

## ESTHER DILEMMA IN HER OWN LIFE LEADS TO MADNESS IN SYLVIA PLATH'S THE BELL JAR

S. Srinivetha<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor Department of English M.I.E.T Arts and Science College, Trichy, India.

### ABSTRACT

Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* is considered as an autobiographical novel because it reflects Plath's personal life. The novel explores several close points in parallel between Plath and her protagonist, Esther Greenwood. Her sense of being enclosed in a bell jar develops an urge for freedom that she seeks through death, because she thinks that death is not an end but the beginning of an alternate identity in new life. She struggles against the stereotypical roles assigned by conservative society and exercises her rebellious spirit by breaking through the chains of social confinements. In this novel, Esther's journey starts from within the jar to the without world.

**Keywords:** Betrayal, Death, Freedom, Illness, Oppression

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### Esther Dilemma in her own life leads to Madness in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*

*The Bell Jar* starts with Esther Greenwood, a lucky girl who wins in a writing competition and becomes an editorial assistant among other girls in New York city. Doreen is her roommate and she is very brave and nice at the same time. Esther likes her so much. One night, all the girls are invited to a party and they go to a pub accompanied by Lenny Shepherd. Esther returns back from the party because of her friend Doreen who stays with Lenny. Jay Cee is the boss of all girls and she blames Esther for being skeptical because Esther has no idea about what she wants to become in the rest of her future.

Esther reminds her old boyfriend Buddy who always behaves as innocent towards her but he betrays her later on. Buddy's doings are different from his sayings and he is diagnosed with tuberculosis. Esther goes to the hospital and visits Buddy once. Esther returns home and she tells Buddy that their relationship is still not clear. Buddy Willard is the first person who broke Esther's heart by his betrayal to her when he confessed to her that he had an asexual relationship with a waitress and she never expects this from Buddy. Esther decided to put an end to their relationship forever. Buddy Willard is ready to marry her but she rejects the marriage proposal. She feels depressed and even stops writing and sleeping also. Esther's mother advises her to study craft but she does not accept it. She prefers to take drugs that help her to sleep at night. This disturbed feeling increases day after day in Esther's life because of society. She finds that this society makes her feel more confused and unsure. She is torn between two worlds.

Esther does not appeal to her completely because she dreams of being a poet and not some house wife that the society wanted. Jay Cee asks her about her future plans, she said that she doesn't know what she really wanted exactly. This oppression reveals her inner conflict between what she wants and what the reality seeks from her. She lost her own world and tried to end up in front of a brick wall of social standards that destroys the ambition of high minded Esther. She stands up for herself several times and she tries to reject society's double standard qualities. The society alienates her from the reality which causes her to feel self-alienation and it further leads to Esther mental breakdown and she tries suicide attempts. Next she visits a psychiatrist who does not take her difficult situation seriously, the doctor decides to solve her problem by shock therapy used for her mental illness.

Esther refuses the treatment and her situation becomes worse. Esther psychological struggles let her think about various ways to commit suicide. Her madness leads her to behave in an aggressive way. She consciously breaks the mirror in the hospital. Esther meets a smart doctor named Nolan who discovers that Esther behaves in a violent way because she dislikes meeting with her mother and relatives. Due to the good treatment of Nolan, Esther's situation becomes better and she accepts the shock therapy. She tells the doctor she wants to have sex with someone, and she further says that she did it once but was not satisfied.

*The Bell Jar* in addition to the abuses that were done toward women Macro who appears at the beginning of the novel as an influential character in the story. Macro insults Esther and calls her a bad name and his words harshly affect her mental breakdown. Among the names Macro used to address Esther is a slut the word which deeply hurts her. He abuses Esther directly by showing carelessness towards her emotions and feelings; it causes her depression more and more. Macro does not respect her and gives her a chance to to know her to love and to be loved in return. This shows that Macro is not polite and he wants to have a sexual relationship with her. Esther has a great aim to achieve more than to like a normal and simple life. In order to stand for her dream she has to make efforts to battle with her family and society. all of these difficulties are caused only because of relatives and society, this makes her situation so hard and mad. The

only solution to get rid of her mental breakdown is electroshock therapy to escape from her sufferings. Esther dreams are like any other girl in the world to achieve in her life. She was shocked by other girls' way of thinking, because most of their dreams are to find a husband and marry him. She tries to change the norms in order to achieve her life but she faces struggles in her success. Buddy's betrayal shocks Esther and she loses confidence in men for the rest of her life.

## 2. CONCLUSION

Madness can be interpreted and seen through the suffering and lack of confidence of Esther in the dominated society. Esther moves from bad to worse, her first experience to get her identity goes through bad in her society. Esther's anxiety grows and grows till it reaches its top which is madness. She feels confused and uncomfortable because she really does not know what she wants to do and if her decisions are suitable and beneficial for her or not. Esther's madness is clearly caused by her surroundings and friends who disappoint her. The society deceives her because she does not receive any encouragement. Plath portrays her problems, desires and hopes through Esther Greenwood. From the beginning of the novel Esther is completely different but the society rejects her idea in order to achieve herself and to realize her dream without men's help.

The Bell Jar may expect that the end Esther will commit suicide as readers think. This open ended conclusion can be interpreted as a positive note toward a better future. In the last scene Esther is having a conversation with one of the psychiatrists where she recovered a few months ago. In The Bell Jar Esther Struggles with family's restrictions which is a cause of her mental illness which can be claimed to be caused by the pressure of society. When the mental illness captures her mind she feels as if she is inside a jar and her world view is distorted. Esther considered her suffering from mental illness as being trapped in a bell jar due to the restrictions and oppressions, even if she manages to recover, she is in a way stuck in the bell jar as a result of society's condemnation.

## 3. REFERENCES

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