

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL

INSTITUTO DE LETRAS

Mariana Chaves Petersen

**The Loss of Language in Sylvia Plath's Narrative:
Woman's Experience and Trauma in *The Bell Jar*,
"Tongues of Stone," and "Mothers"**

Porto Alegre

2017

Mariana Chaves Petersen

**The Loss of Language in Sylvia Plath's Narrative:
Woman's Experience and Trauma in *The Bell Jar*,
"Tongues of Stone," and "Mothers"**

Dissertação de mestrado apresentada ao
Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul
como requisito parcial para obtenção do grau
de Mestra em Letras.

Orientadora: Profa. Dra. Rita
Terezinha Schmidt

Porto Alegre

2017

FICHA CATALOGRÁFICA

Petersen, Mariana Chaves

The loss of language in Sylvia Plath's narrative: Woman's experience and trauma in *The bell jar*, "Tongues of stone", and "Mothers" / Mariana Chaves Petersen. — 2017.

117 f.

Orientadora: Rita Terezinha Schmidt.

Dissertação de Mestrado — Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Instituto de Letras, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras, Mestrado em Letras: Estudos de Literatura, BR-RS, 2017.

1. Sylvia Plath. 2. Narrativa. 3. Experiência da mulher. 4. Trauma. 5. Linguagem.

In loving memory of Therezinha Wilkoszynski Petersen



—Liv Ullmann as Jenny Isaksson in *Face to Face* by Ingmar Bergman

as palavras escorrem como líquidos
lubrificando passagens ressentidas

—Ana Cristina Cesar

Mais comment continuer de vivre dans une telle violence, si
douce aussi soit-elle. Ne pas mourir de mourir, mourir de ne
pas mourir.

—Luce Irigaray, *Speculum de l'autre femme*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	8
Resumo	9
Abstract	10
Abbreviations	11
Introduction	12
1 On Woman’s Experience and Trauma	22
1.1 Speculating with Luce Irigaray.....	22
1.1.1 Language of the Same and the (Nonexistent) Other.....	24
1.1.2 Maternal Origin, Female Genealogies, and Relationships between Women.....	29
1.1.3 Woman’s Sexuality, Theory, and Difference.....	32
1.2 On Melancholia and Trauma	39
1.2.1 The Language of Trauma	39
1.2.2 Melancholia and Incorporation	41
1.2.3 Trauma, Latency, and Memory	45
2 <i>The Bell Jar</i>	53
2.1 On Being a Woman	56
2.1.1 Language, Science, and the Hypocrisy of Gender Norms	56
2.1.2 Motherhood, Female Genealogies, and Relationships between Women.....	61
2.1.3 A Defense of Female Sexuality.....	68
2.2 Under the Bell Jar.....	73
2.2.1 Trauma and Language.....	73
2.2.2 Melancholia, Incorporation, and Trauma	75
2.3 A Possible Recovery	83
3 “Tongues of Stone” and “Mothers”	87
3.1 “Tongues of Stone”	89
3.2 “Mothers”	94
3.2.1 Relationships between Women and Motherhood	95
3.2.2 A Final Loss of Language.....	99
Conclusion	105
Works Cited.....	112

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my family for supporting my education and acknowledging the importance of graduate studies. To my lifetime friends and also the ones I made the last couple of years: your friendship was essential for me to go through with this process.

Thank you to my supervisor, Professor Rita Terezinha Schmidt, for being so present, for reading this thesis so carefully, and for being an example for me and for so many others. To Professor Elaine Barros Indrusiak and Professor Marta Ramos Oliveira, for being important parts of my academic life since my undergraduate studies until now. To Professor Eliana de Souza Ávila, for accepting to be a part of this work. To my undergraduate students from North American Literature IV: our discussions helped me to shape the arguments of this thesis.

I would also like to thank the professors and the staff of the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras (PPGLet): your classes and your guidance were essential to this work. To Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES), for the fellowship that allowed me to dedicate the last two years to research.

Finally, thank you to the staff of the Mortimer Rare Book Room, Smith College, for being so helpful with sending me Plath's manuscripts whenever I made a request.

RESUMO

Inicialmente publicado em 1963 sob o pseudônimo Victoria Lucas, *A redoma de vidro* traz como personagem principal e narradora Esther Greenwood, a qual faz duras críticas aos papéis atribuídos às mulheres nos Estados Unidos nos anos 1950, enquanto passa por um colapso, que culmina em tentativa de suicídio. Depois de o romance ser republicado, reconhecendo a autoria de Sylvia Plath, na Inglaterra em 1966 e nos Estados Unidos em 1971, ele foi objeto de diversas leituras críticas feministas, sendo mais recente o enfoque no romance como estudo de caso. Nesta dissertação, busco estabelecer um diálogo entre essas duas abordagens, relacionando gênero, feminismo, melancolia e trauma, fundamentando-me nos escritos de teóricos como Luce Irigaray, Cathy Caruth, Sigmund Freud e Nicolas Abraham e Maria Torok. Apesar de falarem de diferentes *loci*, ambas Irigaray e Caruth dão especial atenção à linguagem. No romance, Esther perde sua capacidade de ler e escrever, fato que está ligado não só às suas críticas a um mundo pertencente aos homens como também a certos acontecimentos que desencadeiam essa perda. Tendo isso em mente, relaciono a narrativa a dois contos de Plath: “Línguas de Pedra” e “Mães.” O primeiro, de 1955, traz uma personagem (sem nome) em um cenário semelhante ao de *A redoma de vidro*: em um hospital psiquiátrico, ela apresenta dificuldades de ler e de pensar. No segundo conto, escrito em 1962, a situação da protagonista, também Esther, pode ser comparada ao presente da narrativa de *A redoma de vidro*; ademais, uma vez estabelecido o paralelo, a personagem do conto parece apresentar uma perda ainda mais profunda da linguagem que a protagonista do romance.

Palavras-chave: Sylvia Plath; narrativa; experiência da mulher; trauma; linguagem.

ABSTRACT

Initially published in 1963 under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas, *The Bell Jar* has as its protagonist and narrator Esther Greenwood, who seriously criticizes the roles attributed to women in the United States in the 1950s. At the same time, she is going through a breakdown, which culminates in a suicide attempt. After the novel was republished, under Sylvia Plath's name, in England in 1966 and in the United States in 1971, it was the subject of several feminist critical readings, its focus as a case study being more recent. In this thesis, I aim to establish a dialogue between these two approaches, relating gender, feminism, melancholia, and trauma, grounded in the writings of theorists such as Luce Irigaray, Cathy Caruth, Sigmund Freud, and Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok. In spite of speaking from different loci, both Irigaray and Caruth give special attention to language. In the novel, Esther loses her ability to read and write, a fact that is connected not only to her critiques of a world that belongs to men but also to certain events that lead to this loss. With this in mind, I relate the narrative to two of Plath's short stories: "Tongues of Stone" and "Mothers." The first, from 1955, displays its main (nameless) character in a setting that is similar to *The Bell Jar's*: in a psychiatric hospital, she presents difficulties to read and think. In the second story, written in 1962, the protagonist, also named Esther, is in a situation that may be compared to the narrative present of *The Bell Jar*; furthermore, once a parallel with the novel is established, the story's character seems to present an even more profound loss of language than the novel's protagonist.

Keywords: Sylvia Plath; narrative; woman's experience; trauma; language.

ABBREVIATIONS

- TMT Cathy Caruth, "An Introduction to 'Trauma, Memory, and Testimony'" (*Reading On: A Journal of Theory and Criticism*, Issue 1: Trauma, Memory and Testimony, Fall 2006).
- UE Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).
- CÀC Luce Irigaray, *Le corps-à-corps avec la mère* (Les Éditions de la Pleine Lune, 1981).
- jtn Luce Irigaray, *je, tu, nous: Toward a Culture of Difference* (Routledge, 1993).
- SOW Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Cornell University Press, 1985).
- TS Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (Cornell University Press, 1985).
- BJ Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar* (Harper Collins, 2005).
- J Sylvia Plath, *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*. Ed. Karen V. Kukil (Anchor Books, 2000).
- JP Sylvia Plath, *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams* (Harper Perennial, 2008).
- LH Sylvia Plath, *Letters Home: Correspondence 1950-1963*. Ed. Aurelia Schober Plath (Harper Perennial, 1992).

Introduction

Let something happen. Something terrible, something bloody.
Something to end this endless flaking snowdrift of airmail letters,
of blank pages turning in library books. How we go waste, how
we go squandering ourselves on air. Let me walk into *Phèdre* and
put on that red cloak of doom. Let me leave my mark.

—Sylvia Plath, “Stone Boy with Dolphin”

Dody Ventura, the main character of Sylvia Plath’s 1957/58 short story “Stone Boy with Dolphin,” is tired of a life of “blank pages turning in library books” (*JP* 182): there is a sense of waste in activities that are seen as trivial. She thus longs for a happening: for something “terrible,” “bloody”; she wants to “put on that red cloak of doom” and “leave my [her] mark” (*JP* 182). In an a 1955 letter, Plath wrote to her benefactress at Smith College—who would later pay for most of her treatment at McLean hospital¹—Olive Higgins Prouty: “Perhaps the hardest thing I have to accept in life is ‘not being perfect’ in any way, but only striving in several directions for expression: in living (with people and in the world), and writing, both of which activities paradoxically limit and enrich each other” (*LH* 201-202). This quote is not only interesting for displaying how it was difficult for Plath to admit that she could not be perfect, but also for showing how she strived for expression, both in living and writing, activities that are seen to “limit and enrich each other.” We might return to Dody’s claim—“let me leave my mark”—which opposes the turning of blank pages, and which might also be seen as a striving for living and writing; for having one’s name

¹ In 1953, Plath returned home from a *Mademoiselle* internship in New York, to which she went after winning one of the magazine’s contests. Later, her mother, Aurelia noticed how Sylvia’s joy had left her, as biographer Andrew Wilson puts it (209). In August 1953, Sylvia tried to kill herself; she was found by her brother two days later (Wilson 217-219). Plath was then hospitalized at the McLean Hospital; there, following a treatment that was apparently not working, she would undergo at least ten electroconvulsive treatment (ECT) sessions, showing signs of recovery after only two or three (Wilson 228). Concerning Plath’s economic situation, it caused her great anxiety throughout her life. With the death of her father, Otto, all the family expenses were on Aurelia. For her children, she sacrificed herself; Sylvia was conscious of her mother’s financial status and worried about her: Aurelia even believed that Sylvia wanted to end her life to spare her family from anguish and expense (Wilson 194; 216). While hospitalized at the McLean, Plath was concerned about the costs of medical care; in a letter to Olive Higgins Prouty, she wrote: “This is a nervous breakdown—the one illness I several times jokingly said that we could not afford to have” (qtd. in Wilson 221).

remembered for good, marking both people and the literary tradition. Plath once told friend Janet Rosenberg that the letters she wrote home from college were for posterity: she wanted to be famous and thought one day someone might want to publish them (Wilson 172). She both lived and wrote: her writings were deeply connected to her striving for life as well as to her impossibility of living fully and, at times, even of writing.

Posthumously, Plath's desire was fulfilled: her journals and letters were published after she became famous for her poetry,² especially for *Ariel's* 1965 edition.³ The popularity of this book of poems and of Plath's tragic death also led to a new publication of *The Bell Jar*, now under her own name, in England in 1966 and in the United States in 1971. The widespread news of her suicide and the publishing of her poems in *Ariel*, journals, and newspapers made *The Bell Jar* sell really well, probably for those who wanted to know something of her life and saw the book as a means to it (Gill 74). The novel had been published before under a pseudonym—Victoria Lucas—according to Plath's wishes, on January 14, 1963. In accordance to Diane Middlebrook, the pseudonym was because of the apparently autobiographical material in the book, though she also believes it might have been so because Plath wanted to have a different persona for a popular audience, not to be confused with what she saw as her—more

² Plath's journals were first published in 1982 as *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*, an abridged version edited by Ted Hughes and Frances McCullough. They were later republished in 2000 in an unabridged version, *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*, edited by Karen V. Kukil. Plath's *Letters Home* were edited by her mother, Aurelia Plath, in 1975, as a response to the publication of *The Bell Jar* in the United States in 1971. According to Janet Malcolm in *The Silent Woman*, Aurelia was afraid of the reception of the book in the country due to its autobiographical inspiration and she intended to show, through the letters, what she considered to be Plath's good-natured self, in opposition to the *Ariel* and *The Bell Jar* personae (41-42). For now, there is an upcoming edition of Plath's unabridged letters: in a 2016 blog entry, Peter K. Steinberg announced that he and Karen V. Kukil had submitted the manuscript of *The Letters of Sylvia Plath*, "with all the known, extant letters written by Sylvia Plath," to Faber & Faber in London (see Steinberg, "The Letters of Sylvia Plath").

³ The first version of *Ariel*, edited by Ted Hughes, was published in 1965. It has been highly discussed for not being the one that Plath left finished before her death. *Ariel: the Restored Edition*, edited by Plath's daughter, Frieda Hughes, was later released according to the author's original manuscripts and typescripts—this edition brings a facsimile of them (see F. Hughes, "Foreword"; for a comparison between the two editions, see Bundtzen, *The Other Ariel*). Despite the differences between both books, *Ariel* was responsible for Sylvia Plath's recognition as an important twentieth-century poet. She was right to acknowledge, in a 1962 letter to her mother, that "I am writing the best poems of my life; they will make my name" (LH 468). During her lifetime, Plath published several poems in newspapers and magazines. However, her only poetry book that she saw in print was the 1960 *The Colossus and Other Poems*. After the 1965 posthumous *Ariel*, collections of her previously unpublished poems were edited, such as *Crossing the Water* and *Winter Trees*, both from 1971. Later, in 1981, Ted Hughes would edit Plath's *The Collected Poems*, with a great part of all the poetry written by Plath, which would earn her a posthumous Pulitzer Prize.

valued—poetic work (Middlebrook, qtd. in Gill 73). Indeed, Plath did not consider *The Bell Jar* to be a major work: in a letter to her brother, she referred to it as a “pot-boiler” (LH 472); she also told a friend that it was “as an autobiographical apprentice work which I had to write in order to free myself from my past” (qtd. in Ames 12). Nevertheless, though she admitted that her life and writings were intertwined, she was not particularly fond of it, as she admits in a 1959 journal entry about other of her short stories, “The Fifty-Ninth Bear”: “none of the deep emotional undercurrents gone into or developed. As if little hygienic transparent lids shut out the seethe and deep-grounded swell of my experience. Putting up pretty artificial statues. I can’t get outside of myself” (J 501-502).

For this reason, I treat Plath’s work as fiction and try to use as little biographical data as possible for my analyses. Certainly, the lines between fiction and life are sometimes difficult to draw. As aforementioned, Plath’s life experiences are intertwined with her writings. But treating her work as a transposition from life to fiction is to undermine her literary creation as an artist, as well as it is a simplification that she would probably have refused. Thus, though I raise this discussion, it is to emphasize that entering this debate is not among the objectives of this thesis. Analyzing whether what is depicted in Plath’s fiction happened or not in her life is not to value its artistic creation, which transcends the biographical. As Christina Britzolakis puts it, “[w]hile the trauma, loss, and mourning work staged in the writing can never be entirely disentangled from the narrative of her [Plath’s] life and death, it none the less exceeds the personalizations of biography”(8).

Regarding *The Bell Jar*, it was the subject of several feminist critical readings such as Marjorie G. Perloff’s “‘A Ritual for Being Born Twice’: Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*” and E. Miller Budick’s “The Feminist Discourse of Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*.” Budick analyzes the text by showing how, according to her, the narrative creates a feminist discourse and a proposition of a feminine language in opposition to what would be a male one. According to the author, Esther’s discovery of the narrative thread of a feminist discourse is what enables her to leave the bell jar:

she [Esther] discovers the magical thread that is both the source of her inner creativity and her link with the world.

This thread leads out of the bell jar, out of the room of one's own, [...]. It is a powerful thread, an umbilicus able to assimilate the male energy, to convert it within the interior space of the female into a thriving, pulsating, vibrating life, and then to bear that issue outward into the world as a unique expression of self. This is the thread of feminist discourse [...]. (Budick 883-884)

Regarding Perloff, she discusses Esther's psychological state more deeply. In spite of analyzing the character as having a schizoid personality, Perloff's focus is on the world inhabited by Esther and on how the situations that she lives propel her mental illness, a discussion that allows us to question if there is really a difference between those diagnosed as "ill" and those considered "normal":

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 518)⁴

Whatever the extent of Esther's congenital predisposition to madness, the mad world she inhabits surely intensifies her condition. (Perloff 518)

[Plath suggests that] the external or official distinction between madness and sanity [...] is largely illusory. (Perloff 520)

The arrangement of incidents implies that all illness is to be viewed as part of the same spectrum: disease, whether mental or physical, is an index to the human inability to cope with an unlivable situation. (Perloff 520-521)

More recent is the focus on the novel as a case study, a point developed in the article "*The Bell Jar: A Psychological Case Study*," published in 2010 by Stephanie Tsank. At a certain point of her text, Tsank comments on *The Bell Jar's* critical approaches that preceded hers:

⁴ Similarly, Anne Stevenson sees Esther's "madness" as mostly a social problem: "we can regard *The Bell Jar* as an honest, often brilliant account of a woman's confrontation with a society many of whose values are an insult to her integrity" (159).

Many critics view the bell jar as a symbol of society's stifling constraints and befuddling mixed messages that trap Sylvia Plath's heroine, Esther Greenwood, within its glass dome. However, another often overlooked reality is that the physical, albeit metaphorical, suffocation induced by the bell jar is a direct representation of Esther's mental suffocation by the unavoidable settling of depression upon her psyche, and that this circumstance greatly alters the way in which the entire novel can and should be perceived. (166)

Tsank reminds us that Esther's perspective, while under the bell jar, is unstable (166). Nevertheless, she seems to make analyses that are too practical in terms of cause and effect, or even affirmations that are too categorical. Tsank concludes her analysis by saying—mixing the frontiers between author and character—that Plath's writing is a case study: "Plath writes in Esther's voice—that of a depressive, coming from an author and poet who was no stranger to the disease herself, and is able to provide one of the most accurately biting prescriptions for wellness—an unmercifully realistic case study" (176). Tsank ends up leaving aside an essential fact: that Esther is, in spite of the similitudes with Plath's life, a literary creation. Thus, it is not possible to diagnose her as if she were a real patient being psychologically analyzed: we cannot forget that Esther's illness is created and presented through language, as literature.

After all, can we relate Esther's social complaints and her mental state? How are those two realms of one's existence connected? Would it be possible to say that her behavior is due to the traumatic stressors under which she is? According to Laura S. Brown, in a 1995 text called "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma," social parameters are used to define what is or not trauma. By analyzing her own context—she is a therapist—the author highlights the fact that, when a few set of behaviors are classified as pathological, the social structures behind them are not necessarily being considered. She states that there must be a focus on these structures and not on the victims as if they were disconnected from reality (Brown 106). In accordance with her, "we must, if we have any morality, question a society that subjects so many of its inhabitants to traumatic stressors" (Brown 108). She sees two possibilities while facing trauma: "Do we act as handmaidens of the status quo, saying that only those already ill suffer from cultural toxicity? Or do we name as poisonous

those institutions of society that might sicken anyone?" (Brown 110). Brown also sees a necessity to change the perception of what is seen as "human": "a feminist analysis of psychic trauma requires that we change our vision of what is 'human' to a more inclusive image and will move us to a radical revisioning of our understanding of the human condition" (110). In a similar way, Andrea Nicki, in the 2001 "The Abused Mind: Feminist Theory, Psychiatric Disability, and Trauma," tries to validate different mental states by recognizing the behavior of people that suffered several forms of oppression; to this end, the paradigm of humanity as self-controlled, pleasant, conformist, and in conformity with gender norms should be rejected (82). She defends that "cultural and social analysis of mental illness is important since cultural and social factors contribute to the development and prevalence of much mental illness in members of disadvantaged groups" (Nicki 82). Nicki does not deny that there are cases in which mental illness has primarily a biochemical or physical cause, but she sees as evident that oppressed groups (such as women and gay people) form a high percentage of those who are mentally ill (91). According to her, while dealing specifically with women, when they come to know the feminine norms of dependency, vulnerability, and helplessness, they might become mentally ill in order to scape these roles (Nicki 83).⁵

Thereby, we see how social factors not only lead to mental illnesses but also how the mere definition of what mental illness is is socially exclusionary. As Brown and Nicki propose, this is the locus to rethink what normality is, which leads us to questioning what the human is and why a few set of behaviors are seen as acceptable while others are not. In *The Bell Jar*, Esther is going through a moment that will decide her future life: it is then that she comes across with gender inequalities that lead to her revolt, a behavior that today, in the twenty-first century, might be described as "normal." But would it be normal before, in the twentieth century's 1950s?⁶ It is also evident that, in

⁵ In "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity," Susan Bordo discusses hysteria, agoraphobia, and anorexia, disorders that are much more common in women than in men. As she points out, in the three cases, "we find the body of the sufferer deeply inscribed with an ideological construction of femininity emblematic of the period in question" (Bordo 93). Each disorder brings with it one of these constructions, in a way that Bordo sees the bodies of disordered women as a text demanding to be read "as a cultural statement, a statement about gender" (94).

⁶ In the turn of the century, for example, it would certainly not be considered "normal." Preceding *The Bell Jar's* discussion on the theme, Kate Chopin's 1899 *The Awakening*, discusses Edna Pontellier's impossibility to reconcile her desire to live her life fully with the societal expectations placed on her as a mother and former wife, which might be seen as leading to her suicide at the end of the novel. Her outcome has been interpreted as a refusal to conform to the

spite of her critiques of these inequalities, the bell jar was following Esther for a long time and it contributes to her suicide attempt. There seems to be a former, deep, unspoken wound that disturbs her to the same extent as her complaints about the sexist culture of which she is part; thus it is interesting to discuss the traumatic situations that she undergoes relating both gender and trauma studies.

With this in mind, I propose my first objective with this work: to establish a dialogue between those two major issues raised by *The Bell Jar*, taking into consideration the possible feminist and psychological discussions conveyed by the novel. I therefore intend to rethink the relationship between society, depression, and trauma. To this end, I make a theoretical analysis of the possible relations between those two realms to propose a close reading of the novel concerning those aspects. By doing so, I discuss how they are intertwined in *The Bell Jar*; how Esther's psychological state is related to her experience as a female in a masculinist world, as well as how the bell jar has been accompanying her—and influencing her judgements—for a long time.

The popularity raised by Plath's death and the following publication of *Ariel* led not only to the attribution of *The Bell Jar*'s authorship to her but also to the publishing of other of her narrative writings—short stories, essays, and journal entries—in *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*, in 1977.⁷ However, while *The Bell Jar* has been thoroughly critically analyzed, and though Plath wrote short stories throughout her life, not much has been said about the latter. This is the reason why I intent to establish a few parallels between two of her short stories and her novel: by doing so, a few interesting points might be raised. The stories discussed in this thesis are “Tongues of Stone,” from 1955, and “Mothers,” from 1962. Similarly to *The Bell Jar*, the first story depicts a nameless girl in a mental hospital, whereas the second, whose main character is also named “Esther,” is centered on motherhood.

I thus formulate my second objective in this thesis: to relate *The Bell Jar*'s discourses on gender and psychology to those provided by the two stories, “Tongues of Stone” and “Mothers.” As most of Plath's short narrative, they have not had the same

norms imposed on her as a woman (see Schmidt, “Para além do dualismo natureza/cultura: Ficções do corpo feminino,” 253).

⁷ Apart from Plath's poetry collections and *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*, her posthumous publications also include children's stories and a book of drawings. First released separately, the poem “The Bed Book” and the stories “The It-Doesn't-Matter Suit” and “Mrs. Cherry's Kitchen” would later be published in *Collected Children's Stories* in 2001. The first edition of her drawings, entitled *Sylvia Plath: Drawings*, came out in book form in 2013.

attention that her novel did, which prompts me to a close-reading study of them. Besides, I believe that the possible relations between woman's experience and depression can be enlightened if we trace parallels. The girl from "Tongues of Stone" is deeply melancholic, and we might say that more emphasis is given to the loss of cognitive capacities in the story than in *The Bell Jar*. Regarding the two characters named Esther, the situation that the protagonist of "Mothers" is living could be compared to the condition that the adult Esther from *The Bell Jar* undergoes, while already a mother. As I will discuss, there is evidence that this might not be a coincidence. Moreover, the Esther from the short story might be seen as a figure of the complete loss of language, if we propose that this loss originates in the novel. Does the story present an even more profound loss of the protagonist's connection to words, while also assimilating to the masculinist world of marriage and motherhood that the novel's young Esther so vehemently criticized? This is one of the questions that I tried to answer in this work.

When I say that I discuss "woman's experience" in this thesis, I have in mind how a woman's life is generally marked by certain events, as Luce Irigaray comments:

A woman's life is marked by irreversible events that define the stages of her life. This is true for puberty [...], losing her virginity, becoming pregnant, being pregnant, childbirth, breastfeeding—events that can be repeated without repetition: each time, they happen differently: body and spirit have changed, physical and spiritual development is taking place. There are also mothering and bringing up young children, which a woman is more involved with, leaving her constantly in touch with problems of growth and development. During all this time, a woman experiences menstruation, her periods, as continuously related to cosmic time, to the moon, the sun, the tides, and the seasons.

Finally, menopause marks another stage in the becoming of a female body and spirit, a stage characterized by a different hormonal equilibrium, another relation to the cosmic and the social. What is often defined as the end of a woman's life is for her just as much an opportunity to have more time for social, cultural, and political life. (*jtn* 115)

Thus, for my analyses, I focus on the experiences that the main characters in the narratives here discussed go through in a certain way *particularly* because they are women—and identify themselves as such. Of course there are exceptions to Irigaray's examples: there are women that never become mothers, as well as others who do not menstruate: they might be women without uterus, because they were born this way, or because they are transgender or transsexual women. There are infinite possibilities of difference here; we cannot pretend that women experience life in a certain way *because* they are women, but there are certain events that happen more frequently in women's lives in certain contexts and/or periods of time. Therefore, I have in mind that my analysis is centered on a few female characters from narratives that take place in the United States and England in the 1950s and 1960s.

Concerning trauma, I think it is important to say that, in this thesis, I follow Cathy Caruth's position on the relationship between psychiatry and psychoanalysis. She says: "I assume a certain continuity between contemporary psychiatry and early psychoanalysis concerning trauma, and I implicitly suggest that rather than focusing only on the current rift between them [...], we should look at what each can learn from the other" (*UE* 131). Hence, though I start this introduction with debates raised by psychiatry, my theoretical background is grounded in psychoanalysis.

The structure of this thesis comprehends three chapters and a conclusion: they are divided between theoretical revisions and analyses of the literary texts. In my first chapter, "On Woman's Experience and Trauma," I revisit important aspects of feminist theory and trauma studies. Concerning the first, I focus on the writings of Luce Irigaray; regarding the latter, my revision is grounded mostly in works by Cathy Caruth, Sigmund Freud, and Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok. The second chapter, "*The Bell Jar*," discusses exclusively the novel, analyzing it in relation to my previous theoretical revision and to its critical tradition. It deals with topics such as language, motherhood, female genealogies, relationships between women, female sexuality, mourning, melancholia, trauma, and the possibility of recovery. In my third chapter, "'Tongues of Stone' and 'Mothers,'" I revisit these short stories, trying to give them an emphasis that has yet not been given, while also discussing them in relation to the previous theoretical points raised in my analysis of *The Bell Jar*. In this section, I make a contribution to themes such as melancholia, motherhood, relationships between women, and the loss of language. Finally, in my conclusion, I revisit my previous three chapters in a concise

manner, as a way to summarize my main points and think about what this thesis achieves as a study of Sylvia Plath's narrative, from the point of view of feminism, gender, and trauma.

1 On Woman's Experience and Trauma

only the concept of a subjectivity at odds with itself gives back to women the right to an impasse at the point of sexual identity, with no nostalgia whatsoever for its possible or future integration into a norm.

—Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*

It's a funny thing about memories... You bury them. [...] I don't think you mean to, at least I never meant to, but somehow those memories get buried just the same. You bury them so deep that you think you've forgotten them. But you haven't.

—R. J. Stevens, *Becoming Bobbie*

1.1 Speculating with Luce Irigaray

Luce Irigaray's works were of high importance to second-wave feminism. Trained in psychoanalysis, her 1974 book *Speculum of the Other Woman* caused great controversy in the Lacanian school in France. The writing style of this text might be seen as the practical accomplishment of a theoretical project, as Irigaray explains in a note at its very end:

Precise references in the form of notes or punctuation indicating quotation have often been omitted. Because in relation to the working of theory, the/a woman fulfills a twofold function—as the mute outside that sustains all systematicity; as a maternal and still silent ground that nourishes all foundations—she does not have to conform to the codes theory has set up for itself. In this way, she confounds, once again, the imaginary of the “subject”—in its masculine connotations—and something that will or might be the imaginary of the female. Let all, then, male or female, dead or alive, recognize themselves as same according to their desire or their pleasure, even in the parody of capital letters. But if, in the resistance set up against that male imaginary, distortion gave rise to

discomfort, then, perhaps?, something of the difference of the sexes would have taken place in language also. (*SOW* 365)

The omission of notes indicating quotations creates a particular difficulty: the reader has to know beforehand what is being discussed without it being mentioned. Since women have been outside theory, Irigaray does not see why she should have to conform to its writing norms, a practice that she believes equivalent to submitting to the masculine subject. Thus, distortion gives rise to discomfort, which she sees as creating a (female) difference in writing itself. Irigaray tries to avoid a linear, teleological, supposedly scientific language: her text is open, and the reader has to make several inferences, which enriches it even more; she is interested in “not favor[ing] one type of inscription that would already prescribe a meaning to it” (*SOW* 137).

Concerning Irigaray's thinking as whole, Caroline Brainbridge resumes her main focuses:

Irigaray's work focuses on the specificity of the feminine and how symbolic discourses of gender and sexuality traditionally diminish this through their insistence on repressing and disavowing the feminine in culture, language and subjectivity. The focus of her work has its basis in sexual difference as a defining category of subjectivity. She argues extensively for the specificity of the feminine and a sexual/textual/psychical/philosophical/spiritual economy in which the feminine is defined in and for itself. (2)

Since the feminine has been diminished in culture, language, and subjectivity, Irigaray plays an important part in arguing for its specificity, its own definition. While today, given that intersex and trans movements are part of discussions on gender, it might seem that Irigaray's thinking—in terms of *the* masculine and *the* feminine—is outdated. However, Judith Butler, who has coined the concept of gender performativity, as well as questioned the binary conception of gender (see Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*), advocates for Irigaray's significance. It is imperative that we consider her importance at a given moment, and that we have this in mind while grounding certain interpretations in her ideas. According to Butler, Irigaray set the bases for further inquiry:

Irigaray then would not argue for or against sexual difference but, rather, offer a way to think about the question that sexual difference poses, or the question that sexual difference *is* [...] (“The End of Sexual Difference?” 177, emphasis in the original)

Sexual difference is not a given, not a premise, not a basis on which to build a feminism; it is not that which we have already encountered and come to know; rather, as *a question* that prompts a feminist inquiry, it is something that cannot quite be stated, that troubles the grammar of the statement, and that remains, more or less permanently, to interrogate. (“The End of Sexual Difference?” 178, emphasis in the original)

Therefore, Irigaray does not necessarily argue *for* sexual difference, but rather uses it as a question, which prompts feminist inquiry once it is continually interrogated by it.

In Irigaray's later works, she makes a move from critique to politics/praxis (Bainbridge 5), but here I will focus mostly on her earlier publications. I will discuss the most important Irigarayan considerations for this thesis: the nonexistence of woman in language and Western philosophy, the absence of female genealogies and relationships, the erasure of the maternal origin, and women's sexuality and its theory of difference.

1.1.1 Language of the Same and the (Nonexistent) Other

In *je, tu, nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*, published in 1990, Irigaray relates the two grammatical genders of the French language to the two biological male and female genders. She states that sexual difference cannot be reduced to an extralinguistic fact of nature, since “[i]t conditions nature and is conditioned by it”; it determines “the gender of words and their division into grammatical classes: [...] It's situated at the junction of nature and culture” (*jtn* 20). However, she states that, since the feminine has been reduced by patriarchy, language, which is supposedly neutral, is actually masculine: “instead of remaining a different gender, the feminine has become, in our languages, the non-masculine, that is to say an abstract nonexistent reality” (*jtn* 20). Therefore, since language is masculine, the feminine does not exist in language; it is the

nonexistent.⁸ According to her, it is possible to observe this economy in several discourses. In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, she mentions how the various forms of discourse display the different “modes of the ‘subject’s’ self-arousal,” but the philosophical one would be the most ideal to this end, since it “gives privileged status to ‘self-representing’” (*SOW* 232). Hence, by focusing on Western philosophical discourse, Irigaray discusses how its subject is masculine and how women are—or are not—represented through it.

One of Irigaray's most important insights is that “any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the ‘masculine’” (*SOW* 133). This means that women are not seen as subjects: there is only one subject, the masculine, and women work in this economy only as projections of the subject, not having a particular, female subjectivity. In this context, two options are possible for them: either they are objectified in discourse, for being women, or they are reobjectified, when they identify with the male subject (*SOW* 133). Concerning the first case, since subjectivity is denied to women, they are only put in the condition of object. In the masculinist economy, the purpose of the woman-object would be only to serve the imagination of men:

Poised in suspense between the faculties of the male subject, woman cannot be decided about, and her beauty serves to promote the free play of mind. And of course what matters is not the existence of the object—as *such it is indifferent*—but the simple effect of a representation upon the subject, its reflection, that is, in the imagination of a man. (*SOW* 207, emphasis in the original)

Woman as an object is thus a reflection of the subject, what she is in the imagination of a man; her existence is actually indifferent to this logic. The second possibility available for women, to identify with the male subject, would also be inside this economy, since trying to speak in male terms, for Irigaray, is the same as not having voice; it is to continue to be an object. Furthermore, woman is denied the mere prerogative of the unconscious, for she is seen as a castrated projection of the masculine. She has no possibility outside those two options: to serve as recreation to male fantasies of power,

⁸ In *Le corps-à-corps avec la mère*, Irigaray calls attention to the fact that mother tongue [*langue maternelle*] should be called “father tongue” [*langue paternelle*], since it is actually masculine (*CÀC* 24).

and thus being “sensuality” so that man can be the “intelligence,” or converting herself to a discourse that denies herself and her pleasure (*SOW* 140-141).

Woman is part of the economy of what Irigaray calls the “one,” for she sees man as centered outside himself, in a position of totality; he is “the ‘sun’ if it is around him that things turn, a pole of attraction stronger than the ‘earth’” (*SOW* 134). As happens with the sun, man would be the center around which things turn, and the Other would sustain this organization of a universe that is, in fact, identical to the self; the (male) subject is multiple, in a way that he projects himself in several mirages, which reunite again as one (*SOW* 135). According to this logic, to be “feminine” would be a creation in consonance with the parameters of the subject, of the one, and not of the woman herself, since she does not exist as such—she is a faithful mirror that does not alter her reflection (*SOW* 136). This is the first meaning used by Irigaray for the *speculum*: it displays woman as mirroring the subject; she does not exist *for* herself, as something *other*, but she is rather a reflection of the one, a part of his logic. Therefore, the others of the subject are not *really* “others,” because they are always serving the same logos (*SOW* 135). This is why, for Irigaray, woman is not the Other; she is the absent, the nonexistent.⁹ Hence, woman does not exist in metaphysics; she is only taken as “nature”: she is relegated to giving pleasure to man and to her role as mere procreator (*SOW* 166).

As a part of the logic of the one according to which she is nonexistent, it is difficult for woman to notice that she is inside this economy, because she has not seen anything different from that; she has only been taught to see the subject's clarity (the sun) (*SOW* 136). Irigaray mentions that sometimes, in order to avoid that woman realizes this, the subject has to reaffirm his power, which he does by defining the Other through

⁹ For Simone de Beauvoir, in her 1949 *The Second Sex*, woman is the Other of man. According to her, “[s]he [woman] is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other” (Beauvoir, vol. I, “Introduction”). Judith Butler compares Beauvoir's approach to Irigaray's in *Gender Trouble*. Following Butler's analysis, “[i]n opposition to Beauvoir, for whom women are designated as the Other, Irigaray argues that both the subject and the Other are masculine mainstays of a closed phallogocentric signifying economy that achieves its totalizing goal through the exclusion of the feminine altogether. For Beauvoir, women are the negative of men, the lack against which masculine identity differentiates itself; for Irigaray, that particular dialectic constitutes a system that excludes an entirely different economy of signification” (*Gender Trouble* 13). Whereas Beauvoir criticizes women's inferior prerogative inside the logos, Irigaray's critiques are directed towards the logos itself. For her, woman is not the Other against which men are constituted; there is a masculine system responsible for women's exclusion. Nevertheless, even though Irigaray says that woman is not even an Other to man in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, she continues her analysis by using “the Other” to refer to woman, a pattern which I will also follow in this thesis.

metaphors taken as truth by Western philosophy such as virgin, dumb etc. (*SOW* 136). This domination would be assured by pretending that his discourse is heterogeneous while it is not; by making woman believe that she has autonomy, while she does not. When threatened, man attempts to rebuild his house through his theoretical constructions: "he will make the unconscious into a propriety of his language," he will force the production of the same discourse, the representation of himself, of the same, as if it were heterogeneous/other, but this will be done through his language, according to which there is no dialogue, just monologues (*SOW* 137). "By giving here a little more play to the system, here a little less" (*SOW* 137), the subject pretends to give certain autonomy to the Other, in a way that she is satisfied for now, without knowing that she has not actually gained anything.

One of the ways for the subject to reaffirm his power, as aforementioned, is to question the ontological value of woman, a value which is given—or denied—through language. It is by stating what woman *is*—or *is not*—that she can conform to that definition. Irigaray discusses how something cannot simply *be* without being appropriated by a philosophical discourse that gives it a statue of its *being*, of its *fullness*:

The *physis* is always already being appropriated by a *telos*. This is true of the *plant*, or even of its *flower*, "for example." Even so, isn't a *logos* still necessary before the genus and species of the plant can be decided? Etc. The plant may indeed conform to her own purpose, but an other has to certify this. And that other must speak, and speak, moreover, as a philosopher. She may be fully herself and in herself, but an other has to declare that this is the case. (*SOW* 162, emphases in the original)

Irigaray then extends the example of the plant to that of a woman: the substance of both would not be able to move beyond the ontological status assigned to them (*SOW* 163). Woman is therefore appropriated to an end, and she has to be certified *as* something by a certain *logos*—that of a philosopher—in order to be. In this sense, though she is a full being without the necessity of this definition, she is not taken as such unless logocentric discourse affirms that she is. Irigaray analyzes how the requirement of defining a being deprives the body of its spatial possibilities, and how no one should encroach another's space (*SOW* 164)—a definition that resembles Ferdinand de Saussure's explanation on

how a sign does not occupy another sign's position in the system.¹⁰ This process of differentiation, which takes place in language, is what makes man and women "complementary": to the woman it is assigned the status of close to nature, whereas man is taken as unmotivated by nature, but by his being (*SOW* 164-165). Thus, once she is denied an ontological status, woman is nothing but complementary to man; while he is the one, the logos, she is nature. This is why Irigaray sees woman as having no discourse of her own, for discourse is only allowed to the one, not to her. When woman is close to developing a "quasi-subjectivity" that is supposedly hers, it is appropriated by the universal (*SOW* 224). Hence, woman cannot get out of the logos; whenever she tries to do it, she is assimilated as part of the same.

This might seem like a situation without a solution, but Irigaray does provide a way out. If woman were to open a path in this logos that underrates her, a revolution might be possible (*SOW* 142). The question that comes to mind is: how would she open this path if every option/word/route is part of the same of which she is excluded? How would she change the ontological statues assigned to her? Irigaray sees as possibilities the insistence in the "blanks" in discourse by reinscribing them as "divergencies," the questioning of the words through which the subject "clothes" the "female"; she also states that woman has yet to "reveal her nakedness, her destitution in language, explode in the face of them all, words too" (*SOW* 143). This "explosion" through words would be necessary precisely because it is through language that man defines woman in his terms. However, to break with a kind of "specula(riza)tion" does not mean to break with them all: this would make woman even more atonic, it would be a risk to "cutting back"; it is necessary to enter the cave where the speculations are hidden, not for what is there, but for "their indefinitely rekindled hearths" (*SOW* 143-144). Here, Irigaray proposes a move that is the opposite of Plato's allegory of the cave: she suggests a reconnection to the womblike cave and thus to the womb itself. This scenario is evidently an opposition to Western philosophy: it is a denial of the logos, of the logic of the same, and therefore a reconnection with the shadows of its origin, with the womb/the maternal.

¹⁰ According to Saussure, the value of a sign is determined by its opposition to other signs in a way that two words cannot be synonyms, for each one of them has its own value inside the system (114-115).

1.1.2 Maternal Origin, Female Genealogies, and Relationships between Women

The erasure of the maternal origin is one of Irigaray's main concerns. She discusses Plato's *Hystera* by extensively analyzing his allegory of the cave. The cave is seen as a metaphor for the womb: when men leave the cave, they deny ever being there, as well as they deny their maternal origin, their genealogy.¹¹ Once out of the cave, "the genealogical conception has been broken," and thus the child "will be cut off from any remaining empirical relation with the womb" (*SOW* 293). In the case of a woman, her relationship with her origin—with her mother and her sex—must also be canceled so that the masculine economy of the one—*his* economy—prevails: this is how the domination of the Phallus is established (*SOW* 104). Irigaray shows how, not only in Plato's, but also in Aristotle's writings, the origin is seen as masculine; it is as if the fetus were prior to the mother's body, as if it were previously determined by some transcendental entity such as God (*SOW* 161). In this scenario, women would be the "first matter," serving "as in(de)finite basis for the ontological promotion of each living thing," while lacking logos (*SOW* 162). In other words, woman might be said to work as a reproductive machine. Hence, maternity puts her at risk of being limited to it, and, when this limitation happens, her meaning—the Idea of woman—is appropriated by phallogocritism, in spite of her actual meaning being infinite (*SOW* 229).

For Irigaray, one of the implications of the reduction of the mother to the maternal role is her impossibility to have a female identity of her own, with which her daughter(s) may identify. She says that, in order to face the difficulties of entering the between-men cultural world, almost all women are led to renounce their female identity and their relationships with other women; she also mentions that patriarchal traditions have destroyed traces of mother-daughter genealogies (*jtn* 21; 17). In what she calls "our patriarchal culture," Irigaray states that "the daughter is absolutely unable to control her relation to her mother. Nor can the woman control her relation to maternity, unless she reduces herself to that role alone" (*TS* 143). The woman is consumed by maternity; in

¹¹ Irigaray's concerns might be seen here not only directed to Plato's writings, but also to the Lacanian premises that see a necessary repudiation of the maternal body in order to enter the realm of language. According to Lacan, the entrance into the Symbolic, the repressive paternal law, requires a separation from the maternal body; the subject would enter the realm of language only after repudiating its connection to the maternal (see Butler, *Gender Trouble* 107). Thus, Irigaray criticizes both the phallogocentric language of the one and the maternal repression supposedly necessary to enter its realm.

this scenario, if she is a mother, being a woman turns out to be the same as being a mother. Without being valued in other spheres, it is as if woman were this mere function:

Elles ne sont valorisées ni comme travailleuses, ni comme citoyennes, ni dans la vie politique. Au fond, même quand elles travaillent, ce que la société leur demande, c'est de rester des mères. Des machines au service de l'homme-père dans la propriété privée et au service de l'État. C'est institutionnellement lié.

Donc une mère, c'est quoi ? Quelqu'une qui fait des gestes commandés, stéréotypés, qui n'a pas de langage personnel et qui n'a pas d'identité. Mais comment, pour nous les filles, avoir un rapport personnel et se constituer une identité par rapport à quelqu'une qui n'est qu'une fonction ? (CÀC 86)

In this scenario, the maternal function is all that is valued in a woman; even if she works, she is demanded to be a reproductive machine following the wishes of the man-father [*l'homme-père*], private propriety, and the State. With mothers lacking a language, an identity, being reduced to a function, daughters cannot identify with them. Irigaray sees woman as "traditionally a use-value for man, an exchange value among men; in other words, a commodity. [...] Women are marked phallicly by their fathers, husbands, procurers. And this branding determines their value in sexual commerce" (TS 31). In this sense, woman is an object of exchange; we might say, for instance, that being a virgin would give her a higher value of exchange between her father and her husband-to-be. According to this logic, woman would take very little profit, "[e]xcept in the quasi monopolies of masochistic pleasure, the domestic labor force, and reproduction" (TS 32).

After describing the erasure of the maternal origin, the lack of female genealogies and female relationships, Irigaray proposes possibilities to change this situation. She defends that men do not forget their origin: all humans have come from the cave, from the womb. In *Le corps-à-corps avec la mère*, published in 1981, she proposes an imagery and a symbolic that takes into consideration the first contact with the mother, which takes place while still in the womb, and in which the placenta plays an important role (CÀC 21-22). This is not a reduction of women to the maternal role, for she also advocates that they should be seen as much more than just mothers.

Furthermore, Irigaray states that it is necessary to affirm the existence of a female genealogy [*généalogie des femmes*] in families:

Généalogie de femmes dans notre famille : après tout, nous avons une mère, une grand-mère, une arrière grand-mère, des filles. Cette généalogie de femmes, étant donné que nous sommes exilées (si je puis dire) dans la famille du père-mari, nous l'oublions un peu trop ; voire nous sommes amenées à la renier. Essayons de nous situer pour conquérir et garder notre identité dans cette généalogie féminine. N'oublions pas non plus que nous avons déjà une histoire, que certaines femmes, même si c'était difficile, ont existé dans l'histoire et que trop souvent nous les oublions. (CÀC 30)

This movement is very important, because women's memories and identities are somehow lost once they enter their husbands' families, especially due to the fact that the male family names are the ones that pass to the subsequent generations. It is thus necessary to keep in mind that these women have a family history of their own, which is worth remembering. However, Irigaray also shows how women should take into consideration other dimension of the maternal: not only their mothers and grandmothers' ancestry, but also other female creations such as art, desire, politics, which have been seen as interdicted for women and should thus be reappropriated (CÀC 27-28). By stating this, she enlarges the scope of "procreation" to mean much more than just literally giving birth, in a movement that seeks to valorize female creations outside the mere familial sphere.

In *Le corps-à-corps avec la mère*, Irigaray also sets her bases for a sorority:

Essayons aussi de découvrir la singularité de notre amour pour les autres femmes. Ce qui pourrait s'appeler (mais je n'aime pas ces mots-étiquettes), entre beaucoup de guillemets : « « « homosexualité secondaire » » ». J'essaie, ici, simplement de désigner une différence entre l'amour archaïque pour la mère et l'amour pour les autres femmes-sœurs. Cet amour est nécessaire pour ne pas rester des servantes du culte phallique, ou des objets d'usage et d'échange entre hommes, objets rivaux sur le marché, situation dans laquelle nous avons toutes été placées. (CÀC 31)

Along several inverted commas [*guillemets*], Irigaray's sorority is defined as a secondary homosexuality; as another form of love between women. This love for our sisters would be a necessary alternative to phallographic culture, to change the view that women are rivals, objects of exchange between men. Furthermore, Irigaray's sorority would come from women's groups; in those contexts, it would be possible to comprehend love between women, including maternal love (CÀC 61). Concerning the latter, she recognizes that it is not only tenderness, that there are also the bad, phallic mothers [*des mauvaise mères, des mères phalliques*]; she calls mother-daughter relationships a dark continent [*continent noir*] and recognizes how discord between the two is common: "je n'ai pas entendu une femme qui ne souffre vraiment beaucoup d'être en dissension ou en rupture avec sa mère" (CÀC 61-62). In order to change this, woman has to come to terms with her own internal mother and then, if possible, to her real mother (CÀC 62). This situation might be especially problematic when the daughter is mourning her mother. According to Irigaray, when there is no clear separation between the identities of mother and daughter, mourning the mother might make the daughter question herself: "Est-ce que je ne suis pas morte aussi ? Est-ce que ce n'est pas moi qui l'a tuée ? Est-ce que je n'avais pas besoin qu'elle meure pour exister ?" (CÀC 63). In other words, when there is no rupture between the two women's identities, the mother's death might lead the daughter to believe that she is also dead, or even that she desired this death in order to finally live.

1.1.3 Woman's Sexuality, Theory, and Difference

In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray questions the economy of the same that excludes female sexuality completely. She does it through mirror metaphors: the convex mirror represents male sexuality, whereas the concave represents the female one. At the time of her writing, she called attention to the fact that female sexuality had not yet been the object of inquiry: "But which 'subject' up till now has investigated the fact that a *concave mirror* concentrates the light and, specifically, that this is not wholly irrelevant to woman's sexuality? Any more than is a man's sexuality to the convex mirror?" (SOW 144). Female sexuality had yet to be thought, which should be done in terms of female morphology, one of Irigaray's main focuses throughout her writings. It would be

necessary to develop a new theory, for Irigaray is suspicious of theories—centered on the subject and supposedly metaphysical—that try to comprehend female sexuality (*SOW* 144). It is in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, published in 1977, that she would develop her theory of female sexuality by trying to conceptualize it in what she sees as its own terms, *per se*, and not *in relation to* masculine sexuality. According to her, “[f]emale sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters”: Freud saw the clitoris as a little penis, a “masculine” infantile activity that would end with castration anxiety, leading to the “feminine” vaginal passivity of female adult sexual life, an idea which Irigaray strongly opposes; she states that “woman’s autoeroticism is very different from man’s” (*TS* 23-24). Female sexuality is *the sex which is not one*, because female genitals are formed by two lips, which are constantly touching themselves; due to woman’s several erogenous zones, Irigaray concludes that female sexuality is neither one nor two; that it is actually plural (*TS* 28). One might ask how exploring the particularities of female pleasure would lead to woman’s liberation or to a female discourse.¹² Irigaray saw, in the current state of her time, a “self-representation of phallic desire in discourse”; in this context, “[f]eminine pleasure has to remain inarticulate in language, in its own language, if it is not to threaten the underpinnings of logical operations. And so what is most strictly forbidden to women today is that they should attempt to express their own pleasure” (*TS* 77). Therefore, since their sexuality is elsewhere, outside phallographic discourse, by attempting to speak about their own pleasure, women would have a means to break with the phallograticism of discourse, to show how it is not neutral, but centered on the male subject and his sexuality, whose molds have been used to define female sexuality, as perceived by a phallic economy.¹³ This change would lead not only to an expression of female sexuality, but to a rupture with the discourse that does not make it possible for it to be discussed. And this can only

¹² For Irigaray, women’s liberation should come from a change in culture, and especially in language: “women’s ‘liberation’ requires transforming the economic realm, and thus necessarily transforming culture and its operative agency, language. Without such an interpretation of a general grammar of culture, the feminine will never take place in history, except as a reservoir of matter and of speculation” (*TS* 155). Since Irigaray sees language and culture as sexed, female sex and desire are of great importance for a change in culture and language, which would finally lead to a transformation in the economic realm.

¹³ In *To Speak Is Never Neutral*, Irigaray says that “[remaining with mother-nature in affection, identifying with her, without loss of sexual identity] would allow them [women], were it not for the authority of the male identity principle, to enter differently into the universe of speech, to elaborate differently the structure of language, linking it to primary matter through a type of speech never yet produced” (229).

be done through a different language, because to keep speaking the same language would be to reproduce the same history again: "Words will pass through our bodies, above our heads. They'll vanish, and we'll be lost. Far off, up high. Absent from ourselves: we'll be spoken machines, speaking machines. Enveloped in proper skins, but not our own" (*TS* 205).

Irigaray uses metaphors to discuss female sexuality, and the lips and the speculum are central to this means. As I have discussed, the latter appears in her work as the mirror according to which woman is seen as a projection of the subject. But the speculum does not have to be a mirror: it might refer to the gynecological instrument used to separate the lips in order to show the interior; by doing so, woman would become the object to be investigated, included in theory, in a way that female sexuality might be *seen*, differently from previous investigations done with transcendental aims (*SOW* 144-145). However, we might interrogate: to bring woman again as an object would not be to conform to her position inside the economy of the same? As well as Irigaray's metaphor of the speculum is double-sided, woman as object can serve to both means: the approach proposed by Irigaray is that woman and female sexuality are brought to theory, but evidently not in the subject's terms. At the time, according to Irigaray, woman was yet to exist in theory; she could only be found in the *betweens*, in the voids: "Theoretically there would be no such thing as woman. She would not exist. The best that can be said is that she does *not exist yet*. Something of her a-specificity might be found in the *betweens* that occur in being, or beings" (*SOW* 166, emphases in the original). And what would this lead to? It might lead to a crisis in the system, to the subversion of current values; man might continue to be the winner, or woman, by working silently, might overcome the current situation (*SOW* 145). Hence, Irigaray calls for a change, for *any* change, for nothing could be worse than continuing as this (nonexistent) Other. In *This Sex Which Is Not One*, she explains what she means: that "the issue is not one of elaborating a new theory of which woman would be the *subject* or the *object*, but of jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretension to the production of a truth and of a meaning that are excessively univocal" (*TS* 78). Therefore, bringing woman to theory would be rather an attempt to shake logos itself, to break with the conceptions of subject and object by showing difference and thus creating a rupture with the mere foundations of (phallographic) discourse.

Irigaray calls for a change, but how would this be done? Which strategies does woman have to break with phallogocentric discourse? To answer these questions, we have to deal with two of her concepts: masquerade and mimesis. Opposing the psychoanalytical view of masquerade—as corresponding to women's desire¹⁴—Irigaray gives her definition of it:

the masquerade has to be understood as what women do in order to recuperate some element of desire, to participate in man's desire, but at the price of renouncing their own. In the masquerade, they submit to the dominant economy of desire in an attempt to remain "on the market" in spite of everything. But they are there as objects for sexual enjoyment, not as those who enjoy. (*TS* 133)

Therefore, in order to be a part of heterosexual masculine desire, woman would have to play a role in this masquerade, in which she alienates herself while aware of a man's desire for her; she participates as the object of his desire, whereas she renounces her own, in order to continue "on the market." Mimesis, or mimicry, would be quite different: it would happen when the Other speaks exaggeratedly in the terms of the subject. In Irigaray's words:

¹⁴ Irigaray mentions how "[p]schoanalysts say that masquerading corresponds to woman's desire," which "seems wrong" to her (*TS* 133). Indeed, it seems wrong; even in the writings of Jacques Lacan, it seems clear that masquerade corresponds to the desire of the masculine subject. Hence, though Irigaray says that she opposes the psychoanalytical view of masquerade, I see her conception of it as rather similar to the Lacanian one; what she does is criticize it, of course. For Lacan, masquerade would be to "be" the phallus, which is to be the signifier of the desire of the Other, whereas the phallus is a signifier to which the subject gains access in the place of the Other, through relations that "revolve around a being and a having" ("The Meaning of the Phallus" 83). "Being" the phallus is to be the object, the feminine position of not-having the phallus, whereas to "have" the phallus is the masculine position of the subject. In order to "be" the phallus, woman performs a masquerade: "it is in order to be the phallus, that is to say, the signifier of the desire of the Other, that the woman will reject an essential part of her femininity, notably all its attributes through masquerade. It is for what she is not that she expects to be desired as well as loved" (Lacan, "The Meaning of the Phallus" 84). Therefore, in Lacanian terms, woman would have to renounce part of her femininity to "be" the phallus and thus to be desired and loved by the male, who "has" the phallus. As Judith Butler comments, this presupposes a "being" of femininity that precedes the masquerade, "a feminine desire or demand that is masked and capable of disclosure, that, indeed, might promise an eventual disruption and displacement of the phallogocentric signifying economy" (*Gender Trouble* 64). This opens up the possibility for readings that focus on a female sexuality outside phallogocentrism, which is what Irigaray attempts to.

