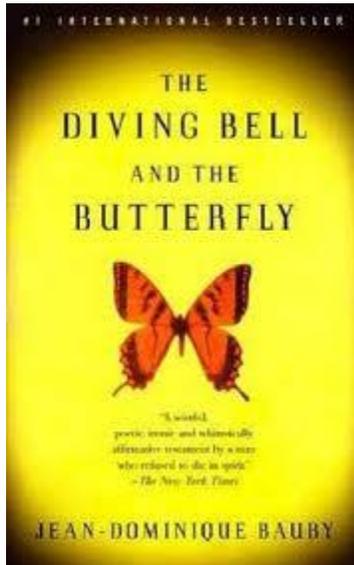


*The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (1997), by Jean-Dominique Bauby

Reviewed by Zareena Yasmeen

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This is a memoir of a man afflicted by lock-in-syndrome; a state of total paralysis that leaves the victim, in the authors' own words "imprisoned in my own body." He was the editor-in-chief of a French magazine named, *Elle* and the father of two young children. He was loved for his witty style and poignant approach to life. In 1995, Jean-Dominique Bauby at the age of 43 years suffered a rare kind of massive brain stem stroke and went into a state of coma for 20 days and then woke up from it with a body that left him completely paralyzed except for his left eyelid that blinked and an intact intellect. And it made possible for him to "dictate" through eye blink system and an alphabet board, the book "The Diving Bell

and the Butterfly" which is an extraordinary testimony to human courage and dignity. He died only two days later after the publication of his book in France.

It is an intriguing narrative of personal illness and tragedy in which Bauby uses the image of a diving bell to describe his encased existence and butterfly is his fantasy of being able to fly freely and escape from his present suffering. In the book, the author shows us new ways the human spirit can prevail over adversity; how an ordinary brave man can retain dignity and assert his creativity in a beautiful way even when confronting his own suffering. Bauby symbolizes his determination to live fully in his mind as he had been able to live in his body by transferring his pain and despair into creativity. Although the thesis is not readily apparent in the book but it still tries to capture the reader through its gripping reminisces of the author's past life and his compensatory fantasies of the present. The scope of the memoir revolves round Bauby's feeling regarding his life before and after the stroke and disability.

However, the book is sometimes confusing due to the flying thoughts of Bauby that strive to appreciate life despite its debilitating affliction that has shattered his life. The memoir projects Bauby's unconditional love to use ability to dictate the truth of life. Most of the time, the book has used rhetoric to encourage the reader to consider the Bauby's message and viewpoint which sometimes is confusing to read and hard to understand. The book is about appreciating life and transforming the human pain and despair into creativity. The strong will and boundless courage of Bauby encourages the reader to be grateful to life in its adversities also.

Moreover, the book is a communication from a mind imprisoned in an unresponsive body and is remarkable for the utter lack of self-pity or sentimentality. Worries are a part of the human life however, by reading this book I have learnt that we must accept the trials, triumphs, and tribulations as a part of being alive. And whenever adversity shows up we must take responsibility of the adversity by giving it love and kindness rather than resentment.

Lastly, as a student, I feel that the laborious task of dictating this book typifies Bauby's desire to give something of him to others. Furthermore, Bauby showed us new ways the human spirit can prevail over adversity. Through his brief entries, Bauby reminds us to treasure life's sensual and personal experiences. And even when confronting his own suffering and demise, Bauby retained his dignity and asserted his creativity in a beautiful way. Moreover, he still kept in touch with himself and the reality of the life around him despite travelling far off in his fantasies as a butterfly. Thus, this remarkable memoir provides us inspiration to enjoy life and to pursue one's goals within the context of one's ability.