

### **Examiner's commentary**

The topic in this essay has been communicated effectively with it being narrow enough to give a clear focus and emphasis within the word limit. The focus and purpose of the essay are set out clearly with the content being relevant and appropriate. The research included is appropriate to the research question and supports the argument very well. The list of resources is well selected to give a range of views and the application of source materials is clearly relevant and appropriate, with a well-chosen variety of quotations. Knowledge of the topic is coherently expressed, with the sections being well-planned and clear. The argument is reasoned and focused and is well supported by the selected evidence. The novel is analysed effectively, continually being focused on the research question. The selection of material, from the secondary resources as well as the novel, shows insight into the issues. The language (rather than terminology) is mostly accurate; sentence structure errors do not obscure meaning. Presentation is very good, with all required elements present and following the standard format.

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**Extended essay**

**Group 2: English**

**Category 3**

**The psychological effects of social  
conventions in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar***

**Research question: "What are the psychological effects of social  
conventions on Esther, the protagonist of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*?"**

**Word count: 3982**

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## Introduction

*The Bell Jar* was published in 1963 and is Plath's only novel, since she committed suicide one month after its publication.<sup>1</sup> The novel contains autobiographical features of Plath's life in the 1950s, and has been described as " [...] an acidic satire [...] exploring the impossibility of living up to the era's contradictory ideals of womanhood."<sup>2</sup> Plath's purpose of displaying the psychological consequences of social conventions could possibly be understood through her own thoughts in her diary: "Being born a woman is my awful tragedy".<sup>3</sup>

The novel deals with American society in the 1950s and how its strict social conventions limited and oppressed women. The focus of the novel is on the protagonist, Esther, whose experiences of pressure from social conventions cause great psychological consequences for her that ultimately result in her attempt to end her life.

To fully comprehend Sylvia Plath's life, as well as the lives of millions of women of her time, one must examine how their society affected and limited them. The consequences inflicted on Esther because of these societal limitations, are therefore worthy of study since they reveal a reality of injustice and oppression against women. This would then enable us to grasp Plath's true purpose of the novel more fully. The decision to display the reasons for Esther's downfall is also what makes *The Bell Jar* an important part in, what later was to be called, the sexual revolution<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, this area of research

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<sup>1</sup> Marsh, Nicky, *The Bell Jar*, Britannica

<sup>2</sup> Churchwell, Sarah, *An introduction to The Bell Jar*, British Library (2016)

<sup>3</sup> Plath, S., & Kukil, K (ed), *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*, Anchor books (2000)

<sup>4</sup> Churchwell, Sarah, *An introduction to The Bell Jar*, British Library (2016)

enables recognition that many of the shortcomings concerning equality in Plath's society still have not improved today. The criticism from Plath's legacy in the form of *The Bell Jar* therefore remains as relevant today as seven decades ago and is part of what seems like a never-ending battle for women.

The influence of social conventions can be observed in all characters of the novel. To narrow the topic down, this essay will focus on the way Esther, the protagonist, is affected psychologically by them. The research question of this essay is: What are the psychological effects of social conventions on Esther, the protagonist of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*? To answer the research question, this essay deals with how these social conventions make Esther feel entrapped by the expectation to comply with the norms and how they result in a repression of her sexuality. Esther's sexuality as a woman is thereby disconnected from love and passion and instead associated with shame. Finally, these experiences accumulate in Esther's struggle to find a female identity in a society where she is denied the possibility of creating her own path and lacks diverging female role models.

## **Body/ Development**

*The Bell Jar* takes place in North America during the 1950s and follows an ambitious woman named Esther. When she is awarded a scholarship to work at a fashion magazine in New York, she is faced with many hard truths about her role as a woman in society. Esther's experiences open her eyes to a patriarchal society with strict social conventions that limit and undervalue women. The consequences of these conventions are a sense of

entrapment and a distorted perception of sexuality, that finally make her lose her sense of identity.

## **A sense of entrapment**

Throughout the novel, Esther feels more and more entrapped because of the limitations and expectations that social conventions impose on her as a woman. Along with a literal entrapment in the form of limits regarding what Esther can and cannot do, an invisible entrapment inside her own mind emerges. Esther's feeling of entrapment is therefore a main psychological consequence of social conventions. Esther's time in New York opens her eyes to the never-ending limitations of women's freedom and choice, which make her realize how little she wants to live the life set out for her as a woman. This becomes evident when Esther describes how the other girls in New York are "[...] waiting to get married to some career man [...]"<sup>5</sup> and emphasizes that "[...] they seemed bored as hell"<sup>6</sup>, which indicates how the conventional life of a woman appears repulsive to her.

