

“How are you?” A Rhetorical Question in Plath’s *The Bell Jar*

Khadija Aamir¹, Atifa Binte Zia² , Anila Akbar³

¹University of Management and Technology (UMT), Lahore

²University of Management and Technology (UMT), Lahore

³University of Management and Technology (UMT), Lahore

Correspondence: atifa.zia@umt.edu.pk²

ABSTRACT

Asking the question, how are you, has been the tradition enrooted in each society, but the focus on the answer has never been the priority. How are you, is a rhetorical question, where the addresser’s credibility does not let the addressee answer it correctly. Sylvia Plath in her novel, *The Bell Jar* not only raises such questions but also shatters the stereotypical notions of perceived mental illness, and how it should be taken seriously. The paper aims to dismantle the misunderstood notions around the novel, *The Bell Jar* by analyzing the binary opposition of how are you and I am fine and intends to find the undercurrent meaning shrouded in its grey areas through Plath’s character, Esther. Esther’s personality is caged between the six specific domains of self-concept, and continuously felt placed in the position of “other” by society. Sylvia Plath is a modern writer who challenged the cycle of society through her only novel, *The Bell Jar*. Esther, the protagonist is constantly in the fight and is torn between the desire to rebel and to belong to the community at the same time. To understand this pretentious question in the novel *The Bell Jar*, we need to understand the power of persuasion through its three building blocks, logos, ethos, and pathos. Hence, to analyze this rhetorical question, the paper will also evaluate Esther’s dialogic relationships through Aristotle’s rhetoric theory and Lacan’s mirror stage narrowed within six domains of self-concept.

Keywords: Deconstruction, Gender, Persuasion, Rhetorical Question, Subaltern, *The Bell Jar*.

Introduction

Discovery is an act where writers rephrase their memories, form new concepts and counterfeit new structures of ideas. While at the same time, they manipulate “all the constraints imposed by his or her purpose, audience, and language itself.” (Flower and Hayes, 1980, pp. 21)

Linda Flower and John R. Hayes in their paper illustrate that “writers don’t find meanings, they make them” (1980, pp. 21). The writer knows how to manipulate and control the reader’s mind.

Asking the question, how are you, has been the tradition enrooted in each society, but the focus on the answer has never been the priority. Sylvia Plath in her novel, *The Bell Jar* not only raises such questions but also shatters the stereotypical notions of perceived mental illness, and how it should be taken seriously. The question, how are you is a problem in itself, where the person who asks this question does

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not care about the answer, he just fulfils his duty by questioning it. Asking this question and seeking its answer stands in a binary opposition, where its grey area (the real answer) will be discovered through Derrida's concept of Deconstruction.

Research Questions

1. Why do people only answer "I am fine" to the question "How are you" as the only archetypal expression?
2. What is self-categorization and how do the six domains of self-categorization builds Esther's torn character?
3. How Esther's character is oppressed by the power of persuasion and its three components: logos, ethos and pathos?

Significance of Study

This qualitative research encompasses a systematic division. The whole research is divided into eight parts, which are the introduction, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study and literature review, theoretical framework, data analysis, and conclusion respectively. The tools for the research are both print and web sources and the analysis does in the light of previous studies on the topic as well as in the light of the primary text *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath. By using Derrida's deconstruction which questions the "bases of authority and hierarchy in society" (Ryan 2017, pp. 87) the paper contends to explore the grey area of the rhetorical question of how are you, and its answer I am fine, through the novel *The Bell Jar*. Besides, other research conducted on Plath's *The Bell Jar*, this research with the help of the above-mentioned theory and Aristotle's rhetoric theory intends to analyze it from a new perspective. Likewise, many other pieces of research in this study also revolve around Esther's mental illness but stands out from the league of being conventional as it focuses to find the actual answer to the mentioned rhetorical question. Concentrating on Esther's mental illness has been the focal point of many researchers, but this research talks about the power play of persuasion parallel to Esther's mental illness. Hence, the idea of exploring the real answer to the mentioned question through Esther's character is new, unique, and quite up to the mark of literary trends.

Literature Review

Sylvia Plath was a modern writer who challenged the cycle of society through her only novel, *The Bell Jar*. Elena Lui is of the view, "The characters know that they cannot freely express themselves, and this lack of autonomy also leads to mental strain" (Lui, 2016, pp. vi). Esther, the protagonist of *The Bell Jar* is constantly in the fight and is torn between the desire to rebel and to belong to the community at the same time. As a concern, her gender plays a role to hide her individuality, "which results in problems such as the need to control the pursuit of perfection and frequent self-sabotage" (Lui, 2016, pp. vi). Hence, mental illness is not only a disease but it affects the person because of its gender, and how society shapes it.

