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**Empowerment through Writing and the Search
for "Self" out of Violence:
Virginia Woolf and Anaïs Nin.**

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in conjunction with the Department of Politics

July 2002

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Abstract

Empowerment through Writing and the Search for “Self” out of Violence: Virginia Woolf and Anaïs Nin

This thesis looks at the relationship between women’s writing and empowerment, using literary criticism, feminist theory and a bit of autobiography to approach specific issues of violence against women. Chapter One brings into light my personal work experience in addressing issues of violence against women and describes a particular case in which I was involved in helping a former client through the criminal justice process. Chapter Two looks back to the past and discusses how Aphra Behn’s role as a writer placed women in a unique, even a precarious position, and also deals with her influence on Virginia Woolf in particular. This chapter also addresses some specific ways Virginia Woolf attempts to locate what she believes are the reasons behinds women’s oppression, in which I particularly look to her notions regarding the “Professional Writer” and her interesting and contestable views on “androgyny” and the “Angel in the House.” In Chapter Four I discuss the work of Anaïs Nin, and her role as a writer of *écriture féminine* and how her work has been viewed as both enlightening and controversial by peers and critics. In this chapter, I examine her prose poem *House of Incest* and her short story “Birth” and several of her erotic stories in an attempt to locate her “feminine voice.” In Chapter Four, I again look to the practical uses of writing as empowerment and recovery and address women writing their stories as a means to recovery and self-definition after experiences of violence and I include an interview with a survivor, now a semi-professional writer, living in Glasgow.

This work is dedicated to my former clients, whose lives have both touched and enriched mine. I would also like to thank Shannon McGlothin for all of his support, encouragement and love throughout my research in pursuit of a personal quest. – Chanda Evans, July 2002

**Empowerment though Writing and the Search
for “Self” out of Violence:
Virginia Woolf and Anaïs Nin.**

Chanda Lynn Evans, University of Glasgow

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'An Unapologetic Apology'

This is an unusual kind of thesis and I am aware that it is open to the accusation that it is in some ways incoherent and willful: it is, after all, a bit of semi-autobiography, a bit of literary criticism, quite a big bit of feminist theory of literature and life, and some practical examination of writing from survivors' groups. How can such a mixture lay claim to being a thesis? Well, I hope that it will emerge that it is held together by a passionate concern for women and in particular women who have suffered, confronted and in various ways triumphed over repression and oppression. However, it is far from being an anti-man diatribe. In some cases we will be able to see how women have contributed to their own oppression; at other times we will be amazed by how much individual women have had to suffer. This is then a personal contribution to the ongoing struggle against the disempowerment of women.

Preface

“It doesn’t stop me from writing,” are the wonderful words of a friend and former co-worker of mine who wrote a book about her own life experiences as a victim and survivor of domestic violence called *Time to Stop Pretending*.¹ I believe the way to heal is through expression and one form of expression is writing. You are able to tell your story in your own words and affect those that read your work as well as empowering yourself by validating what has happened to you in your life. Experiences make us real but without the reality of writing about these experiences I do not think we will equip future writers to make a difference, to do something new, to challenge themselves and others. By looking to the past to confront our futures, we are able to learn from other women writers who challenged the way in which the world viewed them and lent their guidance to the writers of today, allowing us to enter their inner worlds by reading their work. This is not in itself an attempt to break any cycle of violence against women, but it is an effort to present a real need for writing as a form of empowerment, as a way of coping with our individual struggles.

¹ See Stephanie Rodriguez, *Time to Stop Pretending*. Middlebury, VT: Paul S. Eriksson, Publisher, 1994.

Reflections of Violence against Women

Human life—indeed all life—is poetry. — Lou Andrea-Salomé

...Life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.¹ — Virginia Woolf from “Modern Fiction.”

While working as an advocate in domestic violence, I began to consider how the victims of violence could take charge of their own lives. Since my undergraduate degree had been concerned with women’s writing I looked to writing as a mode of expression and empowerment. While working with women² who sought help to end the abusive cycle of violence, I realized each had a personal story of empowerment and survival strategy to reveal. In order for a survivor to begin the road to recovery, there are several steps she must take to empower herself, steps which will enable her “to change her feelings about being battered.”³ The battered woman passes through stages of anger, fear and powerlessness. She then realizes that she has been a victim and “blames her abuser.”⁴ It is in the last stage towards empowerment that the woman feels that she is “more assertive and self-determined”⁵ to break the cycle of violence and leave her abuser. Empowerment is not just about taking back your self-control it is also about dealing with the “structures... in society”⁶ which are inefficient in helping battered women overcome barriers created by their abusers. Society can

¹ Virginia Woolf, Andrew McNeillie, Ed. “Modern Fiction,” *The Common Reader, First Series Annotated Edition* 1925. Reprint, San Diego and New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994, p.150.

² Since my advocacy targeted female victims of domestic violence, I will use she/her to designate as my client/victim and he/him to designate as the abuser/respondent. (However, my advocacy also included other relationship dynamics, including same-sex relationships). I recognize the fact that men can also be the victims of domestic violence where the woman is the abuser; however, statistics show victims are primarily women in opposite sex relationships.

³ Ola Barnett and Alyce D. LaViolette, *It Could Happen to Anyone: Why Battered Women Stay*. Thousand Oaks, CA: NewBury Sage Publications, 2000, p.143.

⁴ Barnett, p.143.

⁵ Barnett, p.143.

⁶ Barnett, p.143.

play an important, if not the only role, in ending the cycle of violence but it can also be complicit in the violence by allowing its continuation. Society, Barnett and La Violette claim first “must change its view of women as subordinate to men.”⁷ Nevertheless, through the actions of individuals, women in abusive relationships *can* gain control over their lives. The help and encouragement of others, even of institutions such as the church, police, courts or social service agencies may enable women to achieve a life free of abuse. Since I was equipped with the understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence, I also knew that not all of these women I was helping were ready and had reached that crucial junction in their relationship to find the strength to locate their own voice, let alone to be able to express themselves through writing. What I then began to discover was that some women had always kept a journal and I decided to see if they could use this writing as a way of approaching and understanding their situation. This could be a process of empowerment in which they could use their own language to tell their stories. I would also suggest reading material as part of the healing process. Writers usually select the most appropriate genre to express themselves publicly, and I took this into consideration when suggesting reading material to my clients. I believe through others’ stories we are able to shed our own frustrations and misgivings about things in life we may have thought too challenging, difficult, or even unimaginable. Stories, intended to delight and surprise the reader, may cause another reader to weep in sadness, or even become filled with remorse. As readers, we often relate in emotionally opposite ways to the same story, and we try to find reasons for feeling as we do about a particular segment or passage,

⁷ Barnett, p.148.

questioning what we have read, referring to knowledge we already possess. We may as readers identify with certain characters and imagine ourselves in their place. The idea of empowerment can also lead to the notion that victims of violence can empower themselves through their own writing. As a reader, the writers *I* found challenging were those I could most identify with at some level, and I usually leaned toward those writers who challenged the perceptions of a world which in turn challenged what they wrote. I also considered those differences in language and style which seemed vital to women's literature and which might also be felt to be empowering. One of the effects of domestic violence and other forms of violence against women can be the suppression of the woman's voice. I sought, therefore, to locate women writers who had pushed through oppressive and repressive barriers. I found that Aphra Behn, Virginia Woolf and Anaïs Nin, all challenged perceptions of women's writing and offered ways of examining how language can be empowering and healing, to the writer and reader. To recommend these writers as a way of empowering a survivor or a victim of domestic violence may not seem a logical response to ending violence against them, but I want to convey the importance of empowerment through language and the stories we elect to tell. I want therefore, to consider how women as readers and writers can come to understand and take control of the situations they find themselves in. Thus language is a road to freedom, self-realization and discovery.

This thesis will attempt to look at the role of specific women writers within the wider context of women's writing in general and in doing so, it will inevitably examine the common tendency to separate writing as therapy from writing as art and creativity. It will also address present day

conditions in which women writers use writing to deconstruct often violent and abusive situations reclaiming their self-worth and identities. I am seeking to collapse the categories of writing as art and writing as a form of healing, and to show that writing by women, whether its objective or motive is therapeutic or creative, has historically involved both empowerment and survival. All art is a kind of therapy as is all writing a form of art. When women band together in writing groups or even when women keep secret records and diaries, they are aligning themselves to a tradition which embraces this form of writing from Aphra Behn to Virginia Woolf to Anaïs Nin to contemporary writers. It is also a form of creativity which links the “highest” and the “lowest” which links Joan X and Virginia Woolf: the expression “healing words” may assist us here.

I also thought about how these writers have used diaries and journals, as well as writing fiction, using their life experiences as a guide and I considered how this language could be used as a way to empower others and encourage them to think about the value of real life experiences as being just as powerful as the fictionalized ones. I sometimes consider our most valuable contribution to ending violence against women is to empower others by sharing our compassion and understanding and by recognizing that although words may be healing, violence against women can also be hidden in the language, images and even in the silences of the books we read. I will first, however, explain from my perspective as a former domestic violence advocate, the framework in which the judicial system operates as it pertains to violence against women and why it is necessary to understand the dynamics of the victim and her abuser, as well as the recourses which are available in the prevention and intervention of violence

against women. My experience is from the United States but the lessons I have learned have a much wider relevance and application.

In the United States, domestic abuse traditionally is viewed as a private matter, but public perception is changing, just as it is in other areas of public health concern.⁸ Since the highly public trial of O. J. Simpson for the murder of his ex-wife, Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend, in California in 1994, polls⁹ reflected the public's growing concern about domestic violence, with approximately 93% agreeing that it was a serious problem.¹⁰ Domestic violence cases across the country, which had been known to the communities in which they occurred, also helped foster this insurgence of concern. Much, however, still needs to be done to address how our communities and how the media tackle these stories to examine the language in which the details are conveyed to survivors.¹¹ One immediate change affecting women, was the passing of the Violence Against Women's Act (VAWA) in 1994 by the United States Congress. Changes in the criminal justice system sent a clear message to women that government no longer wanted families to suffer in silence.¹² This now signaled a new wave of concern which not only targeted women in abusive situations but also their children. This, however, does not change the existing notions which persist in a society which treats women differently from men, especially if they are

⁸ Ethel Klein and Jacqueline Campbell et al., "Domestic Violence in Public Context" *Ending Domestic Violence, Changing Public Perceptions/Halting the Epidemic*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997, p.6.

⁹ See "Domestic Violence in Public Context." The Lieberman Research, Inc. collected data for this research from Nov. 1994- Feb. 1995.

¹⁰ Klein, "Domestic Violence in Public Context," p.8.

¹¹ Ethel Klein and Jacqueline Campbell et al., "Public Education Campaigns on Domestic Violence." *Ending Domestic Violence, Changing Public Perceptions/Halting the Epidemic*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997, p.89.

¹² Barnett, p.3.

being battered.¹³ However, it is vital for people to understand the procedures when dealing with victims of violence and what recourse is available under law to victims as well as abusers within their communities. People who work in the field of domestic violence must also be able to “develop effective social sanctions and messages ... about what currently prevents men from approaching and talking to other men who batter,”¹⁴ as well as determining what will help a batterer to cease his abuse. This umbrella network of organisations which are part of the judicial process also need available to them a resourceful and engaged public which are interested in fostering a better understanding and dialogue between communities, media and elected officials, as well as those who are working to end violence against women, who help protect the lives of their clients. It is possible for individuals to be the catalysts for empowering survivors of domestic violence, but in the end it must be up to the communities to change their belief systems and public perceptions of women altogether for the violence and oppression of all women to cease.¹⁵ I believe that writing is one tool which can be used to reach a larger audience in addressing the issues surrounding violence against women, especially if survivors are the writers. We should never again hear an abuser say he is “going to pull an OJ.”¹⁶

¹³ Barnett, p.8.

¹⁴ Klein, “Public Education Campaigns,” p.101.

¹⁵ Barnett, p.159.

¹⁶ Described by a female victim as a tactic used by her husband to prevent her from leaving, instilling the immediate threat of death if she did. (1995, Bloomington, Indiana USA.)

A Look at the Judicial System in Relation to Domestic Violence

In the judicial system,¹⁷ there is unavoidably an enormous amount of legal terminology, describing various actions, such as motions, injunctions, and requests made by attorneys and citizens alike, which has special meaning within the proceeding of the court. Prosecutors who work for the state file charges and other actions pertaining to criminal cases whereas defense counsels file motions for civil and criminal cases. Often defense counsels and prosecutors may file similar orders to seek protection from the courts for their clients: a Civil Emergency Protection Order is one such order. As an advocate in the field of Domestic Violence, I was neither an attorney nor a social worker. My function was to educate those, primarily women, who were in need of resources and information pertaining to domestic violence. I used various methods of intervention and prevention of abuse involving various relationships between individuals. My role, as an advocate, was centered on helping women who were in a cycle of violence. I was based in the domestic courts, but I was able to act as advocate for women in various stages of seeking assistance from the state. I was an advocate working to end violence. Before I worked as an advocate, most of my knowledge about domestic violence came from my experiences in dealing with victims of abuse in a Battered Women's Shelter while I was an undergraduate at Indiana University. There I learned through hands on experiences, working the crisis lines and participating in shelter activities. I also was present in a supportive role for the victims of sexual assaults when they were being examined in hospital or being questioned by the police. I also received legal

¹⁷ 'Judicial system' refers to my understanding of the legal system as it pertains to the State of Indiana, USA through my employment at the Marion County Prosecutor's Office and the Family Advocacy Center in Indianapolis, Indiana from 1996-1999 and my volunteer work at the Middle Way House in Bloomington, Indiana, USA from 1992-1996.

training, concerning criminal complaints, while working in the Prosecutor's office as a criminal investigator. A criminal investigator interviews complainants who claimed to be victims of alleged crimes, and who wanted to press criminal charges. While I worked as an investigator, I gained familiarity with the internal workings of the legal system and this experience, enabled me to help the women I was assisting in breaking the cycle of violence. Many of the methods I used were acquired by observing and then applying in action what I learned. I learned to ask the right questions of the right people, thus finding loop holes in the system which would help me edge my clients' case a bit further into the courts and my client into a safer environment. I would not have taken these measures, if my clients did not want me to assist them, and I would ask them what they wanted, not what the court could offer them, because often I was able to find more efficient and less threatening alternatives and solutions, than the court might manage to find. My job as an advocate was to communicate the needs of the client to the court as well to build a relationship with the court to find ways to meet the demands of my clients. Many cases were straightforward but others were complicated and required hours of assessment and negotiation with judges. In all cases, however, I did what I could for my clients within the limitations of my role and since this role was wholly to support my clients, rather than to uphold the structure of an institution, I was able to be of consistent use. However, I could not make decisions for my clients. They had to make their own decisions. Through my work and training in the Prosecutor's office, I became familiar with various misdemeanor and felony charges relating to domestic violence. In court as an advocate, it is especially helpful to possess this information so that this

knowledge can be shared with other advocates and clients. While in the Prosecutors office, I wrote Probable Causes, a legal term which describes the statement made by alleged victim of the crime, took photographs for evidence to be used in court, and turned my investigation and files over for the Prosecutor to review in order to determine if the criteria of the state to file criminal charges had been met.

Often I did what is known as “walking a warrant through” which entailed going before a Judge with the warrant in hand, to request a higher bond than normal in cases which the prosecution had already determined were extreme situations of domestic violence. There are various established criteria on which the prosecutor may base a request for the Judge to issue a higher bond, but whatever the criteria, it is generally the advocate who instigates the request. This meant that I went before a Judge and had him sign the warrant on the spot, setting a no bond hold until the alleged abuser was arrested and appeared before the court at his initial hearing, his first appearance in court after being arrested. Sometimes the victim accompanied me and, at other times, I went alone. I would in court try to persuade the civil sheriff to serve the warrant and have the alleged abuser arrested, if possible that day. Often this was a favor to me by an individual officer who thought all abusers should be locked up and the key thrown away. Clearly not all police hold this sentiment when it concerns violence against women, but on occasion I would meet officers who simply did not believe the courts and the prosecutors were working hard enough to get the message to abusers that violence against women would not be tolerated.

Another way to insure that an abuser's stay in jail is lengthy, is by attending the initial hearing with the victim the day after the abuser is

arrested by the police, either on a new charge or on a previous open warrant. This procedure meant I would wait with the victim in the courtroom unless she was in hospital, when I stood at her request or the prosecutor's as her representative so that her best interests were taken into account. Her family members also frequently joined me at the initial hearing. There we waited for the alleged assailant to be called before the Judge on closed circuit television. Normally the Judge set a bond based on bond guidelines drawn up by the courts, determined by factors such as income, pending charges, previous arrest history and other criteria. The judge then gave the alleged abuser a court date and informed him of his rights under the law, but since I was there as the victim's advocate I went with the victim before the Judge to alert the court to particulars regarding the case which the court might be unaware of: often vital information crucial to the case is left out by accident or incompetence or deliberately excluded from police reports, or from the charges initially filed by the prosecutor at the time of the criminal complaint. At this hearing, I could express my fear for the victim's life and persuade the court to issue a higher bond or better still, place a no bond hold on the alleged abuser, which granted him a court date, usually within seven days, but enough time for me to help the victim gain access to other resources. This entailed such precautions as retrieving her keys from the alleged abuser while he was still in police custody, and allowed her time to pack belongings and find safe accommodation. Ideally, a no bond hold is one of the best solutions in a domestic violence case, but this did not happen enough and often the Judge simply granted a higher bond. It seems that only in extreme cases of violence against women and or their children was the court willing to consider the threat of death as a significant factor when determining how

high a bond to set. Accordingly, each Judge had their own criteria for determining when violence was extreme, based on their experience and assumptions while on the bench. As an advocate, I treated all cases of domestic violence as equally important, but the prosecution and the courts classified some as more brutal and life threatening. It was my experience, that the outcomes of cases of domestic violence were difficult to predict and that it was safest to assume that all victims of abuse might at any point in their cycle of violence end up dead. Ideally, to have an arrest the night of the incident places the victim in a less vulnerable position, yet sometimes charges are dismissed or not reported by the police for the prosecutor to review. Sometimes the victims did not want criminal charges filed; they just wanted protection from their alleged abusers.

Across the United States there are several names given to the orders of protection which are granted by courts; they all, however, provide various levels of protection to the clients who seek them. Unfortunately, the media has played a major role in confusing the public as to which purpose a specific order serves and equally confusing those who desire their protection. The role of the advocate is to make it clear to their clients, which order the courts grant them and what recourses are available to them under law to enforce their particular order. I am most familiar with the names and functions of the orders in the State of Indiana and will provide a general idea of their purposes in protecting victims of domestic violence. There are three types of orders routinely granted by courts, a No Contact Order (NCO), a Civil Emergency Protective Order (EPO) and a Civil Permanent Protective Order (PPO). Another order, which is granted when a client is going through divorce court, is a Restraining Order. A responding officer at the

scene usually fills out a No Contact Order (NCO), at the time of an arrest. The police make a report on the incident and take the alleged abuser into custody, if the alleged abuser has not left the scene. Then when the prosecutor files criminal charges based on the officers' report the NCO is filed; the NCO is only in effect, then, once the charges have been filed and subsequently granted by the Judge. Normally, the respondent (the alleged abuser) must go before a Judge in a hearing to have a bond set, to be informed of his rights under the law, to hear the crimes allegedly committed and the rules regarding the NCO. The second order is a Civil Emergency Protection Order (EPO). This order is filed by the alleged victim, who swears under oath that they or their property have been threatened or harassed and hence they require protection from the courts. Often these allegations are enough for criminal charges, but it is not up to the prosecutor to decide this; it is up to the victim to decide whether she merely wants to obtain protection or prefers criminal charges to be filed. During an Emergency Protection Order hearing, the Court usually grants the EPO with the victim never having to appear before the Judge. The court routinely grants EPOs even if they hear only one side of the story. The basis for this is, if a victim fears for her life, then the court must honor her request for protection. Once the court sets a hearing date, then the alleged abuser has a chance to argue against the order. The abuser is not charged with any crime, the victim has simply made a statement requesting assistance from the court to keep the alleged abuser away from her, persons residing in her home, and her property. If during an EPO hearing an eviction (removal of the respondent from the premises) has been requested by the victim or a Writ of Assistance (a police escort to the residence for the victim to retrieve

belongings) the Judge can call the victim before the court to make a statement on record. In cases such as these, the Judge often asks the advocate to assist and explain to the victim why she must go before the Judge. Often the victim believes the respondent will go to jail and does not want this to happen, so the advocate has to make it very clear why her appearance before the Judge is necessary. In other instances, the victim wants the respondent to be in jail indefinitely. Nevertheless, the Judge is simply there at this point in the judicial process to grant the order and subsequent requests, not to convict an alleged respondent on charges and allegations in the victim's petition for the Civil Emergency Protective Order. The victim receives a date when she must return to court so the order can be extended for a longer period. Sometimes I would request an expedited hearing which allows the court date for the Permanent Order (third type of order) to be set within one to two weeks time, much earlier than the standard procedure. An expedited hearing was often the result of the allegations in the EPO, the need for an eviction, or the prosecutor's decision to file criminal charges. The prosecutor needs to be assured that the date for the hearing leaves time for the preparation of an arrest warrant, so that when the respondent appears in court for the hearing a subsequent arrest may be made. The respondent receives the EPO at an address provided by the victim, either his residence or place of work. A civil sheriff goes to this address and serves the order, giving him a copy and a date in which he must appear in court. If the respondent does not appear in court, no warrant will be issued, he will simply not know what occurs. It is then up to the court staff to mail a copy of any alterations to the existing order. Sometimes, a respondent does not appear because they believe they will be arrested or

they know they have an outstanding warrant and do not want to go to jail. In a civil Protective Order hearing, neither party requires an attorney to represent them, but frequently the respondent hires an attorney to represent him. Occasionally, the respondent will send his attorney to court on his behalf and not attend the hearing. When the victim returns to court on their Permanent Protective Order (PPO) hearing date, she goes before the Judge to request that the EPO to be made permanent for a year. Frequently, the alleged abuser is in custody because the previous order was violated, and the respondent was picked up by the police, and there may be further criminal charges pending.

Sometimes the EPO is dropped in favor of the NCO. Usually I urged the court to keep the civil order in place for extra security for the victim. The victim is usually already familiar with the civil procedure and often feels, because her alleged abuser is in jail that the order has worked. In some cases, clients believe that since their abuser is reprimanded and charged with a violation of the order that the order served its purpose, however, this only meant that the police did their job and reinforced the courts order by following procedure and arresting the respondent. Orders only function properly if there is not a violation and clients are kept safe because the respondent obeys the court's request to refrain from abusing and harassing her. Since I was an advocate in the civil court, the retention of the civil order allowed me to continue my contact with the victim, even after her PPO was granted. I did not want her to think just because the case was over, so was her advocacy. If my client's case was transferred to another court, I usually followed and maintained contact with my client.

Once the PPO is granted, other restrictions may be placed upon the respondent in addition to the existing conditions of the order. These restrictions usually result from a request by the victim, her advocate or the Judge. The court often grants at the victim's request that the order is made into a No Contact Order, or that the respondent's gun permit and/or guns are surrendered to the court. The Judge often declares a radius within which the abuser cannot approach the victim, perhaps barring the abuser from the victim's place of work, the children's schools or daycare, places the victim frequented, and even her church. The order could also be dismissed at the request of the attorney or the victim, so that it could be transferred and taken up in divorce court, where it is called a Restraining Order. The court also has the jurisdiction to sort out custody and visitation issues and arrangements at the PPO hearing, if asked to do so by the victim, whether or not the other party agrees with the decision of the court. Frequently the Judge would order temporary child support to the victim, if paternity had been established, and compensation for any damages caused to the victim's property. Evictions could be granted at this time as well as Writs of Assistance to the victim, so that personal property could be collected, even if no eviction was granted. The court also had the power to order the abuser to take counseling, such as anger-control classes and substance-abuse classes. Mediation was often arranged at times through a social worker so that the alleged abuser and the victim could sort out issues in a safe setting, usually relating to custody or visitation disagreements. In extreme cases, the Judge would order an alleged abuser to leave the home even if he were on the lease as tenant. In cases such as these, the Judge and the advocate usually suggested to the victim that she have a new lease drawn up in her

name to prevent any further tenancy problems with the abuser. Sometimes there were cross-petitions, that is both the victim and the respondent filed against each other. In cases such as these, the court did not automatically grant both orders, but instead took testimony from the victim and the respondent and made a decision based on the evidence heard. These cross-petitions (EPOs) were sometimes just a result of anger and embarrassment by the alleged abuser and if the court was aware of this, the respondent's EPO was usually dismissed and the victim's order remained in effect.

Within the legal framework of the criminal justice system, an advocate can lend their assistance in a variety of ways that are beneficial to their clients. For instance after the hearing an advocate can lend support to their clients by sitting down with both parties and explaining again how the order functions. This allows the advocate to reiterate the importance of following the court's advice in the enforcement of their order, as well as clearing up any questions or concerns which the client did not raise before the Judge during the proceeding. Prior to a clients hearing, an advocate can also play a role in delaying court proceedings so that a client who fails to appear (FTA) can be contacted and encouraged to attend their PPO hearing so that the case will not be dismissed by the court. If a client calls to notify her advocate or the court that they cannot make their scheduled PPO hearing, sometimes the court will extend her EPO consequently, granting a new court date. The respondent is then notified through the mail, if he is not present in court, to appear on the newly scheduled court date. Sometimes the client is unreachable before the hearing, and the advocate then must call her later to inform her of what transpired in court. Often a client would come in after her EPO was dismissed, with an excuse as to why she was not

in court. Clients at this time would then file another order, if new incidents occurred, or try to see the Judge so that her previous order could be reinstated. Judges often dismiss without prejudice so the victim can reinstate her order without filing for a new one. Advocates often informed judges why the victim had not appeared: fear of retaliation or death was often a major factor. Frequently it was up to the advocate to remind the court not to place restrictions on the victim, if she did fail to appear in court. In my experience as an advocate I would often telephone my clients from court, if I did not see them during court in the gallery, and I had reason to believe something unforeseen had prevented them from coming to their hearing. It is important for the advocate to have numerous follow-up contacts with the clients so the advocate is aware and up to date on the clients changing situation, as well as providing consistent support to their clients, offering advice, answering questions, making suggestions and providing options. If at any time after the EPOs or PPOs are granted by the courts a violation occurs, it is up to the victim to alert the police or return to court to file contempt charges (civil violation of the order). It is very important that the client carry a copy of the order with her at all times, and it is best if copies are given out to others who reside in her home, as well as her employer, daycare provider, neighbors, family and friends. If the abuser tries to harass or threaten the victim and she is not present, the police may still arrest him, if an individual on behalf of the victim produces an order. All orders are entered into a database which the courts, prosecutors, advocates, staff and police can access, but it is still vital that a hard copy of the order is kept by the victim. If the police make an arrest and charges are filed because the order has been violated, then a criminal case proceeds, in

which the crime is called an invasion of privacy. Other charges may be filed as well, such as battery, criminal recklessness, criminal mischief, or even stalking. The case is then heard in a criminal court. If the victim decides to file a contempt charge the case will be heard in the civil courts. In such courts, the Judge can often place tougher restrictions on the alleged abuser, such as a longer jail sentence, higher court costs, and counseling and even community service.

I can recall one case when the Judge actually incarcerated an abuser for months on end, simply because he would not apologize to the victim for doing something which violated her order. This, of course, was a highly unusual situation, but it presents relief for the victim to know that even in a civil proceeding justice can be served. Justice is a lengthy process and at times, the victim feels discouraged and is ready to end the trips to the court month after month. The role of the advocate is to keep the momentum going. An advocate's support is vital for the victim at this point because the victim is considering her own life, and fighting for her rights as a survivor of domestic violence. The role of the advocate is also a supportive role, providing assurance to the victim every step of the way, often instructing the court to detain the respondent so that the victim can easily and safely leave the court, often escorted by the police as an extra security measure. Courts such as these, called Domestic Violence courts, rely heavily on the advocate to be a mediator between the court and the victim. At times, advocates are called upon by the Prosecution for additional help and on some occasions, even called to the bench to testify. Advocates are not attorneys, yet they have a vital role in ending violence against women and

creating a safe domain for the victim to enter, when she is most afraid for her life.

The advocate has a wider role, promoting “individual action” and “community awareness” as well as working with the victims of domestic violence.¹⁸ What citizens need to see is a lasting effect within the entire community, making domestic violence everyone’s problem and concern, not just those of us who work in the field. Public education can be used to persuade communities to take a hand in solving their “own” problems; communities can work with policy makers and advocates with the goal of eliminating violence in their backyard.¹⁹ Advocates must break down the “barriers” which stop people from reacting and turn them into proactive citizens, wanting to prevent violence in their communities, because they believe there is *No Excuse for Domestic Violence*.²⁰ I am only able to vouch for my personal involvement with the courts and those which I helped throughout the judicial system and I realise that each experience is unique and deserves equal attention. The advocates are as vital to their clients as they are to their communities, however, communities usually only hear of advocates when a client is killed, and not when someone survives. Advocates do need to lend their voice to promote the end of violence against women, and encourage others not to allow such silence to persist. It was, therefore, out of this experience as an advocate that my concern developed for the empowerment of women in specific and general ways.

¹⁸ Klein, “Public Education Campaigns,” p.100.

¹⁹ Klein, “Public Education Campaigns,” pp.92-93.

²⁰ See Klein, “Public Education Campaigns,” p.94. This phrase was part of a national public awareness campaign by the Family Violence Prevention Fund, in the United States in July of 1994, to reduce and prevent domestic violence through education and get people motivated to help stop violence in communities.

Alexis' Story²¹

There are many stories of personal empowerment, which I am able to describe from my involvement with victims of domestic violence. I will begin with the story of Alexis. As I was searching through the piles of Protective Orders that had been brought down by persons seeking an Emergency Protective Order, I sorted through the names and the relationships. As a domestic violence advocate, you are encouraged to prioritize the victims you will be able to best assist throughout the court process, usually focusing on those in abusive relationships. Orders of protection are not only filed by victims of violence but other people who are seeking protection from the courts because of a dispute. As an advocate in court, I regularly came across neighbours harassing one another, co-workers filing cross petitions, family members arguing over property and other victims who had criminal charges pending. The first role of the advocate is to help the petitioner²² comprehend a kind of discourse, which although designed to protect, may itself seem threatening. The role of the advocate not only guides the victim through the court process but advocates ultimately alleviate congestion in the courtroom and decrease the amount of time court staff must spend explaining the orders, so that more clients can be processed and granted their orders in a timely manner. An advocate is also better trained in domestic crisis intervention and prevention than the court staff and is able to give concise answers to question that may have gone unanswered if petitioners relied solely on the court staff for information. This is why the role of the advocate is so vital.

²¹ Her name has been changed to conceal her identity.

²² A petitioner (alleged victim) is someone who is filing an order. The person who is receiving the order is the respondent (alleged perpetrator).

Usually orders were granted on an emergency basis and then the court clerk set a permanent hearing in approximately 30 days. It was in these 30 days that I had most contact with my clients, keeping them informed of any changes in the dates, supporting them when they received threats, and trying to provide options when they felt alone and afraid for their lives. No case is exactly like another yet there are always similar factors. The definitions of violence against women used in research literature vary greatly. "Some include psychological and emotional abuse, financial abuse and sexual coercion, as well as physical and sexual assault as legally defined" within the jurisdiction of each state.²³ The threat of death, isolation and loneliness, lack of financial resources, absence of familial support, having to relocate to a new town or city, and the loss or destruction of their personal property, can all weigh heavily on the victim's mind. All these factors may be disorientating making victims feel that they no longer belong, even invading their sense of identity. Not all victims of domestic violence experienced these specific consequences of being in an abusive relationship, however many do have the feeling that life is just not worth the pain and depression, even thoughts of suicide can creep into the mind. All of these can be a daily reminder of abuse but at the same time a hindrance in a woman's struggle to leave a situation and relationship, which was promising at first, and then turned violent.

