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## Delivering the Woman Artist from the Silence of the Womb: Otto Rank's Influence on Anais Nin

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I felt that I would break out in some wild, disruptive fit of blind, furious rebellion against my life, against the domination of man, my desire for a free artist life.... A fear of the wildness of my fever and despair, of the excessiveness of my melancholy. Then I sat at my typewriter, saying to myself, "Write, you neurotic, you weakling, you weakling, you; rebellion is a negative form of living. Write!"

*The Diary of Anais Nin: 1931-1934* **13<sup>a</sup>**

At the time of her death in 1977 Anais Nin had published ten volumes of fiction, two works of literary criticism, two collections of essays and speeches, and six volumes of her Diaries, these selected and edited from the enormous personal journal Nin began keeping in 1914 when she was 11 years old. Other books have appeared since her death (*Linotte: The Early Diary of Anais Nin: 1914-1920***20**; *The Diary of Anais Nin: 1966-1974***16**; and the two collections of erotic stories, *Delta of Venus***11** and *Little Birds***21**; more books are still scheduled for publication. Before 1966 when the first volume of the *Diary* appeared, Nin and her writings were known only to a small group of enthusiastic readers. It was the *Diary* that brought her public recognition, such literary honors as the French Prix Sevigné and admission to the National Institute of Arts and Letters, as well as her informal position as an always controversial spokeswoman for the women's movement. Nin's fame coincided, then, with the "second wave" of feminism of the

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1960s onward, and although the symbolic value of this woman and her ideas are still being fiercely debated by feminists, Nin was a public figure when she died after a ten-year battle against cancer.

Nin's audience appears to be comprised largely of women. This is not surprising, for from the very beginning of her efforts to express herself in writing, she sought to articulate feelings, perceptions, values, and modes of experience that she felt were authentically feminine. Her first published book was about the novels of D. H. Lawrence, to whom she was attracted precisely because she felt he had tried to portray the complexities of love and sex from the female perspective. Nin envisioned her second book, a prose poem called *House of Incest*,**19** as a woman's version of Rimbaud's confessional poem, *A Season in Hell*. Brief, intense, saturated with neurotic suffering, *House of Incest***19** might be regarded as the source book of Nin's later more mature fiction.

When she was writing *House of Incest*,**19** Nin was involved in psychotherapy with Otto Rank. From the start the Viennese analyst encouraged her to "write as a woman," an endeavor with which Nin seems to have become increasingly comfortable as she matured and found that the "femininity" of her writing, though ridiculed by conventional reviewers, profoundly gratified a small audience of people, mostly women who hungered to hear the articulation of their own feelings and private convictions. In the late 1930s after she had completed treatment with Rank, Nin formulated a personal ideal of "feminine" writing that not only served her well as an artist but also had the effect, as one looks back, of placing her at the forefront of the contemporary search of women artists for their own voices. From the early 1930s onward, Nin was always conscious that the exploration of the "feminine" was her mission as an artist, and all of her mature life she was grateful to Rank whose influence as a man, a therapist, and a thinker was profound and enduring.

It was in Paris in 1933, not long after she had persuaded her friend Henry Miller to visit Otto Rank, that Nin herself entered treatment with the Viennese analyst. Like Miller, Nin was attracted by Rank's book *Art and Artist: Creative Urge and Personality Development*,**24** published in English in 1932. As recounted in the first volume of her published *Diary* covering the period from 1931 to 1934, Nin had already been through what she regarded as an unsuccessful analysis with René Allendy: "The magic of Allendy has died. He has

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failed.... I escaped to Rank, who could help the writer to be born."**13<sup>b</sup>** In keeping with Rank's preference for short-term therapy comprising an aggressive attack on the neurosis, Nin's treatment lasted until August of 1934, a significant duration of nine months, at the end of which Nin was compelled to deliver a six-month stillborn child.<sup>a</sup> This agonizing experience is recorded in *The Diary: 1931-1934***13** and also exists as a separately published story titled "Birth" (*Under a Glass Bell and Other Stories*)**22**. Even a careful reader of the *Diary* will not be able to discover the identity of the baby's father. At the time of her therapy Nin was experiencing discontent with her marriage of ten years to Hugh P. Guiler and was involved in an intense relationship with Henry Miller. (At his own request all references to Hugh P. Guiler have been omitted from the published versions of the *Diaries*.) The paternity of the stillborn baby is of less concern here than the interpretation Nin placed on the child's death.