According to the review by Moss for *The New Yorker*, "camouflage and illness go together in "The Bell Jar;" moreover, illness is often used to lift or tear down a facade" (Moss, 2018, pp. 1). *The Bell Jar* talks about the crises of sexuality; identity and survival are often grey and funny. What marks Esther different from her companions is her wit, intelligence, irony, and her mysterious withdrawn despondency. Moss reviews the tone of the book as "the reader is being lured into the lion's den, that sterile cement room in the basement of a mental hospital where the electric-shock-therapy machine waits for its frightened clients" (2018, pp. 1). Hence, the miscommunication between her and the world widens where she continuously refers to her depression with silence, and how she is a misfit in her society.

In the conclusion of his review for *The New Yorker* says, *The Bell Jar* as "something girlish in its manner betrays the hand of the amateur novelist" (Moss, 2018, pp. 1). Plath links the two themes, women's self-determination and sanity in the shadow of her semi-autobiographical protagonist, Esther Greenwood. By presenting her arguments in every small corner of life and society Plath did not only portray an intelligent

young girl but a nineteen years old teenager who is extremely mature to question those happenings critically. Hence, she not only suffered in her society but also gave her reactions mere strong-headedly. When in chapter five she was just being nineteen evaluated, people were made of nothing but dust only. Many other modernist writers discussed the concept of dust concerning humanity widely to communicate the hideous isolation in the post-world war era. T S Eliot in the first section of *The Wasteland: The Burial of the Dead* says, “I will show you fear in a handful of dust” (Eliot, 1909, pp. np). Dust holds the concept of fear to humanity, and that fear is a driving force for humanity to destroy other humans.

“Aristotle bridged a gap between the sophist and dialectic method through his rhetorical theory” (“2.4 Rhetorical Theory,” 00:00:05 - 00:05:00). His theory is more focused on the sender of the message or the person who is initiating the communication. According to his theory, there are three stages of sending a message. The first one is the “invention stage of communication” (“2.4 Rhetorical Theory,” 00:00:47 - 00:05:00). The second is the “style of a message” (“2.4 Rhetorical Theory,” 00:00:50 - 00:05:00). The third and last one focuses on the delivery of the message. All these three stages are linked with the question, “how are you, [and its answer, I am] fine” connecting with that Esther’s character (Plath, 2014, pp. 160). Aristotle’s rhetoric theory is applied massively to politics, and narratives related to politics. This paper aims to understand Aristotle’s theory with a new perspective by simply applying it to Esther’s character concerning this stereotypical question and its answer. The paper will focus on three building blocks of successful communication, which are, ethos, logos, and pathos, and will demonstrate whether Esther’s communication with people around her was effective or not. The rhetoric theory has “combined larger meta models on communication with smaller practical tips on how to achieve these goals [ethos, logos, and pathos]” (“2.4 Rhetorical Theory,” 00:04:19 – 00:05:00). The research intends to investigate whether Esther was ever considered “right, or believable, nice, intelligent, etc.” (“2.4 Rhetorical Theory,” 00:04:29 – 00:05:00).

“Human beings are always in search of truth” (“The 3 Methods of Persuasion | Rhetoric Aristotle,” 00:00:08 – 00:06:24). Despite anything, people want to know things, and it often results in great pain because each one of them has their point of views. Together they search for truth in multiple ways such as “discussion, argumentation, philosophy, science, and even art” (“The 3 Methods of Persuasion | Rhetoric Aristotle,” 00:00:12 – 00:06:24). When their viewpoints on truth contradict each other, they “often enter into a game of persuasion: [they] try to convince the other that the belie [they] hold is, in, the true one” (“The 3 Methods of Persuasion | Rhetoric Aristotle,” 00:00:25 – 00:06:24). The three building blocks (ethos, logos, and pathos) plays an important role in the process of persuasion. When ethos, logos, and pathos are more often linked with politics, the paper wants to draw a connection between these three methods with the question, how are you, by using Esther’s speech as Aristotle himself privileged oration while describing his theory.

The structure of the narrative is important when studying its rhetoric. Sylvia Plath’s novel, *The Bell Jar* is semi-autobiographical. A string of personal connections runs through the character of Esther as she also “attended universities in the USA, and later in England” (Vega, 2015, pp. 2). Many literary critics and psychiatrists have argued Esther’s depression with Plath’s mental illness.

“There is no doubt that those who have read about Sylvia can identify her with Esther since The Bell Jar looks like a semi-autobiography of Plath. A relevant issue that must be addressed is how Esther’s thoughts of suicide, and thoughts of death, were present on many occasions in the novel. Similarly, this occurred in Sylvia Plath’s real life. (Vega, 2015, pp. 3)”

The study intends to seek how this question (how are you?) works as rhetoric in the novel. The question works as the rhetoric in imposing the persuasion, while Esther (addressee) functions as the rhetorical audience since she is being persuaded.

