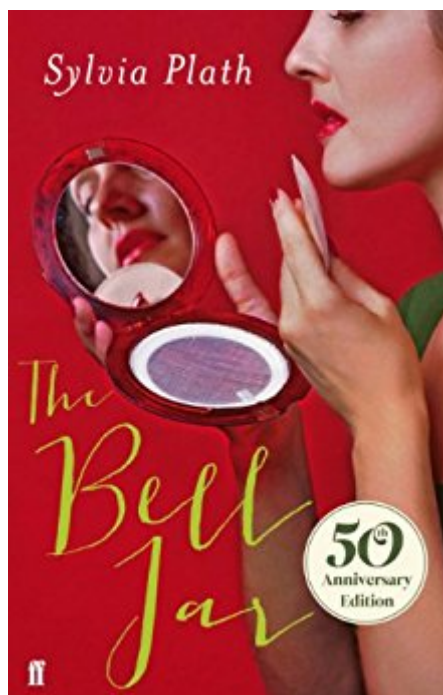


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The Bell Jar (FF Classics)



Synopsis

I was supposed to be having the time of my life. When Esther Greenwood wins an internship on a New York fashion magazine in 1953, she is elated, believing she will finally realise her dream to become a writer. But in between the cocktail parties and piles of manuscripts, Esther's life begins to slide out of control. She finds herself spiralling into depression and eventually a suicide attempt, as she grapples with difficult relationships and a society which refuses to take women's aspirations seriously. *The Bell Jar*, Sylvia Plath's only novel, was originally published in 1963 under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas. The novel is partially based on Plath's own life and descent into mental illness, and has become a modern classic. *The Bell Jar* has been celebrated for its darkly funny and razor sharp portrait of 1950s society and has sold millions of copies worldwide.

Book Information

File Size: 569 KB

Print Length: 244 pages

Page Numbers Source ISBN: 0571226167

Publisher: Faber & Faber; Export - Airside Edition edition (November 20, 2008)

Publication Date: November 20, 2008

Sold by: Amazon Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B002RI9ZUE

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #74,699 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #2

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Children's eBooks > Biographies > Fictional > United States

#13 in Books > Teens > Historical Fiction > Biographical > United States #61 in Books >

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Customer Reviews

I'm not the type of person to write a book review, but I will say I thoroughly enjoyed this novel. At first I felt like I waited too long in my life to read it, but now I understand it was at exactly the right

time. Some people can take a lot out of this, but even those who can't should enjoy the story. Great classic.

Reading this was a bit like being a peeping tom into an exasperating yet intriguing woman's early adulthood and adventures in mid-20th century America. As interesting for the look at then current mental health practices as for her navigation of gender norms, sexual mores, and her own poorly managed insecurities.

I have had and written mercilessly in the softcover version of this book and I decided to treat myself to the hardcover version and I LOVE it!

Whoa, this book completely swept me away! On one hand it's an angst-filled coming of age story, reminiscent of *Catcher in the Rye*, but on the other hand, it's so much deeper than that. I loved reading Esther's views on feminism, her inner conflict about pursuing a career versus being a wife and having a family, and how those futures seemed to be mutually exclusive. The fig tree metaphor so perfectly captures new adult fears over career and family choices, still very relevant today: "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 another fig was Ee Gee, the amazing editor...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." This book also seemed to be a commentary on the mental health institution during that time period, with detailed descriptions of the facilities and treatments administered, from botched shock treatments to insulin shots. The fact that these observations were no doubt based on Sylvia Plath's personal experience made them even more haunting. I really appreciated the narrative style, especially the way the tone drastically shifted when Esther returned home from New York City. Plath showed the helplessness of mental illness, the isolation and resignation, such that the reader almost sinks into despair with Esther. And the ending was beautiful and felt true given the reality of mental illness. There is no magic cure-all, just Esther taking one step after another, trusting that she's ready to return to society. My favorite quote, because it highlights Plath's poetic writing: "I wanted to crawl in between those black lines of print the way you crawl through a fence, and go to sleep under that beautiful big green fig tree."

“The Bell Jar” is a semi-autobiographical account of Esther

Greenwood's (Plath's alter ego) descent into insanity. We follow Esther's personal life from her summer job at a New York magazine, back through her days at a New England school for women, the forward through her treatment at two different asylums (one good/one bad), and finally through her re-entry into the world. Through it all, Esther obsesses about losing her virginity, though she largely finds men repulsive. The bell jar is the symbol Plath uses to explain Esther's strange feeling of alienation. It is as though madness has descended over her as a stifling bell jar. It is shock therapy which finally lifts the bell jar and enables Esther to return to her life once again, though she knows she is not cured. "The Bell Jar" is a brilliantly written account of life with mental illness. Plath uses a type of realism that forces us to see life as a mentally ill person might see it. Though some might find it disturbing, Esther's account is clear, readable, and even witty.

Sylvia Plath is known for committing suicide. She wrote *The Bell Jar* shortly before she made her fatal decision. I wanted to like this novel, but I had a difficult time getting into it. I didn't like the main character, especially in the beginning of the book. (I found her more relatable towards the end of the story.) The main character's tale slips between past and present at odd moments. There are many "loose ends." If Sylvia Plath had lived longer, I'm sure I would have enjoyed her other works. She does have a certain...something, but this book was only okay. It had been on my reading pile for awhile, so I'm glad to get it checked off my list. It's a famous book, but I would no longer consider it a classic, nor would I recommend it to others. Luckily it's only twenty chapters long, a quick read.

This was my first time reading Plath- I stumbled across this book while searching books on and decided to give it a go. I can usually tell from the very beginning if I'll like a book or not and this one I was hooked on right away. It's not as depressing as the other reviews say it is- just merely an account of a mind that views the world differently and a little somberly. I highly recommend. Plath's style of writing is just beautiful. I am not going to purchase her books of poetry.

This is Sylvia Plath's shocking, realistic, and intensely emotional novel about a woman falling into the grip of insanity. The story follows Esther Greenwood who is brilliant, beautiful, enormously talented, and successful, but slowly going under. Plath brilliantly draws the reader into Esther's breakdown with such intensity that her insanity becomes palpably real, even as accessible an experience as going to the movies. A deep penetration

into the darkest and most harrowing corners of the human psyche, *The Bell Jar* is an extraordinary accomplishment and a haunting American classic.

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