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**PRVKY FEMINISMU VE VYBRANÝCH DÍLECH SYLVIE PLATH**  
**FEATURES OF FEMINISM IN SELECTED WORKS BY SYLVIA PLATH**

Bakalářská práce

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## Zadání bakalářské práce

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Bakalářská práce se zabývá prvky feminismu v knihách *The Bell Jar* a *Ariel* od Sylvie Plath. Teoretická část práce se zabývá historií feminismu a blíže definuje feminismus v americkém kontextu. Práce dále představí životopis a dílo Sylvie Plath. Praktická část se zaměří na prvky feminismu v knihách *The Bell Jar* a *Ariel* s použitím poznatků z teoretické části.

HUMM, Maggie. *Modern feminisms: political, literary, cultural*. New York: Columbia University Press, c1992. ISBN 02-310-8073-5. KODRLOVÁ, Ida a Ivo ČERMÁK. *Sebevražedná triáda: Virginia Woolfová, Sylvia Plathová, Sarah Kaneová*. Praha: Academia, 2009. ISBN 978-80-200-1524-2  
PLATH, Sylvia. *Ariel: the restored edition : a facsimile of Plath's manuscript, reinstating her original selection and arrangement*. Paperback ed. London: Faber and Faber, 2007. ISBN 9780571236091. PLATH, Sylvia, *BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE BY LOIS AMES a DRAWINGS BY SYLVIA PLATH*. *The Bell Jar*. Bantam Windstone ed. New York: Bantam Books, 1981. ISBN 0553278355.  
VALDROVÁ, Jana. *Abc feminismu*. Brno: Nesehnutí, 2004. ISBN 80-9032-283-2.

### **Anotace:**

Bakalářská práce se zabývá prvky feminismu v knihách *The Bell Jar* a *Ariel* od Sylvie Plath. Teoretická část práce se zabývá historií feminismu a blíže definuje feminismus v americkém kontextu. Práce dále představí životopis a dílo Sylvie Plath. Praktická část se zaměří na prvky feminismu v knihách *The Bell Jar* a *Ariel* s použitím poznatků z teoretické části.

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V Hradci Králové dne: .....

Podpis: .....

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## **Anotace**

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Bakalářská práce se zabývá prvky feminizmu v románu *The Bell Jar* a sbírce básní *Ariel* od Sylvie Plath. Teoretická část práce se zabývá historií feminizmu a blíže definuje feminizmus v americkém kontextu. Práce dále představí životopis a dílo Sylvie Plath. Praktická část se zaměří na prvky feminizmu v románu *The Bell Jar* a sbírce básní *Ariel* s použitím poznatků z teoretické části.

## **Klíčová slova**

ženské hnutí, feminizmus, *The Bell Jar*, *Ariel*, Sylvia Plath

### **Annotation**

STEHLÍKOVÁ, Jana. *Features of Feminism in Selected Works by Sylvia Plath*. Hradec Králové: Faculty of Education, University of Hradec Králové, 2017. 54pp. Bachelor Degree Thesis.

The bachelor thesis deals with the features of feminism in the novel *The Bell Jar* and the collection of poems *Ariel* by Sylvia Plath. In the theoretical part of this thesis, the history of feminism and feminism in the USA is defined, explained and exemplified. This part of the thesis also briefly introduces Plath's biography and her oeuvre. In the practical part, the thesis deals with the features of feminism in the novel *The Bell Jar* and the collection of poems *Ariel* using the findings from the theoretical part.

### **Keywords**

women's movement, feminism, *The Bell Jar*, *Ariel*, Sylvia Plath



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## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history, women fought for equal rights and recognition of being equal to men. They fought for their right to vote, work, to be educated and to own property in order to gain their independence. This process has lasted for centuries and vast changes of the perspective were recognized by today's population.

This bachelor thesis provides a brief insight into this struggle, which has led to the feminist movements. The first part of the bachelor thesis focuses solely on the social situation starting in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to today and portrays the role of women in the society as well as their effort to fight for their rights. Furthermore, the initial part of the thesis explains the term “feminism” and explores the four waves of feminism. The First Wave of Feminism deals with the struggle for suffrage and mentions important events such as the Seneca Falls Convention and its outcome in the form of the *Declaration of Sentiments* and the achievement of the suffrage for women. The Second Wave of Feminism deals with further steps taken by feminists in order to achieve equality such as the fight for equal pay, planned parenthood as well as the fight against discrimination on the level of employment. The Third Wave of Feminism explores various types of feminism e.g. multiracial feminism, postmodernist feminism, queer theory and ecofeminism. This wave is followed by The Fourth Wave of Feminism which is closely connected to the use of the Internet to promote gender equality with the use of social media, various projects and organizations.

The second part of this bachelor thesis provides information about the American author Sylvia Plath and the features of feminism found in her poetry and prose. Her poems “Lady Lazarus”, “Daddy” and “The Applicant” from the collection of poems *Ariel* are analysed as well as her autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar*. The topics of femininity, family, marriage, sex and identity are discussed with the connection to Plath's life events. Her works provide the outlook of the then period standards and requirements placed on women. Plath is the embodiment of the struggles that women faced during the period of The First and The Second Waves of Feminism. Her oeuvre is still considered as a symbol of feminism, since it describes the issues women face to this day. Women continuously aim to reach gender equality at all levels. They also struggle with finding their identity and their personal purpose in life.

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to provide sufficient information and outlook on the history of feminism in the United States as well as to help to understand Sylvia Plath as an author and a person. The bachelor thesis also aims to examine Plath's oeuvre based on the history of feminism and the knowledge of Sylvia Plath.

# 1 HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF FEMINISM

## 1.1 Feminism

The term Feminism is explained in the *Sociological Dictionary* as a women movement which tries to extricate from the men's dominance in society.<sup>1</sup> In other words, it is a movement that tries to establish political, economical and social equality of the sexes.<sup>2</sup> Women held their subordinate position ever since the history can remember. Being physically weaker in the comparison with men, women were looked at as the “weaker sex” that needs to be protected, but not respected as equal. The role of women had slightly changed throughout the centuries, but the biggest changes started to occur in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was the time when women started to realize their oppression and they started to speak up for their rights.

## 1.2 The Role of the Woman in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

“We now see women in that sphere for which she was originally intended and which she is so exactly fitted to adorn and bless, as the wife, the mistress of the home, the solace, the aid, and the counsellor of the ONE, for whose sake alone the world is any consequence to her.”<sup>3</sup> This quote by George Washington Burnap illustrates well the position of women in the then American society. For a long period of time, home was the only place where women were supposed to be. While men worked outside of home, women had to do all the unpaid house work in order to have their house nice and clean. Obviously, they were dependent on their husband's income.

Women's rights were very limited. As an example, Hana Havelková uses points from the *Code Civil*. This document from the year 1804 inspired other countries in the creation of their civil codes. She mentions a lot of restrictions about women and their position in family and society. Even though it was the husband's obligation to provide for his wife that did not make the life easier for women. Women were the child bearers, the housewives and subordinate to the men whose orders they had to obey. However, it was the men for their legal representation, for decision making ranging from their

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<sup>1</sup> JANDOUREK, Jan. *Sociologický slovník*. Praha: Portál, 2001. ISBN 80-717-8535-0.s.83

<sup>2</sup> BRUNELL, Laura a Elinor BURKETT. Feminism | sociology | *Britannica.com*. Britannica.com [online]. Encyclopædia Britannica, c2017 [cit. 2017-01-29]. Dostupné z: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism>

<sup>3</sup> BURNAP, George Washington. *The sphere and duties of woman: a course of lectures*. 2d ed., corr. and enl. Washington: Zenger Pub. Co., 1847. ISBN 08-920-1001-0.

children's upbringing and education to money possession and ownership of the property.<sup>4</sup>

The role of women is further described by the term “Cult and Domesticity”. The term represents the value system in the then American and British society. It concerns middle and upper classes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Barbara Welter describes “true woman” as the centre of her family who had to possess four essential virtues. These virtues are: piety (value of religion), domesticity (being home, take care of husband and children, do the housework), purity (value of virginity until marriage) and finally submissiveness (requirement of submissiveness and obedience described in the Bible).<sup>5</sup> We can assume that these virtues made women feel and look soft and weak. As Catherine J. Lavender states,

When husbands went off to work, they helped create the view that men alone should support the family. This belief held that the world of work, the public sphere, was a rough world, where a man did what he had to in order to succeed, that it was full of temptations, violence, and trouble. A woman who ventured out into such a world could easily fall prey to it, for women were weak and delicate creatures. A woman's place was therefore in the private sphere, in the home, where she took charge of all that went on.<sup>6</sup>

There is no doubt that women are influenced by the trends about which they can read in the magazines, books or in the newspaper. They can sometimes blindly follow someone's ideas or the view on life which surrounds them. Good examples can be Peterson's Magazine and Godey's Lady's Book. Both of these were magazines that circulated in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As Catherine J. Lavender writes in her notes, these magazines provided women with information about household as well as fashion. The magazines included pictures of women's duties and the four virtues such as a picture of a woman knitting or a woman dressing up to please her husband. However this way of living concerned mostly people who were white and Protestant.<sup>7</sup> This is

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<sup>4</sup> HAVELKOVÁ, Hana. *Abc feminizmu: První a druhá vlna feminizmu*. In VALDROVÁ, Jana. *Abc feminizmu*. Brno: Nesehnutí, 2004. s.162-182, ISBN 80-9032-283-2. s.172

<sup>5</sup> WELTER, Barbara. The Cult of the True Womanhood: 1820-1860: American Quarterly, Volume 18, Issue 2, Part 1 (Summer, 1966), s.151-174. *Xroads.virginia.edu* [online]. Johns Hopkins University Press, c1966 [cit. 2017-05-04]. Dostupné z: <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~DRBR2/welter.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> LAVENDER, Catherine J.,. Notes on The Cult of Domesticity and True Womanhood: Prepared for Students in HST 386: Women in the City, Department of History, The College of Staten Island/CUNY [online]. 1998 [cit. 2017-03-01]. Dostupné z: <https://csivc.csi.cuny.edu/history/files/lavender/386/truewoman.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> LINDLEY, Susan Hill. *You have stept out of your place: a history of women and religille in America*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, c1996. ISBN 06-642-2081-9. s. 56

caused because we are still speaking about the time of slavery, when the life of a white man was superior to the rest of people of different colour.

Gradually, women started to realize their oppression. They did not feel well in the male dominant society. The British author Mary Wollstonecraft supports this fact in her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Mary Wollstonecraft as well as other early feminists did not meet much success. In fact, she was said to be destroying the natural order of things.<sup>8</sup> However, due to the fact that all white men were given the right to vote, women felt empowered to let their voices be heard and gain the right to vote as well as the men did. This desire of women being able to vote culminated in 1848 during the Seneca Falls Convention. We can also mark this event as the birth of the Women's Rights Movement, since two hundred of women attended it. Seneca Falls Convention was organized by Lucretia Mott and Elisabeth Cady Stanton. The topic for the Convention's discussion was the rights of women in terms of social, civil as well as religious. Stanton referred to the preamble of the *Declaration of Independence*.<sup>9</sup> The Preamble clearly says that "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."<sup>10</sup> With the feeling of empowerment, women continued fighting for their rights while attending many conventions which followed.

