), was the first work to be called as a feminist. It aims to challenge the oppressions based on gender by questioning the cultural and historical background and context.

### **Data Analysis**

Sylvia Plath an American short story writer, novelist and a poetess was born in Boston, Massachusetts on 27<sup>th</sup> October, 1932. Though, Plath died young at the age of only thirty, but in this short span of life she managed to write a plethora of work. According to Bloom (2001) Plath wrote more than 250 poems, numerous non-fiction works for magazines and BBC, almost seventy short stories, a play, a children's book, a novel and one draft of her second novel. Not only this, but she also attempted to write her own extensive journal and plentitude of letters. Sylvia Plath was awarded with the Pulitzer award for writing "*The collected poems*."

Plath has attempted to write against gender stereotyping by becoming a voice for all the voiceless American women during 1950's. Judith Butler believes gender is performative. Judith Butler contends that gender "...is real only to the extent that it

is performed” (Butler, 1988, p.527). Sylvia Plath’s work exposes feminism in it, it possesses the themes of oppression of women. Plath presents female as a suppressed being in the patriarchal society, where the role of a woman is to be obedient and passive. She skillfully exposes the struggles and anguishes of American women. Plath has written multitude of poems, her poetry is still admired with large number of readership. Plath’s poetry is confessional in tone expressing her own virulent life experiences. The writing of poetry helps her to escape from this world where she cannot find love. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* explicates the relation of poetry with a woman, she believes a women embraces poetry only when she does not find love.

Plath’s poetry has the amalgamation of themes such as that of demise, resurrection, obliteration, ferocity, anguish, misogyny, patriarchy, gender stereotyping, motherhood, anger, femininity, detestation and so on. *Daddy* depicts patriarchy, it portrays a subordinate woman who is in quest for her autonomy. Qazzaz (2017) notices that Plath’s *Daddy* serves as an outstanding example aiming to expose staunch patriarchy. *Daddy* is a poem that possesses the theme of female exploitation by the stereotypical society and their struggle against patriarchy. *Daddy* connotes the father-daughter relationship, as a relation of dominant over frail. Here, father refers to patriarchy while, daughter is represented as a victim of patriarchy. The speaker describes her oppressed condition and suffocation under her father’s black shoe in which she has lived for thirty years. Having no audacity to speak to the oppressors; her father and her husband. Plath writes that:

You do not do, you do not do  
 Any more, black shoe  
 In which I have lived like a foot  
 For thirty years, poor and white,  
 Barely daring to breathe or Achoo (Lines 1-5).

The speaker compares her father to a swastika, “so black no sky could squeak through,” identifying his cruelty with the Nazi. While, referring herself to an

innocent Jew, to reinforce her position of being a victim to the father. The father stands in front of a blackboard, as an authoritarian teacher “You stand at the blackboard, daddy” (Line, 51). The Speaker fails to retain a venerated image of her father and wants to kill off the father. When she says that: “Daddy, I have had to kill you” (Line, 6). In *Daddy*, the speaker reprimands the tyranny of men by referring not only to her father, but her husband too who has drank her blood for seven years:

If I've killed one man I've killed two  
The vampire who said he was you  
And drank my blood for a year,  
Seven years, if you want to know” (Lines, 71-75).

*Daddy* articulates patriarchy by sharing the life experiences of the speaker with the dominating men; her father and husband in her life who makes her weak and her life as hell. As Beauvoir believes that the relation of woman to male, either to father, husband, or brother is that of a vassalage. Plath's *Daddy* ends with line “Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through” (Line, 80). The speaker calls her father a bastard\_ a man without father who does not know the worth of father's love.

