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IN THE PATH OF BECOMING:
ANAIS NIN'S ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT
AND SEARCH FOR FEMININE IDENTITY

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In the Path of Becoming: Anais Nin’s Artistic Development and Search for Feminine Identity

Chairperson: Veronica Stewart

This essay traces the artistic development of Anais Nin and major issues found throughout her writing, including those surrounding feminine identity and eroticism. A study of Nin’s diary is offered to introduce issues which later manifest themselves in expanded, refracted form in her creative works. Nin repeatedly comes up against the limitations of feminine inscription primarily when trying to articulate the nature of her own subjectivity and eroticism in comparison to that of Henry Miller. She also experiences difficulty in inscribing the narcissistic, quasi-incestuous desire she feels for June Miller, and expands on that experience in her novels and prose poetry.

Using extracts from Nin’s diary and her creative works, comparisons are made between Nin’s own philosophies about writing and those of current theorists on the locus of feminine creativity and essentialism. Works studied in this essay are *Henry and June*, *House of Incest* and *Ladders to Fire*, the first book in Nin’s continuous novel, *Cities of the Interior*. References are also made to Nin’s erotic short stories, *Delta of Venus*, and to Nin’s own theoretic work on the novel entitled, *The Novel of the Future*. Major theorists drawn from to help illuminate Nin’s texts are Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous—all theorists of French feminism; Ellie Sullivan and Jacques Lacan—theorists of modern psychoanalytic theory; and Sharon Spencer, an Anais Nin scholar and feminist.

Nin achieves a fully developed "feminine" text, as described by many theorists of *l’écriture feminine*. Her prose is highly imaginary, flowing as a stream from the unconscious. Her prose is highly visceral and deals almost exclusively with psychological, rather than material or physical reality. But with regard to her own subjectivity, Nin searches to attain the beyond of the feminine *jouissance*, the erotic, that which has been left out of all other constructions of the feminine in the Symbolic Order, and which may contain the key to the "essence" of woman for which she strives throughout her artistic career.
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Introduction

Few modern women writers have as large a body of work as Anais Nin. Yet despite her tremendous contributions to the genres of the diary and prose poetry, Nin has been, until just recently in literary history, virtually ignored. Many of Nin's critics dismiss her writing as "surrealist," "decadent" or "feminine," although it is this last epithet that gives the contemporary reader reason to pause. What makes "feminine" writing problematic? This is a question that haunts all of Nin's writing, for her singular feminine voice, perspective, and sensibility, which words as an important component of Nin's contribution to literature, contains many characteristics of what French feminists such as Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray call l'écriture féminine.

Many women writers of earlier eras wrote fiction, but simply took for granted the implementation of a male discourse in their own writing. This masculinized discourse, which grew out of the linearity of male historicism and value systems like those in place during the Victorian era, either completely squelched or went to great
pains to qualify and analyze female identity within a masculine context. Many authors, from Thomas Hardy to Gustave Flaubert, wrote from a woman's point of view, addressing questions such as Freud's *Was Will das Wieb?*, but it seems that few of this contingency really had the ability to either understand or accurately portray women's experience.

As victims of circumstance, many young women, including Nin, found both their voice and listener in the form of a diary. The diary acts as a loyal, secret sounding board, a confessional for a woman's passions and perceptions, as well as a laboratory in which to experiment with her own identity, both personally and creatively. Nin's own laboratory, consisting of thousands of pages of diary entries spanning decades, is the place where she undergoes the transformation from a strange, uprooted child into a woman with a cohesive literary philosophy and highly personalized narrative style.

In the course of the following chapters, I trace the thread of Nin's literary development. Throughout her literary career, an important question, (not completely unlike Freud's), haunts Nin's writing: What is it to be a woman? and more specifically, What is it to be a woman writer? Nin continually searches for an elusive "essence" of herself—both as a woman and a writer—which she knows instinctively is different from a man's. The solutions Nin
offers in response to the problematic of feminine identity, especially in terms of her tendency toward essentialism, suggests a reductive alternative for women that still troubles some contemporary feminists.

