

The Language of a Closed Mind: Absolutist Expression and Depressive Cognition in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*

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ABSTRACT

The Bell Jar by Sylvia Plath describes the inner world of depression in great detail using the first-person narrative perspective of Esther Greenwood. Even though there are plenty of critical works written on feminist and autobiographical aspects of the book, little is known about the linguistic representation of cognitive distortions. This paper analyzes the way in which the patterns of depressive thinking are coded in the narrative language of Esther Greenwood using a cognitive stylistic framework. Based on the cognitive theory of depression by Aaron Beck, the psycholinguistic study of absolutist language by Mohammed Al-Mosaiwi and Tom Johnstone, and the mind style theory by Roger Fowler, the study takes a qualitative approach of interpretation to analyze the chosen passages along the psychological arc of the story. The analysis indicates that absolutist expressions like “nothing,” “never,” and “always” are not only stylistic indicators, but linguistic performances of cognitive distortion, especially all-or-nothing thinking. The results prove that the depressive thinking in the novel is not only expressed in the theme, but it is built at the micro-level of language. This paper is relevant to the field of cognitive stylistics in that it demonstrates that literary narration presents an effective place to study depressive cognition without the need to make it clinical determinism.

Keywords: Cognitive Stylistics, Absolutist Language, Depressive Cognition, Mind Style, *The Bell Jar*, Cognitive Distortion, All-Or-Nothing Thinking

Introduction

Plath creates psychological uncertainty right at the start of her novel. Plath's opening statement, “IT WAS A QUEER [sic], sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs, and I didn't know what I was doing in New York” (Plath, 1963/1971, p. 1), places us in a mind plagued with bewilderment. This bewilderment is not random but deliberate. It is structural. It proclaims a narrative awareness that is not able to structure experience clearly and confidently. The novel follows the gradual deterioration of the mind of its narrator, Esther Greenwood, from this opening moment, and uses language that follows the patterns of depressive thinking.

The Bell Jar has received significant critical response. It has been interpreted as a condemnation of the mid-twentieth century gender restrictions placed on American women (Friedan, 1963). Its emotional qualities have been traced to Plath's personal psychiatric history by the autobiographical critics (Wagner-Martin, 2003). More recently, scholars have

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explored its representations of identity, trauma, institutional power, and the language of madness (Bonds, 1990; Oikkonen, 2004; Phillips, 2019). These readings are beneficial, though they do have one point of commonality: their perspective of language. They do not see language as a medium that is opaque, a place where psychological experience is created and shaped, but rather as a transparent medium, a vehicle for themes. The question of how depressive cognition is coded in the micro-structures of Esther's narration is not really asked. This study is designed to ask and then answer exactly this question. It looks at the correlation between cognitive distortion and linguistic expression in *The Bell Jar* based on the cognitive stylistic approach. Three theoretical pillars support this examination. The first is cognitive theory of depression by Aaron Beck (1976), specifically the idea of the cognitive triad and the distortion of all-or-nothing thinking. The second theoretical model derives from the work of Al-Mosaiwi and Johnstone in psycholinguistics, who have proven that psychological inflexibility leaves its imprint on the language itself—in particular, in what they refer to as 'absolutist' language, with words like "always," "never," and "nothing" (Al-Mosaiwi & Johnstone, 2018). The third theory is Fowler's mind style, according to which language reflects and even creates a character's inner world (Fowler, 1977). These three theoretical models provide the study with a set of tools to analyze Esther's language as a means of expressing her psychological condition.

The main idea behind this paper is that depressive cognition is not only the topic of discussion in *The Bell Jar*; it is, above all, a linguistic construction. The absolutist statements that occur throughout Esther's narration—"felt very still and very empty" (Plath, 1963/1971, p. 3), "if you expect nothing from somebody you are never disappointed" (p. 70)—are not just emotional statements. These are linguistic enactments of a cognitively closed system that cannot tolerate uncertainty, precludes the possibility, and perpetuates the patterns of thinking that perpetuate depression. Language, in this reading, is not a description of the mind. It is a mechanism of the mind.

This paper contends that the language in *The Bell Jar* is not "decorative" or "incidental." It is practical and self-sustaining. The cognitive system producing Esther's narration is tightened by each of her absolutist statements. Every "no" blocks a possibility, each negation annihilates an alternative. Every totalizing claim, restricts the world of interpretation further. Seen through the prism of Beck's cognitive theory, Al-Mosaiwi and Johnstone's psycholinguistic results, and Fowler's mind style, Esther's narrative voice is not only a portrait of a troubled mind, but a linguistic dramatization of it. Readers are not told that Esther is trapped. Rather, they are trapped with her through language.

