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A TRANSNATIONAL LOOK AT THE MODERN WOMAN

by

ISABELLA HARDESTY

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major program in English  
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and in the Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida  
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Thesis Chair: Dr. Stephen Hopkins



## ABSTRACT

Spanning forty years apart, the short story “Miss Sophia’s Diary” (1926) by Ding Ling and *The Bell Jar* (1963) by Sylvia Plath can speak to one another in revealing the position of women in a revolutionary new era. The two stories may be generationally and geographically distant, yet both hold a collective female consciousness in the context of the emerging modernist epoch. By examining these two pieces of literature in relation to one another, similar attitudes and stylistic trends emerge regarding the treatment of women. The common archetypes, for each respective time and country, imprinted onto women are at some points accepted but also rejected in these two female-focused stories. In disregarding many of the traits associated with the Modern Woman, Ling and Plath mold a unique feminine persona to capture the essence of what a true woman can and should be. Not only does the likeness of the works contribute in establishing a global feminist ideal, it is in the differences where cultural and generational attitudes can be investigated. What seemed the apex of feminism in 1920s China was not as progressive by the standards of 1950s America and can be read as a sign of growth for woman’s rights. Nevertheless, there are many of the same anxieties surrounding women that have lingered on for decades. This thesis will conduct a comparative study on how “Miss Sophia’s Diary” and *The Bell Jar* embody the unique variations of the Modern Woman. Overall, this thesis dismantles borders of both time and space to expose the true meaning behind the Modern Woman’s role in a largely demeaning and patriarchal world.

## DEDICATION

Para mi Abuelita Anita. Te extraño cada día y siempre estás en mi mente. This is for you. For those days when you let me run in the jardín and smiled when I showed you my collection of bugs. You were the strongest woman I ever knew. Yet, that never stopped you from being kind. Thank you for always defending me. Thank you for teaching me love and happiness. Thank you for being the mother I needed. I will always be tu pulgita preciosa. Te amo, Abuelita.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the early 1900s, an incendiary explosion occurred that would spread itself across international borders and fields of study. World War One acted as a signifier for change not just in political history, but also in literary movements as it helped to usher in a newfound modernism. Reflecting the times of its emergence, modernism is figured as a “shared resistance to convention” (Linett 1). Traditional forms found in older literature were being discarded for something altogether new and thus, modern. With the extended reach of World War One, people no longer felt that the old systems of tradition could sustain the burdens and brutalities of modern life. This sweeping motion was applicable to many facets of society, especially writing. Literature seemed to outgrow the rigid structures of the past in search of meaning borne out of the loss of older, simpler ways. In her essay titled “Modern Fiction,” Virginia Woolf proclaims that “‘the proper stuff of fiction’ does not exist...” (3). Woolf calls for an end to constricted literature as there is no right way to go about writing. Through her statement, Woolf advocates a literary liberation from the old which echoes the changing times. Unlike the literary generation before, the rising tide of modernism advocated for no true literary form.

Instead, there was a rise in experimental work that played with the fluidity and ambiguity of literature. The early twentieth century saw a major shift from writing objectively to subjectively. This meant that there was freedom in writing to depict the current moment. As Gertrude Stein put it, “I like the feeling of words doing as they want to do and as they have to do...” (15). Stein’s quote alludes to words’ agency in their own production. Rather than being the puppeteer that reduces words into highly structured ways, modernists would channel words

to create exact images of what they are portraying. These images were messy and scattered; yet, that is exactly what modernist writers wanted to contrive. A closeness to the chaotic nature of life became one of modernism's leading characteristics. Because "Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged," but alternatively a "luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" (Woolf 3), there lies a certain haziness in capturing a moment as it is experienced. Many modernist works are purposefully obscure to match the same unclarity found in real life. Such unique techniques in modernist writing have given the movement an unparalleled impression that has had its lasting effects in the literary sphere.

It is important to note that these concepts of modernism arose from a largely European/North American origin. Nonetheless, Asia still experienced its own forms of modernism. Because most Eastern Asian countries still practiced only writing in classical Chinese up until the end of the nineteenth century, writing consisting of everyday speech was "officially despised as trivial" (Mostow 9), or the antithesis of Woolf's "proper stuff of fiction" (5). As an imperial hegemonic force, enforcing writing in only classical Chinese constructed powerful class divisions as only the rich and well-educated could read and write. This changed in the early 1900s as Eastern Asian countries such as China, Japan, and Korea started writing vernacular fiction that could be read by the masses. Vernacular literature would soon be classified as modern literature. Along with this development, Asia was highly influenced by European literary movements. Taking much inspiration from French naturalists, Asian countries deliberated on their own forms of naturalism. Rapidly, Asia would create unique

systems of modernism that would separate them from the original ones they were motivated by. There was a general push towards the exploration the life's "unvarnished 'truth'" (Mostow 13), an uncensored image of both the appealing and appalling aspects that make up life.

In both Eastern and Western countries, women were gaining more freedoms as time progressed. Due to the large-scale conscription of men for World War One, a substantial number of Western women were thrust into the work force to manufacture supplies for the war, giving them "confidence in their newfound abilities" (Linett 5). Similarly, women in Asia began to work in political activism like in China's May Fourth Movement of 1919. Old forms of family and thus female identity were being reformed to better fit the modern age. As Charlotte Perkins Gilman declared, "New fields are opening..." (Linett 1) and especially so for women during and following the Great War.

For women writers, modernism presented a chance to branch out of the usual conventions placed on them due to their gender. A focus was shifted towards relatively uncovered aspects of a woman's life: her various relationships with other women, religion, philosophy, country among many other elements inhabiting the female mind. By exploring these facets of women and having a "desire to reach beyond such masculine portrayals" (Linett 2), modern female writers were deconstructing the female character in relation to man while constructing a complex feminine perspective. Writers were positing women outside the scope of established femininity hence, forging an "androgynous" (Linett 2) figure. Such characters did not solely adhere to female standards but had some masculine qualities to them or as Woolf

had labeled it, “woman-manly” (Linett 2). Giving women cross gendered characteristics allows the perception of them to change from completely domestic figures to more ambiguous and ultimately realistic human beings.