Rank believed that the artist lived in a state of rebellion against the "biological imperative" of procreation, with its inescapable

allusions to decay and to mortality. If this is an accurate description of the male artist's uneasiness with fatherhood, then (even apart from the demands on her time and energy) the female artist will experience procreation as an even more serious threat to her self-created identity and chosen role in life. Although there is no evidence of this in the published *Diaries*, it seems more than likely that Rank aided Nin in viewing the death of her female child as the cathartic expulsion of the child she was retaining within herself, of herself, that is, as a dependent childlike woman. This death was symbolically necessary to prepare for the birth of Nin's mature self as an artist. Nin wrote,

Psychoanalysis did save me because it allowed the birth of the real me, a most dangerous and painful one for a woman, filled with dangers; for no one has ever loved an adventurous woman as they have loved adventurous men. The birth of the real me might have ended like that of my unborn child.<sup>13c</sup>

After she had recovered physically and emotionally, Nin left France for New York where she assisted Rank with his practice; under his supervision, she worked directly with patients as well as taking over correspondence and related tasks when Rank was away. However, in the late spring or early summer of 1935, Nin abandoned her plan to become a therapist and returned to France where she devoted

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herself with an air of elated vigor to her career as a writer. (At this time Nin's husband either accepted or offered her an unconventional form of marriage that accommodated her needs for free time and personal independence.) A *Diary* entry of June, 1935, captures Nin's exuberant state of mind and defines the essence of her work with Rank:

I was happier when I was selfless [i.e., devoted largely to fulfilling the needs of others], but now that this growth and expansion has started I am unable to stop it. I feel so strangely released, I feel no boundaries within myself, no walls, no fears. Nothing holds me back from adventure. I feel mobile, fluid. I do not miss Rank. I think I have finally conquered the need of a father. He played the role generously....<sup>14a</sup>

Except for a brief period just before and after her return to Paris in 1935, Nin expressed only the most enthusiastic feelings about Rank, the man and his ideas. However, several feminist commentators on Nin's career have evaluated his influence negatively. Stephanie Demetrakopoulos,<sup>4</sup> whose view on this issue is very harsh, as well as Pamela Di Pesa<sup>5</sup> charge Rank with having drawn a sharp and arbitrary line between life and art, and Nin's identity as a woman and as an artist; the result, they believe, actually deepened rather than healed the split between these aspects of her being from which Nin was suffering. This criticism does, in fact, appear sound, if it is based exclusively on a reading of Nin's account of her therapy with Rank as recorded in the first volume of the *Diary*, an account which is edited and which, of course, permits the therapist to speak only in the words of his patient. However, the enlarged context of *Truth and Reality*<sup>27</sup>, *Art and Artist*<sup>24</sup>, and especially the essay "Feminine Psychology and Masculine Ideology"<sup>25</sup> provides a far more complex version of Rank's orientation toward the psychology of woman, as well as the rationale for his attempt to strengthen Nin's identity as a woman before assisting in the consolidation of her identity as an artist. As a man, as distinct from a healer, Rank did, however, "betray" Nin. "Seduced," one might say by her capacity to restate his complicated ideas in graceful lucid English, he attempted to persuade her to devote herself to rewriting the literal translations of his books. Clearly, this task would have frustrated, if not entirely thwarted, her growth as an independent creator of her own works.<sup>4,5</sup>

Rank's death in 1939 may have inadvertently softened or removed any resentment Nin felt in connection with this issue, for both

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in her writings and her public talks, she was unfailingly generous toward Rank, praising him as a therapist as well as a profound, original, and creative thinker. During her later years when Nin was active as a public speaker, she regularly recommended Rank's books to large audiences. She addressed an annual meeting of the Otto Rank Association, she reprinted long passages from his works in her published *Diaries*, and she reviewed reprinted editions of Rank's works, urging others to read them, especially *Truth and Reality*.<sup>27</sup>

When she consulted Rank in 1933 Nin was, as any reader of *The Diary: 1931-1934*<sup>13</sup> knows, in a state of acute suffering marked by obsessive introspection, fear, and a paralyzing conflict between acting upon her desires for her life and fulfilling the needs and expectations of the many people who crowded her private circle: a husband, a mother, two younger brothers, Henry Miller, his wife June, and many other partially dependent friends and acquaintances. (Ironically, Rank himself eventually became one of these resented figures, and that perception of his altered role was what ended the active phase of Nin's relationship with Rank.)<sup>b</sup> During her treatment, however, Nin's most obvious and most difficult problem concerned her father.