Literature Review

Aaron Beck's cognitive model has greatly influenced the study of depression in literature. According to Beck (1976), depression is sustained by systematic errors in thinking, known as cognitive distortions. These include overgeneralization, catastrophizing and most relevant to this study, all-or-nothing thinking, which is the tendency to evaluate experience in a binary, absolute way, with no middle ground. Beck's triadic model of negative self-perception, negative world-perception and negative future-perception offers a framework for understanding depressive cognition. In particular, his idea of automatic thoughts, the unqualified mental reactions that the thinker feels to be true, is relevant to literary analysis, as first-person narration in fiction can create an impression of such immediacy. The metaphor in Esther Greenwood's statement, "I felt myself melting into the shadows like the negative of a person I'd never seen before in my life" (Plath, 1963/1971, p. 11) accomplishes the cognitive collapse that Beck describes: a temporary sense of alienation was translated into a total negation of identity.

Cognitive stylistics is the theoretical link between Beck's psychology and literary analysis. It

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is an interdisciplinary subject that deals with the study of mental processes encoded in linguistic structures. According to Stockwell (2002), readers rely on cues in the text to create mental images and that the study of language is therefore tied to the study of cognition. Leech and Short (2007) point out that the stylistic selections made in the composition of a narrative are not neutral, especially when it comes to the first-person perspective. They always carry cognitive and evaluative weight. The most pertinent idea in this tradition is Roger Fowler's idea of "mind style". According to Fowler (1977) it is the language that codes a character's or narrator's worldview. It draws attention away from the narrative towards the manner of its narration. Semino (2002) builds on this framework, proposing that mind style may be used to represent the patterns of perception related to particular cognitive states, such as depression. This study further supports Burke's (2010) argument that literary language is not just a representation of emotion, but essentially a means of engaging the reader's mind and feelings—a point that directly supports the main argument of this study, that Esther's language represents not simply entrapment, but also a means of enacting entrapment at the level of form.

There has been a lot of theoretical momentum for this cognitive approach in literary studies in recent scholarship. Herman (2017) states that narrative is not only a means of telling a story but it is also a primary tool for how the mind models, interprets, and reacts to experience. His framework positions narrative discourse as cognitively active rather than passively descriptive. This is especially relevant to the first-person voice in psychological fiction, as the narrator's language uncovers a mind in distress. In the same way, Zunshine (2015) places cognitive literary studies in the middle of the narrative theory, psychology and linguistics, and contends that the meaning of literary texts is created exactly in the mental states to which readers are invited to simulate and interpret. Both frameworks agree with the methodological premise of this study, namely that reading the language of Esther cognitively is not a critical obligation, but a reaction to the demands of the text.

This framework is supported by empirical studies carried out by Al-Mosaiwi and Johnstone (2018) in their psycholinguistic research. By examining the language patterns of the online mental health communities, they find that people who are depressed, anxious, and suicidal employ much higher rates of absolutist words than do control groups. The words "always," "never," "completely" and "nothing" are used as markers of cognitive inflexibility and dichotomous thinking. Importantly, their results differentiate between the general negative emotionality and absolutist language. Sadness and despair do not characterize psychological distress most accurately within language; rather, it is the rigidity of expression itself that more truly indicates mental distress. This distinction has important consequences for literary analysis that shift the focus of literary criticism from a thematic register of loss to the inflexibility of language structure. When applied to *The Bell Jar*, it produces a category that is concrete, and analytically defensible, that we can use to analyse the narration in Esther in a systematic way. This is supported by the empirical evidence provided by the computational analyses presented in Rude et al. (2004), which showed that identifiable language patterns could be shown to be measurable indices of depressive vulnerability, thereby providing evidence of measurable traces of cognitive processes in discourse.

