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The Bell Jar's Artistic Exploration of Depression: A Study of Sylvia Plath's Poetics and Feminist Identity

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Abstract: The melancholy and complex book "The Bell Jar," written by Sylvia Plath, is renowned for its creative examination of depression and its connections to feminism and Sylvia Plath's poetic form. This analysis dives into how seriously mental illness is handled in the book, highlighting how it affects the protagonist's psyche and her battles with identity and social expectations. The study examines how women are portrayed and the social pressures they face via a feminist viewpoint, revealing how gender norms were restricted in mid-20th-century America.

Keywords: Sylvia Path, Feminism, Confessional Poetry, Mental Health, Depression

Happiness: a difficult restriction. Something that Sylvia Plath fought for throughout her life and embodied into The Bell Jar. We learn more about her life as we read and observe how lack of moral support, sexism, and her continual sense of failure results in her dwelling into a serious depression that completely controls her life.. Esther is a character with a lot of instability, which fits with this novel's instability. Plath made numerous attempts at suicide both before and after writing the book. The incident hadn't actually transpired until 1963. Sylvia Plath additionally inspects Esther Greenwood's exploration for identity during her first marriage to Buddy Willard, her battles with her mental illness, and the revival of grief in 'The Bell Jar' by drawing on 1950s expectations for young women. Esther Greenwood is the main character of The Bell Jar. She believed that despite her best attempts, she was unable to fit in with others around her. Despite this, she worked really hard and is highly intelligent. After graduating from college, she had recently been awarded a scholarship at a Ladies Day magazine in New York. Esther, who belongs to the middle class, struggles to keep up with others around her. She nevertheless put in a lot of effort and is quite brilliant. She had recently earned a scholarship at a Ladies Day magazine in New York after finishing college. Middle-class Esther finds it difficult to keep up with others around

her. She starts obsessing over the Rosenbergs and always appears to be thinking about them. It is unknown why the Rosenbergs were electrocuted. She couldn't possibly envision having it happen to her because it was her biggest dread. Esther had a peculiar fixation with dying all her life. When she learned what had occurred, the tale followed her wherever she went like a ghost. Who died didn't matter as much to Esther as how they perished did. She was especially disturbed by the actual killing of the Rosenbergs. Esther believed she was the only one responsible for what was going on in her head, but there were actually many other elements at play. Her father's passing when she was nine years old was a significant factor. Esther's father is a memory that keeps coming back throughout her life. She never recovered from the loss of her father. Esther has a strong connection to death, which significantly contributes to her depression.

Buddy Willard, the character in *The Bell Jar*, was Esther's only boyfriend, and they had a future together. He was extremely bright, gregarious, and attractive to everyone. From a distance, he appeared to have all of these admirable traits, but up close, he was disingenuous and exuded a feeling of macho superiority. Esther was consistently made to feel foolish, insecure, and uneducated by him. She always felt that she had to match Buddy's self-assurance, but she was incapable on both a mental and physical level. He cheats on Esther as she makes every effort to meet his standards. Buddy drove Esther, who was already quite unstable, over the brink and she was unable to recover. He was her sole chance to have a marriage in the 1950s and fit in with society. As a result of him, Esther had lost all hope in herself. Women's expectations in the 1950s were extremely high and challenging to meet. Esther has struggled to blend in with the so-called "normal" her whole life since she is an outsider. As she starts her internship, she quickly becomes aware of how unique her life is contrasted to that of those around her and succumbs to the pressure. Esther was unprepared for the real world as she grew up in a modest house with few resources. When she started her college career, she was lucky to have moved above the middle class and received a scholarship. New Yorkers find the city fascinating and intriguing.

Despite her best efforts, she struggles to balance to her new life. Esther finds her new house to be disorienting, exhausting, and sad. Esther was also a writer, but she didn't know where to begin because she knew there was a whole universe out there waiting to be discovered. Plath describes how Esther was aware of tremendous prospects for herself but was unable to act since she was never specific in her search. It appears that her classmates have more confidence in her than she does. Esther wants to learn new things and experience things she's only ever dreamed about. However, she is now plagued by indecision that takes her nowhere but confusion and makes her doubt her goals.

Growing up as a woman in Esther's day, there were rigid expectations for both men and women regarding sex roles. Women were under a lot of pressure to get married, make wonderful wives, and raise children at home. Despite her best efforts, Esther was never confident enough to live up to these standards. Esther's concern that she would not make a suitable wife since she cannot cook, is too tall, lacks patience, and dances clumsily and badly is one of the factors contributing to her sadness. She believes she will never live up to the expectations placed on her. Esther still feels out of place in whatever she does as you read the book. Esther lacks confidence and constantly undermines herself, thus she cannot point to just one item she excels at. As the story progresses, Esther tries dating and eventually meets someone she can envision herself with. When she learns she has been cheated on, her self-esteem is already low. Esther felt the tiniest glimmer of optimism that she was finally assimilating into society. She reached rock bottom when it was abruptly taken away from her and was unable to recover. With little hope left, Esther was driven to examine everything in her life even more. A glass bell-shaped lid known as a bell jar is used to protect fragile goods. It represents Esther's melancholy and the urge to safeguard her as the precious item. Her perspective on life is distorted, and she is left alone with her thoughts. She tries so hard to get away, but she just can't.

Esther was surrounded by her drabness and pessimism. She feels as though a bell jar is hovering over her, ready to break at any moment, even after electroshock therapy clears her mind. Esther's darkest dread is described in the book's opening phrase. Esther felt ill at the notion of being electrocuted. Irony begins to show up in the narrative when you least expect it. Esther is admitted to a mental facility as her sadness worsens during the narrative. When the staff members of the hospital subject her to electroshock therapy in order to treat her, she must confront her anxieties.