Anais Nin was born in Paris in 1903, the daughter of Joaquin Nin, a well-known Cuban-Spanish composer and pianist, and Rosa Culmell-Nin, a singer of Danish and Cuban heritage. When Anais was 10 or 11 her father abandoned his wife and three children (Anais was the oldest) at Arcachon, France. In 1914, without explaining whether the father was to join them eventually, Rosa Culmell-Nin brought her children from Barcelona to New York where they made their home in Manhattan and Queens, moving frequently, until Anais's marriage in 1923. Naturally, a girl of 11 who was abandoned and then compelled to adapt to a new country, a new culture, and a new language while in a state of fearful ignorance about the reasons for her father's absence and possible return, would experience a damaging shock. However, the abrupt and mysterious loss of her father elicited from Anais Nin a typically creative response. She began keeping the *Diary* that today comes to eight edited published volumes with three more, covering the years 1917-1931, yet to appear. Initially, Nin conceived the *Diary* as a letter to her father, a means of persuading him to join his family in the US, but over the years it grew organically and unpredictably, serving its author in many ways while providing her with the continuity and the fullness of personal expression that life itself denied

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her. Current general opinion regards her *Diary* as Nin's supreme literary achievement; it has reached a larger audience than her delicate, innovative, psychologically oriented fiction.<sup>c</sup>

The story of Nin's life between the ages of 11 and 17 is recorded in *Linotte: The Early Diary of Anais Nin: 1914-1920*.<sup>20</sup> As a girl she was extraordinarily industrious, perhaps in part to distract herself from a pervasive sense of loss. At 15 she left school, freeing her mother to work as a special buyer for the Cuban clientele of Lord and Taylor's Department Store. Nin was responsible for running a household that included her immediate family as well as frequent "paying guests." She shopped, cooked, cleaned, mended, and darned—oot without complaint—while at the same time maintaining fluency in French, mastering English (she began to write in English at age 17), reading widely, and writing poems, stories, plays, and making faithful entries in her *Diary*. Nin's literary ambitions were encouraged by both parents; from Europe her father sent French journals, urging his daughter to write poetry and to submit it for publication. Rosa Culmell-Nin, for her part, seems to have dealt resourcefully with the problems of an abandoned wife and mother. Young Anais quotes her mother as having proclaimed: "I am fifty years old, little girl, and am not yet weary of the struggle."<sup>20</sup> She provided her children with an example of tenacity, pride in accomplishing difficult work and in meeting challenges.

As the pages of *Linotte* accumulate and Anais Nin approaches womanhood, the reader notices her diminishing attention to literature and her increasing preoccupation with her appearance and with masculine attention. Her early marriage at 20 did not kill but suppressed the artist in Nin. When it reasserted itself, she once again resorted to writing; just as she had used her *Diary* to build a bridge to her father in Europe, Nin shattered the confinement of her domestic life by writing a book. Produced in 16 days, it is a work of criticism bearing the self-effacing title: *D. H. Lawrence: An Unprofessional study*.<sup>12</sup> (Nin was not yet ready to write a creative work of her own conception and execution.) This book brought her the important relationship, with Henry Miller and his wife June, who also played a significant role in Nin's development, and opened to Nin a world populated by writers and other artists. The same impulse that caused her to expand beyond her life as a wife motivated Nin to seek out Otto Rank "who could help the writer to be born."

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Appropriately, the exchange between an analyst who was associated primarily with a work titled *The Trauma of Birth*.<sup>26</sup> and an analysand who regarded her first birth as "a failure"<sup>13d</sup> focused upon removing the fears and guilts that were strangling Nin's voice. At the end of Nin's first session Rank requested that she leave with him the diary volume she was carrying. She was, as she recorded in the *Diary*, "startled." (On the voyage from Barcelona to New York she had allowed no one but herself to carry the basket in which she kept the *Diary*.)

It was true I had brought it, as I often carried it about, to write in it while I waited here and there. But I had also written in it the fabrications I had intended to tell Dr. Rank. And to suddenly expose it all to someone frightened me. What would he think? Would he lose interest in me? Would he be shocked, startled? It was a bold stroke. He interpreted my carrying it as a wish to share it. He challenged my 'offer.' I hesitated, and then I placed it on the low table between the two armchairs. And I left.<sup>13e</sup>

In a talk that soon followed Rank clarified the two problems that were primarily preventing Nin from living the life that she desired: her longing for an impossible relationship with her father and a guilt-racked sense of obligation to others that was part of her conditioning as a woman. Of Nin's father, who had become a problematic figure in her adult life after a separation of 15 to 20 years, Rank said:

"You had to fulfill the obsession to be reunited with him, but also to liberate yourself from the fatalistic determinism of your whole life, of being the abandoned one. When you lost him as a child, you lost in him the personification of your ideal self. He was the artist, musician, writer, builder, socially fascinating personage. When you found him, you were a young woman in search of your real self. This your father could not give you, because the relationship was only a reflection of the past, of child and father love. This had to be broken so you might find a man independently of this image. Your father, as far as I can make out, is still trying to create you to his own image." After a while, he added: "Man is always trying to create a woman who will fill his needs, and that makes her untrue to herself. Many of your "roles" came out of this desire to fulfill man's needs."<sup>13f</sup>

Rank encouraged Nin to "act out" her anger by abandoning her father as he had abandoned her:

How to separate from my father without hurting him? Rank said, "Hurt him. You will deliver him of his sense of guilt for leaving you as a child.