### **1.3 Waves of Feminism**

#### 1.3.1 First Wave

The First Wave of Feminism concerns the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The women's goal in this phase was to gain not only more work opportunities, but most importantly the right to vote (also called suffrage).

The most important women feminist fighters were Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan Brownell Anthony and Lucretia Mott. With their effort, the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 happened resulting in the *Declaration of Sentiments* (also called Seneca Falls

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<sup>8</sup>WELTER Barbara, s. 173

<sup>9</sup> Seneca Falls Convention begins - Jul 19, 1848 - HISTORY.com. *History.com* [online]. A&E Television Networks, c2017 [cit. 2017-01-29]. Dostupné z: <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/seneca-falls-convention-begins>

<sup>10</sup> Declaration of Independence: A Transcription | National Archives. *Archives.gov* [online]. 2017 [cit. 2017-05-04]. Dostupné z: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>

Declaration) drafted by Elizabeth Cady Stanton. This declaration referred to the *Declaration of Independence* which clearly says that it applies equally to men and women. Also it defines the movement's ideology and further steps in order to achieve women's rights.<sup>11</sup> The topic of women rights was in the spotlight. Due to that many radical and conservative feminist associations were created.<sup>12</sup> Most importantly, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) was created. Its goal was clear. The association wanted to persuade the Congress so it would add a new amendment to the U.S. Constitution giving women the right to vote. Finally, women were given this right and new amendment was passed. The so-called Nineteenth Amendment was ratified by Congress in 1919 and added to the Constitution in 1920.<sup>13</sup> The recognition of women suffrage symbolizes the end of The First Wave of Feminism. Approximately during the same time women in Western Europe were given the suffrage as well. However, further fight for women rights stopped for some period of time due to the emerging World War II and the threat of ideologies such as Fascism and Nazism.<sup>14</sup>

The First Wave of Feminism started at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 and ended by the creation and establishment of a new amendment giving women the right to vote in the year 1920. During these 72 years, women activists made sure that their voices were heard. They set on a long journey. Most importantly, they no longer belonged to homes. They realized that with unity and effort, they could achieve a lot starting with gaining suffrage.

### 1.3.2 Second Wave

Women's movement stopped for four decades due to the First and Second World War. Women tried to raise awareness about emerging ideologies such as Nazism and Fascism. They also started to be more educated than before. Many women got their degree in law, medicine, and science.<sup>15</sup> However, after the World War II, there was no need for women to work, since the economy in Western countries and in the USA got

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<sup>11</sup> RAMPTON, Martha. Four Waves of Feminism. *Pacificu.edu* [online]. Pacific University, 2015 [cit. 2017-01-29]. Dostupné z: <https://www.pacificu.edu/about-us/news-events/four-waves-feminism>

<sup>12</sup> HUMM, Maggie. *Modern feminisms: political, literary, cultural*. New York: Columbia University Press, c1992. ISBN 02-310-8073-5. s.2-3

<sup>13</sup> National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) | American organization | Britannica.com. *Britannica.com* [online]. Encyclopædia Britannica, c2017 [cit. 2017-01-29]. Dostupné z: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/National-American-Woman-Suffrage-Association>

<sup>14</sup> HAVELKOVÁ Hana, s.175

<sup>15</sup> HAVELKOVÁ Hana, s.176

stronger and men took their jobs back. With that, the idea of a good housewife and mother came back. The only happiness that even college educated women were supposed to have was the care of their husbands and children. Many writers focused on the topic of men's and women's identity.

British writer Virginia Woolf is one of the women writers that expressed her feelings toward the then situation not only through her writings, but also through her lifestyle. She disliked the idea of a dependent woman. The vision of becoming the “Victorian woman” did not satisfy her. That is one of the reasons why she purchased a house in which she organized meetings with intellectuals and her friends. As for her and her interest in politics, she organised monthly meetings with women called Women's Cooperative Guild and she also took part in the Suffragette movement.<sup>16</sup> In between her serious depressions or in times when she felt happiness and creativeness, she managed to write many essays such as *A Room of One's Own*, *Three Guineas* and *Killing the Angel in the House*. For the feminist movement, her book *Killing the Angel in the House* was essential. It comprises of seven essays where she discusses feminist and women issues. The Angel represents a selfless woman of the 19<sup>th</sup> century whose only purpose is to comfort her men while taking care of the household.<sup>17</sup> Virginia showed her disagreement in this book and she also said that “Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer.”<sup>18</sup> The French writer Simone de Beauvoir also focused on the topic of women in the society. Her main point is that women themselves accept their subordinate position and define themselves as the second. They are comfortable with their lives, but she warns them that it does not do any good for them.<sup>19</sup>

As men became economically productive, women once again were pushed to their subordinate position of child-bearers and housekeepers. Women felt discouraged and defective. Russell Muirhead quotes the feminist book *Feminine Mystique* written by Betty Friedan, “Women as well as men, can only find their identity in work that uses their full capacities. A woman cannot find her identity through others – her husband, her

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<sup>16</sup> KODRLOVÁ, Ida a Ivo ČERMÁK. *Sebevražedná triáda: Virginia Woolfová, Sylvia Plathová, Sarah Kaneová*. Praha: Academia, 2009. ISBN 978-80-200-1524-2. s.71 - 80

<sup>17</sup> "Professions for Women" by Virginia Woolf. *S.spachman.tripod.com* [online]. [cit. 2017-03-01]. Dostupné z: <http://s.spachman.tripod.com/Woolf/professions.htm>

<sup>18</sup> tamtéž

<sup>19</sup> HAVELKOVÁ Hana, s. 176



children. She cannot find it in the dull routine of housework.”<sup>20</sup> Many women identified with this book. *The Feminine Mystique* is seen as the milestone of The Second Wave of the Feminist movement. Thanks to this book, women realized that they kept their feeling inside and did not talk about them. Susan Browmiller, an American writer and activist, says that it was considered a manly aspiration for women to desire a career. So women felt that there was something wrong with them. Their lives were not fulfilled in the way they wanted to be. Browmiller also points out that despite women's aspirations, they always kept it private and never talked about it with anybody. They were persuaded by the society that their only satisfaction should be only housework, marriage and motherhood.<sup>21</sup> Browmiller was not the only activist and pro-women writer. Marilyn French agrees with her on this issue. She herself went through many struggles. Despite being a college educated woman, she still could not find any job since they were listed by sex. A few jobs were available such as a secretary or a clerk. She was not helped by her teachers since she was expected to get married, have children, and to be a good housewife. So she did. However, feeling miserable, French wrote a book about her struggles. The book titled *The Women's Room* was very inspiring.<sup>22</sup> Such stories and books caught the attention of women across the United States. They later on started speaking about the issue of inequality and their position in the society. Women gathered for meetings where they tried to come up with the roots of this problem as well as they tried to come up with solutions.

In the year 1966, the National Organisation of Women was founded by the already mentioned writer and activist Betty Friedan. This association aimed at the change of policies in the field of education and legislature.<sup>23</sup> The National Organisation of Women (NOW) also supported the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which states that “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex”.<sup>24</sup> As visible from this statement, the ERA would eliminate all legal gender-based discrimination in the country. Many organisations, especially the

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<sup>20</sup> MUIRHEAD, Russell. *Just work*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004. ISBN 0-674-01558-4. s. 139

<sup>21</sup> BROWMILLER Susan.In.: Documentary on Women's Liberation Movement. In: Youtube.com [online]. [cit. 2017-02-05]. Dostupné z: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EOsLjbpHV8M>

<sup>22</sup> FRENCH Marilyn, tamtéž

<sup>23</sup> HUMM Maggie, s. 4

<sup>24</sup> FRANCIS, Roberta. ERA: Why. *Equalrightsamendment.org* [online]. Alice Paul Institute [cit. 2017-02-05]. Dostupné z: <http://www.equalrightsamendment.org/why.htm>

NOW, fought for the ratification of this amendment. The process had two steps: first it had to be ratified by the Congress and then by three-fourths of state legislatures. Various leaders gave speeches about the importance of the ERA with Gloria Steinem in the lead. Finally, the Congress passed the amendment in 1972 and thirty states of the necessary thirty-eight did as well in the year 1973.<sup>25</sup>

However, not all women agreed with the ERA, since they saw their traditional role of an American woman in danger. The STOP-ERA campaign gained importance and the attention of the states. Phyllis Schlafly, a conservative activist and a spoke-woman for the STOP-ERA campaign, protested against the feminist views and warned women about the undesirable changes which they would have to face if the ERA was to pass.<sup>26</sup> Not only did this campaign slow down the process of the ERA's ratification, it stopped it entirely. The final deadline for the ERA's ratification was in 1983. Only thirty-five states out of thirty-eight states which were needed for its ratification, voted for the ERA.<sup>27</sup> Even though the ERA was not ratified, women still gained a lot in The Second Feminist Wave. Not only did they accomplish receiving rights concerning their job and education, but mostly they gained the knowledge of self-awareness and the strength to pursue their beliefs and dreams.

#### 1.3.2.1 Outcomes of The Second Wave

There were several outcomes of The Second Wave of Feminism connected to the empowerment of women and their education rights, reproductive rights as well as rights for equal job opportunities.

Many women got empowered not only by the books already mentioned, such as *Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan, *Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir or *The Woman's Room* by Marilyn French, but also by the famous women's magazine *Ms. Magazine*. The first issue of this magazine was published in July 1972. It became associated with feminists and their views on various issues. Gloria Steinem, the co-

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<sup>25</sup> The Equal Rights Amendment [ushistory.org]. *Ushistory.org* [online]. Independence Hall Association in Philadelphia, c2008-2016 [cit. 2017-02-05]. Dostupné z: <http://www.ushistory.org/us/57c.asp>

<sup>26</sup> SCHLAFLY Phyllis. In.: Untold Women Who Changed The World | The Great Feminist Movement | Biography Documentary Films In: *Youtube* [online]. 2016-02-01 [cit 2017-02-05]. Dostupné z [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEtYf6\\_HSTA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEtYf6_HSTA).

<sup>27</sup> The Equal Rights Amendment [ushistory.org]. *Ushistory.org* [online]. Independence Hall Association in Philadelphia, c2008-2016 [cit. 2017-02-05]. Dostupné z: <http://www.ushistory.org/us/57c.asp>

founder of Ms. Magazine, became its symbol for her feminist articles, but also for her television appearances and lectures.<sup>28</sup> Women were further empowered by the knowledge gained at university, where a new major, feminist studies, was found. The knowledge of society was shaped thanks to the new information acquired and outcomes of surveys published.<sup>29</sup> That also helped the activist organisation to argue on the topics of inequality.

The new emerging TV series also helped to shape the ideas towards women. The TV series *That Girl* casting Marlo Thomas helped women to realize their own potential and pursue their dreams. *That Girl* shows that even a small-town girl can succeed in the big world thanks to dedication and hard work. It shows that she can be independent and self-driven, not subordinate to men and be restrained to jobs such as a secretary or a clerk.