Alexis was an example of such a woman. She was young, only 19, and living with her boyfriend, Donald.²⁴ She had a supportive and loving family. She was pregnant with Donald's child. This still did not stop him

²³ Holly Johnson, "Rethinking Survey Research on Violence against Women." R.Emerson and Russell Dobash, Eds. *Rethinking Violence against Women*. Thousand Oaks, CA and London: Sage Publications, 1998, p.34.

²⁴ His name has been changed to conceal his identity.

from getting jealous when she went out with friends, and he would slap her face. He would call her names, tell her that she was worthless and ugly. He had a gun. He had been arrested and in jail before. He was three times her size. He said he would use his gun, if she provoked him. He then said he loved her and would never hurt her. How could he hurt the woman who was carrying his child? When she left the first time, she told her parents they had a fight. The truth was he had said he would kill her. She went back to him. She wanted to leave again, but this time Donald had plans. He kept her from her family for over a week, refusing to let her leave, while he battered her about the head and body. If an abuser keeps the victim from her support network he creates a world which he is alone her only hope, a hope which is uniquely false.

Isolation is a function of weak social bonding that reduces the extent to which both victims of assault and violent partners are able to sustain attachments to friendship and community networks and receive social support to end the violence.²⁵

Donald was using his power and Alexis's fear to keep her from leaving him. This was his way of asserting control over all aspects of her life, "to keep her isolated and dependent on his demands."

At this time Alexis was nine months pregnant. When she was finally allowed to leave by Donald, she was taken to hospital, where she had emergency brain surgery to remove the blood clots that had formed in her brain from the repeated beatings. In some instances of domestic violence,

²⁵ Johnson, p.43.

there is a fear and shame of detection, which can often lead battered women voluntarily to withdraw from social and family interactions, as their injuries become progressively worse.²⁶ Alexis was a prime example of this sort of cycle of violence. Donald, causing her to experience the most severe battering yet, had slowly cut her off from any support network or social service. Alexis had to endure immense pain during the surgery to remove the blood clot in her brain: she was treated with the minimum of painkillers since she was pregnant and the doctors feared she might suffer a brain hemorrhage and die. Alexis fortunately delivered a healthy baby girl three days later and the doctors were able to remove the clot. Alexis had decided it was time to go to court and keep Donald away from her for good. She had decided to leave him and his abuse. She did not want her daughter to become another victim of domestic violence and she herself a statistic.

Certain research based in the United States has focused on the effects of family violence and not just male-female violence, suggesting that the approach to violence should be handled in the same way, since the forms of violence are similar. Several studies and surveys have been administered since the 1970s pertaining to domestic violence. The Conflict Tactics Scale, developed by Murray Straus in 1990 at the University of New Hampshire, suggests a way to measure family conflict into 18 items to assess the interpersonal relationships. The scale ranges from verbal aggression, from a calm response to an aggressive one, the destruction of property, to acts of physical aggression. Sexual assault however is not factored into any range determined by this method. This scale also does not take into account the gender power imbalance that already exists in a marriage or a relationship

²⁶ Johnson, p.43.

and does not consider the “motives, intentions and consequences” of the abuser. This research has also led others in the field to believe that “wife battering” is not the issue but that “spousal violence” is one of “mutual combat.” This research considers violence on the same scale whether the woman punches the man or the man punches the woman, and thus fails to measure the “damage of consequences of these acts.” This research does not account for a victim’s ability to fight back or withstand her abuser’s attack and tends to “minimize and deflect responsibility for their [the abusers’] violence.”²⁷ This sort of research has been reassessed and altered to reflect the social standings of women, but there are still flaws in the methods of research gathering. Another survey, the National Violence Against Women Survey (Nov.1995-May1996, using a random sample of 8,000 men and women) used a modified version of CTS; it only looked at victimization and did not support the theory of “mutuality” of abuse within the relationship.²⁸ The survey found that approximately 22% of the women had reported being abused and only 7.4% men had reported being abused. The National Crime Victimization Survey (1997) used information from interviews collected from households and communities as well as crimes which were not reported to the police, and found that 1/3 of the victims had been abused before and that approximately 85% of the victims were women. In this survey, it was found that only half of all the incidents were reported to the police.²⁹ The National Survey of Families and Households (1998) reported that women were three times more likely than men to be injured and that about 84% of all trauma victims in the emergency room were women (1994,

²⁷ Johnson, p.27.

²⁸ Barnett, p.3.

²⁹ Barnett, p.4.

National Electronic Injury Surveillance System) Another study which was conducted in 1995 by researchers, Bachman and Saltzman found that yearly “between two or four million women” are abused by their partners. That translates into women claiming more injuries from domestic violence than in “auto accidents, rapes or muggings”³⁰ combined. The FBI collected data from 1976-1996, and found that over 30% of homicides were female victims who were killed by a partner or former partner and that almost 28% were murdered by an unknown assailant in which their relationship was unclear or unknown.³¹ As a former advocate I have found all of these things to be true, and what is most important in view of all the evidence is simply not just awareness in the dangers of family violence but that this violence is a problem which spills over into the rest of our communities and shows up in the classroom, as children use violence instead of negotiation to sort out conflict.³² This sort of cyclical reaction to Alexis’ abuse was what troubled her the most. She had no desire to allow her daughter to witness her own abuse or to think this sort of violence could be tolerated and endorsed as something normal.³³

I met Alexis the day she arrived in court to obtain her Emergency Protective Order. I had received a call from another advocate who had read the police report. There it stated there were no pending charges, Donald had not been arrested and there had been no follow-up investigation. I was then informed this was a particularly sensitive case and I should be on the look out for Alexis. When she arrived she was disoriented from her ordeal, but

³⁰ Barnett, p.5.

³¹ Barnett, p.173.

³² Barnett, p.28.

³³ Eva Lundgren, “The Hand that Strikes and Comforts: Gender Construction and the Tension between Body and Symbol.” R.Emerson and Russell Dobash, Eds. *Rethinking Violence Against Women*. Thousand Oaks, CA and London: Sage Publications, 1998, p.170.

had her mother and her brother by her side. Her newborn baby was at home with her grandparents. She had staples in her head and was embarrassed that a part of her head had been shaved for her surgery. She was barely over five feet tall and weighed a little over a hundred pounds. We spoke for some time. The wording on her emergency protection order and the description of abuse and threats were vague. Had he threatened her with a gun? Had he battered her while she was pregnant? The order stated she had had harassing telephone calls. That was all. The truth came out when I had talked with her for sometime after her mother and brother had left us. She did not want them to know what had really happened. She wanted to keep them from the truth because she herself could not believe that everything she was telling and describing to me was real. I thought she was brave, but I was angered by the situation I saw unfolding before me. The police had been called after she was 'permitted' to leave the apartment she had shared with Donald and had arrived at the hospital where Alexis had been taken. The police knew she had been kept against her will, and they knew she had been pregnant. They also knew that she had had emergency brain surgery to remove a clot in her blood stream, yet no criminal charges were filed. The police had suggested she go to the prosecutor's office downtown to file a Protective Order. The court granted her order.

This was a signal to me that the police considered Alexis to be just another young woman, with a new baby who would eventually return to her abusive boyfriend: in a sense, she was a waste of their time. This was the normal cycle of domestic violence and the police assumed she was in such a cycle and Donald would do it again perhaps abuse her worse next time but would never go to jail. Alexis and Donald were not married, but

cohabitating. Couples like them are typically young, with the man usually experiencing longer periods of unemployment than a married man, and thus the couple would be more likely to experience the stress associated with a lower income and an unstable home environment. These men also have a “greater stake in conformity” with their peer group than with wider society and hence their reputations are not at risk, if they decide to abuse their partners. Married men have the threat of social standing to consider and the fear of legal action, although unfortunately these things do not prevent men from committing acts of violence against women, they may only make some consider the consequences and effects of their actions.³⁴ I believe this scenario of Donald being unemployed with his reputation as an abusive man unlikely to be judged by the community was partially the case for Alexis, but there were also other factors, which contributed to her abuse. I also believe the police played a direct role in fostering the cycle of violence when they did little to be supportive and did “little to dissuade the abusive man of the moral rightness of his position” a sense of which Donald clearly possessed.³⁵ In other words, it is almost a green light for the batterers to abuse without fear of recourse to criminal punishment. I have to say, however, in defense of the police, often they do make a positive impact in the lives of battered women, but this was just not the case for the officer who wrote his report on Alexis. The police made an incorrect assumption.

Societal values have not consistently denounced assaults on wives but, in fact, throughout history, have upheld men’s rights to subjugate their wives by force. Groups and

³⁴ Johnson, p.46.

³⁵ Johnson, p.47.

individuals that uphold the right of men to assault their wives with impunity are available in a variety of male social networks. A strong social bond in these circumstances can serve to increase, not reduce the likelihood of violence.³⁶

What the police can do is to make it publicly clear that violence affects the entire community, and not just the couple or family unit involved.

Personal accountability comes from believing that the problem is widespread and of sufficient threat to the community fabric that affects one's own life— enough to take action. The public must also perceive that the problem is amenable to intervention.³⁷

This includes all those who are in a position of authority and who might have an effect on a victim's life shortly after the abuse. When I met Alexis in court, she was more than willing to sort out her own safety plan. She and I devised safety strategies and she listened attentively when I referred her to battered women's support groups in the community. The woman I met was in truth afraid for her life but determined to survive and become a mother, daughter and sister who had the courage to say enough was enough. I knew I would work to see that Donald went to jail and had no contact with the

³⁶ Johnson, pp.48-49.

³⁷ Klein, "Domestic Violence in Public Context," p.7.

daughter he might have killed in his rage and the girlfriend whose body he had battered and distorted. Today was the day Alexis became ready to set herself free.

Over the months of advocating and supporting Alexis, I often made daily calls to make sure she was taking her medicine and often talked with her family and personally telephoned the District Prosecutor for the East District to file charges against Alexis's abuser. I told Alexis that he would go to jail if he continued to violate her order and that she should continue to call the police whenever he attempted to make contact with her. I had suggested to Alexis that she write down her feelings, her fears and her goals in a journal. A journal can bear witness and by doing so it can validate the writer's sense of self. A journal can also be used practically by a victim to document and log the dates and times when the respondent harasses them in any manner. The journal can be used in court as supporting evidence against the respondent. The journal can also help the prosecution in a case where the victim is murdered, by using and cross-referencing her injuries and accounts of abuse and harassment during her abusive relationship with the perpetrator. Not only does a journal reflect the "life experiences" of a victim representing their feelings and reflection, but it is an added tool in prosecuting their cases in court as well. Alexis had begun a new life away from her abusive relationship with Donald, although she had years of recovery ahead. She also had the constant reminder that he had really hurt her, since she would probably have to continue taking blood thinning medicine for the rest of her life to ensure another clot would not form in her brain and cause an aneurysm. She also suffered some memory loss and would forget things from time to time.

Alexis used her journal in practical ways such as writing down things she did not want to forget such as doctor's appointments for herself and her child, but also used the journal as a way to heal herself. She never actually shared it with me in the two years I worked with her but she had found a way to disassociate herself from her traumatic experiences. She had found a way to deal with things alone without the help of others. She had to take medicine and could not drink alcohol. When she turned 21, (the legal age for alcohol consumption in the United States) we spoke on the telephone, and she expressed her anger in not being able to drink with her friends and enjoy her time out because of the blood thinning medication. She suffered extreme headaches at times and often had a hard time keeping her eyes open. She suffered from depression. She was afraid that she would never get a job, that she could not become a nurse, as she had wished. She was afraid that she would not have a normal life and afraid that her daughter might follow in her footsteps and enter an abusive relationship in the future. Nevertheless, Alexis had immense determination. I watched her change into a confident and vibrant woman, taking her first classes in college and trying to make a life for herself and her daughter. I left my job as an advocate, nearly two and a half years after meeting her, and I knew I would never forget her determination to overcome society's stigmatization of women like herself, caught in the throes of domestic violence, as not sufficiently strong and self-determined. Alexis defied her community and became a survivor, an excellent representative of what an individual can achieve with a lot of support and help from others, but especially with her own acts of self-conviction.

Alexis like other women in similar situations for whom I advocated developed courage and strength through personal experiences and continued to grow and heal by using writing as a way to guide and mentor a damaged spirit. Throughout the entire court process I was there to support Alexis, as I was there to support all the other victims/survivors of domestic violence, who were my clients. Often I would receive cards and letters expressing their thanks and gratitude, many of them expressing freedom and happiness. Frequently my clients mailed me stories they had clipped from newspapers, words that inspired them. Sometimes my clients would mail me the lyrics of a song they had heard which made them feel connected to other victims and the rest of the world. Other clients sent me copies of their own poems, written both during and after their abusive relationship. Before being a victim of violence, some women had been writers and were now able to write without the fear of retribution from their abusers. Still other clients were writing for the first time as a way to validate their feelings and confront their pain. More times than I can recall I would receive a phone call out of the blue, maybe on an anniversary of our meeting or of the day my client decided enough was enough. I also cherished the calls I received from my clients informing me they had moved to a new place, their children were smiling, they graduated from school or were enrolled in college. These were the extra special moments because I was no longer the advocate, but a friend, giving them a thumbs up for all their success and hard work.

A few of my clients sent articles with issues relating to domestic violence, their way of reaffirming that they are survivors. Before I left my job as an advocate, Alexis wrote me a short letter expressing her gratitude.

In the letter she had added an excerpt from something, she had written a year and a half before, when she was depressed and angry with herself. It said, " I will make it." Alexis was private when it came to her writing because she felt what she wrote was just never good enough. I know when her daughter finally said my name, after much struggle, I think Alexis finally realized that maybe she was good enough, but just not ready to share her power with me. I can appreciate her privacy and accept her success, because it does take small steps in order to achieve a leap into a new future without abuse. If writing was her way of finding this path, then keeping it to herself was just fine. Donald was convicted and sentenced to prison for thirteen years, five of which he must serve, and was described by the court as a " menace to society." The last time I heard from Alexis she wanted to know if I was ever coming back, because she said, "others needed me." I told her that I needed them too, and that I would eventually return to advocacy in some way or another. I do not know what Alexis is doing today, but I am sure she will never be a victim again.

When I worked with these women in domestic violence and on a one to one basis, it became hard not to become involved with their lives. It made it hard to watch the news at night or read the paper, when I knew these people, their children and intimate details of their lives, their likes and dislikes, their dreams and their aspirations for the future. I also knew their worst fears. I had to keep things in perspective and not allow myself to become so engrossed in my job that it could cause me to be an ineffectual advocate. Alyce D. LaViolette and Ola W. Barnett write in *It Could Happen to Anyone, Why Battered Women Stay*, that "professionals working with survivors may feel fearful themselves" as well as "in danger of developing

long-lasting anxiety reactions” more commonly known as “secondary traumas.”³⁸ When advocates fail to be able to keep, things in perspective then it is time for them to leave the profession so they do not endanger the women they are trying to help. I had the opportunity to relocate and try a new career, very far from advocacy and found a job as an instructor teaching at a community college. There I began to see my advocacy in a different perspective, prompted in part by the example of Alexis and other clients. Through this discovery, I decided to research how writing is or can be used as a way to empower women. What I wanted to investigate was whether these victims of domestic violence could use writing as a way to locate their pain and reconstruct their identities, by exploring the many facets of themselves. I also wanted to explore some representative women writers who I thought would best represent the diverse ways in which literature can handle images and violence against women. I looked to writers who were themselves empowered by their writing but especially those who at different historical moments, addressed the situation of women in their work.

Obviously, this is a huge field and there is a certain amount of arbitrariness in my selection. Perhaps the most honest way of justifying my choice is simply to say that these women interested me and I felt that they could help me to unite the various aspects of my own work. At the same time, I hope that my research will help me better to understand what writing by women can do for women. I thought this was the answer to how education and empowerment through writing could benefit communities and society.

³⁸ Barnett, p.112.

All citizens must take individual and collective action regarding social and public health issues, even if they are not directly involved in the problem.³⁹

This thesis is in a sense then a practical effort; it aims at being an intervention not merely a reflection. Throughout I consider the definition of violence against women as “psychological and emotional abuse, financial abuse and sexual coercion, as well as physical and sexual assault.”⁴⁰ I believe partly what makes me interested in ending violence against women is how we perceive it as a community and how it affects us individually. I want to widen the definition of violence beyond physical abuse. So far I have been dealing with extremes of domestic violence but underpinning this violence is a much wider kind of violence. Once we place a personal level on domestic violence then educating the public on this issue becomes itself a kind of condemnation and action.⁴¹ Violence is whatever at a specific moment in time causes oppression, degradation and humiliation. It can be denying individuals the right to govern their own financial resources or discouraging them from having a job. “Refusing to allow the woman to work is one tactic in restricting the power-balance in his [the abuser’s] favor; violence is another.”⁴² This violence can be physical; sending victims to hospital, but it may be merely denying them an opinion in the way things are administered in the household. “If status is at stake in one arena of the man’s life, there may be attempts to reinstate it at home through physically

³⁹ Barnett, p.6.

⁴⁰ Johnson, p.34.

⁴¹ Klein, “Domestic Violence in Public Context,” p.8.

⁴² Johnson, p.45.

abusing his wife.”⁴³ This can also lead to the abuser sexually assaulting his partner as another way to show his dominance and control over the entire relationship. His abuse can lead to the victimization of the children, growing up in a dysfunctional home: they may even become targets of his anger and violence. “If isolation is low and the family is well connected to the community through work, family and community networks, a potentially violent man is under surveillance.”⁴⁴ However, this may not curb other forms of abuse that the community may not be able to witness or hear. Violence against women can also be emotional and psychological, gradually wearing the victim down so that she believes she is nothing without her abuser and she cannot survive without him. It is an “internalization of the abuse” and isolation which makes her remain in the cycle of violence, in part because the abuser switches from violence to apology, comforting her in her pain. This pattern of abuse then results in the “externalization of violence” which the abusers role is a supreme authority, or “God,” punishing the victim for her own good, because he is the “lord of the house,” completely controlling his family through fear, domination and isolation.⁴⁵ It is through recognising this internalization of fear and pain that victims can use writing as a way to authenticate their emotional abuse and identify with other victims of violence by sharing their stories. This empowerment through language is a strategy which artists and writers employ when addressing issues of oppression. Writing about life experiences and violence can lead to an increase of public understanding and perhaps in the future will lead to complete awareness and total

⁴³ Johnson, p.45.

⁴⁴ Johnson, p.46.

⁴⁵ Lundgren, p.171.

condemnation of any violence. This is why I believe it is even more important to look to writing as a means in which awareness and empathy can be achieved to encourage others to engage in a thoughtful and meaningful way to end all forms of oppression.

Writing Life Experiences

I propose to investigate the connections between the life experiences of these women and the writers whom I have chosen because of my personal appreciation and interest in their writings. I will investigate their construction of their experiences in art. The three writers, Aphra Behn, Virginia Woolf and Anaïs Nin, deal in one way or another with the oppression of women and female strategies for coping with it and their writing was, of course, one of the ways in which they dealt with their own oppression. I am aware that the relationship between life and art is never a simple one and biographical criticism has various pitfalls and in Behn's case is peculiarly hard, since we usually have to deduce the life from the art and from what we know of the period from other historical sources. Simone De Beauvoir said "we learn through our mothers,"⁴⁶ and we have literary as well as biological mothers. What can we learn from them? Can women writers enable women to learn how not to be victims? I believe I will be able to find fruitful links between life experiences and writing by these women, and that I will be able to show that writing was a way for them to work through whatever violence they suffered in their lifetime, and that their writing, whatever form it may have taken, worked through these issues and

⁴⁶ See Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 1949. Reprint, Edited and Translated by H.M. Parshley. New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1989.

provided a way for them to heal conflicted selves. To do this I will look at specific texts which address issues surrounding violence against women and show how these writers used similar methods in deconstructing themselves in order to re-invent themselves, as a way to empower their inner self and consciousness. I will attempt to demonstrate the value of the artistry of the woman writer who uses her writing to empower others at the same time as seeking her own empowerment and self-acknowledgement.

I will discuss the experiences of these three writers that I feel might have been particularly oppressive within the given historical context. I will try to show how their writing provided different ways of coping with these oppressions. I will address some of the strategies for survival that Behn offers her contemporary readers and audiences, but I will stress that the real dangers of Behn's life cannot be underestimated and that in her case success was always precarious. I will then investigate Woolf's strategies, the precariousness of which are perhaps sufficiently demonstrated by her tragic death, however I believe she has much to say about the problems and barriers encountered by women in general and women writers in particular. I will look at her feminist polemics and essays and her interrogation of women's oppression to seek a connection between life experiences and writing, and show it as empowering. Nin represents a different kind of case since her technique for survival seems to always be in danger of becoming complicit with the oppression she is supposed to be struggling and writing against. In this sense she is perhaps most instructive for victims of violence in creating a safe place, or at least demonstrating one can exist. Finally I will try to show that the role of a women's support group which functions as a writers' group can also be a strategy for women to reflect on their life-

experiences and to construct new identities through their writing. In an environment which thrives on empowerment and recovery, writing can be used for a very specific purpose or it can be used to generate a unique style of art which validates the artists own artistry and personal history as relevant and important to the public, revealing perhaps even a rediscovered identity.

It is part of the writing strategy of Woolf and Nin in their journals to construct themselves as writers as a necessary prelude to becoming accomplished professional lecturers and authors and this allows me to consider the intimate relationship between art and life: they are, indeed, almost one. Controversy still surrounds Nin's writing and her "feminine writing"⁴⁷ style, yet she is not widely studied; Woolf is on the other hand perhaps over-analyzed and studied by scholars, both positively and negatively.⁴⁸ I will, however, contend that women writers today, whether or not they would call themselves professionals, can learn processes of recovery and survival by reading them and by themselves practising the art and skill of empowerment through words.

⁴⁷ See Hélène Cixous on "l'écriture féminine" in "Castration or Decapitation". Translated by Annette Kuhn. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 7, No. 11, 1981, pp.41-55.

⁴⁸ See Elaine Showalter on Virginia Woolf in *A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing*. London: Virago Press, 1993.

Aphra Behn's Influence on Virginia Woolf

See the past in relation to the future; and so prepare the way for masterpieces to come.¹—Virginia Woolf from "How it Strikes a Contemporary"

No woman without vizard in the nation, Can see it twice, and keep her reputation—that's certain.² —Aphra Behn

We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us.³—Adrienne Rich

Virginia Woolf wrote "all women together should let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn ... for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds."⁴ What is interesting for me in this statement from *A Room of One's Own*, is why Woolf selected Behn out of all the female writers available to her from the past for this accolade. Why Aphra Behn? Is it because Woolf related to her as a female writer, because Behn, like herself, was a writer whose writing was often misrepresented by her critics.⁵ Did Woolf find herself drawn to Behn because of the specific nature of her writing or was she intrigued by the historical indifference to the barriers she was breaking as a professional women writer in the Restoration period?⁶ This does not attempt to be an analysis or critique of Behn's work. It is an attempt to locate Aphra Behn's place in literary history and her significance for Woolf in relation to women's writing and life experiences. I believe the relationship between writing by women and their life experiences is

¹ Virginia Woolf, Andrew McNeillie, Ed. "How it Strikes a Contemporary." *The Common Reader*, First Series Annotated Edition 1925. Reprint, San Diego, CA and New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994, p.241.

² Aphra Behn, "The Emperor of the Moon," Jane Spencer, Ed. *The Rover and other Plays* Oxford World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p.276.

³ Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets and Silence, Selected Prose, 1966-1978*. London: Virago Press, 1986, p.35.

⁴ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* 1929.Reprint, San Diego and New York: Harcourt Brace, 1989, p.66. Henceforth *Room*.

⁵ Jacqueline Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse: Images of Women and the Dramatists 1642-1737*. Brighton: Harvester Press, 1988, pp.143-168.

⁶ Laurie Finke, "Aphra Behn and the Ideological Construction of Restoration Literary Theory." Heidi Hutner, Ed. *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory and Criticism*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993, pp.17-43.

uncannily similar through time, with a continuous flow through shifting ideologies. Women's writing notably contains the belief that the personal is political and often demonstrates that the truth can be revealed between the lines of public discourse.⁷ The writings of Aphra Behn represent a shift in the perceptions of the literary world which through successive ideologies sought the domesticity of women and the control of their fortunes and their minds. Her work finds ways of using the personal as the political.

I will be asking if it is helpful to think about the female body when formulating an approach to women's writing over such a long period. I will also ask how more recent studies of women's writing from Woolf's *Room of One's Own* onward can help us understand the contribution of women writers. I will be thinking, then, about women's writing as "bodies of writing" and considering how writers of the 20th and 21st centuries have been and can be influenced by the bodies of earlier women's writing, not only those dictated by the current canon of women's writing. I will look specifically at ways in which Virginia Woolf was influenced by Aphra Behn and I will also suggest that we find women writers having the same struggles for control and recognition over and over again.

Gillian Beer writes in "Representing Women: Representing the Past" that "the encounter with the otherness of earlier literature can allow us also to recognize and challenge our own assumptions and those of the society in which we live."⁸ Margaret Ezell writes in *Writing Women's Literary History* that she believes the current trend in anthologies of women's writing as

⁷ Sidonie Smith, "Constructing Truth in Lying Mouths: Truth-telling in Women's Autobiography." Martine Watson Brownley and Allison B. Kimmich, Eds. *Women and Autobiography*. Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1999, pp. 33-53.

⁸ Gillian Beer, "Representing Women: Re-Representing the Past." Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, Eds. *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997, p.80.

lamenting the “oppressive effects of society on early women writers” is quite easily reinforced by using Woolf’s “potent myth of Judith Shakespeare” in *A Room of One’s Own*, “to represent the tragic fate of talented women.” Ezell asserts that these anthologies suggest that “society...silenced women, and where it could not, it drove them mad and characteristically infused their writings with bitterness and anger.” In this way Woolf and other writers seem almost to be using the past as way of enforcing their present day conditions and continuing to blame society for the lack of female writers and for the anger they are alleged to feel.⁹ The other side to this argument emerges when we ask how it was possible for women writers to have any success at all, and to have achieved publication and notoriety when “women are a muted group?”¹⁰ Thus Jane Spencer draws attention to “the process by which women claimed their ‘empire’ in literature by taking earlier women writers as heroines to celebrate and examples to imitate.”¹¹ Ezell writes she believes followers of Woolf view women as “historically” silenced or absent altogether. Ezell suggests, however, that the silencing was not as extreme as this suggests and that the canon of women’s literature which is present today is forever evolving and constantly being revised when new women writers are uncovered.¹² I believe that Ezell is partially correct in her statement about the current canon of literature, for how can any canon be entirely complete? I do believe, however, that the ideological positions of

⁹ Margaret Ezell, *Writing Women’s Literary History*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, p.25.

¹⁰ Dale Spender, *Man Made Language*. London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, p.204.

¹¹ Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, Inc, 1986, p.24.

¹² Ezell, p.43.

society at different times contributed to the paucity of female writers represented in existing canons and this cannot be ignored by the historians of today. And so Woolf's story of Judith Shakespeare still provides a potent myth, even though, as Ezell points out, it was based on the limited historiography of her day.

Heidi Hutner writes in her essay "Rereading Aphra Behn: An Introduction," that Aphra Behn's work was mostly "ignored by literary critics and historians" because she was a woman and some scholars argue:

That we cannot uncritically revalue Behn's work and attach it to an otherwise unchanged Restoration literature, as some critics attempt to do, because her work challenges traditional literary values and destabilizes traditional aesthetic and historical assumptions about the literary culture of the English Restoration. ¹³

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar write in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* that "women who did *not* apologize for their literary efforts were defined as mad and monstrous" and that they became "unsexed" or "sexually fallen" if they were resourceful in their writing capabilities they were frequently labeled a "rebel like Aphra Behn" who was considered a "'shady lady', no doubt promiscuous, probably self indulgent and certainly 'indecent'." Because of this Gilbert and Gubar speculate that she was "gradually but inexorably

¹³ Heidi Hutner, "Rereading Aphra Behn: An Introduction." Heidi Hutner, Ed. *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory and Criticism*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993, pp.1.

excluded (even exorcised) not only from the literary canon of serious literature” but from people’s personal libraries as well. Issues of “money and morality” had become so important that Gilbert and Gubar believe “no serious writer” could take the risk of enduring similar treatment to that of Aphra Behn.¹⁴ Woolf writing in *A Room of One’s Own* concludes that the conditions were so adverse for exceptional women in the Elizabethan period that grudges and difficulties as well as oppression would necessarily contaminate their minds and affect their creative potential.¹⁵ Margaret Ezell writes that Virginia Woolf “created the character of ‘Judith Shakespeare’ to represent” what a “talented female” in early Modern English society might have experienced. Ezell concludes that Woolf was searching to find the answer to her question as to why there “were no female Shakespeares” and that Woolf “became frustrated” by what Ezell calls “the historical blank representing the life of the average women of that period.” Ezell writes that what Woolf does imagine is that “Shakespeare’s sister was not a commercial, publishing author, much less a successful or celebrated, or self-sufficient woman.”¹⁶ Ezell speculates that Woolf could have only presumed this scenario because of an “absence of facts” and that this was “the likely pattern of experience for a woman writer in the earlier centuries.”¹⁷ Woolf writes in *Room* that if a woman refused to follow or questioned the guidance/rules of her father/husband that she would suffer the consequences and the “gifted sister” of Shakespeare would be “betrothed” even when she “cried out that marriage was hateful to her,” and for that she

¹⁴ Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwomen in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000, pp.63-64.

¹⁵ Woolf, *Room*, p.58.

¹⁶ Ezell, pp.44-45.

¹⁷ Ezell, p.45.

would be “severely beaten by her father.” Woolf writes that her father would have “begged” her not to “shame him” or “break his heart.” If this was the life for “Judith” she wanted no part of it and packed her things up and left, to live out her dreams, as her brother had, yet Woolf surmises, she eventually ends up pregnant, kills herself and is forgotten. Woolf writes:

Genius of a sort must have existed among women as it must have existed among the working class. ¹⁸

Yet, for Woolf, if this were true, then women artists were likely to die mad because their gifts and talents were prevented from ever being used. In Shakespeare’s time, if a woman did write, then she would have

gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at. ¹⁹

Woolf believes that if women did manage to write, they would not have allowed their names to be attached to what they wrote; and so, Woolf claims, “anonymous” was “often a woman.”²⁰ Since Woolf, however, the history of women’s writing and the work of female writers from the Restoration period have gone through a process of rediscovery and have been addressed with new authority by feminist historians such as Janet Todd, Germaine Greer, Margaret Ezell, Elaine Hobby and Jane Spencer who have worked to recover

¹⁸ Woolf, *Room*, p.48.

¹⁹ Woolf, *Room*, p.49.

²⁰ Woolf, *Room*, p.49.

lost texts.²¹ Ezell suggests that “literature, for Woolf, was the process by which one could gain an economic independence... through one’s own labors,” an independence, Ezell concludes, that Woolf assumed “these isolated amateurs ... could not attain.” In Woolf’s “vision of history” Ezell writes that “if women did write, it was over opposition and discouragement, and their writings were never intended to be read.”²² Ezell writes that she believes many current feminist historians, like Woolf, “see the transformation from a system of patronage to that of the paid professional writer as the turning point in women’s literary history.” Ezell asserts that this is one reason why Aphra Behn “has assumed such importance in the canon—because she was supposedly the first professional” woman writer...“and for Woolf her writing ability was particularly important because Aphra Behn was, “the middle-class woman who began to write”²³ and the other female writers from the period were, in the opinion of Woolf, not “as significant in the development of women’s writing and its ‘tradition’ as the professional” writer.²⁴

These writers and other feminists historians and theorists have also demonstrated that there was indeed a silencing of women writers, although we have a much more nuanced picture of how this occurred than was available to Woolf. It is clear that women did write, even if they were on the fringes of society and by examining their lives and their work, literary critics have attempted to bring these past writings into the public’s eye through

²¹ See Janet Todd, *The Sign of Angelica*. London: 1989. *Aphra Behn*. London: 1996. Germaine Greer. *Slip-Shod Sibyls, Recognition, Rejection and The Woman Poet*. London: Viking, 1995. Margaret Ezell, *Writing Women’s Literary History*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993. Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Womens’ Writing 1649-88*. London: Virago Press, 1988. and Jane Spencer *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, Inc, 1986.