Furthermore, Esther is continuously bombarded with the message of her predetermined destiny by those close to her, such as Mrs Willard, saying: "[...] 'What a man is an arrow into the future and what a woman is is the place the arrow shoots off from' [...]"<sup>7</sup> Luke Ferretter additionally argues in *Sylvia Plath's fiction: a critical study*, that "The portrayal of anti-feminist characters like Mrs Willard [...] emphasise [...] how difficult it is for a young woman like Esther to articulate a protest against it."<sup>8</sup> Therefore, despite the fact that Esther does not dream of the security of marriage but instead wants an

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<sup>5</sup> Plath, Sylvia, *The Bell Jar* (London: CPI group, 2013), p.4

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p.4

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p.67

<sup>8</sup> Ferretter, Luke, *Sylvia Plath's fiction: A critical study*, (Edinburgh university press:2010), p.123

exciting and ambitious life<sup>9</sup>, she is held back not only by social conventions, but by other women who are supporting the female norm while trying to repress deviance from it. The reality of Esther's life as a woman is thereby entrapping her in a set mould with limited possibilities.

The shortcomings of understanding Esther's desire for freedom are further emphasized when Buddy visits her at the treatment centre and states: "I wonder who you'll marry now, Esther."<sup>10</sup> Because this comment highlights how society lacks understanding and empathy for the reason behind Esther's suicide attempt. Since one of the main factors that causes Esther's downfall into mental illness is society's conventions regarding marriage. Buddy's comment is therefore ironic, since he once again reminds and pressures Esther about marriage. The comment also exposes the way society thought of women's potential in life and how unimaginable it was that they would want a life diverging from the norm. Moreover, Ferretter argues that Buddy's question concerns Esther, when stating: "Both of them know it is a crucial question, an attack on her sense of identity as a woman."<sup>11</sup> This emphasizes how marriage, even though it is portrayed as a main reason for Esther's mental illness, still remains a defining factor for Esther in her life that she is unable to escape. Plath thereby manages to convey an ironic and tragic message of how not even a suicide attempt could stop the pressure on Esther to conform into society's norms. The psychological consequence is thereby how Esther's sense of entrapment worsens because she recognizes people's lack of understanding of the

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<sup>9</sup> Plath, Sylvia, *The Bell Jar* (London: CPI group, 2013), p.79

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p.230

<sup>11</sup> Ferretter, Luke, *Sylvia Plath's fiction: A critical study*, (Edinburgh university press:2010), p.150

motives behind her suicide attempt, which makes her realize that she will never be able to escape the social conventions.

Additionally, Esther recognises how society not only controls her career, but other life choices too. Buddy Willard is described to Esther as the ideal man; intelligent, athletic and from a clean family.<sup>12</sup> Esther's relationship with Buddy can thereby be argued to be a result of society's ideals concerning how the perfect man should be. Esther explains that she idolizes him to the extent that she considers all his words as "[...] the honest-to-God-truth."<sup>13</sup> This reveals how society's standards influence Esther's judgement of people. However, when Buddy's perfect surface is revealed to Esther as a sham, she realizes that he never was the right man for her - society only made her think he was. The lack of real attraction or love from Esther's side are thereby masked to her by the fact that he is a good partner according to society's standards. As Esther is exposed to these bitter truths of reality she feels "[...] dull and flat and full of shattered visions."<sup>14</sup> This contributes to Esther's sense of entrapment since it makes her lose hope of being able to experience true love in a society that values reputation over feelings.

The entrapment which Esther experiences as a woman comes to life through Plath's primary metaphor; the bell jar. Esther conveys her feelings thinking: "[...] wherever I sat [...] I would be sitting in the same glass bell jar, stewing in my own sour air."<sup>15</sup> The metaphor reveals how the literal entrapment Esther experiences, spreads to her own mind. Esther's entrapment thereby appears as nuanced, with both an internal and

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<sup>12</sup> Plath, Sylvia, *The Bell Jar* (London: CPI group, 2013), p.64

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.53

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.57

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.178



external entrapment. The bell jar thereby conveys Esther's feelings of entrapment in her own mind, that originate from her struggle to find a place in a society with such determined conventions. It further emphasizes how her feelings of confinement never go away and that she never manages to escape the pressures that society puts on her, no matter where she is.<sup>16</sup> Plath's use of a bell jar to symbolize Esther's feelings, is thereby another way in which her sense of entrapment is displayed. Through this metaphor, her sense of entrapment becomes developed to show not only the literal limitations on Esther, but how they infect her mind to become a constant issue that circulates in her head – worsening her mental illness.