Nin studies psychoanalysis extensively throughout her life, and no doubt psychoanalytic concepts provide the framework for her ideas on feminine sexuality. In this spirit, I bring to bear on Nin's work a contemporary dialogue between two schools of thought regarding feminine sexuality and language, namely the compelling and sometimes opposing arguments of French feminism and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. These two post-structural schools of thought greatly illuminate the issues Nin grapples with in her writing and form a fruitful interpretive structure for Nin's work. Many readers of Nin struggle to interpret, and even to qualify, Nin's works by looking at the influences of Surrealism and Romanticism on her art, but Lacanian feminism remains the most constructive arena for the discussion because it encompasses the pervasive issues in Nin's work, those not only of language, but of gendered language and the imagination.

An excellent starting point for this venture rests at the point in Nin's life when she becomes extremely self-aware of her writing style and creative impulses. This coincides with the year she meets Henry and June Miller, depicted in the self-contained journal volumes, Henry and
June. The friendship that develops between her and the Millers opens up both personal and intellectual issues for Nin. These issues include, first of all, those relating to Nin's own sexuality and a sexuality of writing. In her diary, Nin gives full voice to erotic impulses and experiences which, in a more public realm, are considered taboo. She reflects on her love relationships with both Henry and June Miller and discovers a connection between the two of them and two opposing, sexually different modes of language and thought.

Nin carries her sense of the erotic over into her creative works, not just in the form of the erotic short stories in *Delta of Venus,*\(^5\) but also in an eroticism, a sensuality of language springing from the feminine psyche, manifested in the prose poem, *House of Incest.* In the second chapter of this study, I delve into Nin's sense of the erotic, which she closely connects to the maternal drive. Through her depictions of erotic experience, we find Nin turning again and again toward the role of mother, a primality of the maternal melded with the primality of the erotic. Issues of women's writing also emerge in her depiction of erotic experience in which she attempts to locate the origin of language and desire in the locus of both pleasure and creation--the womb.

The last chapter of this study delves more deeply into the realm of imaginative perception and a "psychological,"
rather than "physical" reality. Referring back to the questions of qualifying the "real" feminine psyche, Nin constructs a reality based solely on interior, psychological experience in *Cities of the Interior*, creating a realm of experience often inhabited by women whose physical environment has been regimented by patriarchal social constructs. In the words of Cixous, "the unconscious, that other limitless country, is the place where the repressed manage to survive: women" (*Laugh of the Medusa* 337). In a sense, Nin sees the realm of psychological reality as the one place where a woman under pressure from the outside world can find "a room of one's own," an interior corridor of thought and perception that belongs to her and her alone. In *The Novel of the Future*, Nin outlines this view and how she animates it in the form of the continuous novel, *Cities of the Interior*.

While it may be impossible to give a definitive exegesis on How to Read Nin, we can begin to discover Nin's narrative universe and understand its inherent complexities and questions if we examine her writings closely from a psychoanalytical and feminist standpoint. We can also find great significance in Nin's effort to give a name, or at least a voice, to a woman's identity. As we will see, the questions she raises still remain largely unanswered today, but her work serves as an excellent medium for addressing the elusive question of feminine identity and sexuality.
Endnotes


2. Good examples include Jane Austen and Mary Wollstonecraft. In 1783, Immanuel Kant writes in his conclusion to the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*: "we are compelled to consider the world as if it were the work of a Supreme Understanding and Will...[just as] a watch, a ship, a regiment bears the same relation to the watchmaker, the shipbuilder, the commanding officer" (97). Austen works around well-ordered dichotomies in her texts (sense, sensibility, pride, prejudice) and ends each novel with a series of tidy weddings that finish off the rough edges of the narrative. Her narratives both exemplify and examine the well-constructed "watch" model of the world order prevalent at the end of the Age of Reason.

Mary Wollstonecraft pointedly implements a male discourse in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, knowing her argument is addressed to men more than to women. She thoroughly understands the necessity of relating to the male psyche in order to be heard. And in so doing, she also a "reasonable, rational" tone stereotypically associated with men. In *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft reflects upon what should be the "reasonable service" of child rearing (153).
The best mother, according to Wollstonecraft, is one who has "sense and... independence of mind" which comes from a constructive and appropriate education.

3. Freud's, "What does the woman want?"

4. For a detailed depiction of Nin's interesting childhood and expatriation, one can examine Nin's earliest volume of diaries, entitled Linotte.