This thesis argues that “Miss Sophia’s Diary” (1926) by Ding Ling and *The Bell Jar* (1963) by Sylvia Plath represent versions of the ‘Modern Woman.’ Both texts participate in the definition, construction, and overall acceptance or rejection of certain ideals affiliated with the conception of being modern and female in the twentieth century. With almost a forty-year age gap between “Miss Sophia’s Diary” and *The Bell Jar*, these two stories also come from disparate countries: the former from China and the latter from the United States. I will be exploring the differences in the traditional and cultural standards placed on women in each respective country and time. Although these two texts may seem quite distant from each other because of their date and origin, they hold several of the same conceptions of what the Modern Woman should, can, and will be. In this thesis, I close the gap between these texts to demonstrate both a global realization of women’s position in the modernized world and a rejection of conforming completely to each country’s classification of modernity. In her essay “The Gendered Subject of Human Rights: Asian American Literature as Postcolonial,” Leslie Bow quotes Virginia Woolf in saying “[A]s a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world” (50). Here, Woolf is igniting a female consciousness that deconstructs national borders and tradition to create a united feminine cosmopolitanism. Not only do women’s “global citizen[ship]” and “humanitarian concerns transcend borders” (Bow 50), but the same can be applied to generational gaps. In reading

these texts both in a transnational and transgenerational light, we can view these two stories in dialogue with one another. Each has their own conversation to be had about the Modern Women; yet, it is when we put these texts together that we see a global and feminist exchange occur.

The main characters from Plath's *The Bell Jar* and Ling's "Miss Sophia's Diary" inhabit the essence of the Modern Woman in various ways. For instance, both women are depicted as intensely troubled not because of their relationship towards men, as previous women characters would have struggled with, but because their relationship with the society they belong to. Sophia can be considered a prototype of the Modern Woman. Her main conflict derives not from a complicated love for a man, but instead for his body. Ding Ling is especially straight forward with Sophia's erotic thoughts describing the love interest's "soft, red, moist, deeply inset lips" (Ling 55). In addition to her taboo way of thinking, Sophia is describing her love interest as if he were a woman; therefore, she acts in accordance to her woman-manliness.

Esther's woman-manliness forms out of her desire to be more than just complacent within a woman's role. She wants to be a writer and does end up working at a magazine. However, it is a *woman's* magazine and so the excitement of critically writing is soon replaced with the disappointment of "delicate, ladylike" (Plath 25) activities. In this sense, both characters express a disenchantment on the role of women in the world. While Sophia sets out to find if there is truly a place for women in modernity by the end of the novel, Esther's story seems to echo a reply: that even decades later, women still seek a state of promised modernity

and thus, equality. Moreover, each text still upholds a quality of hope and ambivalence to the future of women. On Modernism, Woolf claims that “there is no answer, that if honestly examined life presents question after question which must be left to sound on and on after the story is over” (5). “Miss Sophia’s Diary” and *The Bell Jar* do such sounding on as they both act in open conflict of what the Modern Woman can be.

As well as commenting on the social standing of women, the two stories can be read as politically aware of one another. Pascale Casanova stated that world literature is “a world of letters relatively independent from economic and political realms...” (34). Yet, this is entirely inaccurate when placing these two stories in conversation with one another. Although they were written decades apart, both pieces of fiction connect via one of world’s most global conflicts: the rise and scare of communism. Through Sophia’s blatant disgust over her love interest “becoming a capitalist” (Ling 68), Ling subtly comments on the rapid growth of communism in China leading up to the revolution in the years to come. From the American side, Plath opens her novel detailing the “queer, sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs” (1), accused communist spies. Both operate within the larger scope of the communist movement and use the political climate to underline the personal tensions each main character is experiencing.

As the Acting Director of International Programs at the Southern Oregon University, Sarah E. Stevens’ research into the changing culture of Republican China will be acting as a basis to much of this thesis. Despite the political implications, Esther and Sophia are not acting

as Sarah E. Stevens' "New Women," who have "discovered the key to self-fulfillment in a larger political cause" (87). Both characters are not actively devoting themselves to the anti/communist movement. Nor is there much interest in their political surroundings as both women are too troubled with themselves to reflect outward. Acting more like the "Modern Girl," each female character "...expresses the struggle for women to find their voices in a new and changing world" (83). The stories' conflict derives from an internal struggle for female space while using political awareness as a backdrop to these issues. Rather than employing politics as a constant, the authors use these (inter)national issues to further increase the tension between their female characters and the modern world.

Overall, this thesis takes on a gynocritical approach as it sets out to expose an interconnected female framework linking the two distinctly feminine texts. The study of the "sexual difference and the specificity of women's writing" (Plate 1) serves as a locus to discover common patterns between female literature. In her 1975 essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," French feminist and literary theorist Hélène Cixous coined the phrase *écriture féminine*, or "women's writing." Cixous proposed "unequivocally that there is such thing as *marked* writing" (350) and thus, women's writing would present itself with similar markers. One structural commonality evident between "Miss Sophia's Diary" and *The Bell Jar* is their epistolary form. Writing in letters or in diary format has long been labeled as a form of feminine expression, especially so in the early twentieth century with Virginia Woolf's diaries. Nonetheless, these feminist connections have yet to be fully explored within the popular literary study of the modernist movement. It was only in 2018 when the first ever feminist

modernisms journal began publication. Where male writers are often pointed as the proponents of modernism, woman writers and feminism are both “everywhere and nowhere” (Laity 1). Even when discussing modernism in terms of women, I have found in both my scholarly research and academic career the dominant figure always seems to be Virginia Woolf, leading to no insight on diverse feminist modernisms. As the creator of Feminist Modernist Studies, Cassandra Laity points out that there is an untapped wealth of feminist literary criticism in modernist works. This thesis delves into feminist modernisms to promote the new voices that have generally been “lost and underappreciated” (Laity 2) in modernist studies.

What I hope to accomplish by completing this study is to provide further comprehension of the Modern Woman in both transnational and transgenerational terms. Not only will my thesis investigate the rise of the Modern Woman, it also seeks to discover her development and if change is truly possible for women as posited by the two stories. I anticipate bringing forth more research on Ding Ling as a feminist writer since there is little scholarship on her works. By comparing her fiction to that of Sylvia Plath, a monolithic figure in American women’s literature, I also hope to establish concrete evidence that a worldwide female consciousness exists. To recognize a universal female identity is the beginnings of dismantling, although slowly and dispiritedly in the two texts, a system of continuous oppression.

## CHAPTER ONE: THE QUEST FOR MODERNITY

Modernism began as a sudden series of innovations that jolted the literary world. As turbulent as the political climate it had sparked, modernists pursued several altogether new techniques in literature. As World War One raged on, so did the disillusionment of citizens everywhere. Once trusted systems of tradition were looked at with skepticism, as people began to witness the immense loss of life resulting from the war. It was “the war to end all wars” that brought vast social change to all aspects of life, thus birthing a new era of literature. What characterized this period from any other is its blatant disregard for both literary and cultural conventions. “Make It New” exclaimed Ezra Pound, and so modernists did by developing radical forms of writing through both mechanics and content. Writing became a prospect for change in its style and representations of people. Disjointed images, unreliable narrators, ambiguous endings, and other characteristics replaced traditional narratives as a way of seeking the subjectivity behind reality. As modernists grew out of customary and often confining writing forms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they opted to expand the horizon of what literature should be.