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He will feel delivered because he will have been punished. Abandon him as he abandoned you. Revenge is necessary. To reestablish equilibrium in the emotional life."<sup>13g</sup>

The second volume of the *Diary* (1934-1939)<sup>14</sup> contains Nin's account of her eventual liberation from the yearning for a relationship with her father. A poetic version of this process is expressed in Nin's novella *Winter of Artifice*.<sup>23</sup> which she was writing during her therapy with Rank.

The problem posed for Nin by her father was quite clear. She desperately wanted to become an artist. But this meant not only becoming “masculine,” which she feared, but also identifying with her father, who had caused herself and others immeasurable pain. Perceiving her own withdrawal of attention from family members as “abandonment,” Nin was unable to act on her own behalf, especially when some of the people she would be “abandoning” were the same ones her father had already hurt. She herself had been badly damaged; how could she inflict the same suffering on others?

To meet this problem Rank seems to have encouraged Nin to associate power with maternal femininity and to have helped her feel confident of her own femininity; this relieved the threat of becoming “masculine” (i.e., destructive) and freed her to invent her own vision of the woman artist. During the periods of therapy recorded by Nin, Rank is occasionally made to say things about gender that sound arbitrary. For example: “Rank believes that to create it is necessary to destroy. Woman cannot destroy. He believes that may be why she has rarely been a great artist. In order to create without destroying, I nearly destroyed myself”<sup>14b</sup>. The word “destroy” is extremely misleading; it is Nin’s own term and, as such, reflects her extreme and exaggerated fear of harming others. At this time Rank was encouraging her to withdraw energy from her father whom, in fact, Nin was beginning to feel she “stopped loving long ago”<sup>13h</sup>. Because Nin dreaded being “aggressive” and “masculine” and because her sense of her value as a woman had been severely undermined by her father’s abandonment, Rank tried to help her fuse a feeling of confidence and capability with a relaxed sense of womanliness. The effort to free her not only from addiction to the diary, but also from her compulsion to secure herself in the affections of others by never disappointing them, perhaps led to the following amusing exchange:

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“Women,” said Rank, “when cured of neurosis enter life. Man enters art. Woman is too close to life, too human.” The feminine quality is necessary to the male artist, but Rank questioned whether masculinity is equally necessary to the woman artist.

At this point, when I became a woman, I glowed with womanliness; I was expansive, relaxed, happy.

Rank said, looking at me admiringly, “You look entirely different today.” I felt as soft as a summer day, all bloom and scent, all joy of being.

“Perhaps,” he said, “you may discover now what you want—to be a woman or an artist”<sup>13e</sup>.

At first Rank’s presentation of these aspects of identity as alternatives seems outrageous: arbitrary, discriminatory, and probably inaccurate. When viewed in the context of the entire relationship, however, this harsh appearance disappears, replaced by the concept of a sequential development in which Nin, assured of her basic female identity, could move on to the more complex and arduous task of self-creation as an artist.

When Nin remarked that she would obtain greater pleasure from Rank’s writing a book than from finishing her own novel (either *House of Incest*<sup>19</sup> or *Winter of Artifice*<sup>23</sup>), he replied:

“That’s the woman in you speaking.... When the neurotic woman gets cured, she becomes a woman. When the neurotic man gets cured, he becomes an artist. Let us see whether the artist or the woman will win out. For the moment, you need to become a woman”.<sup>13j</sup>

Aiding his patient to develop confidence in her womanliness was essential to the transition Rank sought to achieve by persuading Nin to regard herself not as a weak and dependent daughter, the ever vulnerable child, but as the independent and powerful mother figure whose strength is derived from her capacity to grant, or to withhold, what others need: nourishment and love. Rank’s entire edifice of thought is based upon dialectical tensions; he believed that there were basically “two types of woman: the weak, dependent childlike woman who all her life, so to speak, remains a daughter, and the independent strong woman of prefamilial matriarchal organization who draws her strength and self-reliance from motherhood.”<sup>25a</sup>

The woman who felt “like a shattered mirror” when she began therapy with Rank brings to a close the first volume of her published