Plath's *Mirror* attributes a divine power it is an aberrant mirror, behind which stands a stereotypical man which appalls the female onlooker. This mantic mirror gives the female observer an innuendo of her ageing and inexorable future. Here, Plath presents the female entity as a worthless object after ageing and the specular image of the 1950's and early 1960's stereotypical American society. It exhibits gender stereotyping by displaying the woman's inner mental turmoil when she is inept to be what a society expects her. The “mirror” in Plath's poem *Mirror* refers to the deterioration of beauty as vexation for the female speaker. When she is no more in the prime of her youth and beautiful the mirror displays absenteeism of sentiment. Aging process taunts the women by having a flaw that is ineluctable and degrades her value in the stereotypical society. Schwartz (2011) believes that *Mirror* depicts and relates to the lifetime association with an anonymous, impersonal woman who views

aging as a blemish. This change from youth to aging in the life of a woman turns to be a sign of inadequacy making her a non-entity. *Mirror* opens with the lines:

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.

Whatever I see I swallow immediately (Lines, 1-2).

*Mirror* claims to be silver and exact, by indicating the men's supremacy and false perfection. Plath's animates the mirror which can swallow, meditates, see, and also possess the speaking ability.

Plath's *Mirror* refers to gender stereotyping, it speaks on the behalf of men. This man symbolizes men's domineering role and dominates a woman and also expects her to be impeccable forever. This man asserts itself not cruel but only truthful:

I am not cruel only truthful

The eye of a little god, four-cornered (Lines 4-5).

Besides, mirror's immense supremacy and control over a woman, it asserts itself not cruel but truthful, exculpating itself from the woman's censure of cruelty. Bahmany (2015) believes that Plath's *Mirror* is impassive and objective which attributes to it an immense power and also a chance for cruelty. This mirror possess a powerful aura with infinite knowledge, upgrading the mirror from a prosaic status to the esteemed rank of a "god" in her eyes. The female-onlooker yearns to identify herself as an archetypal-mythical persona, and tries to liberate herself from the stereotypical images of herself through poetic process. *Mirror* represents the senescence of a woman through the woeful image of a terrible fish. The poetess writes that:

In me she has drowned a young girl,

And in me an old woman

Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish (Lines, 17-18).

Plath in her poem *Mirror* artistically portrays gender stereotyping attributing men with all the power while, making women powerless and passive creatures.

*Lady Lazarus* is among Plath's *Ariel* poems depicting the mental turmoil in American women after Cold War. The title of *Lady Lazarus* is an inspiration from the *New Testament* account of "Lazarus" who was resurrected by Jesus Christ. Plath refers her resurrection to "Lazarus" by naming herself "Lady Lazarus". This poem articulates the depressed tone in it by proffering a glimpse of the speaker's mental turmoil, who seeks gratification in taking her own-life. Here, she recounts her suicide attempts. The poem starts with the lines:

I have done it again.

One year in early ten

I manage it (Lines, 1-3).

The female speaker in the above lines refers to her suicide attempts. She tries to kill herself seeking freedom against the patriarchal society as a reprisal. Moreover, the speaker compares her personal feelings with the history using different metaphors to describe the ubiquitous gender stereotyping and patriarchy in American society after Cold War. "...my skin/ Bright as Nazi lampshade (Lines, 4-5). The Speaker uses metaphors such as "Nazi lampshade", "paper weight" and "Jew linen" indicating the atrocious delinquencies performed by the Nazis on Jews. Here, the female speaker empathizes herself with the Jews. *Lady Lazarus* has a unique ability to die once in every decade. This act of dying is a kind of endowment possessed by the female speaker. She says:

Dying

Is an art, like everything else.

I do it exceptionally well (Lines, 43-45).

The first suicide attempt was just an accident when she was only ten. The speaker tries to commit suicide again when she is twenty years old. Now, she has committed third suicide as she is thirty "This is Number Three" (Line, 22). Dying is easy for her, but the difficulty lies in coming back to the same place, among "same brutes" (Line, 53) from whom she wants to seek autonomy. In *Lady Lazarus* the speaker uses German word "Herr" addressing her father and her husband. She calls

the men in her life who usurped her creativity as “Herr Doktor”, “Herr Enemy”, “Herr God”, “Herr Lucifer” (Lines 65-79). The speaker refers all men to be as cruel as the doctors during holocaust who ruthlessly burnt Jews, these men believe they are as powerful as “God” as Simone de Beauvoir writes about man that “... he considers himself a fallen god” (Beauvoir, 2011, p.169) but the speaker and women they are no less than “devils. Like Lazarus, the female speaker rises “out of the ash” (Line 82) rising like a “phoenix”, a Greek mythological legendary bird who obtains new life from ashes. Schwartz writes that: “In *Lady Lazarus*, gender becomes a weapon, a stratagem for eventually attaining control over male oppression and female transfiguration” (Schwartz, 2011, p.67). The female speaker wants to liberate herself from becoming men’s prey and finally, she destroys them by saying:

I rise with my red hair

And I eat men like air (Lines 83-84).