To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself—inasmuch as she is on the side of the “perceptible,” of “matter”—to “ideas,” in particular to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make “visible,” by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language. (*TS* 76)

For a woman, the Irigarayan concept of mimesis is the denial to be exploited by discourse by submitting to this precise discourse in a way that the exploitation is made visible due to the excess of her submission. This strategy would be a way to call attention, through mimicry, to how masculinist discourse relegates woman to a subaltern position by exaggerating her subalternity. Whether to submit to a discourse would be an effective way to criticize it opens the possibility of doubt: we can question if it would not be to submit to it even more. Judith Butler interrogates whether the Irigarayan mimesis is actually a critique, and she concludes that it is (“The End of Sexual Difference?” 200-201). After commenting on a work of art mentioned by Rosi Braidotti—who apparently denies mimeses as critique—Butler states:

Does Braidotti want to dispense with the part of Irigaray that enters into the language of philosophy as its shadow, to infiltrate its terms, to manifest the occluded feminine, and to provide a disruptive writing that casts the self-grounding authority of masculinist philosophy into question? Why would not this kind of mimesis be critical? I think we make a mistake if we think that this kind of mimesis results only in a slave morality, accepting and fortifying the terms of authority. Irigaray does something else with those terms. She turns them; she derives a place for women when there was no place; she exposes the exclusions by which certain discourses proceed; and she shows that those sites of absence can be mobilized. The voice that emerges “echoes” the master discourse, but this echo nevertheless establishes that there is a voice, that some articulatory power has not been obliterated, and that it is mirroring the words by which its own obliteration was to have taken place. Something is persisting and surviving, and the words of the master sound different when they are spoken by one who is, in

the speaking, in the recitation, undermining the obliterating effects of his claim.
(“The End of Sexual Difference?” 200-201)

Following Butler's reading, by entering the language of philosophy, Irigaray is able to bring the occluded feminine to view; she is not uncritically accepting the terms of authority: she is using the means available to create a place for women where there was none. She might be using the master's voice, as Butler puts it, but at least she is speaking, and the mere fact that the words are coming from her mouth make them different than if they were coming from her master's. In fact, Butler discusses Irigaray's works in depth in *Gender Trouble* and in other of her writings, such as the abovementioned. Though she points out the weaknesses present in Irigaray's theory, Butler is greatly indebted to her thinking.

As I have discussed, one of Irigaray's main concerns—if not her *main* concern—is that of difference. In *je, tu, nous*, she states that, “[i]n order to obtain a subjective status equivalent to that of men, women must [...] gain recognition for their difference. They must affirm themselves as valid *subjects*, daughters of a mother and a father, respecting the other within themselves and demanding that same respect from society” (*jtn* 46, emphasis added). This seems highly contradictory with her previous position of denying woman the status of a subject, since it would mean to be a part of the phallic economy of the same. How can woman acquire the status of subject through difference, if to do so would be to break with the mere idea of a subject? If the subject is one, the same, how can this concept accommodate difference? Irigaray ponders on a possible balance between equality and difference, saying that “these questions are complex, all the more so in that women are obviously not to be expected to renounce equality in the sphere of civil rights” (*TS* 81). Theoretically, the idea of creating a locus for difference inside phallograticism is a paradox: it would be impossible to acquire equality in an economy that has always denied woman a place as a subject, because the mere conception of a subject is made in a way that only the masculine is able to fit. However, when civil rights are concerned, woman should struggle for equality as long as she has in mind that her work does not stop there.¹⁵ One must first acquire the right to speak to later be able to

¹⁵ Irigaray is very critical of feminisms for equality. According to her, equality between the sexes will only come through difference: “Women's exploitation is based upon sexual difference; its solution will only come through sexual difference” (*jtn* 12). She sees egalitarianism expending “a fair amount of energy denying certain positive values and getting nowhere” (*jtn* 13). Though

disrupt the mere foundations of discourse, and the possibility of conciliating both equality and difference would be a strategy, maybe through mimicry, to broaden the scope of woman's discourse until it were able to produce a rupture in (masculinist) discourse itself. To create the path towards difference, there is not another possible way to start than by uttering the words of the same. And where would this path lead? What would this rupture create? Irigaray comments on this strategy:

without the exploitation of the body-matter of women, what would become of the symbolic process that governs society? What modification would this process, this society, undergo, if women, who have been only objects of consumption or exchange, necessarily aphasic, were to become "speaking subjects" as well? Not, of course, in compliance with the masculine, or more precisely the phallographic, "model."

That would not fail to challenge the discourse that lays down the law today, that legislates on everything, including sexual difference, to such an extent that the existence of another sex, of an other, that would be woman, still seems, in its terms, unimaginable. (*TS* 85)

Hence, we might say that breaking with phallographic discourse would lead to the unknown, for it is still unimaginable to think of woman in those terms, after discourse has been challenged and difference recognized. Nevertheless, though this change would be towards the unknown, at least it would not be in compliance with phallograticism.

Irigaray sees equality as desirable when it comes to civil rights, she is in favor of laws that valorize difference, because "[n]ot all subjects are the same, nor equal, and it wouldn't be right for them to be so. That's particularly true for the sexes" (*jtn* 22). It is evident that laws should take women's particularities into consideration, such as the right to both motherhood and abortion, since most women are able to get pregnant.

1.2 On Melancholia and Trauma

1.2.1 The Language of Trauma

In spite of speaking from different loci, Luce Irigaray and Cathy Caruth give special attention to language, which can be both silencing and transgressive. Irigaray displays a paradoxical relation to it: while affirming that language is not neutral, that it is phallographic and thus excludes the feminine, she also has to use it as the medium to say it and fight phallograticism—at least until a different, female discourse is possible.¹⁶ Cathy Caruth shows a similar case regarding trauma; in accordance with her, “[t]he demand to find a language for trauma is [...] a paradoxical obligation to speak without burying the silence at the heart of the story, to find a language that bears within it, although it does not submit to, the silencing power of the event” (TMT 2). With the view to narrate trauma, one has to find the language to speak without being silenced by the traumatic event; it is through language that trauma might be partly “healed”¹⁷ and become part of history as well as it is through language that women should express themselves in order to be heard and to break with phallograticism. According to Elissa Marder, “because traumatic events often happen *due to* social forces as well as *in* the social world, trauma has an inherently political, historical, and ethical dimension” (1, emphases in the original). As I have previously discussed, depression and trauma cannot be dissociated from the social experiences that happen in the sufferers’ lives. Therefore, we must have in mind, while discussing female trauma, that it takes place in a masculinist world, in which women are expected to have specific societal roles. Women might fail to have an interest in this society altogether, which can lead to serious illnesses. Irigaray questions: “why, after all, should women be interested in a society in which they have no stake,

¹⁶ As I have discussed, Irigaray attempts to create a different, nonteleological, outside-the-same language in *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Nevertheless, she eventually has to recur to the supposedly “neutral” masculine scientific language in order to be heard and comprehended, even if this mere language is the object of her critique. In *This Sex Which Is Not One*, when questioned about what would be the “masculine discourse,” she states that “there is no other [discourse]” (TS 140).

¹⁷ Whether trauma can be “healed” or not is not a consensus. Discussing Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub’s *Testimony*, Elissa Marder concludes: “the most urgent and essential claim of *Testimony* is to show that even though we do not ‘recover’ from our traumatic past, nor can we ‘cure’ it, ‘overcome’ it, or even fully understand it, we can and we must *listen* to it and *survive* it by listening to its effects as they are transmitted to us through the voices of its witnesses and survivors” (4).

which earns them interest only through the compulsory intervention of a third person who does hold a legal and de facto stake?" (*SOW* 119). Women can fail even in finding a reason to live in such a world, in which others have a stake, while they lack it. Furthermore, we should also have in mind women's particularities, by taking into consideration the historical period in which they live or lived and by trying to avoid universal formulas of female oppression that do not consider the specificities of each context.¹⁸

In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, published in 1996, Caruth calls attention to the fact that the language of trauma is not any language; it does not appear in a straightforward way: trauma must "be spoken in a language that is always somehow literary: a language that defies, even as it claims, our understanding" (*UE* 5). Similarly, Dori Laub and Daniel Podell, in their 1995 article "Art and Trauma," say that "[t]he core of massive psychic trauma is an *absence*. While direct attempts at articulation fail to grasp the experience, representations of a traumatic experience in art may resonate in response to that absence" (1992, emphasis in the original). Thus, due to its absent quality, trauma is spoken in a language that defies understanding, such as in literature; paradoxically, it is the indirect quality of the literary discourse that makes it possible for traumatic experience to be grasped in spite of its absence. Furthermore, the possibility to find a language for trauma might be a way to continue living. This struggle for language can be a matter of life and death, as Caruth resumes Dori Laub's thinking: "This struggle for (and within) language is also, as Dori Laub suggests, a struggle on the borders between death and life, the establishment of a new relation between them that defines the very nature of survival" (*TMT* 3). To find a language for expressing one's trauma might be a new way to deal with death and life and, ultimately, to survive.

¹⁸ This is the main critique that Butler directs at Irigaray's thinking: "Although Irigaray clearly broadens the scope of feminist critique by exposing the epistemological, ontological, and logical structures of a masculinist signifying economy, the power of her analysis is undercut precisely by its globalizing reach. [...] Feminist critique ought to explore the totalizing claims of a masculinist signifying economy, but also remain self-critical with respect to the totalizing gestures of feminism" (*Gender Trouble* 18). Therefore, in my following analyses of Plath's narrative, I intend to make the contexts of each of her works clear, aiming at a particular, historically situated discussion, rather than attempting a "globalizing" reach. By doing so, I hope to take Butler's recommendation and explore the masculinist economy of the same, as proposed by Irigaray, while also being critical of its totalizing extent.

1.2.2 Melancholia and Incorporation

Before entering into the discussions on trauma, it is important to analyze melancholia, since Esther can be taken as a melancholic—what today we would call “depressed.” According to Clark Lawlor’s *From Melancholia to Prozac: A History of Depression*, the word “melancholy” has its origin in the Greek “melaina chole” [μέλαινα χολή], translated into Latin as “atra bilis” and into English as “black bile”; in Ancient Greek it was related to causeless fear and sorrow, sometimes to hallucinations (27). In the eighteenth century, “melancholy” was still a term for our concept of depression, which actually arose at the end of the nineteenth century: “Melancholy, hypochondria, spleen, and vapours were all terms for what we now call depression, and all could be as vague (or as specific) as our present variety of definitions and explanations” (Lawlor 5). For Sigmund Freud, “depression” was “a descriptive term rather than disease category,” whereas “melancholia was a feature of unconscious conflict” (Lawlor 142).

Freud explains the feature in “Mourning and Melancholia,” from 1917/15, in which he discusses the similarities and differences between mourning and melancholia. According to him, the characteristics of the two are mostly the same, other than, in the first case, self-regard is not disturbed (Freud 3042). Besides, mourning would happen when there is a real loss, whereas melancholia could be the result of both the loss of a loved object or of a more ideal loss (Freud 3043). While in mourning the person knows what she or he has lost, in melancholia she or he might be aware of the loss “only in the sense that he [*sic*] knows *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him,” which “would suggest that melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness” (Freud 3043). Whereas in mourning the world is seen as empty by the sufferer, in melancholia it is the ego that is impoverished, which might lead to sleeplessness, refusal to eat, and “an overcoming of the instinct which compels every living thing to cling to life” (Freud 3043). A depressed person can accuse her or himself, sometimes by pointing her or his failures to others, as well as by pointing truths sometimes too difficult for others—that are not melancholic—to deal with. Freud mentions that the self-accusations of the melancholic might actually make sense: “it is merely that he [*sic*] has a keener eye for the truth than people who are not melancholic” (3044). What the melancholic says about her or himself actually makes it seem that there was a loss in her or his ego instead of an object-loss (Freud 3045). By analyzing

the view that “the melancholic’s disorder affords of the constitution of the human ego,” Freud sees that “one part of the ego sets itself over against the other, judges it critically, and, as it were, takes it as its object”; he calls it a “critical agency,” commonly called “conscience,” which is distinguished from the rest of the ego (3045). With this in mind, it is possible to say that the self-reproaches made by the melancholic are actually reproaches towards the love object, which have been shifted away to the ego (Freud 3046). Once the libido is withdrawn into the ego, it serves to “stablish an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object”; by means of this identification, the object-loss becomes an ego-loss (Freud 3047, emphasis in the original).¹⁹ Melancholia would be similar to mourning in the fact that both react to a real loss of loved object, but it is a mourning that is turned into pathological; this might be due to a disposition to obsessional neurosis, and thus this form of pathological mourning may lead the mourner to blame her or himself for her or his loss (Freud 3048). The love for the love object might turn into hatred: since the love cannot be given into the object anymore, and once the object is said to be identified with the ego, the hatred directed towards this no-longer-available object is actually directed towards the self (Freud 3048). This is how Freud explains “a satisfaction of trends of sadism and hate”; this sadistic satisfaction in self-tormenting explains the tendency to suicide present in melancholia (3048-3049). By directing its hatred towards the object, the melancholic actually hates her or himself, and evidently the ultimate point in this scale of hatred would be to attempt to end one’s own life. Moreover, Freud shows melancholia as related to traumatic experiences: “Constitutional ambivalence belongs by its nature to the repressed; traumatic

¹⁹ In 1923, in *The Ego and the Id*, Freud would review the identification between the ego and the abandoned object. He starts to see this identification as part of the constitution of the ego and the building of character (Freud 3962). The process of giving up a sexual object that is set inside the ego, priory seen as part of melancholia, is actually very frequent, the character of the ego being a precipitation of “abandoned object-cathexes,” and containing “the history of those object-choices”; it would also be a process by which “the ego can obtain control over the id” (Freud 3963; 3964). While in “Mourning and Melancholia” Freud saw a “critical agency,” distinguished from the rest of ego, that took the ego as object of its judgments, in *The Ego and the Id*, he says the super-ego would not be just a “residue” of the object-choices that came inside the ego; the super-ego—here taken as synonym of ego ideal—would also be a “reaction-formation” against those choices (Freud 3968). Nevertheless, Freud does not oppose his former view on melancholia; he reaffirms that, in melancholia, there is a strong impression that “the super-ego has obtained a hold upon consciousness,” to which “the ego ventures no objection; it admits its guilt and submits to the punishment” (Freud 3985). Again, Freud mentions that the process of identification directs the super-ego into the ego; as if taken possession of “the whole of the sadism available in the person concerned,” the super-ego may succeed in “driving the ego to death” (3985; 3987).

experiences in connection with the object may have activated other repressed material. Thus everything to do with these struggles due to ambivalence remains withdrawn from consciousness, until the outcome characteristic of melancholia has set in" (3052). This is of particular interests here: the outcome characteristics of melancholia would be a way of recalling previous ambivalences; traumatic experiences due to object loss would thus make it possible for something previously repressed to come back.

The Freudian descriptions of mourning and melancholia are relatable to the concepts of introjection and incorporation. In "Mourning *or* Melancholia: Introjection *versus* Incorporation," from 1972, Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok discuss those concepts. Differently from Freud, they see the possibility of a real loss in both cases; the difference is mostly on how the sufferer deals—or not—with it. In introjection, there is the possibility to fill an emptiness with words, whereas in incorporation this is not possible, and thus the object is incorporated into the subject. According to the authors, [i]ntrojecting a desire, a pain, a situation means channeling them through language into a community of empty mouths," the speaking community (Abraham and Torok 128). The initial model of introjection happens in childhood through the experience of the "empty mouth," when the child's empty mouth notices the mother's presence, and thereafter starts to acquire language: the mouth becomes empty and is no longer being filled with the mother's breast, but with words (Abraham and Torok 127). As Abraham and Torok put it, it would be the figurative character of language that makes it possible to give a shape to and share the absence in a community: "Since language acts and makes up for absence by representing, by *giving figurative shape* to presence, it can only be *comprehended or shared* in a 'community of empty mouths'" (128, emphases in the original). Incorporation would be a nonintrojection, a fantasy in which an object is introduced into the body. It means to introduce a loved object into one's body in a way that the loss does not require a major adjustment (Abraham and Torok 126). Through incorporation, the subject is exempted from a "painful process of organization": by ingesting the love object, there is a refusal to mourn and to deal with the consequences of mourning; hence, incorporation is a way of refusing to acknowledge a loss that would lead to a transformation (Abraham and Torok 127). Thereby, incorporation happens when the work of introjection encounters an obstacle; unable to say certain words, a fantasy occurs in the subject: one in which the unnamable object is put into the mouth; when words fail to feed the mouth, the subject's void, it absorbs an imaginary thing, it is

fed by means of fantasy (Abraham and Torok 128-129). Abraham and Torok conclude that “in the face of both the urgency and the impossibility of performing one type of mouth-work—speaking to someone about what we have lost—another type of mouth-work is utilized, one that is imaginary and equipped to deny the very existence of the entire problem” (129).

In incorporation, when an abrupt loss of an indispensable object is incommunicable, the person even denies that she or he lost something at all (Abraham and Torok 129). This is what the authors call the intrapsychic tomb; when a loss cannot be acknowledge, and introjection is so impossible that even the refusal to mourn cannot be put into words, grief is locked in a tomb inside the subject:

Without the escape-route of somehow conveying our refusal to mourn, we are reduced to a radical denial of the loss, to pretending that we had absolutely nothing to lose. There can be no thought of speaking to someone else about our grief under these circumstances. The words that cannot be uttered, the scenes that cannot be recalled, the tears that cannot be shed—everything will be swallowed along with the trauma that led to the loss. Swallowed and preserved. Inexpressible mourning erects a secret tomb inside the subject. (Abraham and Torok 130)

Incorporation is so encrypted that sometimes patients go through therapy without even touching the problem; it can even be hidden under “normalcy” (134). Those crypts are constructed when the love object had a shameful secret, or when it functions as ego ideal; there is an impossibility to speak figuratively, and the subject adopts the literal meaning of words, which leads to humiliation (Abraham and Torok 131). The refusal to introject the loss of the ideal might lead to “manifestations of the fantasy of eating excrement,” such as “unkempt towards outward appearance” (131-132). As Abraham and Torok propose, this is a case of “antimetaphor,” which would “not [be] simply a matter of reverting to the literal meaning of words, but of using them in such a way—whether in speech or deed—that their very capacity for figurative representation is destroyed” (132).

Dialoging directly with "Mourning and Melancholia," Abraham and Torok oppose Freud's idea that the melancholic subject has been disappointed by the love object; they see her or him as loving the object without ambivalences:

We find it crucial to affirm the prior existence of a love totally free of ambivalence, to insist on the undisclosable character of this love, and finally to show that a real and therefore traumatic cause had put an end to it. The system of counter-investments—using the themes of hate, disappointment, and mistreatment supposedly endured on account of the object—results from some traumatic affliction and from the utter impossibility of mourning. Hence the fantasized aggression is not in fact primary; it merely extends the genuine aggression the object actually suffered *earlier* in the form of death, disgrace, or removal—this being the involuntary cause of the separation. Inclusion does not occur unless the subject is convinced of the object's total innocence. (Abraham and Torok 136, emphasis in the original)

Thus, in incorporation, love is put to an end by a traumatic fact; counter-investments such as hate result from the trauma and the impossibility to mourn a fatal separation. Furthermore, the only objects incorporated are those who are taken as innocent by the subject. Abraham and Torok also mention that, as long as this is encrypted, there is no melancholia: "It erupts when the walls are shaken, often as a result of the loss of some secondary love-object who had buttressed them. Faced with the danger of seeing the crypt crumble, the whole of the ego becomes one with the crypt, showing the concealed object of love in its own guise" (136). It is only when the crypt is close to falling apart, faced by a secondary loss, that the ego is fused with the crypt, showing signs of melancholia, guilt, and shame. The fact that there is a prior traumatic event that leads to incorporation and that its crypt only shows after a second loss are relatable to the temporality of trauma—its latency—which I will hereafter discuss.

1.2.3 Trauma, Latency, and Memory

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud also approximates the traumatic neurosis to melancholia. In this text, he supposes that there is a compulsion to repetition that

surpasses the pleasure principle and which would be related to the dreams that occur in traumatic neurosis. This neurosis would approach and surpass the symptoms of hysteria due to "its strongly marked signs of subjective ailment (in which it resembles hypochondria or melancholia) as well as in the evidence it gives of a far more comprehensive general enfeeblement and disturbance of the mental capacities" (Freud 3718). The traumatic neurosis would thus show more signs of subjective ailment and disturbance than other pathologies such as hysteria, it being close to melancholia. What appears to be a distinguishing factor is that those who suffer from traumatic neurosis seem to be concerned with not thinking of a particular accident (Freud 3719). While discussing it in relation to the pleasure principle, Freud sees as a novelty the fact that this compulsion to repeat "recalls from the past experiences which include no possibility of pleasure, and which can never, even long ago, have brought satisfaction even to instinctual impulses which have since been repressed" (3725). He is impressed with how these repressed impulses keep coming back, even though they have never brought any pleasure for the sufferer, who might actually try not to think about them. In order to illustrate a "perpetual recurrence of the same thing," Freud brings the example of Tasso's epic *Gerusalemme Liberata*:

Its hero, Tancred, unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel while she is disguised in the armour of an enemy knight. After her burial he makes his way into a strange magic forest which strikes the Crusaders' army with terror. He slashes with his sword at a tall tree; but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again. (3726)

Unconsciously, Tancred wounds his beloved, whom he had killed, a second time. For Freud, this is evidence that there is "in the mind a compulsion to repeat which overrides the pleasure principle," a compulsion that is generally supported by other motives (3726; 3727). This example is one of the keys for Cathy Caruth's discussion on Freud's text. When she analyzes it, she calls attention not only to the unconscious repetition of the injury, but also to Clorinda's voice: "what seems to me particular striking in the example of Tasso is [...] the moving and sorrowful *voice* that cries out, a voice that is paradoxically released *through the wound*" (*UE 2*, emphases in the original). Tancred's

story represents traumatic experience also “as the enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound, a voice that witness a truth that Tancred himself cannot fully know” (*UE* 3). His perception of having repeated the act of wounding his beloved is only awakened through her own wounded voice, and it is precisely through it that Tancred discovers his own trauma. This leads to one of Caruth's most important insights: according to her, just as Tancred does not listen to Clorinda's voice before wounding her, trauma is not accessible in its original moment: “trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on” (*UE* 4, emphasis in the original). In another text, Caruth calls this “[t]he temporality of trauma—the delay of the event that always returns elsewhere, in another place and time” (TMT 2). Thus, Caruth sees trauma as not being experienced while it takes place, which is a way that the sufferer finds to survive its precise moment; after surviving the moment itself, it can come back to be known later, belatedly, to haunt the survivor.

And how would trauma break the protection to be acknowledged by the sufferer? Freud mentions the “traumatic excitations,” which would be powerful enough to “break through the protective shield”; and thus external trauma would create a disturbance in the organism and set in motion the defensive measures (Freud 3732). He also states that the common neurosis might be seen as a “consequence of an extensive breach being made in the protective shield against stimuli” (Freud 3734). Caruth comments how this “breach” is actually caused by a “fright,” “the lack of preparedness to take in a stimulus that comes too quickly”; the threat to the bodily life is recognized “*one moment too late*” (*UE* 62, emphasis in the original). Therefore, Caruth concludes, the shock is not caused by the direct experience, but by the missing of the experience in time (*UE* 62). Though this missing—maybe due to the protective shield—would make it possible for the sufferer to live through the experience, the lack of experiencing it in time would create a shock, which would be experienced later. This is how traumatic excitations are able to create a breach in the protective shield, belatedly.

Caruth also discusses the missing of the experience while analyzing Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*. In the text, Freud retells the history of the Jewish people as a traumatic story. According to him, Moses, who frees the Hebrews, was actually an Egyptian, a follower of the pharaonic monotheism of Amenophis IV—later Akhenaten (Freud 4845;

4851; 4853). After the Pharaoh's death—and the elimination of his monotheistic religion—Moses becomes the leader of the Hebrews: he converts them into his monotheism, Aten's religion, and migrates with them to Canaan with plans to found a new kingdom to preserve his religion (Freud 4856; 4859). According to Freud, following their departure, the Hebrews slaughter Moses, and after some time Moses's image is somehow fused with the priest of Yahweh, also named Moses, to whom his deeds are attributed: "he [the god Yahweh] was credited with the deed of liberation which had been performed by Moses" (4866; 4873; 4879). The repression of the murder is thus the starting point of the Jewish history, which begins with a traumatic experience, with the return of the repressed:

Jewish history is familiar to us for its dualities: two groups of people who came together to form the nation, two kingdoms into which this nation fell apart, two gods' names in the documentary sources of the Bible. To these we add two fresh ones: the foundation of two religions—the first repressed by the second but nevertheless later emerging victoriously behind it, and two religious founders, who are both called by the same name of Moses and whose personalities we have to distinguish from each other. All of these dualities are the necessary consequences of the first one: the fact that one portion of the people had an experience which must be regarded as traumatic and which the other portion escaped. (Freud 4881)

This would be due to the fact that part of the people were descendants of those who came from Egypt—and therefore were somehow acquainted with the existence of the Egyptian Moses—and the other part joined them later.

In the same text, Freud brings the example of a railway collision of which a person leaves apparently uninjured, only to find, in the next few weeks, the presence of psychical and motor symptoms related to the shock, which would be the development of a "traumatic neurosis" (4893). He calls "[t]he time that has passed between the accident and the first appearance of the symptoms" an "incubation period," or "latency," a characteristic that would be present in both the railway accident and the Jewish monotheism (Freud 4893). Caruth calls attention to the fact that, in Freud's example of the railway crash, the victim was not fully conscious during the accident:

The experience of trauma, the fact of latency, would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself. The historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all. (*UE* 17)

Thus, there is a latency in the traumatic experience itself, which can only be experienced through its forgetting; otherwise, it might not be possible for the person to leave it apparently uninjured. In the sequence of his text, Freud provides his definitions of trauma: "We give the name of traumas to those impressions, experienced early and later forgotten, to which we attach such great importance in the aetiology of the neuroses"; "The traumas are either experiences on the subject's own body or sense perceptions, mostly of something seen and heard—that is, experiences or impressions" (4898; 4900). The development of a neurosis would follow the formula: "Early trauma—defence—latency—outbreak of neurotic illness—partial return of the repressed" (Freud 4905). Therefore, to forget the experience is part of what trauma is; it can be experienced physically or psychically: there is a defense during the experience itself, followed by the latency period, and later by the outbreak of the neurosis and the return of the repressed. While analyzing Freud's writings, Caruth concludes that it is the temporal quality of trauma that makes it possible for its repetition to be explained; she also mentions the term "trigger":

The repetitive dimension of trauma can only be explained by taking its constitutively temporal aspect into account. Present neurobiological accounts of triggers (flashbacks caused by triggering elements in the environment) still run up against the temporal dilemma of repetition when they have to explain how it is that any particular event sets off an alarm that cannot be stopped, hence causing an excessive output of serotonin, which ultimately depletes the system and causes later trigger reactions. (*UE* 133)

Throughout her writings on trauma, Caruth puts great emphasis in its temporal aspect; her definition of trauma depends on its belated quality, on the latency period. Though

she does not seem to be necessarily fond of the term “trigger,” it will be helpful for my further analyses. A trigger would thus be an event that brings back a previous experience, which might happen through flashbacks. By making the sufferer repeat the event later—even if through flashbacks—triggers would have a great importance for igniting the delayed experience of trauma.