²² Ezell, pp.45-46.

²³ Woolf, *Room*, p.65.

²⁴ Ezell, p.47.

journal articles, anthologies and compilations.²⁵ Jane Spencer writes in *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen*, that she believes

Women writers are in a special position because of society's attitude to their sex; and their work is likely to be affected by their response to that position.²⁶

Spencer also suggests that since women have "been oppressed as women" they have at various times found logical recourse, as a result of their oppression and victimization, in "forming a group with significant interests in common."²⁷ Currently, organizations and agencies find it particularly helpful when trauma victims partake in survivor writing groups to address their personal traumas, and use these groups to validate and encourage future success in life.²⁸ Woolf's notion of an "Outsiders' Society" in *Three Guineas*²⁹ in a sense foreshadows these groups which encourage debate and understanding in the world around them rejecting a world which refuses to include them. Woolf writes in *Three Guineas*:

If a name it must have, it could be called the Outsiders' Society...It would consist of educated men's daughters working in their own class... by their own methods for liberty, equality and peace.³⁰

²⁵ Spender, pp.191-233.

²⁶ Spencer, p.ix.

²⁷ Spencer, p.ix.

²⁸ In my chapter called "In Search of the Extraordinary: Locating a Language of Empowerment," I address survivor writing groups, demonstrating how important this resource can be for victims of violence.

²⁹ Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* 1938. Reprint, San Diego and New York: Harcourt Brace, 1989, p.106. Henceforth TG.

³⁰ Woolf, TG, p.106.

Laurie Finke writes in "Aphra Behn and the Ideological Construction of Restoration Literary Theory" that "Behn reveals in her critical writing the difficulties faced by a practicing dramatist in the Restoration theatre." She also emphasizes her belief that it is because of this that Behn had to "operate outside of proper society while at the same time striving to gain a place in it."³¹ Finke is primarily interested in Behn's prefaces to her plays:

In Behn's prefaces, the theater emerges as a cultural activity – a set of practices full of conflict, collaboration, competition, politics, and even gossip. It is an agent of both social and cultural behavior, a producer of – as well as a product of –social meanings.³²

Finke depicts what we conventionally take to be literary criticism in essays and treatises as playing itself out in a "timeless, universal vacuum that continually validates the doctrines of liberal individualism."³³ Behn's prefaces and dedications are never disinterested in the way that such criticism is supposed to be and Behn is well aware of this. But, Finke contends, Behn's prefaces and dedications, nevertheless, make an important contribution to the history of literary criticism. Finke sees Behn as not only a woman who was a "critic of female oppression and those that would exclude women from the profession of writing" yet contends that Behn's "attitude towards the hegemonic culture was riven by contradictions that we

³¹ Finke, p.19.

³² Finke, p.19.

³³ Finke, p.21.

might probe as a means of exposing the ideological gaps within seventeenth-century literary culture."³⁴ Finke describes Behn as taking the restrictions concerning women's writing, as if on cue, and using her own prefaces to portray her work as a "woman" and exploiting the cultural norms which tried to sexualise women's writing. Thus Behn attempts to exploit those who were trying to exploit her by "poaching on the very ideologies that oppressed women by making them objects of sexual consumption." In other words, Behn "adopts the subject position available to her as a woman and an outsider; she plays off the shady lady against the proper lady."³⁵

Spencer writes that "Behn showed a direct confidence in her work and anger against male prejudice" and that "she did not hesitate to provide her audience with the bawdy writing it desired" and in doing so she created great debate concerning "those who thought writing for money implied depravity." Spencer believes this may have formed a "possible stumbling block for the eighteenth-century novelist."³⁶ Spencer suggests that male writers of the period were courting the idea of love and encouraging female writers to "define" what Spencer calls a "specially feminine quality in writing," and that by doing so they "established a precedent" for future women writers to follow "reinforcing the notion that their subject was love." Spencer believes that since Behn was "hailed as a poet of love," this actually contributed to the fact that this "soft passion" was then what women writers took on as their subject matter and that they themselves helped construct this "definition." Spencer speculates that this "enabled them to present their writing as an expression of, rather than a rebellion against their

³⁴ Finke, p.25.

³⁵ Finke, p.27.

³⁶ Spencer, p.28.

femininity.”³⁷ It was what Spencer describes as the “exploitation of feminine qualities” which “led to special restrictions” for female writers. It was also, however, not always “acceptable” for women to write of love and often their work was discredited because it was considered “bawdy” or “erotic.” The female writer was first praised for her natural instinct in her ability to write of love, and then condemned for expressing love, and just as “Behn had protested against this double standard” of male writers “mocking ladies” who went to plays filled with “sexual innuendo,” Behn herself did not have “similar freedoms” because her writing was lurid, coming from a woman.³⁸ I believe one reason for Woolf finding Behn so insightful was that her unconventional approach undermined the oppression of women in general, because she used her writing as a political platform, representing all women, not just literary women. Behn used her own oppression and status as a woman in an attempt to undermine those who wished to represent her as a victim. She was a writer who wrote outside the conventional restrictions established for women writers. It is also quite clear in Woolf’s writing that she looked at the “writer in the historical context” and “the conditions of women’s lives” to gauge their status as a writer and assess their struggles to overcome the wall of oppression they faced, an oppression which imprisoned women’s minds, never encouraging flight.³⁹

Woolf is also interested in what Elizabeth Ermarth suggests in “Fictional Consensus and Female Casualties,” as the “conflict between body and idea” and how this related to women’s experiences. Woolf distinctly

³⁷ Spencer, pp.30-31.

³⁸ Spencer, p.31.

³⁹ Jane Marcus, “Liberty, Sorority, Misogyny.” Carolyn Heilbrun and Margaret Higonnett, Eds. *The Representation of Women in Fiction, Selected Papers from The English Institute*, 1981. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Press, 1983, pp. 60-61.

addresses this in her essay, "Professions for Women,"⁴⁰ and, as Ermarth points out, Woolf is actually commenting on her state as a woman writer, therefore looking to her own experiences as a woman. Ermarth writes that Woolf struggled as a writer and that the "idea that most threatened her" was "the Angel in the House."⁴¹ Woolf is not only looking to the past life experiences of women writers to understand why she can find so few in the canon of serious literature, but she is also approaching this from an autobiographical vantage point and using her "body and idea" to explore the obstacles women writers encounter. She deploys the "Angel" as a figure which causes her to question what she is writing or tries to prevent her from succeeding altogether.⁴² Rachel Bowlby sees the "Angel in the House" as a figure which is all the more "insidious" because it is not a "figure of a man" censoring the woman writer, but the woman writer herself, because as Bowlby writes that:

This 'real experience' reveals another side to the notions that we 'think back through our mothers,' one which involves not the assumption but the putting away of the femininity taken to be not only incompatible with but actively censorious of a woman writing. Woolf's "Angel" explicitly identifies writing as an unwomanly manner of behaving; her own sacrificial

⁴⁰ See Virginia Woolf, "Professions for Women" 1931. *The Death of the Moth*. Hogarth Press, 1942, 1947. Henceforth *Professions*.

⁴¹ Elizabeth Ermarth, "Fictional Consensus and Female Casualties." Carolyn Heilbrun and Margaret Higonnet, Eds. *The Representations of Women in Fiction: Selected Papers from the English Institute 1981*, New Series, No.7. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Press, 1983, p. 15.

⁴² Ermarth, p.15.

femininity is itself over-represented in Woolf's parody in order to render the murder all the more justifiable.⁴³

How is it, then, that women writers were able to move away from the danger of being censored by their own pens, when they needed to locate a language which would enable them to express their experiences as women? I believe in order for women writers to do this they must find what Ermarth describes as the "homogeneity of the common temporal medium" and that it must be "all inclusive" and "must re-present and make available (a) common discourse" which encompasses all "viewpoints" and not just the dominant viewpoint, no matter how various.⁴⁴ The "Angel," then, might be reconceived as a support rather than a censor and would not then prevent the woman writer from writing or speaking her mind, but would rather support her attempt to confront the present with the past and lead the way for future women writers to engage in writing without recourse to societal judgements merely because they are women. This support of the "Angel," or how the "Angel" can help women, will be further addressed in the next chapter where I acknowledge Woolf's struggle with the notion of a gendered mind and her emphasis on androgyny as a way of re-conceiving the artist's mind.

Gillian Beer believes that in the case of women's writing we need to "de-stabilise the word 'representation'" and create a new way of seeing the past by bringing it to the present by "re-presenting" the texts. In other words, we must search in the past and "re-present" women's work in the

⁴³ Rachel Bowlby, *Feminist Destinations and Further Essays on Virginia Woolf*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 1997, p.41.

⁴⁴ Ermarth, pp.8-9.

present, not by bringing it up to date but by “with engaging with the *difference* of the past in our present” and that doing so can make us more aware both of the past and of our own assumptions.⁴⁵ In this way we may “come to know again those beliefs, dreads, unscrutinised expectations which may differ from our own but which may also bear upon them.”⁴⁶ Thus we cannot merely appropriate Behn and make her concerns the same as our own but we can see how her concerns and the strategies she found to address them may still offer ways of understanding our own dilemmas. Aphra Behn was regarded as a writer who challenged the very cultural and literary notions which tied her to Restoration writing and criticism. It is because of her strategy in combating the oppressive ideologies of her time, her refusal to allow them to restrict her work, which Woolf found her so intriguing. Gilbert and Gubar discuss Virginia Woolf’s feeling that “the woman writer seemed locked into a disconcerting double bind: that she had to choose between admitting she was only a woman, or protesting that she was as good as a man.” In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf states that Behn “had to work on equal terms with men.”⁴⁷ Gilbert and Gubar also suggest that women who did decide to tackle this oppressive headache, felt “trapped and sickened by suffocating alternatives and by the culture that created them.” This left the only viable options for women writers as rebellion or placating the existing literary notions that women were less than equal to their male literary counterparts.⁴⁸

Hutner writes that Behn’s “writing is intensely and complicatedly political, registering the fissures and discontinuities in late seventeenth-

⁴⁵ Beer, p.80.

⁴⁶ Beer, p.81.

⁴⁷ Woolf, *Room* p.64.

⁴⁸ Gilbert and Gubar. pp.63-64.

century English culture.” Hutner also believes that “rereading Behn may destabilize traditional notions of what constitutes literature, language and art” and that her work also “revises dominant models of the literary canon, and it is engaged in a number of complex ways in the socioeconomic discourses of the Restoration.”⁴⁹ Attentiveness then to what is *different* in the past is a necessary condition of unprejudiced reading. As Beer puts it “we can never become past readers” but we can “re-learn lost skills”:

We need a reading which acknowledges that we start now, from here; but which re-awakens the dormant signification to its first readers. Such reading seeks intense meaning embedded in semantics, plot, formal and generic properties, conditions of production. These have been overlaid by the sequent pasts and by our present concerns which cannot be obliterated, but we need to explore both likeness and *difference*.⁵⁰

Beer notes that we need to remind ourselves that we are all probably at the mercy of our own “communal metaphors” when we are reading texts, and that we need to be aware that the “process of persistent recognition involves also an understanding of the changing import of images.” We need to remain alert to the import of past metaphors, of course, but we should equally beware of regarding our own assumptions as “natural.”⁵¹ In other words, things that Behn and Woolf write about in their time may, or may not, be important or relevant to present day images and representations of

⁴⁹ Hutner, p.5.

⁵⁰ Beer, pp.81-82.

⁵¹ Beer, pp.81-82.

women, or they may. What also may be found are themes within the texts of the past, which seem still to exist in present day literature, such as specific images of and assumptions about women. I will further elaborate and discuss some of the assumptions which Woolf addresses in my next chapter by looking at *A Room of One's Own* and some of Woolf's essays.

Aphra Behn brought women's writing, as Woolf claims, to an important turn in the road, giving a new direction to her contemporaries and future writers. The life of Behn has been researched and uncovered by feminist scholars, since Virginia Woolf addressed Behn in her writing, but it is Woolf's commentary in which she describes Behn as a woman from a middle class background, once married, widowed, and able to flourish as a writer and actually make a living in the theatre, which brings me to ask again about the special importance of Aphra Behn? Woolf describes Behn as making "money by her wits."⁵² Woolf writes, "for now that Aphra Behn had done it, girls could go to their parents and say, You need not give me an allowance; I can make money by my pen."⁵³ This was the answer, Woolf thought for women writers to make their way in the world as professional writers. But Woolf goes on and suggests that the likely reply would be: "Yes, by living the life of Aphra Behn! Death would be better! And the door was slammed faster than ever."⁵⁴ Catherine Gallagher writes in her essay "Who was that Masked Women? The Prostitute and the Playwright in the Comedies of Aphra Behn" that although Behn was the "first professional female author," she was in a sense an "embarrassment to the generations of women who followed her into the literary market place, an ancestress whose name had to be lived down rather than lived up to." "Aphra Behn,"

⁵² Woolf, *Room*, p.64.

⁵³ Woolf, *Room*, p.64.

Gallagher continues, seemed, in Virginia Woolf's metaphor, to obstruct the very passageway to the profession of letters she had herself opened. From one point of view this might make her an obstacle for women writers because she wrote outside of the private sphere and opened herself up to the ridicule and scandal of being a public woman, but at the same time, Gallagher suggests, Behn self-consciously exploited her scandalousness and "introduced to the world of English letters the professional woman writer as a newfangled whore."⁵⁵

Dale Spender writes that "a woman writer who writes for a public audience is a contradiction" because, as she and Woolf suggest, there "has always been a taboo on writing" and to "speak and write publicly threatens the patriarchal order."⁵⁶ This has not stopped women from writing, yet it has created a division between what is accepted by the "dominant group" and deviant writers and forced "women writers to be judged foremost as women." One way Spender describes this as occurring is that women writers are denied "their womanliness" and she contends this may have been used to serve "the interests of the patriarchal order." Spender believes that because of this treatment women writers have been "obliged to cope with a complex set of problems about their identity as women, as well as the purpose of their writing."⁵⁷ Gallagher suggests that it is because of Behn's deliberate effort to represent herself as a public writer that she became "problematic" for "future female writers."⁵⁸ Behn embraced her status as a

⁵⁴ Woolf, *Room*, p.64.

⁵⁵ Catherine Gallagher, "Who was that Masked Woman? The Prostitute and the Playwright in the Comedies of Aphra Behn." Heidi Hutner, Ed. *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory and Criticism*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993, pp.65-66.

⁵⁶ Spender, p.192.

⁵⁷ Spender, pp.198-199.

⁵⁸ Gallagher, p.84.

“public woman” and did not shy from the “mask” of the “playwright whore”⁵⁹ but used these assumptions about women’s role in society to make money and turn a profit, becoming famous because of her sex. She became a “symbolic figure of authorship for the Restoration,” Gallagher writes, “the writer and the strumpet muse combined.”⁶⁰ Spender writes “as with speech, the prevailing belief has been that it is best if women do not write at all, but if they do then there are ways of discounting their words and making them ‘invisible.’”⁶¹ According to Spender:

The way in which publishing processes and the institution of literary criticism has been set up has facilitated the task of keeping women writers a muted group.⁶²

Jacqueline Pearson shows how Behn is interested in female roles, particularly “sexual roles and stereotypes” and how she employs female characters “who reject conventional views of female behavior and criticize male oppression.”⁶³ Behn, according to Pearson, is “frank and open about sexual themes” and “stresses the equality of men and women”; she is most interested in using her female characters to represent men’s “economic control over women” and to expose the existing “double standards” prevalent in society.⁶⁴ These ideas are not far from the struggles which women writers still find themselves addressing in Woolf’s time, or even today for that matter. “Women novelists of the eighteenth-century inherited

⁵⁹ Gallagher, p.69.

⁶⁰ Gallagher, p.73.

⁶¹ Spender, p.199.

⁶² Spender, p.199.

⁶³ Pearson, p.159.

⁶⁴ Pearson, p.168.

a role from the women dramatists of the seventeenth-century, but their relationship...was not always easy." Spencer writes, "women were defined by their sexuality" and, therefore, so were female writers. If this is true, then Behn's was in part judged by her life, and Spencer adds that the "woman novelist's sexual behavior was as much a subject for concern as her heroine's."⁶⁵ Spencer writes that:

the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth-centuries are rich in semi-autobiographical fiction. This mode suited women because in it they could become their own heroines and as we have seen the cultural association between heroine and woman writer was strong. Romanticized autobiography, or fantastic fiction starring an idealized version of the author, provided a means not just of self-projection but of creating one's identity and authority as a woman writer.⁶⁶

Common themes of oppression and overcoming obstacles are present in literature, art, film and other media, focusing on these unacceptable images and representations of women. As women's writing has progressively been uncovered, Elaine Showalter asserts *In a Literature of their Own*, "critics agree," when they view women's writing as a whole body of work, that there is a "recurrence of certain patterns, themes, problems and images from generation to generation."⁶⁷ Showalter believes that:

⁶⁵ Spencer, p.32.

⁶⁶ Spencer, p.41.

⁶⁷ Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing*. London: Virago Press, 1993, p.11.

each generation of women writers has found itself, in a sense, without a history, forced to rediscover the past anew, forging again and again the consciousness of their sex.⁶⁸

Various disguises have been used in the past to mask the truth. It has been persistently difficult for women to access even the truth about themselves. There are also questions raised in some authors' works about the representation of women's sexuality and stereotypical images of women as either angels or whores. In *Orlando* Woolf wittily uses Orlando's sex change to challenge assumptions about what men or women are "naturally" like. The novel is presented as a biography, forcing the reader to question at first the authenticity and veracity of the author's representation of the truth, but gradually the reader comes to understand that all our assumptions about the nature of woman are built on premises as questionable as the writer's sleight of hand in the construction of her character's gender. Writers interested in gender related issues, have focused on relationships, on the nature and representation of women with regard to their sexual nature. "Cross-dressing" has been used by writers of both sexes as a way of teasing out differences. And various styles of biography/autobiography have been employed to show relationships and even to predict changes in women's status, both in literature and within society.⁶⁹ Demonstrable in the writings of both Behn and Woolf is a consistent reference to these themes and patterns exemplifying their sense of how things will change, offering a prediction of the future of women's advancement in the world, both literary and societal. The need to uncover and find women writers of the past is the

⁶⁸ Showalter, p.12.

⁶⁹ Beer, pp.84-85.

first step in understanding “woman’s experiences” as important and linked to their creativity.⁷⁰

Women's experience of oppression has often made it difficult for them to achieve the mental equilibrium necessary for them to write. Achieving the right state of mind for writing has been a problem for both men and women, but since women have more in their lives to resent, it is a bigger problem for them. Virginia Woolf writes in *A Room of One's Own* that “literature is strewn with the wreckage of men who have minded beyond reason the opinions of others.”⁷¹ Woolf believes that the “state of mind of an artist” needs to be “incandescent, like Shakespeare’s mind.”⁷² Woolf clearly states she knows nothing of his mind, (nor his actual life) but since she believes he is a genius, he, therefore, must have had freedom, and few obstacles in his path to clutter his thoughts enabling “his poetry” to flow “free and unimpeded.”⁷³ Showalter comments that since no one really knows what went on in the mind of Shakespeare, this conjecture by Woolf cannot really be challenged. Showalter does suggest, however, that Woolf took some liberty in even comparing a woman writer in the same period to Shakespeare in the first place.⁷⁴ Woolf finds it wholly impossible to imagine a woman writer from this period able to express such a freed mind, because of all the restrictions placed on all the “Judiths.” This sentiment is shared by many of the feminist historians of the Restoration period. The underlying suggestion in much of their work is that in order to free their minds, women might also be giving up their appearance of chastity. I believe Woolf means

⁷⁰ Showalter, p.9.

⁷¹ Woolf, *Room*, p.56.

⁷² Woolf, *Room*, p.56.

⁷³ Woolf, *Room*, p.57.

⁷⁴ Showalter, p. 284.

that once women had the freedom to write, whether they were cast as prostitutes or not, that this would develop into their demanding other freedoms, such as sexual freedom. If they shared their thoughts and personal inner feelings by writing, it meant that Behn and other female writers of her time would tend to be judged on their morality not their intellect. For a woman to have a mind and use it was not what society applauded as a proper role for women in the "private world."⁷⁵ The exploration of the intellect and the freeing of the mind, is much like the more general broadening of one's horizons in life, opening up the opportunity to make decisions and loosening the ties which bind women to men financially. Showalter believes that:

it is important to see the female literary tradition... in relation to the wider evolution of women's self-awareness and to the ways in which any minority group finds its direction of self-expression relative to a dominant society, because we cannot show a pattern of deliberate progress and accumulation.⁷⁶

Ezell writes that according to Woolf the opportunity to be a *professional* writer in the literary canon "freed" the mind" whereas being an "amateur" did not: "it is implied that if a woman was still dependent on male relatives for support, she was therefore necessarily constrained."⁷⁷ This is one reason why Aphra Behn assumed such importance for Woolf. Ezell believes for Virginia Woolf that "the professional woman writer" was someone who was

⁷⁵ Spender, p.193.

⁷⁶ Showalter, p.11.

⁷⁷ Ezell, p.48.

“independent of men” because she wrote for money and thus “earned her keep,” without as Ezell describes “performing menial labor or being a dependent wife.”⁷⁸ I believe that this provides another reason for Woolf latching on to Aphra Behn’s writing as crucial, for her identifying Behn as an important role model for future generations of female writers.⁷⁹ The only professions for women which gave them any sort of opportunity to earn a living was either being a whore or a writer and Woolf, suggests that they are inevitably closely identified, because they both allow a woman financial freedom. Woolf writes, “Aphra Behn proved that money could be made by writing at the sacrifice, perhaps of certain agreeable qualities.” Writing for women, then, could become a necessity and of utmost importance to surviving, and not just a sign, as Dorothy Osborne puts it, of being “ridiculous” even “distracted.”⁸⁰

But even if women decide to take up their pens and write as Aphra Behn did in the Seventeenth-century and Virginia Woolf in the Twentieth-century, they still have, as Spender suggests, been forced to “split between private and public writing, with the attendant difficulties that may give rise to” and that “men have experienced no such split and have enjoyed the benefit of continuum.”⁸¹ I believe that Woolf selected Aphra Behn from women’s literary history to represent all the female writers whose silence was deafening. Aphra Behn was perhaps just as talented a writer as the other women during the Restoration which Woolf reviewed, but Aphra Behn achieved her dubious fame because she strayed beyond the barriers which were placed before female writers, and broke certain rules. Since she

⁷⁸ Ezell, pp.47-48.

⁷⁹ Spencer, p.42.

⁸⁰ Woolf, *Room*, p.64.

⁸¹ Spender, p.193.

did so, Woolf was able to label her the “first professional woman writer”⁸² and, therefore, actively encourage investigation as to why women’s writing was forgotten in the canon of serious literature. Aphra Behn proved to Woolf’s satisfaction and to some extent the treatment of her writing still demonstrates that the factors inimical to Behn’s strategies in questioning society’s oppression of women, were still dominating for female writers during Woolf’s time, and may well persist for women writers who follow after Woolf, if the past is not continually re-examined so that the history of women’s writing ceases to be a history shrouded in disguise and silence. Woolf writes in *A Room of One’s Own*:

For masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice.⁸³

I believe this statement has great bearing on the writers of today and how they use their writings to reach others, specifically for those who are using writing to inform, educating their communities, and raising the awareness of the obstacles which currently hinder women and women writers in society. One voice raised against violence against women can trigger an outpouring of support and create a mass of voices against violence. Woolf was writing about the history of women’s bodies within the framework of literature, but she was also writing about the history of women’s experiences of writing.

⁸² See Germaine Greer. *Slip-Shod Sibyls, Recognition, Rejection and The Woman Poet*. London: Viking, 1995.

⁸³ Woolf, *Room*, p.66.

Showalter believes that “the female literary tradition comes from the still-evolving relationship between women writers and their society.” I agree with this statement. Society still places special restrictions on women’s lives by various kinds of oppression and separation, and if writers have the ability to transform these obstacles by means of their writing into tangible resources for ordinary women to grasp, then they are succeeding in making a dent in the oppression of all women.⁸⁴ Ezell writes, “Woolf had the courage to say frankly that her generation was ignorant, that books needed to be written and perceptions of the past revised.”⁸⁵ The connection between Woolf and Behn strengthens the body of women’s literary history and shows that there is universality to women’s oppression, even if they wrote centuries apart. Women writers still think back through their mothers.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Showalter, p.12.

⁸⁵ Ezell, p.59.

⁸⁶ Woolf, *Room*, p.76.

Is Virginia Woolf helping Women “Kill the Angel in the House?”¹

When I write, it's everything that we don't know we can be that is written out of me, without exclusions, without stipulation, and everything we will be calls us to the unflagging, intoxicating, unappeasable search for love. In one another we will never be lacking² —Hélène Cixous

When a woman tells the truth she is creating the possibility for more truth around her.³—Adrienne Rich

When Virginia Woolf first published *A Room of One's Own* in 1929⁴ the world then was very different from the one we now experience. Yet *Room* still offers contemporary readers satirical and witty insights to the particular obstacles which women faced if they wanted to write, to leave the “private sphere” and enter the “public” forum of writing. Woolf was primarily a novelist but she also wrote essays, reviews and literary criticism. *A Room of One's Own* fuses two essays, “Professions for Women” and “Women and Fiction”⁵ into a work of prose which asks her readers to think about the kind of restrictions that have historically been placed on women writing. One example of women writers’ struggle in becoming professional writers is that women have been forced to look over their shoulders to see who is watching – Woolf romantically, yet knowingly calls this watcher “The Angel in the House.” In her essay, “Professions for Women,” Woolf writes:

And while I was writing this review, I discovered that if I were going to review books I should need to do battle with a certain

¹ Virginia Woolf, “Professions for Women” 1931. *The Death of the Moth*. London: Hogarth Press, 1942, 1947, p.150. Henceforth “Professions.”

² Hélène Cixous, “Le rire de la méduse” (The Laugh of the Medusa) 1976. Translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. . Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, Eds. *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*. Brighton: The Harvester, 1986, p.264.

³ Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets and Silence, Selected Prose, 1966-1978*. London: Virago Press, 1986, p.191.

⁴ I will refer to this essay periodically in this chapter as *Room*.

⁵ See Virginia Woolf, “Women and Fiction” 1929. *Granite and Rainbow*. London: Hogarth Press, 1958, pp.76-84, and “Professions for Women” 1931. *The Death of the Moth*. London: Hogarth Press, 1942, 1947, pp. 149-154.

phantom. And the phantom was a woman, and when I came to know her better I called her after the heroine of a famous poem, The Angel in the House. It was she who used to come between me and my paper when I was writing reviews.⁶

I will discuss Woolf's imaginary foe in more detail after I establish a linear theme of oppression in women's literature as a subplot to Woolf's own struggle in trying to find the "truth" in relation to the other "phantoms and obstacles" which women writers face.⁷ Dale Spender believes that women writers such as Woolf who wrote for public consumption were almost apologetic because they were addressing themselves to men and writing "either an apology or (a) defiance" but Spender contends that:

no matter which form of accommodation women made, it was an accommodation not required of males for whom there were no restrictions on writing, be the audience male or female.⁸

This may have been true in 1929, but can the teachings of *Room* help women today locate a way to apply these ideals to current writing? In order to answer this question, I will start by looking at *A Room of One's Own's* polemic structures and principles. These are well crafted by Woolf, yet present a challenge to the changing attitudes and roles of women writers. I believe an understanding of the past will also help to better equip future generations and will encourage them to remember to observe the history of

⁶ Woolf, "Professions," p.150.

⁷ Woolf, "Professions," p.153.

⁸ Dale Spender, *Man Made Language*. London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, p.195.

women's writing and the experiences of women in general as important to their progress in restructuring and dismantling the oppressive weights which have tried to squeeze women into silence. In *Creating Safe Space: Violence and Women's Writing*, the editors, Tomoko Kuribayashi and Julie Tharp write:

Historically, writing has been both a means of empowerment and a source of anxiety for women. Feminist scholars of earlier women writers agree that women writers had more obstacles to overcome before they could write than their male counterparts.⁹

Although women writers have been successful and some are now viewed as among the greatest figures in literary history, their path was not always smooth and they fought their way, every step of the way. Kuribayashi and Tharp write that:

Scholars of eighteenth and nineteenth-century British women writers, for example, assert that women who attempted to write did suffer considerably from the incompatibility between the contemporary definitions of the nature of writing and the social-cultural ideals of femininity in their time. Writing was an act of self-assertion, a characteristic alien to behavior

⁹ Tomoko Kuribayashi and Julie Tharp, Eds. *Creating Safe Space: Violence and Women's Writing*. New York: State University Press of New York, 1998, p.3.

expected of women, especially well bred ones.¹⁰

This not only affects the prosperity of their writing career but it has also affected them mentally and physically, draining them of the little energy they have to even formulate sentences, and prepare the dinner, clean the house and *have* children (my italics). Roberta Rosenberg in *Language of Power: Women and Literature, 1945 to the Present* provides her perspective on the evolution of feminist theory as progressing from one generation to another and each generation of writers adding their insight. Rosenberg views the years 1945-1975 as the “female struggle for self-definition in a misogynist world” and from 1975-1985 sees the creation of a “gynocentric” woman-centered world of literature, thought and language,” and from 1985 to the present she believes that there is a post-patriarchal analysis of women and men as “prisoners of gender, and a questioning of gender itself.”¹¹ Rosenberg uses the term “post-patriarchal” to describe a period of “self-consciousness in which gender relations have changed in theory, if not in actual practice.”¹² This is then the evolution on which future writers can look back and locate every generation’s “Angel” and their specific “room.” Kuribayashi and Tharp wonder:

Are women co-opted into the oppressors’ group when they write their way into the mainstream, by accepting and even

¹⁰ Tomoko Kuribayashi and Julie Tharp pp.3-4.

¹¹ Roberta Rosenberg, *The Language of Power: Women and Literature, 1945 to the Present*. New York: Peter Lang Publication, 1996, p.236.

¹² Roberta Rosenberg, p.236.

using the power dynamics that oppressed them in the first place?¹³

In other words, by reconfiguring the “Angel” and claiming her as a powerful ally rather than an inhibitor, can women press forward and exceed the expectations of simply being a writer and not merely a female writer? Can the “Angel” empower women writers to write of their experiences in a *écriture féminine* or must they seek a new language and voice altogether, one which is not bound by the limitations of sex?

Simone De Beauvoir comments in an interview that she views the “dominant ideology” as a force which has been able to accept “women’s literature as well as men’s literature” but she also says that “women have been hindered from creating for a variety of reasons,” just as Woolf demonstrates in *A Room of One’s Own* the conditions she believes women need in order to write. Woolf believed that without financial freedom and independence, an education, time and space to write, women would not be able to become professional writers. Woolf writes that “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.”¹⁴ Beauvoir believes that on the whole women “have been recognized” and that women’s oppression has been much more widespread in “painting,” yet she emphasizes that “literature is always what the dominant ideology recognizes as literature.”¹⁵ Although Beauvoir would argue that women writers did write and were published and recognized, nevertheless there are still fewer successful female writers than male, simply because it is the canon

¹³ Kuribayashi, Tomoko and Julie Tharp, p.5

¹⁴ Woolf, *Room*, p.4.