As already mentioned, after the World War II, women were oppressed back to their jobs of being housewives or into subordinate jobs such as clerks and secretaries. A huge step forward was made in 1961 by John Kennedy, when he established the President's Commission on the Status of Women. Not only did this help to fight discrimination against women, but it also made recommendations for improvement covering paid maternity leave and affordable child care. Another huge step was the signature of Equal Pay Act of 1963 which enables men and women get the same wage for the same work at the same establishment. As John Kennedy said on June 10, 1963

I am delighted today to approve the Equal Pay Act of 1963, which prohibits arbitrary discrimination against women in the payment of wages. This act represents many years of effort by labour, management, and several private organizations associated with labour or management, to call attention to the unconscionable practice of paying female employees less wages than male employees for the same job. This measure adds to our laws another structure basic to democracy. It will add protection at the working place to the women, the same rights at the working place in a sense that they have enjoyed at the polling place.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the Equal Pay Act, the wage gap is still present. It does not concern only gender, but it also concerns people of different race. In the year 2015, women who worked fulltime earned only 80% of what men earned. The gap differs across the states.

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<sup>28</sup> IMBORNONI, Ann-Marie. Women's Rights Movement in the U.S.: Timeline of Events (1921-1979). *Infoplease.com* [online]. Sandbox Networks, 2017 [cit. 2017-02-05]. Dostupné z: <https://www.infoplease.com/spot/womens-rights-movement-us-0>

<sup>29</sup> HAVELKOVÁ Hana, s. 177

<sup>30</sup> John F. Kennedy: Remarks Upon Signing the Equal Pay Act. *Presidency.ucsb.edu* [online]. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, c1999-2017 [cit. 2017-05-03]. Dostupné z: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9267>

The smallest difference between the wages was in New York and the biggest was in Wyoming, where woman earned only 64% of what man earned.<sup>31</sup> Clearly, women made a huge progress, but they have not reached full wage equality just yet.

As for education, it was and still is essential for obtaining more specific and more demanding jobs. *The Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972* helped women to gain equality on the educational level. The document clearly states that “no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance”.<sup>32</sup> Thanks to the Title IX, people are no longer discriminated based on their sex. This concerns not only educational programs, but also activities which are funded by the Federal finance.

As for women rights on the level of their health and intimacy, these rights improved greatly in the 80's. Before that, Women's rights concerning their health were very limited. Since women had the subordinate position towards men, it was not their decision whether they wanted to have children or not. There was nothing that would help women to control their own bodies and decide about their pregnancy. Until 1936, information concerning contraception was prohibited. However, in 1960 the birth control pills were approved by the Food and Drug Administration.<sup>33</sup> In the 60's, women also fought for the right of abortion, which was before considered as a crime. These women faced a lot of criticism from the conservatives who called abortion a murder. The breaking point was in 1973 when the Supreme Court established the right of safe and legal abortion for women.<sup>34</sup> It was the case of *Roe v. Wade* in which a female lawyer Sarah Weddington fought for the right of abortion. When winning the case, the abortion was legalized and the right of abortion was given to the woman and her doctor up till 3 months of pregnancy.<sup>35</sup> Women no longer have to suffer or die due to the

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<sup>31</sup> The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap (Spring 2017): AAUW. *Aauw.org* [online]. AAUW [cit. 2017-02-05]. Dostupné z: <http://www.aauw.org/research/the-simple-truth-about-the-gender-pay-gap/>

<sup>32</sup> Title IX and Sex Discrimination. *Ed.gov* [online]. 2015 [cit. 2017-02-05]. Dostupné z: [https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/tix\\_dis.html](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/tix_dis.html)

<sup>33</sup> IMBORNONI, Ann-Marie. Women's Rights Movement in the U.S.: Timeline of Events (1921-1979). *Infoplease.com* [online]. Sandbox Networks, 2017 [cit. 2017-02-05]. Dostupné z: <https://www.infoplease.com/spot/womens-rights-movement-us-0>

<sup>34</sup> tamtéž

<sup>35</sup> WEDDINGTON Sarah. In: Untold Women Who Changed The World | The Great Feminist Movement | Biography Documentary Films In: *Youtube* [online]. 2016-02-01 [cit 2017-02-05]. Dostupné z [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEtYf6\\_HSTA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEtYf6_HSTA).

illegal and dangerous abortion as they used to. However, abortion is still seen negatively in the US.

Another big step for women was the right to refuse to have intercourse with their husbands. Rape is not only an act of violence, but it is also a demonstration of male's dominance and strength. It also symbolizes the oppression of women.<sup>36</sup> For a long period of time, women believed that their husband had the right over their bodies and that he was superior to them. They had to be submissive and accept his decisions even if he insulted them. However, that changed in 1976. In that year, Nebraska was the first state to pass the law which makes it illegal for a husband to rape his wife.<sup>37</sup> Writer Susan Browmiller wrote a book with the title *Against Our Will*. It was published in the year 1975. It is the first book to express rape as a male's power rather than an isolated sexual act.<sup>38</sup>

Overall, many goals of this wave were met. Higher employment of women in higher positions of business, but also involvement in education and politics was observed. Abortion rights as well as the access to the birth control pill helped women to gain control over their bodies. New university majors concerning feminism were found. Women's support groups and organizations were established.<sup>39</sup> However, these outcomes concerned mostly white American women. Women of different religion, origin, sexual orientation and skin colour had to fight for equality in the following years. This is further described in the following chapter together with new types of feminism.

### 1.3.3 Third Wave

Women of The Third Wave of Feminism are already born with the rights for which women had to fight for in the previous decades. They see themselves as capable and

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<sup>36</sup> OPOČENSKÁ, Jana. Násilí a jeho překonávání. In Oates – Indruchová, Libora et al. Sborník studií: Společnost žen a mužů z aspektu gender. Praha: Open Society Fund Praha, 1999. s. 117-130, s.124

<sup>37</sup> IMBORNONI, Ann-Marie. Women's Rights Movement in the U.S.: Timeline of Events (1921-1979). *Infoplease.com* [online]. Sandbox Networks, 2017 [cit. 2017-02-05]. Dostupné z: <https://www.infoplease.com/spot/womens-rights-movement-us-0>

<sup>38</sup> BROWMILLER Susan. In.: Documentary on Women's Liberation Movement. In: *Youtube.com* [online]. [cit. 2017-02-05]. Dostupné z: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EOsLjbpHV8M>

<sup>39</sup> RAMPTON, Martha. Four Waves of Feminism. *Pacificu.edu* [online]. Pacific University, 2015 [cit. 2017-01-29]. Dostupné z: <https://www.pacificu.edu/about-us/news-events/four-waves-feminism>

strong women.<sup>40</sup> The Third Wave of Feminism differs greatly from the previous ones. Women do not call themselves feminists, since this term is misused by the conservative media and seen as male-bashing and extremist.<sup>41</sup> Women strive for equal rights for everybody. The Third Wave is more individualist, without one particular common goal.

One of the aspects of this wave, which began in the mid-90's, is that women embraced their femininity while wearing low cut necklines, bright tones of lip-stick as well as high-heels. That was before identified with the oppression by men.<sup>42</sup> A feminist Pinkfloor once said "It's possible to have a push-up bra and a brain at the same time."<sup>43</sup> Women were confident in who they were, they knew that they have the power and the strength to fight for what they thought was right. They were sometimes labelled as being bossy or bitches. They tried to redefine these terms while exaggerating them. As an example there is a quotation from the *Bitch Magazine*. "When it's being used as an insult, "bitch" is most often hurled at women who speak their minds, who have opinions and don't shy away from expressing them. If being an outspoken woman means being a bitch, we'll take that as a compliment, thanks."<sup>44</sup> As visible, it says that if outspoken and opinionated women are labelled as bitches, they take this label as a compliment.

Women also labelled themselves as Grrls. The term Grrls does not longer refer to those who are young at age, but it refers also to the ones who are young at heart.<sup>45</sup> They also define their "feminine beauty for themselves as subjects, not as objects of a sexist patriarchy".<sup>46</sup> However, they focus more on being confident and putting their potential in raising awareness about problems of globalized world, rather than screaming for being suppressed by males.

It is important to realize that in The Third Wave of Feminism, there is the focus on the connection between gender and inequalities in the society. People of different race,

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<sup>40</sup> KROLØKKE, Charlotte. a Ann Scott. SØRENSEN. *Gender communication theories & analyses: from silence to performance*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, c2006. ISBN 9780761929185. s. 15

<sup>41</sup> RAMPTON, Martha. Four Waves of Feminism. *Pacificu.edu* [online]. Pacific University, 2015 [cit. 2017-01-29]. Dostupné z: <https://www.pacificu.edu/about-us/news-events/four-waves-feminism>

<sup>42</sup> tamtéž

<sup>43</sup> KROLØKKE, Charlotte. a Ann Scott. SØRENSEN, s. 20

<sup>44</sup> tamtéž, s. 21

<sup>45</sup> tamtéž, s. 15

<sup>46</sup> RAMPTON, Martha. Four Waves of Feminism. *Pacificu.edu* [online]. Pacific University, 2015 [cit. 2017-01-29]. Dostupné z: <https://www.pacificu.edu/about-us/news-events/four-waves-feminism>

ethnicity, and sexual orientation as well as people of various religious beliefs and age were looked at and treated differently.<sup>47</sup> Also the topics such as violence against women, trafficking and “pornofication” of the media got discussed and fought against.<sup>48</sup> As above mentioned, women tried to raise awareness about these issues and they stood against all kinds of discrimination. With such a vast variety of problems, many different types of feminism sprang up. For instance, multiracial feminism analyzes how people of different skin colour are treated, where they stand on the social scale and if they are discriminated based on prejudices. Postmodern feminism focuses more on gender than sex. It says that is important how we perform our gender. The way people talk, dress, and walk is what the society looks at and based on what it makes its opinion. A queer theory, which is partially derived from the postmodernist theory, claims that heterosexuality puts pressure on people. It also claims that there is nothing as two sexes nor two genders. Each person should find his own identity.<sup>49</sup> Another specific type of feminism is ecofeminism, which tries to re-establish the balance between the nature and humans.

The basic thought of this ecofeminism is that nature and women are exploited not only by males, but by humans themselves. It criticizes the attitude of dominance and destructive control over the land. Ecofeminism also tries to face the global ecological crisis, which are caused by humans. The accident in 1979 of the nuclear power plant Three Mile Island can be used as an example. The partial nuclear meltdown of the power plant caused the leak of radioactive gases into the environment. Due to that fact, there was a concern about the possibility of the higher risks of cancer and other health problems. However, no evidence of health problems caused by the leak of the radioactive gases was found.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, this crisis led to demonstrations.

