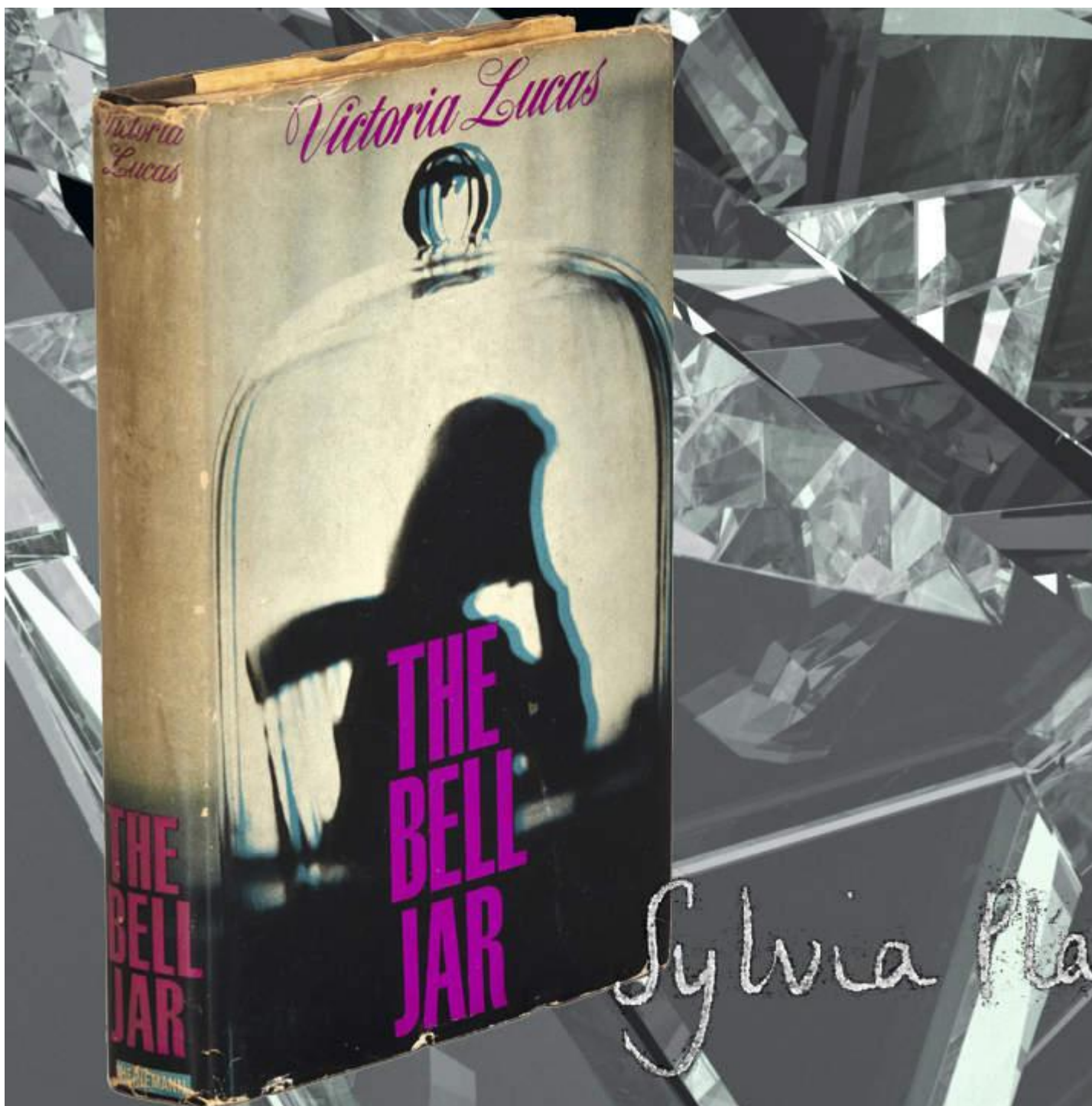


Sylvia Plath: The Bell Jar [B2]

Sylvia Plath è stata una delle voci più importanti della poesia del XX secolo. Il suo unico romanzo è un racconto autobiografico della sua depressione, accentuata dalle difficoltà di inserimento nella società americana del dopoguerra.



Born in 1932 in Boston, Massachusetts, Sylvia Plath had her first poem published when she was eight years old. Her first poetry collection, *The Colossus and Other Poems*, was published in 1960, and the collection *Ariel* in 1965. In 1981, she received the Pulitzer Prize for poetry, becoming the first person to receive the honour posthumously.