To understand the rhetorical question, in the novel *The Bell Jar* how are you, we need to understand the concept of parapraxis. As Sigmund Freud in his psychoanalytic theory introduced parapraxes as, “a lapse

of memory or mental error, such as a slip of the tongue or misplacement of an object, which, in psychoanalytic theory, is due to unconscious associations and motives; commonly called a “Freudian slip” (1900). For instance, in the novel, while meeting with the psychiatrist Esther wanted to tell him about her problems with writing, but was unable to do so. Another important aspect to understand the rhetorical question we need to know about is Speech Act Theory. Speech Act Theory is a “subfield of pragmatics that studies how words are used not only to present information but also to carry out actions” (Nordquist, 2019, pp. 1). When the speaker questions how you, he only cares about the question are what the recipient is going to answer does not bother him in reality.

Esther’s personality is caged between the six domains of self-concept that are; social, competence, Affect, physical, academic, and family. Before going to these six domains of self-concept, it is important to understand Lacan’s post-structuralist turn to *Psychoanalytic Theory*. With language as the central focus, Lacan reinterpreted Freud’s perspective of *Psychoanalysis* (Homer, 2004). Lacan develops the concept of *the Mirror Stage* which occurs between the age of 6-18 months of a child’s development when the child begins to draw a fundamental distinction between the self and the other. Before this, the child is in what he refers to as the Real Stage right from birth. With the *Mirror Stage*, the child reaches the first realization of bodily independence. Thus, begins the lifelong process of identifying the self in terms of the other as with binary oppositions such as men/women or white/black, and so on.

The image reflected according to Lacan is the “ideal I”. The stable and independent version, which the child does not experience in itself, yearns to be the other. According to Lacan this quest can never be fulfilled and may lead to neurosis, anxiety and psychosis. This anxiety is easily transparent in Esther’s character, all her mental struggles are the product of neurosis on a larger scale where she considers herself very still and very empty. Furthermore, then to prove the intensity of this emptiness she compares herself with a tornado where she is moving dully along in the internals of the surrounding uproar.

Throughout the ages, the world has revolved around the tradition of asking how are you, but now due to the prevailing mental illness in such hype; people do not bother to answer it seriously because the person asking it is not serious about it. Thus, the question now is considered rhetorical. Right after sixty-one years of its publication, Plath has kept her character, Esther universal, and the novel feels still so fresh when it comes to mental health and the concept of being a subaltern in every society of all ages. In her article, *The Female Helix of Paradox and Identity within the Mirrored Imagery of The Bell Jar* Dolores Batten declares that Esther being the woman of the 1950s was caged in a bell jar. According to her, Sylvia Plath uses the imagery of the bell jar through her protagonist, Esther, and her mental illness as the allegory of the “patriarchal-driven society” (2019, pp. 69). “The bell jar is a powerful symbol of enclosure that expresses both the strength and the frailty” (Batten, 2019, pp. 69). It can be considered that question, how you are also acting as a symbol of the bell jar when Esther is forced to answer it despite her being unwell because of prevailing circumstances and her weak mental health. Hence, the external force of asking questions is more powerful than the internal powers of her mental illness, which forced her to answer them. Batten illustrates her point by saying:

“Through creating such duplicity in a singular object, Sylvia Plath invites her readers to view a young woman’s life in the bell jar, as it occurs under the metaphorical microscope—yet another scientific image—which magnifies Esther Greenwood’s battles with depression, female subservience, and suicidal tendencies, thus bringing awareness to the concerns and anxieties of the 1950s women. (2019, pp. 69)”

Therefore, the study aims to deconstruct the rhetoric of this bell jar, the question, how are you and its answer, I am fine.

Researchers have done ample work on diverse explicit topics discussed in *The Bell Jar*. Both Dolores Batten and Orestes J Vega have taken the stance of their research from a feministic and psychological perspective. As discussed prior, Batten in her article, argued on the patriarchal notions of the 1950s with the mental capacity of Esther entrapped in a bell jar. Likewise, Orestes J Vega in his article, *The Causes*

and *Effects of Depression on Esther Greenwood in the Bell Jar*, try to find the causes behind Esther's depression amalgamating it with the feministic point of view. He says,

"In addition to her depression problems, one can also observe traits of feminism in The Bell Jar. It is relevant to mention how Plath's feminist side is revealed in the way Esther thinks and acts. Consequently, one can also assume that the fact that she is coping to reveal her feminist ideals, and fighting against the social taboos that surround her, could also be another cause of her depression. (Vega, 2015, pp. 2)"

According to Vega's research, Esther was caged in a predominantly male society, where her depression was the product of this imprisonment. This study approves both of the above-mentioned claims by two researchers, but also sets its stance of analyzing Esther's mental illness through the question, (how are you?) and its forcefully driven answer, (I am fine) because no other research has thought about Esther's mental illness in this prospect.

