

# Emotional Complications in Sylvia Plath's the Bell Jar

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**Abstract:** Emotional complications are the result of childhood trauma. These kinds of problems will reflect during the teenage period. They are associated with illness. In this novel the protagonist reflects the darker side of Plath, she is a voice form, from her negative side. She is also the well-bred oldest child in a typical family with two children. She is a budding intellectual who is later a sexually confused adolescent and finally, she becomes a mental patient. She is desperately in need of help to change herself from the state of adolescence into adulthood. She continues to cut herself off from others and also from her own feelings. She always feels all alone. Her world becomes grayer when she finds herself with more conflict. As a result, she becomes depressed about herself.

**Keywords:** Childhood trauma, depression, illness, reality.

## 1. Introduction

Until the 1970s the American literature's fiction did not have much of prolific women characters. It had only few and they were created by women authors. These women characters in the fiction did not speak their minds. They did not tell the readers about the vast and complex nature of the American culture. No parallels were found to Jane Austen's Elizabeth from *Pride and Prejudice* which created a vacuum. It is probably this vacuum in the American literature that made *The Bell Jar's* protagonist so popular.

## 2. Emotional Complications

Esther Greenwood, the protagonist of the novel, *The Bell Jar*. She is a college going girl with the remark of a good student. She is a talented writer, and a fashion magazine contest winner. She is also the well-bred oldest child in a typical family with two children. She is a budding intellectual who is later a sexually confused adolescent and finally, she becomes a mental patient. She is desperately in need of help to change herself from the state of adolescence into adulthood. She continues to cut herself off from others and also from her own feelings. She always feels all alone, she believes that her father might have helped her out but, she sighs that he died long ago. Her world becomes grayer when she finds herself with more conflict. As a result, she becomes depressed about herself. After her experience in New York City, she encounters severe mental breakdown, and, eventually, she takes sleeping pills which is an

almost fatal suicide attempt. When Esther is under treatment, the readers find that she is not in charge of her own life. She feels that she is in a bell jar. Esther is the darker side of Plath, she is a voice form, from her negative side. Plath is best recognized for her poetry but she also committed suicide when she was thirty. Reading about Plath's life makes it clear that in *The Bell Jar*, originally published under the pseudonym of Victoria Lucas. In this novel, Plath was recording much of her personal experience, very lightly as a form of fiction. Plath attended Smith College and went to New York City in her junior year as a winner of a Mademoiselle writing contest; she tried to commit suicide with an overdose of sleeping pills, and she was hospitalized before finally finishing college. So this book is a documentary of Plath's college years. The knowledge that Plath eventually killed herself affects the reading of this book. All the empathy and sympathy for Esther is tinged by the fact that the readers know that, eventually, Plath did not recover.

Esther lacks from the help of support system in life. She does not have any counselor to lead her through her life. Though she was well educated, it does not help her either. This is because of her less experience in her field which does not let to gain the wisdom. When she loses her virginity she hemorrhages badly. She loses blood continuously which proves that she does not have any control over her body too. This incident creates the fear of body and it leads to her attempt of suicide. Her illnesses underlie the philosophical problems and not having control over her body is one of the major problems she faces. So decides to put an end to it through the thought of suicide. She becomes addict to the thought of suicide because she believes that it is the only way to relieve her pain. She also thinks suicide as an easier method and solution to all her fears and problems. Esther is thus afraid of life and afraid of death, she is also afraid of success and afraid of failure. When these fears give her acute pain, the ideas of death and joining her father in the grave seem to be the best solution.

Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, is filled with the fear of death. A jar is usually defined as an object to preserve things but in Esther's case it becomes a trap. The bell jar itself denotes an entrapment. This entrapment is like being inside a jar or a cocoon or a jail or even a suffocating tomb. When Esther finds

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it difficult to come out of these maze of conflicts and fear she tries to attempt suicide. This becomes an issue of freedom from a suffocating place, where her soul is already dead. Esther has a fear for life. Her suicidal attempt is not she is afraid of death but life itself. This is because she finds that life is filled with more of anxiety and she is handicapped to deal with it. It results in death instinct where Plath also does to overcome her problems. This is the state of confinement which Plath also faces.

Several instances are given in the novel where Esther imagines as if she is confined, she imagines herself as a character in a short story and she finds it difficult to choose the characters because they represent different career path. All these characters are trapped up and they are unable to overcome their critical situation. The place where Esther is found after her attempt of suicide also looks like a confinement, she was found in a basement. This is the scene where she is really trapped and the remaining trapped incidents are mostly her imaginations. Her confinement state is emotional and psychological. It is more obvious that it is because of her mental illness. Eventually, when Esther regains her mental health, she also regains some of the abilities. She begins to approach her conflicts with more knowledge. She no longer sticks to her past. She begins to face her complexions in life and feels as if she is free from her trap. She begins a healthy life but with a caution, because she knows that her mental illness may descend again in the future.

Esther's struggle throughout the novel looks heroic because she is able to sustain the traumas in her life. She also triumphs in it. Her desire to die rather than to live might be a false interpretation because her fate has something else for her life.

Esther attains her maturity through the course of the novel. She is not like any other fictional women character that gets married and begins to run a family. Plath breaks the conventional portrayal of women through Esther. She comes out of her mental illness, gains strength to survive and increases her confidence for life. She knows about the world of fashion but she found difficulty to survive in it. She finds that it is filled with darkness. She is also a failure in her relationship with men. These relationships which had to be filled with trust, romance and meaningful results in misunderstand and distrust. So she gets to understand that the world is unreal. This expression of unreal world grows in her mind and becomes unbearable.

### 3. Conclusion

Throughout the novel, Esther tries to find out her reason of life. She excelled in her academic courses by winning many prizes and scholarships but all these success becomes meaningless when she becomes mentally ill. Though her academic success gave her happiness it did not last for a longer time. She begins to feel helpless when she could not succeed in her career. Her mental illness leads her to explore between mind and body. According to her suicide is the final consequence to free her from the world. Esther or Sylvia Plath their life and tragedy can become other people's salvation.

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