True modernist work endeavored to photograph the essence of life with all its imperfections. This meant to capture its issues in an unclean manner just as life represented it in a “luminous halo” rather than it being “symmetrically arranged” (Linett 2). The modernist movement began to discuss topics previously overlooked, one being a woman’s role in her society. The scope of the Modern Woman looked beyond her relationship with a man to

encapsulate all the varying degrees of her life. Transcendence of conventional roles for women would lead to their humanization and would open “distinctly fresh fields of fiction” (Linett 2) remarked Gilman. Such fields on how the Modern Woman fits into cultural and political spheres will be further explored in the coming sections through the characters from “Miss Sophia’s Diary” by Ding Ling and *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath.

Essential to this thesis is not only the uncovering of similarities in these texts, but to take into account their differences and what they signify. It is important to acknowledge the key disparities in the background of each text to fully understand where differences in female conceptions may arise from. Written by Ding Ling in China, “Miss Sophia’s Diary” takes place in early 1920s Beijing. This time was of great change for China as the May Fourth protests which revolutionized the country only occurred a few years prior. A push for all things new, especially in culture, would launch the reinvention of the modern Chinese woman as well as her duties in the new nation. Conversely, 1950s America continued to be a time of traditionalism for women. Instilled conservative mores were upheld strictly as propaganda of the nuclear family circulated in media. Though the feminine ideal was that of the perfect wife and mother, an abundance of women would not yield to the cultural symbol of femininity. This underlying strain of gender relations were coming to a brim and would eventually overflow into the following decade. With these two differing settings in mind, the first chapter positions modernity and its meaning to women against Esther and Sophia’s thoughts, actions, and relationships.

## Modern Girls to Women

“She stood there until something fell off the shelf inside her.”

-Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Countless works have explored varying articulations of the Modern Woman. With fluctuating portrayals, the Modern Woman is evasive in her definition. Yet, her characterization can be analyzed through the review of specific texts and their own ideal of who the Modern Woman can be. This thesis will use the term of the Modern Woman to represent all the inhibiting characteristics, including both idealizations and fears, of the emerging independent female archetype. The female protagonists of “Miss Sophia’s Diary” and *The Bell Jar* hold within their actions a model of the new feminist ideas washing over the world during their respective times. While shifting tides in the political sphere created opportunities for women’s rights, a deep patriarchal clutch maintained power over most of their lives. As a “physical challenge to the codes of respectable feminine behavior” (Poplawski 278), the optimism of the Modern Woman became a powerful source of progression; yet, there was still a question if meaningful change could be achieved for women. From the article “Figuring Modernity: The New Woman and the Modern Girl in Republican China” by Sarah E. Stevens, the archetype of the “Modern Girl” inhabited these fears and doubts for a progressive future. By looking at both Esther and Sophia under the lens of the “Modern Girl,” this chapter examines how the conflicting hope/apprehension brought on by modernism

accumulated into literature that explored their “sex consciousness” (Linnett 2). Using Virginia Woolf’s ideas on gendered writing, this chapter goes beyond Esther and Sophia’s “womanly” (2) characteristics to construct a complete etching of the Modern Woman. Whether or not the changes in her feminine traits and behavioral tactics can reform an enduring system of oppression is examined through Audre Lorde’s concept of “master’s tools” (Lorde 26). Through the comparative literary review of these two distinct woman’s stories, this chapter threads together common traits of the Modern Woman to form a tapestry of a global female modernism.

By looking at the drives and conflicts within each story, a contemporary way of depicting women reveals the advancement in their literary humanization. Sophia from “Miss Sophia’s Diary” is emotionally tormented by the sexual desire she faces and cannot pursue. It is her sexual desire for Ling Jishi’s “provocative lips” (Ling 55) that spurs her obsession over him. Entranced by a handsome man, Sophia looks on at him “like a small hungry child eyeing sweets” (55). This simile carries greater weight as she is in no position to take the carnal ‘candy’ herself. Instead, she must be given it. Her sexual fulfillment is ultimately impeded by her position as a woman in a subservient role. Much like a child and a parent, Sophia must submit to Ling Jishi’s active role as a man in the rules of courtship. Positing the female protagonist’s conflict from her relationship with a man creates a heteronormative narrative like previous “masculine portrayals of women” (Linnett 2) that modernist woman writers were attempting to distance themselves from. As prior generations of fictitious women were frequented with the accompaniment of a male lover, there was little expansion of a woman’s

own identity. These sketches of women, especially when written by men, were soaked with images of subordination and little resistance to their bound roles.

It seems as if Ding Ling is perpetuating old stereotypes in “Miss Sophia’s Diary;” nevertheless, these conservative foundations function as a locus from which to explore new forms of femininity. In her powerful speech of the same name, Audre Lorde exclaimed “master’s tools will never dismantle master’s house” (Lorde 26) in reference to feminist strategies. Yet, given no tools to begin with, it is with patriarchal tools that development can be achieved, albeit slowly. Sophia may be grappling with her relationship towards a man; however, it is her constrained sexuality that drives her character to be “disenchanted” (Ling 69) with the world. By shaping “Miss Sophia’s Diary” partly in traditional concepts of female issues, Ding Ling takes hold of master’s tools to design a new aspect rarely seen before in the depictions of women. Her development of Sophia’s blatant eroticism for a man humanizes women as beings beyond conventional stereotypes where male love constitutes their entirety. Because “older Chinese literary convention had discouraged women from writing about erotic topics” (Barlow 49), Sophia’s character presents a modern avenue for women to express themselves in a natural and individualistic way. In having women sexualize men, Ding Ling opens a door of possibility for women to voice their desires outside the limitations of classical female function at the same time giving her female protagonist a transformative amount of agency.

It is her lust for Ling Jishi that fuels her internal struggle. Yet, his personality is jilted into the background of the story as Sophia does not feel any romantic feelings for “such a cheap, ordinary soul” (Ling 68). Rather it is “this precious, beautiful form” for which Sophia’s adoration becomes obsession (68). Ding Ling effectively disassociates the man’s personality from his physical body to explicitly relate that women can be overcome by sexuality. In doing so, the sensual descriptions of Ling Jishi’s body evoke inverted scenarios where men would characterize women in an erotic manner. Certainly, the description of Ling Jishi when Sophia first encounters him paints him with a feminine brush: “... his stature, pale delicate features, fine lips, and soft hair are quite dazzling enough...” (Ling 55). By using this role-reversal, Ding Ling proposes a new form of woman that encompasses more of Virginia Woolf’s “woman-manliness” (Linett 2). For Woolf, the mark of a modernist work was an androgynous consciousness as that would “allow one’s art to flow ‘unimpeded’” (Linett 2). The same could be applied to the attributes of conflicted characters like Sophia. Her sexualization of Ling Jishi establishes her as the active participant of the relationship and Ling Jishi as the recipient, if only in Sophia’s written thoughts. She is taking the images of Ling Jishi for her own pleasure, developing her in a stereotypically masculine light. Although she may have these ‘male’ thoughts, Sophia must still act in accordance to being female. Her gender dictates her manner of submissive speaking and the indirect actions she must take to resign herself to lust. Following the lascivious characterization of Ling Jishi, Sophia “did the only thing I could. I lowered my head patiently and quietly read the name printed on the card” (Ling 55). Although she is enthralled with sexual desire, Ding Ling’s protagonist physically submits herself before