Women united and spoke against the use of such energy which can cause danger. Ecofeminists are also very pro-life oriented. They do not accept medical intervention in pregnancies. They warn people about the misuse of medical science. For instance,

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<sup>47</sup> SOKOLOVÁ, Věra. Současné trendy feministického myšlení.. In VALDROVÁ, Jana. *Abc feminizmu*. Brno: Nesehnutí, 2004. s. 199-2012. ISBN 80-9032-283-2. s. 207

<sup>48</sup> KROLØKKE, Charlotte. a Ann Scott. SØRENSEN, s. 17

<sup>49</sup> SOKOLOVÁ Věra, s. 208–210

<sup>50</sup> Three Mile Island | TMI 2 |Three Mile Island Accident. - World Nuclear Association. World-nuclear.org [online]. 2012 [cit. 2017-05-04]. Dostupné z: <http://www.world-nuclear.org/information-library/safety-and-security/safety-of-plants/three-mile-island-accident.aspx>

women in countries such as China are still overlooked and unwanted. The number of abortions rises as well as the male population in the country.<sup>51</sup> The last but not least form of feminism is cyberfeminism, which is focusing on the study of media and information technologies. The aim of cyberfeminism is to find out the perception of gender differences in information and communication technologies as well as the opportunities for the change of such perceptions.<sup>52</sup> These technologies affect all levels of society since they are powerful means of shaping people's opinions and attitudes towards various topics such as politics, job opportunities or education.

The Third Wave of Feminism brings many new forms of feminism together with their findings. Most importantly it shows that the term “woman” stands for woman of any race, religion, ethnicity and nationality. It also points out the diversity of identities and the need of forming those by individuals themselves, not by society. It tries to abolish gender roles expectations and the stereotypes of women and men. And lastly and most importantly, it helps women, girls and people in general to feel good about who they are and what they stand for.

#### 1.3.4 Fourth Wave

The Fourth Wave of Feminism is largely connected to the usage of the Internet and the social media. Today's generation is very dependent on receiving the news from portals such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, etc. These means of information empower men and women to speak up for what they believe in. It enables them to share their stories, opinions and it lets their voices to be heard on a large scale, since their posts can reach people around the whole world. In fact, “young feminists created blogs, Twitter campaigns, and online media with names like Racialious and Feministing.”<sup>53</sup> Thanks to the modernization of the technology and globalization, new information and updates can reach a huge number of social media users within a few minutes. The Fourth Wave deals with various topics which get discussed not only on the academic field, in public discourse, but also in the politics.

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<sup>51</sup> Ekofeminismus. *Nesehnuti.ecn.cz* [online]. [cit. 2017-03-13]. Dostupné z: <http://nesehnuti.ecn.cz/cz/tiskoviny/fem.html>

<sup>52</sup> SOKOLOVÁ Věra, s. 211

<sup>53</sup> BAUMGARDNER, Jennifer. IS THERE A FOURTH WAVE? DOES IT MATTER? BY JENNIFER BAUMGARDNER. *Feminist.com* [online]. c1995-2011 [cit. 2017-03-20]. Dostupné z: <http://www.feminist.com/resources/artspeech/genwom/baumgardner2011.html>



Problems like sexual abuse, rape, violence against women, unequal pay, slut-shaming, the pressure on women to conform to a single and unrealistic body-type and the realization that gains in female representation in politics and business, for example, are very slight. It is no longer considered “extreme,” nor is it considered the purview of rarified intellectuals to talk about societal abuse of women, rape on college campus, Title IX, homo and transphobia, unfair pay and work conditions, and the fact that the US has one of the worst records for legally-mandated parental leave and maternity benefits in the world.<sup>54</sup>

As visible, feminism does no longer refer to the problems that only women have to face. Feminism strives for gender equity and justice. Many campaigns have been launched as well as projects that have received attention. A project called Every Sexism Project was started by Laura Bates in April 2012. This project was so successful that it has spread to many countries. Women write there about issues and problems they have to face. The concept of the project is to cover stories of women being body-shamed, harassed or sexually harassed in streets and at their workplace.<sup>55</sup> This project shows that this problem is not individual, but it is collective and needs to be discussed and taken care of. Discrimination, however, concerns also men, who by social stereotypes are pushed into roles with which they are not comfortable.

A campaign HeForShe, initiated by the UN Women, tries to encourage men and women in fighting the stereotypes. As UN Women Goodwill Ambassador Anne Hathaway said, “The assumption that women and girls look after the home is a stubborn and very real stereotype that only discriminates against women, but limits men's participation and connection within the family and society”.<sup>56</sup> Emma Watson, the UN Goodwill Ambassador and the Ambassador of HeForShe also points out facts concerning this issue while talking to the UN. Watson makes it clear that the word feminism does not refer to men hatred, but it refers to the ability of men and women having equal rights and opportunities. She also covers the topic of children not being raised equally. Boys are taught to be strong and not sensitive. Girls are told to be rather the opposite. She

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<sup>54</sup> RAMPTON, Martha. Four Waves of Feminism. *Pacificu.edu* [online]. Pacific University, 2015 [cit. 2017-01-29]. Dostupné z: <https://www.pacificu.edu/about-us/news-events/four-waves-feminism>

<sup>55</sup> COCHRANE, Kira. The fourth wave of feminism: meet the rebel women | World news | The Guardian. *Theguardian.com* [online]. Guardian News and Media Limited or its affiliated companies, c2017 [cit. 2017-03-20]. Dostupné z: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/10/fourth-wave-feminism-rebel-women>

<sup>56</sup> Speech: “Paid parental leave is about creating freedom to define roles”— UN Women Goodwill Ambassador Anne Hathaway | UN Women – Headquarters. *Unwomen.org* [online]. UN Women, 2017 [cit. 2017-03-20]. Dostupné z: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2017/3/speech-anne-hathaway-iwd-2017>

suggests that it is normal for all genders to be strong and also sensitive.<sup>57</sup> Education about gender mentality is essential. A great number of schools and universities started various projects in order to raise awareness about inequality. Universities worldwide are engaged in the biggest non-profit student organization AIESEC, which helps countries around the whole world via its projects that are built on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. These projects among others help to fight for quality education and gender equality.

The Fourth Wave of Feminism has brought many new findings such as cyberfeminism, various campaigns for gender equality, but most importantly it has helped people to speak up, to organize big events and protests while using social media as the main means of communication. It has helped to raise awareness about various kinds of issues, which get discussed by the media and by the politicians as well.

### 1.3.5 Chapter Conclusion

Four Waves of Feminism are recognized. The First Wave of Feminism concerns the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this phase, the main goal of women was to gain suffrage and more work opportunities. Many women fought for recognition of women rights especially Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who drafted *the Declaration of Sentiments* which states that women are equal to men. The First Wave of Feminism fulfilled what it aimed for – it ended with the establishment of the new amendment which gave women the right to vote.

The Second Wave of Feminism concerns the post World Wars period of time when women were put back to their housewife positions. Many women did not identify with the vision of being the “Victorian woman”. Women such as Virginia Woolf, Betty Friedan, Susan Browmiller spoke against the pressure on women for being treated as child bearers, housekeepers and subordinate to men. This wave of feminism is also associated with the aim of gaining reproductive rights, equal job opportunities, educational rights and equal pay rights.

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<sup>57</sup> Emma Watson Gender equality is your issue too | UN Women – Headquarters. *Unwomen.org* [online]. UN Women, 2014 [cit. 2017-03-20]. Dostupné z: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2014/9/emma-watson-gender-equality-is-your-issue-too>

As for The Third Wave of Feminism, it differs greatly from the previous two ones. This wave is more individual without any certain common goal. However, this wave of feminism does not concern only heterosexual white women, but it concerns people of any race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and religion. There are many types of feminism such as multiracial feminism, postmodernist feminism, queer theory and ecofeminism. The Third Wave of Feminism tries to abolish gender stereotypes and expectations of women and men in the eyes of society.

The Fourth Wave of Feminism is connected to the use of the Internet and social media. Thanks to the easy use of the Internet, many feminist blogs and web pages were created for women and men to express their experiences, ideas and opinions. This wave of feminism still continues and strives for equality of men, women, transgendered people, people of different sexual orientation, people of different race, ethnicity, and religion in all fields such as in the academic field, business and political field. In this phase, the boundaries of taboo topics are broken. Issues concerning equal rights got public spotlight and are discussed on daily basis by politicians, non-profit organizations, activists as well as they are discussed at schools during various projects. The subject of feminism and its features are observed in works of various poets and writers such as Betty Friedan, Susan Browmiller, Virginia Woolf and others. However, the following chapter is solely focused on Sylvia Plath and the features of feminism found in her poetry and her prose.

## 2 SYLVIA PLATH

The second part of this bachelor thesis is focused on the subject of the life of Sylvia Plath as well as the features of feminism found in her works. The chapter consists of Plath's biography and the analysis of her poems "Lady Lazarus", "Daddy", "The Applicant" from the collection of poems *Ariel*. The analysis of Plath's novel *The Bell Jar* follows. Firstly, the aim of this chapter is to present Plath's biography and its connection and influence on her writing. The understanding of this subject is essential for the comprehension of Plath's poetry and prose. Secondly, the aim of this chapter is to analyze Plath's work in the connection with her live events and the social standards of the then society.

### 2.1 Biography

The American poet and novelist Sylvia Plath was born on October 27, 1932 in Boston, Massachusetts to the parents Otto Emile Plath and Aurelia Plath, originally Schober. Sylvia Plath was a talented and educated writer who is mostly known for her novel *The Bell Jar* and her collections of poems *The Colossus*, *Ariel* and *Collected Poems*. Unlike other authors, Sylvia Plath received attention posthumously when winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1981 for her *Collected Poems* which were put together by her husband Ted Hughes.

Sylvia was a daughter of Otto Plath, a university professor of Biology at Boston University and a teacher Aurelia Plath. Sylvia's mother had to leave her career of a teacher behind for the sake of their family, because her husband wanted her to take care of their children and household. Aurelia realized that despite her nature, she had to become submissive. On the other hand, Sylvia Plath's father was a career focused man who did not spend much time with his family. Since he was a specialist in ornithology, entomology and ichthyology, he preferred studying bees to being a father.<sup>58</sup> He is described as a quite a distant, strict and a reserved person with whom Sylvia tried to make a connection. Sylvia's poetry had a link to the interests of her father. It can be seen in her writing *The Beekeeper's Daughter*. She wanted to be loved and was scared of losing him. In the year 1935, due to Otto Plath's illness, Sylvia and her family moved to Winthrop, where her grandmother lived. The location was by the ocean, which is symbolic in Sylvia Plath's writings. The moment of the death of her father was crucial

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<sup>58</sup> BASSNETT, Susan. *Sylvia Plath: an introduction to the poetry*. 2nd ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, c2005. ISBN 0-333-77126-5. s. 2

for young Sylvia. She suffered from depression and for that she started to express her feelings when writing notes and poems into her diary.<sup>59</sup> Young Sylvia continued living with her mother and her younger brother Warren. Aurelia Plath was in the eyes of young Sylvia pictured as a superwoman, who did not show her emotions when losing her husband.<sup>60</sup> Sylvia Plath's childhood influenced greatly her personality and her writing.