¹⁵ Alice Jardine, “Interview with Simone De Beauvoir.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5, No. 2, 1979, pp. 231.

of literature to which women desire to gain entry is male constructed. This notion is similar in theory to Woolf's argument that women are entitled to an education, not just at home with tutors, but a formal university education. Woolf captures her feelings concerning this sentiment clearly as she describes herself being barred from a college library in *Room*. Rachel Bowlby suggests in *Feminist Destinations and Further Essays on Virginia Woolf* that "a position outside might turn out to hold more possibilities for forms of activity or reasoning ruled out a priori" as she suggests "for those who have to maintain the properties of the insider group." Perhaps this is not a group which Woolf would have joined even if had been possible. Bowlby writes that the narrator "is full of scorn and mockery" when describing "patriarchal conventions" and those who never question authority.¹⁶ Woolf writes in *A Room of One's Own*:

Here I was actually at the door which leads to the library itself. I must have opened it, for instantly there issued, like a guardian black angel barring the way with a flutter of black gown instead of white wings, a deprecating silvery, kindly gentleman, who regretted in a low voice as he waved me back that ladies are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a Fellow of the College or furnished with a letter of introduction.¹⁷

Beauvoir also believes that Woolf wrote a lot about "her sex" even when she contested that she was not thinking of her gender at all, and Beauvoir claims

¹⁶ Rachel Bowlby, *Feminist Destinations and Further Essays on Virginia Woolf*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 1997, pp.17-18.

¹⁷ Woolf, *Room*, pp.7-8.

that her writing is very “feminine” because women are “sensitive ... to the sensations of nature, much more so than men, much more contemplative.”¹⁸ Beauvoir says that she believes the only way a woman can write is from “within” because only a woman knows what it “feels as a woman, and to be a woman.”¹⁹ Beauvoir also feels that a woman will write what she knows and that often there is something autobiographical in women’s writings. This is because Beauvoir believes that “women have a need to write their own histories” as Woolf also argues in *A Room of One’s Own*, reflecting on her fictional character “Judith Shakespeare.” I showed in the previous chapter how she looked to Aphra Behn as an example of an earlier woman who was a successful writer, even while society around her condemned her work and that of other female writers, discouraging them or worse, never allowing their work to be published or performed.

What is of particular interest to me in Woolf’s writing is her view on the oppressions which women writers faced. I want to discuss why in *Room* she decided upon “killing the angel in the house” and to consider her view on androgyny as the preferred “sex” of a writer. Although I also feel that her style is helpful though prefiguring the *écriture féminine*, like that of Anaïs Nin, leading to later writers, like Clarice Lispector, Marie Redonnet and now many others.²⁰ Cora Kaplan writes in *Sea Changes* that:

Literature has been a traditional space for exploration of gender relations and sexual difference and one in which women themselves have formidably been present. ²¹

¹⁸ Jardine, p.233.

¹⁹ Jardine, p.233.

²⁰ For *écriture féminine*, see my chapter on Anaïs Nin, or read *The Passion According to G.H.* by Clarice Lispector, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000 or *Rose Mérie Rose* by Marie Redonnet, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994.

²¹ Cora Kaplan, *Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism*. London: Verso, 1986, p.149.

What interests me, then, and, of course, what interested Woolf, are the strategies that women writers employ to overcome the obstacles which still plague them, decreasing their chances of achieving the role of the professional writer. And so since, as Kaplan says, literature itself has been a site for interrogation of the problem, the example of earlier writers can influence and benefit women, showing them how writing may be used as means of empowerment. In other words, the writing of the past will itself show how women writers can kill or transform their angels, empower themselves, and locate their voices.

It has already been claimed by Simone De Beauvoir that the “dominant ideology” is male. Toril Moi writes in *Sexual/Textual Politics* that one of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s arguments in *The Madwomen in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the 19th Century Literary Imagination* is that:

Behind the angel lurks the monster: the obverse of the male idealization of women is the male fear of femininity. The monster woman is the woman who refuses to be selfless, acts on her own initiative, who has a story to tell – in short, a woman who rejects the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for her.²²

Gilbert and Gubar believe that “self-definition” is essential for the “female artist” and that it is complex because of what they describe as “patriarchal

²² Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990, p.58.

definitions" which come between "herself and herself."²³ They believe that the female voice is "duplicitous" but a "true female voice." Moi further suggests that for the female voice to be found it must be unearthed from the male literature which women have "inherited" to find the angel and the monster.²⁴ Moi writes that:

The angel and the monster, the sweet heroine and the raging madwoman, are aspects of the author's self image, as well as elements of her treacherous anti-patriarchal strategies.²⁵

I believe Woolf finds this struggle disheartening and does equate the "double image"²⁶ or as Woolf writes "the figure in the looking-glass"²⁷ which is her "self " as that of the angel/monster which she decides must be killed, in order for the artist to live, but what is also interesting is that she believes by carrying out this violent act she will be able to continue creating as an artist and the obstacle will cease from tormenting her.

I turned upon her and caught her by the throat. I did my best to kill her. My excuse, if I were to be had in a court of law, would be that I acted in self defense. Had I not killed her she would have killed me... But it was a real experience; it was an experience that was bound to befall all women writers at that

²³ Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwomen in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the 19th Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000, p.17.

²⁴ Moi, pp. 59-60.

²⁵ Moi, pp.60-61.

²⁶ Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. p.85.

²⁷ Woolf, *Room*, p.36.

time. Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer.²⁸

The larger debate which Woolf addresses, concerns whether or not there are writing styles unique to women and men. Dale Spender writes that Woolf is “commenting on the male control of women’s writing” but that Woolf is not a harsh critic and does it within an acceptable language so as not to offend her male critics.²⁹ Spender adds that she believed Woolf’s intention “was to satirize” yet there is something laughable at the “caricature of the female Angel in the House” and Spender suggests that it is Woolf’s rebellion “against male control” and that she actually “defers to male power.” Spender sees this as an attempt by Woolf to demonstrate how women as writers fell into the category of a “muted group,” yet at the same time to reach “a compromise,” so that she could be accepted by her male peers and still “retain her reputation” as a women writer. The movement from a “muted position” means that women in Spender’s view “break women’s silence” with women “developing their own scale of values, their own definitions of what is real, worthwhile or relevant.”³⁰ Spender writes that

This excision of women from our literary heritage helps to reinforce the confines of our mutedness. As women we look at the past and find few other women and our suspicions, inculcated by patriarchal order, are fed, and we question our own abilities.³¹

²⁸ Woolf, “Professions” p.151.

²⁹ Spender, pp.203-204.

³⁰ Spender, pp.203-204.

³¹ Spender, p.205.

Even if Woolf is interested in elevating the status of women in the literary canon, she does state that she is interested in “factors other than the writer’s sex.”³² Further more, Woolf declares that Shakespeare had an “androgynous mind”³³ and writes that “it is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex,”³⁴ even though Woolf believes that the “representation of the female body in literature needed to be remedied”³⁵ and supporters of *écriture féminine*, like Hélène Cixous believe:

Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including the one that laugh at the very idea of pronouncing the word “silence” the one that, aiming for the impossible....³⁶

Bowlby, however, writes that denying “the necessity of asserting women’s difference, whether psychological or in terms of access to the forms of literary expression” can be problematic.³⁷ Woolf’s insistence on an “androgynous mind” as essential to creativity has not been uniformly well

³² Bowlby, p.23.

³³ Woolf, *Room*, p. 99.

³⁴ Woolf, *Room*, p.104.

³⁵ Bowlby, p.29.

³⁶ Cixous, p.256.

³⁷ Bowlby, p.37.

received. Showalter writes that “androgyny was the myth” which helped Woolf “evade confrontation with her own painful femaleness” and “enabled her to choke and repress her anger and ambition.”³⁸ Showalter writes

beyond the tragedy of her personal life is the betrayal of her literary genius, her adoption of a female aesthetic that ultimately proved inadequate to her purposes and stifling to her development.³⁹

In regard to Woolf’s attempts to claim the writing mind as androgynous, Showalter believes that Woolf is trying to “flee” from male/female oppositions into androgyny. Toril Moi argues that Woolf actually “fears” these “gender identities.” But Moi suggests that Woolf “rejects them because she sees them for what they are. She (Woolf) has understood that the goal of the feminist struggle... must be to deconstruct the death-dealing binary oppositions of masculinity and femininity.”⁴⁰ Hélène Cixous presents a different way of looking at Woolf’s dilemma involving women’s literature and her personal struggle for self-definition which she writes about in her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa.” Showalter, less sympathetic perhaps to Woolf’s situation, sees Woolf as trying “to find a way of talking about women’s writing that would accept the continuity of the literary tradition.” Showalter suggests Woolf did not want to describe things in a negative manner, which might upset the “dominant ideology” and Showalter sees “more than a hint of fear” in Woolf’s language, and thinks Woolf did not

³⁸ Showalter, p.264.

³⁹ Showalter, p.264.

⁴⁰ Moi, p.13.

want to be glossed over in the canon of literature like so many women before her.⁴¹ I believe Woolf was trying to look to the past to uncover how women are silenced, not because they use a language which is uniquely feminine, but because they are women. Margaret Ezell believes that Woolf was not trying to separate herself as feminine or as a woman by using the term androgyny: she explains that it was the “literary goal” for women writers in the eighteenth century not be “perceived as a woman writer but simply a writer.”⁴² Hélène Cixous writes in the “Laugh of the Medusa” of a “bisexual” standard in language and writing, which I believe, is similar to Woolf’s debate on androgyny.⁴³ Woolf writes in *Room*:

It is fatal to be a man or a woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly of man-womanly. It is fatal for a woman to lay the least stress on any grievance; to plead even with justice in any cause; in any way to speak consciously as a woman.⁴⁴

In using the term “bisexual,” Cixous is referring to what she believes to be the “classic conception of bisexuality”, which she describes as “squashed under the emblem of castration fear” and “the fantasy of a ‘total’ being (though composed of two halves), you would do away with the difference experienced.”⁴⁵ In other words:

⁴¹ Showalter, pp.288-289.

⁴² Margaret J.M. Ezell, *Writing Women’s Literary History*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, pp. 72-73.

⁴³ Cixous, p.254.

⁴⁴ Woolf, *Room*, p.101.

⁴⁵ Cixous, p.254.

Bisexuality: that is, each one's location in self (répérage en soi) of the presence – variously manifest and insistent according to each person, male or female – of both sexes, non-exclusion either of the difference or of one sex, and, from this “self-permission,” multiplication of the effects of the inscription of desire, over all parts of my body and the other body.⁴⁶

If bisexuality is used as interchangeable with androgyny, then it can then be said that what is envisaged is not the alienation of the sexes from each other, nor is it an attempt to be sexless, but it is rather a way of imagining a combination. I believe Woolf uses the term “androgyny” as a way of creating a protective shield around the woman writer, so that she can write without being judged according to her sex, but only by the quality and ability of her writing. Showalter writes that Woolf meant the androgynous mind to be a “luminous and fulfilling idea; but, like other utopian projections, her vision is inhuman ... it represents an escape from the confrontation with femaleness or maleness.”⁴⁷ Woolf writes in *Room* that a sort of “collaboration” needs to take place “in the mind between the woman and the man before the art of creation can be accomplished.” Woolf decides that once this is achieved then “there must be freedom and there must be peace.”⁴⁸ Woolf is not merely commenting upon the differences between a female writer and a male writer but demonstrating how women are denied the freedom to write, unless they consider the male writer. Primarily, Woolf is referring to literary history's denial of the same freedoms for women and

⁴⁶ Cixous, p.254.

⁴⁷ Showalter, p.289.

⁴⁸ Woolf, *Room*, p.103.

men, and without the “freeing of the mind” the writer is trapped and, therefore, silenced. Androgyny was a way for Woolf to un-silence women and free their minds if nothing else. Showalter believes that another way to view androgyny is as a “total immersion in the individual experience, with all its restrictions of sex and anger.” Showalter speculates that this can be accomplished when a woman realizes what it means to be a woman and, therefore, this could “lead the artist to an understanding of what it means to be a man.” Showalter envisions this, as speaking to “the secret heart in all people” and that it would result from daring to “express what is unique, even if unpleasant, taboo, or destructive, in one’s own experiences.”⁴⁹ In Showalter’s opinion Woolf’s creation of an androgynous mind presents weakness not strength for women, and that the real power is when women remember they are women.⁵⁰ I do not agree with Showalter’s analysis of the consequences of Woolf’s technique: I consider Hélène Cixous’ approach a better way of understanding the complex strategies in writing from a feminine/masculine body.

Since Hélène Cixous believes “it’s a secret” to men that women are bisexual in a certain way, since men are “poised to keep the glorious phallic monosexuality in view.”⁵¹ Cixous does not suggest that women allow men to run their lives just because they “lack” a phallus. We must resist reinstating “again and again the religion of the father. Because we don’t want that.”⁵² What we do want, however, is to free our minds and overcome the obstacles

⁴⁹ Showalter, p.289.

⁵⁰ Showalter, p.290.

⁵¹ Cixous, p.254.

⁵² Cixous, p.255.

which Woolf describes in her essays and novels, both in her cautionary tales of indifference to women writers and her description of the struggle to kill "The Angel in the House."⁵³ Cixous writes:

Too bad for them to fall apart upon discovering that women aren't men, or that the mother doesn't have one. But isn't this fear convenient for them? Wouldn't the worst be, isn't the worst, in truth, that women aren't castrated, that they have only to stop listening to the Sirens (for the Sirens were men) for history to change its meaning? You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she is not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing.⁵⁴

Once a woman discovers that she has been held back, because of her sex she will not allow her oppressor to force her into an inferior role, but she will locate:

the strength of women that, sweeping away the syntax, breaking that famous thread (just a tiny little thread, they say) which acts for men as a surrogate umbilical cord, assuring them—otherwise they couldn't come—that the old lady is always right behind them, watching them make phallus, women will go right up to the impossible. When the "repressed" of their culture and their society returns, it's an explosive, *utterly* destructive, staggering return, with a force

⁵³ See Woolf, "Professions," pp. 149-154.

⁵⁴ Cixous, p.255.

never yet unleashed and equal to the most forbidding of suppressions.⁵⁵

Women, as Cixous views it, will no longer fear the “Angel” over their shoulders because they will have realized what they have been denied as women, and as women writers. Cixous proclaims that there will be “more body, hence more writing” and that “for a long time it has been in body that women have responded to the persecution, to the familial-conjugal enterprise of domestication, to the repeated attempts at castrating them.”⁵⁶ In other words, by being denied a proper education and the means to support themselves financially women have been symbolically castrated. In “Professions for Women,” Woolf writes that that a woman will know “herself” when she does all that she is capable of doing, and “has expressed herself in all the arts and professions open to human skill.”⁵⁷ In other words, a woman will know herself when she is able to do everything that men can do and that in order to be a writer you cannot let reality creep in and “break the illusion.” These restrictions which were placed upon women writers forced them to imagine experiences rather than have experiences.⁵⁸ Cixous writes:

If woman has always functioned “within” the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different sound, it is time for her to dislocate

⁵⁵ Cixous, p.256.

⁵⁶ Cixous, p.257.

⁵⁷ See Woolf, “Professions,” p.151.

⁵⁸ Woolf, “Professions,” p. 152.

this “within”, to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of.⁵⁹

Spender calls this the problem for the woman writer of “man made language.” Because of this women “must still deal with a symbolic system constructed by men to ensure the primacy of men: we must still contend with this aspect of mutedness.”⁶⁰ Spender writes that one of the first things women writers must do is to “symbolize woman” and create a “self-definition.” Spender elaborates this by suggesting that women writers have often been forced to portray women in the “distorted forms in which men have cast them.” She further writes that women writers were also often aware of this problem and its effects. For women writers to achieve success apart from men, they must separate their self-definition and image and “construct” new images, “a new symbolic framework for women in which the voices of all women are represented. It must be multidimensional.”⁶¹

Cixous writes that we must “shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the ‘truth’ with laughter.”⁶² Woolf writes in “Women and Fiction” that women will look to the big picture and that they will “look beyond the personal and the political relationships to the wider questions which the poet tries to solve—of our destiny and the meaning of life.”⁶³ I believe that progress brings enlightenment and women’s pursuit of

⁵⁹ Cixous, p.257.

⁶⁰ Spender, p.224.

⁶¹ Spender, pp.224-226.

⁶² Cixous, p.258.

⁶³ Virginia Woolf, “Women and Fiction” 1929. *Granite and Rainbow*. London: Hogarth Press, 1958, p.83. Henceforth “Women.”

education and the political agendas scripted in their writings will increasingly bring them out into the public sphere of literature. They will more fully take their place alongside men and will achieve the freedom which translates into leisure, money and a room to write within uninterrupted.⁶⁴ Cixous writes that “thanks to their history, women today know (how to do and want) what men will be able to conceive of only much later,” and that:

on the one hand she has constituted herself necessarily as that “person” capable of losing a part of herself without losing her integrity. But secretly, silently, deep down inside, she grows and multiplies, for, on the other hand, she knows far more about living and about the relation between the economy of the drives and the management of the ego than any man.⁶⁵

It is by casting aside the man-made “angel” that women writers will be able to write and to create their own literary canon, and their own language; thus they will be able to reinforce their experiences as women, without fear of the consequences. By remaining silent, women are failing to use the power of their voices, but if more voices are heard, then more will follow; and if more taboo subjects are discussed, more openness will characterise all relationships. Until there is nothing but a laughing Medusa⁶⁶ and until we all create and decorate our own rooms and from them share our stories of empowerment and survival.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Woolf, “Women,” p.84.

⁶⁵ Cixous, p.259.

⁶⁶ Cixous, p.255.

⁶⁷ See Woolf, “Professions,” p. 154.

The Search for Anaïs Nin

To trust the world with the diaries. Nothing the world has done so far will convince me that it can be trusted with the truth. —Anaïs Nin

Write yourself: your body must make itself heard. Then the huge resources of the unconscious will burst. Finally the inexhaustible feminine imaginary is going to be deployed.¹ —Hélène Cixous

The woman Anaïs Nin and the artist Anaïs Nin cannot be separated although the relentless antipathy of some critics and scholars to one or the other might encourage separation; but dislike of the one usually implies dislike of the other and approval works in the same way. Many reviews of Nin's work have been negative; yet, others are most positive like Kate Millet, who declares Nin the "mother to us all."² In *Incest: From "A Journal of Love," The Unexpurgated Diary*, Nin writes, "I am aware of my power, but my power is feminine; it demands a match, not a victory. My power is also that of the artist ... I am an artist first, I can keep my ego, my woman's ego, in the background."³ In 1942, the poet and critic, William Carlos Williams, stated that he believed Anaïs Nin was "a good writer ... at her best she writes devotedly, without lie or excess baggage, from some such secret source of power which I have been trying to disclose ... a secret having to do profoundly with her sex."⁴ Estelle Jelinek, although she approves of Nin, nevertheless feels that Nin is only concerned with the "internal, creative"

¹ Hélène Cixous, "Sorties: Out and Out Attacks/Ways Out/Forays." Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, Eds. *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997, p.103.

² Kate Millet, "Anaïs—A Mother to Us All: The Birth of an Artist as a Woman." *Anaïs: An International Journal* 9, 1991, p.3.

³ Anaïs Nin, *Incest: From "A Journal of Love," The Unexpurgated Diary of Anaïs Nin, 1932- 1934*. San Diego and New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1993, p.4.

⁴ William Carlos Williams, "Men...Have No Tenderness": Anaïs Nin's *Winter of Artifice*." 1942, Reprint. Jason Philip K., Ed. *The Critical Response to Anaïs Nin*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996, p. 74.

realities and not with “politics ... with external realities.”⁵ Evelyn Hinz, however, clarifies the case of Nin’s characteristic qualities being both admired and disapproved, writing that Nin’s

experimentation in fiction with the personification of various aspects of the psyche was criticized as her inability to create realistic characters, while her use of imagistic sequence to dramatize the free associative nature of the unconsciousness was regarded as solipsistic formlessness or evidence of a lack of discipline.⁶

Whatever reviewers of Nin’s work might write, Nin has somehow received a reputation as one of the “significant writers of the twentieth century” whether she is regarded as a writer of fiction or more boldly as a liar.⁷ Yuko Yagushi writes, “Anais Nin ... is a collage, always in the making, of constant inconsistency.”⁸ Nin is always changing and recreating herself, both in her own life experiences and as an artist, constantly redefining herself using motifs and creating characters suited to express her artistry. And Nin has always been the subject of debate about the factual concerning the veracity of her writing, especially of her diary. I am, however, more concerned with the nature of her writing as a “feminine voice” and the articulation in that voice of the subject matter she chooses, than with the strict truth of what she

⁵ Estelle C. Jelinek, “Anais Nin: A Critical Evaluation.” Jason Philip K. Ed. *The Critical Response to Anais Nin*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996, p. 49.

⁶ Evelyn J. Hinz, “Anais Nin: Reader and Writer.” *The Canadian Review of American Studies* 6, No.1, 1975, p.118.

⁷ Hinz, p.118.

⁸ Yuko Yagushi, “The Text that is the Writer: On Reading ‘The Diary of Anais Nin.’” *Anais: An International Journal* 16, 1998, p.51.

claimed as autobiographical. Maxine Molyneux and Julia Casterton, believe that Nin's writing, especially her identification with a father-figure and her celebration of sexual difference set her apart and Nin "stands as another voice, making different meaning and representations of women."⁹ Molyneux and Casterton also believe that the characters invented by Nin are shaped out of literature's various identities and representations of woman, literary and other. Many feminist writers have "cast off" these identities such as the "mother," the "witch," the "child," and the "whore" – yet these identities are embraced by Nin.¹⁰ In an interview in May 1970, Molyneux questioned Anaïs Nin about the publication of her third journal and about her attitudes to and thoughts about writing in general. Nin states in regard to differences in style and approach from one *Diary* to another: "When you are twenty you think everything is important. In editing now, I try to take out repetitions and minor subjects, minor themes."¹¹ Molyneux asked Nin if she believed the diary was mostly about herself or about her relationships and interactions with other people. Nin replied:

By exploring yourself you begin to understand others better, by knowing yourself you also make a better friend to others ... It is the relationship between people that really wins out in the *Diary*. The way the friendships developed and the relationships to people. That is why I never understood some

⁹ Maxine Molyneux and Julia Casterton. "Looking Again at Anaïs Nin." *The Minnesota Review* 18, 1982, p. 86.

¹⁰ Maxine Molyneux and Julia Casterton, p.86.

¹¹ Maxine Molyneux and Julia Casterton, p.88.

of the reviews talking about a self-portrait.¹²

Sharon Spencer writes that Nin always “acknowledged that the most basic aspect of feminine identity was to form and maintain loving relationships.”¹³ For Nin writing was an act of wholeness, and involved the whole being, and so for her to challenge her creative will, she also had to change her personal life. This arose from inner change which was simultaneously liberating and frightening.¹⁴ Patricia Lawlor suggests that Nin’s search for connections explains her identification with the image of the labyrinth: the labyrinth “can be seen as a metaphor of her own life and work ... while the labyrinth is the metaphor of the diary, the diary is a metaphor of the inner self.”¹⁵ Lawlor continues that Nin uses the “reoccurrence of many characters” to establish a basis for “recurrent themes in relationships.” But these characters and relationships are presented by a “symbolic language” since “ordinary language” cannot embody the inner self which Nin conveys.¹⁶ Establishing the connection between life and art involves Nin in journeys of self-exploration and exploration of her relationships. She uses the symbol of the “labyrinth” to expand “boundaries of gender, genre and language.” The aim is to resolve her search for connectiveness and achieve the “joy of self-realization.”¹⁷ And so Nin’s need to be known as an artist arises from a need

¹² Maxine Molyneux and Julia Casterton, p.88.

¹³ Sharon Spencer, “The Feminine Self: Anais Nin.” *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 50, No.1, 1990, p.57.

¹⁴ Anais Nin, *In Favour of the Sensitive Man and Other Essays*. London: WH Allen, 1978, p.59. Henceforth FSM.

¹⁵ Patricia Lawlor, “Beyond Gender and Genre: Writing the Labyrinth of the Selves.” *Anais: An International Journal* 7, 1989, pp.26-27.

¹⁶ Lawlor, p.25.

¹⁷ Lawlor, p.31.

for self-validation. Success as an artist demonstrates that one possesses inner power.¹⁸

Nin spent many years in psychoanalysis, first with René Allendy and later with Otto Rank. All through this period, she tried to cultivate an understanding and a new way of feeling about the turbulent relationship she had with her father.¹⁹ Her writing was also a mechanism to gain understanding hence the 'father-loss' symbolism which surfaces throughout her lifelong diary and much of the rest of her writings. Paul Grimley Kuntz suggests, "the artist makes public the most private aspects of the unconsciousness..."²⁰ Nancy Jo Hoy believes that it is the relationships Nin created between the shifting personae in her diary and the changing contexts of their experiences, which fascinates us as readers and draws us to the diary of Nin. "We are fascinated not because this may or may not be the portrait of Anaïs Nin, but because it is one of the first portraits we have of a woman artist, and therefore a mirror for us all."²¹ No other woman writer had written herself over such a long period: the evolution of the diary over time, the continuous processes of the writing establish its difference.

The fictions Nin wrote enabled her to maintain connections to her previous relationships, and so in one sense they function as a record; yet Nin continued to allow these relationships to evolve in her writing, adapting them to her changing life experiences as she saw fit. This is precisely where some critics speculate Nin is lying. One example of Nin's stretching of the truth can be found in the double life she led between California and New

¹⁸ Nin, *FSM*, p.60.

¹⁹ Deirdre Bair, *Anaïs Nin, A Biography*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1995, pp.188-190.

²⁰ Paul Grimley Kuntz, "Art as Public Dream: The Practice and Theory of Anaïs Nin." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 32, No.4, 1974, p535.

²¹ Nancy Jo Hoy, "The Poetry of Experience: How to be a Woman and an Artist." *Anaïs: An International Journal* 4, 1986, p.55.

York. Nin effectively maintained two identities alternating between two homes and two husbands, concealing the truth from many more or less efficiently.²² Nin's writings also revealed discrepancies of truth, especially concerning the nature of her relationship with her father, which was not actually elaborated upon until after her death in her unexpurgated text of *Incest: From A Journal of Love*.²³ In her prose poem *House of Incest*, Nin hinted at family incest, however she developed this relationship between a brother and a sister not a father and a daughter, which is subsequently found in her novella *Winter of Artifice*. Adrienne Rich writes in, *On Lies, Secrets and Silence, Selected Prose, 1966-1978* that:

Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched, we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity: it is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society.²⁴

Rich is challenging the existing notions of what is possible for women's writing, but in a way Nin was involved in self-revision, in challenging her

²² See Noel Riley Fitch, *Anais: The Erotic Life of Anaïs Nin*. Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1993.

²³ Suzette Henke, "Anaïs Nin's *Journal of Love*: Father-Daughter and Incestuous Desire." Suzanne Nalbantian, Ed. *Anais Nin Literary Perspectives*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997, pp. 126.

²⁴ Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets and Silence, Selected Prose, 1966-1978*. London: Virago Press, 1986, p.35.

own writing. The first volume of Nin's diary dates from 1931 but was not published until 1966. In one sense, it is already revised by context. The later volumes enter into a dialogue with feminism and with her own earlier selves. This self-involvement characterises Nin's strategies: She tries to descend into her own unconscious, which she believes is the source for all her selves and to work from within this source.

If it's imagistic, if it's inspirational, if it comes straight from the unconscious then it's something that absolutely sets others free and sets us afloat. But it has to be the language of dream imagery, because that is pure, that really comes from the unconscious, that's the way the unconscious expresses itself.²⁵

Nin sees this as a way of "freeing up the whole psyche ... in our own terms."²⁶ The conscious self was merely an instrument of awareness. The more politically motivated Simone De Beauvoir strongly deprecates the idea of using the unconscious as a tool for writing:

The writer cannot stop her unconscious from showing up that is certain. But it is not something you do... you do not deliberately try to rummage in your unconsciousness. It does not even make sense, since it is precisely unconscious.²⁷

²⁵ Anaïs Nin, Evelyn Hinz, Ed. "Proceed from the Dream." *A Women Speaks: The Lectures, Seminars and Interviews of Anaïs Nin* 1975. Reprint, Penguin Books, 1992, p.123.

²⁶ Nin, "Proceed from the Dream," p.126.

²⁷ Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 1949. Reprint, Edited and Translated by H.M. Parshley, Vintage Books, New York: Random House, 1989, p.230.

The consequence of Nin's method was that she was set apart from the mainstream writers of the day— her connections were first with her self and then with her readers. Otto Rank considered the diary as an "obstacle in the therapeutic process as well as her creative life."²⁸ Yet Nin's connection with her diary was a special relationship and "it functioned as a mirror, a confession, and a chemical interchange between her two— selves the real and the artificial, the natural and the unnatural."²⁹ The diary assisted the emergence of Nin's "assertion of selfhood, the quest for female identity and the conflict between the artist role and the pursuit of the creative will."³⁰ It is rewritten in a language Nin designed, to go "straight to the emotions." Nin suggests "that traditional writing erects a barrier between feeling experience and its written evocation" and what Anaïs Nin desired most was "to describe things from a woman's point of view and in a woman's terms" without intermediary translation into a more feasible language.³¹ As Nin's writings continued, her insistence on "the value of the individual experience and the authenticity of feelings as a way of relating to the world"³² was reinforced by Nin's insistence that she was an artist who would not be hindered by the fact she was a woman.³³ Sharon Spencer explains Nin's peculiarities as functions of her search for authentic expression: for the "woman writer, who, like Nin, yearns to express herself with authenticity" there are inevitable "problems of sensibility and language." This is precisely

²⁸ Bettina L. Knapp, "The Diary as Art: Anaïs Nin, Thornton Wilder, and Edmund Wilson." *World Literature Today* 61, No.2, 1987, p.224.

²⁹ Knapp, p.224.

³⁰ Hoy, p.59.

³¹ Hoy, p.60.

³² Hoy, p.64.

³³ See Sharon Spencer, *Collage of Dreams, The Writings of Anaïs Nin*. Chicago: The Swallow Press, Inc., 1977.

why Nin concentrated so fiercely on inventing “her own language.”³⁴ Her belief in herself as an artist meant that she had to remain true to her own voice as a woman.

³⁴ Sharon Spencer. “Beyond Therapy: the Enduring Love of Anais Nin for Otto Rank.” Suzanne Nalbantian, Ed. *Anais Nin: Literary Perspectives*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997, p.103.

Anaïs Nin: Writing her Dreams and Experiences from her 'Womb'¹

Jung said, 'proceed from the dream outward'² —Anaïs Nin

How many closenesses are there in the world for a woman like me? Am I a unity?
A monster? Am I one woman?³ —Anaïs Nin

Anaïs Nin believes we “find everything we want in the unconscious.”⁴ For Nin, the journey through the unconscious is the means by which we understand obstacles in our lives, progressing to overcome them. The artist for Nin is the one who is able to look inside their “internal world” and use their artistry to project it for the rest of the world to view. Nin describes this process as a way to reach out and eliminate these “obstacles” which block our creative powers. Nin suggests that if you are an artist these obstacles are easier to work through because the artist is capable of exploring the unconscious without difficulty, however, for others Nin says that “psychology at its best does teach us to take the journey into dreams.”⁵ Nin made psychology “her guide” and learned to “respect” her dreams and to use them to understand what was happening in her life. Nin says that by gaining a familiarity with her dreams she was able to overcome “obsessions” and “traumas could be unravelled” so that she “could proceed to the next cycle ... which was life.”⁶ Paul Grimley Kuntz writes that Nin believes dreams represent our ability to associate and may allow us to understand “distortions of reality” at a deeper level and enable us to uncover what is

¹ See Anaïs Nin, Evelyn Hinz, Ed. *A Women Speaks: The Lectures, Seminars and Interviews of Anaïs Nin* 1975. Reprint, London: Penguin Books, 1992.

² See Anaïs Nin, *The Novel of the Future*. London: Peter Owen, 1969.