*Lady Lazarus* delineates a vicious affiliation between the society and individual through a multifaceted metaphors. The poem attains its meaning from the depiction of farfetched metaphors in it. From the onset of the poem, the speaker denigrates herself as effete comparing herself to a cloth, lampshade, linen and napkin. Later, the metaphors such as knees, skin and bone, and hair signifies her transience. Then, she is objectified as gold, ash and a cake of soap. Finally, she transmutes into a red haired devil, who eats men like air by revealing the impulse of revenge from men as Simone de Beauvoir claims: All oppression in one’s life ultimately leads to a state of war (Beauvoir, 2011). The oppressions in Plath’s life urged her to write exceptional piece of poetry with the theme of war in it as persistent in *Lady Lazarus*.

Sylvia Plath’s only prose fiction *The Bell Jar* is among her literary works, which promotes feminism and exposes the male dominant patriarchal society and its inimical effects on women. This American society and its double standards makes Esther split between two choices; the world of her own choice and the world of men’s choice. Plath lived in a society where mental trauma and paranoia were rife after “Cold War”. Plath reprehends the hypocritical society which seems to be like a

“jar” for Esther and many other subdued women like her. Baig (2013) writes that: “The idea of life in *The Bell Jar* itself donates to a sense of entrapment, suffocation and vacuity” (Baig, 2013, p.11). Esther limns Plath’s own experiences, Plath writes: “My heroine would be myself, only in disguise” (*The Bell Jar*, 1963, p.116). *The Bell Jar* recounts Plath’s life experiences as Esther Greenwood, who wins a competition and works as a guest editor of the magazine during the summer of 1953, by exhibiting the 1950’s culture which defined womanhood. Here, Esther’s stay at New York and unsatisfactory courtships with eleven other girls selected like her for magazine editorship is outlined who “looked awfully bored to her” (*The Bell Jar*, 1963, p.4). Before engaging with the people of diverse class, she critically views society’s norms for women making her to suffer from identity crisis. Axelrod (2010) states that: “Her guest editorship in New York, which was intended to integrate her into adult society has disintegrated her instead. Esther feels split between a fabricated public self and a truer, more elusive hidden self” (Axelrod, 2010, p.136).

Esther is encircled by her stereotypical women, like her mother (Mrs. Greenwood), Mrs. Willard (Buddy Willard’s mother), Betsy (her friend), Dodo Conway (Mrs. Greenwood’s fertile neighbor), who expects Esther to embrace these conventions like them. Esther abhors to imitate these stereotypical women and to serve men. She says: “The trouble was, I hated the idea of serving men in any way” (*The Bell Jar*, 1963, p.72). Esther’s mother wants her to learn shorthand so that she will be in demand of all young men. But, for Esther the worth of a woman after matrimony is akin to Mrs. Willard’s threadbare kitchen mat she says that:

And I knew that in spite of all roses and kisses and restaurant dinners a man showered on a woman before he married her, what he secretly wanted when the wedding service ended was for her to flatten out underneath his feet like Mrs. Willard’s kitchen mat (*The Bell Jar*, 1963, p.80).

Marriage seems as a life time servitude of men to Esther. She believes marriage will cut her wings as Simone de Beauvoir writes: “A woman is shut up in a kitchen or a boudoir, and one is surprised her horizon is limited, her wings are cut, and then she is blamed for not knowing how to fly.” (Beauvoir, 2011, p.660). Esther

wants to fly with her wings in all directions, "...like the colored arrows from a Fourth of July rocket" (The Bell Jar, 1963, p.87). She considers getting married and having children as a strenuous responsibility by saying that: "...children made me sick" (The Bell Jar, 1963, p.113). Esther shares her fret of getting married with Doctor Nolan by saying: "What I hate is the thought of being under a man's thumb" (The Bell Jar, 1963, p.212).