5. There is a second collection of erotica by Nin entitled Little Birds.
Chapter 1: Finding her Own Voice:
"To Proceed from the Dream Outward"

The period of Anais Nin's life chronicled in Henry and June is generally considered to be the richest period of her life. During this time, from October of 1931 to October of the following year, Nin's literary philosophy, inspired by her dialogues with other writers as well as through her own experimentation in her prose poems, her continuous novel, Cities of the Interior, and her diary, started to emerge. The text of Henry and June is much more than a diary excerpt, offering more than a simple, diachronic account of Nin's experiences. One reason for this complexity resides in Nin herself. The remarkable way in which Nin perceives reality allows her to experience life synchronically as well as diachronically; she is aware of "two cities at the same time (the conscious and the unconscious realms of being)" (Spencer 169) as she moves from day to day. Nin recounts her everyday experiences coupled with her dreams and internal musings, illuminating and broadening interpretations of her life. In Henry and June, the conscious and unconscious function on equally powerful
levels. A great part of Nin's evolution as a writer involves striking a balance between the two realms of perception in order to achieve a writing of her own, a feminine writing on one hand, but also a writing unique to her own psyche springing from her own unconscious history.

Early on in *Henry and June*, we see a conflict in Nin concerning her own gender identity and a traditional social dichotomy--namely, woman versus writer. Traditional formulations of womanhood tie woman to the domestic sphere and discourage turning away from home and hearth to the self-absorbed arena of writing. The individualistic mode of being ascribed to writers was regarded as appropriate only for males, who felt greater responsibility toward their own identity and intellect than toward domesticity. According to this formulation, a woman in the act of writing turns away from "womanliness" and takes on a masculine, individualistic mode of being. Hence a woman cannot write as a woman--the gender and the occupation are mutually exclusive. While Nin is self-consciously naive, she nonetheless displays the internalization of this age-old conflict:

> I really believe that if I were not a writer, not a creator, not an experimenter, I might have been a very faithful wife. I think highly of faithfulness. But my temperament belongs to the writer, not to the woman. Such a separation may
seem childish, but it is possible ...faithfulness is one of the perfections. It seems stupid and unintelligent to me now because I have bigger plans in mind. Perfection is static, and I am in full progress. The faithful wife is only one phase, one moment, one metamorphosis, one condition. (12)

Nin grapples with a conflict with gender identifications. Nin sees one part of herself as woman as faithful, perfect, static--unmoving and uncreative, "one phase, one moment." The writer in Nin, on the other hand, wishes to stay fluid and ever-changing. Therefore, she perceives "woman" as somehow opposed to "writer," though she does not, perhaps by virtue of her own writing, fully qualify "writer" as exclusively masculine. The dichotomy is confused further in that the qualities through which Nin portrays "woman" are those generally associated with the stereotypically masculine--faithfulness to a construct, stasis, perfection, rationality. On the other hand, the writer part of her being with which Nin identifies belongs very much on the stereotypically feminine side of things by preferring experimentation, creation, and flux. Nin rejects the image of woman with which she has been inculcated and turns toward an identity that is creative, chaotic, and feminine in nature. Though not fully realized by the author herself, her conflict, by way of her own imagery, reflects the
concept of an *ecrivaine feminine*. In the later years of her writing career, Nin fully develops and articulates her own philosophies surrounding *l'écriture feminine*, but in this particular period of her life, she begins her creative evolution by trying to resolve the conflict between her gender and her art.

Henry and June Miller become strong sources of inspiration for Nin’s creativity at this time. Henry, the author of subversive and controversial works such as *Tropic of Cancer*, comes to visit Nin and her husband Hugo at their home, Louveciennes. Nin is immediately fascinated by Henry. After reading some of his work, she gives him the first volume of her diary to read. Henry and Nin form an artistic alliance, exchanging work back and forth, and soon become lovers. When Henry’s wife June Mansfield, arrives at Louveciennes, she entrances Nin with her beauty and mystery. Although June and Nin do not become lovers in the same way Nin and Henry do, the women’s relationship is also marked with intensity and passion.