Whereas Freud discusses one's own trauma, such as in the example of the railway accident, or a collective trauma, in the case of Jewish monotheism,²⁰ trauma can also be in relation to another's death. Caruth calls attention to a “crucial shift” implied by a Lacanian reading of a Freudian text “from the notion of trauma as a relation to one's own death to the notion of trauma as primarily a relation to another's death”; in this case, the temporality of trauma may be understood “in terms of a temporality of the other” (*UE* 143). Her reading is based on a dream and its further analyses taken from Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*.²¹ Following Lacan's discussion in “Tuché and Automaton,” Caruth concludes that the story of the dream is “the story of an impossible responsibility of consciousness in its own originating relation to others, and specifically to the deaths of others” (*UE* 104). She says that Lacan also focuses on the trauma caused by the absence of the other from the child's perspective of the missing parent. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud discusses the case of a boy who played a game in which he would make his toys, attached by a string, disappear while saying “fort” [gone]; when he pulled them back, he would say “da” [there/here] (3720). Freud concludes that the game was related to the child's “instinctual renunciation [...] which he had made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting. He compensated himself for this, as it were, by himself staging the disappearance and return of the objects within his reach” (3721).

²⁰ Caruth argues that individual and historical traumas are, in fact, inseparable. After analyzing a sentence written by Freud that goes from German to English and relating it to his own departure from Germany to England, Caruth mentions what she believes to be Freud's central insight in *Moses and Monotheism*: “that history, like trauma, is never simply one's own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas” (*UE* 24). In the same way that reading Freud's sentence makes one feel his departure, while telling the history of the Jewish people, he confesses a little of his own life: other people's traumas are implicated in one's own, and vice-versa.

²¹ The dream is that of the burning child: “After the child had died, he went into the next room to lie down, [...]. After a few hours' sleep, the father had a dream that *his child was standing besides [sic] his bed, caught him by the arm and whispered to him reproachfully: 'Father, don't you see I'm burning?'* He woke up, noticed a bright glare of light from the next room, hurried into it and found that the old watchman had dropped off to sleep and that the wrappings and one of the arms of his beloved child's dead body had been burned by a lighted candle that had fallen on them” (Freud 945, emphasis in the original).

He also mentions that the “fort” act, that of departure, was staged much more frequently than the pleasurable ending (Freud 3721). According to Lacan, the game represents the idea of the mother, who is absent, and it is a praxis that allows the child to overcome the inner conflict of a splitting of consciousness (“Tuché and Automaton” 63). Caruth concludes that “[t]he trauma of the parent’s departure, Lacan suggests, is thus relived in the traumatic experience of the child” (*UE* 109). In other words, the repetition of the mother’s departure makes the child live this trauma again and again.

Finally, for the analysis of trauma in literary texts, Juliet Mitchell’s *Mad Men and Medusas: Reclaiming Hysteria* is interesting to clarify a few points. Mitchell also says that trauma can be “displaced”: according to her, an original shock can be later triggered by another shock or trauma (280). Nevertheless, coming from a different strand of psychoanalytical understanding of memory than that of Caruth, Mitchell makes a distinction between perception and memory, which she sees as incompatible (281). She suggests that, for the victims of trauma or hysteria, “*memory has regressed to perception*”; since “they cannot remember, they can only perceive” (281, emphasis in the original). She makes a distinction between the traumatic experience, perception and memory:

At the very moment of trauma there is neither perception nor memory. Something experienced as traumatic shock eradicates the victim’s capacity for memory as representation. In its place comes the perception, the presentation of the experience. [...] This presentation of sensory aspects of what happened is not the same as the experience itself coming back in its actuality. It is not ‘the Real’ nor a representation of it as a memory. It is an iconic presentation. Perception necessarily distorts and is individual. It is this perception that returns as the iconic images, or ‘frozen’ movements [...]—the inescapable, repeated perceived presentations of an aspect of the experience, not the experience itself. (Mitchell 281)

At the moment of trauma, there is no possibility of perception nor memory; it is not possible to represent memory. The presentation of what happened is not the experience coming back, it is iconic, it is perception. Thus, differently from Caruth, Mitchell states that what later returns for the victim of trauma is the perception, not the experience

itself. When a traumatic situation is narrated, it is no longer the experience of trauma, nor even its perception: it is the representation of memory. Since at the moment of trauma there is no perception nor memory, and when it comes back there is only perception, when it can be finally put into words, in a third moment in time, it is not trauma that is being narrated, but the memory of trauma. Though my following chapter will be mostly grounded in Caruth's writings, this distinction between traumatic memory and perception will be important for my analysis.

2 *The Bell Jar*

does it not all come again to the fact that it is a man's world? For if a man chooses to be promiscuous, he may still aesthetically turn up his nose at promiscuity. He may still demand a woman be faithful to him, to save him from his own lust. But women have lust, too. Why should they be relegated to the position of custodian of emotions, watcher of the infants, feeder of soul, body and pride of man? Being born a woman is my awful tragedy. [...] my consuming desire to mingle with road crews, sailors and soldiers, bar room regulars [...] all is spoiled by the fact that I am a girl, a female always in danger of assault and battery.

no matter how enthusiastic you are, no matter how sure that character is fate, nothing is real, past or future, when you are alone in your room [...]. And if you have no past or future which, after all, is all that the present is made of, why then you may as well dispose of the empty shell of present and commit suicide.

—Sylvia Plath, from her journals

The Bell Jar is Sylvia Plath's only published novel, but she also worked on other two novels, the first of which was *Falcon Yard*. It was based on the time she studied in Cambridge, and, in spite of having worked on it from 1957 to 1958, she never finished it (Ferreter, "Introduction"). According to Luke Ferreter, *The Bell Jar* was written in 1961, "between early April and late August" ("Introduction"). He considers a passage from Plath's journals as indicative of she having finished the novel; in the December 12, 1958 entry that said "Why don't I write a novel?," Plath later added "I have! August 22, 1961: THE BELL JAR" (J 438; 696). There were different drafts of *The Bell Jar* before its final version: its heroine's name changed a few times. In an early draft not prior to 1961, she was called "Frieda" (see Plath, *The Bell Jar*: early draft). On a second draft, it is possible to see that both the character's name and the novel's pseudonym were changed from "Frieda Lucas" to "Victoria Lucas"; the title was also changed, from *Diary of a Suicide* to *The Bell Jar* (see Plath, *The Bell Jar*: second draft). Plath actually submitted the novel's manuscript with its heroine named Victoria Lucas, which she had to change due to her editor's request that the pen-name was not the same as the main character's; she thus agreed and requested its change to Esther Greenwood (see Plath, letter to James Michie, November 14, 1961). After *The Bell Jar*, Plath started another novel, which she would

leave unfinished as well. Among its working titles, there were *Double Exposure* and later *Doubletake*: it would be a semi-autobiographical novel about a wife who finds out what her husband really is like, which differs from what she previously thought of him (see Ferreter, "Introduction," and Plath, letter to Olive Higgins Prouty, November 20, 1962).

In *The Bell Jar*, the main character and narrator, Esther Greenwood, strongly criticizes the roles attributed to women in the United States in the 1950s, at the same time that she is going through a breakdown, which culminates in a suicide attempt. Esther is a straight-A, English-major student at the prestigious Smith College. At the beginning of the narrative, she travels to New York as one of the awards of a female-magazine contest. Once there, Esther works as an intern, meets people, but also undergoes unpleasant situations such as her experience with Marco, who attempts to rape her. While in New York, Esther sees herself as separated from the other girls that also won the contest: she believes to be an outsider; she describes herself as an "an observer" (*BJ* 105). However, in spite of admitting the exact opposite, she feels and suffers due to these events.²² After her time in New York is over, Esther comes back home, to the suburbs of Boston. When she gets there, she finds out that she was not accepted into a writing course that she was counting on attending during summer. It is then that the reader, through a series of flashbacks, is acquainted with events from Esther's past, as well as with the narrator's present situation: she is writing her story from another stage in life, in which she is a mother. The past situations narrated by Esther are relatable to her breakdown, which keeps getting worse until it turns into something inevitable. A few examples of those situations are Esther's experiences with her previous boyfriend Buddy Willard, the premature death of her father when she was a child, her anxieties in relation to her (professional and marital) future, and her troubled relationship with her mother. At a certain point, Esther is no longer able to handle basic activities such as taking care of her hygiene, reading, and writing. She thus goes to a male psychiatrist, with whom she does not identify. After a traumatic electroconvulsive therapy session, she decides not to go there again. She ends up attempting suicide and being sent to two mental hospitals: first to a public and later to a private one. In the latter, she is put under the supervision of a young female psychiatrist,

²² In accordance with Gill, "[i]n the opening scene alone we have a voice which is simultaneously detached from what it sees and detached from itself but also wholly implicated" (78). As Linda Wagner-Martin puts it, "[h]er [Esther's] perceptions set her outside society but do not free her from the pressures of that world" (*The Bell Jar: A Novel of the Fifties* 82).

Doctor Nolan, whom she seems to trust, and she is able to undergo electroconvulsive therapy again in a less traumatic way. At the end of the narrative, everything is settled for Esther to leave the hospital; yet there is a feeling that she is better but not completely; that the bell jar—metaphor of her psychological state—is still suspended over her head.

To discuss *The Bell Jar*, it is important to take into consideration that the novel takes place in the United States in the 1950s. In this context, there were not many roles available for women; as Linda Wagner-Martin mentions, it was “a major achievement” for a woman to find “an identity other than that of sweetheart, girlfriend, and wife and mother” (*The Bell Jar: A Novel of the Fifties* 36). Few were the “achieving women” of the decade, and “the average age for women to marry had fallen to 20.3” (Wagner-Martin, *The Bell Jar: A Novel of the Fifties* 3). Young girls were expected to marry really early; even those who went to college would probably leave their jobs and marry after they finished their studies. This contributes directly to Esther’s struggle, for she did not believe to be possible to combine the roles of married and career woman. Ferreter goes further to say how this ideal of a 1950s American woman would set the basis for what was considered to be a mentally healthy woman at the time: “a woman needed wholeheartedly to embrace—or to [*sic*] least to tell her doctors that she did—the ‘feminine’ role of housewife and mother. [...] Women were expected to be docile, submissive and obedient if they were to be regarded as mentally healthy” (ch. 4). The performance of femininity was expected from women not only for them to perform their roles of married housewives, but also for them to be considerate “normal.” Christina Britzolakis mentions how Esther’s breakdown can be read “as an effect of her socialization” (33); with few options, Esther cannot choose among those limited possibilities, and her critique is directed towards this society as a whole. In such a strict context, a small deviation might be considered out of “normalcy.” But is Esther’s case a *small* deviation? As Britzolakis comments, “[p]aradoxically, the cruelly distancing, alienated perspective of the bell jar allows the narrator certain key insights not vouchsafed to the ‘normal’ point of view” (18). Esther’s sharp comments might be possible due to the fact that her psychic state is shattered. She knows that the society in which she is has few models and possibilities for women; differently from most of them, she is able to give them voice: she says that she does not want to marry and makes sharp critiques on the female role models available, while she is also able to criticize her

society's double standards for women. Being outside "normalcy" allows Esther to say what she means, without being constricted to—while also being a part of—the parameters of the 1950s femininity. We shall discuss now where Esther stands as woman in this context—but not just any woman, a woman that is, as she puts it, "under the bell jar."

2.1 On Being a Woman

2.1.1 Language, Science, and the Hypocrisy of Gender Norms

Esther's recollections of her dialogues with previous boyfriend Buddy Willard constitute the core of her gender anxieties. Linda Wagner-Martin sees Esther's frustration with him as being "over his control of words, not his control of their emotional relationship" (*The Bell Jar: A Novel of the Fifties* 80). At the beginning of their relationship, Esther always felt as if he had to be right; or at least as if she could never say what she wanted because she got nervous: "He was a couple of years older than I was and very scientific, so he could always prove things. When I was with him I had to work to keep my head above water" (*BJ* 56). Buddy dominated a scientific language that Esther did not, and so she could only answer him back in imaginary conversations (*BJ* 56). Furthermore, though he later changes his mind about it, while they are dating, Buddy despises poetry; he even says that a poem is "[a] piece of dust" (*BJ* 56), which reinforces Esther's initial vision that literature is her—feminine—field in opposition to his—masculine—science. Esther appears to see the world as sexed, as divided in two genders. In college, she wants to succeed—or at least to pretend to succeed—in both. Though majoring in English, Esther has mandatory classes in physics and chemistry. She gets an A in physics, despite not feeling comfortable in those classes with her sciences professor, who writes "hideous, cramped, scorpion-lettered formulas" in a red chalk (*BJ* 35). Science is difficult and uninteresting, in opposition to literature.²³ The fact that Esther gets an A in physics in spite of hating it gives her a kind of double vision: she can

²³ An exception to this rule is botany, which Esther likes. Nevertheless, what she seems to like about it are its "fascinating words like carotene and xanthophyll" in opposition to chemistry's "ugly abbreviations" (*BJ* 35).

do well both in her (female) interests and in others' (male) interests. Mr. Manzi's science actually seems too simplistic for Esther; she feels that she is much better studying Shakespeare: literature—even when written by a male—is seen as more into the feminine realm.

The novel's portrayal of science as a masculine field—with women being its objects—is reinforced when Esther and Buddy watch a baby being born. He assures her that the woman in labor is under a drug that would make her forget the pain that she was having, as if she were in some kind of sleep. About this, Esther comments: "I thought it sounded just like the sort of drug a man would invent. Here was a woman in terrible pain [...] and she would go straight home and start another baby, because the drug would make her forget how bad the pain had been" (*BJ* 66). The scientific conception of childbirth seems to bother Esther, as well as the fact that the mother does not have any kind of agency during it: "I thought if you had to have all that pain anyway you might just as well stay awake" (*BJ* 67). This uneasiness with physicians is also evident when Esther goes to her first psychiatrist, Doctor Gordon. Right from the beginning, she despises him; she looks at the family picture on his desk and thinks he would never be able to help her with his perfect wife, children, and dog "haloing him like the angels on a Christmas card" (*BJ* 129). When she mentions that she went to Smith College, he recollects the place with a sexist comment: "My, they were a pretty bunch of girls" (*BJ* 131).

Concerning her daughter's future, in spite of knowing of her devotion to literature, Mrs. Greenwood wants Esther to learn shorthand, so she could have a practical skill (*BJ* 39-40). Esther refuses to learn it, as well as she refuses Mr. Manzi's science: "The trouble was, I hated the idea of serving men in any way. I wanted to dictate my own thrilling letters. Besides, those little shorthand symbols in the book my mother showed me seemed just as bad as let *t* equal time and let *s* equal the total distance" (*BJ* 76). While science is seen by her as a male field, shorthand would be to conform to the fact that she would have to serve men by accepting a lower occupation. She would also have to write *their* words, not hers. In one of their dialogues, Buddy tells Esther that, after she was a married mother, she would not want to write poetry anymore (*BJ* 85). According to Annis Pratt, this comment makes Esther even more upset with the idea of marriage (31). Esther starts to notice that maybe writing would be another path denied to her: once she consolidated the position that society demanded of her as a female, that of a married woman and mother, being a poet would no longer be an option. She

concludes that “when you were married and had children it was like being brainwashed” (*BJ* 85). Luce Irigaray’s arguments that language is actually masculine, the feminine being a nonexistent reality (*jtn* 20) and that the subject is masculine, while woman is only a projection of him (*SOW* 133; 140-141) might prove interesting to comment Esther’s case. Trying to speak in male terms is the same as not having voice: Esther cannot simply appropriate the masculinist economy and do the same, because her ambitions are limited to her being female. In spite of her capacity to write, male poets would always be poets, even after marriage, but she would be somehow “brainwashed” to give up writing. Furthermore, her collapse is mainly centered on how she can no longer use language: an English major with writing skills, she suddenly cannot read nor write, and she is extremely bothered with how terrible her handwriting is. Once home, when she tries to write a novel, or her thesis, she simply cannot concentrate. When her mother explains to Philomena Guinea what her problem is, she says that “it is Esther's writing. She thinks she will never write again” (*BJ* 185). Esther’s relationship to language is of great importance, and for her to get better is to take over her previous interest in words—her high-school English teacher even visits at the hospital to try to do this by teaching her to play Scrabble (*BJ* 202).

Irigaray also mentions how women can be objectified in discourse, just for being women, or reobjectified when they try to identify with the subject (*SOW* 133). Esther seems to be very critical of how women are observed by men; she thinks that Lenny stares at her friend Doreen as an animal in the zoo, “waiting for it to say something human” (*BJ* 11). The moment in which Esther herself is most objectified is when she is with Marco. While still in New York, Doreen introduces her to him. When Esther meets him, she describes him as a “woman-hater,” because he paid attention to her “[n]ot out of kindness or even curiosity, but because I’d happened to be dealt to him, like a playing card in a pack of identical cards”; Esther begins to see “why woman-haters could make such fools of women. Woman-haters were like gods: invulnerable and chock-full of power” (*BJ* 106; 107). After being trusted with his diamond stickpin, Esther ends up going with Marco to the garden. He throws her in the mud, tears her dress, and starts calling her a “slut,” a situation that Esther describes as a “battle” (*BJ* 109). She punches him in the nose and begins to cry, and Marco says: “Sluts, all sluts. [...] Yes or no, it is all the same” (*BJ* 109). He clearly does not think a woman should desire sex for it to happen. Marco then wipes the blood from his nose and stains Esther’s cheeks with it (*BJ* 109).

Wagner-Martin sees this event as particularly shocking because Esther has never seen such hatred: "Esther has never known such violence, such hatred, [...]. He sets her up. No matter how Esther behaves with Marco, [...] she will become the objectionable woman he needs to punish" (*The Bell Jar: A Novel of the Fifties* 39). Marco actually threatens to break Esther's neck if she does not tell him where she put his diamond stickpin (*BJ* 110). He sees her as nothing more than an object, the woman that is there for him to attack; as Esther puts it, she is just a card in a pack, whereas he sees himself as a god.

But Esther does not want to serve as recreation to male fantasies, as well as she does not want to be a part of a discourse that denies herself and her pleasure, to put it in Irigaray's terms. When Esther finds out that Buddy is not a virgin, she feels deceived. The problem is not the fact that he has slept with someone else, but that he acted as a hypocrite: "What I couldn't stand was Buddy's pretending I was so sexy and he was so pure, when all the time he'd been having an affair with that tarty waitress and must have felt like laughing in my face"; Esther cannot "stand the idea of a woman having to have a single pure life and a man being able to have a double life, one pure and one not" (*BJ* 71; 81). Esther is mad at Buddy's hypocrisy for having pretended that she was more experienced than him and also for reminding her of the hypocrisy of gender double standards: she does not want to be the naive girl who waits until marriage while her boyfriend does not; she does not think it is fair for men to be able to have a freer sexual life than she does. She also hates the fact that she was the one who had to be worried about getting pregnant, as she tells Doctor Nolan: "A man doesn't have a worry in the world, while I've got a baby hanging over my head like a big stick, to keep me in line" (*BJ* 221).

As I have discussed earlier, Irigaray mentions how, though woman is fully herself, she *is not* while discourse has not pronounced her to *be*; woman cannot move beyond the ontological value given by a discourse that denies her (*SOW* 162-163). In Esther's context, women that transcended gender definitions and expectations were not described as heroic, but as pathological, abnormal, something not to be. Esther wants to have agency, not to conform to patriarchal discourses such as Mrs. Willard's, which does not allow her an existence of her own. According to Mrs. Willard, woman is defined in relation to man, the great protagonist of human life: "What a man is is an arrow into the future and what a woman is is the place the arrow shoots off from" (*BJ* 72). That thinking is what leads Esther to have a negative view of marriage altogether: "That's one

of the reasons I never wanted to get married. The last thing I wanted was infinite security and to be the place an arrow shoots off from. I wanted change and excitement and to shoot off in all directions myself, like the colored arrows from a Fourth of July rocket" (*BJ* 83). She does not want to serve a man full of possibilities; she wants to have possibilities herself, which seems incompatible with married life for women: she sees a life spent in domesticity as "a dreary and wasted life for a girl with fifteen years of straight A's," but she knew that that was "what marriage was like" (*BJ* 84). Nonetheless, to deny marriage in her context was seen as abnormal; it was expected from women to simply marry, without questioning it. When Esther tells Buddy that she is "never going to get married," he answers her: "You're crazy. [...] You'll change your mind" (*BJ* 93). For Buddy, a single woman that is not in want of a husband can only be out of her mind; she is outside the parameters of "normalcy" of his time.

However, even accepting to be "crazy" will not secure a woman like Esther from having to think about marriage. Right after her suicide attempt, Esther is momentarily blind. When she wakes up and notices that she cannot see, someone from the first, public hospital tells her: "There are lots of blind people in the world. You'll marry a nice blind man someday" (*BJ* 171). Caroline J. Smith mentions how even at the hospital, a place of recovery, Esther cannot escape the domestic models assigned for her, which troubled her so much (18). To put it in Irigarayan terms, whenever woman tries to get out of the logos, she is (re)assimilated as part of the same: even Esther's suicide attempt and further hospitalization will not prevent her from having to marry someday. Perhaps this was the reason she tried to kill herself in the first place. As Ferreter puts it, maybe the only way out of domestic models in this context is death: "To become the arrow of Mrs Willard's proverb, as Esther wants to do, is to cease to exist as a woman in the way that the concept of woman is publicly defined. The weight of the gender ideology against which Esther struggles to be herself seems to leave her no option but to leave the world altogether" (ch. 4). In her context, wanting to be an "arrow," to have agency, is the same as wanting to be something else, for being a woman is defined as being "the place the arrow shoots off from," not the arrow itself. Apparently, the only solution is death, but not even her suicide attempt secures her a place outside the masculinist, patriarchal economy. Irigaray mentions how women are treated as products of exchange between men, their values in sexual commerce changing due to different factors (*TS* 31). When Esther is about to leave the second, private hospital, and Buddy visits her, he makes it

clear that she has now a lower price in the marriage market: "I wonder who you'll marry now, Esther. Now you've been [...] here" (*BJ* 241). Knowing the parameters of her time according to which a woman is—or is not—marriage material, Esther can only agree with Buddy: "And of course I didn't know who would marry me now that I'd been where I had been. I didn't know at all" (*BJ* 241).

2.1.2 Motherhood, Female Genealogies, and Relationships between Women

If we think of Irigaray's proposition of a move back to the womblike cave (*SOW* 143-144), we might say that *The Bell Jar* proposes an into-the-womb movement during Esther's quest for suicide, but later it works as an attempt to go out of the cave. In fact, the bell jar seems to be a suffocating womb of which Esther tries but never manages to get out completely. The images presented throughout her breakdown are related to babies—especially fetuses. When she is studying different ways to kill herself, she considers drowning, and makes a connection between the babies she saw in jars with Buddy and her own situation while under the bell jar: "I thought drowning must be the kindest way to die, and burning the worst. Some of those babies in the jars that Buddy Willard showed me had gills, he said. They went through a stage where they were just like fish" (*BJ* 157). The womb is like a sea, in whose waters she could drown, immersed in a solution, like the one in which those fetuses died. The way she finally attempts suicide, by crawling into a hole in the wall, recalls a womblike tomb. She describes her crawling into the "hole mouth" in the cellar: "A few old, rotting fireplace logs blocked the hole mouth. I shoved them back a bit. [...] It took me a good while to heft my body into the gap, but at last, after many tries, I managed it, and crouched at the mouth of the darkness, like a troll. [...] I wondered how long it had been since this particular square of soil had seen the sun" (*BJ* 169). Britzolakis mentions how, "the only resolution to Esther's dilemma seems to lie in regression to the womb of non-being; only by committing suicide, apparently, can she avoid the scenarios prescribed for her" (33). Furthermore, the womb is not only a metaphor for Esther's state, her suicidal drive, but it is also a central figure of her life options.

In the famous passage of the fig-tree insight, Esther analyses the possibilities that she has in life, but she is unable to embrace any of them:

I saw my life branching out before me like the green fig tree in the story.

From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future beckoned and winked. One fig was a husband and a happy home and children, and another fig was a famous poet and another fig was a brilliant professor, and another fig was Ee Gee, the amazing editor, and another fig was Europe and Africa and South America, and another fig was Constantin and Socrates and Attila and a pack of other lovers with queer names and offbeat professions, and another fig was an Olympic lady crew champion, and beyond and above these figs were many more figs I couldn't quite make out.

I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig tree, starving to death, just because I couldn't make up my mind which of the figs I would choose. I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest, and, as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and, one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet. (*BJ* 77)

Through this metaphor, Esther considers what she can make out of her life, and by extension what she will have to put aside whether she makes a choice, and thus she simply cannot decide. She feels so oppressed by people who can do much more than she can that she cannot even start; she mentions: "I felt dreadfully inadequate. The trouble was, I had been inadequate all along, I simply hadn't thought about it" (*BJ* 77). Each branch offers a possibility for her life based on a certain female model. At a certain point of the narrative, she questions the influence that mother figures claim to have over her, feeling confused: "Why did I attract these weird old women? There was the famous poet, and Philomena Guinea, and Jay Cee, and the Christian Scientist lady and lord knows who, and they all wanted to adopt me in some way, and, for the price of their care and influence, have me resemble them" (*BJ* 220). She does not understand why they somehow see her as their daughter, or their pupil, and each one of them presents characteristics with which Esther is not willing to cope. She does not identify completely with any of them.

The problem with these women is that either they are too professional, the 1950s stereotype of the career woman, such as Jay Cee, or they are the example of domesticity such as Mrs. Willard. Wagner-Martin calls attention to how women in the novel work as agents of the patriarchy in relation to Esther: "The plausible explanation for Esther's

anger lies in the fact that it is displaced—is directed at the patriarchy and all its control—yet is expressed toward these hovering and seemingly well-intentioned older women who, through their example and language, reconfirm the teaching of that patriarchy” (*The Bell Jar: A Novel of the Fifties* 54). Those women are examples of how to live according to—or against—the patriarchy; there is no way in between: she can only deny or accept its economy completely. It is interesting how it is among women that Esther finds the most ardent defenses of marriage, chastity, and domesticity—Mrs. Willard being their greatest advocate. Wagner-Martin sees Mrs. Willard’s “real role in the novel” as that of a “spokesperson for the dominant 1950s gender ideology” (*The Bell Jar: A Novel of the Fifties* 33). She has given up her job to be a housewife and dedicates herself entirely to domesticity, to make house utilities to which no one pays attention. This happens with a kitchen mat, which is an image for married women, according to Esther:

She’d spent weeks on that rug, and I had admired the tweedy browns and greens and blues patterning the braid, but after Mrs. Willard was through, instead of hanging the rug on the wall the way I would have done, she put it down in place of her kitchen mat, and in a few days it was soiled and dull and indistinguishable from any mat you could buy for under a dollar in the five and ten.

And I knew that in spite of all the 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. (*BJ* 84-85)

Esther sees women that reaffirm patriarchal notions as being flattened underneath men’s feet, and those women actually believe their existences to be centered on the roles of wives and—especially—mothers. According to the masculinist discourse of the one, as Irigaray mentions, woman is reduced to nature, to being a procreator (*SOW* 166). The greatest example of reduction to maternity in the novel is that of Esther’s neighbor Dodo Conway, who “raised her six children—and would no doubt raise her seventh” (*BJ* 116). Esther observes her: “A woman not five feet tall, with a grotesque, protruding stomach, was wheeling an old black baby carriage down the street. Two or three small children of various sizes, all pale, with smudgy faces and bare smudgy knees, wobbled along in the

shadow of her skirts" (*BJ* 116). Wagner-Martin notes that women are depicted as dehumanized after pregnancy in *The Bell Jar* (*The Bell Jar: A Novel of the Fifties* 86), and this certainly applies to Dodo, whose stomach is described as "grotesque" after many pregnancies.