Since Sylvia Plath excelled at poetry, she received a scholarship at Smith College in Northampton after graduating from Bradford High School. During her studies at Smith College, she wrote around 400 poems. In the year 1953, she also won a fiction contest and gained an internship in the *Mademoiselle* magazine in New York City. Plath describes this experience as fabulous, but also as very chaotic at the same time. She suffered from exhaustion and swings of mood about which she speaks in her letter to her brother Warren. The same year after the end of her internship in New York City, her depression drove her to attempting to commit a suicide by swallowing a bottle of sleeping pills and hiding in a cellar of their house.<sup>61</sup> When saved, she was taken to a psychical institution where she spent six months. However, when feeling better, she came back to Smith College and graduated with summa cum laude. She was given Fulbright scholarship at Cambridge University in the United Kingdom. This was one of her happiest periods of time since she enjoyed the British way of living.<sup>62</sup> However, when sending out her writings to publishers, she was continuously rejected. For that, she wrote to her mother:

I begin to feel that I lack that 'indefinable something' that makes a winner... Now I can see the advantage of an agent – she keeps you from the little deaths every writer goes through whenever a manuscript comes back home. It's like having your child refused admittance to public school. You love it, and often can't see why.<sup>63</sup>

Her depression from being continuously rejected disappeared with the encounter of her future husband.

When studying at Cambridge University, she met Ted Hughes whom she married in 1956. They both were very talented poets who shared similar lifestyle. As Alfred Alvarez, an English poet and critic points out, Ted Hughes had an enormous influence

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<sup>59</sup> KODRLOVÁ, Ida a Ivo ČERMÁK, s. 83

<sup>60</sup> BASSNETT Susan, s. 2

<sup>61</sup> BASSNETT Susan, s. 9

<sup>62</sup> KODRLOVÁ, Ida a Ivo ČERMÁK, s. 85

<sup>63</sup> BASSNETT, Susan, s. 9

on Plath's work. He helped her to find her voice.<sup>64</sup> When moving to the United States, they both became teachers. However, Plath did not manage to teach for a long period of time since she was exhausted and did not have enough time to write her poetry. When exhausted and still rejected by publishers, she suffered from depression again. Her condition changed with the arrival of her two children. She had to manage doing housework and writing her poetry. In the year 1960, she published her first collection of poems called *The Colossus*. That was when they moved back to the United Kingdom. Plath was constantly under pressure since she had to work on her poetry, do housework as well as look after her two little children.

The discovery of the infidelity of her husband broke her. She continued writing and published her autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar*.<sup>65</sup> As Alvarez points out, she was an extraordinary poet that wrote around two to three poems a day with the topics of common chores such as cooking and taking care of the children.<sup>66</sup> She also used the infidelity of her husband in her writings in which she expressed her suffering of the loss of her love. Despite her love for her husband, she was not able to cope with his infidelity and wanted to get divorced and become independent from him.<sup>67</sup> She moved with her children to London, where during winter, her depression came back to her again.

During her lifetime, Plath tried to commit suicide three times and she was hospitalized in a psychic institution. During her whole life, she attended meetings with her doctor and even when being abroad, she kept in touch with her doctor. Despite working hard and writing her poetry, she was unable to continue with her life and doing the daily tasks. She suffered from depression, insomnia, hysteria and partly malnutrition. In the year 1963, she committed suicide using the gas in the oven. Her children were sleeping next door, but she made sure they were not injured. There is a speculation that she did not want to die since she left a note to call for a doctor.<sup>68</sup> The topic of her suicide is still discussed by literary critics. Some see Sylvia Plath as “damaged individual whose death was the culmination of a long flirtation with the idea of dying, others saw her as an

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<sup>64</sup> Sylvia Plath documentary [complete].In: *Youtube.com* [online]. 2012 [cit. 2017-05-04]. Dostupné z: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmamNSa3sP8>

<sup>65</sup> KODRLOVÁ, Ida a Ivo ČERMÁK, s. 88

<sup>66</sup> Sylvia Plath documentary [complete].In: *Youtube.com* [online]. 2012 [cit. 2017-05-04]. Dostupné z: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmamNSa3sP8>

<sup>67</sup> BASSNETT, Susan, s. 16–17

<sup>68</sup> KODRLOVÁ, Ida a Ivo ČERMÁK, s. 89

Everywoman, whose poetry spoke of the pain of being a woman struggling to live up to impossible ideals of womanliness”.<sup>69</sup> Sylvia Plath's personality was very complex. For the understanding of her writings her personal background needs to be known and understood.

Sylvia Plath was an author that is still spoken about, taught about and analysed. The power of her language, her expression of rage and outrage, the motive of a woman struggling for self-realization while fulfilling social expectation is pointed at by feminist critics.<sup>70</sup> Despite not considering herself as a feminist, features of feminism are observed in her poetry and her novel. These features are analysed in the following chapter.

## **2.2 Literary Works by Sylvia Plath and Their Features of Feminism**

### **2.2.1 Ariel**

The collection of poems *Ariel* was written in the last months of Sylvia Plath's life. *Ariel* is the outcome of Plath's intensive and dedicated work. When living in a flat in London with two little children, Plath managed to succeed in writing several poems a day. Despite the cold winter and her feeling of loneliness and bad living conditions, she wrote a significant number of poems. In order to comprehend *Ariel*, Plath's biography needs to be known and understood. The topics of her poems were inspired by her daily routines of a young woman and a mother of two. She writes about loneliness, depression, joy, children, love and disappointment.<sup>71</sup> It could be said that her poems have a confessional type of character. Plath did not try to write about topics as such, she rather focused on expressing herself through her writing. *Ariel* observes boundaries between reality and hallucination. It is full of pity, remorse and irony. Themes such as death, violence and suffering are found especially in “Lady Lazarus”. In this poem, the speaker talks about committing suicide and compares herself to a victim of the Holocaust. It is filled with aggression and her imaginary experiences carried out by the Nazis. She compares her emotional suffering with the physical and psychical torture of Jews. However, at the end of the poem, she overcomes her struggles when symbolically expressing her rise from the ash. Themes of gender, mortality and freedom are observed in “Daddy”. This poem does not only express Plath's relationship to her father and

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<sup>69</sup> BASSNETT Susan, s. 1

<sup>70</sup> BASSNETT Susan, s. 1

<sup>71</sup> PLATH, Sylvia a Jan ZÁBRANA. *Ariel*. Praha: Mladá fronta, 1984. s. 109–122

husband, but it shows the relationships of women towards men in general. “The Applicant” refers mostly to gender stereotypes of the then period. Plath's expresses the stereotypical gender roles while using an interview scenario, which turns out to be a scenario of a role being sold. Besides Plath's distinctive themes, her writing is also rather unconventional since it does not follow any certain literary style.

*Ariel*, a finished collection of poems found on a kitchen table on the day of her death, consists of a great number of poems, which range from pastoral chores such as “The Bee Meeting” to her medical trauma found in her poems such as “Tulips”. *Ariel* was published posthumously in the year 1965.<sup>72</sup> Originally, it was edited and compiled by Plath's husband Ted Hughes. However, in the year 2004, a new version of *Ariel* was published with Plath's original order.<sup>73</sup> In this part of the bachelor thesis, the attention will be solely focused on those poems, where features of feminism can be observed. Namely poems “Lady Lazarus”, “Daddy” and “The Applicant” will be discussed. These poems show Plath's struggles of a woman, of a person who lost a parent at a young age as well as her struggles with marriage, depression, oppression and loneliness.

#### 2.2.1.1 Lady Lazarus

“Lady Lazarus” is a very dark, brutal and complicated poem, which mentions attempts of suicide as well as the effort to break free from the male dominant society. This poem is rather autobiographical. “Lady Lazarus” begins with saying “I have done it again”.<sup>74</sup> At first, it is not clear what the author means by “it”<sup>75</sup>. However, later the parallel to author's attempts of suicide are recognized. Sylvia Plath mentions in “Lady Lazarus” the three attempts of committing suicide. In the poem, Plath points out that the attempts were carried out once in every ten years.

I have done it again,  
One year in every ten  
I manage it...<sup>76</sup>  
The first time it happened I was ten.

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<sup>72</sup> Ariel | poetry collection by Plath | Britannica.com. *Britannica.com* [online]. Encyclopædia Britannica, c2017 [cit. 2017-05-04]. Dostupné z: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ariel-poetry-collection-by-Plath>

<sup>73</sup> Ariel | Academy of American Poets. *Poets.org* [online]. Academy of American Poets [cit. 2017-05-04]. Dostupné z: <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/book/ariel>

<sup>74</sup> “Lady Lazarus”, line 1. In.: PLATH, Sylvia. *Ariel: the restored edition : a facsimile of Plath's manuscript, reinstating her original selection and arrangement*. Paperback ed. London: Faber and Faber, 2007. ISBN 9780571236091.

<sup>75</sup> tamtéž

<sup>76</sup> “Lady Lazarus”, lines 1–3



It was an accident.  
The second time I meant  
To last it out and not come back at all.<sup>77</sup>

As already mentioned, Sylvia Plath tried to commit suicide every ten years. As a matter of fact, the first time was an accident, when she nearly drawn at the age of ten. As mentioned in the chapter three, Plath tried to kill herself by swallowing sleeping pills, but she was rescued by her brother. That was at the age of twenty. The third time when she faced death was when she deliberately drove off the road.<sup>78</sup> Beside the topic of suicide, Sylvia Plath tries to illustrate in “Lady Lazarus” the male dominance over females. For that, she uses the metaphor of the Holocaust, where women are portrayed as Jews and males as Nazis. As Krishna Daiya exemplifies, “The speaker identifies herself with the Jewish victim of the Nazi concentration camps. The Nazis smashed the complete freedom of self-expression as well as the identity as an individual.”<sup>79</sup> As seen, Sylvia Plath found a certain parallel between the horrors of the Holocaust and her struggles of personal oppression. The influence that her husband and father had over her is discussed in her poems. In “Lady Lazarus”, she identifies her husband and father as Nazis who hurt her.<sup>80</sup> However, she finds the revenge at the end of the poem when she says to her enemies to beware of her, because she was going to rise like Lazarus out of the ash. Moreover, Sylvia Plath introduces a female counterpart of Lazarus, who was originally brought back to life by Jesus in the New Testament.

Herr God, Herr Lucifer  
Beware  
Beware.  
Out of the ash  
I rise with my red hair  
And I eat men like air.<sup>81</sup>

The last verse implies that she can reach anything as well as it symbolizes that she has new strength to fight male oppression. At first, Sylvia Plath felt like a victim in a male-dominated literary world, when her husband was the literary genius and she felt subordinate and truly not equal to him. This frustration is expressed in her early poems,

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<sup>77</sup> “Lady Lazarus”, lines 35–38

<sup>78</sup> DAIYA, Krishna. *Lady Lazarus: The Odyssey of a Woman from Existential Angst to Unrivaled Triumph*. International Journal of Advancements in Research & Technology, Volume 2, Issue 12. SciResPub, c2013. ISSN 2278-7763

<sup>79</sup> tamtéž, s. 166

<sup>80</sup> NARBESHUBER, Lisa. *Confessing Cultures, Politics And The Self In The Poetry Of Sylvia Plath*. Victoria, Canada: ELS Editions, 2009. ISBN 1-55058-385-4 s. 66

<sup>81</sup> “Lady Lazarus”, lines 79–84

however, in “Lady Lazarus” it seems that she found a way how to come out of his shadow and use her own personal voice.