Henry and June Miller come to embody Nin’s creative conflict, for they occupy diametrically opposed and stereotypically gendered positions in Nin’s psychic architecture: Henry represents the masculine, entrenched in language and realism; June represents the feminine, operating on levels of sensuality and metaphor. In Lacanian terms, Henry’s sensibilities and gender place him on the
side of the Symbolic--the conscious world of reality. June operates on the level of the unconscious Imaginary realm. Nin senses that her creativity would be compromised if she allowed herself to be pulled only in one direction, ignoring the power of the other contingency. Desirous of and inspired by both Henry and June, Nin finds herself pulled in two directions simultaneously. She views this conflict between the forces of the Imaginary and the Symbolic as crucial and ominous: "Henry gives me life, June give me death" (48).

The choice between life and death of consciousness would seem to be simple at first glance, but the life and death these two options offer Nin have profound repercussions on her writing. When she directs her desire toward the enigmatic, elusive June, Nin finds a nature so similar to her own that it arouses within her unsettling feelings of narcissism and incest. But while irresistibly drawn to the sexual energy both of Henry's body and prose, from the outset of their relationship, Nin finds his inclination toward realism, toward prostitutes, violence, and coarseness completely foreign to her own nature. The point of balance between these two natures embodied in Henry and June contains the source of Nin's own feminine voice in a system of language claimed as masculine territory.

Henry's language, as well as his physical magnetism, attracts Nin. She is as sexually drawn to Henry's language
as she is to the man himself: "...in his writing he is flamboyant, virile, animal, magnificent" (6). We get a sense of the physicality, and more importantly, the masculinity of his language through Nin's eyes. She idolizes Henry, viewing him as the ultimate possessor of words, even as he possesses her body. Inspired by his skill as a writer and wishing to learn from him, Nin covers the walls of her writing room with Henry's words, as if to create a womb of language from which she can absorb his voice and be re-born in his image: "I have tacked up on the wall of my writing room Henry's two big pages of words, culled here and there...I will cover the walls with words. It will be la chambre des mots" (41). Henry's body embraces hers in their love relationship, and she wants his words to overwhelm her in kind. He floods her with his language:

Henry's letters give me the feeling of plenitude I get so rarely. I take great joy in answering them, but the bulk of them overwhelm me. I have barely answered one when he writes another.

Comments on Proust, descriptions, moods, his own life. (43)

Nin is inundated with masculine language, but Henry's words in particular seem to touch her in a physically fulfilling way, giving her feelings of "plenitude" and "great joy," leaving her "overwhelmed."

The influence of Henry's writing on Nin's own is
evident in several passages early on in Henry and June. Nin begins experimenting with masculine imagery. In a letter to her husband Hugo she writes:

I came here to seek my strength, and I find it.
I'm fighting. This morning I saw young, tall, thick silhouettes of skiers, with heavy boots, and their slow, conquering walk was like a gust of power. Defeat is only a phase for me. I must conquer, live. (36)

Her language evokes strong images of competition, war, and domination. Henry's language rules their relationship so thoroughly that Nin even finds difficulty using her own words to describe it: "I would never let Henry touch me. I struggle to find the exact reason, and I can only find it in his own language: 'I don't want just to be pissed on'" (40). While the intensely realistic quality of Henry's writing, his "raw strength, his pisses and fucks" (42) excite Nin physically, reservations spring up inside her out of fear that the vulgarity of a relationship with Henry debases her inner sanctum.

Henry's subversion in writing is similar to the subversive quality of women's writing in that he "take[s] pleasure in...changing around the furniture, dislocating things and values, breaking them all up,...and turning propriety upside down" (Cixous 344). But however rebellious Henry's language is against social, "moral" norms of
narrative, Nin finds Henry’s "torrent of realism" (Nin 49) ultimately unsatisfying. She makes the fundamental distinction between their writing styles by concentrating on the difference between what propels Henry’s writing and what propels her own:

When he writes he does not write with love, he writes to caricature, to attack, to ridicule, to destroy, to rebel. He is always against something. Anger incites him. I am always for something. Anger poisons me. I love, I love, I love. (50)

Because her impetus is so different from his own, Henry’s realism and flood of words and violence cannot reach Nin’s inner self: "There is in me something untouched, unstirred, which commands me. That will have to be moved if I am to move wholly" (8). Nin considers love the creative force within her, driven by unconscious "impulse, by emotion, by white heat" (44) that burns within her psyche, unfettered by the confines of reality. So although Henry gives Nin "life:" i.e., realism and hard language springing from harsh reality, his presence demands that she deny the other half of her being—that half tied to the unconscious and her imagination. She cannot, therefore, fully accept the artistic and psychological influences of Henry.