Irigaray also mentions that when a woman is reduced to the maternal role, the daughter lacks a female identity with which to identify (*CÀC* 86). It is difficult for a daughter to look up to her mother if being her mother is all that this woman is; she is reduced to a mere function. This is Esther's case with Mrs. Greenwood: the latter lives for her children, for supporting them all by herself; she is not only the maternal figure, reduced to motherhood, she also works, but not for personal fulfilment, she does it to support her children; and thus by working she also ends up being consumed by motherhood. Though confused with what she wants for her life, Esther knows that she does not want to be like her mother: she is more inclined towards being a writer, having a name, an identity of her own. Though she is a brilliant student, her mother keeps insisting that she learns shorthand, something that would be an extra income when she were married rather than a real ambition for her life. This makes Esther think that maybe, if Jay Cee were her mother, she would "know what to do" (*BJ* 39)—but Jay Cee is also undermined in the narrative: she is constantly described by Esther as unattractive. When it comes to Esther's mental state, Mrs. Greenwood does not seem to understand her daughter altogether. When Esther tells her that she is "through with that Doctor Gordon" and will not see him again, her mother says: "I knew my baby wasn't like that. [...] Like those awful people. Those awful dead people at that hospital. [...] I knew you'd decide to be all right again" (*BJ* 145-146). Mrs. Greenwood is unable to show empathy for what Esther is going through—she seems to represent one of Irigaray's bad, phallic mothers (*CÀC* 61). As I have discussed, Irigaray mentions the lack of separation between mother and daughter as creating a difficulty for the daughter to be, especially in case of mourning, since she might wonder if she has not killed her mother in order to live (*CÀC* 63). In *The Bell Jar*, Esther claustrophobically sleeps in the same room as her mother, which makes it impossible for them to be seen as separated beings. During one of the nights that they spend sleeping together, she actually pictures herself killing her mother: "My mother turned from a foggy log into a slumbering, middle-aged woman, her mouth slightly open and a snore raveling from her throat. The piggish noise irritated me, and for a while it seemed to me that the only way to stop it would be to take the column of

skin and sinew from which it rose and twist it to silence between my hands" (*BJ* 123). Esther's mother is also portrayed as dehumanized, making a "piggish noise." Regarding sexuality, Mrs. Greenwood fails again to connect with Esther. At a certain point, Esther mentions how there is no way to be sure whether one is going to get pregnant or not (*BJ* 80), an information that she acquired from her mother. She quotes an article defending chastity that her mother has sent her, but Esther is not willing to take it; she feels the article does not take into consideration "how a girl felt" (*BJ* 81). Concerning the depiction of Mrs. Greenwood, at least at first, a positive, female genealogy, such as Irigaray suggests (*CAC* 30), seems unthinkable in *The Bell Jar*.

This negative view of mother figures seems to change after Esther meets Doctor Nolan. When she sees her for the first time, Esther is surprised that she is a woman: "I didn't think they had woman psychiatrists. This woman was a cross between Myrna Loy and my mother" (*BJ* 186). A mixture of her mother and a famous actress, Doctor Nolan is a woman *and* a scientist; a combination that Esther believed to be impossible and an exception to her views on both women and science. Like Jay Cee, the psychiatrist is one of the few older women that are not treated as "Mrs.": she is *Doctor* Nolan. She is, in fact, one of the few women with whom Esther seems to sympathize; she even says that she "loved" Doctor Nolan (*BJ* 211). Before her first electroconvulsive session under Doctor Nolan's supervision, Esther is hugged by her, in a moment of affection that bears no resemblance to the ones she has with her own mother: "Doctor Nolan put her arm around me and hugged me like a mother" (*BJ* 212). Differently from the other women, Doctor Nolan has a life of her own that is not consumed by motherhood, and, unlike Mrs. Greenwood, she seems to listen to Esther's needs. The physician compensates what her mother lacks, especially when it comes to her illness; according to Wagner-Martin, Esther "understands the rejection implicit in her mother's refusal to accept the truth about her illness, and the corresponding and somewhat compensatory generosity of Doctor Nolan's acceptance of it" (*The Bell Jar: A Novel of the Fifties* 42). In fact, one of the reasons why Esther seems to connect with Doctor Nolan is because the psychiatrist has given her permission to hate her mother. While Esther is at the private hospital, the visitor that has the most impact on her is her mother. After a particular visit, Doctor Nolan tells Esther that she is not to receive visitors for some time. It was Esther's birthday, and her mother had visited her, bringing her roses, which Esther promptly throws away (*BJ* 202-203). She comments the incident with Doctor Nolan:

“That was a silly thing for her to do,” I said to Doctor Nolan.

Doctor Nolan nodded. She seemed to know what I meant. “I hate her,” I said, and waited for the blow to fall.

But Doctor Nolan only smiled at me as if something had pleased her very, very much, and said, “I suppose you do.” (*BJ* 203)

Hating her mother is an important step for Esther to develop a subjectivity of her own; she metaphorically kills her by being allowed to hate her. She can then stop blaming herself for not wanting to follow her mother’s pieces of advice; even though Mrs. Greenwood has spent her life to provide for her children, this is not enough reason for Esther to agree with and want to be like her. This is another example of how Doctor Nolan understands her better: instead of giving Esther articles on sexual abstinence as Mrs. Greenwood does, the psychiatrist offers her contraception, even though it was still not legal at the time. It was illegal in Massachusetts until 1967 for married women and until 1972 for single women (Ferreter, ch. 4). As Wagner-Martin summarizes, Doctor Nolan “gains force as the only strong yet humane woman character in the novel because her role regarding Esther is to empower her” (*The Bell Jar: A Novel of the Fifties* 59).

Concerning herself, as a young woman, Esther does not show interest in being a mother. When she goes to the gynecologist for contraception, she sees several mothers with their babies and questions her “unmaternal” instincts: “How easy having babies seemed to the women around me! Why was I so unmaternal and apart? [...] If I had to wait on a baby all day, I would go mad” (*BJ* 222). Interestingly, we know that Esther is a mother while she is writing about her past breakdown. In fact, the only reference we have of her present time situation is when she discusses the gifts that she was given while in New York: “I use the lipsticks now and then, and last week I cut the plastic starfish off the sunglasses case for the baby to play with” (*BJ* 3). Though we know that she has a baby, we do not know whether adult Esther is consumed by motherhood; whenever the experiences of her youth are narrated, it is as if she saw the world through her younger perception, and therefore not much of her present self is disclosed.

Other relationships between women, those that are not related to mother figures, are also not valorized in *The Bell Jar*; we have anything in the novel but a proposition of sorority. Esther can actually be mean to other women. On more privileged girls than

herself, she comments: "Girls like that make me sick. I'm so jealous I can't speak" (*BJ* 4). When in New York, she apparently makes friends, but her opinions on them constantly change. She identifies with Betsy to a certain point, but, when she gets tired of her, she mocks her with Doreen. Betsy and Doreen work as opposites: Betsy is the girl that does everything right; the one that will marry and be a mother, whereas Doreen is the one who wants to go out, drink, and have sex. As Esther puts it, "Betsy was always asking me to do things with her and the other girls as if she were trying to save me in some way. She never asked Doreen. In private, Doreen called her Pollyanna Cowgirl" (*BJ* 6). The company of Doreen made Esther forget her worries (*BJ* 8). They work as Esther's doubles; she oscillates between them, as if she were choosing the sides of her own personality that she wants to use in particular moments. Eventually, Esther gets tired of both: Betsy does not have Doreen's sense of humor, and Doreen is sometimes too wild for Esther to take. One night, Esther refuses to share a cab with Betsy, because she prefers to go to an event with Doreen. The two end up going to Lenny's apartment, Doreen's love interest. In spite of Doreen's claim—"Stick around, will you? I wouldn't have a chance if he tried anything funny" (*BJ* 15) —Esther leaves. Doreen sees her friendship with Esther as a kind of protection between women, but Esther does not "stick around" and later says she will not have anything to do with Doreen anymore: "I made a decision about Doreen that night. I decided I would watch her and listen to what she said, but deep down I would have nothing at all to do with her. Deep down, I would be loyal to Betsy and her innocent friends. It was Betsy I resembled at heart" (*BJ* 22). Betsy and Doreen might actually be Esther's friends, but she does not return their favors. She does not appear to be a good friend (or a friend at all): when Doreen comes back to the hotel from Lenny's place, Esther leaves her sleeping in the hall, pretending not to know that she was left there alone (*BJ* 20-22).

While at the private hospital, Esther also keeps a distance from Valerie, a girl who has been lobotomized. When she is leaving for good, Esther feels somehow superior to her:

Valerie's last, cheerful cry had been "So long! Be seeing you."

"Not if I know it," I thought. (*BJ* 240-241)

Irigaray mentions that a second love between women—a sorority—should come from women’s groups (CÀC 61). *The Bell Jar* is almost entirely focused on women’s groups: first, the group of girls that goes to New York, later, Esther’s flashbacks of her female-college life, and finally the female mental hospitals. Nevertheless, she apparently traces a path for herself that does not allow her to create bonds with no other woman but Doctor Nolan.

When it comes to women that are sexually or racially different from Esther, she puts herself even more at a distance. She denies the lesbian possibility vehemently; when Joan tells Esther that she likes her, she acts as if the other were repulsive: “That’s tough, Joan, [...]. Because I don’t like you. You make me puke, if you want to know” (BJ 220). At a certain point, Esther sees herself in the self-service hotel elevator as “a big, smudgy-eyed Chinese woman staring idiotically into my [her] face” (BJ 17). Later, after Marco marks her cheeks with his blood, she looks into the mirror and sees a face that looks “like a sick Indian” (BJ 112). Since these non-Western women are not characters, we cannot analyze how Esther treats them, but they are figures used for depicting her state when she is looking tired, sick, or like an idiot and therefore they are far from what Esther saw as positive images for women. By analyzing the depiction of non-white women in *The Bell Jar*, Ferreter mentions that “[u]nconsciously, she [Esther] equates not being fully a woman with not being fully white” (ch. 3).

2.1.3 A Defense of Female Sexuality

As an aspiring author, Esther thinks that she needs to have lived in order to write. When she fails to write a novel, she mentions that she “needed experience”: “How could I write about life when I’d never had a love affair or a baby or even seen anybody die?” (BJ 121). Those examples are part of what Irigaray considers to be events that mark a woman’s life, that define the different stages of her life (*jtn* 115). Of course this idea has a particular woman in mind: in this case, a white, Western, heterosexual woman; nevertheless, since this is Esther’s case, I will attain to this definition in my following analysis. As I have discussed, Esther thinks that articles defending chastity do not take into consideration how a girl feels. From this opinion, we can infer that she is not inclined towards sexual abstinence. In fact, her sexuality is one of her greatest concerns. According to Ferreter, “the novel [*The Bell Jar*] is a defence of the value of female

sexuality" (ch. 1). In spite of knowing what was requested of American girls that intended to marry in the 1950s, Esther is able to criticize these demands; she is even able to look for contraception in spite of knowing it is illegal. When she enters the gynecologist's room for her "fitting"—a diaphragm—she feels that she is on her way to freedom: "freedom from fear, freedom from marrying the wrong person, like Buddy Willard, just because of sex, freedom from the Florence Crittenden Homes where all the poor girls go who should have been fitted out like me, because what they did, they would do anyway, regardless" (*BJ* 223). After the fitting, Esther feels she can finally experiment sexually without concerns; she is her "own woman" (*BJ* 223). Not only Esther sees the importance of contraception for a single woman, she also acknowledges that "poor girls" should also have been "fitted," for they would have sex regardless of using contraception or not. Esther makes this comment without judgment: she knows how a girl might simply want to have sex, just like boys do; the difference is that the females are the ones who might end up pregnant. Far from blaming the other less fortunate girls²⁴ who had sex, Esther sees sexuality as a vital part of any woman's life.

As Irigaray puts it, speaking about female sexuality would be a way to break with the phallogocentric discourse. If we think about the adult Esther's situation, we might say that the writing of her memoirs is a way of defending female sexuality through discourse. Concerning the young Esther, when Buddy asks her whether she has seen "a man"—meaning, a naked man—she agrees to "see" him (*BJ* 68). When he finishes taking his clothes off, Esther is not impressed: "he just stood there in front of me and I kept staring at him. The only thing I could think of was turkey neck and turkey gizzards and I felt very depressed" (*BJ* 69). Since she has heard about sex and male sexual organs all her life, Esther expected more of the first time she saw one in person. In an attempt to mock phallogocentric discourses, Plath creates a comic situation that displays how depressed a woman might be after creating high expectations of something that might resemble other animals' parts. Men have spoken of women's bodies and of how they should behave sexually, but the roles are inverted when Esther gets to narrate her impression of the male anatomy—and also by the fact that she denies to show her body to Buddy after seeing his. Whereas discourses such as the psychoanalytical have described female sexuality as a lack, in relation to male sexuality, Esther's choice of

²⁴ Though she is more fortunate than many, Esther does not see herself as coming from a privileged background. She describes her upbringing as that of "a girl [who] lives in some out-of-the-way town for nineteen years, so poor she can't afford a magazine" (*BJ* 2).

words seems a comical way to fight it back. Later, when Buddy reveals to Esther that he has slept with a waitress the previous summer, she comments: "What does your mother think about this waitress?" (*BJ* 71), which also seems an attempt to diminish his power as a more experienced male, especially because his mother is an advocate for chastity.

In other of her sexual encounters, Esther admits that she just wanted to have sex without feeling guilty. She accepts Constantin's invitation to go to his apartment because she wants to, even though her mother once advised her "never under any circumstances to go with a man to a man's rooms after an evening out, it could mean only one thing" (*BJ* 80): Esther does not care; after all, she wants to do it. She thinks that "a spectacular change" would occur after her first time (*BJ* 82). Her encounter with Constantin might be approximated with the Irigarayan mimesis. In the author's terms, it would happen when a woman speaks exaggeratedly in terms of the male subject, resubmitting herself to the masculinist discourse in order to make it visible (*TS* 76). The difference is that, in Esther's case, she does it in order to do what she wants. After having dinner with Constantin, she makes up her mind: "I decided I would let Constantin seduce me" (*BJ* 78). She is able to admit that she sexually wants Constantin; once at his apartment, since he does not "seduce" her, she goes to his bedroom first, to which he follows (*BJ* 82). Nevertheless, though she spatially leads Constantin, Esther is not able to make the first move: they fall asleep and nothing happens. By letting herself be seduced, Esther is playing the role men generally expect women to play: to let them make the first move. However, by entering his bedroom, she is actually the one who acts, not by a direct approach, but by an indirect one, waiting for Constantin to play his role as a male. Esther's attempt fails, but she is able to play with what is expected from her as woman—passivity—in order to do the exact opposite: try to lead. This exposes how it is necessary for her to "be seduced" in the male subject's terms, since, as a woman, she could not necessarily seduce him herself, and she is actually making this masculine economy clear by forcing a situation in which the male has to act according to it, by taking a stand. She is doing the opposite of denying her desire in order to be the object of a male desire; she is forcing the male to take a stand in order to fulfil *her* desire. In the end, it is clear that Constantin did not desire her, in spite of her efforts. Later, in a passage in which Esther is flirting with a sailor, she also seems to be playing a part: during their short encounter, she pretends to be a fragile orphan from Chicago called Elly Higginbottom (*BJ* 132-134), before abruptly leaving him. Though briefly, with the sailor, Esther plays the role of the

fragile woman that needs to be saved, in a comical performance of femininity that has little to do with the morbid thoughts that were dominating her mind at the time.

Differently from mimesis, for Irigaray, masquerade would be when a woman plays a role to participate in man's desire, renouncing her own, without attempting a critique (*TS* 133). With Irwin, though Esther apparently wants to have sex with him, we might speculate whether she is being part of a masquerade. She apparently wants to lose her virginity to get even with Buddy: "Ever since I'd learned about the corruption of Buddy Willard my virginity weighed like a millstone around my neck. [...] I was sick of it" (*BJ* 228). In this case, her desire would not be so much of her own as it would be to get even with a man. Whether it is just a matter of revenge or really of desire, we cannot tell, but when she loses her virginity to Irwin, she feels as if she went through a kind of ritual. Esther is happy that she is no longer a virgin, but she is also able to recognize that the experience was not one of pleasure:

I lay, rapt and naked, on Irwin's rough blanket, waiting for the miraculous change to make itself felt.

But all I felt was a sharp, startlingly bad pain.

"It hurts," I said. "Is it supposed to hurt?"

Irwin didn't say anything. Then he said, "Sometimes it hurts." (*BJ* 229)

Irwin does not really care how it is going for Esther, and she plays her role of object by continuing there in spite of not being sexually fulfilled. Later, she starts bleeding and feels happy for losing her virginity (*BJ* 229). Nevertheless, the bleeding is abnormal; ironically, Esther is hemorrhaging. She goes to Joan's apartment, and the latter helps her to go to the hospital. The physician says that Esther was "one in a million" due to the reaction that she had (*BJ* 233). By playing her part according to Irwin's sexual desire, Esther is able to finally get rid of her virginity; however, it happens at the cost of her own pleasure, by submitting herself to him, by having sex with a man who is not really caring if she is liking it whatsoever, nor if she is feeling pain.

Irigaray is mostly concerned with thinking female sexuality outside its relation to male sexuality (*TS* 23-24). In *The Bell Jar*, Esther is able to think about her own sexuality, but this happens mostly in relation to male sexuality. She apparently wants to have sex to get even with Buddy, but, when it finally happens, she is no longer interested in him

anymore. Furthermore, after Irwin does not show any more empathy than required after Esther's hemorrhage, she says that she will send him the hospital bill and never see him again:

"The hospital says they are sending me the bill because there was no answer to the bill they sent to you."

"All right, all right, I'm writing a check now. I'm writing them a blank check." Irwin's voice altered subtly. "When am I going to see you?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"Very much."

"Never," I said, and hung up with a resolute click.

[...] I felt unaccountably weak-kneed and relieved.

Irwin's voice had meant nothing to me. (*BJ* 241-242)

After what happens, at least Esther is able to take a stand: not only she makes Irwin pay for not having really cared, she does not feel the need to pretend that the incident was a fortunate one for her—it clearly was not.

With Marco, masquerade seems to be taken to its final consequences. After he tears Esther's dress, he throws himself over her:

Then he threw himself face down as if he would grind his body through me and into the mud.

"It's happening," I thought. "It's happening. If I just lie here and do nothing it will happen." (*BJ* 109)

Initially, Esther seems to think of it as a way to get rid of her virginity, but after Marco starts calling Esther a "slut," she begins to cry and call for Doreen (*BJ* 109). Most critics say that this was a rape attempt, but, of course, it depends on the definition of rape that one has in mind. A feminist analysis of this incident might indeed conclude that Esther was raped; to have one's clothes tore certainly qualifies as a violent experience. In "Rape: On Coercion and Consent," Catharine A. MacKinnon mentions that a feminist analysis would show that battery is not so different from rape, "not because both are violent but because both are sexual" for the rapist; she states that "sexuality [from a

male's perspective] is violent, so perhaps violence is sexual" (49). In this violent sexual encounter, Esther seems to submit to the role of mere object just for the hope of no longer being a virgin. Of course she did not know beforehand how violent Marco would be, and she might have been paralyzed during such a traumatic event, without knowing how to react. The way Esther acts—especially when it comes to getting rid of her virginity—might sound strange, especially because it does not make sense neither to her own pleasure nor to the patriarchal world she lives in—a world that wanted her to remain a virgin. Perhaps we do not understand her behavior because her actions—at least the ones before the suicide attempt—happen in consonance with her shattered psychological state.

2.2 Under the Bell Jar

2.2.1 Trauma and Language

In *The Bell Jar*, at least two temporalities of trauma can be pointed out. The first one is that of young Esther, depressed—or melancholic. She is not able to talk about previous traumatic experiences such as the death of her father, or even about the ones that have recently happened to her, such as Marco's rape attempt. We can also mention a second, belated moment: the adult Esther is writing about a traumatic period in which she underwent electroconvulsive therapy, attempted suicide, and was put in a mental hospital. According to Juliet Mitchell, at the moment of trauma, there is no perception nor memory; later, when it returns, there is only perception (281). As I mentioned before, when trauma is finally able to be narrated, in a third moment in time, it is to the memory of trauma that we have access. In the case of *The Bell Jar*, the older narrator presents trauma as a narrative through narrative memory; she is not experiencing it, nor perceiving it, at the present time of narration. We might say that the young Esther indeed *perceived* a trauma that was previously experienced, as well as she experienced new traumatic situations, both of whose memories the older Esther is able to narrate. However, in spite of this gap in time, in the present time of narration, there seems to be no distance between the older narrator and her younger self, for she tells her previous experiences without critically distancing herself from her previous judgements, without

positioning herself as an adult in relation to her younger self. In fact, in a first reading of *The Bell Jar*, the fact that Esther is an adult might pass unnoticed; the language of the narrative erases the temporal and spatial differences between the character's two moments in time. This might be an attempt to recreate in literary terms Esther's initial traumatic perceptions later associated with traumatic memory. As Cathy Caruth mentions, the language of trauma, somehow literary, defies our understanding (*UE* 5). Through literary language, Plath creates an adult Esther that is able to narrate traumatic memories and, ultimately, to survive in the narrative. It is up to the reader to comprehend *The Bell Jar's* shifts from present to past, past to previous flashbacks.

Furthermore, language is one of the novel's main issues because it is what the young character can no longer master. As Wagner-Martin puts it, "[t]he final question for Esther in her prison house of language—misnamed, misaddressed, misheard, and misidentified—is, What does language mean? What does language do?" (*The Bell Jar: A Novel of the Fifties* 78). She is at a certain point in which no one understands her, what she wants for her future, how unwell she is, her behavior, her sexuality. What can she do with language while being nothing but misunderstood? In a certain way, Esther's perspective from under the bell jar is linked to the limits of language itself, as Britzolakis puts it: "At one level, of course, the 'glassed-in cage' [the alienated perspective of the bell jar] of self-consciousness is coextensive with the prison-house of language itself, in which the 'I' is always inscribed as an other" (18). To narrate one's own experiences is to deal with the limits of language itself, with what can or cannot be put into words, and with how this inscribes the "I" as an other. But language is also a means to overcome difficulties. Sometimes language is what it takes for one to live or die, as Caruth comments (*TMT* 3). That is a possible interpretation for what *The Bell Jar's* narrator is doing in the present time of the narrative: overcoming a traumatic time of her life and thus surviving it.

Anne Cluysenaar sees Plath's image in her works as that of "a typical 'survivor' in the psychiatric sense" (qtd. in Wagner-Martin, *The Bell Jar: A Novel of the Fifties* 63). Regarding Esther, the character survives a suicidal attempt and therapies that resemble torture practices. When Doctor Gordon sends her to have electroconvulsive therapy, the description of the situation is of someone being electrocuted to death:

I shut my eyes.

There was a brief silence, like an indrawn breath.

Then something bent down and took hold of me and shook me like the end of the world. Whee-ee-ee-ee-ee, it shrilled, through an air crackling with blue light, and with each flash a great jolt drubbed me till I thought my bones would break and the sap fly out of me like a split plant.

I wondered what terrible thing it was that I had done. (*BJ* 143)

It is not a coincidence that *The Bell Jar* starts by mentioning the electrocution of the Rosenbergs that summer (*BJ* 1): more than treating Esther, her first attempt with electroconvulsion makes her feel as if she were being punished. Later, when she goes to the private hospital, she thinks how there must be a hidden “machine exactly like Doctor Gordon’s, ready to jolt me out of my [her] skin” (*BJ* 189); there, when she realizes that she is assigned to have an electroconvulsive section again, she gets desperate: she does not even open her eyes, “lest the full view strike me [her] dead” (*BJ* 214). This time, it is like “going to sleep,” as Doctor Nolan promised her earlier (*BJ* 189), but how Esther behaves *before* it is indicative of how the first time left her deeply wounded.

Esther shows other indicatives of how wounded she is. When she is unable to write, read, or find meaning in what she previously found, she cries out, in a way that no one understands—not even her. She starts to speak with what she calls a “zombie voice,” which seems to come, in Caruth’s terms, through the wound. Esther does not even recognize it as coming from herself: “I dialed to the Admissions Office and listened to the zombie voice leave a message”; “I tried to speak in a cool, calm way, but the zombie rose up in my throat and choked me off” (*BJ* 119; 126). But no one understands Esther’s cry for help, and, after this point, we have the feeling that she is walking on a thin line between life and death. She cannot enjoy anything while under the bell jar; she feels suffocated: “I couldn’t feel a thing. [...] wherever I sat [...] I would be sitting under the same glass bell jar, stewing in my own sour air” (*BJ* 185). And why is it that Esther is suddenly suffocated, stewing her sour air?

2.2.2 Melancholia, Incorporation, and Trauma

The fact that Esther is not well is evident since the beginning of the novel. Even before the incidents that might be considered traumatic are narrated, she says that there

is something wrong with her; that she feels inadequate. While in New York, she talks about this experience: "I was supposed to be having the time of my life" (*BJ* 2), which indicates that she was not having it. When she explains how she could not get excited as the other girls were feeling, she synthesizes her state: "I felt very still and very empty, the way the eye of a tornado must feel, moving dully along in the middle of the surrounding hullabaloo" (*BJ* 3). She feels recurrently empty, as if everything were falling apart around her and she were in a state of numbness. When she goes to a bar with Doreen and Lenny, she considers: "I felt myself melting into the shadows like the negative of a person I'd never seen before in my life" (*BJ* 10). What could be an exciting night for a young girl only makes her emptiness more evident: she is turning into the negative of someone whom she does not recognize; it is as if her sense of identity were melting. Later, when she is with Constantin at the UN, she feels "dreadfully inadequate": "The trouble was, I had been inadequate all along, I simply hadn't thought about it" (*BJ* 77). It is as if, suddenly, she realized how there is no place for her in none of the options that she thought that she had in life.

We can say that Esther shows a great number of characteristics of the Freudian melancholia. Concerning self-regard, she stops washing her hair and changing her clothes. Freud mentions how, in melancholia, the ego is impoverished, leading to sleeplessness, refusal to eat, and a lack of the instinct to live (3043). Esther cannot sleep and clearly sees less and less the point of living. When she comes back home from New York, everything starts seeming pointless. Simple tasks that are generally part of people's routine are useless to her: "The reason I hadn't washed my clothes or my hair was because it seemed so silly. [...] It seemed silly to wash one day when I would only have to wash again the next"; "everything people did seemed so silly, because they only died in the end" (*BJ* 128; 129). Nothing made sense; doing anything seemed "silly," because she would die after all, and the ultimate consequence of finding no sense in existence is ceasing completely to be.

Still in Freudian terms, Esther shows signs of an incomplete work of mourning, of a mourning that has turned into a pathological state. At a certain point in the narrative, she mentions that her mother has not allowed her brother and her to mourn their father. If we were to trace the progression of Esther's breakdown towards suicide, we could say that she starts to *think* about killing herself right before her first electroconvulsive session with Doctor Gordon, but it is precisely on the morning after she visits her

father's grave for the first time that she actually *attempts* suicide. She decides that she will kill herself when she spends all of her money, which she does right before visiting his grave (*BJ* 167). While entering the graveyard, she finds it odd that she had never been there, and she has the impression that his death was unreal to her:

I thought it odd that in all the time my father had been buried in this graveyard, none of us had ever visited him. My mother hadn't let us come to his funeral because we were only children then, and he had died in the hospital, so the graveyard and even his death had always seemed unreal to me.

I had a great yearning, lately, to pay my father back for all the years of neglect, and start tending his grave. I had always been my father's favorite, and it seemed fitting I should take on a mourning my mother had never bothered with. (*BJ* 165)

When Esther sees her father's gravestone, she puts azaleas on it and starts to cry in a overreaction that she does not comprehend:

I couldn't understand why I was crying so hard.

Then I remembered that I had never cried for my father's death.

My mother hadn't cried either. [...]