## **A distorted relationship with sexuality**

Esther's view of her sexuality becomes distorted by social conventions regarding female sexuality, that eventually make her perceive sexuality as a burden that is disconnected from love. Esther argues that "A man doesn't have a worry in the world, while I've got a baby hanging over my head, [...] to keep me in line."<sup>17</sup> The threat of having a child from pre-marital sex limits Esther's sexuality since the widespread message of the essence of virginity, circulating around her from her mother, Mrs Willard and female magazines, makes her fear the destruction of her reputation. For instance, Esther's mother sends her an article which states that there is no way to completely avoid pregnancy and that a woman "[...] shouldn't sleep with anybody but her husband [...]"<sup>18</sup> In the same magazine, Esther reads that a girl loses her respect if she sleeps with a man and that he would

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<sup>16</sup> Plath, Sylvia, *The Bell Jar* (London: CPI group, 2013), p.178

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.212

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.76

make “[...] her life miserable.”<sup>19</sup> Once again, Ferretter argues that Plath chose to “[...] emphasise how widely the double standard of sexual ethics is accepted and enforced by women [...]”<sup>20</sup>, which displays how deeply the social conventions were rooted. The fear of being seen as a whore if she loses her virginity therefore makes her “[...] defend it at all costs.”<sup>21</sup> The extent to which sexuality limits Esther becomes evident by her decision to acquire birth control, during which she thinks: “I am climbing to freedom, freedom from fear, freedom from marrying the wrong person, like Buddy Willard, just because of sex [...]”<sup>22</sup> The hold society has on Esther concerning female purity is then further understood by Esther’s relief after undergoing the procedure, when she thinks: “I was my own woman.”<sup>23</sup> This shows how controlled Esther felt by the potential dangers of her own sexual desires, because of society’s unacceptance towards female sexuality. What Plath manages to do through Esther’s act of defiance by acquiring birth control, is to expose how hard it is for Esther to control her own sexuality. As well as the hardship to achieve sexual equality in a society which tries to repress female sexuality altogether. The social conventions that label women based on purity, are thereby seen to exert great influence on Esther’s mindset regarding her own sexuality and the limitations of it. Esther’s feelings of worry regarding purity and reputation, are therefore factors that contribute to her mindset that sexuality is a burden. Because for Esther, conventions regarding sexuality become additional ideals to live up to, that cause limitation, pressure and psychological stress.

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<sup>19</sup> Plath, Sylvia, *The Bell Jar* (London: CPI group, 2013), p.77

<sup>20</sup> Ferretter, Luke, *Sylvia Plath’s fiction: A critical study*, (Edinburgh University press: 2010), p.123

<sup>21</sup> Plath, Sylvia, *The Bell Jar* (London: CPI group, 2013), p.218

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.213

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.213

In contrast to Esther's sexuality, there is a greater acceptance of men as sexual beings with sexual desires, that cannot be held back. Esther's constructed illusions of mutual purity are crushed when Buddy reveals himself to have had an affair. Esther then struggles to accept the fact that she should remain a virgin for a man that has not done the same for her.<sup>24</sup> When Esther expresses this issue she is faced with the unjust truth: "[...] boys were like that and you couldn't honestly accuse them of anything [...]"<sup>25</sup> Examples of this attitude are found throughout the novel, where the rights that social conventions give to men concerning their sexuality make them entitled to women's bodies. These conventions result in a culture of sexual violence that Esther experiences several times. For instance, when she is on a date with Marco who tries to force himself on her and calls her a slut when she resists.<sup>26</sup> Male characters in *The Bell Jar*, such as Marco, thereby symbolize the domination that society's social conventions grant to men over women's lives, including their bodies.

