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Alienated Subjectivity in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*

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Abstract

This article has analyzed Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar to explore the resilient personality of Esther Greenwood that exemplifies the image of nonconformist women in the patriarchal society of America. Esther has been prepared to fight against the standards of femininity induced in the personality of general women. She stands out of the crowd for her dignity. The objective of the paper has been to investigate into the characters created to reveal diverse images of women in the American society. The key finding of the research is that Esther during her professional journey undergoes diverse complications primarily created for women to suffer from and imposed upon them by the male-dominated society. She has not experienced any solace of life neither at home has nor she been satisfied in the society at large. Therefore, she feels isolated. Her alienation leads to attempting for suicide as she takes it as the way of relief and mental satisfaction. Her decision of taking her own life implies her desperation and disinterestedness in the world controlled by men. By using the concept of Betty Friedman as expressed in The Feminine Mystique, this paper has been inscribed to reflect on the confused personality of Esther.

Keywords: Femininity, dignity, alienation, psyche and construction

Introduction

This paper examines the views of different critics on Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, a novel that recasts the life profile of the author. The alienated life that Plath lives up is reemphasized in the light of the critical observations. The construction of Esther as a character reveals the mirror of Sylvia Plath. Whatever Esther experiences in the plot implies to the bitter experience of the novelist. Plath herself undergoes numerous trials and tribulations as depicted in *The Bell Jar*. How societal and cultural values oblige individuals to harm themselves for mental satisfaction as exemplified in the case of Esther Greenwood, the protagonist of the novel is the paramount aspect of discussion in this paper. According to Anne Lucas Gomez, not all women feel cheerful living this sort of life and, after a few time, they realize that they feel purge indeed in the event that they keep doing chores all day. This circumstance of sex disparity, family and social weight towards women and misery is upbraided by Betty Friedman within *The Feminine Mystique*. The life of Esther, the major protagonist has lived an extraordinary life that normal women cannot lead in patriarchy. The societal and cultural challenges that Esther has come across are assessed in the reading. In addition, Plath reflects the uneasiness and dissatisfaction that the circumstance causes to youthful women ladies within the character of Esther Greenwood from *the Bell Jar* (2021, p.

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3). Human beings are the culprits of their social and cultural backgrounds. It is quite challenging for individuals to go beyond the surrounding particularly women in the male-controlled society as experienced by Plath.

Discussion

The paper assesses the personality development of Esther Greenwood who is the mouthpiece of the novelist. Her journey begins from ignorance and lasts to the experience that teaches her about treacheries and conspiracies of patriarchy that tends to shallow Esther's subjectivity. Hence, for the sake of her subjectivity, she challenges the standards set for women expected to be more feminine than humane. The emotions that the creator felt are communicated in *The Bell Jar*. Plath makes a youthful female character that acts as an expression of her profound sentiments towards American society. Esther offers with the group of onlookers the uneasiness and fear that she feels almost her future since she is anticipated to be a characterized sort of woman that she is not beyond any doubt in case she needs to be. The social desires that cause Esther uneasiness are the result of the "feminine mystique" that Friedan censures in her book. For Esther, the primary individual who instills on her the thought of the idealized woman is her mother. Mrs. Greenwood persuades Esther that she must be the culminate understudy in arrange to get the leading capabilities (Gomez, 2021, p. 6). The parental expectations enforce girls to experiment on their self as in the case of Esther. The novel reads:

My mother kept telling me nobody wanted a plain English major. But an English major who knew shorthand was something else again. Everybody would want her. She would be in demand among all the up-and-coming young men and she would transcribe letter after thrilling letter" (*The Bell Jar*, p. 40)

Esther reveals her experience with her mother who imposes her choices and ideas on her daughter regardless of her choices. The relationship between the mother and Esther is balanced and reciprocal. Whatever the mother has internalized is handed down to her daughter. Because of this trend, Esther is bound to feeling emotional isolated from her own mother. She speaks, "The trouble was, I hated the idea of serving men in any way. I wanted to dictate my own thrilling letters" (*The Bell Jar*, p. 40). She has been pressurized to learn about how to serve men which she cannot understand anymore. Hence, she expresses her desire for independence from the marital status wherein she has to serve the men even at the cost of her personal esteem. Therefore, she rethinks about the marriage by recalling the experience with Buddy Wilard. "Because I did look down on Buddy Wilard, and although everybody still thought I would marry him when he came out of the TB place, I knew I would never marry him if he were the last man on earth" (*The Bell Jar*, p. 28). She is not interested in marrying this man as she dreads the consequence of marriage.