The society in which Esther lives held gender double standards. *The Bell Jar* exposes these gender stereotyping through the male characters. All men portrayed by Sylvia Plath depict a conventional insolence towards women and their careers. Esther tries to cast-off society's double standards, this alienates her and aggravates her mental health urging her to commit suicide. Esther Greenwood's acquaintances with her former boyfriend "Buddy Willard" establishes the core of gender anxiety in her. It is not only Buddy Willard who affects her mental life, but the acquaintances with all men in her life affects her health. Buddy Willard represents the image of all patriarchal men and plays an eminent role in aggravating her mental state.

The patriarchy prevalent in 1950's America became a source of mental trauma in women. After Cold War marriage was considered imperative for girls, family life was their main ambition. Beauvoir writes that: "woman first discovers herself in patriarchy as wife (Beauvoir, 2011, p.176). The society urged women to get married to be under man's duress and patriarchy. Lamb (2011) accentuates that many American women during 50's and early 60's were under psychiatric aid. The married women were reported unsatisfied with their married life while, the unmarried women were suffering from mental trauma and paranoia. Esther Greenwood in *The Bell Jar* also suffers from paranoia prevalent amongst the American women after Cold War.

The outset of *The Bell Jar* portrays the story of Rosenberg's that terrifies Esther Greenwood and later connects Esther's electrocution with their catastrophe as an act of rebellion and mental illness. Esther says about the execution of Rosenberg's that: "It had nothing to do with me" (The Bell Jar, 1963, p.1). Later, when Esther herself undergoes through ECT she takes it a punishment than cure. Esther's mental trauma arises as she is torn between choices incapable of choosing

between her desires that makes her neurotic. Esther says that: "If neurotic is wanting two mutually exclusive things at one and the same time, then I'm neurotic as hell" (*The Bell Jar*, 1963, p.89-90). Later, Esther's rejection from a summer writing course takes her into deep depression and Doctor Gordon's unmanaged electro-convulsive therapy results in her severe suicide attempt. After treatment the novel ends with Esther meeting with the board of hospital, suing her to be discharged. Esther Greenwood aspiration are marred by patriarchal society making her feel that she belongs to another planet and has mistook the way (Beauvoir, 2006).

### **Findings**

Plath's both genera's, prose and poetry represents the viciousness of society which seizes the autonomy of women. Plath's protagonist Esther Greenwood in *The Bell Jar* represents not only the story of one girl, but all those American women who were starving for autonomy during 50's and were in quest of their self-identity. Hence, alienating Esther and affecting her mental health psychologically. The novel's title *The Bell Jar* is a metaphor of suburban conformity, and conventional life as an entrapment and demise for Esther and many other women like her. It also represents Esther's mental suffocation under the "bell jar". This Bell Jar suffocates Esther Greenwood she says: "The bell jar hung, suspended a few feet above my head. I was open to circulating air" (*The Bell Jar*, 1963, p.206).

Plath's poetry reminds the readers about psychological oppressions, desire for autonomy and quest for attaining true self. She tries to redefine man-made traditions questioning, patriarchy and gender stereotyping. For instance, Plath's *Daddy* is an emblem of stifling patriarchy. In this poem, women are presented as the victims of patriarchy, whose repressive condition is compared to the Jewish prisoners in the concentration camps in Nazi's regime. *Daddy* presents Plath's wrath and rage against the image of father and men in general. The woman speaker in Plath's *Lady Lazarus* has a unique talent to die once in every decade. She tries to liberate herself from male control and juxtaposes her personal sentiments with the history. She relates herself with the innocent Jews by recalling the brutal doctors during holocaust, who burned many Jews alive. Plath's *Mirror* displays the agony of a

woman, who lives in a stereotypical society that is reluctant to accept her with any flaw. Besides, mirror is a man who has enormous authority and power over the woman, it asserts itself not cruel, but only honest. Plath simply dehumanizes women in this patriarchal society. Plath's work in fact stands as the greatest works in the feminist literature by presenting a cognizance of female experience.