her male 'love' interest. It is the first of many acts of subordination Sophia endures for the sake of her sexual interest in Ling Jishi. These actions echo Sophia's acceptance of the fixed patriarchal foundations of her society and further explain why she would eventually choose to leave it completely. During her time in Beijing, Sophia's only option to vent her identity with all its typically male characteristics is through her diary entries since China's "system of overweening patriarchy dictated the tiniest detail of a woman's life, discouraging individualism and prohibiting choice" (Abbott 77). As a result, these personal accounts exhibit her woman-manliness despite her actions proving otherwise.

Sophia's anxieties in her role as a woman are evinced by the unsteady time period for female expression. Like the effect of World War One on Western countries, the May Fourth Movement of China left citizens disillusioned by traditional systems of culture, notably the patriarchal family. Such rapid changes to deeply instilled institutions of patriarchy demanded a new woman to be invented to fit the radically nationalistic times. However, many women continued to feel uncertain if true liberation could be found through the modernization of the country. The term "Modern Girl" was created to signify the feminine anxiety arising from the "fears for the modern nation and the drawbacks of modernity" (Stevens 83). Caught between her intense sexual thoughts and conservative morals, Sophia is cast as a "Modern Girl" that is "struggling against society and tradition, lost in the midst of a changing culture" (87). Her actions are based off the same female moral structures that the May Fourth Movement claims to abandon. After all, Sophia must "act as women are supposed to act" (Ling 52). Yet, her yearning for sexual freedom and thus, an immense part of her identity, hinders Sophia's

attachment to the female morals that are still ingrained into society. This causes a state of mental contempt for herself. No matter if Sophia chooses to surrender to her carnal desires or become the “pure, young girl” (67) of traditional gender roles, she is met with a loss of identity. It is her “search for self-identity within a rapidly changing society” (Stevens 89) that causes such deep frustrations as she must maneuver between multiple avenues of womanly behavior. Through these contradictions in the expectations placed on Sophia, her anxieties act in representation of the “Modern Girl.”

The mental strain of living as a woman in a modern world bubbles up in new forms of sicknesses within the text. As a “mirror- gazing woman seeking to find herself-her subjectivity, her sexuality, her independence...” (Stevens 91), Sophia begins to slip into episodes of panic and mental instability. Since she is not part of the collective that embraces modernism as a beneficial progression for a nationalistic China, Sophia is isolated from rest of society. At first, it is the physical representation of sickness that ostracizes her as the “Modern Girl.” Sophia has tuberculosis and goes between living on her own and at health facilities. She likens these residences to prisons describing fellow patients as “the other inmates” (Ling 51) and feeling as though she has “been imprisoned” (56). These descriptions add an authoritative tone to her having TB as it consistently treats her as if she were a criminal for questioning the modernist movement. In viewing sickness as anti-modernism, Sophia’s confinement arises from her lack of assimilation to the norms of a newly formed culture. Surprisingly, she wants to join the masses that hold modernity and nationalism to the highest importance. Sophia explains, “...if I refuse medication, how can I allow any hope of recovery?” (56). However, her optimism is

soon diminished by the turmoil she endures in her complex relationship with Ling Jishi. By the end of the story, she abandons any hope of rehabilitation and “decided to take a train south, somewhere where no one knows me, where I can squander the remaining days of my life” (81). By succumbing to her illness of being a “Modern Girl,” Sophia subverts the typical “Modern Girl” narrative where the female archetype “-like the city, like modernity itself-must be conquered by anxious male characters” (Stevens 99). Instead, she chooses to liberate herself with isolation and eventual death than being conquered by the new age of modernity.

With implications of mental illness, Ding Ling questions if a space for full female expression could exist under the guise of modernism. Sophia seems to respond to this search in the final line of the story declaring, “Oh, how pathetic you are, Sophia!” (Ling 81). By referring to herself in the third-person, Sophia disassociates from the version of herself that encompasses the “Modern Girl.” Hence, another model of illness is used to demonstrate the manic episodes that constitutes Sophia’s downfall from what was deemed progressive. As a Chinese citizen, Sophia recognizes the need to adapt for “the necessary transformation of the Chinese nation” (Stevens 83). Her disassociation acts in a failed attempt to distance herself from her marginalized self-identity that continuously combats the very system she wants to join. In the end, she dissociates once more in saying “... now she understands that nothing has any meaning whatever and that tears are only the most elegant proof of that lack” (Ling 78). Sophia’s resignation into nihilistic thought confirms all the anxieties the “Modern Girl” has over the uncertain future: that free space for women to be as they are is a meaningless pursuit as it may never exist. Both physical and mental illness drive Sophia into abandoning

all her hopes and proves that the Modern Woman is still subject to a domineering existence even under the pretense of modernism.

While Sophia's conflict with her self-identity manifests from her relationship with a man, Esther's issues come from her mental struggle of living with a gendered identity. The conflict which arises in *The Bell Jar* breaks from the typical female-led narrative where a woman's relationship with a man is the fundamental focus. Moreover, these female characters are often "constructed, positioned and represented as objects for male use" (Sena 35) within the relationship rather than being written for themselves. *The Bell Jar* approaches the female protagonist in new light as her desires and dilemmas center on the internal struggle to fit herself as a woman in a largely closed off world. As Esther puts it herself, "I felt very still and very empty, the way the eye of a tornado must feel, moving dully along in the middle of the surrounding hullabaloo" (Plath 3). Like the eye of a tornado, it is the encompassing chaos that defines the center. The "surrounding hullabaloo" functions to keep female identity contained within its own limits. Yet, Esther displays a clear frustration on what "custom would have us believe" (Linett 1) regarding female identity or the lack thereof: "The silence depressed me. It wasn't the silence of silence. It was my own silence" (Plath 18). Again, Plath's language here can relate back to the tornado metaphor. The eye of the tornado is silent, passive while the winds that envelop it are violent and active. Women caught in the cyclone of patriarchy have little chance of escape. However, a notable progression in conflict can be explored between "Miss Sophia's Diary" and *The Bell Jar*. As "Miss Sophia's Diary" posits Sophia's excited sexuality as a point of contention for the character, *The Bell Jar* is at odds with Esther's

compliance with her gender role. Her “own silence” against gender inequalities acts as the disturbance whereas Sophia continues to assert certain womanly roles through both her thoughts and actions. Therefore, Esther recognizes these oppressive disparities foisted onto women; even so, the looming storm of patriarchal values rages on around her.

