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Introduction into women writers

*The Bell Jar* written by Sylvia Plath is a novel about a young women name Esther Greenwood who is nineteen years old. Esther is the protagonist and narrator of the story who lives in the outskirts of Boston, has a harsh life were the death of her father at an early age is affected. Esther, who lives with her mother, gets accepted in a scholarship for a fashion magazine company in New York City where she will have everything for free. Once Esther is in New York City she struggles with pressure as what she is going to do after college, and struggles with her surroundings as her social life. Esther is really insecure about herself and her choice of making decisions. Throughout the novel Esther enters into depression, which makes her have suicide thoughts, finding her identity and also attempted rape. Throughout the years after the novel was first published, different publishers have created and recreated new covers to represent The Bell Jar in different styles. The 50th anniversary edition depicts Esther’s perfectionism and struggle with her identity throughout a mirror, while in the 1st edition cover segments Esther’s illness through the image of the bell jar and mysterious tone.

The Faber and Faber 50th anniversary published book is the first cover I chose. Here we have a blood red cover with large yellow script font. Sylvia Plath’s name is right on the top center of the cover with white font. There is a lady on the cover with a green dress with red lipstick on. She is putting some make up while hold the mirror with her right hand. She is only showing part of her face in the mirror while on the cover you could still see part of her face.

The cover is showing part of her face, using a compact with a mirror, which depicts Esther’s identity throughout the novel. After her evening with Doreen and Lenny, Esther fails to recognize her own reflection in the elevator doors; “I slid into the self-service elevator and pushed the button for my floor. The doors folded shut like a noiseless accordion then my ears went funny, and I notice a big, smudgy-eyed Chinese women staring idiotically into my face. It was only me, of course.” (Plath p.18) The mirror symbolizes Esther’s struggle with her identity. Esther confronts her own reflection; she believes that it is not her.

After her first shock treatment with Dr. Nolan, she thinks her reflection is another women in the room. “The girl was still sitting on the pin-stool, the torn sheet of music splayed at her feet like a dead bird. She starred at me, and I stared back. Her eyes narrowed she stuck out her tongue.” (Plath p.145) The most dramatic scene was after her suicide attempt Esther fails to recognize her bruised face in the mirror. “The nurse sighed and opened the top bureau drawer. She took out a large mirror in a wooden frame that matched the wood of the bureau and handed it to me. At first I didn't see what the trouble was. It wasn't a mirror at all, but a picture. You couldn't tell whether the person in the picture was a man or a woman, because their hair was shaved off and sprouted in bristly chicken-feather tufts all over their head. One side of the person's face was purple, and bulged out in a shapeless way, shading to green along the edges, and then to a sallow yellow. The person's mouth was pale brown, with a rose-colored sore at either corner.” (Plath p.174) She throws the mirror to the floor, breaking it. This is an example that Esther's feelings were leading her into a disliking of her own appearance and feeling that she is not really being herself. In the beginning of the novel Esther struggle identifying her. She used pseudonyms in some situations in the novel. “My name's Elly Higginbottom," I said. "I come from Chicago." After that I felt safer. I didn't want anything I said or did that night to be associated with me and my real name and coming from Boston” (Plath p.11). Pretending to be someone else gave Esther freedom.

The second cover I choose was published by Heinemann in 1963, shows a women in the background of the cover sitting in a chair possibly a wooden chair. She is sitting down in a thinking position resting her arm on the table, while her chin is on her wrist. Also the bell jar on the table is more focus then the lady in the background. There is a size difference between the lady and the bell jar, which makes the lady, seem to be trap in the bell jar. The title of the book is written in large purple bold font. Plath’s Pseudonym name, Victoria Lucas appears to be located on top and center of the bell jar. Sylvia Plath uses her pseudonym name Victoria Lucas to keep her current events privet or maybe just find herself in a different identity. A month after publishing the bell jar, Plath committed suicide at the age of 31. The vibe of this book cover looks very mysterious and dark. The lady in the out of focus background could be Esther lost in her mind thinking of a suicidal plan. The cover overall looks very fussy and overwhelming as your seeing it in the point of Esther after her shock treatments.

This cover shows different perspectives as how the bell jar is being symbolizes by making it look like it is trapping the lady inside the bell jar. Throughout the novel, many times Esther says she feels like she is trapped in the bell jar. “I knew I should be grateful to Mrs. Guinea, only I couldn't feel a thing. If Mrs. Guinea had given me a ticket to Europe, or a round-the-world cruise, it wouldn't have made one scrap of difference to me, because wherever I sat -- on the deck of a ship or at a street café in Paris or Bangkok -- I would be sitting under the same glass bell jar, stewing in my own sour air.” (Plath p. 185) This quote from the beginning of chapter 15 introduces the bell jar as a symbol. Where no matter when Esther goes from her living hell life she will always feel trapped in the bell jar. The bell jar of Esther’s mental illness separates her from the people she cares about. Esther’s madness illness is uncontrollable which depicts that the dark side of Ether is taking over. Also on the last chapter, Esther reminiscing of the experience she has undergone. Mrs. Greenwood suggests treating Esther’s madness as if they were nightmares that can be erased. “ "We'll take up where we left off, Esther," she had said, with her sweet, martyr's smile. "Well act as if all this were a bad dream." A bad dream. To the person in the bell jar, blank and stopped as a dead baby, the world itself is the bad dream.” (Plath p.237) in this quote Esther response, that she feels like madness is being like trapped in a bad dream but a nightmare that cannot be awakened.

The two covers appear to demonstrate two different women on each cover. Also in the novel it seems like there are two Esther’s. Esther who wants to live in the city, and Esther that prefers the country life. There is also Esther who wants to keep her virginity till marriage, and the Esther that does not want to wait. Also in the novel Esther has two faces, the protagonist and the antagonist. The first cover seems to show a more vivid and brighter cover then the first edition cover. On the first cover the lady that depicts a lady with an apple greed dress using a compact with a mirror showing part of the refection of her face. Who seem to live a city life on this vivid cover. On the other cover is very dark and horror mood like. It depicts Esther’s dark side and illness that is always trying to commit suicide.

 In conclusion, we are able to see in both covers of the bell jar, that gives us two different points of view towards the novel. They both feature a positive cover and a negative side. Something about bell jars, they have smooth surfaces and if there is a flaw it is already consider the weakest part of the structure and could shatter. Esther was always struggling for perfection that made her feel like her life was like a bell jar. Any mistakes she would blame herself. But she also struggles with identity. Both book covers use a material object. On the first cover we have a mirror and on the second one we have a bell jar. These objects are used in the story through metaphors and symbolism. Which gives the readers an image to think how Esther related herself with materials. Plat often used pseudonyms in the novel in social situations. Where Esther used it as freedom to pretend to be someone who she was not. This becomes a split personality where towards the end of the novel her depression get worst and loses her mind who she is.

 

**Cover 1: (on the right)**

**Publication date**: Jan 14th, 1963

**Press published with**: Heinemann

**Cover 2 (on the left)**

*50th* *Anniversary*

**Publication date:** *January* *3rd* *2013* *by Faber and Faber*

<http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/410276.The\_Bell\_Jar>.

"The Bell Jar, First Edition." *Sylvia Plath*. Heinemann, n.d. Web. 23 Apr. 2014. <http://www.abebooks.com/book-search/title/the-bell-jar/author/sylvia

 plath/first-edition/sortby/1/page-1/>.