SEMI-AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL

[The Bell Jar](#) is Plath's only novel. It was first published in 1963 under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas, and then again in 1967 under her real name. While it is fiction, the book is inspired by Plath's own experience at women's magazine *Mademoiselle* in New York City. [The Bell Jar](#) describes a difficult six months in the life of college girl Esther Greenwood, who is chosen for a month-long summer [internship](#) at *Ladies' Day* magazine. However, Esther finds the work [unrewarding](#) and struggles [to fit in](#) with the other girls on the programme. She dreams of becoming a poet, but is paralysed by the fear of making the wrong choice. "From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future beckoned and winked [...] 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." "Dalla punta di ciascun ramo occhieggiava e ammiccava, come un bel fico maturo, un futuro meraviglioso. [...] ma sceglierne uno significava rinunciare per sempre a tutti gli altri, e mentre me ne stavo lì, incapace di decidere, i fichi incominciarono ad avvizzire e annerire, finché, uno dopo l'altro, si spiaccicarono a terra ai miei piedi". Esther becomes depressed, and begins to imagine ways of committing suicide. One serious [attempt](#) leads to her hospitalisation.

PARANOID CONTEXT

This episode [mirrors](#) Plath's own [breakdown](#) at the age of twenty, after which she was diagnosed with clinical depression. However, [The Bell Jar](#) is more than [thinly-disguised](#) autobiography. Throughout, Plath critiques the oppressive and competitive culture of 1950s America. The opening of the novel refers to Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, a real-life American couple who were convicted of spying for the Soviet Union. "It was a queer, sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs, and I didn't know what I was doing in New York. [...] I couldn't help wondering what it would be like, being burned alive all along your nerves." "Fu un'estate strana, soffocante, l'estate in cui i Rosenberg morirono sulla sedia elettrica, e io ero a New York e mi sentivo come un'anima persa [...] non potevo fare a meno di domandarmi che effetto faceva, essere bruciati vivi lungo tutti i nervi".

FEMALE ENTRAPMENT

In the post-war period, women were [stripped](#) of many of the liberties they had gained during the Second World War. They were expected to be educated, but forced to go back to being wives and mothers rather than workers. Fiercely intelligent, Esther resents her societal role as an ornament [trapped](#) in a suffocating glass [display case](#), or “bell jar”. “To the person in the bell jar, blank and stopped as a dead baby, the world itself is a bad dream.” “Per chi è chiuso sotto una campana di vetro, vuoto e bloccato come un bambino nato morto, il brutto sogno è il mondo”.

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT

In the novel, Plath masterfully and painfully dissects depression. Trapped in the introspective “[sour](#) air” of the bell jar, Esther loses her empathy. When her friend Doreen [shows up](#) at her door drunk after a [date](#), Esther leaves her in a pool of vomit in the hotel corridor. Instead of being grateful to her benefactress, Mrs. Guinea, who pays for her education and her medical treatment, Esther can’t “feel a thing.” Even after her suicide [attempt](#), when she is shown her reflection in a mirror, her description is impersonal. “You couldn’t tell whether the person in the [mirror] was a man or a woman, because their hair was shaved off and sprouted in bristly chicken-feather tufts all over their head.” “Non era chiaro se la persona ritratta fosse maschio o femmina, perché aveva i capelli rasati che spuntavano qua e là a ciuffetti ispidi come penne di gallina”. It is only after psychoanalysis and shock therapy that Esther’s sense of self begins [to reassert](#) itself. “I took a deep breath and listened to the old brag of my heart. I am, I am, I am.” “Feci un profondo respiro e ascoltai il mio cuore ripetere l’antico canto. Io sono, io sono, io sono”. While Plath’s protagonist sees hope in the future, the author herself took her own life only a month after the publication of [The Bell Jar](#). Since then, its acclaim and its notoriety [has soared](#). While she was writing it, Plath separated from her husband, the English poet Ted Hughes, and there has been much speculation about their marriage in the shadow of Plath’s lifelong battle with depression. In 2003, a biographical film entitled *Sylvia*, starring Gwyneth Paltrow and Daniel Craig, [attempted](#) to tell the couple’s story.

Glossary

- **The Bell Jar** = campana di vetro
- **unrewarding** = non appagante
- **to fit in** = integrarsi
- **attempt** = tentativo
- **date** = appuntamento
- **internship** = tirocinio
- **stripped** = privare, spogliare
- **trapped** = intrappolare
- **display case** = vetrinetta
- **sour** = aspro
- **shows up** = presentarsi
- **to reassert** = riaffermare
- **breakdown** = esaurimento nervoso
- **mirrors** = rispecchiare
- **thinly-disguised** = dissimulata
- **has soared** = alzarsi