Esther’s gender ambiguity sets the precedent for the Modern Woman to be as she is. Throughout the novel, Esther herself never promotes stereotypical female characteristics. Nor does she display much masculinity in her development. Alternatively, Esther’s despondent attitude toward both genders creates an ambivalence concerning her own gender identity. It could be argued that this is evident of Woolf’s “sex consciousness” (Linett 2) concept. Yet, to call Esther “woman-manly” or even “androgynous” (2) would do a disservice to recognizing her complex nature as a woman. The semantics Woolf uses implies the weakness in writing exclusively as a woman. This is understandably so as there was no self-identifying strong female figure during Woolf’s time with only prior archetypes touting women’s subjugation. However, it is not “fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex” nor “anything written with that conscious bias is doomed to death” (2). *The Bell Jar* proves this concept wrong as it openly engages in a “sex consciousness” through its ambiguity of gender within Esther. She knowingly defies the norms of womanhood in questioning the institution of marriage and its validity proclaiming, “I’m never getting married” (Plath 93) as it “was like being brainwashed, and afterwards you went about numb as a slave...” (85). Nevertheless, there is still a deep desire to lead such a traditional life as Esther sometimes describes it in a positive manner. What impedes her is the inability to fulfill all her desires represented as figs on a tree: “One

fig was a husband and a happy home and children, and another fig was a famous poet and another fig was a brilliant professor..." (77). It is the fear of having to pick one life path that drives Esther closer and closer to her mental collapse. Esther views each path as equally rewarding "but choosing one meant losing all the rest, and, as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black" (77). Esther's thoughts and desires are rhizomatic, meaning multiplicitous regarding gender, whereas the society she lives in and therefore her lifestyle is governed by a patriarchal hierarchy. By having Esther's desires dominate the text, Plath is presenting gender in a rhizomatic manner where there is no hierarchal system, nor one typical characteristic of gender is above the other.

Instead, Esther's portrayal of the Modern Women is a call to end the exclusivity of gender. It postulates women as fluid beings whose desires reach beyond the home. Yet, it does not reject family life but instead embraces it as a flawed but gratifying institution for women. Though the ending of the novel is left open-ended on the future of Esther, there are hints that women can achieve a home life with the satisfaction of outside work. The novel is written in a reflective tone as Esther recalls in the present moment, "I still have the makeup kit they gave me... I use the lipsticks now and then..." (Plath 3). She also alludes to having a family since "last week I cut the plastic starfish off the sunglasses case for the baby to play with" (3). With the mix of her writing and family life, Esther has achieved what Plath posits as the Modern Woman. It must be recognized that this attainment of "mutually exclusive things" (94) does not compose a perfect reality for women. As *The Bell Jar* is partly autobiographical, Plath's own life should be addressed. She had achieved a successful writing career and children yet

was still overburdened with mental strains so great that she would eventually end her life at the young age of thirty. Therefore, the Modern Woman is not an ideal or perfect model for real women, but it is a pathway in the direction towards women's equality.

Through the transposing of the "Modern Girl" onto the American character, Esther, a transnational commonality between "Miss Sophia's Diary" and *The Bell Jar* hints at the establishment of a global female identity. Like Sophia, Esther's character exhibits several incongruities that align with the conflicting "Modern Girl." Although she candidly refuses the possibility of ever getting married, her thoughts persist the imaginings of domestic life. With many of the men Esther encounters throughout the book, she begins to fantasize "what it would be like if Constantin were my husband" (Plath 84) or if she had "met this prison guard in school and married him and had a parcel of kids... It would be nice..." (150). These differing accounts amount to a character that wants multiple exclusive things at once. The desire for antithetical aspects of life marks Esther as the "modern girl [who] could be fraught with contradictions: looking for love but scorning men..." (Stevens 86). As a woman, Esther cannot have access to all the avenues life has to offer like her male counterparts would have. It is this exclusivity of choice that creates her conflicting stances and leads to her disillusionment for the future. Esther's craving for more than her limited role can give her demonstrates what a Modern Woman inhabits: a sense of self-searching for a space of one's own through the mind and wishes of one's own. Anxious and apathetic, Esther represents the Modern Woman's struggle against the promise of modernity without any of its fulfillment.

Like Ding Ling's short story, *The Bell Jar* fixates on mental illness to reaffirm the "Modern Girl's" presence in modernist women's writing. With the new era of modernism, "women's lives... needed imaginative expression" (Linett 2) regarding relationships outside of men. The exploration of mental health opened new facets of writing as the female mind could be portrayed without the conventions of sex placed over it. Esther's mental health acts in accordance to the characteristics of the "Modern Girl." This is illustrated in how she is typically "tired, frustrated, and made pessimistic by the people and situations surrounding her" (Stevens 91). In fact, there are a myriad of moments in which Esther reacts to a situation by concluding that it tired or depressed her. In response to seeing Buddy Willard naked for the first time, Esther explains, "the only thing I could think of was turkey neck and turkey gizzards and I felt very depressed" (Plath 69). Often, these apathetic reflections follow gendered discussions of sexuality or women's roles in relationships. The tiredness Esther feels in each moment amasses into her innermost resentments with the societal treatment of women; as a result, Esther becomes hopeless for the future and thinks her "case was incurable" (159). She was tired of hearing "What a man is is an arrow into the future and what a woman is is the place the arrow shoots off from" (72), placing women as stationary objects that have no future for themselves. "[L]ost in a 'mystical delirium'" (Stevens 91), Esther would rather die than be a "slave in some private, totalitarian state" (Plath 85) that is marriage and the misogynistic society it occupies. The mental instability Esther clashes and at times submits to speaks to the unjust treatment women still faced in 1950s America. The Modern Woman recognizes such abuses as hypocritical to a state of progress as Esther does. Yet, there remains a whisper of

desperation as women like Esther endeavor to maneuver around gendered obstacles only to be consumed by their pessimism over a female future.