Gayatri Spivak in her theory of *Subalternity* (2012), speaks about the otherness of third-world women, but Esther being part of a superpower country suffers the same objectification as the women belonging to underdeveloped nations. "Her critical discourse raises the issues of marginal subjects such as the place of the subaltern women in society and their empowerment." (Morton, 2003, pp. 24) The word subaltern by Gramsci refers to the voiceless group of people in society. Esther being the other gender in society was too subaltern, where she was suffering in silence, and was unable to communicate or was unable to answer the question where doctors asked her about her feelings right after she failed attempt to kill herself.

Methodology

To find out the real answer to the question, how are you, this study has selected two theories: deconstruction by Jacques Derrida and rhetorical theory by Aristotle. The paper wants to explore the grey areas by creating the binary of this question with its archetypal answer, I am fine. For this purpose, the paper will first break down the text of *The Bell Jar* through the incidents where Esther was forced to answer this question, "because writing is in some respects the perfect metaphor for difference and the relational constitution of identity" (Ryan 2017, pp. 84). It is perceived that sometimes the nonchalant behaviour of the addresser makes the correct answer fades away in oblivion because the addressee is unable to say it, as Derrida says, "truth, according to this deconstructive way of thinking, is complex" and the addresser do not want to hear it (Ryan 2017, pp. 84). The study will use two models of Derrida's deconstruction, first, it will analyze the binary of the mentioned question, and its stereotypical answer to discover what lies between these two. Secondly, the research will analyze Derrida's perception of truth is complex, and how writers through the sign of writing tell a certain truth. For Derrida, a reader's viewpoint is more important than of writer's. Thus, by considering this importance the paper aims to dismantle Plath's *The Bell Jar* by taking this rhetorical question under consideration.

Later on, the study will explore the answer through Aristotle's notion of persuasion. Persuasion is considered a model of "successful communication [and] has three building blocks; logos, ethos, and pathos" ("2.4 Rhetorical Theory," 00:01:23 - 00:05:00). Logos is related to the logical reasoning of an argument based upon facts. Ethos is known for the credibility and ethics of the addresser. Lastly, pathos in a conversation shows the emotional harmony between the addresser and the addressee. These three building blocks seem to be visible in this question, answer conversation, but this study aims to see whether this conversation leads to successful communication, or does it ends in miscommunication.

Discussion

Every question has an answer, but not every inquiry is considered logical. "How are you?" is a common question asked by people upon interaction, but through ages, due to the hype of the increasing mental illness, this query is considered no less than any rhetorical question. Esther, Sylvia Plath's protagonist in *The Bell Jar* was going through mental illness, and due to this tried killing herself. The next day when

she was saved by the doctors after four failed attempts they asked, “And how are you feeling this morning, Miss Greenwood?” (Plath, 2014, pp. 160), a train of pent-up emotions ran through her mind, and she expressed her feelings [obviously to herself] that how much she hates this idea of people asking “cheerfully how are you” and proposes the idea that “they know you’re feeling like hell” but no matter what people “expect you to say “Fine” (Plath, 2014, pp. 160). The reason why people finally answer this question, in the same manner, is because they know that no one around them or the person asking this question does not give heed to the real answer or calls it a “grey area” in Derrida’s words.

Answering this question is not as spontaneous as the question itself. Not answering this question wholeheartedly is related to one’s mental illness, where sometimes they are unable to answer even the simplest questions. Likewise, the simplest questions of life seem a hurdle to Esther in *The Bell Jar*. As Derrida illustrates that “writing is in some respects the perfect metaphor for difference and the relational constitution of identity. In a speech, according to metaphysics, the voice is absent; writing is an empty, lifeless sign made up of formal elements that have no living substance. [but he justifies writing as] a sign of mental speech.” (Ryan 2017, pp. 84), Plath through her writing raised the same voice. It is not her novel only where by keeping Esther as her illusion she portrays the reality of mental illness, but almost all of her poetry revolves around the same theme, and how differently it works in society in contrast with the mind. Hence, writing can be considered a sign of a sign.

As the person is unable to give the real answer to the question, how are you, the underlying meaning dies when in oblivion he/she answers it, as I am fine. As Derrida says, “truth, according to this deconstructive way of thinking, is complex. It requires that one attend to context, to how things that appear before our eyes arise out of complex webs of relations and invisible determinants.” (Ryan 2017, pp. 84). To state the reality was one of the other difficulties that Esther faced in *The Bell Jar*. As suggested by her mother to visit a psychiatrist, Esther was unable to express herself completely or at all. When Doctor Gordon asked her, “...tell me what you think is wrong.” (Plath, 2014, pp. 116), her mind again was unable to answer it correctly, she wanted to escape the very situation of revealing herself and wanted to turn “...the words over suspiciously, like round, sea-polished pebbles that might suddenly put out a claw and change into something else.” (Plath, 2014, pp. 116). For her, to state the intensity of her depression was as difficult as answering how are you, a mere normal question. As per Derrida’s perception stating the truth was quite complicated for Esther, and then as a result she again was unable to tell her complete circumstances, which were bothering her the most.

