

Susana Kaysen: *Girl, Interrupted*

Reviewed by Stephanie Colwell

Susana Kaysen's memoir *Girl, Interrupted* is a look at mental health and womanhood in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The timing of its consumption on my part was convenient; this semester, I was having my own look at mental health and womanhood in a college career that seems to be lasting a century. Because of that, this book is comforting. The descriptions of Kaysen's unique neuroses felt like looking at my reflection in a window—of course the words were describing her, but I could still see myself. I felt her mental racing and dragging. I felt the dread of wanting to stop the thoughts but knowing I can't but being sure that I can but really, I can't. Those thoughts make me feel alienated, but with reading them came comfort. Sort of. As much comfort as you can have with your mood disorder. But the book also allowed me to step away from my own woes for a minute and step into late 1960s patriarchy, which, believe it or not, was worse than the patriarchy now. *Girl, Interrupted* embodies the phrase that is often the first out of the professor's mouth in any Women's Studies class that you take: the personal is political. Susana Kaysen's experience with the mental health system is not a solitary one, and the vestiges of the gender notions that drove the unfortunate events of her two-year hospitalization (including the hospitalization itself) linger today. The New York Times wrote of the book, "When women are angry at men, they call them heartless. When men are angry at women, they call them crazy." As a woman, I know this to be true, and with her memoir, Kaysen shows readers that there's a history behind that. In an age of feminism and rising mental health awareness, this book couldn't be more important.