### **Conclusion**

Sylvia Plath a modern American writer, exhibits the veracity of male dominant society and its baleful impacts on women in her work. Plath as a feminist through her literary work, became a voice for all oppressed women during 1950's American society. Plath skillfully pinpoints the restrictions imposed on women in the era she lived and its negative consequences, through her female characters in both of her literary genera's; poetry and fiction. Plath voices against gender stereotyping and patriarchy and rejects men's servitude by seeking autonomy through suicide. As Simone de Beauvoir in her work *The Second Sex* argues on the historical account of women's subdue position, Plath also contributes to women's emancipation by articulating American Women and their mental turmoil. Her work delineates the deleterious impacts of patriarchy and gender stereotyping which brought with it mental trauma in many women.

## References

- Axelrod, S. G. (2010). Alienation and renewal in the bell jar. *Plath Profiles: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Sylvia Plath Studies*, 3, 134-143.
- Bahmany, L. R. (2015). *Mirrors of entrapment and emancipation: Forugh Farrokhzad and Sylvia Plath*. Leiden University Press (LUP).
- Baig, M. (2013). Sylvia Plath's bell jar as a psychological space. *US Open English & literature journal*, 1(1), 01- 17.
- Beauvoir, S. D. (2006). *The woman destroyed*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Beauvoir, S. D. (2011). *The second sex*. London: vintage.
- Bloom, H. (2001). *Sylvia Plath: Comprehensive research and study guide*. USA: Chelsea House Publishers.
- Butler, J. (1988). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. *Theatre journal*, 40(4), 519-531.
- Ghandeharion, A., Bozorgian, F., & Sabbagh, M. R. G. (2015). Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar: a mirror of American fifties. *K@ ta*, 17(2), 64-70.
- Gjurgjan, L. I. (2011). The (Im) possibility of women's bildungsroman. *SRAZ, LVI*, 107-121.
- Gupta, T., & Sharma, A. B. (2014). Portrayal of gender roles in the poetry of Sylvia Plath. *Asian Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 3(3), 142-147.
- Lamb, V. M. (2011). The 1950's and the 1960's and the American Woman: The transition from the "housewife" to the feminist. Retrieved from <https://dumas.ccsd.cnrs.fr/dumas-00680821/document>
- Pelt, A. (2015). Esther's sartorial selves: Fashioning a feminine identity in the bell jar. *Plath Profiles: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Sylvia Plath Studies*, 8, 13.
- Pinke, C. (2011). The problem Sylvia Plath has left unnamed: Understanding the complexity of female disenchantment in the cold war era. *Valley Humanities Review*, 2, 1-18.
- Pipos, C. (2013). The confession of love, loss and anger in Sylvia Plath's poetry. *Plath Profiles: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Sylvia Plath Studies*, 6, 329-334.
- Plath, S. (1963). *The bell jar*. New York: Harper Perennial.

- Plath, S. (1981). *Collected poems*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Qazzaz, E. (2017). Acts of resistance in Sylvia Plath's daddy, lady Lazarus, and Ariel: a journey from oppression to emancipation. *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies* 4(1) 209-218.
- Rose, J. (2016). Feminism and the abomination of violence. *Cultural Critique*, 94, 4-25.
- Schwartz, S. E. (2011). Sylvia Plath: A split in the mirror. *Plath Profiles: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Sylvia Plath Studies*, 4, 55-76.
- Smith, R. (2008). Seeing through The bell Jar: Distorted female identity in Cold War America. *Aspeers*. 33-55.
- Tsank, S. (2010). The bell jar: A psychological case study. *Plath Profiles: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Sylvia Plath Studies*, 3, 166-177.
- Valizade, H. (2017). Sylvia Plath's "Mirror" and Forough Farrokhzad's "The bird may die" comparative analysis from a mystical perspective. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 8(1), 162-166.