“Deconstruction might be a puzzling phenomenon.” (Bali, 2014, pp. 1), where it is commonly known for dismantling a certain text so that it can “analyze the critical difference...” (Bali, 2014, pp. 1) from its complete entity. Therefore, “it is not the text, in the application of deconstruction that is destroyed but it is the vivid and dominating significance and belief of the text, which is examined and decrypted” (Bali, 2014, pp. 1). Hence, by analyzing the question of how are you, Sylvia Plath’s only novel, *The Bell Jar*, can be a breakdown for realizing the grey area which stands between, yet hidden between the question of how are you, and its answer I am fine. Binary oppositions are the central theoretical oppositions that structure thoughts. It refers to the both absence and presence of certain dichotomies present in a text or society. Between such dichotomies, one of the opposition is valued while the other one is treated as contradictory to it. It is with the discussed question, where how are you at the left-hand side (the valued one) and its answer, I am fine is at the right-hand side (the devalued one). Hence, the addresser automatically becomes the subject and the addressee becomes the object and is sometimes under pressurize to answer this rhetorical question. It is with Esther who was already facing a lot mentally that she took this step of suicide, but when all the doctors surrounding her, asked this question she was powerless to face but again she was bound to answer it. “I feel lousy” was the answer that Esther gave to them in return, but as mentioned before they did not give importance to it (Plath, 2014, pp. 160). Thus, this carelessness of the addresser marks a very large difference when someone is unable to answer this question sincerely because, at the end of the day, they all are seeking just one archetypal answer, which is I am fine.

Moving further, the immense use of the question how are you, and the answer I am fine, seem not to have much importance in the eyes of both the addressee and the addresser. The question that arises here is do they really want to hear the answer or they don't even bother to know. If so, then why in our modern society it's becoming a habit to ask this sort of question we can say that because of social norms people ask this question upon the first interaction. From here we get to know that asking question is the norm of society but to know the answer is not, because we just fulfil the very obligation of our greetings. This can be interpreted in multiple ways that why people don't bother to know the real answer, one reason that we think might be, both addresser and addressee are not close enough that's why they don't feel comfortable to answer what they feel and what they wanted to ask. People do tell about their miseries, depression and the thing that are bothering them only to those who are close enough to listen and understand. But in every case, this isn't right, because sometimes when we tell our mother or someone who is close enough they don't understand maybe they understand but they don't show.

There is always a reason behind the answer to every question but it depends on the relationship and mutual understanding between the addresser and addressee. The same case applies to the question of how are you, where the addresser formally asks that question but when it comes to the turn of the addressee, it hinges on their mentality and psychology. This point reflects in the novel "I felt low...I felt now that all the uncomfortable suspicions about myself were coming true, and I couldn't hide the truth much longer" (Plath, 2014, pp. 24). It shows her inner feelings she is unable able to share with anyone from her surroundings. This lack left an impact on Esther's mentality, which makes her feel, departed from her ambience. Everyone needs to fill the gap in her personality, which only be filled up by one from his or her close friends and relatives to make him/her relaxed.

The question how are you, holds a vast interpretation which is depicted according to everyone's mentality and their present mental condition mainly. In the novel, when she went to a psychiatrist who asked her about her condition and suffering. Hence, Esther tells Doctor Gordon about her continuous difficulty in reading, eating and sleeping but the real cause was her not able to write anything. Here came that perspective of lack of communication between her and Doctor Gordon and also it shows her psychology that how it moulded and affected by the disturbance in their life. As Doctor Gordon merely fulfils their duty, he doesn't critically approach the real fact behind all these disturbances in his life of Esther. It shows that the addresser does not bother the hidden real fact behind the question and Doctor Gordon just asks the question to tell about your situation but does not find the real reason.

In Aristotle's rhetoric, an art of persuasion is always present in normal conversations, but this persuasion is somehow blending in with the discussed question. Rather it can be considered that it gets bland when the addresser asks it but does not care about the answer. He unconsciously puts up this persuasion in the addressee's mind, and the addressee gets involved in the limelight. Persuasion overall acts as a cage for rebellion, and as discussed earlier, Esther was the rebellion of the 1950s, though not an explicit one she was becoming one because of her prevailing mental illness. Emelie Brax, in her article, quotes Kenneth Burke as, "wherever there is persuasion, there is rhetoric" (Brax, 2015, pp. 2).