The “contemporary anxieties about modernity” (Stevens 91) stretched to great lengths in the work of women writers. Both Sophia and Esther illustrate a longing for change without much prospect of it occurring. During the twentieth century, women’s rights had developed by a grand amount as many were getting an education and working outside the home. However, these newfound freedoms were deceptive as the main objective for women was still to get married and have a family. Strides had been made to position marginalized women closer to the center of gender equality, still their rights remained in the peripheral of the public eye. Although Sophia and Esther contest with similar patriarchal systems, the endings to the two stories reveal conflicting attitudes on the future of women. While Sophia isolates herself to eventually die of tuberculosis, Esther does get “all right again” (Plath 3). The divergence in endings can possibly reflect the available “tools” (Lorde 26) each woman has access to in their respective country and time. Nonetheless, “Miss Sophia’s Diary” and *The Bell Jar* forge images of the Modern Woman as one who continuously questions and combats the placement of women in society.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE POLITICIZATION OF THE MODERN WOMAN

The globalism of communism set the world ablaze, creating an ideological battlefield. As the twentieth century presented brand new ways of communication, the proliferation of world media made international news accessible to the average citizen. This created a new generation of politically aware individuals seduced by the mass media's presentations of both "political and cultural antagonism" (Stafford) against enemy countries. With political fervor only increasing because of transnational news, attitudes on such topics exploded with mostly nationalistic zeal. From its origin in the Soviet Union, communism grew into a worldwide monolith that would oppose the major capitalist countries of the modern globe. Just as War World One brought a death to the imperial world of tradition, communism found its time to flourish in unstable countries. It prospered in countries such as China where the Cultural Revolution of the 1910s supplied fertile ground for the political system to grow. Posed as the ultimate freedom from capitalist traditions where workers would only suffer, communism became a hopeful promise for a brighter future. This promise was not only lent to workers, but to women as well. Under communism "the question of women" could be answered as a new worker to the force that would ultimately create a strong nationalistic country. However, for those living in capitalist nations, communism manifested a new form of evil that would threaten the very nature of every citizen's lives. Thus, the two systems performed a dance of death with each other as each became the threatening 'other.' From such tensions could only arise rebellion on both sides. Ding Ling and Sylvia Plath explore these (inter)national pressures to reveal how the political sphere impacted women in their search for identity through a

troubling time. This chapter will examine how the fields of political influence can often overlap and interact with one another to reveal the Modern Woman's frustrations on a global scale.

It must be explained that this chapter will be written in endeavor to close the marginal 'gap' that is often used when discussing world literature. Periodically, studies of countries outside those in North America and Europe have been posited as the 'other' or lesser when compared to Western society. For most part, "the foreign reader is likely to impose domestic literary values on the foreign work" (Damrosch 4), leading to theorists perpetuating Western concepts on global literature. Academia has gotten progressively better at looking past Western bias, yet for the purposes of this thesis, I will be mainly be using Chinese archetypes to frame both "Miss Sophia's Diary" and *The Bell Jar*. Because world literature casts "multiple windows on the world" (15), scholars should use these windows as an opportunity to explore the reflections they cast of one's own world. I seek both window and reflection in this thesis to find commonality and difference between these two texts. By adapting an American novel to the theory of a frequently "peripheral" country, I will demonstrate how utilizing diverse ways of thinking can lead to the development of new global connections.

The archetype of the "New Woman" creates a framework for what the Modern Woman was being held up against. Unlike the "Modern Girl" I have previously discussed, the "New Woman" is "always linked to the positive aspects of modernity" (Stevens 86). She was born out of the dynamic times following the May Fourth Movement of China. The promise of the movement paralleled that of modernism: a change to all things new. This included a new

political system that would make China a powerhouse of economic and global influence during the twentieth century. While culture itself was being innovated during this time, the May Fourth Movement also concentrated on developing a “national strength” (84) for the sake of the republic. With the Communist Party of China gaining more traction, strong notions of nationalism would soon become a staple to the ideal Chinese citizen. However, much like the Modern Women described previously, some were conflicted on the future of the country and what that meant for their own freedoms. The Chinese “Modern Girl” represents all the anxieties of a fearful and changing time. In response to the “woman question” (82) and how the gender would fit into the developing party, a new female archetype was created free of modern apprehension. The “New Woman” acted as the ideal for emerging women in twentieth century China. She was the radical zealot whose goals and focuses were to dedicate her entirety to the communist movement. As a “necessary transformation of the Chinese nation” (83), the perfect woman became the perfect supporter of China’s evolving government. Even in her name, the “New Woman” outranks the “Modern Girl” who is cast as indecisive, childish, and lost. Moreover, this new archetype links feminist and Marxist theory in its extreme solution to female oppression. The communist party argued that “sexism is a by-product of capitalism’s relentless appetite for profit” and therefore, “would wither in the advent of a successful socialist revolution” (Ruben 157). In creating the “New Woman” as a figure of liberation, the party was handing out a promise equal rights so long as women dedicated themselves to communism. This recognizable model serves to analyze the political tensions between the search for one’s self and the effects of a global modernization.

While Sophia does capture the “Modern Girl’s” frustration with her position, her character represents a failed prototype of the “New Woman.” Her political aligning is revealed in reaction to Ling Jishi’s own position as he “wants to be a capitalist” (Ling 68). Being an “overseas Chinese from Singapore” (64), Ling Jishi was presumed exposed to Western influence since Singapore at the time was a British colony under Crown rule. In the eyes of the “New Woman,” Ling Jishi would be a collaborator of the enemy for going abroad and being indoctrinated with such a loathsome political system. This can be attested as Sophia exclaims multiple times, “How can I say I’m in love with this man from Singapore?” (58). Sophia subtly distinguishes Ling Jishi as a man who has been influenced heavily by the capitalist systems he has embraced abroad. Subsequently, Sophia’s lust for Ling Jishi revolts her as she discovers the “extent of his ambition” (68) is only to make money. As the ultimate enemy against the communist party, capitalism was a selfish system set to the disadvantage of the working class. Therefore, the “New Woman” of the time would be expected to reject all capitalist ideals in favor of China’s leading political party. Sophia desperately acts as the “New Woman” in her blatant disgust over Ling Jishi’s capitalist attitude, claiming she “despised the gorgeous man” (69). Yet, she is still magnetically drawn to his physical body. Through a powerful lust, Sophia internally battles with herself in what she knows is a culturally wrong desire. Not only does her sexual desires for a capitalist detract from her “New Woman” role, they likewise exhibit her own capitalist pursuits. After the May Fourth Movement, female sexuality was dismissed because of its taboo nature as well as it being a distraction from the ideal women’s political agenda. Because of this, any mention of female sexuality was deemed as “bourgeois by Maoist

new women” (Liu 4). Therefore, Sophia’s “desire to mark every part of [Ling Jishi’s] body with my lips” (Ling 57) acts as a capitalist notion that only serves her own self-interests rather than that of the collective nation. Although Sophia does want to adhere to the “New Woman’s” role, her innate sexual desires betray her in wanting to express an unrestricted female identity.

