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The Bell Jar (Modern Classics)



Synopsis

The Bell Jar chronicles the crack-up of Esther Greenwood: brilliant, beautiful, enormously talented, and successful, but slowly going under -- maybe for the last time. Sylvia Plath masterfully draws the reader into Esther's breakdown with such intensity that Esther's insanity becomes completely real and even rational, as probable and accessible an experience as going to the movies. Such deep penetration into the dark and harrowing corners of the psyche is an extraordinary accomplishment and has made The Bell Jar a haunting American classic. This P.S. edition features an extra 16 pages of insights into the book, including author interviews, recommended reading, and more.

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Customer Reviews

Plath was an excellent poet but is known to many for this largely autobiographical novel. The Bell Jar tells the story of a gifted young woman's mental breakdown beginning during a summer internship as a junior editor at a magazine in New York City in the early 1950s. The real Plath committed suicide in 1963 and left behind this scathingly sad, honest and perfectly-written book, which remains one of the best-told tales of a woman's descent into insanity. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

"Esther Greenwood's account of her years in the bell jar is as clear and readable as it is witty and disturbing - [this] is not a potboiler, nor a series of ungrateful caricatures; it is literature." -- The New York Times
"Frances McDormand is a fabulous reader, alternating between the narrator's breathy

whisper and the other characters' stronger personalities" -- The Fort Worth Star-Telegram "Frances McDormand's recording is spellbinding" -- People "McDormand gives a sensitive, intimate performance. Her dry, ironic tone, covering up for an undercurrent of fear, perfectly captures the character of Esther." -- Billboard Magazine -- This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

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 not am 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 rational— 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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