In the view of Kristin Lyons, Plath's heroes beneath a few changes in their personalities and they modify their activities to fit the form set for them by their families, spouses, places of living, and societal values. As each woman wrestles with her genuine self, perusers must take after closely to get a handle on onto the mental travel in which the heroes set out. At

times, it is troublesome to observe which of the protagonists' strategies of expression reflect their genuine characters, or in case they are only items of their situations (2020, pp. 4-5). Each woman features a slipping get a handle on her possess character; she ceaselessly wrestles with names and questions her put inside her society. Their need of a character oozes a sense of deadness and issues with space and course. These battles stem from the characters' perceptions almost societal parts, gentility, and mental wellness. As Plath's composing advances, so do her dull topics of mental sickness and character battles, and her heroes persistently discover themselves stuck in their possess individual limbo, drifting perpetually in a vat of nothingness and getting a handle on at unmistakable considerations and short lived undertakings to deliver them any minor sense of self (Lyons, 2020). The protagonists accomplish their ventures for character all through her composing, most frequently comparing themselves to measures set by men. "Stone Boy with Dolphin", composed around 1957 and 1958, too presents a numb and withdrawn hero, who gives herself with hindering names based on how she accepts she shows up through the male look.

In spite of the fact that Ellen's life contrasts from Esther's, Ellen's uncertainties are comparative to Esther's within *The Bell Jar*, at her summer internship, Esther feels out of putting another to the wealthier young women within the program, and she may only truly distinguish with Betsy, who the other young women call a "cowgirl" (*The Bell Jar*, p. 6). Esther has dreams she feels are as well distant from her reach, dreams that offer to distinctive aspects of her character. She sits, gazing at all of them until she envisions they are not achievable (*The Bell Jar*, p. 77). Like Esther, Ellen battles making choices that will influence her future (Lyons, 2020, pp. 20-21).

In spite of as of having a child, Esther depicts no closeness with her child, essentially depicting her as "the baby". At eight months pregnant, Esther still dresses to cover up her pregnancy, and she appears uneasiness over the Mothers' Union assembly. Amid the assembly, she and Mrs. Nolan laugh as they thrust absent from the other mothers' rules and the rector's supplications.

Esther starts in calm get up and go talks and consolations, ceaselessly persuading herself she seems legitimately be portion of the assembly. As the baby kicks, she consoles herself, "I am a mother, I have a place here" (*The Bell Jar*, p.15)—her to begin with genuine affirmation of her motherhood. Like Ellen in "Day of Success" and Esther Greenwood. Esther in "Mothers" offers herself reassurance, as she feels uncertain around the environment she is in and the commitments she may make to such a space. In expansion, her American childhood clears out her feeling inaccessible and othered by the women (Lyons, 2020, p. 23). Maybe the foremost recognizable picture from *The Bell Jar* is the fig tree Esther envisions herself sitting in, envisioning each person fig as a diverse future. She writes:

From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future beckoned and winked. One fig was a husband and a happy home and children, and another fig was a famous poet and another fig was a brilliant professor . . . and beyond and above these figs were many more figs I couldn't quite make out. I saw myself sitting in the

crotch of this fig tree, starving to death, just because I couldn't make up my mind which of the figs I would choose. I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest . . . (*The Bell Jar*, p. 77)

Esther tortures herself as she finds physical punishment less painful than the societal pain she experiences almost every day. She cannot live even a single minute in freedom. This is the reason, she isolates herself and stays positioned in solitude. Her self-image appears confused, but here, her battles gotten to be amplified. Since Esther cannot select which future she needs most—or long run that would best fit her—she envisions losing the openings to completely accomplish any of the titles in which she longs. In spite of the fact that Esther criticizes socially acknowledged excellence and behavior guidelines for women, she compares herself to other women's accomplishment of those guidelines. Esther endeavors to exemplify the picture both society and the magazine seen to be legitimately feminine. She experiences a few ceremonies of entry, adjusting her self-image as the novel advances. She criticizes the feminine picture the magazine guidelines for sex, and mulls over career way. As she spirals into a more profound discouragement, she develops assist absent from the magazine offers, highlights twofold guidelines for sex, and mulls over career ways. As she spirals into a more profound discouragement, she develops encourage absent from the magazine's measures, abandoning the world aromas and mold and replacing them with philosophical perceptions.