Responses to *The Bell Jar* have been abundant and generally thematic. In a feminist interpretation, derived from Friedan's (1963) description of "the problem that has no name" (p. 15), the novel is a critique of the social roles that were unavailable to women in mid-twentieth-century America. These readings show the external challenges to Esther but do not view her language as a cognitive system; rather, they treat it as a transparent record of experience. The novel is regarded as autobiographical criticism, particularly by Wagner-Martin (2003), who reads it as a disguised account of Plath's psychiatric breakdown—a contextually valuable approach that nonetheless risks turning the text into biography. This

tendency to read psychological distress thematically rather than linguistically is not confined to Plath scholarship. In their study of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, for instance, Khan and Khattak (2022) offer a richly informed analysis of mental illness, gender, and modernist narrative, demonstrating how Woolf's stream of consciousness technique grants access to the inner lives of psychologically distressed characters such as Septimus Warren Smith and Clarissa Dalloway. Yet despite its psychological sophistication, the study remains within a thematic and feminist critical framework, analyzing what the characters experience rather than how the language of their narration constructs and sustains that experience at the micro-structural level. This methodological pattern—psychologically aware but linguistically underspecified—characterizes a significant portion of the existing scholarship on mental illness in modernist and post-modernist fiction (Khan & Khattak, 2022). These are valuable critical traditions, but they share a methodological limitation: they do not ask how Esther *builds* experience in language—only what she goes through.

This is a real and meaningful gap. The issue is not whether Esther is depressed, but what type of depression she has. The more interesting, less researched, question is how the language that she uses contributes to the creation, maintenance, and communication of that depression. That she speaks of her future describing it like a fig tree, whose fruits “wrinkle and go black” when she sits paralyzed in its branches, is not only a metaphor for vacillation and indecision, but it is also a description of her future as a woman who is sitting paralyzed in the branches of a fig tree (Plath, 1963/1971, p. 91). This amounts to the verbal enactment of catastrophizing, where instead of dealing with a situation in a constructive way, it becomes something absolute and irredeemable. The phrase “If you expect nothing from somebody you are never disappointed” (p. 70) is one of these cases where the power of “nothing” and “never” takes form exactly as the self-defeating reaction that Beck mentions as typical of depression. It cannot simply be explained as style, but rather an example of where language becomes a mode of thought in itself. What is needed here is an approach which can read both language and cognition together. Cognitive stylistics offers such an approach. In this study, it is applied to the narration of Esther Greenwood in order to show that the depressive cognition of the novel is not just another thematic issue. It is part of its linguistic structure.

Methodology

This study uses qualitative interpretive research design with cognitive stylistics approach. Qualitative methodology is suitable since the main objective is to understand the way in which language is used to create psychological experience in a literary work, rather than to quantify or measure language features. As Creswell (2014) says, qualitative research is about meaning—the manner in which people or fictional narrators linguistically describe and make sense of their world. The main source of data is *The Bell Jar* (1963/1971) by Sylvia Plath. Purposive sampling is used to select textual data, which is defined by Patton (2015) as the intentional choice of information-rich cases that are directly relevant to the research purposes. Passages are chosen based on two criteria: First, the presence of absolutist language, and second, the presence of cognitive distortion. Selected passages are taken throughout the psychological journey of the novel from initial confusion through increasing depression to eventual partial recovery, providing analytical coverage of the entire novel. The analytical framework combines three theories: Beck's (1976) cognitive theory of depression, Al-Mosaiwi and Johnstone's (2018) psycholinguistic model of absolutist language, and Fowler's (1977) theory of mind style. Lexical choices, syntactic structures and figurative patterns are analyzed in each passage. Throughout the analysis is interpretive and does not claim clinical or empirical generalization.

Results and Discussion

The narrative of the psychological journey in *The Bell Jar* is clearly organized through Esther Greenwood's use of language, which becomes increasingly distorted throughout. Four intertwined findings emerge from the careful examination of key passages in the text. First, cognitive rigidity is evident in the structure of language, rather than in the explicit language of absolutism. Second, figurative language, and in particular, the fig tree metaphor, serves as a cognitive framework to spatialize and perform misconceptions and distorted thinking, not just describe them. Third, lexical absolutism becomes more pronounced at the psychological nadir of the novel, creating a self-reinforcing system of discursivity that maintains and perpetuates the depressive cognition of the novel. Fourth, the same absolutist cognitive lens applies to both temporal experience and interpersonal perception, which is to say, distortion does not just happen in the perception of the self, but in all of Esther's perceptions of the world. These findings are explored on three levels of analysis: lexico-semantic, syntactic, and figurative.