Brainwashing is considered to be the second thought of persuasion, and it is vivacious enough in Plath's *The Bell Jar*. The part of Esther's brainwashing is depicted through her shock treatment prescribed by Doctor Gordon. This incident of brainwashing is not only illustrated through Esther's shock treatment, however, but Plath has also shown it through multiple minor characters' reactions situated in this scene. "Doctor Gordon [fitted] two metal plates on either side of [Esther's] head. He buckled them into place with a strap that dented [her] forehead and gave [her] a wire to bite" (Plath, 2014, pp. 129). Esther explains her situation as, "there was a brief silence, like an indrawn breath" and illustrates as "something bent down and took hold of [her] and shook [her] like the end of the world" (Plath, 2014, pp. 129). The one-time treatment shook her to the nerves that she "thought [her] bones would break" (Plath, 2014, pp. 129). Later on when she was done with the shocks and was called into Doctor Gordon's cabin, without thinking about his profession or Esther's mental capability to tolerate those shocks he bluntly asked, "how do you feel" (Plath, 2014, pp. 129).

Before answering these questions, the readers could see Esther going into the state of the stream of consciousness, where she compares her childhood incident of biting an electric wire of her father's floor lamp with that of her just-ended shock treatment. She does not answer the persuaded question until Doctor Gordon repeats it, and then when she is completely under the spell of persuasion she answers, "all right" when she knew she "felt terrible" (Plath, 2014, pp. 130). Hence, it can be said that there is always a contradiction between what the addresser asks, and what the addressee wants to answer, but does not. *The Bell Jar* tells its readers how through careful brainwashing someone can be persuaded, and because of this brainwashing Esther did not tell her real situation after the electric shocks, rather she selected the archetypal answer, as archetypes are always acceptable in society.

The question works as rhetoric in imposing the persuasion, while our addressee functions as the rhetorical audience since she is being persuaded. It can also be assumed that the rhetoric or persuasion hinges like a bell jar, whereas the addressee or the rhetorical audience is caged within this bell jar. Likewise, as discussed in the previous section the question, how are you, acts as the bell jar in Esther's life, and this question is just one example of it because the readers know that there were countless times when Esther felt imprisoned within this bell jar. It was not until chapter fifteen when Esther gave a direct reference to the bell jar, rather she has "show[n] the effects of a bell jar that can be felt throughout the text while only mentioning the bell jar by naming a total of five times. This adds to the reader's experience of Esther's disorientation" (Batten, 2019, pp. 75). She knew that no matter how hard she tries or wherever she goes, she "would be sitting under the same glass bell jar, stewing in [her] own sour air" (Plath, 2014, pp. 168). It is not Esther only who feels the inappropriateness of the question this way, but many other people feel the same towards it.

The addresser asks the question, how are you, for mere formality, and the addressee who quickly gets preserved in the vacuum of the bell jar gulps the "sour air" and answers it as the addresser expects it which is, I am fine (Plath, 2014, pp. 168).

The question seems to possess the power of "ancient Greek rhetoric" and is not just a mere "human symbol" (Foss and Littlejohn, 2009, 1). According to Aristotle, "a successful communication has three building blocks; logos, ethos, and pathos" ("2.4 Rhetorical Theory," 00:01:23 - 00:05:00). These three building blocks are always visible in this question and its answer, but is it a successful communication? As perceived by its name, logos denote the development of logical arguments based on facts and figures. When on the next morning of her failed suicide attempt "a whole troop of young boys and girls in a white coat came in, with an older, grey-haired man" (Plath, 2014, pp. 160). They asked, "and how are you this morning, Miss Greenwood [with a] artificial smile" trying to develop a logical argument with a girl about failed suicide attempt (Plath, 2014, pp. 160). It can be considered that these bunch of doctors were trying to develop a logical argument with Esther, but it was not logical, especially at that particular time. Henceforth, people consider that a logical argument can only be formed through this opening question in any conversation, but they should first know the timing and situation which matters the most.

The second building block, ethos, is based upon the character of the speaker/addresser. According to Aristotle, the personal traits of the speaker matter. It is perceived trustworthiness that people have built for the doctors specifically, and then there is a geniality and intelligence of the speaker that is measured through ethos. Whether the speaker deserves to hear the receivers' thoughts or not is also decided in this phase of rhetoric. Doctor Gordon was the suggested psychiatrist by Esther's mother, but he turned out to be much sourer than her expectations. He was sour when Esther had her first meeting, and he was sour when he asked her "how do you feel" right after the brutal shock treatment (Plath, 2014, pp. 129). Esther during these two visits understood that Doctor Gordon was not a trustworthy psychiatrist. Esther's dilemma changed a little bit when a group of doctors asked her the same question when she attempted suicide, that is why she said to them that she felt "lousy" or maybe she knew the fact that they do not care about her answer (Plath, 2014, pp. 160). When comparing Doctor Nolan, it can be said that she was far better than the above-mentioned doctors. At least she meant her questions and cared about Esther's answers. Personal traits play a significant role in a persuasive argument like this. She answered Doctor

Gordon's claim by simply saying, "all right" when she actually "felt terrible" (Plath, 2014, pp. 130). Thus, the nature of the question and addresser both result in the wrong answer. Esther knew that the person/s asking this question was asking without any rational backing which Aristotle termed the so-called authoritative argument. Thus forth, the credibility of the addresser's position also matters.