I laid my face to the smooth face of the marble and howled my loss into the cold salt rain. (*BJ* 167)

Esther lost a real loved object, but we might say that she lost more than that with him. Freud mentions how, in melancholia, the object-loss becomes an ego-loss (3047). Besides saying that she was her father's favorite, Esther also mentions that she was "only purely happy" until she was nine years of age, when he died (*BJ* 75). When she is with Constantin—and he takes her hand—she feels happy as she had only been with her father: "I felt happier than I had been since I was about nine and running along the hot white beaches with my father the summer before he died" (*BJ* 74-75). She did not lose only her father, it is as if with him she also lost any sense of happiness, and she was not the same after his death. Of course one is never the same after experiencing such a loss, but something about Esther's self is shaken, a fundamental part that, after all this time,

suddenly precludes her from continuing to live. The comments that she makes about her father generally do not have the same attention as her critiques of the masculinist world in which she is. However, the fact that they are not her main emphasis might actually mean how important they are. Freud mentions how the sufferers of traumatic neurosis seem concerned with not thinking of a particular accident (3719), and the fact that Esther's experiences with her father are undeveloped in her narrative can be seen as an indication of how she is still not ready to cope with them. In accordance with Wagner-Martin, "[w]ithin Plath's novelistic world, the male head of household—Esther's father—is absent, yet his early and unexpected death gives him power through his family's memory. Part of Esther's pervasive guilt stems from her belief that she never managed to please her father; more of it stems from her failure to adequately mourn his death" (*The Bell Jar: A Novel of the Fifties* 47). The fact that her father is absent makes him a more powerful figure than if he were alive and it also prevents Esther from blaming him, as she can do with her mother. Though only a child when he died, Esther feels guilty for not having properly mourned him, a decision that was not even hers, but her mother's. The fact that Esther mentions how she was her father's "favorite" might also be evidence of how much she wanted to please him and maybe thinks that she did not; by means of her narrative, she can now be the perfect daughter, since she is the one telling the story.

We can also comment Esther's state of mind in accordance with Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok—which is particularly interesting when we have in mind Esther's relationship to words. According to the authors, incorporation is a means to avoid a process of reorganization by incorporating the loved object into the subject.²⁵ Differently from introjection, in which emptiness is filled with words in a figurative shape, in incorporation the loss is encrypted in the subject in a way that it can go unnoticed; there is a refusal to deal with mourning and its consequences. As we know, Esther was not able to mourn her father; this appears to have been imposed on her, but we do not know to what extent this is true. The fact that she apparently spent ten years—from nine until nineteen years old—without noticing how sad she was after his death is evidence of how she did not deal with the psychological consequences of this loss

²⁵ Though I agree with Irigaray's view that the subject is constituted in a way that women cannot fit its parameters, and thus the "subject" is actually the masculine subject taken as the universal, for my psychoanalytical analyses of Esther's depressive and traumatic experiences, I will consider the subject of psychoanalysis as being able to include the feminine. Nevertheless, the fact that Esther is a woman inserted in a masculinist culture is not to be forgotten and, in consonance with the prior section of this chapter, is essential to this thesis.

for much too long. In incorporation, since it is not possible to perform the “mouth-work” of speaking, the subject fills her or his mouth with the loved object in fantasy, and thus denies dealing with the problem (Abraham and Torok 129). Since Esther has not mourned her father, we can speculate that she has incorporated him; later, when she is going down the road of her breakdown, she cannot make sense through words anymore, and she ultimately decides to kill herself by *swallowing* pills: since she could never speak about her loss and now cannot speak or write at all to the community of empty mouths—of speakers—she fills her mouth in order to die. Moreover, in incorporation the loss is so encrypted that everything is swallowed with the traumatic event that led to the loss; sometimes even in therapy the loss goes unmentioned, and the subject can even pass as “normal” (Abraham and Torok 130; 134). At a certain point, Esther considers killing herself by cutting her wrists, but she concludes: “the skin of my wrist looked so white and defenseless that I couldn’t do it. It was as if what I wanted to kill wasn’t in that skin or the thin blue pulse that jumped under my thumb, but somewhere else, deeper, more secret, a whole lot harder to get at” (*BJ* 147). The death of Esther’s father is so encrypted in her that, not only has she not mourned him, she actually never speaks about it to anyone in the novel; not even to the therapist that she likes, Doctor Nolan. Esther *never* talks about it during therapy; she just mentions her problems concerning sleeping, reading, writing, and dealing with her mother. Before her suicide attempt, her family actually thinks she is “normal”; her problems are so encrypted that no one is able to tell that she is suffering. In accordance with Wagner-Martin, Esther’s “world of friends and family understands her so little or—she fears—cares so little about her that she can fool everyone about her mental and physical state. To be so successful at disguising her very real health problems is the tragedy of Esther’s experience” (*The Bell Jar: A Novel of the Fifties* 25). Esther knows that people are clueless about her psychological state; they understand her so little that she is able to disguise her inner situation. Incorporation would ultimately be an antimetaphor, a destruction of the figurative capacity (Abraham and Torok 132). And this seems to be Esther’s main symptom; the one that she expresses to others, since she apparently cannot put into words—or maybe even realize—what might have really caused her mental disturbance. At a certain point, she cannot read novels or anything that requires a refined cognitive capacity: she can only read scandal sheets and abnormal-psychology books (*BJ* 159). Furthermore, she can no

longer write, just *survive* while using language, until she finally thinks that she cannot live anymore.

Besides, as Abraham and Torok mention, in incorporation, the love for the object is put to an end by an abrupt traumatic fact. This is the case of the death of Esther's father: *because* he was a loved object that died while she was still an infant, and with whom she shared cherished memories, his death can be said to have been traumatic. As discussed in my first chapter, trauma can be of one's own, collective, or in relation to the death of another—the Lacanian shift observed by Caruth (*UE* 143). She suggests that trauma can also be related to the impossibility of dealing with another's death (*UE* 100). If we think about Freud's example of the *fort-da* game (3720), we might say that Esther's father is a "fort" that never becomes a "da," for he goes and never comes back, not even dead: she has not seen her father's body, nor gone to his funeral.

Both Freudian melancholia and Abraham and Torok's incorporation can be related to trauma. Regarding Esther, she falls so abruptly in a path towards suicide that it might seem strange for a first-time reader; she is suddenly coopted by a suicidal journey, with no apparent reason. According to Caruth's "temporality of trauma," the traumatic event is not known while it happens, it is only known belatedly (*TMT* 2; *UE* 4). It seems that Esther only comes to know how her father's death has wounded her later, when she is with Constantin in the UN and realizes that she was only happy until she was nine years old:

And while Constantin and I sat in one of those hushed plush auditoriums in the UN, next to a stern muscular Russian girl with no makeup who was a simultaneous interpreter like Constantin, I thought how strange it had never occurred to me before that I was only purely happy until I was nine years old.

After that—in spite of the Girl Scouts and the piano lessons and the water-color lessons and the dancing lessons and the sailing camp, all of which my mother scrimped to give me, and college, with crewing in the mist before breakfast and blackbottom pies and the little new firecrackers of ideas going off every day—I had never been really happy again. (*TB* 75)

Esther starts by describing the "Russian girl" and, as if hit by a revelation, thinks about how she was unhappy after her father's death. Nothing could compare to the time when

she was “purely happy,” when he existed. Perhaps it was because she was a child, and childhood memories might look as part of a golden, better age; but the fact is that all the activities that her mother did her best to provide for her were not enough to fill this hole. It is interesting how this realization happens so suddenly. Why is it that Esther comes to know it at this particular moment? Maybe it is because she feels happy with Constantin as she had not since her last summer with her father, but it is rather unlikely that Constantin is so important to her. Ferreter, while analyzing Plath’s narrative work as a whole, says that “[s]he usually does not narrate a traumatic childhood experience directly, but rather portrays the effects of what the reader must infer are unspoken, unresolved traumas in her characters” (ch. 1). This seems to be Esther’s case: in what we could call an epiphany, the text hints at all the weight that Esther carries from this traumatic childhood event. Concerning the temporality of this revelation, we might say that Esther has been through a latency period. This is why her father’s death leaves her apparently uninjured: the state of numbness in which she lives her life for ten years makes it possible for her to survive this event; it is as if she only mourns him much later, when she finally goes to his grave. If we take another look at Freud’s trauma scheme, “[e]arly trauma—defence—latency—outbreak of neurotic illness—partial return of the repressed” (4905), we could say that Esther starts experiencing her outbreak, and then the repressed returns: we know that it is only after she is already having her breakdown that she finally visits her father’s grave, after she has awakened somehow from her numbness. And what could have caused such an outbreak?

Caruth mentions how a fright can break what Freud calls a protective shield (*UE* 62), and the events happening in Esther’s life when her breakdown starts might be seen as causing a breach in hers—working as triggers. The situations that immediately precede Esther’s collapse affect her seriously: her experience with Marco marks her not only psychically, but also physically, since he stains her cheeks with his blood. After the incident, which happens during Esther’s last night in New York, she goes to the hotel and throws all of her clothes from the sunroof; she “fed my [her] wardrobe to the night wind” of New York City, while at her feet “the city doused its lights in sleep, its buildings blackened, as if for a funeral” (*BJ* 111). It is as if some part of Esther died that night—or was it awakened? She does not even spare an outfit to travel back home, which makes her exchange a bathrobe for a few of Betsy’s clothes. Going home, Esther keeps Marco’s blood on her cheeks: “I hadn’t, at the last moment, felt like washing off the two diagonal

lines of dried blood that marked my cheeks. They seemed touching, and rather spectacular, and I thought I would carry them around with me, like the relic of a dead lover, till they wore off of their own accord" (*BJ* 112-113). The event is traumatic in itself, and it marks Esther deeply, which she recognizes by keeping the blood marks as "relics." According to Wagner-Martin, Esther reacts to this aggression only privately, by throwing out her clothes; moreover, for the author, "[t]he shock of Esther's encounter with Marco moves her past even the appearance of normality" (*The Bell Jar: A Novel of the Fifties* 39). Though Esther was already unwell before it, her experience with Marco is crucial to the way that she quickly starts to change her behavior. After this, she does not feel the need to perform "normalcy" anymore: she stops worrying with hygiene and appearances completely. Another incident, when Esther finds out that she was refused to the writing course, also contributes to shake her sense of self—that of a straight-A girl who is never refused to anything to which she applies. The only thing that she seemed to be looking forward when coming back from New York was that course, and she was sure that she would be accepted: "it was a very small class, and I had sent in my story a long time ago and hadn't heard from the writer yet, but I was sure I'd find the letter of acceptance waiting on the mail table at home" (*BJ* 103). When her certainty proves to be wrong, after one more disillusion, Esther sees no point of getting out of bed whatsoever:

I buried my head under the darkness of the pillow and pretended it was night. I couldn't see the point of getting up.

I had nothing to look forward to. (*BJ* 117)

It is after events such as the two abovementioned that Esther starts to consider suicide. She does not see a future for her life beyond the age of nineteen: "I saw the years of my life spaced along a road in the form of telephone poles [...] and try as I would, I couldn't see a single pole beyond the nineteenth" (*BJ* 123). She has no sense of continuity in her life; she can see nothing beyond her present-time, under-the-bell-jar situation. Esther also explains why she can no longer read nor write: "Words, dimly familiar but twisted all awry, like faces in a funhouse mirror, fled past, leaving no impression on the glassy surface of my brain" (*BJ* 124). Words, which used to be her means of putting herself into the world, her sense of identity, suddenly leave no trace in her brain. And what are words without the possibility of cognition, of creating meaning?

Furthermore, if we have those two events in mind, we might say that they trigger something that could not be stopped, and thus Esther starts to descend faster and faster towards suicide, as when she skies during her visit to Buddy's sanatorium, an event told in one of her flashbacks. Going down, she pictures herself plummeting "past the zigzagers, the students, the experts, through year after year of doubleness and smiles and compromise, into my [her] own past" (*BJ* 97). It is particularly interesting how she plummets into her *past*; it is evidence that there is a prior event with which she has to come to terms. While skiing, she actually thinks about suicide: "The thought that I might kill myself formed in my mind coolly as a tree or a flower" (*BJ* 97). The thought was already there, but still in a state of latency; it is only after her past is triggered that she decides to kill herself to the point of actually attempting it.

2.3 A Possible Recovery

A recurrent discussion in *The Bell Jar's* criticism is if Esther is really better at the end of the narrative. One of the possible critiques of the ending of the novel is that Esther is somehow submitting to the rules of a masculinist world in order to be taken as "well" and "normal." But we can also think that this makes it possible for her to continue alive and thus, when she is older, to write her previous critiques in a memoir.

We know that Esther has not forgotten what happened to her. When she is preparing to leave the hospital, apparently for good, she comments on how her mother told her to act as if it were all "a bad dream" (*BJ* 237). This leads Esther to rethink her stay under the bell jar, which brings back memories. She recaptures the experiences that she has been through, making it clear that she has not forgotten them:

A bad dream.

To the person in the bell jar, blank and stopped as a dead baby, the world itself is the bad dream.

A bad dream.

I remembered everything.

I remembered the cadavers and Doreen and the story of the fig tree and Marco's diamond and the sailor on the Common and Doctor Gordon's wall-eyed

nurse and the broken thermometers and the Negro with his two kinds of beans and the twenty pounds I gained on insulin and the rock that bulged between sky and sea like a gray skull.

Maybe forgetfulness, like a kind of snow, should numb and cover them.

But they were part of me. They were my landscape. (BJ 237)

As Esther comments, it is not possible to *forget* her breakdown, but she can learn how to *live with* it. Those experiences will always be part of her “landscape,” like scars; she cannot simply pretend that they were a “bad dream,” because she has lived in this dream for far too long.

When Esther is about to go to her final interview before leaving the hospital, she seems everything but sure: “I wasn’t sure at all. How did I know that someday [...] the bell jar, with its stifling distortions, wouldn’t descend again?” (BJ 241). Though she has been at the hospital and feels that she must be better since she was allowed to leave it, she is in doubt: “I had hoped, at my departure, I would feel sure and knowledgeable about everything that lay ahead—after all, I had been ‘analyzed.’ Instead, all I could see were question marks” (BJ 243). Of course it is normal for a girl of her age to see question marks—especially for a girl in her situation—but this passage gives the impression that Esther is not better yet, and that being “analyzed” is no guarantee of getting better. She seems to be in another kind of latency, as if the bell jar might descend again in the future. But can anyone be sure that she or he will be fine in the future? No one, not even those taken as “normal” have the privilege of this certainty.

About Esther’s going out of the hospital, Smith mentions: “she resigns herself to behaving appropriately as a way to secure her freedom” (20). Britzolakis seems to share this view on Esther’s performance of being better: “In order to receive her certification of normality, Esther has to perform appropriately before the tribunal of the hospital board, and, no doubt, present the right ‘image’” (39). If we analyze Esther’s behavior and the fact that she was able to *pass* as being fine when she was not, how can we be certain that she is not doing it again? She knows too well how to perform “normality” and thus she would not ruin her chance of going out of the hospital by performing it poorly. Nevertheless, how could someone in her situation behave differently *knowing* that she or he is being analyzed by a hospital board that will decide if she or he can be taken as

better enough to leave it? The inspection provided by the board is problematic in itself; it is not a surprise that Esther decides to act according to its rules.

Maybe it is precisely the fact that Esther performs so well that leaves the ending open for interpretation—and maybe this openness was justly what Plath intended. For Wagner-Martin, “[t]he ending of the novel focuses on Esther’s rebirth as a person, beginning her life as language speaker anew, shaken out of the dialogue mode by the trauma of her breakdown” (*The Bell Jar: A Novel of the Fifties* 81). She says that Plath intended *The Bell Jar’s* ending to be “positive,” calling it a “thoroughly positive ending for Esther’s narrative” (Wagner-Martin, *The Bell Jar: A Novel of the Fifties* 13; 79). It is difficult to deny that Esther rebirths after her suicide attempt; being so close to death, taken out of the womblike cave in which she chose to die, everything works for this to be seen as a rebirth. In fact, while Esther is waiting for the interview with the hospital board, she wonders if there is “a ritual for being born twice” (*BJ* 244). Besides her rebirth, concerning her “life as language speaker,” Esther’s capacity to read and write seems to be coming back; at least during one of her final moments in the hospital she has her eyes on a book (*BJ* 216). But I would not go so far as to call *The Bell Jar’s* ending “thoroughly positive”; the mere themes developed by the novel seem to prevent such an affirmative reading. Tim Kendall is also not so confident; according to him, “the destructive social systems remain in place at the end of the novel, and Esther has still not discovered a desirable identity for herself” (qtd. in Ferreter, ch. 1). After all, Esther is back to the world that she so vehemently criticized, and she still does not know what to do with her life. If we say that Esther is better, are we not using the parameters of normality given by a masculinist society in order to see her fit it again? At what cost will she go on living? Perhaps we have to pay a price in order to live in a society whose values we are against, or we simply cannot go on living.

As I mentioned before, we cannot analyze *The Bell Jar’s* ending ignoring its second temporality: the older Esther is the one who is writing; it took some time before she was able to deal with the events from her past. Regarding the gifts that she was given while in New York, Esther mentions: “For a long time afterward I hid them away, but later, when I was all right again, I brought them out, and I still have them around the house” (*BJ* 3). Previously, the mere sight of these objects could make her recall what she had been through, so she hid them, only to look at them at another time, when she was “all right again.” Likewise, she needed time before revisiting and writing about that

period of her life. About Esther's present-time situation, Wagner-Martin comments that it is "reassuring—Esther has married and has a child" (*The Bell Jar: A Novel of the Fifties* 61). We cannot actually tell if marrying has been reassuring for Esther, because this was precisely what she did not want to do with her life when she was younger. Has she changed her mind? We cannot really tell, just suppose.

In another passage of her text, considering the novel as a whole, Wagner-Martin seems to be less certain about its outcome: "The narrative of *The Bell Jar* ultimately told was of a woman struggling to become whole, not that of a woman who had reached some sense of a stable self" (*The Bell Jar: A Novel of the Fifties* 46). Whether Esther has managed to become "whole," we do not know, but she has reached a "stable self," at least one stable enough to keep on living. Plath actually considered giving a coda to *The Bell Jar*, as it is schematized in her planning of the novel (Plath, *The Bell Jar: outline of chapters*). As Ferreter puts it, "[i]n deciding not to write it, and thereby not portray Esther's experiences after being released from hospital, Plath chose to emphasise the question marks with which Esther's story ends" (ch. 2). Better than giving a glimpse of Esther's life after the hospital, the ending that Plath chose brings many questions; it is quite open, and this is why one cannot make affirmative statements about it. Concerning the adult Esther, who is in a second temporality that is not developed enough to be called a coda, much can be inferred, but the gap in time in the character's life allows us only to make suppositions; few things can be affirmed about her present-time state. The most obvious is that she has survived, which seems important enough.

3 “Tongues of Stone” and “Mothers”

True stories are the ones that lie open at the border, allowing a crossing, a further frontier. The final frontier is just science fiction—don’t believe it. Like the universe, there is no end.

—Jeanette Winterson, *The Stone Gods*

Words dry and riderless,
The indefatigable hoof-taps.
While
From the bottom of the pool, fixed stars
Govern a life.

—Sylvia Plath, “Words”

Sylvia Plath wrote poetry and short fiction since very young. Not only did she write them, she worked for them to be published, which was not an easy task: she had a pile of rejected stories and poems, but she never gave up writing and submitting them. Concerning fiction, already in the spring of 1944, when she was 12/13 years of age, one of her stories was printed in the local newspaper, *Townsmen*; in August 1950, she saw her first story in print, “And Summer Will Not Come Again,” published in the women’s magazine *Seventeen* (Wilson 41; 93). Plath’s desire to write and publish narrative also led her to win contests. “Den of Lions” and “Sunday at the Mintons” won magazines *Seventeen* and *Mademoiselle* contests, respectively (Wilson 99; 161). As a prize for winning the latter, Plath traveled to New York in 1953 to work as a guest editor for a month, which would be fictionalized later in *The Bell Jar*. As Ted Hughes mentions, there are approximately seventy extant short stories by Plath (1). These stories are held at the Lilly Library, Indiana University, and the Mortimer Rare Book Room, Smith College. Regarding the stories that Plath actually saw in print, it is difficult to establish its exact amount, for many have been lost, especially the ones written when she was very young. Until today, twenty of her stories were collected in *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*; thirteen of these twenty had already been published: ten, during Plath’s lifetime, and three, posthumously.

According to Luke Ferreter, Plath “made no distinction in value between the literary fiction published by the *New Yorker* or the *Atlantic Monthly* and the women’s fiction published by *McCall’s* or the *Ladies’ Home Journal*” (ch. 5). She wanted her work to be published; it did not matter if it were in a women’s magazine. She would also rewrite a story, or change its ending if it were necessary for its publication; sometimes she worked for years in the same story until she saw it in print. According to Ted Hughes, “[h]er ambition to write stories was the most visible burden of her life”; she saw working on prose as a “real job,” in opposition to writing poetry, her “evasion” (2-3). Maybe this was due to the fact that she saw story writing as a way to make a living rather than writing poetry: she worked really hard for having her stories accepted. Ferreter mentions how Plath carefully studied the style of each magazine, and thus she wrote—or rewrote—the stories that she intended for each one according to its requirements (ch. 1).²⁶ As an English graduate, Plath studied literature carefully, and learned with the works of other writers as well as with the criticism that she received on her own writings.

A common approach to Plath’s stories is grounded in the fact that they deal with themes that are also developed in *The Bell Jar*, her poetry, her journals, and her letters. The repetition of themes and tropes in Plath’s works, generally relatable to her biography, has led to different interpretations that analyze her work as a whole.²⁷ Luke Ferreter’s 2010 *Sylvia Plath’s Fiction* is known to be the first in-depth study to focus on her novels and short stories, while also relating them to her poetry, biography, and historical context. There are previous studies on Plath’s short stories, but without the aim of covering most of her narrative. This is the case of Melody Zajdel’s 1984 “Apprenticed in a Bible of Dreams: Sylvia Plath’s Short Stories,” in which she discusses a few of Plath’s stories by relating them to *The Bell Jar*. Zajdel’s point is that they deal with

²⁶ As an example, in a letter to her mother, Plath said that she would rewrite “In the Mountains” for it to be suitable for *Seventeen* (LH 155). She mentions how she would have to develop more “the inner struggle of the girl,” initially intended to be “cryptic as Hemingway,” which she considered “fine for a lit. course, but not for 17” (LH 155).

²⁷ As an example, Judith Kroll provides a structuralist approach of Plath’s oeuvre in *Chapters in a Mythology: The Poetry of Sylvia Plath*. Kroll studies Plath’s poetry as “a unified body of work” (6): she focuses on different myths and discusses Plath’s poems and prose in relation to them. A more recent, important study on Plath’s works as a whole is Christina Britzolakis’s *Sylvia Plath and the Theatre of Mourning*. Britzolakis analyzes Plath’s works as a “theatre of mourning,” in which she sees figures of mourning as presented through a performance (7). Differently from previous readings, Britzolakis is concerned with bringing Plath’s works back to their contemporary debates and to the modernist tradition.

themes that would later be developed in more depth in the novel. In fact, she sees the stories “Tongues of Stone,” “Sweetie Pie and the Gutter Men,” “Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams,” and “In the Mountains” serving stylistically and thematically as apprenticeships for Plath’s later writing of *The Bell Jar* (Zajdel 182; 192). The repetition of themes is evident in the stories that she discusses, all somehow relatable to the novel: “Tongues of Stone” takes place in a mental hospital; “In the Mountains” depicts its protagonist’s visit to her boyfriend in a sanatorium (Esther also visits Buddy in one); the main character in “Sweetie Pie and the Gutter Men” tells the story of when she once saw a baby being born with her medical-student boyfriend (such as Esther and Buddy do); and “Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams” deals with electroconvulsive treatment. However, in spite of echoes of *The Bell Jar* in her short fiction, I do not see Plath’s stories as “apprentice pieces,” but as works with intrinsic value. Plath certainly grew as a writer from her 1954 fiction to that of 1961, but to treat her earlier work as apprenticeship to finally write *The Bell Jar* is to see those previous writings only as a means to an end. Thus, though making a comparison is also my objective here, it should go without saying that Plath’s stories are objects of studies for themselves; they can be discussed without necessarily being related to other of her writings.²⁸ Nevertheless, in this thesis, I will focus on two stories so as to enrich my previous discussions on *The Bell Jar* concerning the loss of language, melancholia, relationships between women, and motherhood.

3.1 “Tongues of Stone”

“Tongues of Stone” is considered the first Plathian fiction based on the events that led to her own breakdown. In accordance with Ferreter’s dating, Plath wrote “Tongues of Stone” in the fall of 1954, for a short story writing class that she took with Alfred Kazin at Smith College (“Introduction”). This version was thus sketched just a year after her breakdown. It was rewritten in January, 1955 for *Mademoiselle* magazine; Ferreter establishes January 29, 1955 as the most approximate date of its writing (ch. 2; “Introduction”). “Tongues of Stone” takes place in a mental hospital, where the protagonist is a patient. She is nameless: the third person narrator only refers to her as

²⁸ I have previously focused on only one of Plath’s short stories in an article about the uncanny in “The Fifty-Ninth Bear” (see Petersen, “O insólito em ‘The fifty-ninth bear’, de Sylvia Plath”).

“the girl” (JP 273). The reader accompanies her through her routine at the institution, getting to know a few details about her, her treatment, and what she is experiencing at the time. If we relate the story to *The Bell Jar*, we might say that Esther’s anxieties, during and after leaving the hospital, find echo in the nameless girl’s complains about herself, especially in how she is dealing with not being able to read nor think. Another point in common between the two protagonists is a passage in which they imagine themselves killing their mothers.

In her article, Zajdel sees “Tongues of Stone” as presenting at least six key incidents that were later transformed and used in *The Bell Jar*: both girls’ breakdowns start and are treated similarly, both see their sleeping mothers and realize that there is no parental security nor reason to continue living, both try to escape the world around them by hiding under their mattresses, both are saved from suicide attempts and believe to be blind when first awakened, each girl tries to strangle herself at a certain point, and both stories portray the insulin treatment for depression (182-185). In spite of these similarities, Zajdel sees a movement from a flat narrative in the story to a powerful voice in the novel (183). She calls attention to how Plath uses the same material, sometimes the same phrases and images, in both “Tongues of Stone” and *The Bell Jar*, but they go from descriptions to delineated conflicts: in the novel, there is an increase in the awareness of the girl’s surroundings, different from the short story’s limited, third-person view of the events (Zajdel 187-188). To depict one’s breakdown in a first-person narrative is indeed an effective strategy to show one’s perception of the world from under the bell jar: Esther’s focalization makes it possible for us to understand more directly her criticism towards the society that inflicts her sufferings; by seeing the world through Esther’s lenses, we become more familiar with how she feels, which provides the means for us to identify with her psychological state. Nevertheless, whereas *The Bell Jar*, due to its long length, is able to criticize the different societal spheres that harmed Esther, especially concerning gender, “Tongues of Stone,” a short narrative, focuses more on a few themes. In the story, more emphasis seems to be given to the fact that the girl cannot read than in *The Bell Jar*.

In the narrative, the girl spends an afternoon alone “carrying a book of short stories which she did not read because the words were nothing but dead black hieroglyphics that she could not translate into pictures anymore” (JP 274). Whereas in *The Bell Jar* words left “no impression on the glassy surface of my [Esther’s] brain” (BJ

124), the girl is also unable to translate words into meaning; it is as if they were hieroglyphics. Like the girl, Esther also spends time at the hospital pretending to read, both girls wrapped in blankets (*JP* 274-275; *BJ* 201). After the girl awakens from her suicide attempt, like Esther, she is also momentarily blind, and a nurse tells her that she will be blind for good and marry a blind man (*JP* 278). For this girl, it does not make a difference if “her eyes were blank, blind windows,” because she could not read nor think (*JP* 278). Thus, the problem is not only that she cannot read, but that she is afraid that she cannot think as well; throughout the story, there is an emphasis on the loss of linguistic and cognitive skills in general. It is as if she were already dead, as if her brain were paralyzed: “now she sat trapped for sixty years inside her decaying body, feeling her dead brain folded up like a gray, paralyzed bat in the dark caverns of her living skull” (*JP* 276). Though “Tongues of Stone” lacks the disturbing directness of Esther’s first-person narration, the story’s images are quite strong, such as this girl’s paralyzed brain, like a bat in her living skull. It is as if there were nothing inside her; it seems that she can no longer feel: “Nothing in the world could touch her. [...] The sky and leaves and people receded, and she had nothing to do with them because she was dead inside, and not all their laughter nor all their love could reach her anymore” (*JP* 278). Whereas here there is a direct sentence that says that love could not reach the girl, in *The Bell Jar*, we have Esther’s sour comments towards the ones that were close to her, which creates the same idea but through her complex, under-the-bell-jar perspective.