The narrative consciousness established from the very first pages of the novel is cognitively rigid even before any clearly absolutist lexicon appears. From the very first sentence, the novel places a historically unprecedented event next to the author's admission of perplexity: "IT WAS A QUEER [sic], sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs, and I didn't know what I was doing in New York" (Plath, 1963/1971, p. 1). The grammatical conjunction of the two clauses is highly significant as it shows how the author fails to understand the scale of the discrepancy between the catastrophe of the whole community and her personal perplexity; both events appear to belong to one emotional category. Such distortion of scale is an early example of a distorted perception that forms part of Beck's (1976) cognitive model of depression. The external reality and the narrator's state of mind merge into one plane of consciousness.

This rigidity is further highlighted through Esther's thoughts on silence: "The silence depressed me. It wasn't the silence of silence. It was my own silence" (Plath, 1963/1971, p. 22). It is clear that what is present in the syntactic structure of this sentence is the presence of recurrence—a relationship between the clauses where the ending clause looks backwards to the previous clause, progressively turning from an external to an internal object. Once the point of "my own silence" is reached, all else is subordinated to it, making all other interpretations impossible. Absolute thinking does not always have to be explicitly marked in the language, as noted by Al-Mosaiwi and Johnstone (2018), it can also be found in the broader structure of language. It is a clear example of such a structural absolutism, not coded into the vocabulary, but into the syntax. Esther's mind in this early phase is more inclined towards certainty than complexity, internal perception over external reality. As Beck (1976) claims, these tendencies are precursors to further severe cognitive distortion.

The fig tree metaphor is the most analytically fruitful as well as the most cognitively complex passage in the novel. Esther says: "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" (Plath, 1963/1971, p. 90). The metaphor starts in a generative manner. Indeed, at its core, the concept of branching serves to represent the idea that there is much choice available to the individual, meaning that she lives in a world of possibilities. However, Esther's system of cognition cannot keep up this openness. text continues, "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" (p. 91). Spatial displacement plays an important role. Esther's spatial positioning shifts from the branches that are full of possibilities to the crotch that represents splitting. This new positioning is representative of what Beck (1976) referred to as dichotomous thinking. It is the spot for choice making where paralysis and entrapment rather than agency take place. Choice is transformed into a disaster and catastrophe.

Syntax structure of this text reinforces the cognitive dimension. The rhythm of possibilities is

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generated through repetition of clauses. Each clause mentions different versions of Esther's future self: "a poet," "a brilliant professor," "an Olympic lady" "amazing editor" (Plath, 1963/1971, p. 91). They are both generated and destroyed simultaneously. Figurative nature of this language does not merely illustrate dichotomous thinking which Beck (1976) calls all-or-nothing thinking. Instead, it reinforces the concept through its syntax. As Esther hesitates the figs "wrinkle and go black" (p. 91), turning the future from an open field to a decaying system. Catastrophizing, which Beck (1976) defines as the magnification of potential negative outcomes into absolute inevitabilities, is here given precise figurative form. In the cognitive architecture of this metaphor, a manageable human experience of indecision becomes a death sentence. According to Herman (2017), the narrative structures and represents mental experience. The story in this passage does not demonstrate a healthy mind making a choice. It portrays a mind for which decision is no longer a cognitive possibility.

The highest point of lexical absolutism is found at the psychological nadir of the novel where the depressive cognition is most linguistically prominent. Esther's feeling of being all but emptied as she nears a breakdown is expressed in a simile of total evacuation: "I felt very still and very empty, the way the eye of a tornado must feel" (Plath, 1963/1971, p. 3). The double "very" is not used in the traditional sense of emphasis. It is a totalizing intensifier which takes away all gradation from the emotional experience. The eye of the tornado is a place of complete calm and stillness, while the rest of the area around the center is in destruction—a spatialization of depression as emptiness in the face of catastrophe. Within this specific linguistic environment, however, there is absolutely no intermediate position, that is, no place for mediation whatsoever. Emotional experiences are described only in absolutes, either wholly felt or wholly unfelt. As Al-Mosaiwi and Johnstone (2018) argue, this approach should not be seen simply as the manifestation of negativity, but rather as the expression of emotional experiences without any modality to them whatsoever, and thus as one of the characteristics of depressed speech. As one can see in such statements as, "If you expect nothing from somebody you are never disappointed" (Plath, 1963/1971, p. 70), the two expressions, "nothing" and "never," do not stand separately, but work together as to eliminate any other possibility. Together they construct a closed logical system. The sentence structure is conditional, making it more rational and protective. What it actually means, however, is a cognitive defensive withdrawal, a shutting down of options for connection, partial satisfaction, or even small amounts of trust as described by Beck (1976) in his analysis of negative automatic thoughts. The language of the argument is airtight, and so is the logic of the argument. The absolutist construction creates its own self-confirming enclosure. Zunshine (2015) argues that literary texts generate meaning through the mental states they invite readers to simulate. The mental state this sentence invites readers to simulate is one of complete emotional contraction—a mind that has sealed itself against experience in order to survive it.