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*Diary* in a mood of exuberant acceptance of her complex being. Happily proclaiming that she has “three selves,” Nin describes the essential third as wanting

to learn a profession so that she may always write as she believes, wants to help Rank make a new life because he helped her make a new life, and wants the unknown, the unfamiliar. I finally promised to go to New York for two months [to help him with his practice]. I feel two months are short in the span of eternity.<sup>13k</sup>

Many years later when Nin was nearly 70, she gave a talk at the Otto Rank Association in which she summarized the essence of what she gained from her work with Rank: “It was only when I met Dr. Rank that I realized I had my own work to do.” Developing the theme of the special guilt of the woman artist, which deepens the guilt already experienced by the talented individual regardless of gender, Nin explained:

Man is expected to achieve.... Whatever he does is expected of him by society, and he is delivered of guilt when he produces. But woman was trained to give first place to her personal commitments—home and children and husband or family—she was encumbered with duties which absorbed all her energies, and the very concept of love was united to the concept of care and nurturing, whether physical or symbolic. When she reduced the hours of devotion and gave her energies



to other interests, she felt a double guilt. She was made aware that she was failing in her personal responsibilities, and her other achievements were severely undervalued by the culture. So the guilt is much deeper in woman and becomes in many cases the roots of her neurosis or even pathology.<sup>18a</sup>

At the end of this talk Nin was asked a question about how to achieve revitalization, and her answer was an affirmation of therapy.

Therapy is not only a 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.

Psychology removes the scars, the fears, the rigidities which prevent us from expanding. It is a revivifying process.<sup>18b</sup>

A shift in attention from Nin's personal evolution to the general context of feminist inquiry today reveals an area of influence in which Rank's thinking appears to have had a rich and urgently important impact upon Nin's writings. This is the question whether there is an

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authentic "feminine" sensibility in perception, thought, and language which is different in significant ways from the standards of excellence that prevail in a culture that has evolved from the attitudes and creations of men. Needless to say, this is a volatile area for discussion and one that raises profound questions about gender to which there are as yet no definitive answers. However, for those who believe in the existence of a long repressed and silenced "feminine" experience and in the desirability of rendering it in artistic forms, Nin's writings are crucial. For example, Margret Andersen, a professor of French literature, has written: "My view, that Nin's definition of the basis and of the goals of women's writing is most accurate and corresponds to what other women writers are trying to achieve, is confirmed when we see that, some 40 years later, a Frenchwoman, Annie Leclerc, says much the same without ever having read Nin." Andersen cites Nin as a "forerunner of modern French thought on this subject."<sup>1</sup>

In 1937 Nin articulated her ideal of "womb oriented" writing but it did not appear in print until 1967 when the second volume of the *Diary* was published. Today, however, perhaps especially in France, the concept of a newly excavated "feminine" esthetic is a vital issue, and Nin—her remembered presence but especially her novels—is one of the writers whose works are at the center of the discussion. Once one has read Rank's essay, "Feminine Psychology and Masculine Ideology," posthumously published in 1941 in *Beyond Psychology*,<sup>25</sup> one cannot possibly miss the significant presence of Rank's thought in Nin's literary philosophy of the "feminine." The ideas expounded in this essay appear to have evolved from concepts that Rank was weighing as early as 1933 when Nin entered treatment with him.

Denying the line of thought that was initiated, in all likelihood, by Aristotle and restated by Freud, that woman is incomplete or partial man, Rank adopts a position similar to that of Jung, depending upon the concept of polarity that is rooted in Pythagorean accounts of the Monad and the Dyad. Like Jung, Rank regards the feminine as one of two opposing principles which are equal and complementary. Rank's theory differs from Jung's in that the former appears to regard the blending of masculine and feminine characteristics in one individual as unnatural and even unhealthy, while Jung, on the other hand, accepts and advocates "psychological bisexuality." The major difficulty with "Feminine Psychology and Masculine Ideology," which is generally liberal and farsighted, is an inherent contradiction; on the

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one hand, Rank says that the nature of woman is still a mystery because she herself has been unwilling to reveal herself and, on the other hand, he asserts a seemingly confident sense of what is "authentic" in the female and what is "man-made." He both does and does not know the "true" nature of woman.