Striving to find the one emotion or sensibility that can touch her unconscious self, Nin turns to the
"incandescent" June (32). For Nin, drawing close to June provides a way of stepping away from Henry's flood of patriarchal signification. She escapes into the feminine world of the Imaginary, where words fall away to reveal a more intuitive communication, and fragmented metaphorical images replace the highly structured language of realism. Nin feels a strong erotic connection to June, like she did with Henry, but the eroticism, instead of containing imagery of "pisses and fucks," carries multiple layers of meaning in metaphor and metonymy. In the points in her diary where Nin discusses June, the language changes--it opens out conceptually. We are borne, as is Nin, by the power of metaphor to see beyond the simple word, glimpsing the larger picture in our own mind's eye.

When Nin first catches a glimpse of June, she does not see a composite form, but a "startlingly white face, burning eyes...color, brilliance, strangeness" (Nin 14). As Nin gazes upon June, she jettisons into the Imaginary realm where, to borrow Ellie Ragland's terms, June is "parcelled out, broken up, separated [into] pieces of body, language, [and] thought" ("Lacan" 4), relegated to an object of desire. When they are together, the physical forms of Nin and June come apart and refract a collection of evocative images, metonymies for the whole: "She was color, brilliance, strangeness" (14). The "disembodied" nature of Nin's vision of June contributes to her incandescence and
etereality. June inspires impressionistic rather than realistic description, diffusing Nin's perception, allowing her to capture essences and angles of form without insisting upon its totality. Indeed, June seems to elude any concrete definition: "I could not grasp her core" (14). June is a de-centered being, devoid of sincerity, wholeness or certainty.

It seems that the only thing that has the power to keep June from flying apart into abstracts is the grounding physicality of her husband. Henry's connection to June ties her like an anchor to the Symbolic:

The only power which keeps you together is your love for Henry...He hurts you, but he keeps your body and soul together. He integrates you. He lashes and whips you into occasional wholeness.

(15)

In Nin and June's relationship, their language has a tendency to break up and lose coherence, echoing the break up of physical reality that englobes their perception. Whereas Henry's courtship relied heavily on language, June's is non-verbal. She and Nin communicate with a language of gesture and intuition. Evocation and falsehood replace demotic language. They become intimately acquainted solely through intuition: "'When Henry described you to me,' she said, 'he left out the most important parts. He did not get you at all.' She knew that immediately; she and I had
understood each other, every detail and nuance of each other" (16). By operating on the level of intuition, June succeeds in touching that "untouched, unstirred" place within Nin that Henry could never reach with words. When June speaks, she tells lies, or simply babbles unconsciously, lost in a fantasy world bordering on madness. In fact, words are superfluous between Nin and June--the power between them emanates from the senses: "I do not make any sense out of her words. I am fascinated by her eyes and mouth" (Nin 17). The language the women speak together is a feminine language, not understood by masculine minds: "What a secret language we talk, undertones, overtones, nuances, abstractions, symbols...Henry is uneasy. Hugo is sad" (26). Henry and Nin's husband Hugo react uncomfortably to the subversion of the signifying system over which they as men preside.

And unlike her highly sexual relationship with Henry, Nin and June only experience fleeting contact on the physical level. What they exchange takes the form of female symbols--intimate possessions found only in the female universe. June, although in need of "shoes, stockings, gloves, [and] underwear" (21), asks only for Nin's perfume to evoke memories and the rose dress Nin wore on their first meeting. The gifts' exchange value dissolves away into the more intimate value of a private token. June possesses them only to commemorate their psychic union. The two women
fetishize each other's possessions as metonymical representations of the whole woman they each desire.