Pathos, the "emotional appeal" ("2.4 Rhetorical Theory," 00:02:29 – 00:05:00) is the third and deciding building block of persuasion. The addresser uses this building block to persuade the addressee through feelings. "The speaker could appeal to fears, hopes, likes, dislikes or sense of humour" of its audience ("2.4 Rhetorical Theory," 00:02:32 – 00:05:00). Aristotle instructs his readers to follow this with the help of stories or exaggeration. While reading *The Bell Jar* the readers might have noticed this technique being used by Doctor Gordon specifically. He tells his story of visiting Esther's college which had a "WAC station" during the war and then gives her the appointment for next week, where he was supposed to listen to her and help her (Plath, 2014, pp. 117-118). He repeats the same thing after Esther's electric shock treatment. He first asks about her condition, and Esther well aware of his nonchalant behaviour says, "all right" and let's go. He as a psychiatrist should have put some effort to make Esther speak, but he selected the other way round, and asked her about her college again, and repeated his question, "they had a WAC station up there, didn't they, during the war" (Plath, 2014, pp. 130). Though Aristotle's instructions to take help from stories are visible in this incident, through the above analysis, it can be claimed that Doctor Gordon did not use this instruction to persuade Esther to speak up her mind, rather he was more concerned about his question that whether Esther's college had a "WAC station" or not (Plath, 2014, pp. 130). Hence, it can be said that the addressee wants to build an emotional harmony between its addresser through a constructive persuasive argument, but the irresponsible behaviour of the addresser who asks this question does not let it happen.

John Turner proposed the theory of self-categorization, where he states that the self-concept consists of two main levels: personal identity and social one. Therefore, one's self-realization is based upon how a person perceives him/herself and how others recognize him/her. Dr Bruce A. Bracken then divides the idea of self-concept into six specific domains: social, competence, affect, physical, academic and family. Plath portrayed all these six domains in Esther, but they all are very conflict with her character.

Social hierarchies play a very important role either to build your personality or destroy your personality. As in the case of Esther, she idealizes Doreen a lot because she belongs to the upper class that's why she tried to spend time with her and whenever during any moment when she wasn't around she used miss her and wished her to be here. Betsy, the other girl in her social circle likes her a lot but did not admire and idealize her because of her status. At that point, she confused herself that she should fit either in the upper class or in the middle. At some point, it is quite evident that this social and class difference arouses a sense of isolation and mental instability in Esther's life. She wanted to be fit with Doreen to escape from her situation.

Furthermore, Doreen persuades Esther to come along with her to the dance club she sets a blind date for her with Marco. Marco after giving her the diamond pin realized Esther was not obeying him and he started calling her "slut". As in *The Bell Jar* "Slut!" The word hissed by [her] ear. "Slut!" (Plath, 2014, pp. 98). This depicts that Esther tried his best to fit in the upper class but couldn't. This social hierarchy objectifies her. Social hierarchy act as a driving force where

Generally, competence is known as the ability to do something efficiently, but when it comes to the second domain of self-concept, it is known as the ability to meet basic needs. To meet basic needs, mean how a person applies control over one's own life, how a person copes with specific problems, and how person are does or does not change his behavior or environment because of the opposed abilities to adjust or adapt to situations as they are. Esther to gain education through the exposure of internship, (the basic need of her life) goes to New York, but she feels like disappearing in that society. She refers to everyone as "dissolving" (Plath, 2014, pp. 18) though she wanted to be a part of New York's life it was her prevailing mental differences with the society which acted as the driving force of her aloofness in New

York. At first, Esther was aware of her identity, but her experiences over there made her feel more impure than others. Hence, Esther was unable to adapt to the situations in New York, and she tried hard to fight against those opposing problems, but somehow she failed and came back home wearing clothes borrowed from Betsy and depression.

Another domain of self-concept is affected, where a person is aware of his/her emotional state, and it is visible in the novel. As this question affects her personality and psyche as well. When asked “And how are you feeling this morning, Miss Greenwood?” ... [She] hate[d] saying anything to a group of people... [she] also hate[d] people to ask cheerfully how you are when they know you are feeling like hell and expect you to say “fine” (Plath, 2014, pp. 160). The aggressive mood of Esther was disturbed and affected by the non-serious attitude of the people surrounding her because the question was baseless following her suicide attempt. As addresser intentionally is not aware of the inner feelings of the addressee and does not have any concern about it at all.

