When people think of Sylvia Plath, they rarely associate her work to politics, focusing on her mental illness and tragic suicide instead. But Plath’s work was not just about a fixation on death and the fragility of human life. Contrary to what people think, Plath’s writing reflects her role in politics. In *Letters Home*, Sylvia Plath wrote to her mother in 1956 about a change in her writing from the “love lyric” to “…bringing the larger social world of other people into my poems…Now, I am making a shift. The world and the problems of an individual in this particular civilization are going to be forged into my discipline…” (Plath, 222).

Plath’s comment demonstrates that her work did not focus solely on her own experiences. Rather, Plath used her poetry and prose to connect personal experience to the larger political concerns of her lifetime. In the 1950s, the Cold War and the threat of Communism dominated American public discourse. This “larger social world” is the backdrop for and inflects Plath’s literary investigation of the clash between the private life of the individual and greater forces of authoritative control. In *The Bell Jar*, Plath frames Esther Greenwood’s identity crisis and mental breakdown in context of Cold War politics and domestic ideology, while the poem “Three Women” explores conflicting gender roles with pregnancy. In both works, female characters experience “agency panic,” in which they place too much or too little agency in themselves and others in response to oppressive geopolitical and gender ideologies.