In this relationship with June, Nin suffers a conflict similar in nature to the woman/writer dichotomy she experiences. Nin knows that she desires June, but identifies her desire as masculine. The notion of desire for a female seems strange, but on some level very natural, to her: "I have wanted to possess her as if I were a man, but I have also wanted her to love me with the eyes, the hands, the senses that only women have. It is a soft and subtle penetration" (18). Nin makes the distinction between union with a man and union with a woman the same way she separates the language of man and woman. Nin images physical communion with June, and language, as refracted essences of the body and the senses, and a penetration of the imagination rather than of the womb: "When she smelled my handkerchief, she inhaled me. When I clothed her beauty, I possessed her" (25). In this state of flowing relativity and boundless desire, even gender definitions become blurred. The two women shift in and out of masculine and feminine roles. Once June plays the male role. June comments to Nin: "'The other night...I was hurt to hear your name mentioned in Montparnasse. I don't want to see cheap men crawl into your life. I feel rather...protective.'" Nin then remarks on what she perceives as June's "strange, manlike strength" (17).
Later, when the two women go shopping together, their roles reverse: "I held June's hand firmly. I commandeered the shop. I was the man" (24). At one point, Nin wants to lay her "blood" like a heroic sacrifice at the feet of June's "beauty" and "incredible humility" (24). Nin and June shift in and out of these roles with ease, opposing and unopposing.

Throughout their courtship, Nin feels her identity soaking into June like dye into white cloth. But as Nin and June become closer, other boundaries, especially those that separate their personal identities, become blurred and the appearance of their individuality dissolves away in Nin's perception: "she will add the sum of me to her. She will be June plus all that I contain" (19). The absence of a center Nin perceived in June initially now manifests itself more fully. Their identities enmesh through their like minds and through the symbols of their courtship: "We have both lost ourselves...You are like me...We are overwhelmed" (24). Nin grows to perceive June as a being who does not really exist at all outside of the imagination. In fact, June does not exist other than in what Nin herself creates: "There is no June, only an image, invented" (47). In this sense, June is a tabula rasa, a blank page on which Nin can (re)create her. But June also seems to act as a reflective mirror into which Nin gazes with narcissistic infatuation. Ultimately, Nin realizes that she and June could become the
same person: "'When we were together June said, 'You will invent what we will do together.' I was ready to give her everything I have ever...created, from my house, my costumes, my jewelry to my writing, my imaginings, my life" (48). But by becoming June, Nin would be banished to the world of the Imaginary where there is no flow of signifying chains of meaning. Nin would be unable to write because she would be outside the system that houses language.

Soon, Nin begins to fear the love she feels for the self she creates in June. As she speaks of June in her diary, Nin creates the woman about whom she writes. When June enters into Nin’s life, she produces not only a text in which she creates June as a character, but she also creates her own image in the form of the text itself. Nin feels a strong desire for June, but sensing her desire is more for her own image of June rather than for June as an other, she identifies her desire as narcissistic and destructive: "I am so filled with my love of her. And at the same time I feel that I am dying. Our love would be death. The embrace of imaginings" (21). The "death" Nin glimpses in her relationship with June, a death which is at once seductive and terrifying, would occur with a complete inward turning onto June, in which Nin would waste away in narcissistic self-contemplation of her own ego¹, in Lacanian terms, in an excess of jouissance²: "We have absorbed our egocentric selves into our love. Our love is our ego" (27). Nin’s
psyche collapses in on itself, focusing, as Ragland suggests, on an object of desire that is not other from herself, a "petit a that is neither inside nor outside" ("Lacan" 6). Nin is "imprisoned within elemental hallucinations, [and]...a metaphorical state of 'death'" ("Lacan's Theories" 8). In such a state, the need to write, to create, does not exist. No written language exists in a state that does not require signification, and Nin experiences a symbiotic wholeness with the Other, as if in death or in the womb. Nin concludes that "love between women is a refuge and an escape into harmony" (33). An escape into June's world means leaving writing--language--behind: "Such love is death" (33). In the love between man and woman "there is resistance and conflict" (33), but language can find an impetus to assert itself because the love, the desire to create, remains forever unsatisfied.

During the height of her struggle against her own desire for both Henry and June, Nin has a waking dream, one that haunts her for a while:

I felt a terrifying oppression, as if I had crawled into a hole and were stifling. I remembered many dreams I have had of being forced to crawl on my stomach, like a snake, through tunnels and apertures that were too small for me, the last one always smaller than all the others, where the anxiety grew so strong that it awakened
The smallest aperture in which Nin finds herself in this dream represents the zero point, the potential death of her identity. The dream springs from her unconscious and the narcissism that has taken root there.