In the perspective of logocentrism, concerns and focus mainly on the speech by somehow neglecting writing. In the case of Esther, she was losing her ability to write which affects her mentally and physically. “But when I took up my pen, my hand made big, jerky letters like those of a child, and the lines sloped down the page from left to right almost diagonally, ...” (Plath, 2014, pp. 116-117). Her condition was pathetic as she cannot able to write and express their inner feelings through writing except for speech.

The rhetorical question of how you affect the mentality of a person too. This question, hold deep thoughts in it but it cannot be told to everyone. As people somehow do not know the meaning of their reply to this question. They just say that to justify their side to answer the person of their question. Then it changes the mind and thoughts of people in that way like they start considering their life by taking a recap of their past and present sufferings and hurdles. Somehow people admit the reality which cannot be changed because of firm norms and boundaries built by society. In the last section of the novel, when Esther has to come out of the asylum, she returned to her college life. She admitted the reality of society and the real concept of Bell Jar. As she comes to know about the facts of people having concern for others and how life deals with people. This asking question about yourself is just a part of the norm same as treating a woman in a society like women are in a bell jar. This cage is for all women who lived in a society and who have to live in a society fulfilling the norms.

According to Mirror Stage, when a person sees his/her reflection in a mirror, considers the reflection of a mirror as a self while it is their other. In the novel when Esther forces the nurse to give her a mirror. “I want to see a mirror...At first I didn’t see what the trouble was. It wasn’t a mirror at all, but a picture” (Plath, 2014, pp. 158-159). Esther insisted on seeing herself in a mirror, but when she saw herself in a mirror she was confused in identifying herself. She was so much in the disturbance and critical phase of her life that she was even unable to recognize herself in a mirror even. This incident depicts the sixth domain of self-concept known as, physical.

The next domain of self-concept that plays a very important part in Plath’s *The Bell Jar* is academics. As it is widely known, it was her failure to get admission in the writing course for which she was excited, that triggered the cells of mental illness, and later forced her to attempt suicide. This even split her mind and body to concentrate on sleeping, reading and writing. She even considers to take a course on shorthand before starting to write her novel, but her mind was transformed by the idea of getting failed again, she felt downtrodden among other candidates over there, and ultimately, she gave up her reading, writing, and persuading her dreams. She even considers “junk” her thesis, and “whole honors program and become an ordinary English major.” (Plath, 2014, pp. 112). Hence, considering the binary opposition of pass and fail, Esther considers herself a mere failure and devalues her writings.

Family, one of the dimensions of self-concept introduced by Derrida plays a very important role. When asked, “How are you”, my brother said I looked my mother in the eye [and said] the same,” (Plath, 2014, pp. 156). Family plays a very important role in the mental stability of a child. In the case of Esther, she

never had any affection from her father because he died too early, besides this she could not get a chance to visit his grave ever. She said, “I remembered that I had never cried for my father’s death. My mother hadn’t cried either. She had just smiled” (Plath, 2014, pp. 150-151). These incidents depict that she had never received any affection from her father and couldn’t feel bad at his death because her mother never cried.

Her relation with her family helps us to identify the grey area of her life in other words we can say that the self-concept helps us to find the grey area of the question how are you, and the answer is I am fine. In the case of Esther, her close ones like her mother couldn’t understand the miseries of her daughter that was going through. This aspect is very much related to the question of how you are, and the answer is I am fine. Even when we tell our suffering to the person who’s much close to us they don’t get it. Alternatively, it may be the case people are expecting too much from their close ones and when they don’t do what has expected it hurts and sometimes it affects the psyche. It can also be the reason why both the addressor and addressee don’t bother with the real answer.

Conclusion

Hence, it can be concluded that the question how are you, is only a mere rhetorical question, where society forces one to answer it no matter what. The position of Esther’s mental illness left her incapable of answering a simple question and was later considered very complex. The addresser then holds the position of the subject, the powerful, and the addressee is considered to be the object, the powerless. By analyzing the question how are you and its answer, I am fine through Derrida’s deconstruction, we can conclude that the grey area (the real answer) somehow vanishes when the addresser is forced to give that one archetypal answer. Another reason why the addressee cannot answer this question is because of the addresser’s credibility, the position does not let it happen, and positive persuasion does not take place. The addresser is only able to persuade the addressee to answer the question in its archetypal way, but does not persuade itself to understand the addressee’s position, and should hear the true answer. The research has deliberately repeated the main argument in each paragraph to tell its readers why Esther was unable to answer the question, how are you? The paper focused on three building blocks of successful communication, which are, ethos, logos, and pathos, and demonstrated that Esther’s communication did not affect people around her because of their nonchalant behavior.

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ORCID iDs

Azka Bint e Zia²  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3948-1609>

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