Nonetheless, "Feminine Psychology and Masculine Ideology"<sup>25</sup> is a remarkable piece of work. Although it was published 15 years before Erich Neumann's *The Great Mother*,<sup>9</sup> it contains many of the same ideas. Besides providing a theoretical frame of reference for the arbitrary sounding assertions recorded by Nin from her therapy sessions, "Feminine Psychology and Masculine Ideology" states the issues that have become central to contemporary study and debate on the topic of woman's nature, her thought processes, her language, and her art forms. The most immediately winning quality of this essay is its underlying sense of sympathy with modern woman's aspiration to develop her individuality and her capabilities for work beyond the home and family. Rank freely acknowledges that woman's "biological predicament usually comes into conflict with her individual self-development."<sup>25b</sup> Approximately 30 years in advance of Elizabeth Gould Davis<sup>2</sup> and Merlin Stone,<sup>29</sup> Rank was exploring the consequences for modern woman of the displacement in Greece and Asia Minor of the original mother goddess by a self-created masculine hero-god.<sup>d</sup> With Jung, Rank describes the imbalance in modern life that he attributes to the suppression of the feminine: "The gradual masculinization of human civilization, in my opinion probably the most enlightening clue to history, is borne out by mythical and religious tradition as well as by the development of social concepts and artistic creation."<sup>25c</sup> As he traces this process Rank describes the story of the creation, and subsequent rejection by man, of the first woman, Lilith. Autonomous, created at the same time as Adam and from the same substance, Lilith was replaced by the "docile," "man-made," and, of course "bad" Eve.<sup>25d</sup>

More than a decade before Simone de Beauvoir, in her masterpiece *The Second Sex*,<sup>3</sup> argued that man projects onto woman everything in his experience that he dislikes or cannot understand, making of her "The Other," Otto Rank made precisely the same point:

... man divided the visible universe, as it were, into two categories, the 'I' and the 'not-I.' The things he accepted, liked or needed he classified as belonging to the I-class, relegating everything else to the not-I class. By

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virtue of his believe in personal immortality, in which woman as the bearer of sexual mortality did not participate, she automatically became identified with the not-I class (wo-man—no man). Hence, all not-I things, which later formed the neuter class in European languages, were first considered feminine.<sup>25e</sup>

In his attempt to account for man's ambivalence toward woman, Rank concludes:

Woman, as the eternal bearer of the irrational element in human nature, for that reason always has been and still is “tabued,” which in the original sense of the word means cursed and venerated, avoided and sought, feared and loved.<sup>25f</sup>

At the core of “Feminine Psychology and Masculine Ideology” is a crucial discussion of the alienating effects of male-conceived language on woman. Like most of the structures of civilization, language reflects masculine attitudes and thought processes; it also contains the terms by which woman has been defined, judged, condemned, adored, and, in general, portrayed as The Other. The problems of sensibility and language are particularly acute for the woman writer, for she is obliged either to master the language which is itself one of the instruments that limits and contains her identity and may feel alien to her as a medium of expression, or she must invent her own language, an action whose disadvantages are too obvious to require elucidation. And yet in France today there is a movement led by the highly educated and—oddly—extremely prolific writer Marguerite Duras urging women to employ silence as their most authentic form of expression and their most potent weapon against the patriarchally dominated cultural establishment. The strategy of silence seems more nearly a political than an esthetic position. In “Feminine Psychology” Rank described woman's secrecy as a psychological defense employed self-protectively: “Her real self is hidden, and she is hiding it!”<sup>25g</sup>

Most women writers with a genuine desire to discover or to invent a feminine esthetic do not reject but attempt to adapt the common language to their female sensibility. The need to do this was first asserted by Virginia Woolf in her brilliant essay of 1928 *A Room of One's Own*<sup>30</sup>, a piece of writing which still forms the point of departure in many discussions of the different ways that men and women think and express themselves. Anais Nin, a great admirer of Virginia Woolf's work, is one of the few women writers who has dared to give voice to a programmatically “feminine” approach to literary style and

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substance. During the middle 1930s, after her treatment by Rank, she was engaged in formulating her literary goals. Part of this process was marked by the conflict she experienced between her “feminine” diary, a flowing unstructured way of writing with which she felt comfortable, and fiction writing, which she regarded as artificial, fixed, rigid, and lacking in feeling. From the very start of their relationship, Rank, confessing that psychologists didn't know very much about women, encouraged Nin to speak and write “as a woman.” While working simultaneously on *House of Incest*<sup>19</sup> and *Winter of Artifice*<sup>23</sup>, she wrote in her *Diary*:

*It is the woman who has to speak. And it is not only the Woman Anais who has to speak, but I who have to speak for many women. As I discover myself, I feel I am merely one of many, a symbol. I begin to understand June, Jeanne, and many others. George Sand, Georgette Leblanc, Eleonora Duse, women of yesterday and today. The mute ones of the past, the inarticulate, who took refuge behind wordless intuitions....*<sup>13m</sup>