³ Anaïs Nin, *Incest: From "A Journal of Love," The Unexpurgated Diary of Anaïs Nin, 1932-1934*. San Diego and New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1993, p.9.

⁴ Anaïs Nin, Evelyn Hinz, Ed. “Proceed from the Dream.” *A Women Speaks: The Lectures, Seminars and Interviews of Anaïs Nin* 1975. Reprint, London: Penguin Books, 1992, p.111.

⁵ Nin, “Proceed from the Dream” p.112.

⁶ Nin, “Proceed from the Dream” p.113.

“human in us all.”⁷ Kuntz asserts Nin believed it is through our dreams, that we are capable of entering “the hidden self”⁸ and in a sense a “shared consciousness”⁹ with others by allowing the most “intimate aspects” of ourselves to be uncovered.¹⁰ Kuntz believes that:

Nin’s own language seems to indicate that the artist is like the psychoanalyst, one who has found a way through his neuroses and is in a position to help others.¹¹

Nin writes that to:

reach an honest objectivity means that we have to know what points of our nature are given to a particular prejudice, what part of us is defensive and what part of us distorts what we hear.¹²

To attain this we first need to be completely honest with our selves and to “clear away these distortions and to clarify our vision.” Nin suggests this can be achieved by finding through psychology which part of our “psyche” is “not objective”. Nin believes that psychology enables us to recognize “deep down” our unconscious and the “more we bring it into consciousness,” Nin believes, the more we will be able to see clearly and be

⁷ Paul Grimley Kuntz, “ Art as Public Dream: The Practice and Theory of Anaïs Nin. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 32, No.4, 1974, p.531

⁸ Kuntz, p.533.

⁹ Kuntz, p.532.

¹⁰ Kuntz, p.532.

¹¹ Kuntz, p.534.

¹² Nin, “Proceed from the Dream,” p.114.

more honest and objective. Once we achieve this objectivity within, then we are able to “proceed from the dream”¹³ and look objectively at the world around us.¹⁴ Dreams for Nin are a guide and she uses their images and symbols as interpretative tools, relating her dreams to her own life experiences, searching for what Kuntz describes as a “sincere or authentic” truthfulness through creation and art.¹⁵ Nin believed that the process of the unconscious meant that she was able to “gain freedom in creativity.”¹⁶ Diane Richard-Allerdyce believes that Nin makes a conscious effort to seek and “develop her literary philosophy,”¹⁷ through her work while Duane Schneider writes that Nin tries to fasten at the same time “psychological authenticity” in her work “through the manipulation of symbolism, dreams, and other dramatic devices.”¹⁸ Nin describes this as her “psychic participation and carrying out the dream” involving her own work and that of other artists. In Nin’s mind, this opens other worlds which invite us “to enter”. For Nin it is the “interaction of all these psychic energies”¹⁹ which she believes is the “whole mystery of growth, of expansion and deliverance from the traps which life sets.” In other words, Nin sees this as a way to find a door to enter another realm, even if it “is only by way of the dream” and says:

¹³ Nin, “Proceed from the Dream,” p. 109.

¹⁴ Nin, “Proceed from the Dream,” p. 114.

¹⁵ Kuntz, p.535.

¹⁶ Kuntz, p.536.

¹⁷ Diane Richard-Allerdyce, “Narrative and Authenticity: Strategies of Evasion in the Diaries of Anaïs Nin: Then and Now.” *Anaïs: An International Journal* 13, 1995, p.90.

¹⁸ Duane Schneider, “Anaïs Nin in the Diary: The Creation and Development of a Persona.” *Mosaic: Journal of Comparative Study in Literature and Ideas* 11, No.2, 1978, p.10.

¹⁹ Nin, “Proceed from the Dream,” p.117.

I wrote about all of them, my friends and myself, as much in terms of our potential as our actual selves. I tried to imagine the future ... to put your mind forward.²⁰

Duane Schneider suggests that Nin uses these devices to create “a new art form— the journal-novel.”²¹ I believe, however, that this is not a new tradition or style of writing, but simply, Nin pushing the boundaries of an existing genre. Nin creates within her diary people whom we eventually recognize as characters in a larger story, just as in works of fiction. As Schneider theorizes, since the narrator never actually tells us she is involved in the stories she narrates, we cannot assume these experiences are autobiographical. This aspect of Nin’s writing causes the reader to speculate whether this is just an elaborate manifestation of imagination which conjures “the violence, the drunkenness, the sexuality”²² that we find in Nin’s writings, or whether it is, as Nin claims it to be, a “feminine voice.”²³ Nin allows the reader to imagine what is real and what is created and the “narrator’s vision of the artist transforming the world” is a vision to which Nin whole-heartedly clings.²⁴ It was most important for Nin to have an “abundant life” and she believed that dreams played a vital role in achieving this goal.²⁵ When Nin first began her diary, it was as a letter to her father, while as a child she was coming to America.²⁶ The diary is used by the author as a confidante, a person, and she “speaks to it” in the way a letter is

²⁰ Nin, “Proceed from the Dream,” p.118.

²¹ Schneider, p.10.

²² Schneider, p.12.

²³ Sharon Spencer, “The Music of the Womb: Anaïs Nin’s “Feminine Writing.” Jason Philip K., Ed. *The Critical Response to Anaïs Nin*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996.

²⁴ Schneider, p.14.

²⁵ Schneider, p.16.

²⁶ See Deirdre Bair, *Anaïs Nin, A Biography*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1995.

normally used to speak to someone, the person to whom the letter is addressed.²⁷ One question, which pervades criticism of Nin's work is how much of her writing, is true and how much of it is fiction.

Nin uses a combination of dreams, material from psychoanalysis and real life experiences to construct her stories. The importance of dreaming is associated with Nin's fascination for psychoanalysis, and Nin attempted to incorporate dreaming and psychoanalytic material in her own unique style of writing which she called the "language from the womb." Lynette Felber describes this as something that is "lyrical and flowing," a particular language which is "centered on woman's experiences." Felber suggests often these experiences such as sexual pleasure and menstruation are considered "taboo."²⁸ On the other hand, Sharon Spencer suggests that Nin's approach to the "writing of the womb" is more the process of being "alive" and having "warmth, color, vibrancy and ... a sense of movement." Spencer believes that women's writing "must be honest, even if the search for truth causes pain."²⁹ Nin is foremost a "story teller" yet Evelyn Hinz believes that her "greatest mastery ... lies in the art of autobiography." This is partly because Nin "is never content with merely recording personal experiences" but is "concerned with their symbolic dimensions."³⁰ This is one reason why Nin's writing has a "fictional" quality even when it purports to be "rooted in reality."³¹ I believe Nin used experiences which were genuine and real but it is the fictional transformation of these that produces

²⁷ Yuko Yagushi, "The Text that is the Writer: On reading 'The Diary of Anaïs Nin.'" *Anaïs: An International Journal* 16, 1998, p.53.

²⁸ Lynette Felber, "The Three Faces of June: Anaïs Nin's Appropriation of Feminine Writing," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 14, No. 2, 1995, p. 316.

²⁹ Spencer, "The Music of the Womb," p. 59.

³⁰ Evelyn Hinz, "Anaïs Nin: Reader and Writer." *The Canadian Review of American Studies* 6, No. 1, 1975, p.122.

³¹ Kuntz, p.529.

the characteristic Nin authenticity. The real and the fictional collaborate, as it were, to produce the authentic. In the “labyrinth” she thus creates, the reader, as well as Nin herself embark on a “spiritual journey” which might not always be a pleasant one.³²

In Anaïs Nin, we find a woman who lived out “shadow,” which can partly be defined as the ugly unconscious that we hide from the world around us.³³

The difficulty in reading Nin’s work is whether what she seems to claim as the truth, really is the truth. Diane Richard-Allerdyce writes “we have little problem accepting what is ‘true’ when it is presented as ‘fiction.’”³⁴ The problem of what is the truth is then a convention and is clear for the reader. It is, however, when the “fictional is presented as truth” that reading is complicated, this “poses a dilemma.”³⁵ This creates an entirely different problem because readers tend to feel that they are being lied to, that perhaps the writer is trying to conceal something.³⁶ Nin made a career out of her fictions, “yet it is the role of facts and truths” which is most important, because the truth tends to be become “overshadowed by the fictions.”³⁷ Suzanne Nalbantian, writes “Nin exposed facets of the individual self which were contradictory.”³⁸ She continues: Nin’s “life and diary were a laboratory

³² Daisy Aldan, “To Write is to Love Again:” An Interview with Anaïs Nin, New York, 1969.” *Anaïs: An International Journal* 6, 1988, p.87.

³³ C.L. Sebrell, “ Anaïs Nin and American Invention.” *Spring: A Journal of Archetype and Culture* 62, 1997, p.123.

³⁴ Sebrell, p.126.

³⁵ Sebrell, p.127.

³⁶ Sebrell, p.127.

³⁷ Sebrell, pp.127-128.

³⁸ Suzanne Nalbantian, “Aesthetic Lies.” Suzanne Nalbantian, Ed. *Anaïs Nin: Literary Perspectives*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997, p.4.

for experimentation” and that the “material was her fiction.”³⁹ Doris Niemeyer suggests that Nin used her diary “to cope with her conflicts” and that she used the diary and her writings as a “repository (for) her conflicts.”⁴⁰ This is not a debate about whether diary writing is wholly truthful. I am primarily interested in Nin’s writing and how it relates to her experiences as a woman, not simply in whether she was a good story-teller or a good liar; my interest is in how she used her experiences to empower herself by constructing a female voice from the “woman’s experience, her vision, her point of view.”⁴¹ It is a “belief in the individual’s responsibility for creating the world”⁴² which I believe sets Nin apart as a writer. What is most at stake is not the factual basis or veracity of the work but its authenticity. Nin’s advantage was that she used “autobiographical” accounts of her own life to fix this authenticity, which her readers (female and male alike) could identify with. Whether these stories were actually based on the facts of her “real life” is not for her readers the most important factor. It was how she delivered her stories to her audience which captured the imaginations of those she sought to connect with as an artist. Presuming Nin achieves this authenticity in her work, her next step as a writer is to create characters which women can identify with in relation to their own life experiences. Toril Moi writes in *Sexual/Textual Politics* that she believes:

Writing is seen as a more or less faithful *reproduction* of an external reality to which we all have equal unbiased access,

³⁹ Nalbantian, p.4.

⁴⁰ Doris Niemeyer, “How to be a Woman and/or an Artist: The Diary as an Instrument of Self-Therapy.” *Anais: An International Journal* 6, 1988, pp.71-72.

⁴¹ Aldan, p.89.

⁴² Hinz, p.121.

and which therefore enables us to criticize the author on the grounds that he or she has created an *incorrect* model of the reality we somehow all know... This view fails to consider the proposition that the real is not only something which we construct, but a controversial construct at that.⁴³

I believe it is important for works of literature to embrace what is real and Moi suggests that without an “authentic expression of real experience” we are at risk of dismissing works of literature which fail to uphold these truths because standards for literature are based on “ideological assumptions” about whether or not these works are “true to life.”⁴⁴ For example, although we may not have experienced acts of violence or aggression in a similar manner, a writer may construct particular experiences of oppression. This does not imply however, that the reader cannot achieve an authentic reading of these experiences based on the writers’ perceptions of the real world. Diane Allerdyce-Richard writes in “Narrative and Authenticity, Strategies of Evasion in the Diaries of Anaïs Nin: Then and Now,” that she believes “Nin’s work is a valuable pursuit of the truth precisely because it challenged the definitions”⁴⁵ and that Nin also “employs her belief that literature is a representational drama of life and selfhood.”⁴⁶ Moi writes that although with feminist criticism, there is a demand

for a representation of female role models in literature. The

⁴³ Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990, p.45.

⁴⁴ Moi, pp.45-46.

⁴⁵ Allerdyce, p.83.

⁴⁶ Allerdyce, p.87.

feminist reader... not only wants to see her own experiences mirrored in fiction, but strives to identify with strong, impressive female characters.⁴⁷

It then becomes a question of how Nin is able to captivate her readers with her “voice’ and to offer insight to the inner core of what it means to be a woman. It is Nin’s style of writing, and her development of a new “third” way of seeing the rest of the world and the “climate which the individual must create from himself”⁴⁸ which enables us to read her work through a new lens.

This new “third” way of writing and interpreting the world is Nin’s use of dreams to fasten her life experience into artistic work. Nancy Jo Hoy suggests that Nin was not interested in dreams *per se* but rather the “characteristics of the flow and absence of rational patterns” and that Nin’s primary goal was to “expand one’s consciousness” as well as to achieve the “elimination of the artificial dimensions of time into past, present and future.” This created a unique perspective into the experiences of the “inner space.”⁴⁹ This “labyrinth” represented Nin’s unconscious and her personal journey through the outer realities of the world, yet simultaneously focusing on the inner realities of the mind and her experiences as a writer. This motif of flowing and constant change is relevant to Nin’s style of writing, symbolizing the manifestation of her dreams within her writing. Nin employed this technique to “pursue her own evolution” as well as cherish the value of “individual growth” focusing on “positive change.”⁵⁰ In this

⁴⁷ Moi, p.47.

⁴⁸ Hinz, p.121.

⁴⁹ Hoy, p.65

⁵⁰ Hoy, p.66.

sense, Nin has created a new way of writing, by rejecting the traditional patterns and styles that were available to her as a writer and created her own.⁵¹ Nin believes that dreams are actually another kind of language “the inspirational which is the one that penetrates our unconscious directly and doesn’t need to be analyzed or interpreted. It penetrates us the way music does, through the senses.”⁵² Margaret Andersen asserts that Nin refuses the imposed duality of the mind and body “or of emotion and body that man has invented.” Andersen suggests this is why when we imagine a woman writer as an artist, both are equally important.⁵³ By examining Hélène Cixous’ writings I will demonstrate how Nin’s work is “different” in the Cixous sense. I will also show how it is a new language and style of women’s writing, locating a more precise account of “writing from the womb.”⁵⁴ It is through this analysis that I hope to be able to establish the necessary link between Anaïs Nin and *écriture féminine*.⁵⁵

Toril Moi believes French feminists have “preferred to work on problems of textual, linguistic, semiotic, or psychoanalytic theory” because they consider this important in deconstructing women’s oppression. Moi also asserts that these theorists have been able “to produce texts where poetry and theory intermingle in a challenge to established demarcations of genre.”⁵⁶ I believe this theory can be adapted as a way to analyse Nin’s style of “writing from the womb.” This theory is also important in Nin’s pursuit of another genre for her to incorporate her dreams, life experiences and

⁵¹ Margaret Andersen, “Critical Approaches to Anaïs Nin.” *The Canadian Review of American Studies* 10, No. 2, 1976, pp.261-262.

⁵² Nin, “Proceed from the Dream,” p.122.

⁵³ Andersen, p.264.

⁵⁴ See Spencer, “The Music of the Womb.”

⁵⁵ See Felber.

⁵⁶ Moi, p.97.

symbolism, establishing a new way of expression in the literary world. Nin was ahead of her time in this respect as I suggest, when I think of her voice as an early version of that of H el ene Cixous.⁵⁷ Another French feminist, philosopher and novelist, Annie Leclerc, has also been noted by Margaret Anderson as producing work similar to Nin's "womb writing" and Anderson feels that a "new writing style" one which we "invent ... from within," creates a new language which fuses "conscious as well as the subconscious." This partnership can be beneficial if women refuse to "remain silent."⁵⁸ Nancy Jo Hoy contends that because Nin used psychoanalysis as a fundamental part of her writing and since this practice in Hoy's opinion is clearly subversive, she provoked those "hostile to ideas which threaten the establishment:" it is because of this, she suggests, that Nin was not taken seriously as a writer in her lifetime. Furthermore, Hoy believes that "serious women's writing by definition is anti-establishment" since it "lies outside the patriarchal domain."⁵⁹ But it would be surprising that any woman could be a writer if this were true. I do not believe that it was just because her work was outside of the "dominant ideology"⁶⁰ that critics disputed Nin's writing. I believe critics, scholars and researchers perhaps did not understand her style and preferred, therefore, left it alone. More recently, however, continuing developments in linguistics and language of several of the French feminist theorists, including H el ene Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Annie Leclerc and Julia Kristeva, have enabled researchers to address Nin's work with new insight and establish her work

⁵⁷ Moi, pp.102-126, 150-173.

⁵⁸ Anderson, p.262.

⁵⁹ Hoy, p.63.

⁶⁰ See Simone DeBeauvoir, *The Second Sex* 1949. Reprint, Edited and Translated by H.M. Parshley. New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1989.

within a specific feminine genre of writing. Leclerc, as I have noted, suggests there is another way for women to free themselves from what she calls the “master;”⁶¹ yet, she insists we must not “wage a war on men” but that we “must deflate [their] values” and “question their right to demand.” Leclerc also thinks this is one reason why the “hero enjoys silence.”⁶² He has nothing that will contradict what he says, and since women prefer silence to a “revolt”⁶³ or a revolution then they will remain captive, with their voices caught in their own throats, unwilling to take a risk and speak. Cixous believes that speaking up/out is exactly what women need to do in order to challenge the “dominant ideology’s” way of thinking, and writing the world (word).

Cixous holds the belief that “defining a feminine practice of writing is impossible” yet at the same time she argues that this “does not mean it does not exist.”⁶⁴ It is not that there is not a “femininity in writing” but that there is a “privilege in voice,” that “writing and voice’s voice are intertwined and interwoven,” and that “she goes completely into her voice.” This is a way to “defend this logic of her discourse” so she uses her “body” and “exposes herself” yet at the same time she “inscribes what she is saying because she does not deny the unconscious drives.” In a similar manner Nin uses her unconscious to embrace her experiences, expressing them through her voice, as well as her body, creating “her story in history.”⁶⁵ Luce Irigaray suggests that a woman must have a “(re) discovery of herself” and through this she

⁶¹ Annie Leclerc, From “Parole de femme” (A Woman’s World) 1974.Reprint, Translated by Gillian C. Gill, Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, Eds. *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*. Brighton: The Harvester, 1986, p.81.

⁶² Leclerc, pp.79-80.

⁶³ Leclerc, p.85.

⁶⁴ Hélène Cixous, “Sorties: Out and Out Attacks/Ways Out/Forays.” Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, Eds. *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997, p.98.

⁶⁵ Cixous, “Sorties.”

will be able “signify the possibility of not sacrificing any of her pleasures to another...” and that this is a “sort of universe in expansion” and that “the other” will not be subject “under the primacy of the phallus.”⁶⁶ Irigaray claims that women would emerge once the “various systems of oppression” are examined, especially women’s capacity for pleasure and desire, away from the phallus, because women’s pleasure once discovered offers escape from the control of men. I believe that this is possible through writing a new text which does not eliminate women’s passions but celebrates their experiences in life.⁶⁷ Lynn Kettler Penrod describes Cixous’ texts as rich, literary passions which “constantly celebrate life” and question “who loves” and “who gives” as well as “seeking a connection between life and art.”⁶⁸ Cixous’ writing material and subject matter are derived from many sources. Penrod describes these sources as “grandmother texts, theoretical texts in psychoanalysis, philosophy, or anthropology ... legend and myth.” These texts provide the groundwork for Cixous’ formula which produces “dreamlike texts” that might be considered “bizarre narrational situations.” Cixous weaves a language of poetry with images of “flowers, women’s bodies...[and] small animals” into her texts to create her “writing stage.”⁶⁹ Nin and Cixous embrace similar techniques in their deployment of imagery to “allow the reader to enter the psyche of the writer,” which in a sense may be construed as “autobiographical,” and yet “there is always a veiled, hidden element,” which leaves the reader restless, demanding an explanation. Nin believes that we have “two distinct needs ... a human

⁶⁶ Luce Irigaray, “Ce sexe qui n’en est pas un” (This Sex which is Not One) 1977. Reprint, Translated by Claudia Reeder. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, Eds. *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*. Brighton: The Harvester, 1986, p.104.

⁶⁷ Irigaray, p.105.

⁶⁸ Lynn Kettler Penrod, *Hélène Cixous*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996, p.12.

⁶⁹ Penrod, pp.12-13.

need to be intimate with experience” and a second need “to create something that has more permanence, which is the myth of our lives, the symbolic, spiritual significance.” Nin believes the only way to achieve this is through “art ... [and] literature” and once we are capable of recognizing these two needs, then the next step is to “transform our experiences through a well crafted medium ... so that it will become timeless.”⁷⁰ It is “*écriture féminine*, in form and in content” which creates the “intimate connection between writing and life.”⁷¹ The stylistic and imaginative writing style of Hélène Cixous in Penrod's description is uncannily similar to the style which Anaïs Nin developed in her work. The drive to connect life and art is a powerful force within Nin's writings and this is how the autobiographical contributions of her diary lead to her fiction. Images of water, the labyrinth and the use of dream-like language flourish in Nin's writing, creating similar “webs” of both “veiled” and unveiled truths, between the reader and the writer/narrator. Since Nin chose the “labyrinth” to symbolize her basic themes in her early texts, she is “re-writing the ancient myths, re-writing history” and “expressing her vision of men and women.” Patricia Lawlor claims that Nin even goes “beyond gender differences” so that the outcome is nothing short of the fulfilment of the “individual” enriching the “human condition.” This process then leads to a “universal significance” and not merely a “quest” for “self realization.”⁷² Nin's writing style itself becomes part of the search for a universal meaning behind symbols and words, presenting a new language of feeling and providing an insightful guide to our inner psyches.

⁷⁰ Anaïs Nin, Evelyn Hinz, Ed. “The Artist as Magician.” *A Women Speaks: The Lectures, Seminars and Interviews of Anaïs Nin* 1975. Reprint, London: Penguin Books, 1992, p.179.

⁷¹ Nin, “The Artist as Magician,” p.13.

⁷² Lawlor, p.31.

Fictions of Truths in *House of Incest* and “Birth”: Writing as Therapy

As a woman I was fully aware that it was my personal world which was the source of my strength and my psychic energy.¹— Anaïs Nin

Those who write know the process. I thought of it when I was spitting out my heart. Only I do not wait for my love to die.² —Anaïs Nin

Art has always lent itself to heal those who are in need of a sabbatical from the external “realities” of the world. And art can heal our inner universes as well. Art therapy is not a new phenomenon. My own grandmother throughout her life and until her death in the late 1990s, used writing to create portraits of her family life and the relationships she had over the years. Looking back on it now, I see that this was also a healing mechanism for her, helping her to escape the sadness she sometimes felt, yet it also gave her great pleasure to be able to share her stories with other writers, providing a supportive network. Her stories were simple, yet poetic in her descriptions of the people, events and places which were important to her. The sheer force in the act of writing enabled her to focus on fond memories and communicate these emotions and ideas through her careful selection of words. Writing was both cathartic and a form of self-therapy as she gained success and respect within her community of writers. Anaïs Nin also used writing as a form of therapy, seeking solace in her ritual journaling in her diary. I propose that Nin delivered a more powerful form of therapy than analysis by writing fictional truths which dealt with her personal pain and the recovery of certain events in her life. These stories also seem to have performed a role in enabling Nin to address and adjust to specific issues in

¹ Anaïs Nin, *In Favour of the Sensitive Man and Other Essays*. London: WH Allen, 1978, p.62. Henceforth *FSM*.

² Anaïs Nin, *House of Incest* 1936. Reprint, Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1994, p.1. Henceforth *H of I*

her life. She was able to find the answers and solutions she sought to real life experiences by working through her fictions. Before I analyse *House of Incest* and Nin's short story the "Birth" I will briefly discuss the relationship Nin had with her father, her psychoanalysis and how these influenced her writing, helping her to develop it as a discourse for recovery, self-reflection and empowerment.

There are a number of repeated symbols throughout Nin's *écriture féminine*³ and a number of them relate to her complex and "disturbing"⁴ relationship with her father. Examining these helps us to locate Nin's voice within her writing, and to trace her steps as an artist once she entered therapy. It is also important to follow Nin's progression through analysis, charting how she found her voice as an artist through the multi-layered personae she created in her characters into whom she dismembered her selves.⁵ This strategy is especially obvious in her prose poem *House of Incest* which will be discussed later in this chapter. In *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination*, Jessica Benjamin suggests that the father figure is the representative of the outside world and the mother the inside world. The female child has penis envy, according to Freud because she wants to identify with her father, but cannot because she lacks the phallus. This takes place when the child notes the differences between mother and father when trying to understand which gender

³ Susan Sellers, *Language and Sexual Difference, Feminist French Writing*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991, p.83.

⁴ Sharon Spencer, "Beyond Therapy: the Enduring Love of Anaïs Nin for Otto Rank." Suzanne Nalbantian, Ed. *Anaïs Nin: Literary Perspectives*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997, p.101.

⁵ Suzanne Nalbantian, "Aesthetic Lies." Suzanne Nalbantian, Ed. *Anaïs Nin: Literary Perspectives*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997, p.5.

category they fall into, and hence locate the differences between the sexes.^{6†}

Nin herself remarks from her diary in *Incest: From "A Journal of Love"* that:

The effect of Allendy's sexual timidity is more intense on me ... because it is related back again to the first and ineffaceable pain of my Father's abandonment – of which I am not yet free. I still feel the roots of this pain stirring when any event takes place that can distinctly remind me of it ... The departure of my Father that day, in spite of my hysteria— for me there is a connection in feeling ... I know now that ... all those doubts of my Father's love and all other loves are erroneously based on my distorted, morbid, neurotic fear. That is why I am again stuck— suffering from my fixation with the past.⁷

The early love of the father is an "ideal love." The child idealizes the father because the father is the magical mirror that reflects the self as it wants to be—the ideal in which the child wants to recognize himself.⁸ For Nin this idealization of love continued throughout her adulthood because of the lost love she never received from her father who abandoned his family when she was a young child. Benjamin suggests that this sort of love can lead to "submission to a powerful other who ... embodies the agency and desire that one lacks in oneself."⁹ For Nin this meant that she simply sought a

⁶ Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination*. London: Virago, 1993, p.100

† This theory does not take into consideration if the child comes from a home where both parents are the same sex.

⁷ Anaïs Nin, *Incest: From "A Journal of Love," The Unexpurgated Diary of Anaïs Nin, 1932-1934*. San Diego and New York: Harcourt Brace & Co, 1993, p.99.

⁸ Benjamin, p.100.

⁹ Benjamin, p.100.

surrogate “ideal love” in almost every relationship she formed with the males in her life. This submission meant that the satisfaction of Nin’s own desires was consistently placed second to the needs of her lovers. This caused her to restrain or hold back any desire that she might have been able to claim as her own, in “real life” experiences.¹⁰ Her fiction tells a different story and suggests that she created “ideal love” for herself by means of the traits of her characters. In “The Voice”¹¹ we see Nin sorting out levels of love with the help of a male therapist, and this is based on her relationship and analysis with Otto Rank. Suzette Henke suggests that what distinguishes Nin’s reaction to her “father-loss” is ultimately “her ability to articulate the resonances of traumas in forms of life-writing” and through this Henke believes Nin’s writing “serves as therapeutic healing texts.”¹² The therapy made Nin realize that one cycle led to another and that in order to overcome what she perceived as “cultural guilt” she could use her therapy to achieve “self realization”. As a result Nin’s writing and her personal life gradually intermingle.¹³ Benjamin states that the “devaluation of the mother” will eventually accompany “the idealization of the father” and this “gives the father’s only role as liberator a special twist for women.” Benjamin goes on to claim that for women “their necessary identification with their mothers, with existing femininity is likely to subvert their struggle for independence”¹⁴ and that the “missing father is the key to their missing desire.”¹⁵ Again with the help of analysis Nin arrives at a similar conclusion.

¹⁰ See Judith Herman and Lisa Hirschman. *Father-Daughter Incest*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000, pp.96-108.

¹¹ See Anaïs Nin, *Winter of Artifice* 1939. Reprint, Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1995, pp.87-130.

¹² Suzette A. Henke, “Life — Writing: Art as Diary, as Fiction and Therapy.” *Anaïs: An International Journal* 16, 1998, p.79.

¹³ See Nin, *FSM*.

¹⁴ Benjamin, p.103.

¹⁵ Benjamin, p.107.

The first cycle was the relation to the missing father, the second was the relation to the mother from whom I took the concept of female sacrifice, third was the assertion of my own creative will. A final, a synthesizing analysis by a woman who brought me to a harmony among all parts of my myself ... only the diaries and their usefulness to others ... I became free from guilt.¹⁶

A good example of this merging can be found in the "Birth" story where Nin blurs the boundary between the "I" narrator and the "I" subject. It is worth stressing again that Nin was suffering from an absent father. Benjamin asserts it is because of this that:

many girls are left with a lifelong admiration for individuals who get away with their sense of omnipotence intact; and that they express their admiration in relationships of overt or unconscious submission. They grow to idealize the man who has what they can never possess – power and desire.¹⁷

I believe that this is also helps when analyzing Nin's adult relationship to her father and the influence of this relationship on her choice of subject matter in her writing.

¹⁶ Nin, *FMS*, p.63.

¹⁷ Benjamin, p.109.

[The] change from the exciting father in general to his phallus ... is ... what happens when the father himself is “missing” – that is, when he is absent, not involved or offers seduction rather than identification. The girl struggles to create the identification with him out of the whole cloth: and the symbol thus takes the place of the concrete relationship of recognition that she misses.¹⁸

Benjamin asks “ could an identification with the father allow” a girl “to make desire and agency her own?”¹⁹ Benjamin also comments on the mother figure, suggesting that if the mother is not considered as a sexual entity then the daughter's identification with the father would give her a “stolen” identity which would be at odds with how gender identity is often structured for women with the “image of women as sexual objects. ” The position of the girl within the larger framework of culture would then not reflect her father’s beliefs. Benjamin points out that if the relationship between the daughter and the father is “sexualized,” then the relationship becomes “ a barrier, rather than an impetus, to the girl’s autonomy.”²⁰

This suggests that children must identify with one parent in order to sort out their gender. But both parents can and should play a vital role in the gender identification process for both girls and boys. Since we still subscribe, Benjamin claims, to a culture in which the notion of Oedipal and pre-Oedipal phases is taken to be correct, it may take a while for parents to change established roles in acclimatising their children to differences and

¹⁸ Benjamin, p.110.

¹⁹ Benjamin, p.111.

²⁰ Benjamin, pp.111-112.

sameness in the sexes. "The 'real' solution to the dilemma of woman's desire must include a mother who is articulated as a sexual *subject*, one who expresses her own desire."²¹ This would allow the child to identify with both parents equally, enabling them to achieve a "separation and difference" which is not harmful and one sided. This would also allow the child to see that one parent does not have to be more powerful while one is "subordinate." This notion challenges the existing gender structures which have persisted between mothers and fathers. As children mature it is important for them to have a sense of self based on the equal but different importance of both parents. Without a sense of independence and self-awareness, the roles the children see their parents follow will most likely be the roles they themselves adopt as adults, unless they are "taught" to change as they grow older. If male children follow uncritically in the footsteps of their fathers they may become oppressive and demean women. And girls may allow this oppression and abuse, because they learned from their mothers to be silent. Nin was a special case because she seemed only to identify with her father, and in search of her identity pursued her desires and sexual fantasies, not wholly as an object of desire but as a "subject " of her own desire.²² Nin writes:

Therapy is not only the healing of neurosis. It is a lesson on how to grow how to overcome the obstacles to our growth. Experiences tend to alienate us. We close up defensively. To protect ourselves from pain, we dull our responses.

²¹ Benjamin, p.114.

²² Benjamin, p.114.

