CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Sylvia Plath is one of the most popular and admired 20th century American poets and novelists. She is well known for her writing that centered around aloneness, pain, and death ("Sylvia Plath"). Being well known as a poet, she also wrote her only novel, The Bell Jar, which shows a portrait of 1950s Americans' attitude towards women. It is the time in which social norms were harsh to women. Women were supposed to fulfill certain roles such as being a mother, a diligent homemaker and an obedient wife. Society at that time believed that women were not supposed to work or have a career if the head of the family could fulfill the needs. Women were encouraged to marry and stay at home to take care of their family (Kareem). Even after Plath's suicide, her works "continued to fascinate generations of readers and the publishers" (Arnold).

I choose Plath's only novel to be analyzed in my thesis. The story of the novel is inspired by Plath's own experienced in life. It tells about a young brilliant woman named Esther Greenwood who goes through a mental breakdown that leads her to do

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suicide attempts. The novel is first published in 1963 under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas and has become a classic of American literature. The Bell Jar "has been celebrated for its darkly funny and razor sharp portrait of 1950s society" ("Sylvia Plath") and millions of copies are sold worldwide.

In this thesis, I choose to analyze the portrayal of the protagonist because the novel focuses on the protagonist's life. Portrayal is "the act of showing or describing somebody or something in a particular way" ("Portrayal, def. 1"). Protagonist is "the leading character or one of the major characters in a play, film novel, etc." ("Protagonist, def. 1").

Plath "lays bare the connections between society's norms and oppressions and her protagonist's journey through suicidal depression" (Evans) in this novel. The novel clearly tells that depression can occur to women if they have to face the society's norms that do not go along with their perception on how women should live in society. Moreover, Plath also says, "I've tried to picture my world and the people in it as seen through the distorting lens of a bell jar" ("Sylvia Plath"). From her statement, it is clear that Plath tries to capture what it is like to be stuck in depression and to show the dilemma that a woman may face in her life through the story of Esther Greenwood. The bell jar itself symbolizes the feeling of being trapped and the sense of being watched and studied (Tsank). The approach that I choose to analyze the novel is formalism because I do not refer to any external sources except the novel itself in analyzing the protagonist. I include some historical facts about lives of women in the 1950s in the U.S. as a background.

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Statement of the Problems

The problems I would like to answer in this thesis are:

1. How is the protagonist portrayed in the novel?

2. What is the purpose of the author in creating such protagonist?

Purpose of the Study

Based on the statement of the problems above, the purposes of the study are:

1. To show how the protagonist is portrayed in the novel

2. To show the purpose of the author in creating such protagonist

Method of Research

I use library research in writing my thesis. First, I begin with reading and understanding the primary text, Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar. Second, I search for some references and information from books and internet websites to support my analysis. Lastly, I draw a conclusion of my analysis.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis consists of three chapters. Chapter One is Introduction, which consists of Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research, and Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two consists of Analysis of the Protagonist in The Bell Jar. Chapter Three is Conclusion, which is followed by Bibliography and Appendices, consisting of Synopsis of the Novel and Biography of the Author.