#### 2.2.1.2 Daddy

The poem “Daddy” is another example of Plath's confessional poetry in which she similarly to “Lady Lazarus” uses metaphors in order to connect her personal experience to political and historical events. “Daddy was celebrated perhaps more as a confessional anthem of female oppression, subversion, and resistance in a world dominated by male power.”<sup>82</sup> Plath identifies herself as a Jew who is oppressed by Nazis, who are being portrayed as sadistic and controlling. She feels as a victim of their brutality as well as powerless in the male-dominant society.

In the first stanza, Plath compares her father to a black shoe, which is a symbol of a dark and cramped place. She says that she has lived there for thirty years and was not able to breathe neither to sneeze. That illustrates that she was suppressed or felt suppressed by her father. The black shoe can also symbolize the male-dominant society in which she has to live and is unable to express herself. In the lines 6-7, there is the irony that her father is already dead, but for her, he still exists and for that, she had to kill him. Plath's father died when she was very young. His death haunted her throughout her life.

You do not do, you do not do  
Any more, black shoe  
In which I have lived like a foot  
For thirty years, poor and white,  
Barely daring to breathe or Achoo.<sup>83</sup>  
Daddy, I have had to kill you.  
You died before I had time——<sup>84</sup>

Their relationship was distant. Plath tried to get close to him, get to know him, however, she did not find a way how to do that. This fact is expressed in fourth and fifth stanza, when the speaker in the poem does not even know from what town in Poland her father

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<sup>82</sup> Literature Resource Center - Document - Overview: "Daddy". *Go.galegroup.com* [online]. Vol. 28. Detroit: Gale, c2008 [cit. 2017-05-04]. Dostupné z: <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=LitRC&sw=w&u=hradec&v=2.1&id=GALE%7CH1430006590&it=r&asid=58b7627ab0367f83c8b383c41005ca80>

<sup>83</sup> “Daddy”, lines 1–5. In.: PLATH, Sylvia. *Ariel: the restored edition : a facsimile of Plath's manuscript, reinstating her original selection and arrangement*. Paperback ed. London: Faber and Faber, 2007. ISBN 9780571236091.

<sup>84</sup> “Daddy”, lines 6–7

came from. She also points out that his death “Bit my pretty red heart in two,”<sup>85</sup> however, later on in her life she replaces her father for another man who reminds her of him.

And then I knew what to do.  
I made a model of you,  
A man in black with a Meinkampf look  
And a love of the rack and the screw.  
And I said I do, I do.<sup>86</sup>

When saying “I do”<sup>87</sup>, in the lines 72-74, the speaker marries a man who she compares to a vampire that drank her blood for seven years. The vampire is a symbol of a creature that sucked out her energy and was superior to her. The period of seven years refers to her marriage with Ted Hughes. At the end of the poem in the line 76, she declares a triumph when saying “There's a stake in your fat black heart”<sup>88</sup> as well as in the final line she says “Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through”<sup>89</sup>, meaning that she set herself free.

The poem *Daddy* links Plath's relationships with the important men in her life to aggressors of the World War II. She expressed her feelings of being suppressed and for that she points at and criticizes the inequalities between the sexes at the level of their power.

### 2.2.1.3 The Applicant

The background of *The Applicant* shows fixed roles of women and men in the society in the 50's. This is the time, when most women were housewives and child bearers. Despite being well educated, women were taught by the society to get married and be submissive to men. The poem also shows that intellect was not as valued as physical beauty. This fact is shown in the poem which illustrates a women being interviewed for a job of a wife.

In the first stanza, the word “our”<sup>90</sup> represents the society. The speaker asks if in the eyes of the society the interviewee is suitable for the job. The speaker also is concerned

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<sup>85</sup> “Daddy”, line 56

<sup>86</sup> “Daddy”, lines 62–67

<sup>87</sup> “Daddy”, line 74

<sup>88</sup> “Daddy”, line 76

<sup>89</sup> “Daddy”, line 80

<sup>90</sup> “The Applicant”, line 1

about the physical appearance of the interviewee. That also points at the necessity of fulfilling beauty standards.

First, are you our sort of a person?  
Do you wear  
A glass eye, false teeth or a crutch,  
A brace or a hook,  
Rubber breasts or a rubber crotch,...

The poem also shows the pressure on women when being interviewed. The speaker tells the woman to stop crying. He also asks her if her hand is empty. Hand symbolizes marriage. For her hand being empty, it evokes that the life of an unmarried woman is empty. This part of the poem also mocks the domestic works done by women. It also illustrates that women are submissive when the speaker says “And do whatever you tell it”.<sup>92</sup>

Stop crying.  
Open your hand.  
Empty? Empty. Here is a hand  
To fill it and willing  
To bring teacups and roll away headaches  
And do whatever you tell it.  
Will you marry it?  
It is guaranteed...

*The Applicant* portrays the woman as a blank page waiting to be written by a man. The speaker implies that it is the men's job to fill women's heads and also to shape her into something of a value. The domestic works are once again mentioned. Women are pictured as dolls. A doll refers to a woman of beauty, but controlled by somebody other than herself. It also illustrates that women have to look pretty, dress nicely and always smile without having feelings and opinions.

Now your head, excuse me, is empty.  
I have the ticket for that.  
Come here, sweetie, out of the closet.  
Well, what do you think of that?  
Naked as paper to start  
But in twenty-five years she'll be silver,  
In fifty, gold.  
A living doll, everywhere you look.

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<sup>91</sup> “The Applicant”, lines 1–5. In.: PLATH, Sylvia. *Ariel: the restored edition : a facsimile of Plath's manuscript, reinstating her original selection and arrangement*. Paperback ed. London: Faber and Faber, 2007. ISBN 9780571236091.

<sup>92</sup> “The Applicant”, line 13

<sup>93</sup> “The Applicant”, lines 8–15

It can sew, it can cook,  
It can talk, talk, talk.<sup>94</sup>

*The Applicant* portrays a man interviewing a woman for the position of marriage. It evokes the atmosphere of a job interview, where questions about personal features are asked and examined. The stereotypes of the then society are highlighted such as the necessity of a woman to be pretty, submissive, flawless and married. The theme of gender roles and its connection to submissiveness is found in Plath's novel *The Bell Jar*. Plath's struggles and her disagreement with such gender roles are expressed in this novel. The topic of *The Bell Jar* and the features of feminism found in this novel are analysed in the following chapter.

### 2.2.2 The Bell Jar

*The Bell Jar* is an autobiographical novel written by Sylvia Plath. Originally, the novel was published under the pseudonym "Victoria Lucas" in 1963. In her novel, Plath uses events of her life as well as people whom she met and influenced her. Plath herself said that she had to write this autobiographical novel in order to deal with her past.<sup>95</sup> This fresh, bitter, colloquial and sardonic novel concerns Plath's experience at her internship in New York as well as her depression and her hospitalization in mental institution which followed. *The Bell Jar* shows the madness of the 50's in America. It points at the social expectations of women and their loss or confusion of their identity.

#### 2.2.2.1 Characters and Plot

The main character/narrator of *The Bell Jar* is Esther Greenwood, a talented young college student who is given an internship in New York. Throughout the story, she deals with the madness that surrounds her. The standards of the society and her role of a woman are ever-present. She struggles with her identity. On the one hand, she wants to fulfil what she believes she has to do. On the other hand, she tries to escape from these standards and revolt. She is supposed to be preppy, pretty, cheerful and putting everyone else first. She is supposed to be virgin and pure until her marriage. However, Esther despises being pushed to a place where she does not feel comfortable. Esther is influenced by her mother, Mrs. Greenwood.

Her mother in the novel remains in the background. She is the symbol of a hardworking mother who provides for her family, who does the housework and who represents the

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<sup>94</sup> "The Applicant", lines 26–35

<sup>95</sup> KODRLOVÁ Ida a Ivo ČERMÁK, s. 107

moral sense of the then women of the 50's. She reminds Esther of the importance of purity and virginity. Despite supporting Esther in her writing career, she encourages her to learn how to shorthand in order to find a job as a secretary of some man. Mrs. Greenwood also worries that Esther's ambitions would interfere with her future role of a mother and a good wife fulfilling her domestic responsibilities and duties. She believes that Esther should get married and have children with a nice man.

Buddy Willard seems to be the ideal man in the eyes of the then society. He is a smart university student majoring in medicine. He shows affection for his family and the idea of a happy family of his own. Esther once sees him as her perfect future husband, however, once she gets to know him better, she changes her mind. On the one hand, he acts as a pure and honest man. On the other hand, his actions say the opposite. He hurts Esther when he tells her that he had sex with a waitress just because she was young and free. He also tells her that her poetry is like dust and that her desire to write would change when she becomes a mother.

The novel begins when Esther Greenwood, a talented young student, gets a monthly internship in a magazine in New York. She works under the auspices of Jay Cee who is her boss and who helps her to be ambitious and self-confident. Esther lives in a hotel, which is for women only. She spends her internship there with other eleven young girls. However, she befriends solely with two of them. Both of these girls resemble to Esther in some way. Doreen is a beautiful young girl who has a cynical perspective on the rules of society. She rebels against these rules and standards. On the other hand, Betsy, is an optimist and a cheerful girl that follows the rules and the expectations which she is given. All the girls experience a time in New York, which is supposed to be the best experience of their lifetime. However, Esther does not feel this way. She worries about her abilities and her further steps after finishing her studies at college. She partly feels the burden of her virginity, which she tries to lose in New York. When meeting Constantin, she finds him suitable for her first intercourse. However, he does not feel attracted to her. Later, Esther meets Marco, a self-confident man who hates women in some way. He is a violent person who tries to rape Esther, since he believes that all women are sluts.

When coming back home, Esther finds out that she was not accepted to a writing class which was very important to her. At first, she decides to write her senior thesis as well

as learn how to shorthand. Soon, she finds out that she is not capable to write, nor sleep or eat. After many sleepless nights, Esther is taken to Doctor Gordon, whom she does not trust. He is not able to help her and his treatment does her mental state even worse. His shock therapy upsets Esther and for that, she decides to end with his therapy. In the eyes of her mother, Esther's condition got better since she decided to go home and behave. However, the truth was opposite. Esther suffered from malnutrition, insomnia and depression. She tries to commit suicide by hanging herself, drowning in the sea as well as later slitting her wrists. However, during her last attempt, she could have died. Esther swallows a bottle of sleeping pills and hides in the basement of their house. When found, she is taken to the hospital.

In the psychological ward, she behaves in a very uncooperative way. She is paranoid, tired and depressed. Philomena Guinea, a wealthy novelist who sponsors Esther's education decides to sponsor also Esther's treatment. Esther is taken to a private hospital where the atmosphere is more relaxed and comfortable. Esther's condition gets better with the help of Doctor Nolan whom she trusts. In this hospital, Esther meets Joan, a girl who used to attend the same college as well as date Buddy Willard. She believes that she shares with her some particular experiences and a certain connection.