Unsuccessful in his attempt to persuade Nin “to keep a sketchbook, instead of being kept by a diary,”<sup>13m</sup> Rank became an enthusiastic supporter of the Diary as an authentically feminine work: “Rank thinks my diary invaluable as a study of woman's point of view. He says it is a document by a woman who thinks as a woman, not a man.” Triumphantly, she notes: “So the man who took the diary away from me as neurosis gives it back to me as a unique work by his enthusiasm for it.”<sup>14c</sup>

The problem of how to write her own personal fiction disappeared once Nin had formulated her ideal of “feminine” writing. In August 1937, a stimulating conversation among Henry Miller, Lawrence Durrell, and his wife Nancy, provoked Nin to burst forth with a defense of her subjective, lyrical, flowing fiction. Later, she reflected:

Henry and Larry tried to lure me out of the womb. They call it objectivity.

But what neither Larry nor Henry understands is that woman's creation, far from being like man's, must be exactly like her creation of children, that is it must come out of her own blood, englobed by her womb, nourished by her own milk. It must be a human creation, of flesh, it must be different from man's abstractions.

Man today is like a tree that is withering at the roots. And most women painted and wrote nothing but imitations of phalluses.... My work

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must be the closest to the life flow. I must install myself inside of the seed growth, mysteries. I must prove the possibility of instantaneous, immediate, spontaneous art. My art must be like a miracle. Before it goes through the conduits of the brain and becomes an abstraction, a fiction, a lie. It must be for woman, more like a personified ancient ritual, where every spiritual thought was made visible, enacted, represented.<sup>14d</sup>

Woman's task, then, as Nin saw it, was to restore balance to the human composition by repudiating the false images of femininity that have been invented by man, by asserting her own authentic nature as she herself experiences it, and by expressing this authentic woman in her life projects, including her art. Nin wrote that man

disposed of her [woman] by identifying her with nature and then paraded his contemptuous domination of nature. But woman is not nature only. She is the mermaid with her fish-tail dipped in the unconscious. Her creation will be to make

articulate this obscure world which dominates man, which he denies being dominated by, but which asserts its domination in destructive proofs of its presence, madness.<sup>14e</sup>

“Feminine” writing does not, of course, have to be practiced exclusively by women. The point is not who does it but the nature of the subject matter, the tone, structure, and approach to language. According to Nin, “feminine” art strives to restore connections with nature. In describing the sculpture of Cornelia Runyon, Nin wrote: “From the first she had an essentially feminine attitude toward her material. She began with a respect for what the sea or the earth had already begun to form in the stones. She contemplated and meditated over them, permitting them to reveal the inherent patterns they suggested. She never imposed her own will over the image tentatively begun by nature.” Nin’s concept of “feminine” writing stresses feelings instead of thought processes:

I choose the heightened moments, because they bring to bear all the forces of intuition. For this I choose moods, states of being, states of exaltation to accentuate the reality of feeling and the senses. It is this that I contribute to a feminine concept: the language of emotions, altogether different from that of intellect.<sup>16</sup>

Because feminine art seeks to link up, to relate, to reveal the connections among the diverse aspects of life, it must flow, resisting the tendency to harden and crystallize. To achieve the desired sense of spontaneity, the immediacy of writing that arises directly from the

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feelings without the intervention of the mind, Nin stresses the use of improvisation. The writer who wishes to present character, theme and situation dynamically, with animation, will, in all likelihood experiment with language in order to penetrate and reveal the depths of feeling that are concealed by words and gestures, the surfaces of visual reality.

It is true, of course, that these literary ideals are by no means exclusively feminine; in practice, Nin’s mentors are D. H. Lawrence and Marcel Proust, and the roots of her art lie in the French Symbolist movement and, to a lesser extent, in the Surrealist program for revolution of consciousness and of values, especially in the realm of the erotic. It is equally true that not all women writers will be temperamentally sympathetic to the ideals Nin has identified as “feminine.” The significance of her statements about art that comes from the “womb,” besides their being a description after the fact, a critical explanation of what she was already doing in writing, is that this outpouring of ideas represented the bringing into awareness of ideals that she needed to articulate for herself. Whether “feminine” or not—and perhaps gender is irrelevant to modes of expression in the arts—Nin’s literary values have been neglected and even derided in the United States. Traditionally, writing that is intuitive, introspective, delicate, tentative, explorative, meditative, has been ridiculed as “precious” or “purple,” often as “feminine.” Nin’s statement of her beliefs, her articulate opposition to Miller and Durrell, gave her courage, once she saw the rationale for her own literary practice in words, and this courage gave her a sense of justification and ease about writing about herself as a woman.