The polarizing ideals pushed by the Communist party created a bubble of isolation encapsulating Sophia’s every action. As the Modern Woman, Sophia questions all things in the ever-changing backdrop of China’s modernization. She walks aimlessly among those rushing forward to embrace the new aspects of the country, including communism. Because of her lack of conformity, those who have embodied the positives of modernism are weary of Sophia’s actions. As Deborah Tannen explains, “there is no unmarked women” (556), with Sophia being no exception. Rather than her “decisions about hair, clothing, makeup, and accessories” (Tannen 553) distinguishing her, Sophia is categorically marked by her every action in relation to a man and because so, suffers in mental isolation. Her interest in a man like Ling Jishi, who her friends recognize as a capitalist, only further enforces Sophia to be mentally isolated from the rest of society. One of her only friends, Yufang, remarks, “people like Ling Jishi are not like the guys we ran around with in Shanghai” (Ling 72) making it clear the difference between men who stayed in China and those who left for capitalist pursuits. Despite being Chinese, Ling Jishi is treated with the suspicion of a foreigner. His nationality has been stripped away since he is classified as the ‘other’ by every character in the novella, including Sophia. Even so, Sophia’s associations with Ling Jishi blur her intentions in becoming the “New Woman” and disconnects her from the few people she considers friends.

In a manipulative way, Yufang claims, “I know you would never actually fall in love with a man like Ling” (72). By framing her sentence as a fact rather than a question, Yufang is pressing Sophia towards assimilating to her “New Woman” duty by making that the “blame, it seemed, was on me now” (72). Furthermore, Ding Ling chooses to clearly separate Sophia from the rest of the characters through her name. Like how “all married women’s surnames are marked” (Tannen 554), Sophia’s own name differentiates her from the group. While all other characters have traditional Chinese names (Yunje, Weidi, Yunfang), the main heroine has a noticeably Western name. Despite being cast as an outsider, Ling Jishi still maintains some Chinese identity through his name whereas Sophia does not. This isolates Sophia from the very start of the novella being that she has been marked as distinctly different, Western, and thus, dangerous to the development of the communist party in China. Both internal and external pressures force Sophia to evaluate her infatuation with a capitalist as they soon lead to her continuous isolation from the rest of modern society.

By reconceptualizing Audre Lorde’s idea of “master’s tools” in the context of the Chinese government’s political motivations, the ending to “Miss Sophia’s Diary” paints a somber picture of female space. During the dash for modernization, those in power had to reconfigure women to meet nationalist needs. The “New Woman” was one to be liberated with “economic independence” and “participation in productive activities outside their homes” (Liu 3). However, feminism was never thought apart from its relation to the state. Even if Sophia may be ‘liberated’ by the standards of previous traditions, she is still held to the will of a patriarchal nation. All that she desires is for someone to “really understand me” (Ling 52). Yet

with the “ever- present backdrop of the nation and socially progressive ideals” (Stevens 87), Sophia cannot completely experience the full recognition of self she covets. The “state feminism” of China made it so women’s rights could only be perceived through the lens of “wider social revolution” (Liu 3). Instead of a feminism that grew from and for women, China’s state feminism was initially provoked by a group of men with the interest of the nation in mind. While Lorde’s statement on how “master’s tools will never dismantle master’s house” (Lorde 2) can be applied to Sophia’s lack of pursuit in her sexual advancements, the analogy can be examined with roles of women in state feminism. Under the guise of freedom, women in communist China represent the very “tools” that are being advised against. Because of the utility of women in the workforce and as the “New Woman,” women became the tools of a patriarchal state. With little to no agency of her own, the Modern Woman had few options: to conform to the patriarchal standards of the “New Woman” or remove herself entirely from the society that erases her female identity. In a final act of passion, Sophia chooses the latter. Rather than staying in Beijing or being sent to ‘recover’ in Western Hills, Sophia “decided to take a train south, somewhere where no one knows me, where I can squander the remaining days of my life” (Ling 81). Seemingly, Ling’s response on how to free women from the bonds of a patriarchal state is to simply leave “master’s house” (Lorde 2). Although Sophia’s self-imposed exile may seem like a death sentence as untreated tuberculosis will likely kill her, the ending of the story is open to new beginnings. Sophia is going on a journey, one that was not imposed on her but that she chose for herself. The open-endedness of the story’s conclusion implies the possibility of hope amidst misery. Her search for the existence of a female space

may go unanswered; yet, Ding Ling posits that some form of change must occur for women to truly be liberated. Instead of “silent[ly] suffering” (Ling 67), walking on the edge of assimilation and rebellion, Sophia’s decision to stop being one of “master’s tools” firmly takes a stance against state feminism’s lack of cultural female freedoms.

While Sophia is much more impassioned towards the state-induced female afflictions affecting her, Esther is somewhat ambivalent to the political goings of the Cold War. Esther functions more in accordance to the Chinese “Modern Girl” than that of a failed “New Woman” regarding the political reality of 1950s United States. Throughout *The Bell Jar*, Esther acts as a spectator to both the events in her life and those happening on an (inter)national scale as she declares, “I am an observer” (Plath 105). It is through this seemingly ambivalent lens that internal conflict can manifest. The start of the novel opens with the “queer, sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs...” (1), a married couple convicted for conspiring to give U.S. nuclear secrets to the Soviet Union. When discussing a national event involving the execution of two people, Esther’s tone is detached from the topic matter: “I’m stupid about executions” (1). Divergent from the “New Women” of China, Esther has little interest in politics and does not actively position herself on any political side unlike Sophia. Even though the American “population was increasingly aware of new countries and new threats” (Lamb 9), Esther takes no blatant stance on capitalism nor communism.

Yet, what made it so she “couldn’t get [the Rosenbergs] out of my mind” (Plath 1) was the loss of humanity she recognizes in their execution. The passionate persecution of the

Rosenbergs came during the Cold War when “anti-communist obsession invaded communities, neighborhoods, institutions and the work world” (Lamb 10). Essentially, every aspect of life was imbued with a sense of fear and paranoia, leading to the dehumanization of those suspected of communist sympathies. While making small talk with a fellow intern, Esther asks “Isn’t it awful about the Rosenbergs?” (Plath 100) demonstrating a degree of sympathy for the couple. When Hilda replies “Yes!” Esther thought “at last I felt I had touched a human string in the cat's cradle of her heart” (100). All through the novel, Esther never feels understood as an individual because of the need to hide away her true feelings. Even when the things Esther learns “surprised me or made me sick I never let on but pretended that's the way I knew things were all the time” (Plath 13). Thus, when she has the first genuine human connection over the executions of two people, Esther is “at last” contented. Unlike the “New Woman,” Esther’s “key to self-fulfillment [is not] in a larger political cause” (Stevens 87), but rather in the authentic moments with other people that make her feel seen. Yet, all this is crushed when Hilda replies “It's awful such people should be alive...I'm so glad they're going to die” (Plath 100). Plath echoes her reply sporadically in the beginning of the chapter, hinting that such dehumanizing language breaks Esther’s hope of ever feeling true human connection. Much as Esther dissociates herself from (inter)national politics, its cultural influence embitters her prospects of finding self-fulfillment during a desolate era.