Esther is a fighter who challenges all kinds of circumstances. In any case, she returns to the physical picture she depicts within the starting of the novel to be discharged from the refuge, as she must demonstrate to the board she has adequately molded into the picture of the idealized feminine well-being. She ponders, "There should . . . to be a custom for being born twice—patched, withdrawn and endorsed for the street . . ." (*The Bell Jar*, p. 244). She revamps herself to fit the public's shallow beliefs almost females' wellbeing, in spite of being basic of those guidelines. Esther concerns herself with mulling over patriarchal values including marriage and sexuality. When she envisions marriage, she fears she must forsake her mental dreams and instep be contained to the kitchen. The household housewife is imbued in her as a picture of marriage and parenthood—a picture which she relates to her mother. Kim Horner has stated that within *The Bell Jar*, Plath employs parody to uncover the onerous, out of line, and crazy desires of women amid the 1950s as depicted by Esther. Particularly, women are anticipated to stay "pure" and to marry and gotten to be moms instead of to have careers. The novelist's passing from suicide is in the blink of an eye after the distribution of the novel. Looking at the novel as a work of parody uncovers that underneath the surface of its wittiest entries, *The Bell Jar* is an angrier novel than it has been characterized to be (2022, p. 52). Plath employs strategies characteristic of women's parody counting composing from the position of somebody who is marginalized by society; collapsing male pretensions with humor; subverting female generalizations; and denying supplying the closure of a conventional cheerful finishing. These methods uncover the lip service of a culture that extremely limited Esther's conceivable outcomes in life.

The novel studies social desires for women through Esther's blameless tone. Plath assaults her targets by subverting generalizations. Esther's desire to be a artist and teacher, and her declared failure to cook for illustration, sabotage traditional roles for women in 1950s America. Esther fills the hysteric part within the novel. However, there is a turn. Not at all like the normal "hysteric" as a minimal character, has Plath made Esther incomprehensible to expel, indeed when her sickness is at its most noticeably awful. No matter how distant her sickness has advanced, Esther never loses her sharp viewpoint on the irrational restrictions on women's conceivable outcomes in life. Esther's health falls apart to the point of not being able to perused, compose, eat, or rest. Her outrage is concealing by an ailment experienced by a brilliant youthful lady battling with the battle for enthusiastic autonomy (Horner, 2022, p. 54). Esther is underwhelmed by her boyfriend, who is considered a great potential spouse. Since women's essential objective ought to be marriage, they are anticipated to swoon at men's feet. Esther depicts her to begin with therapist, Dr. Gordon, as alluring, the sort of man ladies are gathered to fantasize around wedding. She says, "I seem see right absent he was conceited" (*The Bell Jar*, 129). Esther notes that a photo of the doctor's family somewhat faces her, saying she did not think he would position it unless he "was attempting to appear me right absent that he was hitched to a few glitzy lady and I'd superior not get any ideas" (*The Bell Jar*, p. 129). The text highlights the need of understanding and bolster accessible for those battling with the antagonistic encounters. Esther is met with rejection and disregard from the restorative experts she experiences, and is incapable to discover the assistance and understanding she frantically needs. This serves as a strong commentary on the stigmatization and need of bolster that those with mental ailment regularly confront.

Sneha V John has responded to *the Bell Jar* stating that the author employs vivid and reminiscent dialect to communicate the concentrated of Esther's battles with misery and injury. Esther's discouragement and injury are delineated as overpowering and all-encompassing, invading each viewpoint of her life and rendering her incapable to lock in with the world around her. The novel serves as a confirmation to the versatility and quality of those who battle with these encounters (2023, p. 17). Plath's courageous depiction cultivates sympathy and mindfulness empowering a more nuanced understanding of these conditions. By plunging into the complexities of mental sickness through the composed word, we clear the way for important discussions and expanded back systems. In doing so, we contribute to a social move prioritizing kindness over judgment and comprehension over bias (John, p. 19). Kindness and understanding must be the priority in the social affairs. Esther's inclination towards these positive attributes demonstrates the goodness on her part as constructed so far for emboldening and inspiring the women of the time.

