

Taylor of plath's novel  
the bell jar,



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Taylor (2012) has argued in his studies of why men oppress women that, 'most women throughout history have been enslaved by men' and this is shown in both *The Yellow Wallpaper* and *The Bell Jar*. Gilman's short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*, incorporates the absolute power men have in patriarchal societies, which they abuse towards women. This ownership and control over women to fit the traditional gender roles is constructed through gaslighting and its complete psychological manipulation leading to the female's mental illness.

Mental illness being defined as a condition which causes serious disorder in one's behavior or thinking. Whereas, the contemporary piece of Plath's novel *The Bell Jar*, the inability to control the pressure and fit into the traditional gender roles is the catalyst of Esther's mental illness. Gilman's short story is written in the first-person narrative in a journal. This is a privilege to the reader as it is the anonymous narrator's personal perspective.

The confidentiality of her narrative, including her work as a passionate writer, is presented as something she has to be 'so sly about it' around the other characters in the short story, including her husband. The slyness of her writing also connotes a sense of guilt possessing the narrator although writing is her way to escape from her physical confinement. To add to this, it builds distrust within the reader of John (the husband and her doctor) as well as his motive due to his hatred towards the narrator engaging with literature. This is reflective of the oppression of women due to the traditional gender roles, which consisted of having a purpose of being a wife not intellectual and educated, as that was a male-dominated field.

Plath builds a similar trust between the narrator and the reader in *The Bell Jar* as the majority of the novel is recollections or inner dialogue. However, in *The Bell Jar* it can also be viewed as a limited narrative, one which is detached and cold when recollecting her memories. This detachment could be derived from the pressure of traditional gender roles and representative of the desolation of conventional expectations.

Esther may feel as being alienated from a world and has to repress her dark humor. This isolation is presented by Plath instantly in the first section of Chapter 1, as Esther explains that due to her fortunate circumstances she should feel satisfied and fulfilled however she finds herself not 'steering anything, not even myself.' Despite overcoming her middle-class, with few opportunities she is unmotivated by the artificially glamorous New York, in fact it had the opposite effect and has made her feel 'very empty'. Through this Plath connotes numbness that occupies Esther, foreshadowing the takeover of madness and future mental illness, in a way of which the conflict of her feelings and the societal expectations becomes so large it leaves Esther unable to survive under it. It can also be argued that both of the first-person narratives in both *The Yellow Wallpaper* and *The Bell Jar*, are untrustworthy and unreliable due to their mental state and disorder. This is clear when the anonymous narrator of *The Yellow Wallpaper* frustratingly addresses the reader, "you see he does not believe I am sick!", this desperate yet alarming pronoun can be representative of the start of the deterioration of the protagonist into mental illness.

This convinced belief that she is sick can be seen as a product of John's acts and his controlling behavior, revealing the oppression and ignorance within

the household. It is clear to the reader that this relationship is under a controlling behavior, eing constructed by John as hedepriives the protagonist of means needed for independence as well as fromsources of support