When Esther decides to have sex for the first time with a man named Irwin, she experiences strong pain and bleeding, but is reassured by Irwin saying: "Sometimes it hurts."<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, Esther is reassured that bleeding is normal.<sup>28</sup> The bleeding which almost results in Esther's death emphasizes how the priority of male sexuality puts women in vulnerable positions. This is also a way in which Plath portrays how Esther is treated as if she exists for the sole purpose of men's pleasure. Because Esther's

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<sup>24</sup> Plath, Sylvia, *The Bell Jar* (London: CPI group, 2013), p.67

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.66

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.104-105

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.218

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.218

wellbeing during their intimacy is treated as unimportant and irrelevant, which is emphasized by the treatment of her bleeding and pain as acceptable. This is the final factor causing Esther's distorted view of her sexuality, since her sexual experiences become disassociated from actual love and tenderness, to instead be associated with pain and the belief that sex exists for the pleasure of men. The fear of pregnancy and the shame associated with female sexuality along with the male sexual dominance, thereby result in Esther's disconnection between love, passion and sexuality. Where she instead perceives her sexuality as a burden and a further cause of pressure.

## **A lost sense of identity**

Social conventions regarding female norms, limitations and sexuality leave Esther struggling to find her own identity. Firstly, the strictness of these conventions is why there is a lack of intellectual female role models in Esther's life. The women closest to her are her mother and Mrs. Willard, who "[...] both married their professors and settled down [...]"<sup>29</sup> and thereby followed the conventional path. Esther describes the attempt of other women to direct her into this conventionally right path, expressing how they wanted to " [...] have me resemble them."<sup>30</sup> Despite their efforts, Esther expresses how she " [...] hated the idea of serving men in any way."<sup>31</sup>, which she mentions as a reason for not wanting to get married.<sup>32</sup> Esther's view into the lives of the women around her therefore appears to leave her determined to not end up like them. But due to a lack of

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<sup>29</sup> Plath, Sylvia, *The Bell Jar* (London: CPI group, 2013), p.54

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.211

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p.72

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p.24

different female role models, she struggles to know what that life would be like or how to accomplish it.

The lack of variety among Esther's female role models is proved by Esther's statement when she finds out that her psychiatrist, Dr Nolan, is a woman: "I didn't think they had woman psychiatrists."<sup>33</sup> The absence of women diverging from the norm in Esther's life, is thereby one reason for her struggle to fully embrace a norm-breaking identity.

Because even though Esther clearly expresses her diverging aspirations, she is held back by the attitudes of people around her who are part of the norm. For instance, Buddy tries to convince her that as soon as she has children she will not want to pursue her career anymore; something which makes Esther wonder whether women's fates were to be "[...] numb as a slave in some private, totalitarian state."<sup>34</sup> The lack of female role models with other perspectives on women's lives thereby leaves her without confidence to pursue the life and identity she wants.

Esther's glamorous clothes that she wears while working at the magazine in New York become symbols for her life within the female norm. Because the clothes become associated with the superficial and constructed happiness in Esther's life, since society regards them as a sign of success and ultimate happiness for a woman. But when Esther is struck with the truths of her limitations and the role society wants her to play, she feels as if the clothes have an "[...] identity of their own [...]".<sup>35</sup> She therefore decides to feed her "[...] wardrobe to the night wind [...] in the dark heart of New York."<sup>36</sup> This is

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<sup>33</sup> Plath, Sylvia, *The Bell Jar* (London: CPI group, 2013), p.179

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.81

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.100

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.107

evidence of Esther's sense of separation from the identity of her physical self, since she struggles to decide who she truly is. Because the clothes speak of contentment and success within the female norm; something that Esther doesn't identify with. Moreover, Plath's choice to describe New York as having a dark heart, points at Esther's realization of the injustices in her society and its cruel social conventions that she can't seem to conquer.

The struggle for Esther to find her own identity is further illustrated by Plath through a metaphor of a fig-tree, where Esther imagines the figs as different possibilities of her future: "One fig was a husband and a happy home and children, and another fig was a famous poet [...]"<sup>37</sup> Esther gives voice to her inability to choose the path of her life saying that she was "starving to death," because she " [...] wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest [...]"<sup>38</sup> The pressure from the expectations of her to follow social conventions and become a wife and a mother, thereby seem to collide with her own passions; making her lose her way in the world. In line with this is also Tim Kendall's argument of how "Esther contains all and none of the multitudes presented to her [...]", which is why she "remains as faceless at the end of the novel as at the beginning."<sup>39</sup> This thereby concludes how Esther fails to find an identity because social conventions do not allow her to be everything she feels meant to be: a mother, a wife, and at the same time a career woman.