The Bell Jar captures the metaphorical and strict capture of the hero, Esther—a youthful woman who wins a month-long internship as a writing editor. Her hate towards performative womanliness bends her failure to classify herself into a particular sort of womanhood. Her dependence on instructive approval eventually flounders after getting a dismissal to a prestigious summer composing program. Laura Anderson has examined

Esther' interpersonal relationship and says that her mother, Mrs. Greenwood looks for offer assistance for Esther, and she is constrained to experience a traumatic electroconvulsive-therapy treatment. She endeavors suicide and is secretly institutionalized, once more having to experience numerous eletro-convulsive treatments. Plath portrays a conventional society stamped by unbending sexual orientation parts and restricted openings for ladies (2023, p. 3). Esther's complication with doubleness emerges to begin within her mental aspiration and freedom and furthermore, in her career as an editor that is driven to seek after a career in composing. Her ambition is empowered by her status within the center course. However, the culture of sexism restricts her opportunity in accomplishing a "full life". At college, Esther's mental development clashes with her gentility; she skews more manly since of her mental victory in a masculine-assigned course. She demonstrates her mental aspiration as being the as it were female in her course to pass with an A (Anderson, 2023, p. 19). Despite her academic success with outstanding result, she is made dependent in patriarchy. She cannot conform to the standards set so far as she does not want to lead a life of a dependent and docile woman. Instead, she seeks for independence and prefers to take decisions on her own although she is alone to fight her battle.

Esther is autonomous as she has the capacity to form choices for herself and not have to be depending on the authorization of others. Elly offers a cover for Esther to mobilize and feel more secure in dismissing men's sexual progresses whereas moreover articulating hyper-feminine qualities in both magnificence and mien, that of which Esther accepts she needs. Elly does not take on the inside insufficiencies felt by Esther, instep, Elly is "an orphan" free of a history that does not incorporate Esther's story of encompassing a "scholarship at a huge eastern women's college" and "refused a impeccably strong restorative understudy for a husband" a future that would have resulted in a hegemonically regulating, but unsuitable life for Esther (*The Bell Jar*, p. 132). Her crave to be surrendered from her intellect—a masculine-assigned quality—and fulfill Elly's prediction to "marry a strong, but delicate carport technician and have a enormous cowry family" eventually mocks the college-to-home pipeline (*The Bell Jar*, p. 133). Her failure to completely grasp Elly breaks her personality since she is at chances with this sense of ladylike insufficiency. Not at all like Doreen, might Esther not self-express herself through sexual and female opportunities. Instep, her warmth for Doreen darkened. She chosen that night, she "would observe her and tune in to what she said, but profound down, [she] would have nothing to do with her" (*The Bell Jar*, p. 22). She does not copy the life patterns of other women including Doreen. She does not indulge in the feminine pleasure that generally women seek for in male-dominated society. At the cost of her personal and temporary pleasure, she moves ahead to live her life of emancipation.

Virtue culture surrounds Esther and in spite of the fact that it disinterests her, it covers her from the hazard of lifting the cloak. Esther's failure to elude virtue culture maps onto her scene of whiteness. She is basic of the film, to begin with since of its notice of technicolor. She claims she abhors technicolor since of the startling utilize of colorful ensembles within the film. In fact, she evaluates the complex office from the black/white twofold of noir,

which concurs with Esther's rubric on gentility to immaculateness and haziness to evil. Besides, Esther's brief summation of the film concludes that the blonde young woman is remunerated with the prospect of commitment to the star football player for her whiteness and execution of virtue. On the other hand, the black-haired young lady, who Esther partners her resemblance to the sex request of Elizabeth Taylor, does not get the same compensate (Anderson, 2023). *The Bell Jar* gets it whiteness as a barrier of benefit that needs the guarantee of fulfillment from organization or societal sex parts.

Women are apparently limited to a plot that characterizes appropriate womanliness as small more than household freedom. A terrible strife goes on between their interest to have break even with chance to work and the need of outlets, so they revolt against a character that is credited to them. Few women favor career and to go in life by their claim; these are gifted people. They are once in a while considered fruitful. A few women attempt to adjust between the want to fulfill their female parts in life and their anguish to have their claim independence and career (Fejer & Talif, 2014, p. 3). Plath presents a combination of distinctive female characters extending from the exceedingly taught knowledge to conventional housewives appearing the everyday components of women's conventional lives. They are subordinate to Esther and her creating awareness and are appeared as it were through their impact on her as a central character (Fejer & Talif, 2014, p. 4). Esther remembers how she:

Hated coming downstairs sweaty-handed and curious every Saturday night and having some senior introduce me to her Aunt's best friend's son and finding some pale, mushroomy fellow with protruding ears or buck teeth or a bad leg. I didn't think I deserved it. After all, I wasn't crippled in any way, I just studied too hard, I didn't know when to stop. (*The Bell Jar*, p. 54)