Thus armed, Nin devoted her energy to developing the lyrical psychological style that she called “symphonic writing.”<sup>e</sup> Although *House of Incest*,<sup>19</sup> which she completed while working with Rank, contains the germinal themes of Nin’s later books, *Cities of the Interior*<sup>10</sup> is her major achievement; a group of five interrelated novels, it is characterized by a graceful and inventive facility for imagery and an ingenious and playful sense of structure. The subject is the psychology of woman:

Theme of development of woman in her own terms, not as an imitation of man. This will become in the end the predominant theme of the novel: the effort of woman to find her own psychology, and her own significance, in contradiction to man-made psychology and interpretation.

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Woman finding her own language, and articulating her own feelings, discovering her own perceptions. Woman’s role in the reconstruction of the world ... The evolution will be from subjectivity and neurosis to objectivity, expansion, fulfillment.<sup>16</sup>

The personal relationship between Anais Nin and Otto Rank was very short, especially when one considers the pervasive and continuous influence of his presence and his ideas on the writer’s life and works. Ironically, Rank, who helped Nin discover and strengthen her identity, has had to remain nearly mute in this exploration of their relationship. The man is here only to the degree that he can be abstracted from his thought. Even his words have been translated, with inevitable distortion, into those of his one-time patient.

In 1939 when Nin arrived in the US to remain here permanently, she telephoned Rank, only to be told that he had died of a throat infection. “The death of Rank did not seem believable,” she wrote in her *Diary*, “because he was only in his fifties, because of his vitality and love of life.” In a long speculative passage about Rank’s disappointments, she wrote:

I knew he felt analysis and therapy separated him from life rather than fulfilled his personal needs. Analysis creates illusory attachments. He must have been caught in the illusions of love more than other men. Because he was spiritually rich, he was preyed upon, used. What had he intended to do with his leisure in the California sun? Fulfill the writer, the poet and playwright he once was? Who really knew him intimately and well?

In the face of death, one asks oneself invariable: Did I see enough, hear enough, observe enough, love enough, did I listen attentively, did I appreciate, did I sustain the life? Did Rank die not knowing perhaps how much or how deep was his gift, how vivid his human presence?”<sup>16</sup>

## Notes

<sup>a</sup> See *The Diary of Anais Nin: 1931-1934*, p. 277.<sup>12</sup> Here Rank's view of therapy is described as follows by Nin: "I do not believe in long drawn-out psychoanalysis: I do not believe in spending too much time exploring the past, delving into it. I believe neurosis is like a virulent abscess, or infection. It has to be attacked powerfully in the present ... I believe in attacking the core of the illness, through its present symptoms, quickly, directly."

<sup>b</sup> See *The Diary of Anais Nin: 1934-1939*, p. 46.<sup>13</sup> The early pages of this volume contain Nin's account of her reasons for leaving Rank in New York and returning to France. She claims that he wanted her to "rewrite his books, condense and clarify them. He would have a rough translation made of *A Study of Incest in Literature*. It was a 600 page book. It would be a lifetime task. I would have to abdicate my own writing. Already I was shying of [sic] too much analysis. Intellectual banquets. Orgies of ideas. the force of a man's ideological creation, and the human tragedy of it. His wisdom attracts people to him.... He is lonely in his world of ideas" (p. 23). Later, she writes: "I do not miss Rank. I think I have finally conquered the need of a father. He played the role generously, but he also tried to dominate me and absorb me into his work. He wanted me to devote my life to the rewriting of his books, a lifelong task which would have destroyed the artist in me. He will never forgive my return to Paris" (p. 46).

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<sup>c</sup> See Spencer, A., *Collage of Dreams: The Writing of Anais Nin*<sup>28</sup> and Knapp, B. L., *Anais Nin*,<sup>8</sup> for analyses and interpretations of Nin's fiction. Both Knapp and myself regard *Cities of the Interior* as a major literary achievement, an opinion with which the popular press and reviewing media do not agree.

<sup>d</sup> See Davis, E. G., *The First Sex*<sup>2</sup> and M. Stone's *When God Was a Woman*<sup>29</sup>. Stone's book provides the historical data to support the mythological approach of Erich Neumann in *The Great Mother*<sup>9</sup>. Nin had read Esther Harding's books, *The Way of All Women*<sup>6</sup> and *Woman's Mysteries: Ancient and Modern*<sup>7</sup> and was influenced by both books. She had a consultation with Harding but was not treated by her.

<sup>e</sup> For a fuller discussion of Nin's philosophy of writing, see Spencer, S., *Collage of Dreams*,<sup>27</sup> pp. (a) 115; (b) 120; (c) 127-28 (d) 138-39 as well as the chapter titled "Symphonic Writing."<sup>11</sup>

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