The image of this dream, this labyrinthine cavern of "tunnels and apertures" in Nin's mind, becomes the path by which Nin escapes her narcissism. She "proceed[s] from the dream outward" (Nin 261) to effect her psychic separation from June in via the construction of the prose poem, *House of Incest* wherein she spells out the predicament:

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

(29)

The suffocating structure Nin dreams represents the structure of incestuous desire surrounding June and Nin. Nin qualifies her relationship with June as incestuous as she explains in the poem: "If only we could all escape from this house of incest, where we only love ourselves in the other" (70). In a sense, the desire feels like incest with oneself, a terrifying sensation for one searching for individuality, fearing "the prospect of endless self-duplication" in her infatuation of her mirror image (Scholar 79). In *House of Incest* Nin and June (embodied in the
character Sabina) walk through the dream labyrinth together. They are trapped, but they know that they must pass through the smallest aperture, in essence, pass through the zero point of the Imaginary, to escape back to the Symbolic realm. But as with the death drive, the notion fills them with both fear and desire:

We could not believe that the tunnel would open on daylight: we feared to be trapped into darkness again; we feared to return whence we had come... The tunnel would narrow and taper down as we walked; it would close around us, and close tighter and tighter around us and stifle us. It would grow heavy and narrow and suffocate us as we walked... Yet we knew that beyond the house of incest there was daylight. (Nin, *House of Incest* 70)

In the prose poem, neither women, as characters, escape the house of incest, but Nin as writer, in the very act of creating the structure in language, does. In *House of Incest*, Nin separates June from herself by inscribing June within the boundaries of language and creates even further distance by figuring her as the character Sabina.

In June, Nin finds a blank page, a *tabula rasa* on which to project herself. She discovers herself, or more precisely, her own voice, by looking onto the reflective surface of June. The narcissism springs from Nin's focus on
June as an Imaginary being, whereas when Nin focuses on creating June in language, she breaks free from narcissistic contemplation, separating June from herself through written language. Lacan tells us that "the word kills the thing" ("Lacan, the Death Drive" 8), meaning that the representation of June in an order of signification creates an image of June in the symbolic, where the self and the other are separate, and June is forced to be separate and distinct from the image of herself.

At the end of House of Incest, a dancer appears, a "woman without arms" who, appropriately in this House of Incest, dances "all for herself" (71). Because she is without arms, she cannot grasp or enclose anything, cannot "clutch at the lovely moments of life" (71). The dancer is symbolic both of Nin's dilemma with her own narcissism and her inability to separate herself from her experiences. But the dancer dances "towards daylight" (72)--what we could see as the actual end of the poem itself--its closure in text. Nin's enclosure of the whole structure of incestuous desire in the poetic form represents "a symbolic acceptance for all the inhabitants" of the House of Incest and "separations... resolving the narcissistic dilemma in abstract form" (Scholar) 89.

Nin rejects June just to the extent that she may preserve her identity as writer, for a writer must dwell at least in part in the realm of the Symbolic in order to
implement language. Nin has "a feeling against complete chaos." She wants to "live with June in utter madness, but...also want[s] to be able to understand afterwards, to grasp what [she has] lived through" (Henry and June 44). She affords herself the possibility of a return to the unconscious, but also feels the necessity of resurfacing in the realm of reason and order, so that she may linguistically organize and reflect upon her experiences.

When Nin rejects Henry, she retreats not from Henry the man but from what Henry represents in language--a constraining, too-conscious realism. Nin turns inward onto herself via June, "the only woman who ever answered the demands of [her] imagination" (16), and discovers a place of total self-contemplation. There, Nin glimpses the death of her creativity and steps back to objectify June through language; her desire for language overcomes her desire for June. But Nin does not return to "reality" empty handed. In works like House of Incest, which springs from this first voyage into the unconscious, Nin blazes a trail for future voyages of the same nature, opening psychic paths in her own mind by way of which the power of Imaginary perception can subvert the Symbolic order, creating her own kind of l’écriture féminine. Nin’s writing, then "disrupt[s] conventional narrative" through the "nonlinear, polyphonic, open-ended" form of both her diaries and other works, "subvert[ing] hegemonic forms," like Henry Miller’s staunch
realism, "and aris[ing]...out of the...primary processes" of the Imaginary (Friedman & Fuchs 4).
Endnotes

1. See Ellie Ragland’s book, *Essays on the Pleasures of Death: From Freud to Lacan*, especially chapters two and three. Ragland discusses the double-edged nature of the death drive, which, as an excess of *jouissance*, leads us to be "caught in the paradox of loving what we are even if our *jouissance* kills us" ("Lacan" 17).

