

Feminism in a novel the bell jar by sylvia plath

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In Sylvia Plath's autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar*, the reader learns of the adventures of a young woman in a male-dominated society that will not let her achieve her true potential. Plath's alter ego, Esther, is thus driven to a nervous breakdown and attempts suicide numerous times. In many ways, this novel is a feminist text, centered around the struggles of a young woman who cannot reach her goals in our male-dominated society.

People close to Esther, do not accept her talents as a poet and writer, but rather try to push her into traditionally more feminine roles. For example, Esther's mother repeatedly tries to convince her to learn shorthand, but Esther rebels, saying "... when I tried to picture myself in some job, briskly jotting down line after line of shorthand, my mind went blank. " (100) Esther, unlike many women of her time, refuses to be controlled by society's gender-based constraints: " The last thing I wanted was infinite security and to be the place an arrow shoots off from.

I wanted change and excitement and to shoot off in all directions myself, like the colored arrows from a Fourth of July rocket. " (68) The phrases " infinite security" and " the place an arrow shoots off from" come from Mrs. Willard's description of the woman's role in society (58). This passage directly addresses Plath's central purpose in the novel, which is to look at the mental problems that can befall a woman with ambitions that the surrounding culture will not allow her to fulfill.

This book was published in 1963, towards the beginning of the " feminist movement"; the events chronicled in this book, however, take place in 1953 (208), in a period during which women's rights were not yet widely

recognized in our society. The passage quoted above, and the emotions which it conveys, are typical of a feminist like Esther, but Esther is ahead of her time and is thus unable to express herself to society in the way she wants.

In this novel, Plath shows us the ways in which women were discriminated against, through the eyes of a sensitive young artist. Through this, she conveys the important message that actions such as this are morally incorrect and can lead the victims to experience unfortunate fates such as Esther's mental breakdown. It is important to keep such things as this in mind when reading the novel, and this feminist point of view is the central purpose of *The Bell Jar*.