It is evident that the girl in “Tongues of Stone” shows signs of depression: she feels “dead inside,” and even her loved ones cannot reach her. If we think about Sigmund Freud’s mourning and melancholia, we cannot say that the girl is or has been in mourning, since we know little about her; the narrative focusses on her present-time state. Nevertheless, she is clearly melancholic; among the factors observed by Freud, she presents: loss of the will to live, sleeplessness, disturbance of self-regard, and self-accusations. According to the narrator, the girl has not slept nor cried for two months, and, at the present-time of narration, she still could not sleep, just cry (*JP* 274). She spent nights in her bed attempting to read, but she could not; she would thus try to sleep and also fail:

At night she sat up in bed with the blanket wrapped around her, making her eyes go over and over the words of the short stories in the tattered magazines she

carried about until the night nurse came in with the flashlight and turned out the reading lamp. Then the girl would lie curled up rigidly under her blanket and wait open-eyed until the morning. (JP 278-279)

Furthermore, also as in *The Bell Jar*, in “Tongues of Stone” the girl stops washing her hair and changing her clothes, because she sees no purpose in doing it, since “every day she sweated in the sun and got her plaid cotton shirt wet, and every day her long black hair got oilier” anyway (JP 276). Moreover, here the critical instance directed towards the self is even more severe than that of *The Bell Jar*: the girl judges herself even more directly than Esther. She thinks that the other girls would not tell her that “you are a cretin and there is no hope for you,” which she would believe because she knew it was true (JP 276). She also feels like an impostor: she was “pretending to be clever and gay, and all the while these poisons were gathering in her body, ready to break out behind the bright, false bubbles of her eyes at any moment crying: Idiot! Impostor!” (JP 276). The idea of a “false” self in opposition to a “real” self is present in *The Bell Jar* as well: the depressed Esther is seen as her “false” self, whereas her “real” self is her better version. Nevertheless, we might also say that the “false” self, during depression, is the one who pretends to cope with people without being willing to do it; and thus the “real” self would be the voice of the depressed: without social constraints, she could say the “truth.” This is the case of the girl from “Tongues of Stone”: the “false” self is the one that pretends to be happy, whereas the “real” is the depressed one, which calls her happy version an “impostor.”

At a certain point, in the hospital, the girl tries to kill herself by suffocating but she is unable to do it, so she steals a glass and breaks it into many pieces, keeping two of the sharpest shards for herself (JP 279). The nurse comes in to give her her insulin shot and the girl finally has a reaction to it, which makes her feel different (JP 279-280). The nurse tells her that she will sleep that night, and the girl seems to enter into a state of numbness (JP 280). The story ends with a feeling that she is on the verge of getting better, as if, after the reaction, she would finally be able to sleep and maybe see a way out of her state of despair and self-hatred. The ending was changed due to a request made by Plath’s writing professor, Alfred Kazin: in a letter to her mother, she writes that the story had “a turn for the better at the immediate end”; Kazin told her that writing should “give more joy,” and Plath thus decided to give it “a conclusion of dawn, instead

of eternal night” (*LH* 155-156). Zajdel sees the breakthrough caused by both the girl’s and Esther’s reactions to insulin treatment as the “final movement in each story” (186). I agree with Zajdel when it comes to “Tongues of Stone,” but I do not see insulin associated to a positive response in *The Bell Jar*. In fact, when Esther mentions insulin, it is only to say that it was making her fatter (*BJ* 192; 237). The novel’s breakthrough happens when she undergoes electroconvulsive therapy again, for the second time, with Doctor Nolan. It is then that Esther begins to have—at least apparently—a healthier approach to life; it is then that she acquires privileges to leave the hospital, for instance. Moreover, in one of the final moments of *The Bell Jar*, Esther is critical of her mother’s advice to consider her experience that year as “a bad dream” (*BJ* 237); likewise, there is a moment in “Tongues of Stone” in which the girl also mentions this as suggestion: “After a while they would get tired of waiting and hoping and telling her that there was a God or that someday she would look back on this as if it were a bad dream” (*JP* 274). The “bad dream” here is clearly a lie that the girl believes would be told to her once “they” were tired of not seeing any improvements in her state. Differently from the novel, the idea of a bad dream appears way before the story’s ending; in spite of its general negative approach, the short narrative finishes with the possibility of improvement due to the insulin reaction and thus its ending receives a lighter tone.

As in the novel, in the story there is a scene in which the girl imagines herself killing her mother while she sleeps: “During those last nights before her blackout the girl had lain awake listening to the thin thread of her mother’s breathing wanting to get up and twist the life out of the fragile throat, to end at once the process of slow disintegration which grinned at her like a death’s head everywhere she turned” (*JP* 277). Before going to the hospital, the girl was already unable to sleep, and she spent her nights listening to her mother’s breathing. Here, the will to end her mother’s life is related to her “disintegration”; by breaking her “fragile throat,” the girl could be sparing her mother of undergoing the whole, slow process towards death. Besides, she might want to spare herself of seeing the approach of her mother’s death, presented through the sinister image of death’s grinning head. In *The Bell Jar*, Esther’s does want to spare her mother from suffering, but to give an end to the “piggish noise” of her breathing, which irritate her (*BJ* 123; see my second chapter 64-65). Whereas Esther’s relationship with Mrs. Greenwood is one of *The Bell Jar*’s central points, the girl’s relationship with her mother is almost nonexistent in “Tongues of Stone.”

If we think about other women, about Irigaray’s proposition of a sorority (CÀC 31), like in *The Bell Jar*, “Tongues of Stone” does not depict a sorority among the women in the hospital. With almost no reference to men and taking place only between women, this female space is not enough to create a sorority. The girl finds nothing but hostility in the company of the woman who is working with clay, for instance (JP 273-274). The story’s title actually comes from the fact that the girl could not rely on anyone; she hated the sun, which she saw as “treacherous,” but it was the only one to talk to her, since “all the people had tongues of stone” (JP 275). Nevertheless, she seems less critical of other women than Esther. But maybe we feel that the girl is more lovable because we do not have direct access to what she thinks: Esther, even when behaving politely, generally kept negative inward opinions about others. It seems that Plath intended to create a more hostile environment in *The Bell Jar*: with a first-person narrator, the reader has direct access to Esther’s thoughts as a depressed person, who could not depict people as sympathetically as the third-person narrator of “Tongues of Stone.”

3.2 “Mothers”

Another story that can be approximated to *The Bell Jar* is “Mothers,” since motherhood is also important in it—if not its central point. According to Ted Hughes’s dating in *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*, “Mothers” was written in 1962. It was first published posthumously as “The Mothers’ Union” in the October 1972 issue of *McCall’s*. In spite of its late publication in *McCall’s*, Ferreter does not see it as “a women’s magazine story,” but more as an “observational mood piece published by literary magazines like the *New Yorker*” (“Introduction”). Similarly, Tracy Brain sees the story’s “more serious” preoccupations at odds with the “women’s magazine genre” (*The Other Sylvia Plath* 64). It is indeed a serious, almost anthropological story: with a keen third-person narrator, “Mothers” portrays the complexity behind wanting to belong somewhere while being critical of its social hypocrisies. Like *The Bell Jar*, it also has a main character named Esther. She is a married woman who has a small child, a daughter, and is pregnant again. The whole story is centered on the Mothers’ Union of a small town in Devon, England, where Esther, her husband, and her daughter live. In the story, the protagonist goes to one of the mothers’ meetings, which take place at the local

church. Esther is new in Devon: she is an American who wants to be accepted at the same time she is somehow an outsider; she sees herself as different from the other female residents.²⁹ During the meeting, she apparently sympathizes with Mrs. Nolan, who, like herself, does not know anyone in town. Later, we discover that Mrs. Nolan is not welcome at the Mothers’ Union for being divorced. Esther is outraged about it, but later seems to comply with Mrs. Nolan’s exclusion. With this in mind, I believe that the two Esthers, from *The Bell Jar* and “Mothers,” have more in common than just their names, and I will now focus on their possible similarities concerning my previous discussions on relationships between women, motherhood, and language.

3.2.1 Relationships between Women and Motherhood

“Mothers” opens with a display of Esther’s irritation with how people called in without ringing in Devon, a fact to which she got used, though she felt spied on (*JP* 11). Rose is waiting for them to go to that month’s Mothers’ Union together: she introduces Esther to Mrs. Nolan, who knows no one in town, in spite of being there for six years. As the narrator puts it, “[i]f Mrs. Nolan, an Englishwoman by her looks and accent, and a pub-keeper’s wife as well, felt herself a stranger in Devon after six years, what hope had Esther, an American, of infiltrating that rooted society ever at all?” (*JP* 12). Through the narrator’s free indirect speech, we get to know Esther’s uneasiness about the possibilities of her acceptance in Devon: it might be even more difficult than she had in mind. This shows how, as an American, she is unable to read this English community’s social rules. Brain mentions how Esther does not notice reasons that might cause Mrs. Nolan’s exclusion such as the “possible Irishness” of her name or her working-class status, since married to a pub-keeper, which Esther actually sees as an attribute (*The Other Sylvia Plath* 64). In spite of the story’s third-person narrator, it is Esther’s perception, as an outsider, that prevails in “Mothers.” She feels uneasy in this community, with whose traditions she is not acquainted.

²⁹ Plath and Hughes also lived in Devon: they moved to Court Green on August 31, 1961 (Wagner-Marin, *Sylvia Plath: A Biography*). As Wagner-Marin mentions, moving there was crucial for them to live comfortably with a growing family and for both Hughes and Plath to write (*Sylvia Plath: A Biography*). Though Plath’s journals of the time were destroyed—or disappeared, there are still uncertainties—a compilation of notes on Plath’s Devon neighbors was published as “Appendix 15” in her journals (*J* 630-674). David Trinidad speculates that “Mothers” could be a fictionalization of missing journal entries, as well as Plath’s only known story that might have resulted from her neighbors’ sketches (135-136).

Nevertheless, though she keeps a distance from the townspeople, Esther also wants to belong in Devon. For Wagner-Martin, she cannot decide if she wants to know the townspeople or not (*Sylvia Plath: A Literary Life* 71). During the service at church, Rose kneels, while Esther and Mrs. Nolan do not: the two also confess to each other that they almost never go to church (*JP* 13). However, this is not really true in Esther’s case: she sees the church as a way to integrate. We come to know that she has previously been an assiduous frequenter of Evensong, despite being brought up as Unitarian and having once “swallow[ed] an impulse” to tell the rector that she was an atheist (*JP* 14). Thus, though she identifies with Mrs. Nolan’s outsider perspective in relation to the community, she is apparently trying hard to be a part of it. Her will to belong in Devon also seems to be stronger than her current religious convictions—her atheism or agnosticism.

Later in the narrative, the rector’s wife makes a speech supposedly welcoming Esther and Mrs. Nolan, saying that she hopes that they will become members of the Mothers’ Union (*JP* 19). It is thus that the rector approaches Mrs. Nolan to say that she is not welcome there. He nods at Esther, “as if they had already had a great deal to say to each other” (*JP* 19): it is clear that, unlike Mrs. Nolan, Esther will be allowed to become part of the community of churchgoers. In spite of being neither Anglican nor English, she is welcome at his church. The rector then subtly tells Mrs. Nolan that she does not belong among them:

“I’m sorry, but the reason I’ve not called [Mrs. Nolan’s] is because I thought you were a divorcee. I usually make it a point not to bother them.”

“Oh, it doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter now, does it,” muttered the blushing Mrs. Nolan, tugging furiously at the collar of her open coat. The rector finished with some little welcoming homily which escaped Esther, so confused and outraged was she by Mrs. Nolan’s predicament.

“I shouldn’t have come,” Mrs. Nolan whispered to Esther. “Divorced women aren’t supposed to come.”

“That’s ridiculous,” Esther said. “I’m going. Let’s go now.” (*JP* 19)

As I have previously discussed, in accordance with Luce Irigaray, the subject is always masculine, and, in this economy, women function as projections of men, objectified or

reobjectified (*SOW* 133). Without a subjectivity of their own, they are objectified, or reobjectified if they try to speak in male terms. In “Mothers,” though there is a Mothers’ Union meeting, an event supposedly organized by and for mothers, it displays the patriarchal mentality of the Church of England through the careful eye of the male rector: only women who behave according to what is expected of them are able to be a part of this community. So women receive the status of object: if they attempt to behave differently, they will be excluded, as Mrs. Nolan. She is evidence that this is not a place for women, but for women who behave according to the patriarchal conventions assigned to them; otherwise, they are pariahs. As I have mentioned before, according to Irigaray, it is through language, by saying what a woman is or is not that she might have to conform to that definition, to the ontological status assigned to her (*SOW* 163). The rector makes this clear, though subtly, when he approaches Mrs. Nolan: he makes her aware that he knows that she is divorced. Therefore, being a “divorcee” becomes all that she is, and it does not matter if she has other attributes, she will not be tolerated at his church.

After the rector lets Mrs. Nolan know that she is not welcome, the three women leave the meeting. At a certain point, Mrs. Nolan parts from the other two and follows her way home (*JP* 19). Rose and Esther comment on her case:

“I didn’t know they didn’t allow divorcees,” Esther said.

“Oh, no, they don’t like ’em. [...] Mrs. Hotchkiss said that even if Mrs. Nolan wanted to join the Mothers’ Union, she couldn’t.” (*JP* 20)

They change the subject and continue their way together: “Rose crooked out one arm, and Esther, without hesitation, took it” (*JP* 20). By taking Rose’s arm, Esther becomes an accomplice of Mrs. Nolan’s exclusion: in spite of being outraged with the fact that divorced women are not allowed and of sympathizing with Mrs. Nolan, she wants her place in the community, and Rose is able to guide her through this process, since she is one of the accepted mothers. For Gill, Esther’s “initiation into this world comes with her apparent betrayal, or sacrifice, of Mrs Nolan” (90-91). Throughout the story, the two women seem to have a connection; they might have been friends outside the Mothers’ Union, and maybe they would create a real bond. Nevertheless, though, during tea, they peer at each other, “like schoolgirls with a secret” (*JP* 17), when Esther is going home

with Rose, she does not hesitate in taking her arm. In fact, Esther is able to attend church without being a believer and to accept injustice for the sake of feeling *as if* she belonged, but we can question whether she *actually* belongs in such a context. According to Gill, Mrs. Nolan is “the obvious scapegoat. But Esther, too, is an outsider” (90). She knows that her place in the community, as an American, has to be conquered, that it is not guaranteed—this is probably why, even though she obviously likes Mrs. Nolan, she gives up their friendship for social acceptance.

Though the Mothers’ Union is supposedly a female space, there is no sorority in it. Irigaray sees sororities coming from women’s groups; she sees this other form of love between women as important for them not to be servants of phallograticism, for enabling them to be something other than rivals and objects (*CAC* 61; 31). In “Mothers,” when other women do nothing to prevent Mrs. Nolan’s exclusion, they comply with it; in order to be accepted, they become part of a discourse that denies and puts aside women who do not behave according to the rules. As Irigaray puts it, in a phallogratic economy, women do not exist for themselves, but as mere reflections of the one, and they do not notice that they are part of this economy, for this is what they have been doing all their lives (*SOW* 135; 136). Thus, the women in the Mothers’ Union end up working as agents of patriarchy; they might not sound as emphatic as Mrs. Willard in *The Bell Jar*, but this can be due to the fact that, in Devon, social norms work subtly: no one utters them as clearly as in the suburbs of Boston. Regarding the rector’s wife, she is not only an agent of patriarchy, but a hypocrite, like the other women in the Union, as Wagner-Martin puts it: “even though she has verbally asked the two women to join, social forms and religious codes let everyone know that Mrs. Nolan cannot join. What Esther has experienced [...] is their flagrant hypocrisy” (*Sylvia Plath: A Literary Life* 72). The rector’s wife plays the part of the welcoming host despite knowing beforehand that Mrs. Nolan will be rejected. Nevertheless, in spite of learning about women’s hypocrisy, Esther is apparently going the same way. According to Wagner-Martin, “she seems to commit herself to joining the group, and to behaving toward divorced women just as the Mothers’ Union members do” (*Sylvia Plath: A Literary Life* 71). We cannot be sure whether she would indeed behave “just as” the other mothers do towards divorced women, but she has taken the first step by getting close to Rose in detriment of Mrs. Nolan.

By becoming part of the Mother’s Union, like the other accepted mothers, Esther’s identity is reduced to that of a function. In a phallogratic context, Irigaray explains that

women are only seen as “nature”; they are relegated to pleasuring man and being procreators; they end up being reduced to a function, to being mothers, and nothing more (*SOW* 166; *C&C* 86). If, in *The Bell Jar*, the young Esther could not identify with her mother, consumed by motherhood, in the story, everything is centered on motherhood: if there is a women’s meeting, it is only because they are mothers—and only those who have never been divorced are “acceptable” mothers to attend it. Beyond her position as an outsider, we do not know much about Esther, just that she has a child and is pregnant again; it is difficult to grasp an identity for this character beyond that of a mother. During the meeting, when they are still at church, Esther feels her baby kick and thinks to herself: “I am a mother; I belong here” (*JP* 15). This gives the idea that being a mother is enough for creating a sense of belonging, as if it were all it took for women to define themselves, and for them to identify with each other. This puts aside all the differences between mothers, their individual identities. As Irigaray mentions, women have to renounce their female identities to enter the between-men cultural world (*jtn* 21). By defining herself only as a mother, Esther is securing her place in the between-men world, in which she is serving as a procreator while lacking a female identity of her own. If we think about *The Bell Jar*, if we recall Esther’s present-time situation, all we know about her is that she is also a mother—that she has given an old gift for “the baby to play with” (*BJ* 3). Thus, both characters are called Esther, and both seem to have their present situations defined by motherhood alone.

3.2.2 A Final Loss of Language

In 1962, when “Mothers” was written, *The Bell Jar* had already been accepted for publication, and its protagonist’s name had already been changed to “Esther” (see Plath, letter to James Michie, November 14, 1961, and my second chapter, 53). Hence, when Plath named the story’s character, she knew it would match the name of her novel’s protagonist. As I will now discuss, according to what is known about Plath’s later fiction, this might have been intentional.

The repetition of names is not uncommon in Plath’s narrative. Concerning the stories published in *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*, a few examples of repeated first and last names follow: Agnes (“The Whishing Box,” “All the Dead Dears,” and “The Day Mr. Prescott Died”), Betsy (“Initiation” and *The Bell Jar*), Cora (“The Daughters of

Blossom Street” and “All the Dead Dears), Ellen (“Day of Success,” “Tongues of Stone,” and “All the Dead Dears”), Millicent (“Sweet Pie and the Gutter Men” and “Initiation”), Minnie (“The Daughters of Blossom Street” and “All the Dead Dears”), Myra (“Sweet Pie and the Gutter Men,” “All the Dead Dears,” and “The Day Mr. Prescott Died”), Sadie (“The Shadow” and “The Fifty-Ninth Bear”), Miss Taylor and Billy (“The Daughters of Blossom Street” and “Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams”), Greenwood (“All the Dead Dears” and *The Bell Jar*), Guinea (*The Bell Jar* and “Stone Boy with Dolphin”), and Tomolillo (“The Daughters of Blossom Street,” “The Fifteen-Dollar Eagle,” and *The Bell Jar*). If we consider Plath’s manuscripts, there are even more repetitions. Ferreter discusses stories held at the Lilly Library: two of them, “Platinum Summer” and “The Smoky Blue Piano,” have characters named Lynn, and, in “The Matisse Chapel,” there is another character named Sadie (ch. 2). Besides, Plath had the intention to name the heroine of her novel *Falcon Yard* “Dody Ventura” (J 311), which ended up being the protagonist of the story “Stone Boy with Dolphin,” this being a fragment of the novel. She later changed the name of *Falcon Yard*’s main character to Sadie (J 498), which would also be the name of the protagonist of “The Fifty-Ninth Bear.” Though her choices of names seem rather random, there are possible associations of meaning between characters with the same—or similar—names. Andrew Wilson, for instance, sees the last name “Minton” used in stories with relatable themes (72-73).

However, in spite of the frequent repetition of names in Plath’s narrative, “Esther” seemed to have a special importance to her. Ferreter comments on the 1948 story “The Visitor”: Esther is the visitor, “a college friend of the narrator’s mother, who has chosen a career rather than marriage” (ch. 5). Apart from this story, written before Plath entered Smith College, “Esther” also appears in “All the Dead Dears,” but she is a minor character; she does not work as one of Plath’s alter egos in this case. In *The Bell Jar* and “Mothers,” Esther works as an alter ego, and, given the importance of both works, as I will discuss, she might be taken as Plath’s main alter ego. The fact that Esther is a Jewish name, after a queen, is of particular interest here. Plath identified with Jewish people and beliefs; according to friend Janet Salter, “if we [Plath and she] were ever in a situation where we didn’t want people to know we were referring to ourselves, we would use biblical names—I would call myself Ruth, and Sylvia liked to use Esther” (qtd. in Wilson 290). Maybe it is not a coincidence that she ended up choosing Esther for more than one text. According to Kendall, “Plath, unquestionably, aspires to Jewishness”; he

mentions that “[w]hat appeals to her about the Jewish faith in the twentieth century is its confirmation through suffering” (54).³⁰ In fact, in “Mothers,” when the rector tells Esther that it is not a problem that she was brought up as Unitarian as long as she is a Christian who believes in the “efficacy of prayer,” she is not able to tell him how, after Comparative Religion classes at college, she “ended up sorry she was not a Jew” (JP 14).

Furthermore, “Esther” is not the only name from *The Bell Jar* that appears in “Mothers”: the repetition of Doctor/Mrs. “Nolan” as someone with whom both Esthers sympathize is also of particular interest. In the novel, Doctor Nolan is a mother figure, under whose supervision Esther is able to undergo her treatment. In the story, Mrs. Nolan is another outsider, like Esther; however, despite their initial identification, she seems to be later left behind by the latter.

Brain speculates that “Mothers” “may offer us another glimpse of Esther Greenwood, years after the events of *The Bell Jar*” (*The Other Sylvia Plath* 64), and I agree with this possibility. In this direction, David Trinidad comments on a note made by Plath’s mother on the printed version of “Mothers,” published in *McCall’s*, held at the Mortimer Rare Book Room: “Aurelia Plath’s marginalia [...] informs us that ‘Mothers’ was originally intended as a segment of what would have been the unfinished novel *Doubletake*. If Aurelia is correct, the short story may be the only fragment we’ll ever have of the missing novel” (136). The printed version held at Smith College is now too fragile to copy, so they were unable to send it to me. Nonetheless, according to their description, it includes a typed label on the front cover that reads: “p. 80 ‘The Mothers’ Union’ story by Sylvia, originally intended as a segment of what would have been Book III had she not burned the Ms. for Book II” (Mortimer Rare Book Room, *Guide to the Sylvia Plath Collection* 124). As I have mentioned, *Doubletake*—also called *Double Exposure*—was the last of Plath’s novels, which she left unfinished when she died. In a November 20, 1962 letter, Plath explained that *Doubletake* would be a semi-autobiographical novel “about a wife whose husband turns out to be a deserter and philanderer although she had thought he was wonderful & perfect” (see Plath, letter to Olive Higgins Prouty, November 20, 1962). What happened with the manuscript after her death is still not certain. In the introduction to *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*, Ted Hughes mentions that Plath “wrote some 130 pages of another novel, provisionally

³⁰ Plath’s later poetry provides a great number of Jewish references, mostly in relation to the Holocaust. I have discussed the theme in an article called “O Holocausto como metáfora na poética de Sylvia Plath.”

titled *Double Exposure*," a manuscript that "disappeared somewhere around 1970" (1). In a 1995 interview, he says that Plath's mother saw "a whole novel," about which he "never knew": "What I was aware of was sixty, seventy pages that disappeared. And to tell you the truth, I always assumed her mother took them all on one of her visits" (qtd. in Heinz, "Ted Hughes: The Art of Poetry No. 71"). Whether there were 130 or 60 pages, or if Plath's mother did really keep the novel's manuscript, it is still uncertain. While we do not have access to this manuscript—which might never happen—all we can do is analyze what we do have, and the information available points towards a connection between "Mothers" and *Doubletake*. I thus accept the idea that "Mothers" provides a "glimpse" of *The Bell Jar*'s Esther in the future, and I propose that "Mothers" works as *The Bell Jar*'s afterword. As I have mentioned, the two Esthers have common characteristics beyond their names: in *The Bell Jar*, little is known about the adult Esther other than the fact that she has a baby; in "Mothers" Esther has a child and is again pregnant. The story might really work as part of another novel telling the following events in the life of *The Bell Jar*'s protagonist; however, as this last novel was never finished, "Mothers" functions as a sort of *The Bell Jar*'s afterword. Plath intended *Falcon Yard*'s chapters to work separately, like stories (*J* 311), and this might also be the case of *Doubletake*.

If we question whether *The Bell Jar*'s Esther finishes the narrative by accepting to live in the male world that she refused before, the story's Esther assimilates into an even more conservative society, centered on the Church of England. I have previously discussed how she sees herself as a mother, but she also defines herself as a wife, who serves her husband's work, rather than her own. When asked what she did in Devon by Mrs. Nolan, Esther answers: "Oh, I have the baby. [...] I type some of my husband's work" (*JP* 16). Differently from the first-person *The Bell Jar*, whose Esther wanted to write her own words when younger and was the narrator of her breakdown when older, "Mothers" has a third-person narrator, and so this Esther does not even tell her own story. Whereas, in *The Bell Jar*, Esther strongly opposed learning shorthand because she did not want to type men's letters, but her own (*BJ* 76), in "Mothers," she is confined to typing her husband's writings. Not only does this story depict women as mothers, as nature, it also portrays men as reason, as logos: Esther does the mechanical work of typing her husband's words, while he is the reasonable subject who writes them. As aforementioned, Irigaray believes the feminine to be a nonexistent reality in language,

which she sees as masculine (*jtn* 20). With this in mind, we might say that “Mothers” figures a final or a complete loss of language, whose origin is depicted in *The Bell Jar*. It is as if the story’s Esther succumbed to being part of the discourse that denies her even as an other; the discourse of the one that denies her pleasure, to put it into Irigaray’s terms. The young Esther from the novel had already lost her connection to words, which she apparently regains, later writes about in her memoirs, and then loses again in the story, by being reduced to the function that terrorized her when young: that of being a mother. Esther is defined as one of the Union mothers; she is pregnant, typing her husband’s writings. We know little about her: she questions her faith and is sympathetic towards Mrs. Nolan’s situation, but she ends up being like the other women; she accepts her role as wife and mother, without ambitions of her own. Whereas in *The Bell Jar* the young Esther bragged about being “an observer” (*BJ* 105), in “Mothers,” the protagonist does not want to remain an outsider, she wants to be accepted, even if it means submitting to a discourse with which she disagrees.

By analyzing this later narrative writing by Plath, there seems to be a movement towards the acceptance of her previous concerns, as a woman, while she is also criticizing this acceptance. *The Bell Jar* shows a revolt against the hypocrisy of gender norms, and Sadie from the 1959 “The Fifty-Ninth Bear” uncannily avenges herself from her husband, who sees her as a mere fragile creature.³¹ In “Mothers,” the protagonist seems willing to pay the price of social acceptance, even it means to comply with a conservative position towards women. These propositions might change if we had access to everything that Plath wrote with *Doubletake* in mind: since the novel’s objective was to depict a woman who was betrayed, its voice could be closer to that of her *Ariel* writings,³² which she was writing at the same time, or maybe to that of *The Bell Jar*’s young Esther. Still, we can only speculate about the remains of this novel, and thus I stick to my conclusion—that “Mothers” depicts a woman without the prerogative of

³¹ “The Fifty-Ninth Bear” tells the story of a couple that is camping in a park. They are evidently in discord; Norton recurrently sees Sadie as fragile, and, since we only have access to his perceptions, we initially do not know how Sadie feels. At the end of the narrative, at night, while trying to move a bear away from their car, Norton is killed by the animal, who was apparently summoned by Sadie. It was the fifty-ninth bear that they counted while camping, that number being Sadie’s “symbol of plenitude” (*JP* 109).