When Esther's mental state and condition gets better, she is allowed to leave the hospital in order to escape from the hospital environment. She meets Irwin, a professor of Math, with whom she loses her virginity. However, she suffers from severe bleeding and is taken to the hospital, where she undergoes a medical treatment. After coming back to the private institution where she is hospitalized, she finds out that Joan hanged herself despite the fact that her condition had seemed to be improved. Esther is visited by Buddy Willard and knows that their relationship is not possible. He tells her that no man would marry her since she was hospitalized in a mental institution. At the end of the story, Esther faces an interview which would enable her to go home. She is scared because she thought that by then, she would have had it all solved out. On the other hand, she feels to be reborn.

#### 2.2.2.2 Women and Femininity

*The Bell Jar* presents the then standards of women in the 50's. It shows that the women's position was subordinate and not equal to men. Women are portrayed as the ones that are dependent upon men in decision making and in life as such. Despite having various

talents and completed higher education, women are expected to become mothers and wives. They are expected to leave their aspirations aside and fulfil the needs of their husbands. In *The Bell Jar*, Esther has a conversation with her boyfriend Buddy Willard. He does not understand her poetry and finds it unnecessary and pointless. He compares it to the dust. Moreover, he expects Esther to give up her writing and one day to fulfil her position of a mother and a wife.

I also remembered Buddy Willard saying in a sinister, knowing way that after I had children I would feel differently, I wouldn't want to write poems any more. So I began to think maybe it was true that when you were married and had children it was like being brainwashed, and afterward you went about numb as a slave in some private, totalitarian state.<sup>96</sup>

Esther at first idolizes Buddy and sees him as the moral and educated person whom she has to follow. In chapter five, she says “My trouble was I took everything Buddy Willard told me as the honest-to-God truth”<sup>97</sup>. In the beginning of the novel, she did not argue with Buddy and instead she nodded on everything he said and responded with a simple answer “I guess so”<sup>98</sup>. However, throughout the story, she evolved. She revolved against the idea that Buddy's mother claimed. She often said that “What a man wants is a mate and what a woman wants is infinite security,” and, “What a man is is an arrow into the future and what a woman is is the place the arrow shoots off from”.<sup>99</sup> However, Esther did not have the same opinion about this. She wants to explore all her possibilities that she has. In the chapter seven, she clearly says “The last thing I wanted was infinite security and to be the place an arrow shoots off from. I wanted change and excitement and to shoot off in all directions myself, like the colored arrows from a Fourth of July rocket”.<sup>100</sup>

Despite her abilities and her desires, she is often pushed to the submissive position even by her mother. Mrs. Greenwood tells Esther to learn shorthand so one day she would be easily employable by men. Mrs. Greenwood suggests that

An English major who knew shorthand was something else again. Everybody would want her. She would be in demand among all the up-and-coming young men and she would transcribe letter after thrilling letter.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> *The Bell Jar*, chapter 7. In.: PLATH, Sylvia. *The Bell Jar*. [1st U.S. ed.]. New York: Harper & Row, 1971. ISBN 9780060133566. unpagged

<sup>97</sup> *The Bell Jar*, chapter 5

<sup>98</sup> *The Bell Jar*, chapter 5

<sup>99</sup> *The Bell Jar*, chapter 6

<sup>100</sup> *The Bell Jar*, chapter 7

<sup>101</sup> *The Bell Jar*, chapter 7



However, Esther does not share the same desire as her mother. She does not want to know shorthand and work as a secretary of a man. She would rather work on her own. As she says in the chapter seven, “the trouble was, I hated the idea of serving men in any way. I wanted to dictate my own thrilling letters”<sup>102</sup>. Esther was significantly different from the rest of the girls she knew. When she was in New York and lived in a hotel that was solely for women, she observed the difference between her and them. She saw their appearance and knew their aspirations. She describes them as pretty, well-dressed ladies who work as secretaries and want to get married.

This hotel – the Amazon – was for women only, and they were mostly girls my age with wealthy parents [...] and they were all going to posh secretarial schools like Katy Gibbs, where they had to wear hats and stockings and gloves to class, or they had just graduated from places like Katy Gibbs and were secretaries to executives and junior executives and simply hanging around in New York waiting to get married to some career man or other.<sup>103</sup>

Esther tries to distance herself from these girls. The idea of being dependent upon men and work for men irritates her. She would like to escape from being told what to do and she would rather pursue her own career and her own path. However, Esther still struggles with being the good girl that listens to her mother and respects the rules of society as well as she struggles with the idea to revolt, be independent and become a famous writer. Esther knows that she cannot possibly have it all even though she would love to. As Linda Wagner-Martin exemplifies, “Greenwood believed firmly that there was no way, in the American society of the 1950s that a talented woman could successfully combine a career with homemaking”.<sup>104</sup> Esther expresses this struggle of choice when comparing it to picking a fruit from a fig tree. She imagines that each fig represents one option and that it is possible to pick and eat just one. However, Esther is not capable to do so, since she desires to have all the fruit from the fig tree. Being paralyzed, she watches the figs falling down of the tree and turning bad. The symbolism of the fig tree is further explored in the chapter 2.2.2.4 Sex and Identity.

I saw my life branching out before me like the green fig tree in the story. From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future beckoned and winked. One fig was a husband

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<sup>102</sup> *The Bell Jar*, chapter 7

<sup>103</sup> *The Bell Jar*, chapter 1

<sup>104</sup> WAGNER, Linda W. Literature Resource Center - Document - Plath's <i>The Bell Jar</i> as Female 'Bildungsroman'. *Go.galegroup.com* [online]. Vol. 62. Detroit: Gale Research, c1991 [cit. 2017-05-04]. Dostupné z: <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=LitRC&sw=w&u=hradec&v=2.1&id=GALE%7CH1100000663&it=r&asid=821f18a74f46e39377e8a17ae00ea5f9>

and a happy home and children, and another fig was a famous poet and another fig was a brilliant professor, [...] 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. I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest, and, as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and, one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet.<sup>105</sup>

From this citation, it is visible that even though women had some choices, they always had to pick just one. As Esther said, “choosing one meant losing all the rest”<sup>106</sup>. But since women were influenced by the standards of society, they usually forgot or did not even think about various options they had.

### 2.2.2.3 Family and Marriage

The theme of family and marriage is ever-present throughout the story. Esther comes from a family where her dad died when she was very young and her mother was not very sympathetic towards what Esther had to face. For that, Esther sought a role-model among women that would help her to evolve and solve her personal crises. She often looked up to the ambitious and successful women around her such as her boss in New York, Jay Cee. Unlike her mother who tries to teach Esther shorthand, Jay Cee made living from writing and helps Esther to become more ambitious and self-driven. She encourages her to learn languages and pursue her own career.

My own mother wasn't much help. My mother had taught shorthand and typing to support us ever since my father died, and secretly she hated it and hated him for dying and leaving no money because he didn't trust life insurance salesmen. She was always on to me to learn shorthand after college, so I'd have a practical skill as well as a college degree.<sup>107</sup>

Despite meeting Jay Cee and Doctor Nolan, who are both successful in their job, Esther is surrounded by women that manage to do the domestic work without complaining. For that, it seems to her that there is something wrong with her, because she does not enjoy things that they do. In chapter seven, she compares herself to other women such as her mother, grandmother and friends. She mentions that they knew how to cook and by that, satisfy their men. On the one hand, Esther feels useless for not being able to do domestic work. On the other hand, the domestic work scares her. She worries that it would imprison her in the kitchen as it imprisoned her mother as well as the mother of Buddy Willard and other women around her. Her worries about that are expressed in chapter seven where she states:

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<sup>105</sup> *The Bell Jar*, chapter 7

<sup>106</sup> *The Bell Jar*, chapter 7

<sup>107</sup> *The Bell Jar*, chapter 4

It would mean getting up at seven and cooking him eggs and bacon and toast and coffee and dawdling about in my nightgown and curlers after he'd left for work to wash up the dirty plates and make the bed, and then when he came home after a lively, fascinating day he'd expect a big dinner, and I'd spend the evening washing up even more dirty plates till I fell into bed, utterly exhausted.<sup>108</sup>

Doing housework is not the only thing that women were pressured to do. There was also the pressure on having children. A woman without children was seen as unsuccessful and her role in life and her role as a woman were seen as not fulfilled. In *The Bell Jar*, this standard is expressed in the chapter ten. Esther looks out from her window and sees her neighbour Dodo Conway with her children. Esther feels that she will not have life if she does not accept this role and become a mother one day as well.

I watched Dodo wheel the youngest Conway up and down. She seemed to be doing it for my benefit. Children made me sick. [...] I crawled back into bed and pulled the sheet over my head. But even that didn't shut out the light, so I buried my head under the darkness of the pillow and pretended it was night. I couldn't see the point of getting up. I had nothing to look forward to.<sup>109</sup>

Esther is haunted by being pressured to get married and have children. She cannot accept this role since she sees it as a waste of time and her potential. For that, she uses Buddy's mother as an example of the wrongdoing of marriage. She points out that all the years spent at school become a waste, since there is no time to have a career. Married women are expected to do the domestic tasks only. This is expressed in the chapter seven.

This seemed a dreary and wasted life for a girl with fifteen years of straight A's, but I knew that's what marriage was like, because cook and clean and wash was just what Buddy Willard's mother did from morning till night, and she was the wife of a university professor and had been a private school teacher herself.<sup>110</sup>

The last point to be mentioned is motherhood. It is portrayed as a beautiful experience. However, Esther herself sees that it is not what it seems to be. She describes the pain that she sees when witnessing a woman giving birth to a baby. On the one hand, there is the portrait of a big happy family as the one of Mrs. Conway. On the other hand, there is the pain behind it which is not often talked about. Buddy's friend Will, the one in charge of delivering the baby, tells Esther in chapter six "You oughtn't to see this," Will muttered in my ear. "You'll never want to have a baby if you do. They oughtn't to let women watch. It'll be the end of the human race."<sup>111</sup> It seems that this painful

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<sup>108</sup> *The Bell Jar*, chapter 7

<sup>109</sup> *The Bell Jar*, chapter 10

<sup>110</sup> *The Bell Jar*, chapter 7

<sup>111</sup> *The Bell Jar*, chapter 6

experience that women have to undergo tries to be hidden from them. Also, Esther finds it suspicious when she finds out that women are drugged before giving birth. It seems that women need to be drugged in order to forget about their pain so they would one day get pregnant again.

I thought it sounded just like the sort of drug a man would invent. Here was a woman in terrible pain obviously feeling every bit of it or she wouldn't groan like that, and she would go straight home and start another baby, because the drug would make her forget how bad the pain had been, when all the time, in some secret part of her, that long, blind, doorless and windowless corridor of pain was waiting to open up and shut her in again.<sup>112</sup>

To sum up, Esther feels pressured by the standards of the then society. She feels that she has to get married, have children and be a housewife. However, she is scared of fulfilling these standards, because it is not what she desires. She finds it hypocritical that women have to give up their dreams and satisfy everyone, but themselves. She also finds it odd that motherhood is portrayed in such a positive way, but in reality it is not what it seems to be. Esther also hopes to find a role-model, which would help her to deal with her personal crisis and help her to move on with her life.

#### 2.2.2.4 Sex and Identity

*The Bell Jar* points at the double standard between men and women in the 50's which has an immense influence on their sexuality and identity. Women are required to stay pure and virgin until marriage. Even after marriage, sex serves as the mean of reproduction rather than pleasure. On the other hand, sexual desires and sex outside marriage seems to be natural for men. In the novel, sex is also associated with violence and rape which indicate the dominance that males have over women.

