

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The present dissertation has made an attempt to provide a special critical focus on the fictional and non-fictional works of Sylvia Plath. Plath is without doubt, one of the most talented of modern poets. She has been associated with the tradition of confessional poetry. But besides being a poet, she was also a fiction writer. She wrote one novel, The Bell Jar, and also a collection of short stories Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams. Plath has been studied by different scholars from different points of view. But comparatively, her fictional and non-fictional texts have not received the kind of critical attention they deserve. This makes it necessary for us to pay special critical attention to Sylvia Plath's prose works.

Chapter-I of the dissertation has given a broad survey of the relationship between Sylvia Plath's life and works. An attempt has been made in the first section of this chapter to provide possible points of correlation between Sylvia Plath's emergence and development as a creative writer and the emotional ups and downs of her private life. Plath's early family life, her neurosis, her attempts to commit suicide are all aspects of private life which get transmuted into confessional utterance in her poetry as well as fiction. The second section of Chapter-I has provided a broad survey of all the works of Sylvia Plath, alongwith the kind of critical reception they were accorded.

Chapter-II deals with Sylvia Plath's novel, The Bell Jar^I is about what it is to lose one's grip on sanity and recover it again. It is easy to say and it is

said too often that insanity is the only sane reaction to the America of the past two decades. And it is also said frequently that the only thing to do about madness is relax and enjoy it. But neither of these clever responses to her situation occur to Esther Greenwood, who is the narrator, protagonist and central character in this novel.

In *the* novel The Bell Jar, we see that the world in which the events of this novel take place is a world bounded by the cold war as one side and the sexual war on the other. We follow in *the* novel The Bell Jar, Esther Greenwood's personal life from her summer job in New York. With Ladies Day magazine, back through her days at New England's largest school for women, and forward through her attempted suicide, her bad treatment at one asylum and her good treatment at another, to her final re-entry into the world like a used tire: "Patched, retreated, and approved for the road."

In the novel The Bell Jar, Sylvia Plath has used the most important technical device of realism. Sylvia Plath's technique of realism ranges from tiny verbal witticisms that bite, to images that are deeply troubling. When she calls the hotel for women that Esther Greenwood inhabits in New York the "Amazon", she is not merely enjoying the closeness of the sound of that word to "Barbizon". She is forcing us to rethink the entire concept of a hotel for women. She says, mostly girls of my age with wealthy parents who wanted to be sure that their daughters would be living where men could not get at them

and deceive them. And she is announcing a major theme in her work, the hostility between men and women.

At the end of the novel, Esther is going to her interview with the doctors who will decide on her freedom and sanity. After walking through the familiar labyrinth of shoveled asylum paths, she faces the doctors in the examination room and guiding myself by them, as by a magical thread, I stepped into the room. The magical thread that holds the self to the world is like the magical ball of mercury, the guide of travellers, the winged messenger of the Gods, it may break into a thousand fragments and be put back together. And it may also be shattered again, as we know it came to pass for Sylvia Plath. But Esther is forever safe, and able to share with us her experience and what she has learnt in her journey. For her also, life is no rose garden, but rather a very precarious path on which choices must be made, enemies fought, and false myths demystified.

After reading The Bell Jar, one inevitably comes to the conclusion that many factors have contributed to Esther's mental breakdown. Although she wants to be a good daughter, her mother's demanding and unloving nature ruins any hope of achieving a healthy relationship. She yearns to be a career woman, a wife, and a mother but she does not think ^{that} she can have all of the choices at once. As Linda Wagner Martin remarks: "perceptively in her recent, definitive biography of Plath, Esther's comic fig tree "monologue" is

calculated to imply that a woman dies failed to make that single choice. Her dilemma is entirely artificial. Only social pressure forces the choice.”¹

In Chapter-III, we have made an attempt to provide a detailed textual analysis of the stories included in Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams.

“Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams” contains two shorter images rather than major events that move into “The Bell Jar”. The first is simply the description of a woman who enters the psychiatric clinic and whose dream the narrator seeks to record. The woman was brought to Emergency Room because her tongue was stuck out and she could not returns it to her mouth. This occurred during a party for her French-Canadian mother-in-law, who she hated worse than pigs. This same character appears equally briefly in the novel, in the state psychiatric ward, as Mrs. Tomolille. Again she has a hated French-Canadian mother-in-law, and again her symptom is the uncontrollable tongue which sticks out until it’s swollen. The second image is more powerful, for it is crucial to with the story and the novel. The narrator’s experience of electro-shock treatment. In “Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams,” the final scene is the administration of the shock treatment. In the misapplied shock, the narrator sees her first direct sight of “Johnny Panic himself. He comes into view as she is ‘shaken like a leaf in the teeth of glory, while the air crackled with blue-tongued lightning- haloed angels: The same treatment is likewise described in “The Bell Jar, when Dr.Gordon fails to properly administer the

shock. 'Then something bent down and took hold of me and shoot me like the end of the world. Whee, it shrilled, through an air crackling with blue light'.

Thus Plath's short stories show her development as a creative writer - a development as much linked with her novel The Bell Jar as with the deep structure of her confessional poetry.

R E F E R E N C E

- Martin,- Robert-A., Esther's Dilema in The Bell Jar,
Notes on Contemporary Literature : Carroltan,
G.A., 1991 Jan., 21:1, 6-8.