Esther shares her struggles and sacrifice for skill development and competence enhancement. What she has done is asserted in the extract to justify that she has always been an aspirant of leading an independent life. Esther lives in a culture where women are encouraged to move beyond the private sphere of home, yet it puts many limitations to these options that hinder that movement. Mass media and newspapers' articles keep warning young women against losing chastity, and emphasizing the importance of keeping virtue (Fejer & Talif, 2014, p. 6). Esther's world is full of rapid movement of contraries; sometimes opposites that might be unified; she, eventually, obtains such tendency toward things around her, when Buddy calls her "neurotic":

If neurotic is wanting two mutually exclusive things at one. And the same time, then I'm neurotic as hell. I'll be flying back and forth between one mutually exclusive thing and another for the rest of my days. (*The Bell Jar*, pp. 89-90)

Esther is committed and satisfied with her subjectivity although she is single to take the issue in this way. She cannot compromise with the demands and imposed values of patriarchy. She has a very unconventional way of dealing with reality. Her speech identifies division; the character articulates the inner conflict in the role she is expected to play. The

novel depicts a patriarchal society and characters that strengthen these standards and structures, but that the novel itself challenges them. A few characters challenge or battle to go up against to these, particularly the most character, Esther. These two positions, i.e. adjusting to or challenging the structures, can be observed through certain bunches of individuals. On the one hand, those acclimating to the patriarchal structures are primarily the men and the more seasoned ladies. On the other hand, the more youthful women are by and large those who respond to and challenge these structures (Rolfsson, 2021, p. 15). Eric says that if he loved a woman:

It would be spoiled by thinking this woman too was just an animal like the rest, so if he loved anybody he would never go to bed with her. He'd go to a whore if he had to and keep the woman he loved free of all that dirty business. (*The Bell Jar*, p. 84)

The comparison between women and animals and degradation of women's position is heinous. It hurts those women who can think and rationalize for the betterment of their personal development. Arastirma Markalesi (2021) has argued that both Plath and Friedman touch upon how they at last driven women to the psychiatric clinics and the coming about failure of male specialists to get it and distinguish the genuine bind of ladies. America within the 1950s sees the re-birth of the religion of home life and genuine womanhood. A patriarchal philosophy of a bygone period, the faction of home life was built up on the idea of isolated circles allotting private and open circles to ladies and men individually (p. 325). The novel reflects the harsh political air of the fifties which was a time of developing conventionalism fed by fear of a past war and the progressing Cold War with Russia. Esther is confused as she cannot decide what to do:

I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig tree, starving to death, just because I couldn't make up my mind which of the figs I would choose. I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest, and, as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and, one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet. (*The Bell Jar*, p. 73)

For the sake of independence and mental satisfaction, Esther starves to death. She has found the society partial and prejudiced against women who seek for independence and self-esteem. She cannot decide on her own. Therefore, she does not want to live this alienated and discarded life. Esther states that she is "interested in everything" (*The Bell Jar*, p. 29) and at the same time she does not know what to do with her life, which sums up the reason for her identity crisis. This confusion leads her to choosing death. This decision is the result of despondency and desperation she has experienced in patriarchy.

Conclusion

The paper has examined the identity advancement of Esther Greenwood—the major protagonist in the novel. Her travel that started from numbness and stopped to the involvement that instructed her almost treacheries and tricks of patriarchy badly affected mental status. Subsequently, for her subjectivity, she challenged the benchmarks set for women anticipated to be more Feminine Mystique than sympathetic. The feelings that the

maker felt are communicated have been presented in the paper. Esther has grown mentally at the cost of her physiological pleasure. The finding of the paper is that women who are unconformists who get ready to lose anything for their esteem and mental satisfaction. They can get to lead alienated lives as well by discarding the societal standards set in patriarchy as exemplified in the case of Esther Greenwood. The resistance against American society has been explored in the discussion. Plath has made an energetic female character that acts as an expression of her significant assumptions towards American society. Esther offers with the gather of spectators the uneasiness and fear that she feels nearly her future since she is expected to be a characterized sort of lady that she isn't past any question in case she must be. Esther uncovers her experience with her mother who forces her choices and concepts on her girl notwithstanding of her choices. The relationship between the mother and Esther is adjusted and corresponding. Anything the mother has internalized is given down to her girl. Since of this drift, Esther is bound to feeling enthusiastic disconnected from her possess mother. Esther endeavors to embody the picture both society and the magazine seen to be authentically female. She encounters many ceremonies of passage, altering her self-image as the novel progresses. She criticizes the feminine image picture the magazine rules for sex, and mulls over career way. As she spirals into a more significant disheartening, she creates help missing from the magazine offers, highlights twofold rules for sex, and mulls over career ways. Only the resilient women like Esther can stand against the well-established patriarchy for their dignity and psychological satisfaction.

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