Further evidence of this self-reinforcing linguistic system appears in Esther's description of her disintegrating sense of self: "I felt myself melting into the shadows like the negative of a person I'd never seen before in my life" (Plath, 1963/1971, p. 11). The metaphor of the photographic negative is cognitively precise. A negative is an inversion—the reversal of light and dark, presence and absence. To be "the negative of a person" is to be defined entirely by what one is not. This is overgeneralization in its most complete linguistic form.

What is only a fleeting sense of estrangement is made absolute, through the metaphor, into total and permanent inversion of identity. The absolutism is reinforced by the words "never seen before in my life." Esther is not an unknown woman to herself at this time only. Before this, she never has had the opportunity to perceive herself as one complete being. The absoluteness of time, suggested by "never" and "in my life," stretches this sense of fragmentation throughout the entire course of her life, leaving absolutely no space for any

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exceptions.

In addition to the self-distortion, there is a strong temporal distortion in the novel. According to Beck's (1976) observations, depression usually manifests itself as a feeling of "time as frozen" and "time as closed" with present that does not move and future that does not open. This cognitive distortion of time and reality is not merely told in *The Bell Jar*; it is also executed in a stylistic manner. The emotions that Esther experiences are repeated over and over again, but with only minor variations in word choice or expression, and without any real development. This produces a sort of stylistic numbness—a story that moves forward in action and appears to be psychologically paralyzed. This effect is not a random accident with no logic behind it. It is a proper picture of the depressive experience itself.

The distortion of time is most clearly seen in Esther's introspection about her many sleepless nights: "I hadn't slept for twenty-one nights" (Plath, 1963/1971, p. 175). Numbers are cognitively significant due to their specificity. That Esther has not slept for a long time is not the issue. The real issue of significance is that she has tallied each and every night, that time has been made not a flow, but a heap of similar, indistinguishable units. Each individual night is just an echo of the isolation experienced in the last night. The record of sleepless nights signifies a lack of growth and stagnancy. For Esther, there is no movement of time, merely its pressure. The language used here, along with the number of nights without sleep that she spends tossing and turning, creates a continuous loop that mimics eternal stagnation.

Esther does not have a future of possibility, but of suffocation and enclosure. She pictures herself to be "stuffed farther and farther into a black, airless sack with no way out" (Plath, 1963/1971, p. 153). The image is not a vision of a future which is different from the one that has been lived out. It is facing inwards, towards a more finished enclosure. Absolutism of "no way out" is the absence of any possibility of change or exit. This negative future orientation, inability to envision a future that is much different from the current one, is a symptom of depressive thinking, as defined by Beck (1976). This inability is not the only thing that is reflected in the language of Esther. It builds it for herself and for the reader, by totalizing images of enclosure and an absolutist rejection of possibility.

Esther's portrayal of other characters is characterized by evaluative extremes and relational distance. She does not usually fall short of extremes in her opinions. The intimate relations she had are all shown to be alienated and distorted. This especially pertains to her intimate relation with her mother. She says that her mother was "the worst" because she "never scolded" but instead kept "begging me, with a sorrowful face, to tell her what she had done wrong" (Plath, 1963/1971, p. 243). The emotional register is completely unambiguous and complete. There are no complexities about her; she is simply the worst. This is interpersonal overgeneralization, which is the process of making a single totalizing judgement about a complex interpersonal relationship. It is the mental equivalent of the all-or-nothing thinking that controls Esther's perception of herself. Likewise, Esther sees all her visitors as judging and measuring her, "measuring my fat and stringy hair against what I had been and what they wanted me to be" (p. 243). The negative interpersonal schemas, which Beck (1976) describes as central to depressive cognition, are all present in the negative reinterpretation of neutral or well-intentioned interpersonal contact.