³² The *Ariel* poems present a more transgressive, aggressive, and sometimes even vengeful voice in relation to Plath’s earlier poetry published in *The Colossus and Other Poems*. Steven Gould Axelrod and Nan Dorsey see a movement from evoking “the ghost in language” to confronting him directly (79).

language, without a voice, typing words that are not her own. Is it a critique? By depicting the apparent inevitability of this scenario, Plath is also criticizing it. Maybe it functions like Irigaray's mimesis: by submitting her character to a patriarchal, exclusionary community in which she is only a mother, Plath exposes the hypocrisy of gender norms in a new scenario. Though less enthusiastically than in *The Bell Jar*, the aim here also seems to be that of social critique.

Conclusion

Nothing outside hurt enough to equal the inside mark, a Siamese twin circle of teeth marks, fit emblem of loss. I lived: that once. And must shoulder the bundle, the burden of my dead selves until I, again, live.

—Sylvia Plath, “Stone Boy with Dolphin”

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.

—Tracy Brain, “Unstable Manuscripts”

Like Dody Ventura, who feels that she had an experience that marked her, that made her feel as if she had “lived: that once” at the end of “Stone Boy with Dolphin” (*JP* 203), Sylvia Plath was able to live and write about experiences that would make her a part of the literary canon. In spite of her premature death, Plath left several works that still are—and still will—be objects of academic inquiry. Though her narrative—especially her short narrative—is not considered her main achievement as a woman of letters, though she is still mostly regarded as a poet, I hope this thesis is able to prove otherwise: that she was as much a writer of fiction as of poetry. Despite her focus on poetry, she put a lot of effort on writing prose: as I have mentioned, one of her final projects was the writing of another novel.

To discuss Plath’s works without acknowledging their biographical groundings is difficult: it is inevitable to use her journals, letters, and biographies to understand a few aspects of her writings. There is so much material available *on* Plath and *by* Plath that it would be a shame to ignore it. Nevertheless, though I used biographical sources in this thesis, it was only with the intention of enriching my arguments. To discover the importance of the name “Esther” for Plath to analyze the stories with Esther protagonists is very different than to justify her short narrative merely based on her biography, or vice-versa. As long as the main point is to discuss her works, biography is

welcome, as long as we do not forget their social dimension. As a writer, Plath saw personal experience as “very important,” but as long as it was “relevant to the larger things” (qtd. in Orr 169-170), and I believe that she achieved this goal through her writings.

Concerning my theoretical revisions, Luce Irigaray’s theory has proven useful for feminist discussions of literary texts. She unveils the limitations of language, philosophy, and psychoanalysis by proposing that the feminine is nonexistent in language, that the subject is masculine, whereas women are objects, reduced to being procreators, constricted to definitions according to the subject’s terms. She mentions that women are denied the prerogative of the unconscious, criticizes the erasure of the maternal origin, how the reduction to the maternal role makes it impossible for women to have an identity of their own, or to be figures with whom their daughters might identify. With this in mind, Irigaray proposes a theoretical move back to the womb: that we focus on female sexuality on its own terms, speak about female pleasure in order to break with the phallogocentrism of discourse, and thus create a rupture in the theoretical machinery. And maybe this would allow woman to be something other: at the time of Irigaray’s writing, something that was still unimaginable. Maybe this is a change that starts subtly: mimesis might be the means to do it; it might be the way to call attention to the masquerade that women have to perform sexually, in spite of their own desire. Irigaray describes the problem, analyzes its difficulties, and opens cracks in the system. Nevertheless, her discourse attempts a universal approach, which does not necessarily take into consideration the differences between women. However, it is important to point out that this approach is conditioned by her timeframe; all theories are limited to a certain extent, and Irigaray’s substantial works are significant for feminist readings of certain texts, which is the case of my corpus.

I had a certain difficulty to articulate Irigaray’s thinking with psychoanalysis. How can we conciliate the idea that the subject is masculine while also considering a woman as the subject of trauma? When Sigmund Freud wrote “he” did he mean “human,” a supposedly universal, or did he really mean the masculine subject? I am not saying that he intentionally excluded females from his writings on melancholia and trauma, but he definitely had a masculine subject in mind while writing about the human psyche. In this thesis, since psychoanalysis is the basis for my readings on trauma and melancholia, I had to accept Freud’s “he” as being “he or she,” or, as I use it

in this work, “she or he.” Though I agree with Irigaray, and I believe psychoanalysis was conceived with the male subject in mind, for now, what we can do is interrogate it from within, because to break with it completely would be a great loss. Judith Butler once mentioned in a conference that “you have to be willing to play a little with Freud... and psychoanalysis, right? You argue with the parts you don’t like and you steal the parts you do” (see Butler, “Conferência Magna com Judith Butler”). And this was the approach that I pursued in this thesis.

Concerning language, there are possible connections between feminist and trauma studies: one has to use a still phallographic language to fight phallograticism, as well as it is through language that trauma can be voiced and not silenced by the traumatic event. Regarding the Freudian melancholia, it proved useful for analyzing my corpus: many of its symptoms are presented in the literary works, such as disturbance in self-regard, refusal to keep doing activities that are essential to living, personal accusations, and identification with the abandoned object. For Freud, melancholia can be a result of a work of mourning that was not completed. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok discuss this in different terms: when introjection fails to happen, incorporation occurs. In the latter, the emptiness felt by the sufferer cannot be filled with words, and thus the object is incorporated into the subject. The denial of the loss can be so hidden as to be encrypted, but it can erupt as melancholia in case of a second loss. This gap in time between losses is similar to the temporality of trauma, to use Cathy Caruth’s terms. She believes trauma to be accessible only belatedly, as a strategy for surviving it while it actually happens. Later, something might happen to trigger this previous trauma, which is then finally experienced. Besides, trauma can be understood not only as one’s own but as related to another’s death. Concerning narratives of trauma, it is the representation of the *memory* of trauma that is narrated, which is the case of *The Bell Jar*.

The Bell Jar is a complex novel, which allows many possible readings such as feminist and psychological or psychoanalytical ones. Nevertheless, it is not possible to separate the two spheres, since they are intertwined. Esther Greenwood narrates her breakdown while criticizing the masculinist world in which she lives, and both are connected: psychological suffering cannot be separated from the reality in which the sufferer lives. Esther sees the world through the distorted lenses of the bell jar, but it is how this same world makes her feel that catalyzes her breakdown. Esther can be seen as traumatized; nonetheless, we cannot diminish her unconformity with the gender

hypocrisies of her society: in a more welcoming, accepting environment for women, her outcome might have been different. To focus only on Esther's depression, without giving attention to her complaints, would be to diminish the critiques that she makes about being a woman in the United States in the 1950s. Through literature, Plath is able to give voice to a woman in such a context.

Esther's psychic state allows her to make observations that she might not have the courage to whether she was behaving according to what was socially expected of her. She is thus able to criticize this society's double standards regarding gender. On this matter, Esther sees the world as divided into masculine and feminine realms. Science, physics, chemistry are male fields that she does not understand, in opposition to literature: words are an integral part of her identity. Eventually, Esther sees that, if she married someday, she might have to conform to being a housewife and a mother; she sees that she could give up writing, which makes her anxious about the impossibility of having both a family and a career. Furthermore, physicians are also part of the masculine science that puts Esther into a poorly performed treatment. Nevertheless, when she meets Doctor Nolan, a female physician, the treatment works better. Doctor Nolan functions as a mother figure for Esther. Her own mother, Mrs. Greenwood, is more worried about her daughter having a practical skill—such as shorthand—whereas Esther wants to type her own words; she refuses a career that would be only complementary to that of a future husband. Esther does not have a woman with whom she identifies until she meets Doctor Nolan. Before her, older women work as agents of the patriarchy for Esther. Even after her first hospitalization, the pressure to marry follows her through the speech of a nurse. Different from the other women, Doctor Nolan seems to listen to and to empower Esther; she is the only woman with whom Esther creates bonds—she is also the one who helps Esther to get contraception. Regarding sexuality, Esther cannot stand the fact that a man could have sex before marriage but a woman could not. She eventually ends up having sex with a stranger—an experience that is not really positive, given its hemorrhagic outcome. She is also not impressed when she sees the naked body of her then-boyfriend Buddy Willard. Nevertheless, when she feels sexually aroused, she is not ashamed of it, and she is able to perform the roles available to her to try to get what she wants.

Regarding trauma, *The Bell Jar* presents two temporalities: that of young Esther, previously wounded and attempting suicide, and that of the older Esther, narrating the

traumatic moment of her young life in which she attempted to kill herself and underwent electroconvulsive therapy. Since the beginning of the narrative, the young Esther is not well—she feels inadequate all along—but events such as the one with Marco and being refused to summer school trigger her breakdown. Then, language, meaning, are suddenly lost to Esther, who sees herself as if under a bell jar. While suffocating in its air, she perceives her voice as that of a zombie; words fail both on the pages of her novel and through her voice on the phone. She shows signs of melancholia, especially concerning self-regard; everything seems pointless. Her melancholia is apparently due to an incomplete work of mourning, since she had not mourned her father; she even mentions how she was only happy until he died. We might also say that this is a case of incorporation: Esther refuses to deal with mourning and incorporates the loved object. Unable to speak and losing her figurative capacity, Esther fills her mouth: she swallows pills in order to die. Moreover, the loss of her father is so encrypted in her that she cannot put this memory *out*, only *in*; she never mentions it to anyone, not even during therapy. Maybe it is because she loved her father so much that his death is so traumatic. After a latency period, triggered by other events, this trauma comes back to haunt her. In the moments that follow Marco's rape attempt, her behavior changes completely: she no longer feels obligated to perform "normalcy." When she is refused to the writing course, she feels as if she had no reason to get out of bed. She attempts suicide and is hospitalized, and, at the end of the novel, Esther is not really convincing about her getting better—but is anyone ever sure about that? Maybe she behaved in a way that allowed her to leave the hospital, a way that conformed to the masculinist world that she previously criticized. Nevertheless, she is able to survive long enough to write her critiques, since she is the novel's narrator. Her capacity to read seems to have come back, at least, but it is quite an open ending.

In spite of Plath's efforts to write and publish stories, they are still not studied as *The Bell Jar*, which is generally used as the basis for the discussion on her narrative writings. It is actually difficult not to think of the novel while discussing "Tongues of Stone." This story depicts a situation very similar to that of *The Bell Jar's* mental hospital: the nameless character is anxious about being unable to read, think, or sleep. She feels as if her brain were paralyzed, as if she were dead inside. The story's third-person narrator creates a distance, and thus we do not have access to sharp comments such as the ones made by Esther in *The Bell Jar*. However, "Tongues of Stone" portrays the girls' cognitive

losses through strong images. She is melancholic; she sees no point in living and she feels like an impostor. Nonetheless, at the end of the narrative, there is hope that her insulin treatment will work and that she will get better.

The other story that I discuss here, “Mothers,” is about the thin line between keeping one’s convictions and wanting to belong somewhere. Esther keeps her distance, but also wants to be a part of the Devon community. Regarding the Mothers’ Union, in spite of its women’s meetings, they are organized by the male rector, and not all women are able to join them. Simply for being a divorced woman, Mrs. Nolan is not allowed to be part of the Union, though she is a mother. About this refusal, Esther is outraged; nonetheless, despite her sympathy for Mrs. Nolan, she continues her way back home with another, “acceptable” mother. In the Union, women are together for being mothers; they are reduced to this function. In this women’s group, there is no sorority: they continue to be rivals and objects; the other women comply with Mrs. Nolan’s exclusion, and Esther is apparently going the same way. Concerning the name “Esther,” though the repetition of names is not uncommon in Plath’s narrative, this one was of particular importance to her, since she identified with Jewish people and beliefs. Given that “Mothers” was probably intended to be a part of Plath’s last, unfinished novel, *Doubletake*, we might say that the story works as *The Bell Jar*’s afterword. The fact that the story’s protagonist does not write is the key to this reading—even the narrative is in third-person—and thus we might say that she has succumbed to the masculinist world which *The Bell Jar*’s young Esther so vehemently criticized. If, in the novel, the character lost her domain over words for a period of time, in “Mothers,” this loss is more profound; the story seems to point to Irigaray’s views on language being masculine and excluding the feminine, and thus it might work—through mimesis—as another of Plath’s social critiques.

Comparing *The Bell Jar*, “Tongues of Stone,” and “Mothers,” we might say that Plath’s adult characters tend to conform to social norms that exclude women, whereas her younger characters are at odds with life, with how society and phallogocritism works. This revolt is one of the reasons for melancholia, depression, and it works as a trigger for traumatic memory. Both *The Bell Jar*’s Esther and the girl from “Tongues of Stone” are suicidal and depressed, but it is only Esther that relates her suffering to gender inequality. Moreover, the adult Esther, though she remembers it all, has apparently succumbed to what she once criticized. In “Mothers,” Esther knows how unfair the rules

are for new women to join the community, but she benefits from being one of the accepted. If a younger self might see this scenario as absurd, the older Esther ends up playing according to its rules.

Ultimately, as Tracy Brain mentions in “Unstable Manuscripts: The Indeterminacy of the Plath Canon,” reading and interpreting Plath’s works is coming back to them again and again, in a “long-term relationship” with its several indeterminate versions (34-35). In spite of so many years of Plath scholars discussing her writings, there are many publications to come and to provide the means for new perceptions and interpretations of her works and life. A volume of her complete letters is to be published this year and glimpses of it have recently caused new controversies.³³ As David Trinidad mentions in “Hidden in Plain Sight: On Sylvia Plath’s Missing Journals,” her childhood journals and her complete pre-1956 poems are still to be published; moreover, the controversy on what happened to her last journals and novel is still to be explained (151-155).³⁴ Thus, in spite of many years of Plath scholarship, there is still much to be said, and this thesis is a small effort to contribute to such a long tradition, with what I believe could still be discussed concerning *The Bell Jar*, “Tongues of Stone,” and “Mothers.” My aim here was to provide my interpretation of these works concerning issues that I think are of extreme importance to them such as language, motherhood, relationships between women, trauma, and melancholia; through my analyses, I hope to have shown how woman’s experience and trauma are intertwined in Plath’s narrative.

³³ In soon-to-be-published 1962 letters to Dr. Ruth Barnhouse, Plath’s former therapist, she confided that Hughes had physically abused her two days before she miscarried their second child and that he told her that he wished she were dead (see Kean, “Unseen Sylvia Plath Letters Claim Domestic Abuse by Ted Hughes”). To these revelations, which caused great controversy in 2017, Carol Hughes, Ted’s widow, replied: “The claims [...] are as absurd as they are shocking to anyone who knew Ted well” (qtd. in Kean, “Unseen Sylvia Plath Letters Claim Domestic Abuse by Ted Hughes”).

³⁴ Recently, in a May 24, 2017 article, it was revealed that two unknown poems by Plath were found; they are called “To a Refractory Santa Claus” and “Megrims” and were undiscovered for fifty years until Plath scholars Gail Crowther and Peter K. Steinberg found them in a carbon paper, hidden in the back of an old notebook of Plath’s (see Kean, “Unseen Sylvia Plath Poems Deciphered in Carbon Paper”). It is possible that a third unpublished poem still exists, and there is hope that her final journals will still be found; about the latter, Steinberg comments: “This requires hope and faith, possibly delusion. But I do feel there are caches of papers still to find the light of day” (qtd. in Kean, “Unseen Sylvia Plath Poems Deciphered in Carbon Paper”).

WORKS CITED

- Abraham, Nicolas and Maria Torok. "Mourning or Melancholia: Introjection versus Incorporation." 1972. *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*. Vol. I. Edited, translated, and with an introduction by Nicholas T. Rand. The University of Chicago Press, 1994, pp. 125-138.
- Ames, Lois. "The Bell Jar and the Life of Sylvia Plath: A Biographical Note by Lois Ames." *The Bell Jar*. Sylvia Plath. Harper Collins, 2005, pp. 3-15.
- Axelrod, Steven Gould and Nan Dorsey. "The Drama of Creativity in Sylvia Plath's Early Poems." *Pacific Coast Philology*, Vol. 32, No. 1, 1997, pp. 76-86, www.jstor.org/stable/1316781. Accessed 19 Nov. 2012.
- Bainbridge, Caroline. *A Feminine Cinematics: Luce Irigaray, Women and Film*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. 1949. Translated from the French by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany Chevallier. Vintage Books, 2011, ePub Edition.
- Bordo, Susan. "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity." 1993. *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*. Edited by Katie Comboy, Nadia Medina and Sarah Stanbury. Columbia University Press, 1997, pp. 90-110.
- Brain, Tracy. *The Other Sylvia Plath*. Routledge, 2001.
- . "Unstable Manuscripts: The Indeterminacy of the Plath Canon." *The Unraveling Archive: Essays on Sylvia Plath*. Edited by Anita Helle. The University of Michigan Press, 2007, pp. 17-38.
- Britzolakis, Christina. *Sylvia Plath and the Theatre of Mourning*. Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Brown, Laura S. "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma." *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Edited by Cathy Caruth. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, pp. 100-112.
- Budick, E. Miller. "The Feminist Discourse of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*." *College English*, Vol. 49, No. 8, Dec. 1987, pp. 872-885, www.jstor.org/stable/378115. Accessed 23 May 2012.
- Bundtzen, Lynda K. *The Other Ariel*. 2001. Sutton Publishing, 2005.
- Butler, Judith. "The end of sexual difference?" *Undoing Gender*. Routledge, 2004, pp. 174-203.
- . *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 1990. Routledge, 2010.

- . "Conferência Magna com Judith Butler" (Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance). Conference mediated by Vladimir Safatle. I Seminário Queer, 09 Sept. 2015, Sesc Vila Mariana, São Paulo, SP, www.youtube.com/watch?v=IkLS0xMo-ZM. Accessed 23 May 2017.
- Caruth, Cathy. "An Introduction to "Trauma, Memory, and Testimony." *Reading On: A Journal of Theory and Criticism*, Issue 1: Trauma, Memory and Testimony, Fall 2006, readingon.library.emory.edu/issue1/articles/Caruth/RO%20-%202005%20-%20Caruth.pdf. Accessed 14 Jan. 2015.
- . *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening*. 1899. Dover Publications, 1993.
- Ferreter, Luke. *Sylvia Plath's Fiction: A Critical Study*. 2010. Edinburgh University Press, 2012, Kindle Edition.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Complete Writings* (Arthur Wallens Classics). A.W. Books, 2016, Kindle Edition.
- Gill, Jo. *The Cambridge Introduction to Sylvia Plath*. Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Heinz, Drue. "Ted Hughes: The Art of Poetry No. 71." *The Paris Review*, Vol. 134, Spring 1995, www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1669/ted-hughes-the-art-of-poetry-no-71-ted-hughes. Accessed 13 May 2017.
- Hughes, Frieda. "Foreword." 2004. *Ariel: The Restored Edition*. Sylvia Plath. Edited by Frieda Hughes. Harper Collins, 2005, pp. xi-xxi.
- Hughes, Ted. "Introduction." 1978. *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*. Sylvia Plath. Edited by Ted Hughes. Harper Perennial, 2008, pp. 1-9.
- Irigaray, Luce. *Le corps-à-corps avec la mère*. Les Éditions de la Pleine Lune, 1981.
- . *je, tu, nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*. 1990. Translated from the French by Alison Martin. Routledge, 1993.
- . *Speculum of the Other Woman*. 1974. Translated from the French by Gillian G. Gill. Cornell University Press, 1985.
- . *This Sex Which Is Not One*. 1977. Translated from the French by Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke. Cornell University Press, 1985.
- . *To Speak Is Never Neutral*. 1985. Translated from the French by Gail Schwab. Routledge, 2002.

- Kean, Danuta. "Unseen Sylvia Plath Letters Claim Domestic Abuse by Ted Hughes." *The Guardian*. 11 Apr. 2017, www.theguardian.com/books/2017/apr/11/unseen-sylvia-plath-letters-claim-domestic-abuse-by-ted-hughes. Accessed 13 May 2017.
- . "Unseen Sylvia Plath Poems Deciphered in Carbon Paper." *The Guardian*. 24 May 2017, www.theguardian.com/books/2017/may/24/unseen-sylvia-plath-poems-deciphered-in-carbon-paper. Accessed 26 May 2017.
- Kendall, Tim. "Sylvia Plath's 'Piranha Religion.'" *Essays in Criticism*, Vol. 49, No. 1, January 1999, pp. 44-61, doi.org/10.1093/eic/XLIX.1.44. Accessed 09 May 2017.
- Kroll, Judith. *Chapters in a Mythology: The Poetry of Sylvia Plath*. 1976. Harper Colophon, 1978.
- Lacan, Jacques. "The Meaning of the Phallus." *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*. Edited by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose. Translated from the French by Jacqueline Rose. Macmillan Press, 1983, pp. 74-85.
- . "Tuché and Automaton." 1964. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XI). Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. Translated from the French by Alan Sheridan. W. W. Norton & Company, 1998, pp. 53-64.
- Laub, Dori and Daniel Podell. "Art and Trauma." *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 76, 1995, pp. 991-1005.
- Lawlor, Clark. *From Melancholia to Prozac: A History of Depression*. Oxford University Press, 2012.
- MacKinnon, Catharine A. "Rape: On Coercion and Consent." 1989. *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*. Edited by Katie Comboy, Nadia Medina and Sarah Stanbury. Columbia University Press, 1997, pp. 42-58.
- Malcolm, Janet. *A Mulher Calada: Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes e os Limites da Biografia* (English: *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath & Ted Hughes*). 1994. Translated from the English by Sergio Flaksman. Companhia das Letras, 2012.
- Marder, Elissa. "Trauma and Literary Studies: Some 'Enabling Questions.'" *Reading On: A Journal of Theory and Criticism*, Issue 1: Trauma, Memory and Testimony, Fall 2006, readingon.library.emory.edu/issue1/articles/Marder/RO%20-%202006%20-%20Marder.pdf. Accessed 14 Jan. 2015.
- Mitchell, Juliet. "Trauma." *Mad Men and Medusas: Reclaiming Hysteria*. Basic Books, 2000, pp. 280-316.
- Mortimer Rare Book Room, Smith College. *Guide to the Sylvia Plath Collection*. 2006. Organized by Karen V. Kukil with revisions & additions by Barbara B. Blumenthal. Smith College, 2016.

- Nicki, Andrea. "The Abused Mind: Feminist Theory, Psychiatric Disability, and Trauma." *Hypatia*, Vol. 16, No. 4, Fall 2001, pp. 80-104, muse.jhu.edu/journals/hyp/summary/v016/16.4nicki.html. Accessed 10 Jan. 2014.
- Orr, Peter, editor. "Sylvia Plath." *The Poet Speaks: Interviews with Contemporary Poets*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966, pp. 167-72.
- Perloff, Marjorie G. "'A Ritual for Being Born Twice': Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*." *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 13, No. 4, Autumn 1972, pp. 507-522, www.jstor.org/stable/1207445. Accessed 23 May 2012.
- Petersen, Mariana Chaves. "O Holocausto como metáfora na poética de Sylvia Plath." *Mafuá*, Vol. 22, 2014, www.mafua.ufsc.br/antiga/numero22/ensaios/mariana.html. Accessed 22 May 2017.
- . "O insólito em 'The fifty-ninth bear', de Sylvia Plath." *O insólito nas literaturas de língua inglesa*. Edited by Claudio Vescia Zanini and Sandra Sirangelo Maggio. Dialogarts, 2015, pp. 154-170.
- Plath, Sylvia. *Ariel*. 1965. Faber & Faber, 2009.
- . *Ariel: The Restored Edition*. 2004. Edited by Frieda Hughes. Harper Collins, 2005.
- . *The Bell Jar*. 1971. Harper Collins, 2005.
- . *The Bell Jar*: early draft. The Sylvia Plath Collection, Mortimer Rare Book Room, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, Series I, Box 4, Folder 2, not before 1961, 43 pages.
- . *The Bell Jar*: outline of chapters. The Sylvia Plath Collection, Mortimer Rare Book Room, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, Series I, Box 4, Folder 1, Spring 1961?, 2 pages.
- . *The Bell Jar*: second draft. The Sylvia Plath Collection, Mortimer Rare Book Room, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, Series I, Box 4, Folder 1, n.d., 89 pages.
- . *Collected Children's Stories* (Faber Children's Classics). Illustrated by David Roberts. Faber & Faber, 2001.
- . *The Collected Poems*. 1981. Edited by Ted Hughes. Harper Collins, 2008. Print.
- . *The Colossus and Other Poems*. 1960. Vintage International, 1998.
- . *Crossing the Water*. Harper Perennial, 1971.

- . *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*. 1977. Edited by Ted Hughes. Harper Perennial, 2008.
- . *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*. Edited by Ted Hughes and Frances McCullough. Dial, 1982.
- . Letter to James Michie. The Sylvia Plath Collection, Mortimer Rare Book Room, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, Series II, Box 16, Folder 10, 14 Nov. 1961, 2 pages.
- . Letter to Olive Higgins Prouty. The Sylvia Plath Collection, Mortimer Rare Book Room, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, Series II, Box 16, Folder 16, item 4, 20 Nov. 1962, 1 page.
- . *Letters Home: Correspondence 1950-1963*. 1975. Edited by Aurelia Schober Plath. Harper Perennial, 1992.
- . *Sylvia Plath: Drawings*. Harper Collins Publishers, 2013.
- . *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*. Edited by Karen V. Kukil. Anchor Books, 2000.
- . *Winter Trees*. 1971. Faber & Faber, 1975.
- Pratt, Annis. *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction*. Indiana University Press, 1981.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*. 1916. Translated by Wade Baskin. Edited by Perry Meisel and Haun Saussy. Columbia University Press, 2011.
- Schmidt, Rita Terezinha. "Para além do dualismo natureza/cultura: Ficções do corpo feminino." *Organon: Revista do Instituto de Letras da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul*, Vol. 27, No. 52, Jan.-June 2012, pp. 233-261, seer.ufrgs.br/organon/article/view/33480. Accessed 25 Oct. 2016.
- Smith, Caroline J. "'The Feeding of Young Women': Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, *Mademoiselle* Magazine, and the Domestic Ideal." *College Literature*, Vol. 37, No. 4, Fall 2010, pp. 1-22, muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/college_literature/v037/37.4.smith.pdf. Accessed 10 Jan. 2014.
- Steinberg, Peter K. "The Letters of Sylvia Plath." *Sylvia Plath Info Blog*. 01 June 2016, sylviaplathinfo.blogspot.com.br/2016/06/the-letters-of-sylvia-plath.html. 17 Feb. 2017.
- Stevenson, Anne. "Writing as a Woman." *Women Writing and Writing about Women*. Edited by Mary Jacobus. Croom Helm, 1979, pp. 159-176.
- Trinidad, David. "Hidden in Plain Sight: On Sylvia Plath's Missing Journals." *Plath Profiles: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Sylvia Plath Studies*, Vol. 3, Fall 2010, pp.

124-157, scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/plath/article/view/4514. Accessed 09 May 2017.

Tsank, Stephanie. "The Bell Jar: A Psychological Case Study." *Plath Profiles: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Sylvia Plath Studies*, Vol. 3, Summer 2010, pp. 166-177, scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/plath/article/view/4714. Accessed 17 Apr. 2016.

Wagner-Martin, Linda. *The Bell Jar: A Novel of the Fifties* (Twayne's Masterwork Studies No. 98). Twayne Publishers, 1992.

---. *Sylvia Plath: A Biography*. 1987. Endeavour Press, 2014, ePub Edition.

---. *Sylvia Plath: A Literary Life*. 1999. Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Wilson, Andrew. *Mad Girl's Love Song: Sylvia Plath and Life before Ted*. Scribner, 2013.

Zajdel, Melody. "Apprenticed in a Bible of Dreams: Sylvia Plath's Short Stories." *Critical Essays on Sylvia Plath*. Edited by Linda W. Wagner. G. K. Hall & Company, 1984, pp. 182-193.