Esther is aware of the necessity of her virginity. Her mother reminds of that when sending her an article called In Defence of Chastity. This article clearly states that girls should not have sex with anybody until their marriage. When reading the article, Esther finds out about the double standard between men and women. She says that:

This woman lawyer said the best men wanted to be pure for their wives, and even if they weren't pure, they wanted to be the ones to teach their wives about sex. Of course they would try to persuade a girl to have sex and say they would marry her later, but as soon as she gave in, they would lose all respect for her and start saying that if she did that with them she would do that with other men and they would end up by making her life miserable. The woman finished her article by saying better be safe than sorry and besides, there was no sure way of not getting stuck

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<sup>112</sup> *The Bell Jar*, chapter 6

with a baby and then you'd really be in a pickle. Now the one thing this article didn't seem to me to consider was how a girl felt.<sup>113</sup>

Further in the text, Esther expresses her rage that she cannot stand “the idea of a woman having to have a single pure life and a man being able to have a double life, one pure and one not”<sup>114</sup>. She also feels this rage when she experiences this double standard herself, when she finds out that her boyfriend Buddy Willard lost his virginity to a waitress only because she was willing to and free. Esther then feels betrayed and later, she feels the need to lose her virginity as well in order to lose the burden and protest against the standards. However, in doing so, she experiences violence and getting hurt. When meeting Marco, a violent sadistic women-hater, Esther gets herself nearly raped. Luckily, she manages to fight back and escape.

Marco waited until I half rose. Then he put both hands on my shoulders and flung me back. “My dress. . .” “Your dress!” The mud oozed and adjusted itself to my shoulder blades. “Your dress!” Marco's face lowered cloudily over mine. A few drops of spit struck my lips. “Your dress is black and the dirt is black as well.” Then he threw himself face down as if he would grind his body through me and into the mud. “It's happening,” I thought. “It's happening. If I just lie here and do nothing it will happen.” Marco set his teeth to the strap at my shoulder and tore my sheath to the waist. I saw the glimmer of bare skin, like a pale veil separating two bloody-minded adversaries. “Slut!”<sup>115</sup>

Esther, however still seeks the loss of her virginity, since she foolishly expects some major change. At the end of the novel, Esther is hospitalized at the private mental institution. During one of her excursions outside the hospital, she meets Irwin, a professor of Math. She decides to get seduced by him and lose her virginity to him. She expects a major empowerment and a change, however, she experiences pain and severe bleeding. Despite telling Irwin beforehand that she is a virgin, he does not believe her. He ignores her pain and continues with the intercourse. When Esther informs Irwin about her severe bleeding, he assures her that it is normal and that she is going to be alright.

“You know, Irwin, I think I ought to tell you, I'm a virgin.” Irwin laughed and flung me down on the bed. A few minutes later an exclamation of surprise revealed that Irwin hadn't really believed me. I thought how lucky it was I had started practicing birth control during the day, because in my winey state that night I would never have bothered to perform the delicate and necessary operation. I lay, rapt and naked, on Irwin's rough blanket, waiting for the miraculous change to

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<sup>113</sup> *The Bell Jar*, chapter 7

<sup>114</sup> *The Bell Jar*, chapter 7

<sup>115</sup> *The Bell Jar*, chapter 9

make itself felt. But all I felt was a sharp, startlingly bad pain. "It hurts," I said. "Is it supposed to hurt?" Irwin didn't say anything. Then he said, "Sometimes it hurts."<sup>116</sup>

Motives of sex and violence are present in the novel. It seems that the double standard placed on men and women makes men the controllers of and superior towards the feelings of women. In case of Esther, the double standard and the rules placed on women drives her mad. She tries to revolt against them, but instead, she gets hurt.

*The Bell Jar* also deals with the struggle of women searching for their identity. As Linda Wagner exemplifies, "For a woman of the 1950s, finding an identity other than that of sweetheart, girlfriend, and wife and mother was a major achievement"<sup>117</sup>. In the novel, Esther believes that she knows where her life is heading. But after realizing that her awards and scholarships mean nothing in the real world, she loses control over her life. She knows about all the possibilities, however, she is also familiar with the already mentioned fact that she can pursue only one path. Esther has always been a winner with her plans clearly stated. However, after talking to her boss, Jay Cee, she realizes that she does not have her life planned as she thought she had.

Jay Cee went on a little more mildly. "What do you have in mind after you graduate?" What I always thought I had in mind was getting some big scholarship to graduate school or a grant to study all over Europe, and then I thought I'd be a professor and write books of poems or write books of poems and be an editor of some sort. Usually I had these plans on the tip of my tongue. "I don't really know," I heard myself say. I felt a deep shock, hearing myself say that, because the minute I said it, I knew it was true.<sup>118</sup>

As stated above in the chapter 2.2.2.2 Women and Femininity, the fig tree represents the choices that women have in their lives. However, they can only eat one fruit from the tree. The choices are stated by Esther. Figs represent either having a career, a husband and a family life, travelling or other options. There is the dilemma that women face. Women can take the risk and try to control their lives. However, it can lead to loneliness. Women can also delegate their power to men by becoming their wives and mothers of their children. All in all, Esther believes that unlike men, it is not possible for women to have it all.

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<sup>116</sup> *The Bell Jar*, chapter 19

<sup>117</sup> Wagner-Martin, Linda. *The Bell Jar: A Novel of the Fifties*, New York: Twayne, 1992  
—, *Sylvia Plath: A Biography*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987; London: Chatto and Windus, 1988

<sup>118</sup> *The Bell Jar*, chapter 3

### 2.2.3 Chapter Conclusion

The second part of the bachelor thesis analyses the life and life events of the American author, Sylvia Plath. It also deals with the features of feminism found in her poetry namely in the poems “Lady Lazarus”, “Daddy”, “The Applicant” from the collection of poems *Ariel* as well as the features of feminism found in her novel *The Bell Jar*.

Sylvia Plath is a well-known American poet and novelist known particularly for her collections of poems *The Colossus*, *Ariel* and *Collected Poems* and her novel *The Bell Jar*. Plath's relationship with her father had an impact on her mentality and her creativity. Her personal failures, loss of her father and husband as well as the oppression of her as a woman led to severe depression. Plath during her lifetime attempted suicide three times, however, the fourth time was final.

Before Plath's death, her collection of poems *Ariel* was finished. This collection of poems consists of poems that were inspired by her personal struggles. The features of feminism are examined in poems “Lady Lazarus”, “Daddy”, “The Applicant”, in which Plath deals with the themes of gender roles, social standards and male dominance.

*The Bell Jar* also portrays the inequalities between the genders and the absurdity of social standards of the then society. The novel is autobiographical with the main character/narrator Esther who talks about her experience at internship in New York and expresses her depression and attempts of suicide.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this bachelor thesis has been to explore the subject of feminism in the United States as well as to analyze the literary works by Sylvia Plath and their features of feminism. The bachelor thesis is divided into two major parts. The first one gives information on the subject of feminism and the four waves of feminism in the United States. The following part examines the biography of the American author, Sylvia Plath. It specifically analyses the features of feminism in Plath's poems "Lady Lazarus", "Daddy" and "The Applicant" from the collection of poems *Ariel* as well as it analyses those features in the autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar*.

The first part of the bachelor thesis illustrates the position of women from the 19<sup>th</sup> century until today. The chapter The Role of the Women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century portrays women as child-bearers, mothers, wives whose obligation is the domestic work and pleasure of their husbands. On the social scale, their position is subordinate to men and their rights are limited. Women such as the British author Mary Wollstonecraft wrote about the subject of the male dominant society. Major changes came with The First Wave of Feminism.

The First Wave of Feminism strives for the right of suffrage. The most important person to be mentioned is Elizabeth Cady Stanton who drafted the *Declaration of Sentiments* after the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. The declaration refers to the *Declaration of Independence*, which states that it applies equally to men and women. The National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) was founded. Its aim was to persuade the U.S. Congress to give women the right to vote. In 1920, a new amendment was passed and gave women the right of suffrage. The actions of feminists stopped due to the World Wars, however, after these wars, women were pushed back to their housewife positions.

The Second Wave of Feminism deals with the depression that women faced. Writers such as Betty Friedan or Susan Browmiller were very influential. Thanks to the book *Feminine Mystique*, women realized that they are pushed into position in which they are not comfortable. The National Organization of Women (NOW) was founded by Betty Friedan. Its aim was to change the policies in the field of education and legislature. It also supported the Equal Right Amendment (ERA), which was supposed to eliminate all legal gender-based discrimination. However, this amendment was not ratified. On the



other hand, major positive changes for women occurred with the introduction of the Equal Pay Act (EPA), *The Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972* as well as the establishment of legal abortion. The Second Wave of Feminism is followed by The Third Wave of Feminism, which introduces more individual approaches towards feminism and thus introduces new feminist forms.

Furthermore, forms such as postmodern feminism are introduced. This movement focuses more on gender rather than sex. It claims that there is nothing as two sexes nor two genres. Another form introduced is ecofeminism, which tries to face the global ecological crises caused by the hands of humans. Last form mentioned is cyberfeminism. This form of feminism focuses on the study of media and information technology. The Third Wave of Feminism tries to abolish gender roles and points out the necessity of diversity of identities. This aim is supported also in The Fourth Wave of Feminism.

The Fourth Wave of Feminism is connected to the use of the Internet and the social media, which enables and empowers men and women to speak up. Projects such as Every Sexism Project and HeForShe are introduced. These projects aim to fight against gender discrimination.

The second part of the bachelor thesis is focused on the life of Sylvia Plath and features of feminism found in poems “Lady Lazarus”, “Daddy”, “The Applicant” and the novel *The Bell Jar*. Sylvia Plath represents confessional type of poetry and prose. Her pieces of work are closely connected to her life events. Plath's childhood, relationship and the loss of her father, internship in New York as well as depression influenced her to a high extent. Despite her talent and ambitions, she committed suicide and gained recognition posthumously. She is best known for her collections of poems *The Colossus*, *Ariel* and *Collected Poems* as well as her autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar*.

The collection of poems *Ariel* covers the topics of loneliness, love, death, rage and depression. The aim of breaking free from the male dominant society is observed in “Lady Lazarus”. Plath uses the metaphor of the Holocaust in connection to the suppression of women. In “Daddy”, the topics of suppression, subversion and resistance in a world dominated by male power are observed. The poem “The Applicant” portrays the stereotypes of the 50's as it points at the requirements of women. *The Bell Jar* also explores the subjects of double-standard and standards of society and its effect on

women's identity, femininity, sex as well as their family life and marriage. *The Bell Jar* is an autobiographical novel with the main character/narrator Esther who portrays a college girl at an internship in New York. Esther struggles with her identity, depression and her desires that cannot be fulfilled. The events in the novel are parallel to the ones of Plath. Plath's works are still widely appreciated, since they address to a new generation, especially to women. Plath is celebrated for her works that please as well as disturb the reader while raising awareness about the issues that women face up to this day.

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