Psychology removes the scars, the fears, the rigidities, which prevent us from expanding. It is a revivifying process.²³

Benjamin's analysis of how women relate to the "ideal love" in relation to their mother is important in understanding Nin's complex identity. Benjamin concludes that "the need for the ideal object who is truly outside and survives attack is crucial to the fantasy of ideal love"²⁴ and says the female "struggle for recognition" will not be able to be "repaired by using a male identification" in order to "revolt against the mother." What the child needs to accomplish is to "simultaneously both separate from and identify with the mother"²⁵ so that women can then express themselves "subjectively" through their bodies (the bodies, that is, of their mothers); thus they can ultimately "reclaim and know their bodies."²⁶ Hélène Cixous suggests that "in woman there is always, more or less, something of the mother" and that within women, the mother figure is "repairing and feeding, resisting separation."²⁷ Cixous believes that:

it is in writing, from woman and toward woman, and in accepting the challenge of the discourse controlled by the phallus, that woman will affirm woman somewhere other than in silence, the place reserved for her in and through the symbolic.²⁸

²³ Nin, *FSM*, p.65.

²⁴ Benjamin, p.120.

²⁵ Benjamin, p.121.

²⁶ Benjamin, p.124.

²⁷ Hélène Cixous, "Sorties: Out and Out Attacks/Ways Out/Forays." Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, Eds. *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997, pp.98-99.

²⁸ Cixous, "Sorties," pp.98-99.

She also believes that the “entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason” and that this history “has been the phallogentric tradition.”²⁹ The “phallogentric order” has oppressed the unconscious of women and Susan Sellers writes that Luce Irigaray thinks women’s unconscious can only “exist in the silences” which Irigaray describes as faults along the “male-oriented world”.³⁰ Cixous also asserts that there have been some “failures”³¹ that is she believes some women have broken this tradition through writing. Cixous writes in her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa” that:

poetry involves gaining strength through the unconscious and because the unconscious ... is the place where the repressed manage to survive: woman ... she must write her self because it is the invention of a new insurgent in writing which ... will allow her to carry out ... the ruptures and transformations in her history.³²

The first step, Cixous argues, is done “individually, by writing her self” and the next step is by “seizing the occasion to speak ... to become at will the taker and initiator, for her own right, in every symbolic system, in every political process.”³³ I believe Nin’s approach to “writing from the womb” reaffirms Cixous’ belief that women must write the self. There remains the

²⁹ Hélène Cixous, “Le rire de la méduse” (The Laugh of the Medusa) 1976. Reprint, Translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, Eds. *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*. Brighton: The Harvester, 1986, pp.249-250.

³⁰ Sellers, p.59.

³¹ Here Cixous makes reference to all the women of the past who somehow managed to write, or (to paraphrase Woolf) by finding “a room of one’s own.”

³² Cixous, “Le rire de la méduse,” p.250.

³³ Cixous, “Le rire de la méduse,” p.250.

special problem, however, that Nin's identification with her father is based on lost and abandoned love and that it is through this realization that she finds her voice. Nin is only comforted, then, by writing her pain to comprehend her loss.

Nin spent most of her adult life "as a writer and biographer, articulating various versions of personal traumas" in her work, illustrating what Suzette Henke suggests as "scriptotherapy—the practice of writing out and writing through traumatic experiences."³⁴ Nin links her themes by linguistic and symbolic strategies which enable her almost obsessively to search for recovery and to reconstruct her dismembered and fragmented selves. What Nin cannot articulate orally she may be able to write. This allows her, as a victim of a traumatic experience, to work "through a process of rehearsing and reenacting the drama of mental survival," thus "creating a healing effect which enables the victim to survive."³⁵ The abuse Nin endured from her father was both physical and psychological. But the former is a hazy area: Nin often forgot the treatment she sustained from her father as a child and calls on her mother to fill in the missing details, either things she had actually forgotten or things she had tried to repress in her subconscious. On one occasion Nin's mother, Rosa, comments on her husband's abuse of the young Anaïs:

"Joaquín was very brutal. He would lock me up in one room so as to be able to beat you, and he only came home to scold

³⁴ Henke, "Life—Writing," p.84.

³⁵ Henke, "Life—Writing," pp.84-86.

and criticize ... You must remember scenes of brutality."³⁶

Nin does recall ritual scenes of spanking but insists her father was violent to all members of the family not just her. When Nin's father did leave the family, Nin, like many children, blamed herself for his departure, even though, as Henke describes, Nin's child relationship with him was conducted either through "spankings" or by his taking "nude photos."³⁷

Nin writes in *Incest: From "A Journal of Love"* that:

As a child of eleven, I regretted the brilliant life I had lost with my Father's departure. How could I have realized the value of this life? (How could I cling to it obstinately?)³⁸

Nin continues:

I realize the meaning of my childhood...this abdication of life demanded of the artist is to be achieved only relatively. Most artists have retired too absolutely; they grow rusty, inflexible to the flow of currents.³⁹

What does Nin mean by this? Is it possible that Nin believed she would never achieve artist status unless she evolved and was able to move through

³⁶ Suzanne Henke, "Anaïs Nin's *Journal of Love: Father-Daughter and Incestuous Desire.*" Suzanne Nalbantian, Ed. *Anaïs Nin Literary Perspectives*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997, p.123.

³⁷ Henke, "Anaïs Nin's *Journal of Love,*" p.124.

³⁸ Anaïs Nin, *Incest: From "A Journal of Love," the Unexpurgated Diary of Anaïs Nin, 1932-1934*. San Diego and New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1993, p.45.

³⁹ Nin, "Incest" p.46.

her experiences by way of her writings? Toril Moi writes in *Sexual/Textual Politics* that the unconscious is actually a result of “repressed desire” and therefore “consciousness is desire.” Lacanian theory of desire, is described by Moi as claiming that “desire behaves precisely the same way as language: it moves ... from object to object ... and will never find full and present satisfaction just as meaning can never be seized.”⁴⁰ This would suggest that the “latent sexual fantasies of sexual union” which Nin has with her father derive from Nin’s attempt to “explore” these experiences through her writings as an adult because of the “injuries caused by childhood sexual abuse” and they have been “repressed memories, both real and imaginary.”⁴¹ This creates patterns of childhood abuse and a longing in Nin for “the ever elusive father/lover of her dreams.”⁴² Freud writes in the “Economic Problems of Masochism” that he believes there is “a fine line between wanting to be beaten by one’s father in fantasies and be sexually active with him.”⁴³ The saying that “love hurts” rings true for Nin. In reality, of course, love should not hurt, but as victims of abuse will convey to family members and advocates, this is precisely what they hear from their abusers. Judith Lewis Herman writes in *Father-Daughter Incest* that in order to understand incest and why a disproportionate number of the victims are females while the abusers are male, you must look to “male supremacy and female oppression.”⁴⁴ She also writes that incest “also rests on certain basic assumptions about the power of the parents and the needs of the children” and it is also “assumed that children need the unconditional protection and

⁴⁰ Toril Moi *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990, p.101.

⁴¹ Henke, “Anaïs Nin’s *Journal of Incest*,” p.123.

⁴² Henke, “Anaïs Nin’s *Journal of Incest*,” p.124.

⁴³ Henke, “Anaïs Nin’s *Journal of Incest*,” p.123.

⁴⁴ Judith Herman and Lisa Hirschman, p.3.

nurturance of their parents” in order to live healthy lives.⁴⁵ Herman writes that:

A man who sexually abuses his daughter is more than just an offender; a woman who has had a sexual relationship with her father does not derive her complete identity from her status as an incest victim. ⁴⁶

Nin, however, does the unthinkable and actually has a consensual sexual union, an incestuous affair with her father.⁴⁷ At the time of this affair Nin was undergoing analysis, first with René Allendy and later with Otto Rank and reading psychoanalytic texts. Joanne Rock speculates that Nin might have had the affair based on the Oedipal desire to possess the phallus, yet Nin desired her father unconsciously as a way to fulfill some void left in her life because of his abrupt departure from her childhood.⁴⁸ While Nin was undergoing analysis with Otto Rank, Rank “was most famous for his work interpreting the Don Juan legend, the incest motif, and the idea of the Double. ... Rank’s theory suggests that the ‘double personifies narcissistic self love and becomes an unequivocal rival in sexual love.’”⁴⁹ Nin’s fascination with her father and her “idealized love” for him, not only suggests that she viewed him as her double but also that her “desire for approval and acceptance” by him was a more overpowering force to make him see her as a separate entity and “avenge” her father’s abandonment of

⁴⁵ Judith Herman and Lisa Hirschman, p.3.

⁴⁶ Judith Herman and Lisa Hirschman, p.4.

⁴⁷ Joanne Rock, “Her Father’s Daughter, Re-evaluating an Incestuous Relationship.” *Anais: An International Journal* 13, 1995, p.29.

⁴⁸ Rock, p.30.

⁴⁹ Rock, p.34-35.

her as a child.⁵⁰ The sexual union Nin has with her father “backfires in its obsessive-compulsive repetition of unacknowledged patterns of early sexual abuse.”⁵¹ In other words, Nin is unable to heal from her childhood experiences through this new experience as an adult. Suzanne Henke suggests that “seducing the ... patriarch, by manipulating him through gifts of pleasure, ... Anaïs hopes at last to master the man who has dominated her imagination and then, by abandoning this ... lover” she may escape from his control, free herself from his abuse. For Nin this was playing another role, that of the “vengeful adult ... who deserts her wounded admirer.” Through her writing Nin, then, is able to “reverse the original trauma”⁵² by the healing process of “creating semi-autobiographical” stories to achieve what Henke terms “spiritual resolution.”⁵³ What Nin wanted most was to attain an identity apart from her father and create a new identity by re-inventing the old one, by representing herself through her writing as a desirous, artistically flowing vision of feminine power and control.

Toril Moi writes in *The Kristeva Reader* that if women are unable to represent themselves without recourse to the phallus, women instead become objects.⁵⁴ A woman is defined in relation to the phallus as the one who is castrated (the one without the phallus) or, as Cixous suggests, the “one who lacks, lack.”⁵⁵ So represented a “woman lives her desire only as an attempt to possess ... the equivalent of the male sex organ”⁵⁶ which attempt, therefore, ultimately “symbolizes the absence of power and desire.”⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Rock, pp.36-37.

⁵¹ Henke, “Anaïs Nin’s *Journal of Incest*,” p.128.

⁵² Henke, “Anaïs Nin’s *Journal of Incest*,” p.129.

⁵³ Henke, “Anaïs Nin’s *Journal of Incest*,” p.132.

⁵⁴ See Toril Moi, Ed. *The Kristeva Reader*. Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Pub, 1995.

⁵⁵ Hélène Cixous, “Castration or Decapitation.” Translated by Annette Kuhn. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 7, No.11, 1981, p.46.

⁵⁶ Irigaray, p.99

⁵⁷ Benjamin, p.124.

Irigaray summarises this by saying in order for women not to be fixed by the structures and definitions of the “symbolic contract” they need to end the language which binds them to it.⁵⁸ In other words, the symbolic representation of the phallus, as an already existing established mode of representation, is linked to desire, and independence evolves into an organising method within our psyche between the experiences of others and how we relate to the world. It is a question of how we deal with each other, and how we relate to other’s experiences and feelings, yet we are still capable of recognising similar feelings and longings within our self. In order for women to recognise desire and have desire they must receive pleasure and take pleasure.⁵⁹ Nin achieved this representation of pleasure, of women’s desire, through her “language of the womb.” Women must find pleasure in sex and their sensuality in order for them to have desire and cease their silence of oppression. When Cixous writes, she is interested in letting her unconscious loose and through this process she believes we can tap into locked away knowledge and desires.⁶⁰ By doing so, we are able to create a new text.⁶¹ Audre Lorde believes that the erotic powers we possess are within and that we must allow ourselves to pull power from within and proceed outward from our inner reserves to find mutual fulfillment.⁶²

Woman must write her self: must write about women and
bring women to writing... Woman must put herself into the

⁵⁸ Sellers, p.78.

⁵⁹ Benjamin, p.126.

⁶⁰ See Nin, *H of I*.

⁶¹ Sellers, p.58.

⁶² Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984, pp. 53-59.

text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement.⁶³

In the power of women's writing lies the key to women's desire and vice versa: the empowerment of the desiring woman as an artist will enable her voice to be heard. When women write, then the "huge resources of the unconscious will burst out" and the "feminine imaginary will be deployed" allowing fictions of truth and creating new ways for us to heal from within.⁶⁴

⁶³ Cixous, "Le rire de la méduse," p.245.

⁶⁴ Cixous, "Sorties," p.103.

House of Incest

Anaïs Nin published her prose poem, *House of Incest*, in 1936. It firmly established the labyrinth as the most prolific symbol of her writing: Suzanne Nalbantian summarises this as the “labyrinth of selfhood.”¹ This allowed Nin to create a “metaphor for the fragmented psyche.”² Nin writes in her essay “The Unveiling of Women” that the *House of Incest* reveals a world through dreams.³ Nin states that she “paid attention to dreams” and writes that she used them “to help” herself “in life but also to create.”⁴ Nin used dreams to sort out her feelings and explain things which were related to her life experiences, although she did not seek an immediate connection between her dreams and life experiences. Instead, Nin let her dreams and their images “come floating up,” allowing herself the time “to enjoy them.”⁵ In *The Novel of the Future*, Nin writes that for her:

neurosis is the contemporary expression of romanticism, where the ideal wish was unfulfillable and ended in withdrawal.⁶

Nin believed that for some people “the unconscious is frightening because it endlessly surprises us.” Nin elaborates and suggests when individuals are “experiencing such fears, the conscious mind seeks first to repress the unconscious” and Nin conjectures this “gives many the illusion that the

¹ Suzanne Nalbantian, “Aesthetic Lies.” Suzanne Nalbantian, Ed. *Anaïs Nin: Literary Perspectives*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997, p.9.

² Nalbantian, “Aesthetic Lies,” p.13.

³ Anaïs Nin, “The Unveiling of Woman,” Evelyn Hinz, Ed. *A Woman Speaks: The Lectures, Seminars and Interviews of Anaïs Nin* 1975. Reprint, London: Penguin Books, 1992, p. 86. Henceforth *Woman Speaks*.

⁴ Nin, “Proceed from The Dream,” *Woman Speaks*, p.119.

⁵ Nin, “Proceed from The Dream,” p.120.

⁶ Nin, *The Novel of the Future*. Peter Owen, 1969, p.35. Henceforth *NF*.

conscious mind is strongest." Nin points out that "suppression requires much energy."⁷ To track one's dreams was an "important part of the exploration of the unconscious." Nin also believed that "they had to be connected with life."⁸ In *House of Incest*, Nin writes in her opening chapter that her first "vision of earth was water veiled" and that she looked "upon the changing face of the world... with anonymous vision upon my completed self."⁹ Nin is retracing her birth, with the waters of the womb symbolising her unconscious memories of her first viewing of the world around her which is presented in a dream-like state rather than in a realistic manner. Nin is writing that in order to understand the self you must proceed from the beginning, from those earliest memories. For the narrator reality is in constant flux: the narrator, although awake, prefers the slumbers of dreams, seeking to remain in the subconscious and yet to access it to detail experiences. Nin uses a free textual interplay in which language causes "the boundaries between night and day to fade," our conscious and subconscious to merge, making "all things possible."¹⁰ Nin writes that "psychoanalysis ... revealed to me the constant interaction of dream and action." Nin believed that one had to "unravel" the dream to find its "meaning ... and reach the relation of dream to life."¹¹ In other words dreams can influence one another and "make things happen."¹² Since, as Nancy Jo Hoy suggests, Nin emphasises "psychological awareness" in her writing, Nin is able to use her skills "to trace events and traumas in her

⁷ Nin, *NF*, p.35.

⁸ Nin, *NF*, p.118.

⁹ Nin, *House of Incest* 1936. Reprint, Swallow Press, 1994, p.3. Henceforth *H of I*.

¹⁰ Benjamin V. Franklin and Duane Schneider, *Anaïs Nin: An Introduction*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1977, p.5.

¹¹ Nin, *NF*, p.118.

¹² Sharon Spencer, *Collage of Dreams, The Writings of Anaïs Nin*. Chicago: The Swallow Press, Inc., 1977, p.45.

own life," readily discussing them with "honesty," using this insight to develop a connection "like the links of a visible chain ... across ... a lifetime."¹³ Benjamin Franklin and Duane Schneider write in *Anais Nin: An Introduction*, that they believe the "events and experiences and emotions are not so much recalled or remembered" by Nin "as they are relived and re-experienced" but they argue that "those things are internal rather than external to her."¹⁴ Hoy believes that Nin used these links to address the disappointments in her life, especially the loss of her father, and her not being recognized as an artist in the literary community. Through therapy, Nin discovered that her dreams all dealt with issues involving her "family and early love," and she eventually by analyzing her dreams, figured out the specific pattern, she felt that she was "caught in."¹⁵ Nin writes that the analysis of her dreams enabled her:

to find the pattern in the sense of art, in the sense of writing prose poems. I began to describe the dreams themselves and then to dream about the dream, to dream around it.¹⁶

Julia Kristeva believes that there "is a truth in analysis" whether or not it is a "correct intervention" but that the truth alters daily and is "dependant on its specific context." Kristeva believes that this "particular form of truth lies in the cure," and that if there is "no truth in analysis there will be no cure."¹⁷

¹³ Nancy Jo. Hoy, "The Poetry of Experience: How to be a Woman and an Artist." *Anais: An International Journal* 4, 1986, p.53

¹⁴ Benjamin V. Franklin and Duane Schneider, p.6.

¹⁵ Nin, "Proceed from The Dream," p. 120.

¹⁶ Nin, "Proceed from The Dream," p. 120.

¹⁷ Toril Moi, Ed. *The Kristeva Reader*. Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Pub, 1995, pp.17-18.

What Kristeva means by this is that the cure is within psychoanalysis and this means that the cure works “by producing subjects which are free to construct imaginary fantasies (or works of art)”.¹⁸ Kristeva insists writers must “produce a new language”, quite like Nin’s poetic prose found in *House of Incest*.¹⁹ By using psychoanalysis Nin discovered the patterns located in her subconscious (dreams) and used the discovered patterns as a guide to write, as well as integrating them into *The House of Incest*. The results Nin found were unexpected and at times she did not fully comprehend why certain images emerged in her dreams. Nevertheless, Nin did not impose any limitations or restrictions upon herself and tried to truly let the dream write itself.²⁰ In *House of Incest*, Nin “wrote about weaknesses and deformations of the self, about her preoccupation with women’s identity” and “about fears and anger.”²¹

Lynn Sukenick believes that as the artist creates “his/her own environment” s/he develops a mask, designing it as “part of the revelation rather than hiding behind it.” The artist is completely aware that the “creation” is also a “compelling mask” and can conjure “inventiveness and levels of aspiration which are not part of the self.”²² Sukenick contends that Nin desired her readers to “ignore the masses of ordinary detail” especially those details which we “are trained” to authenticate and in doing so Nin “compels” the reader to have faith in her belief that this “supreme version is worth having.”²³ In addition, we need to forget about the small details of daily life and emphasise the things, which are extraordinary, creating a

¹⁸ Moi, p.18

¹⁹ Moi, p.18

²⁰ Nin, “Proceed from the Dream,” p. 120.

²¹ Hoy, p.56.

²² Lynn Sukenick, “The Diaries of Anaïs Nin.” *Shenandoah* 27 No.3, 1976, p.100.

²³ Sukenick, p.103

larger than life picture. What Nin writes might seem to be untrue because of this heightened version, but both the author and the reader strive for connection not isolation. Nin's version of the story brings out the details which inspire and encourage joy in life. Instead of turning away from what is a personal experience as some writers might, Nin uses her experiences to increase her "art as she moved from life experiences to her diaries and onto her fiction."²⁴ Nin writes in her essay "The Artist and the Magician," that she believes:

Creativity is so necessary for human life because it shows us the capacity for change ... we have to believe that there is a transcendental truth, that our life is not composed of simply a crisis or a trauma or a terrible moment which makes us feel that we might have to disappear or drop out or forget everything. We have to believe that there is continuity, that life has a continuance.²⁵

Nin believes there is a "power in story-telling ... which sustains your life so that you never succumb to the terrible despair." Nin also believes that story-telling "lies in the enjoyment of language that takes you into another realm." Nin describes this as entering "the realm of poetry of art" and through this encounter, we "discover the pleasure of possessing the skill to fly."²⁶ By entering this world, we let go of ourselves and just write or create what we feel and desire. It is through this flow of experiences that Nin uses art as the

²⁴ Suzanne Nalbantian, "Into the House of Myth: From the Real to the Universal, from Singleness to a Variety of Selfhood." *Anais: An International Journal* 11, 1993, p.12.

²⁵ Nin, "The Artist as Magician," *Women Speaks*, pp.172-173.

²⁶ Nin, "The Artist as Magician," p.173

connecting link between reality and imagery. In this way she is able to locate the space for a discourse where she can use her texts as a way to heal and empower herself. Since she is willing to validate her pain and anguish so openly and publicly, Nin can also mask her identities by layering them on top of her true feelings, masking herself and creating an almost magical world, her own safe place to escape to. Nin writes in *House of Incest*:

To nourish illusion. To destroy reality. I will help you; it is I who will invent lies for you and with them we will traverse the world.²⁷

Nin used art to “save” herself from her life experiences – she transformed them into art to overcome them. Through her writing she empowered herself to continue as an artist, who must merge life and art. Thus she lived the life of an artist who is unable to surrender to the reality of the rest of the world. Suzanne Nalbantian writes in her essay, “Into the House of Myth: from the Real to the Universal, from Singleness to a Variety of Selfhood,” that “art “ allowed Nin the only method of liberation from her labyrinth of “selfhood,” and this was only achieved as a result of “her artistic sensibility” after her exploration of the “psyche” was accomplished. I believe that Nin was only able to achieve this by situating herself within her fictions, making them as close to her real life as she possibly could, a real life that Nalbantian argues was “difficult for her to endure unless art periodically saved her.”²⁸

Between the years 1929-1936, Nin and her husband Hugh (Hugo) Guiler lived in a large house on the outskirts of Paris in the village of

²⁷ Nin, *H of I*, p.13.

²⁸ Nalbantian, “Into the House of Myth,” p.14.

Louveciennes. Nalbantian suggests that although Nin uses many metaphors within *House of Incest*, she also incorporates various characteristics and descriptions of her actual home.²⁹ Nalbantian writes that although Nin chooses to characterise “the house as incestuous,” she uses this term only metaphorically to describe her exploration of the psyche and the “confinement of the interior recesses of one’s subconscious.”³⁰ Both Franklin and Schneider see *House of Incest* as a “book of dreams, fantasies, half-realities ... interior monologues and journeys.” Nin guides the reader on a journey through experiences and relationships that “actually represent the unnamed narrator” who is trying to cope with a “multifaceted self.” The reader is taken in and out of the subconscious of the narrator’s mind and journeys through a labyrinth of nightmarish images created by dreamlike prose.³¹ The piece is also about “lesbianism and brother-sister incest” both used as “a foil for the narcissism” which Nin locates in “herself and from which she eventually seeks to be liberated... The ultimate desire is for escape and liberation.”³² Sharon Spencer writes in *Collages* that she believes *House of Incest* is an “imagistic enactment in poetic prose of a woman’s “perilous” journey.”³³ Spencer believes that “the “I” desperately longs to expand the dimensions of herself through fusion with two other women who dominate her dreams with relentless constancy and force.”³⁴ In other words *House of Incest* is Nin’s attempt to expand the narrator’s identity

²⁹ Nalbantian, “Into the House of Myth,” p.12.

³⁰ Nalbantian, “Into the House of Myth,” p.13.

³¹ Benjamin V. Franklin and Duane Schneider, p.4.

³² Suzanne Nalbantian. “Into the House of Myth: From the Real to the Universal, from Singleness to a Variety of Selfhood.” *Anais: An International Journal* 11, 1993, p.13.

³³ Spencer, p.15.

³⁴ Spencer, p.15.

though “psychic fusion” with the characters in her prose poem.³⁵ Nin writes that,

House of Incest (was) based on the idea that the first love is always within the family and was always, in an emotional sense, incestuous. But what I found was that if you just keep your dreams, and you’re not relating them to your life or to an orientation, then you fall in love with them for themselves ... you discover another language ... a language of images.³⁶

In *House of Incest*, Nin used her real house in Louveciennes as a metaphor “to translate the complexity of selfhood and her theory of multiple selves.”³⁷ In order to achieve this “fusion” of her selves Nin had to create characters which represent various facets of the narrator and ultimately guide them out of the “dream which is the book” or in other words the “nightmare” in which the narrator is “trapped”.³⁸ Spencer believes that “dreams provide transcendence” and since Nin emphatically refers to the “creative will,” she suggests that Nin believed “psychoanalysis can be a philosophy” and this is one reason why she “insisted on the practical nature of the dream.” The dream then creates a bridge between its images and “relationships,” establishing a “mutual exchange and influence” as a force of “creative power.”³⁹ Nin believes that it is very important to “corroborate the reality of our existence through intimacy and we need also the myth.”⁴⁰ The myth

³⁵ Spencer, p.15.

³⁶ Nin, “Proceed from the Dream,” pp.119-120.

³⁷ Nalbantian, “Into the House of Myth,” p.15.

³⁸ Benjamin V. Franklin and Duane Schneider, p.7.

³⁹ Spencer, p.54

⁴⁰ Nin, “The Artist as Magician,” p.179.

is then found within the characters she presents as the different parts of the narrator. Nin uses dancing, music and various other media available to the artist and combines them into a prose which is poetic, imagistic and surreal.

The first character the narrator presents is Sabina, who is described as a “face suspended in the darkness of the garden ... her nacreous skin perfumes spiralled like incense. ... A voice that had traversed the centuries, so heavy it broke what it touched.”⁴¹ Sabina is a sensually prowling woman who stimulates the narrator’s creativity: “The soft secret yielding of woman I carved into men’s brains with copper words; her image I tattooed in their eyes.”⁴² Through her the narrator haunts men’s “memory with the tale they wished to forget.” She is unforgettable: “men recognized her always.” The narrator and Sabina also recognize one another: “I her face and she my legend.”⁴³ I believe that Nin is making the point that women have the same histories but we have been “split ... divided ... into parts, the body cut off from emotions.”⁴⁴ Spencer describes this as the struggle of the “I” trying to “attain a sense of union with her body ... her sexuality.” The “I” cannot express this part of herself, but she can express love and this enables the narrator to accept the missing parts of her “own psychological being.”⁴⁵ Nin implies that the narrator and Sabina are the same person,

I AM THE OTHER FACE OF YOU...
THIS IS THE BOOK YOU WROTE
AND YOU ARE THE WOMAN

⁴¹ Nin, *H of I*, pp.7-8.

⁴² Nin, *H of I*, p.9.

⁴³ Nin, *H of I*, p.10.

⁴⁴ Spencer, p.80.

⁴⁵ Benjamin V. Franklin and Duane Schneider, p.9.

Nin weaves her labyrinth of prose and declares that she is “ill with the obstinacy of images, reflections in cracked mirrors. I am a woman with Siamese cat eyes, smiling always” and that these distorted images of her self are “mocking my own intensity.”⁴⁷ Nin describes this as the “OTHER” and claims that she sees “two women in me freakishly bound together” but at the same time, being torn apart and she can hear the “tearing, the anger and love, the passion and pity.” The narrator says that when she can no longer hear, it is “the silence” which “is more terrible because there is nothing but insanity around me.”⁴⁸ The images are too much for the narrator, and the “I” retreats into the house and tries to find love, locating a new terror that they will “forget” who they are and who “they have loved.”⁴⁹ Franklin and Schnieder describe this as the point at which “all her connections break, her house becomes empty and her desire to fuse disparate elements of herself diminish altogether. So she turns within herself.”⁵⁰ Nin spirals the narrator into a reality which is “drowned and fantasies choked each hour of the day”⁵¹ and creates another character, Jeanne “who is associated with the intense, insular, incestuous loves”⁵² which represents the “narrator’s fear of reality.”⁵³ It is important to remember that this conversation evolves from within the narrator’s mind and is not a conscious relationship between ordinary characters in a text. Nin writes that the narrator “cannot be certain

⁴⁶ Nin, *H of I*, pp.14-15.

⁴⁷ Nin, *H of I*, pp.15-16.

⁴⁸ Nin, *H of I*, p.16.

⁴⁹ Nin, *H of I*, p.18.

⁵⁰ Benjamin V. Franklin and Duane Schneider, p.11.

⁵¹ Nin, *H of I*, p.20.

⁵² Spencer, p.81.

⁵³ Benjamin V. Franklin and Duane Schneider, p.13.

of any event or place, only of my solitude” and says that she is “an insane woman for whom houses wink and open their bellies.”⁵⁴ The narrator says they are:

enmeshed in my lies ... I cannot tell the truth ... the truth would be death-dealing and I prefer fairytales. I am wrapped in lies which do not penetrate my soul. As if the lies I tell were like costumes.⁵⁵

For Nin, lies, like the unconscious, are something which cannot be controlled and reality is simply too much to bear: it is better to be layered in a “costume” than to be exposed to the truth.

Jeanne provides a metaphor for the fear of the unknown (reality) and the consequences of narcissism in loving one’s own reflection like a “mirror” or being incapable of any other love.⁵⁶ The character Jeanne is in love with the male image of herself, represented by Nin as her own brother.⁵⁷ Nin creates Jeanne as a broken woman, unable to love and physically challenged with a crippled leg, forcing her to revert to a fantasy world where she has a “fear of finding another like myself,” and through this “madness” she feels she will “burn down the walls of our secret house and send us out into the world seeking warmth and contact.” The narrator describes these worlds as “self-made and self-nourished ... full of ghosts and monsters.”⁵⁸ For Nin there is no choice but to follow Jeanne “into the house of incest.”⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Nin, *H of I*, p.24.

⁵⁵ Nin, *H of I*, p.25.

⁵⁶ Nin, *H of I*, pp.28-29.

⁵⁷ Spencer, p.81.

⁵⁸ Nin, *H of I*, p.30.

⁵⁹ Nin, *H of I*, p.33.

According to Spencer “attitudes towards love [are] represented by the contrasting” characters of Sabina and Jeanne – “towards spontaneous seizing of any desire on one hand ... and toward the alluring forbidden love of her brother,” and it is because of this that the “I” must enter the labyrinth of the *House of Incest*.⁶⁰

Only the truth disguised in fairy-tale, and this is the fairy tale behind which all the truths are staring as behind grilled mosque windows. With veils.⁶¹

The identities of the self are veiled just as the truth is veiled from reality, and it is impossible to determine what is indeed truth. Nin states that “lies create solitude”⁶² and it is now clear that Nin is trying to show that all of the qualities shown in her characters are “lies because they are out of balance with the basic nature of things” and that they lead to a “self-defeating insularity,” which is the “fear of madness”⁶³ which Jeanne confronts when she is unable to share the “whole truth.”⁶⁴ The narrator says that she:

cannot tell the whole truth because I would have to write four pages at once ... I would have to write backwards, retrace my steps constantly to catch the echoes and the overtones.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Spencer, p.81.

⁶¹ Nin, *H of I*, p.46.

⁶² Nin, *H of I*, p.46.

⁶³ Benjamin V. Franklin and Duane Schneider, pp.14-17.

⁶⁴ Nin, *H of I*, p.46.

⁶⁵ Nin, *H of I*, p.46.

The truth is a “composite of multiple views, rather than a single perspective” just like history.⁶⁶ Previously I wrote of Kristeva’s views concerning multiple truths in analysis and her ideas pertaining to a “new language.”⁶⁷ Kristeva also describes this as a way in which psychoanalysis and dreams are

affected through a transference of love: an imaginary process of identification with an archaic ideal ego (the ‘father of personal history’). The truth of analysis is therefore also the truth of love.⁶⁸

The narrator turns to the character of the “modern Christ” whom Nin describes as someone who is “crucified by his own nerves, for all our neurotic sins!”⁶⁹ The modern Christ is represented in the *House of Incest* as someone who feels too much and is also inclined to escape from this house “where we only love ourselves in the other” and says “if only I could save you from yourselves.”⁷⁰ All the characters, including the narrator are, however, still afraid of the “world on the other side of the walls ... where there was daylight.”⁷¹ They fear “to be trapped into darkness again ... to return whence we had come, from darkness and night,” yet they know that “beyond the house of incest there was daylight.”⁷² In Nin’s labyrinth the narrator’s mind takes her into the house of incest to confront and challenge

⁶⁶ Benjamin V. Franklin and Duane Schneider, p.17.

