

Integrated cells which
are reproducing
uncontrollably, and
which



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Integrated into the story of *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath is a “case history” of a depression patient, from its subtle beginnings to its terrifying consequences to its shaky resolution.

On the subject of this depression, there is an article written by William Styron which, in the course of describing his own dealings with the disease, he compares it to cancer. It is my own firm opinion that this assertion is perfectly valid, and it can be shown through careful analysis of the causes and effects of both depression and cancer that this is so. In addition, using *The Bell Jar* as an example of a case of depression, we will see how this comparison makes clear sense. First, we must address the nature of cancer and its effect on the individual bearing its weight. Cancer is the result of a mutation of the genetic material of a cell, resulting in the lack of some inhibiting factor which would otherwise restrict the uncontrolled reproduction of this cell. As a consequence, this cell reproduces without bound, generating a cluster of cells which are reproducing uncontrollably, and which use the resources of the body to an extent beyond their proportional allotment. Eventually, the requirements of the tumor exceed the body's ability to provide, and the individual dies.

Treatment of cancer includes surgery, the use of chemotherapy, and the use of radiation therapy. Surgeons removing a tumor make every attempt to remove as much of the affected tissue as possible, because the presence of even a single, properly placed cell left after surgery could result in a second bout with the cancer. Chemotherapy entails exposing the cancer to a barrage of chemicals which are toxic, in the hope of poisoning it to death.

Unfortunately, these chemicals, which are toxic to the tumor, are also toxic to the patient.

Chemotherapy results in a plethora of serious negative side effects for the patient, even for all of it's ability to fight the disease. Radiation therapy works by the same premise as chemotherapy, but instead of chemicals it is radiation that is used to try and destroy the cancer. Interestingly enough, often it is radiation which generates the mutation in the genetic material of the cell which causes the cancer, and yet it is possible to treat the cancer with radiation (exposure to certain chemicals can cause cancer too, resulting in the same paradox relating to chemotherapy.) Now, these treatments for cancer can be related to treatments for depression, as we will see shortly. Important to any discussion of cancer is a consideration of it's causes.

Because of the statistical nature of genetic mutations, which are the cause not only of cancer but of evolution, more spontaneous, natural genetic mutations must be negative than advantageous. Some of these negative mutations result in cancer. These natural mutations (another paradox) are caused by sunlight, chemicals in food, and normal biological processes occurring in the cell.

In all cases of cancer except for a select few, the victim has nothing to do with the cause of the cancer. Obvious exceptions include the use of tobacco and the careless exposure of one's skin to the sun. These situations are ones where the victim is wholly responsible for their condition, though we can still maintain compassion and make medical attempts to remedy their problem.

One other issue relating to cancer which needs to be addressed is that of pain related either directly to the cancer, or to its treatment.

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In many cases of cancer, the patient is in great pain. Often this pain results from the cancer itself, though many times the treatment (particularly chemotherapy and radiation therapy) results in pain and sickness. Doctors are permitted to prescribe pain medication, and in some states cannabis, to alleviate this pain, though many times they are reluctant to prescribe pain medication for extended periods of time (or cannabis at all) because of a fear of raising the suspicions of local or federal drug enforcement agencies. In general, however, the pain of a cancer patient can be satisfactorily soothed, though rarely entirely relieved. A similar discussion of depression is necessary to thoroughly understand the situation, and begins as follows.

Depression is