The distancing function of pronouns is also analytically important here. According to Fowler (1977), the choices made about grammar are intricately tied into the process of consciousness building. The novel's use of "they" and "them" to refer to the social world in which Esther lives is a linguistic distancing from the self and other that contributes to her cognitive isolation throughout the novel. When she looks at the other patients in the psychiatric institution, she does not refer to them as people with whom she shares an experience. She observes them with the same detachment that she employs to observe strangers. The use of pronouns in such a detached way cannot simply be a literary device. It reflects a thought

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process—one that is reflected through language.

The language that Esther uses when she appears to connect with someone reflects the fact that in reality, this connection is threatening rather than sustaining. After she takes on an alter ego, “Elly Higginbottom” of Chicago, she thinks, “After that I felt safer. I didn’t want anything I said or did that night to be associated with me and my real name” (Plath, 1963/1971, p. 13). This is structural absolutism, not lexical. There can be no safety without the elimination of identity. She cannot cognitively engage in partial concealment or selective disclosure, which is the typical process of social interaction. This is not shyness or social anxiety in the common sense of the word. It is a thinking style where being oneself is a form of vulnerability and risk. The language works this out quietly, and, as Stockwell (2002) would say, it places the reader in the condition of loneliness it describes.

The novel’s final pages indicate some tentative and partial change in this mental state. The bell jar is up, says Esther. She is able to breathe again. The repetition of “I am, I am, I am” (Plath, 1963/1971, p. 289), echoing the sound of heartbeats, establishes an unstable, yet a genuine connection with oneself. One needs to bear in mind that the absolutistic nature of the language used in the novel becomes increasingly apparent towards its end. The all-encompassing force of the statements made by Esther gives way, allowing for an instance of possible interpretation for the very first time in Esther’s life. From the perspective of Beck’s (1976) cognitive theory of recovery, it is a matter of weakening of the negative schemas rather than their defeat. The bell jar is not broken; it just gets lifted, though this lifting is temporary and partial. Indeed, the way in which the language describes Esther’s recovery process is far from absolute. Instead of saying that the cognitive distortions were removed from her mind completely, she says that they receded. What is even more important, it is the process of the partial recovery of Esther that finds its reflection in the language with the same precision with which her previous mental state was reflected. It is in this context that Fowler’s mind style becomes an extremely valuable analytical tool.

Conclusion

The present study has illustrated how the topic of depressive cognition in *The Bell Jar* goes beyond the theme and is a matter of language itself. By using cognitive stylistics analysis which involves theories of cognitive approach by Beck (1976), psycholinguistic findings by Al-Mosaiwi and Johnstone (2018) and mind-style concept by Fowler (1977), the paper has shown how the narrator’s language in *The Bell Jar* is built around cognitive distortions. Absolutist language, recursion, totalizing metaphor and distancing techniques combine to create a discourse which is hermetically sealed in a way that not only symbolizes but performs depression. This language does not depict the bell jar. This language is the bell jar. The study has also established the usefulness of interdisciplinary methodology in literary studies. With cognitive stylistics, one can freely engage both in theoretical discourse and literary form without reducing either of the two. Literary narrative becomes an area where cognitive processes are not only mirrored but acted out. *The Bell Jar* is a prime example of this idea in practice. Its major contribution to literature does not lie in its biographical nature nor its feminist ideology, but rather in its linguistics significance. Through her writing, Plath creates a narrative voice whose grammar captures the very state of mind it is attempting to capture. Thus, in this process, she renders depression as something legible in a way that is impossible for clinical diagnosis to achieve.

Recommendations

Several directions are available to pursue further study on the topic based on this paper. To begin, the cognitive stylistic analysis used to analyze *The Bell Jar* could be applied to literary texts featuring mental illness by authors like Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and

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David Foster Wallace, to test whether the same patterns of absolutist language and cognitive distortions emerge within those texts as well. Next, the qualitative method of analysis employed in this paper could be effectively combined with the quantitative approach based on computational analysis of corpora, thereby adding another level of evidence for the interpretative patterns found in this paper. Subsequently, future research might examine the relationship between narrative perspective and cognitive distortion in comparative terms—analyzing how third-person narration of mental illness differs linguistically from first-person narration. Finally, the framework developed here could be applied to contemporary autofiction dealing with depression and anxiety, where the boundaries between fictional consciousness and authorial cognition are deliberately and productively blurred.

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