⁶⁷ Moi, p.17-18.

⁶⁸ Moi, p.18.

⁶⁹ Nin, *H of I*, p.47.

⁷⁰ Nin, *H of I*, p.48.

⁷¹ Nin, *H of I*, p.48.

⁷² Nin, *H of I*, pp.48-49.

her split selves, resulting perhaps in her transformation into a complete person. *The House of Incest* ends with the conjuring of a dancer who begins by dancing “the dance of a woman without arms.” Then she dances “her fears” to her own rhythm of life, “listening to a music” which only she can hear. It is only when the dancer regains her arms that the narrator is complete and recognizes herself. She is not longer in a “nightmare of fragmentation”⁷³ but a whole individual “dancing towards daylight.”⁷⁴ The dream has enabled the narrator “I” to acknowledge and accept all the different facets of her self. She succeeds in overcoming all the characters’ flaws and creating a truth which is more whole and complete than she had ever been able to imagine. *The House of Incest* is Nin’s evolution of selfhood and her exploration of the unconscious. It is performed like a play and the reader is the spectator of her sometimes lucid dream. The performance flows in a continuity of creative images, embracing desire, fear and pain. The heightened sensations undress the inner psyche, reflecting a powerful healing energy from within, developing a wholeness and a completeness for the narrator and as a consequence for the reader in their respective interior worlds. Nin uses the dancer and the dance to suggest both creativity and generosity. It is only when the dancer opens her hands in a giving gesture that the narrator, although still filled with anguish at the passing of things, learns to relinquish and forgive. Thus the words of Anaïs Nin in all their slipperiness, through all their encounters with the fractured and fragmentary can finally be felt to be “healing words.”

⁷³ Benjamin V. Franklin and Duane Schneider, p.19.

⁷⁴ Nin, *H of I*, p.51.

“Birth”

In her short story “Birth” in the collection, *Under a Glass Bell*, Anaïs Nin offers a first person narration of an emotionally charged and introspective, yet oddly detached, description of a woman’s physiological and psychological turmoil as she gives “birth” to a still-born daughter. Nin uses what seems to be her own voice to narrate the story, making the reader speculate whether the story is at least in part autobiographical. As I have already indicated, Nin uses real life experiences in her work, and so it is safe to assume that much of her “fiction” is derived from actual events which are either partially autobiographical or even completely drawn from actual events she experienced or witnessed. Lynn Sukenick suggests that because “novels and poetry do not purport to be records of fact ... they stand and fall by their convincingness.”¹ Sukenick believes that the “lies Nin told” were to make “improvements and not hurt” and that this relates back to Nin’s striving for perfection as an artist.² Lajos Elkan writes in “Birth and the Linguistics of Gender: Masculine/Feminine” that the writing style Nin uses has two things in common with poems: it is “self-referential ... and there is an authentic voice of the author mixed with the characters’ words.”³ Elkan proposes that this story not only gives a graphically detailed description of a birth, but that the author makes two very significant innovations. The first involves the representation of the narrator’s “body as part of the logical discourse” – it in a sense becomes the “object of the discourse.” Secondly the narrator “submits to physical pain to the scrutiny of the intellect”⁴ (in

¹ Lynn Sukenick, “The Diaries of Anaïs Nin.” *Shenandoah* 27 No.3, 1976, p.96.

² Sukenick, p.96.

³ Lajos Elkan, “Birth and the Linguistics of Gender: Masculine/Feminine.” Suzanne Nalbantian, Ed. *Anaïs Nin: Literary Perspectives*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997, p. 153.

⁴ Elkan, p.158.

effect to the critics). Elkan writes that male writers find it difficult to write of female birth experiences in a realistic manner. She believes this is because giving birth is one thing in life, which male writers can only imagine and never actually experience. The pinnful paradox of this short story is that within birth and the beginning of life, Nin creates death. So for Nin, in the "Birth" story the narrator "was a vessel for both" life and death.⁵ The first sentence of "Birth" is the doctor speaking to the narrator: "The Child," said the doctor, "is dead."⁶ Elkan believes that,

The threshold of life and death is passed in a single liberating act. The mother, however, does not want to part with the dead child, as if by this loss she would suffer the loss of her own self-identity. The separation is experienced by the woman, who can then give an eyewitness account of the event.⁷

I believe this is where Nin sets the scene for the subsequent rebirth of the artist out of the pain of the woman. Elkan, however, feels that Nin "perhaps ... consciously ... did not establish a link between her maternal instinct and the creative urge."⁸ The narrator comments on what the child is doing to her body and says that she did not want:

to push out anyone, not even this dead fragment of myself ...
All in me which chose to keep, to lull, to embrace, to love, all in

⁵ Elkan, p.158.

⁶ Anaïs Nin, "Birth," *Under a Glass Bell* 1948. Reprint, Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1995, p.53.

⁷ Elkan, p.159.

⁸ Elkan, p.161.

me which cared, preserved, and protected, all in me which imprisoned the whole world in its passionate tenderness, this part of me would not thrust out the child, even though it had died in me.⁹

This is the language of a loving and caring mother who does not want to part with her child. The womb will not thrust out the child, “a fragment of life like a fragment of the past.” The child perhaps represents the “lost” child the mother once was, and she cannot endure the feelings of it being “buried in strange places ... lost, lost, lost.”¹⁰ Nin sets the stage for “the complexities of creation where women are concerned” and her interest in “the relation women had with the creative act.”¹¹ Julia Kristeva writes in “A Woman’s Time” that “pregnancy seems to be experienced as the radical ordeal of the splitting of the subject ... separation and coexistence of the self and the other, of nature and consciousness.”¹² Kristeva also asserts that when the child emerges this “leads the mother into a labyrinth of experiences, that without the child, she would only rarely encounter: love for another.” Kristeva says that this love is not for herself or the child, but for whom the “I” is relevant, which she describes as “love or sexual passion.” Kristeva believes that for someone to achieve this without “masochism, and without annihilating one’s affective, intellectual and professional personality” is “won through a guiltless maternity ... and that it becomes a creation.”¹³ Kristeva concludes that it is through literature, which leads to the

⁹ Nin, “Birth,” p.53.

¹⁰ Nin, “Birth,” p.54.

¹¹ Elkan, p.160.

¹² Toril Moi, Ed. *The Kristeva Reader*. Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Pub. 1995, p.206.

¹³ Moi, p.206.

“aspiration towards artistic and, in particular, literary creation, that woman’s desire for affirmation now lies” and not with the child in question. It is through this identification that Nin is able to “bear witness to women’s desire to lift the weight of what is sacrificial in the social contract (maternity) from their shoulders.”¹⁴ This story is Nin’s struggle to overcome her fear of maternal instinct in relation to a biological child. Nin believed that this child would ultimately destroy her creative instinct as an artist, and inevitably, the only way for the artist to live was by the death of the child.¹⁵ Stephanie Demetrakopoulos writes in her essay, “Anaïs Nin and the Feminine Quest for Consciousness: The Quelling of the Devouring Mother and the Ascension of the Sophia” that the narrator at first desires to protect the child, then considers “sacrificing her own life, the life of the adult artist,” but that “symbolically, although unconsciously, she is rejecting the devouring mother within.”¹⁶ Elkan agrees with this point, but I believe, however, that Nin consciously links the death of the artist to the death of the child, surrendering herself as a mother, and throughout her story she uses specific images and symbols to create a language which allows an exploration of her feelings as both woman and artist. By doing this, Nin creates a wholly separate identity from that of a mother, especially of a mother who has lost a child through a “stillbirth.”¹⁷ Nin herself is then reborn as both a woman and an artist through this sacrifice. Hélène Cixous views the process of birth differently and writes in “The Laugh of the Medusa” that:

¹⁴ *Moi*, p.207.

¹⁵ Nin said herself that she had many “children” and Diane Richard-Allerdyce writes, that Nin’s “own children were her... art and other artists.” See Diane Richards-Allerdyce, *Anaïs Nin and the Remaking of the Self: Gender, Modernism and Narrative Identity*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998, p.97.

¹⁶ Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos, “Anaïs Nin and the Feminine Quest for Consciousness: The Quelling of the Devouring Mother and the Ascension of the Sophia.” *The Bucknell Review* 24 No.1, 1978, p.130.

¹⁷ Allerdyce, pp.44-66.

We won't advance backward anymore; we're not going to repress something so simple as the desire for life. Oral drive, anal drive, vocal drive—all these drives are our strengths, and among them is the gestation drive—just like the desire to write: a desire to live self from within, a desire for the swollen belly, for language, for blood.¹⁸

Cixous is writing of the text in *écriture féminine*; we must not, she believes, repress our desires, no matter how strong they seem, no matter how overwhelming and “women must know how to live detachment.” She claims that “giving birth is neither losing nor increasing” but that “it is adding life to an other.” Nin was also through this “birth” trying to “live detachment,” but at the same time, she desired an intimate connection to the other life, as well as maintaining control over her own.¹⁹

Nin uses an incantatory almost “lyrical” language, repeating specific phrases repeatedly throughout the story, using such symbols for water²⁰ as “ice” and the color “blue.”²¹ Nin uses a language, which closely links water to blood, both vital life forces in nature, and her imagery is laced with motion, and continuity. Nin incorporates words and phrases such as swelling, trickling, waves of red, falling fast like a waterfall, rolling, gently rolling, icy threads, ice in the veins, spilling out, drinking me, slipperiness,

¹⁸ Hélène Cixous, “Le rire de la méduse” (The Laugh of the Medusa) 1976. Reprint, Translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, Eds. *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*. Brighton: The Harvester, 1986, p.262.

¹⁹ Cixous, p.262.

²⁰ Nin used images of water to represent the unconscious.

²¹ Nin, “Birth,” 54-57.

and blood.²² She creates a linguistic and emotional labyrinth,²³ circling words in and out of her text, turning water into blood and blood into life and life into death. It is as if she is wandering in and out of un/consciousness as well as in/out of giving birth/death. The narrator abruptly turns her anger towards the doctors and the nurses trying to help her and for the first time blames them for her suffering. The narrator decides that she “has an instinct” and that it is natural for women to give birth and it is their “struggle with nature” as well as with themselves. Nin writes that “with the meaning I put into it all, with my desire to give and to hold, to keep and to lose, to live and to die.”²⁴ The narrator then claims that she wants “to remember all the time why I should want to live. I am all pain and no memory.”²⁵ Why is this child trying to kill her? Nin writes that:

The child is not a child, it is a demon strangling me. The demon lies inert at the door of the womb, blocking life, and I cannot rid myself of it. ²⁶

The child is no longer something natural and in need of maternal love, it is now something which might cause death and must be destroyed. The memories which can no longer be recalled, are perhaps the repressed demons of the narrator’s own past, hidden deep in her psyche, or Nin might simply be suggesting that women often repress memories of giving birth because they are in pain and that perhaps if they could remember then they

²² *ibid.* pp.53-57.

²³ See Anaïs Nin, Evelyn Hinz, Ed. *A Woman Speaks: The Lectures, Seminars and Interviews of Anaïs Nin* 1975. Reprint, London: Penguin Books, 1992.

²⁴ Nin, “Birth,” p.56

²⁵ Nin, “Birth,” p.56

²⁶ Nin, “Birth,” pp.56-57.

might elect to never experience a pregnancy or birth again. These memories might even be Nin's fear of being father-less as a child, equating her own past life experiences to the child's future experiences.²⁷ Suzette Henke believes that Nin at this point has "identified so completely with her father" that she is abandoning her own "potential daughter" and "rejects" her to avoid a repeat of her own past, including a lover who "abdicates the responsibilities of parenthood."²⁸

The womb is described as the gateway to a new life (a child), but since the womb is blocked then the narrator's life is threatened, not the life of the child she is trying to push out. The womb then becomes identified as something which is alive and "it is stirring and dilating" as the narrator taps on her stomach "drum, drum, drum, drum."²⁹ The doctors and nurses are amazed that the womb is alive without their "instruments."³⁰ Once the womb wakes up then the child is pushing "out of the tunnel" where the "blood is spilling" and "there is a fire and flesh ripping and no air." The child's birth is killing the narrator by cutting off air to the womb. The child is delivered and suddenly the "weight is gone" and the narrator's "strength returns." Since the child is out of the womb, the narrator is miraculously healed, and the womb is again alive. The narrator asks to see the dead child, and thinks at first it is a "diminutive little man" however it is a girl, who is "perfectly made, and all glistening with the waters of the womb."³¹ The narrator has healed all her past experiences of pain and loss since she has created a perfect being and is able to grieve for the daughter, which will

²⁷ See Deirdre Bair, *Anaïs Nin, A Biography*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1995.

²⁸ Suzette Henke, "A Confessional Narrative: Maternal Anxiety and Daughter Loss in Anaïs Nin's *Journal of Love. Incest.*" *Anaïs: An International Journal* 14, 1996, p.74.

²⁹ Nin, "Birth," p.57

³⁰ Nin, "Birth," p.56.

³¹ Nin, "Birth," p.57.

never “reach her full potential.”³² The dead child’s gender also has an effect on Nin, since she felt she was having a boy, and Henke suggests this creates an almost “narcissistic bond” between mother and daughter, even if Nin thought this child’s life would extinguish her own.³³ Elkan concludes that:

Nin describes birth as an event with triple implications, from a realistic point of view. They are the mother unwilling to part with the child, the outside world uninterested with the mother’s psychological crisis brought on by the forced separation, and of course, the child, stillborn in the story, who is not even given a chance to manifest itself.³⁴

Only Nin knows the details of her actual pregnancy, which she herself revealed to the public as a third trimester abortion, yet the story of “Birth” is resonant with the loss Nin felt for her creation (child) and celebrates the pain she endured through delivery.³⁵ Nin the writer, has a “re-birth” through the death of her own daughter which might have otherwise “infected”³⁶ her creative energy so this “stillbirth” left her the only viable option of removing what was unwanted from her body. This allowed Nin to live for herself, for her love and for her “life as a woman individuated.”³⁷ Joan Bobbit concludes that the writings of Nin are texts by a woman who “offered her self” but “presents only a metaphor of self.” The face that Nin presents to her readers in the end is “elusive” and although she

³² Allerdycce, p.96.

³³ Henke, p.75

³⁴ Elkan, p.162.

³⁵ Bair, pp.197-203.

³⁶ Bair, p.202.

³⁷ Bair, p.202.

desires to unmask her many selves through her writings, in the end we cannot know for sure if the "self" which remains is really Anaïs Nin.³⁸ "Birth" only reinforces Nin's desire to maintain her creative hold as an artist and suggests that she will go to any length to have this control over her life no matter the outcome.

³⁸ Joan Bobbit, "Truth and Artistry in the Diary of Anaïs Nin." *Journal of Modern Literature* 9, No.2, 1982, p.276.

Is it Pornography or the Female Voice of Eroticism?

The sexual life is usually enveloped in many layers, for all of us—poets, writers, artists. It is a veiled woman, half-dreamed.¹ —Anaïs Nin from the Preface of *Little Birds*.

I am the one woman writer who is not content with erotic literature— I live at the same pitch I write— there is a curious consistency.² —Anaïs Nin from *Incest: A Journal of Love*.

I'll keep my word with thee, as the least evil; A tantalizing woman's worse than devil.³ — Aphra Behn from "The Lucky Chance."

Anaïs Nin is most famous for her diaries, less known for her fiction, yet I believe notorious for her erotica published in two collections years after they were written in the 1940s. Her first collection *Delta of Venus* was published in 1969, followed by *Little Birds* in 1979, which was published after her death from a prolonged battle with cancer.⁴ One reason why I find Nin's erotica so interesting is that while she was writing, Nin was having an affair with Henry Miller.⁵ Miller was also writing and publishing sexually explicit stories, which were frequently banned and labeled obscene.⁶ Nin, however, did not publish her erotic work at the same time. I speculate whether Nin refrained from trying to publish her erotica because she felt they were not artistic or if she considered her erotica beneath her literary abilities as an emerging artist. Since their publication, her erotic stories have been much debated. Are they erotica for women written from a female point of view in

¹ Anaïs Nin, from the Preface of *Little Birds*. 1979. Reprint, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990. Henceforth *Birds*.

² Nin, *Incest: From "A Journal of Love", The Unexpurgated Diary of Anaïs Nin, 1932-1934*. San Diego and New York: Harcourt Brace & Co, 1993, p.27.

³ Aphra Behn, "The Lucky Chance." *The Rover and other Plays*. Jane Spencer, Ed. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998 p.222.

⁴ See Noel Riley Fitch, *Anaïs: The Erotic Life of Anaïs Nin*. Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1993

⁵ See Fitch, Henry Miller (and consequently his second wife, June) is the subject of much of Nin's writing throughout her friendship with him, from the onset of her introduction to him late in 1931, when she met the struggling, and still unpublished American writer from Brooklyn, New York, residing at the time in Paris. Miller is most famous for his *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn* novels.

⁶ See Deirdre Bair, *Anaïs Nin, A Biography*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1995.

a feminine voice, or just pornography written by a woman? In order to understand the dynamics behind societal views of erotica and pornography I want to try to find clear and coherent definitions of what is erotic or pornographic, although the one is dependent on the other and will inevitably vary according to context. Diana Russell in *Dangerous Relationships: Pornography, Misogyny, and Rape* uses statistical research and background material in an attempt to define pornography and erotica. Russell defines pornography:

as material that combines sex and/or the exposure of genitals which abuse or (degrade) in a manner that appears to endorse, condone, or encourage such behavior.⁷

Russell defines erotica as:

sexually suggestive or arousing material that is free of sexism, racism and homophobia and is respectful to all human beings and animals portrayed.⁸

Under these definitions, the exploitation of violence against women would be enough to transform erotica into pornography. I am going to provide some groundwork for the discussion of Anaïs Nin's works of "erotica" to determine if Nin left images of violence against women in her writings, or if

⁷ Diana E.H. Russell, *Dangerous Relationships: Pornography, Misogyny and Rape*. Thousand Oaks, CA and London: Sage Publications, 1998, p.3.

⁸ Russell, p.3.

she was indeed able to discover a new language, an *écriture féminine* to write of a woman's sexual experience. This study does not attempt to provide an analysis of whether certain images of women in society are in themselves erotic or pornographic, but an attempt to explore Nin's "language of the womb."

Most of the surveys conducted by the researchers Russell cites in her book point out the differences between "violent and non-violent pornography." Two Canadian researchers, James Check and Ted Guloien, define "sexually explicit materials" as materials which are "violent, non-violent but dehumanizing, and non-violent and non-dehumanizing."⁹ The first two descriptions are pornography and the last erotica. In order to discuss Nin's work the differences between pornography and erotica must be clarified. The problem with defining the difference between pornographic material and erotic material is that the definitions reflect cultural assumptions about what is violent and dehumanizing. And so at any given time there are pre-existing notions regarding pornography and erotica and within these broad beliefs each of us has limits which reflect what we individually consider pornographic or erotic. These limits enable us to define for ourselves what we believe to be violent and dehumanizing, and non-violent and non-dehumanizing. What one person may find sexually arousing, another person may find degrading and graphically explicit. I should also clarify that women are notably objectified in various other ways, found in music, print, media and film. In order to call some images pornographic a working definition of a specific form of dehumanizing and/or violent depiction of women must be used. Many

⁹ Russell, pp.3-4.

artists paint erotic images, which show women being objectified, but not in a violent and dehumanizing way. It is possible to represent violence against women in ways that are neither pornographic nor erotic. My own definition of pornography and erotica is similar to Russell's definitions. I would add, however, that within the context of literature, there is another question to consider for this thesis. How far can specific linguistic usages be erotic and empowering both for women who read the erotica and for those who write it? I also, like Check and Guloien, consider dehumanizing material as pornographic, but suggest that within erotica there may be elements of violence within consensual acts of sexual exploration. This may be witnessed in the form of certain ritualistic scenarios such as spanking, the use of blindfolds and exhibitionism or voyeurism to heighten the senses during a sexual encounter. In one specific story from *Delta of Venus*, "The Veiled Woman," Nin's main character is represented as a beautiful woman who insists on sexual encounters with unknown partners. These encounters are represented in a non-violent, and for me non-dehumanizing way, in spite of the fact that the woman and the stranger engage in a consensual sexual act while being watched by a stranger from the other room.¹⁰

Nin's writings may perhaps be considered as both erotic and pornographic. I suggest this is how she writes, mixing eroticism and pornography throughout her short stories, so that sometimes a reader might not notice this subtle change. I argue it is because of her unique style of writing, her "writing from the womb" that a reader might disregard her descriptions of violence because she is a woman writing erotica instead of a man, like Henry Miller, who by Russell's definition is a pornographic writer.

¹⁰ See Nin, "The Veiled Woman" in *Delta of Venus* 1969. Reprint, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990, pp.87-96.

Nin writes in her Preface to *Delta of Venus* that the person who commissioned her erotica preferred “more sex and less poetry”.¹¹ Nin thus in a sense apologizes to her readers, yet at the same time claims that her “feminine voice” is still present in her writings. Karen Brennan writes in “Anaïs Nin; Author(iz)ing the Erotic Body,” that she believes it is impossible to know whether Nin herself wrote the more explicitly sexual material or the assembled group of friends whom Nin asked to help her write erotica.¹² Brennan believes that Nin might have actually inserted more pornographic depictions to please her employer¹³ and this is one reason why Nin believes that her voice is still locatable in the writings even in the more explicit descriptions of sex and violence. Nin considered her voice in erotica important, since she believed this genre of writing had been primarily the “domain of men.”¹⁴ Edmund Miller writes in “Erato Throws a Curve: Anaïs Nin and the Elusive Feminine Voice in Erotica,” that just because Nin claims her voice is heard in her erotic writings does not mean that others will regard her language as feminine. Miller claims that Nin actually usurps certain pornographic themes which after all filter into her writings: an example of this is what Miller views as her distortion of the male “rape fantasy,”¹⁵ inevitably distorted just because it is written by a woman. Miller writes that even Nin’s attempts at describing a “rape fantasy” falls short of depicting women as insatiable because it is not a characteristic “situation of pornography which is written by men.”¹⁶ Miller argues that the “fantasies of

¹¹ Nin, from the Preface of *Delta of Venus* 1969, Reprint, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990. Henceforth *Venus*.

¹² Karen Brennan, “Anaïs Nin; Author(iz)ing the Erotic Body.” *Genders* 14, 1992, p.75.

¹³ Brennan, pp.67-70.

¹⁴ Nin, from the Preface of *Venus*.

¹⁵ See Russell for an example of a “rape fantasy,” p.47.

¹⁶ Edmund Miller, “Erato Throws a Curve: Anaïs Nin and the Elusive Feminine Voice in Erotica.” Suzanne Nalbantian, Ed. *Anaïs Nin Literary Perspectives*. Macmillan, 1997, pp176-177.

the insatiable women are interpreted by men as authorizing them to rape in the real world"¹⁷ especially if they believe that all women desire sex and those who "resist are pretending."¹⁸ In other words, when a woman says "no" to sex she really means, "yes."¹⁹ Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar suggest of women's writing that:

Since creativity is defined as male, it follows that dominant literary images of femininity are male fantasies too. Women are denied the right to create their own images of femaleness, and instead they must seek to conform to the patriarchal standards imposed on them. ²⁰

If Nin is to create a new language of erotica for women readers, she first has to accept the fact that she only has the male language of erotica to look to for guidance. Miller writes, that Nin does not achieve what erotica is meant to do for the reader which is "arousal".²¹ However she does, in Miller's opinion, "conform precisely to the negative standards of pornography... and explicitly vulgarize the sensual."²²

Maxine Molyneux and Julia Casterson believe, on the other hand, that erotica "inhabits two worlds." The first is the world of "conventional pornographic fiction," what they call "a delight to the male (and perhaps the

¹⁷ Miller, pp176-177.

¹⁸ Miller, pp176-177.

¹⁹ In recent years this notion of "no means yes" has been used in court cases in the USA as ways to place blame on the rape victim rather than the rapist. I believe this is just another excuse for crimes against women to be minimized not only by the legal system, but our culture in general.

²⁰ Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. *The Madwomen in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the 19th Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000, pp.1-25

²¹ Miller, p.166.

²² Miller, p.181.

female) reader” and secondly what they describe as the “world of women’s desires” a world which they believe is at “odds with purely secular pleasure” but a world which is more interested in its “own gratification.”²³ In the erotica of Nin, Molyneaux and Casterton believe we “catch glimpses of her understanding of her own and other women’s desires and gratification.”²⁴ Nin’s writing does not exactly distance itself from the author and it is clear when we read Nin’s erotica that we can discern her personal presence in the descriptions of models, the dancing, the clothing, the knowledge of languages, paintings, literature, various lovers and a sense of adventure.²⁵ We see this as a function of understanding women’s desires because “Nin does not distance herself from her pornographic writing.”²⁶ A self-portrait of an artist, a self-portrait of Nin, is her “signature as an artist.”²⁷ “Elena” in *Delta of Venus* acts in a manner which is reminiscent of Nin’s sexual explorations involving multiple partners and the subsequent writing of her experiences.²⁸ Smaro Kamboureli suggests in “Discourse and Intercourse, Design and Desire in the Erotica of Anaïs Nin”, that “it is a signature that falsifies her apologetic tone while it verifies her belief that her pornography is not completely void of art.”²⁹ Kamboureli also writes that:

We see Nin’s sexual discourse avoid the vulgarity of hard-core pornography. Her lyrical language emphasizes the poetics of

²³ Maxine Molyneux and Julia Casterton. “Looking Again at Anaïs Nin.” *The Minnesota Review* 18, 1982, p.99.

²⁴ Maxine Molyneaux and Julia Casterton, p.99.

²⁵ See Fitch.

²⁶ Smaro Kamboureli, “Discourse and Intercourse, Design and Desire in the Erotica of Anaïs Nin.” *Journal of Modern Literature* 11, No.1, 1984, p.148.

²⁷ Kamboureli, p.148.

²⁸ Nin, “Elena,” *Venus*, pp.97-177.

²⁹ Kamboureli, p.148.

sexuality. She transgresses the limits of the body's anatomy by stressing eroticism.³⁰

Thomas March claims in "A Fire that does not Burn: A Note on the Erotic Aesthetic of Anaïs Nin," that Nin's work is not "traditional male-centered pornography" with "metaphoric description of body parts" and that her writings emphasize the "clinical" and her "descriptions are poetry," even though March believes it is "bad poetry."³¹ I will examine this debate over Nin's descriptions and consider whether reading Nin's erotica could incite violence against women or if it would simply be considered 'soft' pornography. Would reading this material encourage or cause violence against women or simply allow the reader to question the authenticity and validity of the author's belief that this erotica should be considered "feminine writing" and, therefore, not really violent towards the women it represents?

Various studies, using a variety of methodologies and a range of practical tests have consistently produced the result that "exposure to nonviolent, erotic materials did not have any demonstrated antisocial impact."³² However, research conducted using what has been defined as pornographic material (violent and non-violent dehumanizing) material has been found to increase the subject's tolerance of concepts regarding rape and other violent acts against women.³³ Therefore, when the subjects viewed or watched pornographic images they found afterwards that perhaps the

³⁰ Kamboureli, p.153.

³¹ Thomas M. March, "A Fire that does not Burn: A Note on the Erotic Aesthetic of Anaïs Nin." *Anaïs: An International Journal* 16, 1998, p.167.

³² Russell, p.130.

³³ Men are also frequently victims of violence, but most of the research I have found has been focused on violence against women.

violence against women they observed was somehow justified normal behavior between partners or even legitimate portrayals of women. Pornography is not the sole reason why men rape, abuse and commit violent crimes against women and children but Russell's research suggests that it is a contributing factor and does substantially increase the likelihood of men's doing so.³⁴ Based on these findings it is unlikely that Nin's erotica would incite men to rape or commit acts of violence against women, but it might encourage the reader to think about the differences between erotica and pornography. By looking at specific stories from Nin's work, I will try to show that Nin's work attempts to develop a female voice in what is primarily a male writer's genre. I will also show that Nin not only used examples from her own experiences and those of her friends in the characters she portrayed but that she was able to locate a power from within, which Audre Lorde defines as the erotic "power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person."³⁵ I will examine several of Nin's erotic stories and ask whether she is the voice of female eroticism or if, as suggested by Edmund Miller, she is just following a path already established by other pornographic writers. Lorde believes that

The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a female and spiritual plane firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feelings.³⁶

Nin understood this resource as deriving from the unconscious of her

³⁴ Russell, p.130.

³⁵ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984, p.56.

³⁶ Lorde, p.53.

dreams. I believe the use of this derived erotic power enabled her to become a 'feminine voice' for women, liberating herself and others from sexual repression/oppression through her writing. Lorde writes that it is a false belief that only the "suppression of the erotic within our lives and consciousness" will keep women "truly strong." Lorde believes that such "strength is illusory" because it is "fashioned within the context of male models of power."³⁷ Lorde suggests that when we overcome the fear of the erotic, then those who try to oppress us and keep us within that fear ultimately become weak and lose their hold over women, unable to maintain their power over women.³⁸ Hélène Cixous writes in her essay "Sorties: Out and Out Attacks/Ways Out/Forays" that she believes a "woman has always functioned 'within man's discourse" and that this "puts down or stifles [her] very sounds" and it is "time for her to displace this 'within,' explode it, overturn it" and that a woman must "grab it" and take it back and "make it hers." Cixous writes that a woman must

take it in, take it into her woman's mouth, bite its tongue with her woman's teeth, make-up her own tongue to get inside of it.³⁹

Nin claims that the language of her writings has always placed emotions and feelings first and I believe this can be demonstrated generally from her work. Just as Cixous writes, that it is important for women to use their own

³⁷ Lorde, p.53.

³⁸ Lorde, pp.57-58.

³⁹ Hélène Cixous, "Sorties: Out and Out Attacks/Ways Out/Forays." Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, Eds. *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997, p.101.

language I believe Nin attempts to use her “own tongue.” Through her feeling exploration of language, Nin creates her “voice.” Lorde explains that when we “look away” from our feelings and then refer to them as something else this, does not produce the erotic. Lorde describes this as the “misnaming of the need” because of our inability to recognize the abuse involved. In other words, Lorde believes that a denial, implicit or explicit, of consensual need and feeling “results in pornography and obscenity,” which Lorde calls the “abuse of feeling.”⁴⁰ There are places in Nin’s writing where I believe the narrator is abusive, yet there is always a clear “meaning” to the feelings which Nin recognizes in her characters’ adventures; and Nin is more interested in focusing the reader’s attention on the “actual experiences leading up to the sexual act” than in the act itself.⁴¹ An example of a passage which I believe Nin’s seeks to startle and grab the attention of the reader in an obscene gesture rather than in an erotic overtone is found in the story of “Pierre” in *Delta of Venus*. The opening scene shows the main character engaging in an act of necrophilia with a female corpse that he helped pull out of a river. Obviously this act is neither emotionally nor sexually gratifying for the corpse, but Pierre is completely fascinated and “haunted by her for days” and is forced to “escape” from the city to get her out of his mind.⁴²

Sophia Papachristou suggests that a “female writer writes in the way she (has) experienced love.”⁴³ Papachristou writes that Nin purposely constructs “time” as a unique sequence of experiences. This establishes the

⁴⁰ Lorde, Audre. p.59.

⁴¹ March, p.113.

⁴² Nin, “Pierre,” *Venus*, pp.227-229.