The impossibility of having both a career and a family, that is illustrated in the metaphor

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<sup>37</sup> Plath, Sylvia, *The Bell Jar* (London: CPI group, 2013), p.73

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.73

<sup>39</sup> Kendall, Tim, *Sylvia Plath A Critical Study*, (Faber and Faber: 2001), p. 56

of the figs, is described as a result of the social conventions. Because society's conventions cause women to inevitably carry the exhausting burdens of the home<sup>40</sup>; a life Esther perceives as "[...] dreary and wasted [...]".<sup>41</sup>The inability for Esther to have both a family and a career thereby creates a big dilemma for her, where she is forced to choose between doing what is expected of her and what she wants. The consequence of this is that Esther starts to feel like a failure for not being able to be the exemplary conventional woman that society wants her to be, but still failing to completely diverge from it.<sup>42</sup> Kirsty Grocott describes this phenomenon in the Telegraph, stating how "Esther feels there are few choices[...]Esther cannot decide to which category she belongs and believes that whichever she chooses, she will ultimately serve men [...]"<sup>43</sup> She also adds how the novel is of great importance today, since it forces us to evaluate how these problems still are relevant due to the continuation of many limitations and injustices that Esther experiences.<sup>44</sup> In the end, these are the reasons why Esther's search for a feminine identity is failing and leave her inevitably lost between two separate identities. This is what makes Esther lose her sense of identity because the social conventions make her unable to completely break free from the norm and just pursue a career, but she still cannot fully embrace an identity within the female norm.

The psychological implications of Esther's lost sense of identity are illustrated by a metaphor of Esther's years of life as a road with telephone poles, where Esther expresses how she "[...] couldn't see a single pole beyond the nineteenth."<sup>45</sup> The social

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<sup>40</sup> Plath, Sylvia, *The Bell Jar* (London: CPI group, 2013), p.80

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.80

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.27-28

<sup>43</sup> Grocott, Kirsty, *Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar still haunts me*, The Telegraph (2013)

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Plath, Sylvia, *The Bell Jar* (London: CPI group, 2013), p.118

conventions and norms which make it seem impossible for Esther to create her own path and identity, are thereby seen to crush her sense of further existence. Sarah Churchwell argues how Plath thereby presents the consequences of a society which “[...] makes finding a positive identity as a woman so difficult that its heroine is driven to self-destruction.”<sup>46</sup>, as demonstrated by Esther’s attempt to end herself – through suicide. This is further supported by Ferretter, whose view is that for Esther to become who she truly is “[...] is to cease to exist as a woman in the way that the concept of a woman is publicly defined” and that this “[...] seems to leave her no option but to leave the world altogether.”<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion

After a detailed examination of Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*, it becomes evident that Esther is highly affected by living in a society with strict social conventions that limit women. This essay highlights how she is affected to the extent that she feels internally entrapped, gets a distorted relationship with her own sexuality and loses her sense of identity.

Esther’s sense of entrapment originates from the strict norms and limitations of her life, which try to force her to adjust herself into a set mould. The constant message of her pre-destined role as a wife and mother coming from her mother and Mrs. Willard, as well as the pressure to choose the right partner according to ideals, leave Esther with a

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<sup>46</sup> Churchwell, Sarah, *An introduction to The Bell Jar*, British Library (2016)

<sup>47</sup> Ferretter, Luke, *Sylvia Plath’s fiction: A critical study*, (Edinburgh university press: 2010), p.148



constant internal battle between who she really is and what social conventions need her to be.

Esther's disconnection to her own sexuality is the result of social conventions that bring shame upon female sexuality. While men can express their sexual desires, women are not meant to have any. These conventions are also the reasons for the pressure on Esther concerning purity, that comes from the female figures around her. This mindset of sexuality becomes imprinted on Esther, which thereby disconnects her sexuality from real love and passion. Instead, these distortions cause acceptance of pain as a natural part of women's sexual lives; as Esther experiences during her first sexual encounter. This disconnection thereby results in Esther's perception of her sexuality as a burden or something that exists for men's pleasure.

Ultimately, Esther loses her sense of identity since society does not seem to provide her with much choice of how to live her life. This becomes evident by Esther's lack of female role models that diverge from the norm, which contributes to her struggle in creating another life for herself in contrast to the women around her. The social expectations on Esther to confine to the conventional woman's life, also expose Esther to the impossibility of having both a family and a career. Her failure to be the perfect woman according to ideals, but also to diverge completely, leave her in between two separate identities. This results in her inability to imagine a future for herself. All these factors thereby accumulate to result in Esther's attempt to end her life.