As a result of Esther’s lack of full visibility, she experiences both great internal and external turmoil that is only heightened by the intense political forces. Esther clearly sympathizes for the Rosenbergs’ situation in that they will be executed with millions of

spectators in support of their death. Granted the extremely public event “had nothing to do with” Esther, she still “couldn’t help wondering what it would be like, being burned alive all along your nerves” (Plath 1). Plath’s main character does not care about the crimes the Rosenbergs committed nor their own beliefs in the communist movement. All that spikes Esther’s imagination is the method by which the couple will die. Death by electrocution, as she imagines it, “must be the worst thing in the world” (Plath 1). Because the Rosenbergs were established as enemies to all things American including “democracy, freedom, family, progress and hard work” (Lamb 9), Esther is looking into her future. She recognizes a radical difference to the traditional norm akin to her own unconventional ideas on women and marriage. As a “mirror-gazing Modern Girl” (Stevens 91), Esther is viewing a reflection of her future as she is similar in her rejection of 1950s American values. After World War Two, American “society needed to establish the idea that prosperity, freedom and future were [its] main interests” (Lamb 11); thus, the age of the nuclear family was born. Especially due to the American government wanting to portray its citizens as perfect families, the United States in the 1950s aggressively ratified gender stereotypes as the cultural standard. With this age of prosperity and Cold War tensions, “women were put under an immense pressure to return to their traditional role as mothers and housewives” (12), abandoning pursuit of any individualistic dreams like having an independent career. In complete opposition, Esther refuses to ever marry and “flatten out underneath [a man’s] feet like Mrs. Willard’s kitchen mat” (Plath 85). Therefore, the Rosenbergs execution foreshadows Esther’s own form of execution for not abiding by the gender stereotypes. Esther’s paranoia and sympathy come to

fruition as she is electrocuted because of her declining mental state caused by the lack of female space mentioned in the last chapter. During her electroshock treatment with Dr. Gordon, Esther describes the absolute pain and horror experienced “like the end of the world” (143). The wording is similar to her empathetic descriptions of the Rosenbergs’ deaths. She concludes her ordeal in almost a question: “I wondered what terrible thing it was that I had done” (143) to warrant this torturous treatment. Admittedly not connected to the political changes at the time, Esther can heavily relate to the persecution of the Rosenbergs. Her dismissal of a set and gendered way of living for women eventually leads to her own ill-treatment for a greater good.

As her fears of feminist punishment are actualized, Esther is pressured in deciding whether she will try conforming to society’s standards or leave the patriarchal society behind. After her electroshock treatment with Dr. Gordon, Esther refuses to go back again. This comes as a relief to her mother who, in reference to the other patients in the mental ward, explains, “I knew my baby wasn't like that...Like those awful people. Those awful dead people at that hospital...I knew you'd decide to be all right again” (Plath 145). In segregating the other patients from her daughter, Esther’s mother fails to understand Esther and her experiences, not recognizing that she is absolutely like those other patients in the ward. By calling them “dead people,” her mother is ostracizing her daughter further into mental turmoil. Afterall, there is no recovery for someone that is already dead. Therefore, she is reinforcing Esther’s “fears of female subjectivity” (Stevens 83) and rejection. Further, Esther’s mother implicates her daughter as responsible for her mental distress, again failing to comprehend the lack of control Esther endures at the hands of a government prescribed gender identity. As a result of her

mother's ignorance, Esther decides to act in rebellion of her gendered position comparable to Sophia's exile from society. However, Esther's own 'ending' is much more brutal as she goes down to her house's cellar, enters "the mouth of the darkness" (Plath 169), and takes around fifty pills. She had "lugged the heavy, dust-covered logs across the hole mouth" (169), essentially entombing herself to an unmarked grave. Like Sophia, Esther no longer wants to live in a society that postulates women as "master's tools" (Lorde 2) for master's use. While using master's tools to dismantle his house "means that only the most narrow parameters of change are possible and allowable" (1), acting as a patriarchal device would lead to no change whatsoever. Both characters know the only way of escaping this objectification is to leave the very society that enables such misogyny. In response to Sophia having some hope in finding a female space of one's own, Esther seems to answer that such a place may never exist and that for her, death was the only form of liberation.

The two texts enable dialogue of their respective political moments while commenting on their governments' model of women. The ideal woman created at large for both 1920s China and 1950s America trickled down to influence the individual woman's search for subjectivity. Linked to the tumultuous surge of communism, these pillars of femininity weighed heavily on women to conform to the state's standards in order to drive nationalistic interest. In contrast, Sophia and Esther actively rebel against their country's restrictive and feminized label. As Modern Women, both seek out their own female individuality through internal and external expression of identity. Even if it requires repudiating the entire culture that inhibits patriarchy, these two women will not conform to the limitations placed onto them.

Because of their radical actions, Sophia and Esther construct new images of female identity set contrary to the backdrop of state feminism in China or the nuclear family of America. In search for a genuine female space, “Miss Sophia’s Diary” and *The Bell Jar* not only question, but actively clash with their respective country’s portrayal of what women should and can only be.

## APPENDIX: DIGITAL HUMANITIES

Here, as an addition, is an Appendix offering a brief overview at how digital humanities can be utilized for the advancement of textual research. These experiments further the comparative research of what the Modern Woman represents within Ding Ling's "Miss Sophia's Diary" and Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*. Below are just a few of the graphs I created that reveal key patterns in the two texts. To complete this experimental section, I used Voyant Tools, a free, web-based program. Voyant is a corpus analysis program which evaluates and organizes a piece of text linguistically. An algorithm, like Voyant is incredibly helpful at "revealing patterns of association we might otherwise overlook" (Underwood 1377). This is ultimately the objective of corpus linguistics, a tool employed in the field of digital humanities. In the analysis of the data its experiments produce, corpus linguistics facilitates the discovery of quantitative patterns within much larger bodies of textual data. Because of such innovations, new information that previously would have been laborious and tedious to obtain can be accessed in mere seconds. With Voyant, inputting lengthy texts and clicking the "Reveal" button, creates a plethora of charts and graphs. There are several different facets to Voyant that could be evaluated endlessly for possible new meaning. I have compiled only a couple of the many graphs Voyant has composed from "Miss Sophia's Diary" and *The Bell Jar*.

One of the first visual representations to pop up in Voyant are word clouds. A word cloud easily collects the most used words in the selected sample and arranges them in size





Sophia's Diary" acknowledges men or man far greater times than it does women or woman. While in *The Bell Jar*, women and men are mentioned around an equal amount of times. This alludes to the main characters' own introspective nature. Sophia focuses much more on the actions of the men around her than of women. She never explicitly addresses the role of women as it comes almost as an unspoken rule. Living on the brink of feminist revolution in 1950s America, Esther observes and criticizes the positions of both men and women in society. As a result, she is much more explicit in her gender experiences. More can be examined; however, in this short application, digital humanities and its tools prove to be exceedingly useful in manifesting new meaning in literature. Through such small observations in these Voyant graphs, further theoretical analysis forms from the accessible use of digital humanities.

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