⁴³ Sophia Papachristou, “The Body and the Diary: On Anaïs Nin’s first Erotic Writings.” *Anaïs: An International Journal* 9, 1991, p.62.

importance of time within her writing and conditions the characters' experience of "satisfaction." Papachristou suggests that since it takes time for a woman to reach satisfaction, Nin is building a "temporal dimension" in her writing to make the reader feel the "silences" in time and the "duration" it takes for the erotic union to be complete and for the woman to feel "joy".⁴⁴ A closer look at the erotic writings of Nin will better demonstrate how time and progression are important. In Lorde's opinion, without a connection of mutual respect and joy, qualities which the erotic enforces, the erotic loses all power and we are merely "objects of satisfaction." Lorde suggests when we do not consider how we feel we are in denial of our experiences and we "allow ourselves to be reduced to the pornographic, the abused and the absurd."⁴⁵ Without the connections to the erotic power within, our feelings lose validation and we are then vulnerable to manipulation.

In *Delta of Venus*, I examined several stories which based on my earlier definitions, seemed to be classifiable as pornographic, and several others which I could define as erotic. In "The Hungarian Adventurer" pornographic images range from a father "seducing" (raping) his daughters, incest between brothers and sisters and an attempted rape. Woven between all of these scenes are descriptions of characters such as the Brazilian dancer Anita, described as having "elongated eyes ... like the eyes of tigers, pumas, leopards" with "jeweled hands" and "her sex" as a "hothouse flower."⁴⁶ There is also a description of the Spanish Ambassador's daughters and what they are wearing: "short white dresses with short white socks."⁴⁷ This supports the idea that girls entice men by what they are wearing, leading to

⁴⁴ Papachristou, p.62.

⁴⁵ Lorde, p.59.

⁴⁶ Nin, "The Hungarian Adventurer." *Venus*, pp.2-3.

⁴⁷ Nin, "The Hungarian Adventurer," pp.4-5.

their molestation by an/the “adventurer.” Frequently, these schoolgirl scenarios are found in pornographic magazines, and Russell writes that she believes they appeal to both pedophiles and non-pedophiles.⁴⁸ The “Hungarian Adventurer” is the story of a pedophile who is never satisfied, so he is an “adventurer” moving from place to place, woman/child to woman/child, playing the role of a seducer/molester, without remorse for his actions, focusing wholly on his desire.⁴⁹ In “The Boarding School,” Nin writes of a Priest who is sexually explicit in questioning his students but not overtly sexually excited when he hears his students “confess” their fantasies and dreams.⁵⁰ The Priest also performs strange rituals to punish the boys,⁵¹ yet at the same time “coaches them in masturbation.”⁵² There is also his favorite boy, “fair-haired ... with the eyes of a girl”⁵³ whom he fancies most. Eventually this special treatment leads the other boys to gang rape the “delicate blond boy” when their group becomes lost on a field trip from school.⁵⁴ “The Boarding School” is about a perverse man whose sexual longings contribute to the dehumanization and torture of a young boy by his fellow classmates, thus perpetuating acts of violence. Nin never presents an alternative to violence at the school by creating images of non-violent erotica. This scenario of a gang rape and child abuse is pornographic and similar in its explicitly degrading and violent depictions to those in “The Hungarian Adventurer.” In contrast, the short story, “Mallorca,” does not have any images of violence until the end of the story, where there is an

⁴⁸ See Russell.

⁴⁹ Nin, “The Hungarian Adventurer,” p.2.

⁵⁰ Nin, “The Boarding School,” *Venus* p.26.

⁵¹ Nin, “The Boarding School,” p.27.

⁵² Miller, p.171.

⁵³ Nin, “The Boarding School,” p.26.

⁵⁴ Nin, “The Boarding School,” p.28.

attempted rape, which suddenly turns to longing, desire, and eventually passionate, even forbidden love. The descriptions leading up to the rape scene are erotic and visually stimulating describing a woman named Maria, being lured to swim in the "moonlight"⁵⁵ by another woman, Evelyn. The language is dreamlike describing how Maria's body looks in the night air, and how you can hear the "soft lapping of the waves."⁵⁶ The two women playfully and sensually embrace one another, until they are both naked, until suddenly Maria feels "something so unexpected she screams." It is at this moment Evelyn's identity as a man is revealed.⁵⁷ This is Nin's version of a "rape fantasy." The story begins in a promising non-violent erotic manner but ultimately Nin's language and erotic imagery turn violent.

In the story "Artists and Models" Nin writes for the first time in *Delta of Venus* a short story which is wholly non-violent. The story is about a relationship between an artist and his model, and the sexual awakening of the model with her exploration of sexual desires. The artist is presented as a great erotic storyteller, first telling the model of his days in 'Montparnasse' about a great Cuban lover and "the wife of one of the great modern painters" who was a "nymphomaniac." He also describes this woman, as wearing a large belt around her waist, much like a chastity belt, drawing lovers to her like bees.⁵⁸ The artist tells the story of "Mafouka," whom he finds "beautiful," and describes as a woman-man, with both sex parts.⁵⁹ The erotic tales within erotic stories present voyeuristic erotic sensations, creating a titillating atmosphere for both the model and the artist. These

⁵⁵ Nin, "Mallorca," *Venus*, p.35.

⁵⁶ Nin, "Mallorca," p.35.

⁵⁷ Nin, "Mallorca," p.36.

⁵⁸ Nin, "Artist and Models," *Venus*, pp.38-44.

⁵⁹ Nin, "Artist and Models," pp.44-48.

sexually charged meetings allow the model to have adventures and experiences of her own, creating her own erotic stories. Nin cleverly constructs "Artist and Models" with various characters describing their own erotic tales and past adventures, climaxing in the sexual encounter between the model and the artist, who in turn now have a new erotic tale to reveal.⁶⁰ Another story in *Delta of Venus* which is erotic and non-violent is Nin's self-portrait story "Marianne," which draws from her own experiences as a writer, who is "turning out erotica for sale to a collector."⁶¹ The story is about a young woman who is a painter, but types erotica to earn a living. The narrator describes Marianne as a woman who has "had many sexual adventures" however it was all "external" and "nothing had touched her very deeply" and she is "cold ... frigid" and "being psychoanalyzed."⁶² This story represents Nin's faithful connection to feelings and sex, which as I suggested earlier, she believes, are the basis for erotic power. It is not until Marianne reads the erotica she has been typing that she remembers a sexual encounter she had experienced, although it was not particularly satisfying. What is interesting for the character Marianne, is that through remembrance of the story she becomes sexually aroused.⁶³ Marianne discovers the need to express her own experiences through the medium of writing. She writes the story about a male model who posed for her while she painted and describes how she became aroused by drawing his figure so much that she desired him. However, the passion she felt for him was not reciprocated and he was incapable of satisfying her sexual longings.⁶⁴ In a strange twist of fate her

⁶⁰ Nin, "Artist and Models," pp.62-65.

⁶¹ Nin, "Marianne," *Venus*, p.74.

⁶² Nin, "Marianne," p.75.

⁶³ Nin, "Marianne," p.75.

⁶⁴ Nin, "Marianne," p.76-82.

lover also writes erotica for money and presents it to the collector. It is, however, handwritten and illegible and so Marianne finds herself typing her own lover's erotic stories.⁶⁵ In his writings, Marianne discovers that her lover is only sexually satisfied by being objectified by women and receives immense pleasure from their penetrating gaze. Ultimately, he is unable to give any pleasure in return, because he is only interested in his own exhibitionism and his female gaze's voyeurism.⁶⁶ Marianne becomes jealous of her lover's interest in having other women draw his body and eventually they part. Subsequently the story ends with Marianne typing erotica just as the story began.⁶⁷ In the story "Marianne," Nin not only presents the objectification of men by women, but also has the male character finding this gaze pleasurable, a concept that is usually not associated with women in a similar position. This story is non-violent and non-dehumanizing and is erotica rather than pornography.

Nin's *Delta of Venus*, contains several more stories which are erotic and others which are clearly, pornographic demonstrating her uncanny ability to use writing as a way to explore sexual experiences by both women and men in a non-violent and sensual way, as well as, showing her readers she is also capable of being explicitly degrading and pornographic. What sets Nin's work apart from ordinary pornography is the language she uses to reveal her tales, which creates a veil of metaphor, which may shelter her readers from the often violent and pornographic descriptions, embedded, as they are, in erotic images, of flowers, bodies, frequent exotic locations and occupations. This may be one of the reasons why Nin's work is still

⁶⁵ Nin, "Marianne," pp.83-84.

⁶⁶ Nin, "Marianne," pp.84-85.

⁶⁷ Nin, "Marianne," p.86.

controversial and presents a dilemma for some readers because it may not be clearly violent and de-humanizing for women. Hélène Cixous writes in "Sorties: Out and Out Attacks/Ways Out/Forays:"

A feminine text cannot not be more than subversive: if it writes itself it is in a volcanic heap of the old 'real' property crust. In ceaseless displacement. She must write herself because, when the time come for her liberation, it is the intention of a new, insurgent writing that will allow her to put the break and the indispensable changed into effect her history. At first, individually, on two inseparable level: - woman, writing herself, will go back to this body that has been worse then confiscated, a body replaced with a disturbing stranger, sick or dead, who so often is a bad influence...By censoring the body, the breath and the speech are censored at the same time.⁶⁸

Nin creates a place for women to relate to these images and experiences by trying to write about female characters that are either attempting to take control of their sexual desires or at least to explore them through various sexual experiences. I believe Nin tends to avoid pornographic descriptions of her own experiences in her stories yet, is happy to present experiences in what she perceives as a true female voice of eroticism, whether or not they are de-humanizing representations of violence against women. Nin does have a unique style which seems to anticipate the notion of *écriture féminine*. Nin is not, however, simply the female voice of eroticism nor is she clearly a

⁶⁸ Cixous, pp.102-103.

female pornographer. Anaïs Nin lies somewhere between eroticism and pornography and from this perspective she has done her best to capture what she considers a woman's erotic power. In other words Nin had the courage "to write—the act that will 'realize' the uncensored relationship of woman to her sexuality, to her woman-being given back access to her own forces."⁶⁹ Moreover, the admission of and exploration of that erotic power is an element in the wider empowerment of the female.

⁶⁹ Cixous, p.103.

In Search of the Extraordinary: Locating a Language of Empowerment

To say that woman is a mystery is to say, not that she is silent, but that her language is not understood; she is there, but hidden behind veils; she exists...¹

—Simone De Beauvoir

We need anti-toxins, we need a place in which to recover our vision, we need a place in which to reconstruct ourselves after shattering experiences.² —Anaïs Nin

The leaning -tower writer has had the courage, at any rate, to throw that little box of toys out of the window. He has had the courage to tell the truth, the unpleasant truth, about himself. That is the first step towards telling the truth about other people. By analyzing themselves honestly.³ — Virginia Woolf

The story of Alexis enabled me to establish a familiar background involving women, writing and domestic violence. It also made it feasible for me to focus on my belief that an author and reader can achieve empowerment by “writing from” concerning their personal experiences, as a form of self therapy and a way of informing the public about important issues, while showing and expressing creativity and courage. As Alexis was preparing for a new future without the threat of violence, thousands of women in similar situations across the world are taking steps to overcome their obstacles and rediscover themselves through writing.⁴ Women who stand out and write from experience “challenge the authenticity of a world view in which women are mute and invisible.”⁵ Through my research I found many stories of empowerment and located voices of women from various backgrounds. I have personally worked with many women who used writing as a way to assert their identities, separate from their abusers, and

¹ Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 1949. Reprint, Edited and Translated by H.M. Parshley. New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1989, p.257.

² Anaïs Nin, Evelyn Hinz, Ed. “The Artist as Magician.” *A Women Speaks: The Lectures, Seminars and Interviews of Anaïs Nin* 1975. Reprint, London: Penguin Books, 1992, p.171.

³ Virginia Woolf, “The Leaning Tower.” 1940. Reprint, Rachel Bowlby, Ed. *A Women’s Essays, Selected Essays: Volume One*. London: Penguin Books, 1992, p.174.

⁴ Anaïs Nin, Evelyn Hinz, Ed. “Woman Reconstructing the World.” *A Women Speaks: The Lectures, Seminars and Interviews of Anaïs Nin* 1975. Reprint, London: Penguin Books, 1992, p.49.

⁵ Dale Spender, *Man Made Language*. London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, pp.226-227.

yet other women who read stories of empowerment and gained renewed strength to continue their battles to end violence against women. Literature can provide a broad foundation for understanding historical struggles of oppression as seen in my chapter on Virginia Woolf and can also construct new ways of looking at women's life experiences as valid representations of artistic expression as I have tried to show through Anaïs Nin. I feel it is also important, however, to look to "ordinary " women in ordinary places, recovering their own voices and telling their own stories.

Women who are writing have a variety of established ideologies to overcome personally, as well as trying to provide alternatives to systems of oppression. Dale Spender writes in *Man Made Language* that "the male defined hierarchical world view that we possess is ... deeply engrained," and so in order for us "to avoid replicating the injustices of classism, racism and sexism" Spender suggests that "we must deliberately seek to give recognition and validity to those areas of experience that have been expressly denied in the male version of literature and of *truth*."⁶ Women who are writing have then a variety of established ideologies to overcome personally, as well as trying to provide alternatives to systems of oppression. Ola Barnett and Alyce D. Violette write in *It Could Happen to Anyone: Why Battered Women Stay* that:

Sexism is a system of combined male controls: physical control, psychological control, derogatory beliefs about women, and

⁶ Dale Spender, p.227.

institutional policies and regulations that discriminate against women.⁷

It is difficult for a person who is victimized to avoid operating within the existing roles which women and men have been socialized to fill. The occurrence of sexism is commonplace throughout “family, media, psychiatry, medicine, language, organized religion, (the) government and legal system.”⁸ One problem is that acceptance of these stereotypes has resulted in justification of the continued “unequal treatment of women.”⁹ To end abuse and violence against women there must be an outcry from society for a change in the “social and cultural institutions that permit...abuse.” Once this need is recognized, then perhaps a more permanent solution can be found.¹⁰ In addition, since “the patriarchal structure of a society creates a mood that allows” and quite often “encourages” and even “normalizes violence, particularly violence directed at the least powerful” then the struggle against oppression must be widespread.¹¹ It will take more than just a few advocates and sweeping changes in legislation to undo, overturn or even reform a way of thinking which is so engrained in our culture, that violence seems a way of life, which victims/survivors must simply endure. Since this “patriarchal terrorism is rooted in historical and cultural notions of male ownership and domination of female partners,” I believe this has also encouraged and enabled the control abusers feel they have over their partners, and the result of this institutionalized way of thinking is an

⁷ Ola Barnett and Alyce D. LaViolette. *It Could Happen to Anyone: Why Battered Women Stay*. Thousand Oaks, CA: NewBury Sage Publications, 2000, p.19.

⁸ Barnett, p.19.

⁹ Barnett, p.19.

¹⁰ Barnett, p.21.

¹¹ Barnett, p.109.

“escalating pattern of coercive violence.”¹² How then can we re-think violence against women, when it is and has been part of daily life?

Mary Marecek in *Breaking Free from Partner Abuse, Voices of Battered Women Caught in the Cycle of Domestic Violence*, a self-help guidebook on how to leave an abusive relationship, writes that you need to:

Take charge...act... don't wait for things to get better. They won't. Violence only gets worse. Hope can get you killed. Your only hope is yourself.¹³

Between her detailed advice and instruction on how to recognize abusive signs in a partner, is Marecek's poetry. Simple yet inspiring words for women who are trying to leave an abusive relationship and overcome oppression, Marecek's poetry conveys the stories which speak to survivors of domestic violence. If her how-to information does not reach the ears of the victims then her poetry most certainly will. In her poem entitled "i whisper to the wind" Marecek talks of how "he beats me" and the speaker says a "prayer at night that he will go." She also describes how others around her know, but "they dare not speak the truth." It is the "silence" of knowing and not doing anything, which Marecek calls a "conspiracy."¹⁴ Her book is not only empowering in that it gives women in an abusive situation a name for their pain, but it encourages them to decide on their own terms what to do, providing a language which creates a dialogue for them to end their silence by moving forward and ending their abuse. Marecek's poetry

¹² Barnett, p.110

¹³ Mary Marecek, *Breaking Free from Partner Abuse, Voices of Battered Women Caught in the Cycle of Domestic Violence*. Buena Park, CA: Morning Glory Press, 1999, p.16.

¹⁴ Marecek, p.17.

also provides a mechanism to break free by asserting her voice through the silence of denial, which so often accompanies victims of violence. Marecek represents a growing number of women who use their own experiences to reach others, by writing poetry which is a reflection of their voices seeking empowerment. As I searched for survivors of domestic violence, involved in contemporary writing, I found many who told their stories within an autobiographical genre, such as my friend and former colleague, Stephanie Rodriguez in her novel, *Time to Stop Pretending*¹⁵ and author Debra Thompson in her book of poetry, *Refuge*.¹⁶ I also found a growing number of alternative ways to validate personal experiences through writing, by contributing to Internet sites which address specific forms of abuse.¹⁷ These survivors are able to present their pain and recovery from violence in a public arena yet maintain their privacy through an anonymous voice, working to end violence against women. They achieve this by writing their own personal stories of survival. The anonymity of these voices from “within,” does not hinder their impact in dealing with violence, but reinforces the fact that some women choose to write in secrecy to remain safe, and that the ever-persistent threat of abuse lingers. Nevertheless, many women include their names and addresses on these Internet sites so others may contact them to discuss their stories and poems about their experiences. One writer in particular, Hannah Kate Llewellyn, caught my attention while I searched these sites, with her poem “If These Walls Could Talk.”¹⁸ In the

¹⁵ See Stephanie Rodriguez, *Time to Stop Pretending*. Middlebury, VT: Paul S. Eriksson, Publisher, 1994.

¹⁶ See Debra Thompson, *Refuge*. Frederick, Maryland: AmErica House Book Publishers, 2001

¹⁷ By using a search engine, such as Google™ or GoMamma™ and typing in keywords such as “domestic violence, writing by survivors and abuse” I was able to find numerous sites providing intervention and prevention in the cycle of violence, statistics, recourses, as well as chat rooms, discussion panels and writings by survivors of all forms of abuse.

¹⁸ By Hannah Kate Llewellyn (2000-2002) Found on www.gentletouchsweb.com

poem, Llewellyn writes about what has gone on behind closed doors and “the screams...the tears” and “the pain” which she has endured.¹⁹ The walls are silent because they cannot actually speak of the pain, but others around us need to know, and the narrator uses poetry as a way to speak to them and encourage them to listen. The survivor and poet, Debra Thompson, has also used the Internet as a way to share her experiences with others and has posted many poems from her book, *Refuge* on-line, thus reaching a wider audience and educating them about violence against women, particularly those who are/were victims of domestic violence. Thompson’s words, like those of so many other women who write their life stories to empower others, are from the heart and carry a message of hope.²⁰

Sonia C. Apgar writes in her essay “Fighting Back on Paper in Real Life: Sexual Abuse Narratives and the Creation of Safe Space,” that she believes one of the “major components of the recovery process is the establishment of a coherent personal narrative.” This narrative or story “not only fits with the survivor’s memories and perception but also fits in to the social constructions or cultural norms available to her.” In other words, a woman writer will write about what she knows and about the abuse as well as her feelings. Apgar believes that when a woman writes her story, it “provides the survivors with a psychological distance that allows her the possibility of analyzing her past”²¹ I call this the validation of reality, a process which enables the author through her narrative to recognize her abuse as real and unacceptable in her life. Through writing the

¹⁹ See www.gentletouchsweb.com.

²⁰ See Debra Thompson.

²¹ Sonia C. Apgar, “Fighting Back on Paper and in Real Life: Sexual Abuse Narratives and The Creation of Safe Space.” Tomoko Kuribayashi and Julie Tharp, Eds. *Creating Safe Space: Violence and Women’s Writing*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1998, p.48.

author/survivor refuses to endure further abuse, because the survivor is able to make sense of her experiences and commit “her thoughts and feelings on to paper.”²² I believe this can enable the survivor to see “patterns of abuse.”²³ Writing breaks down barriers which the survivor may not have been conscious of earlier. She may not recognize, for example, verbal abuse by her partner and connect his persistent name-calling to her low self-esteem concerning her body image.²⁴ Many of my clients used writing as a way of achieving what Apgar describes as a “sense of control through psychological distancing” which also provides a safety net, allowing the survivor to “fill in the gaps” of her narrative.²⁵ In a very real sense this is an autobiographical account of the survivor’s own struggles in her life experiences as a victim, and by writing about her past she is able to “establish the ... reflexivity of the self.” In other words, she can present the self as “other to gain distance and perspective.”²⁶ If the clients I helped through advocacy were not ready to establish a link between their abuse and their abuser, it is possible if they wrote a narrative about their life, it might enable them to gain the insight they needed to recognize their abuse. However, writing their narrative might also cause them to reflect on their part in their abusive relationship and cause them to blame themselves for remaining in the cycle of violence

²² Apgar, p.48.

²³ Apgar, p.48.

²⁴ A former client, Kathryn,* thought that she was ugly and took diet pills to make herself “more beautiful” to her abusive ex-husband until she made the connection between her body image and his verbal assaults. It was at this point in her marriage she recognized that she was in an abusive relationship. Kathryn had always thought she had to be “beaten up” in order to get help in dealing with her abusive husband, and that verbal abuse was ok.

*Names have been changed to conceal their identities.

²⁵ Apgar, p.49.

²⁶ Apgar, p.49.

by not seeking the help they needed.²⁷ The process of writing is the survivor's strategy for healing from a traumatic experience. Apgar writes:

By establishing herself as a moral and therefore worthy member of society, the survivor necessarily distinguishes herself as separate from but related to others. The act of constructing personal narratives of traumatic experiences facilitates the process of breaking down recessive blocking.²⁸

This is the validation of the inner psyche, letting the consciousness know that it is time to listen to what the voice within has to say.²⁹ Once the survivor is ready to discuss or write about her experiences then the next step for the survivor is to identify with other survivors who have similar experiences to share. One way women and victims of violence achieve this is by forming writing support groups.

In an interview with the lead facilitator of the Scottish Women's Poetry Survivors' Group in Glasgow, I found Donna Campbell's³⁰ story all too familiar from those of other survivors of abuse and violence. Donna is a former victim of domestic violence and has been the lead facilitator for the Support Group in Glasgow for approximately five years. Donna is a published writer and mainly focuses on poetry, her favorite medium,

²⁷ Another client, Veronique,* blamed herself for the murder of her daughter by her husband and his subsequent suicide, because she did not do return home when he had threatened her on the telephone. Veronique and her son would have also been killed if she had chosen to listen to her husband as she had done so many times in the past when he threatened to kill himself. Through writing and therapy, Veronique was able to blame her husband and not herself. (This incident occurred in 1998, and by 2001 Veronique was still trying to cope with her loss, but had stopped blaming herself.)

²⁸ Apgar, p.51.

²⁹ Apgar, p.51.

³⁰ Donna Campbell gave me permission to use her full name.

however, for over a year and a half, she has been working on a “novel” but would prefer to call it the “the story” of her life. Donna believes the joy of writing is that you “can tell a bit of the truth and then the rest is fiction.” She believes that poetry allows the “luxury of being unstructured” so that it is less “intimidating for victims of domestic violence and other forms of violence to use this as a means for therapy and recovery without even trying.” Donna wrote before she became involved with an abusive partner and thinks that many people are writers but “often abuse propels them into writing” not necessarily about their “life experiences,” she suggests, but, of course, this has a “great influence on what they are writing.” As the facilitator of this survivors’ writing group, Donna feels it is important to allow the participants the freedom to explore their thoughts and ideas and use these emotions to guide them to the “scary blank space” (paper) and in this way the emotions become “real to both the writer and the reader.” This encourages them to “flow with a language” that is familiar and non-threatening. Donna believes one reason why there is such a problem with violence against women is that communities turn a blind eye to these problems and Donna says that all the recent campaigns to end violence against women here in Scotland are a:

bunch of rubbish...because the community is not interested and why would they? We do not know each other. People see fighting on the streets and walk right by. They hear a woman crying in her own home from abuse and do nothing, because they do not want to get involved. They do not know her. They

do not know their own neighbors on a friendly level much less, to get involved to help them.

The lack of proper education and growing up in poverty is the greatest problem to ending violence against women and children, and Donna believes that women need to be helped to see the cycle of violence around them. This proves to be a very difficult goal since, "they see mum and aunt being beaten, they think it is normal for them to be battered too." Donna does not believe that you need higher education to be a writer: she herself left school at the age of sixteen. Donna will not bring up issues of abuse to the participants of her group yet she maintains a very informal atmosphere. If issues of abuse or violence arise, then Donna refers the women to other social organizations for guidance, since she does not feel comfortable discussing all the dynamics of recovery. Donna is quick to point out that she is not trained as a social worker or counselor and that she "is first and foremost a writer." As she writes, Donna says that "stuff" comes out in her writings and she wonders "where did that come from?" I believe Donna is wise in her advice to the writers in her group to just let the words "flow" and that this is a way for women to use writing as a guide to search within and locate a place they never imagined existed, and write out their stories of anger and pain, using these emotions as tools for recovery. I agree with Donna when she says that children need to be able to talk about what they feel and see, and I think that if children started writing when were young, it would help them to express themselves better when they became adults. Donna is also a mother to three children and encourages them not to hide from their emotions, but embrace them. Even as a child Donna told me she

had “dreamed of becoming an author” and has kept a diary since she was child. Although Donna is the facilitator for a “women only group,” she actually prefers groups which are mixed sex, because she believes:

Women and men need to learn from each other. This is another way to break the barriers because in domestic violence children grow up and often men have a hard time to not become violent themselves.

Donna thinks expressing emotion and making insightful comments about one’s life can create a flood of healing power and can help educate communities.³¹ Apgar confirms this belief and suggests:

A survivor needs a community that validates her experience and sense of self. Personal narratives in both spoken and written form provide the vehicle for communal exchange and growth because, in their constructions of coherence, they necessarily make (at least) tacit reference to both personal beliefs and social norms and expectations and allow for an examination and potential reformulation of the available subject positions and cultural constructions that endanger women.³²

I believe that a woman can use her writing to empower herself and others, yet I also believe at the same time she can use her writing to resist the

³¹ From my interview with Donna Campbell in Glasgow, Scotland, March 2002.

³² Apgar, p.51.

cultural norms surrounding women as victims of violence and she can reinvent herself as a strong individual, challenging existing stereotypes and views of women's roles in relationships. To refuse to allow herself to be called a victim is the beginning of the recovery process for the survivor, and thus she "regains what she has lost."³³

Writing provides a powerful discourse to explore the many facets of one's identity, and it can also be used to enlighten and educate others regarding personal tragedies and experiences, and this consequently empowers the reader. Will victims of violence always pick up the pen and write their deepest and darkest fears and regrets or will they read self-help books and watch television for guidance? I believe some will decide to write and others will read stories of struggle, and others may still decide to remain silent. Empowerment through silence is not usually successful as a means of healing from a traumatic experience – if anything it may compound the problem. Judith Herman writes in *Father-Daughter Incest*, that silence can lead to a never-ending cycle of violence against those who are powerless, from one victim to another, a steady flow of trauma, leaving victims of abuse angry, often their family shattered. However, even when victims of abuse decide to disclose their victimization to a trusted person, they may be blamed by a parent, or worse not believed, by those who feel that perhaps their abuse should have remained secret.³⁴ This is not how we want children to think of the world, as a door closed in the face of oppression and victimization. A more understanding and educated community will not tolerate any form of abuse, let alone allow abuse to persist; yet, at the same

³³ Apgar, p.54.

³⁴ Judith Herman and Lisa Hirschman. *Father-Daughter Incest*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000, p.132.

time, communities must do their best to prevent the continuance at any level of existing. When a victim of domestic violence finally decides to leave an abusive relationship, she may find it impossible to get help from family members or friends, because they simply gave up on her years ago, and now turn away from her request for help, when she needs them most.³⁵ Writing will certainly not cause the abuse to vanish, nor will it make victimisation tolerable, but it does validate the victim's pain. This is an on-going process of recovery, of finding a voice which will create the mechanisms for self-empowerment. This does not mean that victims should ever accept their abuse or in any way tolerate their abusers, but it can enable them to move toward a future with a restored sense of self, their identity no longer fragmented, but replaced with a positive image of the self.

Women's writing, if it is to make a contribution to the elimination of oppression, must encompass the diversity of women's experience. It must be multidimensional or it falls short of the goal to which we aspire.³⁶

The goal is of course, for women to create a new framework in which they "are represented" and not confined by their silence. It is then that women and women writers will possess the ability to reconstruct their own histories.³⁷ The most important thing for women writers to remember is that the past can help when understanding the present, and through writing women can and do empower other women offering a safe place for their

³⁵ Barnett, pp.80-85.

³⁶ Spender, p.227.

³⁷ Spender, p.229.

stories to reside. When women writers encourage the world around them to look at violence against women as a destructive cultural pattern in which silence is not a viable option, then we will all have discovered this extraordinary language of empowerment.

It seems fitting that at the end of this thesis on women and empowerment through writing that I should include some of my own poetry. For me, this is an incentive for others who may not think of themselves capable of writing to try their hand at something new. They also may just might surprise themselves and feel as I have through art and process of writing, empowered. I now must ask the question of myself, which I sought to uncover through my investigation of Aphra Behn, Virginia Woolf and Anaïs Nin. Who is my Angel in the House? Who is my Laughing Medusa? The Angel in the House, for me are the barriers I create around myself, a sort of protective space which allows me to think beyond the "white space" and develop an idea from beginning to end. It is also about not being afraid to share my inner thoughts and feelings, not only with myself but also with others. For me my Angel is the gift of experience and knowledge which others have shared with me and my Angel is not at all abrasive or destructive but encouraging and warm. My Angel is also my community around me, which often brings ordinary people on an ordinary day together to create something extraordinary. It is the gift of understanding which will cultivate peace and cause my Medusa to Laugh at all of our idiosyncrasies which we believe will cause us to fail but in the end she is merely encouraging us to continue. She gives life to our experiences which we might otherwise feel are drab, boring and uneventful. Writing, for me is a way to release emotions, both positive and negative. It is also a way

for me to honour those who have inspired me to do good, and by telling their story in my own language I feel as if I can see more clearly and I have found a new way to express myself in my surroundings. The artistry of writing is not about whether the story or poem is brilliant, even published, or considered for an anthology. It is, I believe about what language can do for the 'self' and that is empowerment: urging us to continue our task of survival. It is from this pursuit of empowerment we insist on locating our voices through the silence to tell our personal, perhaps, ultimately very political ideologies concerning ourselves, communities and each other. I believe this silence we so often share will cease to be a word associated with women writers and violence against women and the 'veil' of silence will lift so that our true selves are revealed and we can celebrate, the lives of our mothers and the future mothers to come.

Silhouette © Debra Thompson 2001 from *Refuge*.
Used with the exclusive permission of the author.

The power to cripple
has charmed you
the power to harm
has overtaken your heart
you jealously guard
this power
though it feeds upon your very soul
stripping you,
gripping me...
I am but
the canvas
you paint your hatred upon
green,
black on blue,
purple...
angry strokes collide
taper into gray
The caress of the brush
leaves lines
that crease my face
in an eternal plea
shadowy traces,
the stain
of endless tears
rage eclipsing love
blaming me
holding me responsible
for the shadow
I am
hiding away
receding from view
growing dimmer
to elude
I melt,
and yet
you continue to paint
slapping haphazard colors,
careless against
pale skin,
the portrait darkens
colors bleed
into black
evaporating in the stale air
Canvas upon canvas
languishing one upon the other
in gloomy corners
days weep into nights
gathering
cobwebs.

drums beating © Chanda Evans 1999

the loud cries rang out into the still night
the moon high, dazzling and full
bodies moving to a loud beat
the fire blazes madly and a roar
of voices are carried by the wind
rain belts down and the cries
grow stronger, the fire more intense
this dancing rages for hours
until the moon is bright and glowing
like an evil beast lurking in the night

for J.W.

kidnapped © Chanda Evans 2001

like the sun didn't
know when to stop
window glass
sea blue melted
streams
like the river tears
wandering down her
face
she prays
knees bent
figuring a door
might open
become unhinged
escaping like a draft
from the wind
she'll slip though
unnoticed

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