The display of the psychological consequences of social conventions on Esther in *The*

*Bell Jar*, suggests that Plath intended to condemn and criticize her society for pushing women like her into mental illness and suicide. The consequences of social conventions affect Esther to the extent that she completely loses herself in the pursuit of satisfying both herself and society's standards – until she no longer sees the point of existence. The consequences of social conventions on the rest of the characters remain as unsolved questions, but not of less importance. For instance, Buddy could be argued to experience many psychological consequences from the pressure of living up to the male ideal, despite possessing many of the freedoms that Esther longs for. Furthermore, some remaining questions include the fact that *The Bell Jar* deals with the process of recovery from mental illness, which further illuminates shortcomings of society but also small glimpses of light for Esther.

Lastly, this novel may speak even louder than its original purpose, since the focus on women's oppression can be argued to be just as relevant today. The novel could thereby function as tragic evidence of the continuation of many of the shortcomings existing in Plath's own time. This result of Plath's work could not have been foreseen, but makes it serve an even greater purpose than Plath could have imagined.

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## Extended essay - Reflections on planning and progress form

**Candidate:** This form is to be completed by the candidate during the course and completion of their EE. This document records reflections on your planning and progress, and the nature of your discussions with your supervisor. You must undertake three formal reflection sessions with your supervisor: The first formal reflection session should focus on your initial ideas and how you plan to undertake your research; the interim reflection session is once a significant amount of your research has been completed, and the final session will be in the form of a viva voce once you have completed and handed in your EE. This document acts as a record in supporting the authenticity of your work. The three reflections combined must amount to no more than 500 words.

**The completion of this form is a mandatory requirement of the EE for first assessment May 2018. It must be submitted together with the completed EE for assessment under Criterion E.**

**Supervisor:** You must have three reflection sessions with each candidate, one early on in the process, an interim meeting and then the final viva voce. Other check-in sessions are permitted but do not need to be recorded on this sheet. After each reflection session candidates must record their reflections and as the supervisor you must sign and date this form.

### First reflection session

Candidate comments:

The process of finding my research question was difficult since I found it hard to limit my area of research. I therefore chose to read Plath's published diary to achieve better understanding of the novel's purpose. This was a good decision since it made me aware of important themes and what I was most interested in: society's effect on women in the novel. However, I realized while researching that this was too broad to enable deep analysis within the world limit, since there were too many aspects. This made me understand the essence of a narrow research question for deep analysis. I found it hard to narrow my scope since all aspects were connected. But by identifying those mostly related I managed to narrow my focus to the psychological effects of social conventions on the protagonist. This made it easier to draft a structure of my essay with arguments that all link together, which I struggled with when my research question was too broad.

Date:

## Interim reflection

Candidate comments:

A challenge I've encountered is that I need to make better connections between my arguments and the research question. Because there's a tendency to drift off topic and lose why my writing is relevant to what I'm trying to prove. I'll therefore continue my process by rethinking whether some parts of my essay are relevant and by making clearer arguments written with links to the research question. Furthermore, I recognize that I could've done my research in secondary sources differently. At first, my sources were from internet newspapers. But later I realized that there were other quality sources in the form of books, that contained analysis specifically concerning my area of research. Those sources contained more suitable content that I could've made use of from the beginning. This was thereby a setback, since I had to make big changes to my essay late in the process. I therefore should've done a more thorough research in secondary sources at the start, instead of choosing those I first encountered.

Date: November 15, 2018

## Final reflection - Viva voce

Candidate comments:

The process of writing taught me much. I expanded my academic vocabulary and improved the skill of linking paragraphs and creating complex sentence structures. Furthermore, I learnt how to simplify the writing process by dividing the essay into smaller parts instead of writing everything at once. My key method was to plan my writing, which confirmed that I benefit from structuring and organizing my work. These skills will be useful at university while writing similar essays, as well as in my future career. An overall challenge was to maintain focus and achieve a logical structure, since it's a much longer essay than I was used to. However, after structuring this essay and realizing that you must cut parts sometimes, it will be considerably easier the next time. I've also always been interested in my topic: gender equality and women's issues. But my interest deepened throughout this essay, since I got insight into what for me was unknown women's history, as I read the book and articles connected to it.

Date: January 16, 2019