



The Bell Jar by Sylvia Plath
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This book.

It is so incredibly haunting and raw, yet it was also beautifully written with its complex poetry and metaphors. Plath is a deeply emotional writer who is capable of making us hate and love Esther at the same time. This semi-autobiographical novel portrays a young woman's struggle with severe depression, and how even when surrounded by success and money she still feels the suffocating grips of the 'bell jar.'

There's a stark contrast of life and death in the story, the fig tree metaphor shows the confusing nature of growing up and having to decide the path you want to take for the rest of your life. But the falling figs represent the overwhelming urge to have every career and experience, while the reality is that one cannot have everything. The rotting fruit symbolises that the wrong choice causes failure.

Moreover, Esther's idea of her success culminates in 19 paths. When she is falling into the worst of her depression; she jumps from 19 distinct life's. Plath builds on this through Esther's immense desire to end her life, she hasn't slept for three weeks and her motivation to take care of herself has diminished; as the bell jar's protruding voice has told her that life is 'silly'. Esther has grown numb, and she is in a cycle of isolation and dissociation. She sees death as the only ending to her suffering. I found the parts that described her suicide attempts extremely painful to read. As someone who's been suicidal in the past; it talked to the dark part of my brain that I had been running from.

The 19 blades Esther wants to use to die reflect the 19 possible paths she could take in life. Here Plath is blurring the lines between life and death as the number 19 shows expresses how depression becomes the person, making them feel highs and lows, but really it is all a form of self-harm and destruction to the person.

I also struggle seeing how mental illness was treated in the 1950s. Dr Gorden's shock treatment and poor therapy reflects the lack of understanding that society had on mental

health and the continual use of words like 'nut' and 'them' creates a monster like image for people with mental illness. We only see any actual progress for Esther when Philomena Guinea places her in a private hospital. (Although they still call it an asylum which is its own problem!)

At the hospital Esther finally finds a therapist that works for her, and she was able to make progress, even though her end goal was just to get out of the hospital. I really enjoyed Doctor Nolan as she treated Esther as a human, and she used good methods to help her.

While Esther is still in New York, Plath hints at her expression through things like intoxication of herself, like in a steaming hot bath. She loves its cleansing benefits and how she submerges herself in its power. As well as this her disassociation at the parties makes it evident that she is unable to handle the social situations. She doesn't realise why she can't enjoy them, and as she sees them as fake and meaningless. Another example is when she is subconsciously angry that there is no window in her room, because it means there's no option to jump, and we also see that she hates being alone as it "wasn't the silence that bothered me It was my own silence." We see that when she's surrounded by people, she is trapped in her own head.

Esther is angry that she's in the hospital, and she doesn't utterly understand that it's okay to be unwell when there's nothing outwardly wrong. This is key when she can't stop taking her temperature just to see if she is physically ill. She says, "I would rather have anything wrong with my body than something wrong with my head."

One part I found interesting, was Esther's desire to lose her virginity. It begins with her relationship with Buddy Willard, who she discovers is a hypocrite as he is not a virgin. This experience shows her the injustice of men and women. She is angry that men can go around sleeping with any woman and not have to face a consequence; but if a woman where to do that, she would end up pregnant, or shunned for not being 'pure'.

To have sex, Esther would gain power and a choice, and the moment that she goes to bed with a man, is the ultimate moment of change for her.

Just after losing her virginity; Esther begins to bleed profusely, referencing historical brides who bled on their marriage bed. Plath is illustrating Esther's sacrifice as she removes what haunted her. It also reminds us of her so called 'cleansing' of herself. Her sacrifice is like her being reborn into something better.

Esther's taken her own freedom as she obtains illegal birth control and becomes satisfied with the fact that she doesn't have the burden of pregnancy or a husband anymore. She spent the novel running from that stereotypical life that was set out for her, and the removal of bearing a child allows her to be sexually free and it gives her the control instead of a man.

Overall, this has become my upmost favourite book, the 'Bell Jar' was a metaphor for Esther's and Sylvia Plath's own depression. It has a suffocating quality that forces its victims to live in a shell of self-pity and depression, making them lose sight of life's meaning and the happiness they once had. The story's narration is aberrant and derisive, making readers think deeply about their own happiness and mortality. My intrusive thoughts gradually increased with Esther's breakdown, making my own depression worse as I developed Esther's thoughts.

It is so hard to fully express the impact this book made on me, I feel that I am one with it, my soul has absorbed it. I will say it's not an easy read, it is one that will tear you in half and make you question yourself. But it is a masterpiece of literature, and I cannot credit Plath enough for her work, I am ready to tackle her poetry and discover more pain and beauty

from its murky contents. I love this book. I love it, and I will always wonder if Esther ever got out of the hospital, or if she is still trapped in the Bell Jar, trying with all her efforts to escape...