Esther believed that because it hurt and left her feeling disoriented, this was more of a punishment than a way to heal her. She could hardly keep a thought together and had lost her intelligence. The irony in the bell jar is that in addition to experiencing her worst nightmare, Esther also lost what little of herself she still had. In the 1950s, Sylvia Plath goes into great depth about Esther's life, including her battles with sex roles and finding her own identity. Esther finds it more difficult to obtain the assistance she requires because of the historical period that the novel is set in. Women were held to greater standards than before. Like Esther, the entire work lacks stability and an understanding of its own purpose.

Feminist Dreams and Themes of Power

She crafted strong concepts and the events exposing them, which was the most effective way to convey her narrative and, moreover, the sentiments of both her protagonist and herself. The limits put on women in the 1950s, the meaninglessness of societal presumptions, and the use of suffering as a catalyst for progress are just a few of the critical and well-known issues she brought up. Unsettling circumstances, the viewpoints of key and supporting characters, and Esther's own personal thoughts were used to portray these ideas. Her treatment of her topic served as the book's main focus from start to finish.

In the 1950s, there were a lot of exaggerated notions about what "ideal" women should be like in terms of their personalities, looks, and core goals. The culture at the period severely repressed women, and they were supposed to be positive, adaptive, and content with their roles as wives and mothers. They had to give up everything in order to fit into the pretendedly perfect mould that the world had created.. We may presume that Plath also exhibited Esther's trait of alienation from females who had undergone such metamorphoses: she did not agree with such unwilling alteration of the personality.

But she was constantly compelled to question if she really wishes to live the life she was led to want—one in which she would marry a gorgeous guy, provide for him, and start a family. The readers could clearly see the direction she intended to go because of her aspirational personality and love of writing. On the other side, characters like Buddy Willard did not agree with Esther despite his powerful sentiments for her. As his harsh criticism on Esther's dreams and desire to, according to Esther, brainwash her with marriage, were typical qualities of gentlemen back then, Plath utilises his character to symbolise the attitudes of most men of the period.

This topic of defying the conventional perception of women is skillfully developed throughout the novel through a variety of different relationships, people, viewpoints, and events, giving the reader a fresh and insightful perspective on women both then and now. In all honesty, it is obvious that Esther was hailed as a hero more for rejecting these ideas than for adopting them.

Distancing, suffering, and unimaginable tragedy

Pain, emptiness, unreality, and living as a whole are some of Plath's other masterfully woven themes. Esther experiences a pervasive atmosphere of unreality and emotional emptiness, and her life and the environment in which she lives appear painfully staged. This is a factor that finally pushes her towards suicide behaviour. She makes it clear that she would prefer to cease to exist rather than endure a fabricated life.

Since Plath committed suicide at the early age of 30, it is clear that She had a really serious conviction that this was true.. Contrary to Plath, Esther did succeed in making a major recovery. With the proper use of psychiatric medicine and placement in a number of mental institutions where she made friends and spoke with a talented female therapist by the name of Dr. Nolan, she was able to restore her stable mental condition. Since she was nine years old, she had thought that this was not conceivable. Esther's journey from slithering into the abysses of madness to crawling out of them was expertly and meticulously created by Plath.

With the exception of the fact that in her story, the hero and the villain both exist in one person and throughout society as a whole, she crafted it in the manner of a hero's journey. It is all the more satisfying when Esther is able to overcome her mental instability since her profound and rather misunderstood anguish seems to be the catalyst for her healing. It's probable that Plath had this in mind when she wrote Esther, and that's why she succeeded in retrieving her life from the bell jar metaphor and doing so. The Bell Jar was skillfully written by Sylvia Plath in a style that appeals to her readers' hearts as much as their eyes. Both the senses and the mind are delighted by her many and insightful analogies.

Esther's tale is gloomy, menacing, and even tragic. But it also works well for motivating, uplifting, and inspiring others. We are given an unrestricted entry to Esther Greenwood's confused mind, and in many ways, to Plath herself, by recounting the narrative from a personal and reflective first-person point of view. Esther stands out from the crowd because she struggles to manage her sadness while refusing to conform to societal norms. This, in my opinion, makes her a hero of her day and a deserving inspiration for everyone striving to survive in a society bound by predetermined roles and the laws that go along with them.

Conclusion

“The Bell Jar” is a magnificent creative examination of feminism, despair, and Sylvia Plath’s unique poetics. Plath explores the nuances of mental illness and illustrates its isolating and suffocating impact on the human psyche through the eyes of her protagonist Esther Greenwood. She creates a narrative with a brilliant language style that conveys the profound depths of despair while also providing a glimmer of hope and resiliency.

The book also sheds light on the 1950s social restrictions placed on women, offering a stinging feminist critique of the era. By revealing the oppressive expectations and demands placed on women to fit into a predetermined mould, Plath questions traditional gender roles. Esther’s path of self-discovery and empowerment is a metaphor for the hardships of other women who are trying to rebel against repressive standards.

Through the book’s brilliant imagery and eerie analogies, Sylvia Plath’s lyrical sense is evident. Her vivid writing takes the tale above the level of a simple autobiographical account, turning it into a timeless piece of literature that appeals to readers of all ages.

In addition to its honest depiction of sadness and how it intersects with feminism, “The Bell Jar” is still regarded as a timeless masterpiece due to its significant contributions to literature and our understanding of mental illness.

Because of Plath's artistic brilliance, her voice will go on, inspiring and illuminating people who face comparable struggles or try to understand the human condition at its most vulnerable.

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