2. In Julia Kristeva’s book, *Desire in Language*, the term *jouissance* is defined as enjoyment that is "sexual, spiritual, physical, [and] conceptual at one and the same time" (16). It is a "total joy or ecstatic" (16) that goes beyond the boundaries of signified meaning.
Chapter 2: A Woman's Erotica:
The Desire of the Mother

If the passivity of women is going to erupt like a volcano or an earthquake, it will not accomplish anything but disaster. This passivity can be converted to creative will...To become a man, or like a man, is no solution.

--Anais Nin, In Favor of the Sensitive Man

In women there is always more or less of the mother who makes everything all right, who nourishes, and who stands up against separation; a force that will not be cut off but will knock the wind out of the codes.

--Helene Cixous, The Laugh of the Medusa

The womb endures as a metaphor for the locus of human creativity, primarily writing. In "Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor," Susan Stanford Friedman examines the pervasive usage of the womb as a metaphoric locus for creativity and (re)production as the metaphor for the production of text. Friedman also discusses how both men and women writers use this metaphor, "writers as disparate as Philip Sidney and Erica Jong, William Shakespeare and Mary Shelley, Alexander Pope and Denise Levertov" (371). Anais Nin closely connects, even conflates, creation with procreation, the pregnant imagination with the pregnant
body, in her own writing:

The art of woman must be torn in the womb-cells of the mind...woman’s creations 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 with her own milk. (Diary, 1934-1939 235)

In Henry and June, Nin’s statements conflict with the particularly masculine sensibility of Henry Miller. Nin closely connects his penetration of her during sex with words that attempt to encroach on her awareness yet remain inadequate as a means to express her perceptions:

The core of my being is touched by a body which overpowers mine, inundates mine, which twists its flamed tongue inside of me with such power. He cries, "Tell me, tell me what you feel." And I cannot. ...Words are drowned. I want to scream savagely, wordlessly--inarticulate cries, without sense, from the most primitive basis of my self, gushing from my womb like honey. (82)

Nin conflates the mouth and womb, and the penetrating tongue (language) incites her to speak, but Nin’s instinct, laid bare in the intensity of the erotic moment, is to cry out from the womb. This "savage, primitive basis of [her] self" has no language, residing outside of the linguistic realm.
and the power of articulation that Henry, calling to her from the Symbolic, demands.

Nin’s metaphoric perception of the feminine power of creation/language runs parallel to that of the French feminist Helene Cixous who also reacts to a masculine formulation of language in "The Laugh of the Medusa," where she expresses the belief that "women must write through their bodies" (342). Cixous equates the gestation drive with the desire to write with "the desire to live the self from within, a desire for the swollen belly, for language, for blood" (346). According to Lacan, the phallus is the symbol of power that presides over the Symbolic Order and language. However, as Luce Irigaray points out, a woman "appropriate[s] that organ for herself" in the act of writing (This Sex Which is Not One 350), "masquerading" as the masculine to achieve the power of language. Lacan tells us that in fact "masquerade is the very definition of 'femininity' precisely because it is constructed with reference to a male sign" (Feminine Sexuality 43). And as Irigaray observes, the inherently masculine metaphor of penis/phallus for creativity privileged in the symbolic system remains "quite foreign" to the feminine (This Sex 350), both in terms of tenor and vehicle. The whole other contingency of human consciousness, the feminine, is left without representation, apart from its function as a negative or a "not all" in the symbolic order. According to
Lacan, "the woman's sexuality is inseparable from the representations through which it is produced (images and symbols for the woman cannot be isolated from images and symbols of the woman)" (Feminine Sexuality 43).

With the feminine relegated to a place always/already outside of the symbolic system, woman seems barred from the ability to use language--to signify--unless she appropriates for herself the masculine implement of power. To complicate matters even further, the notion of appropriation itself, according to Anne Rosalind Jones, runs against the female grain, for woman possesses "a peculiarly female attentiveness to objects, the ability to perceive and represent them in a nurturing rather than dominating way."

The "typically feminine gesture, not culturally but libidinally, [is] to produce in order to bring about life" (Jones 360) rather than to conquer, rend or limit. Cixous may concede that the womb represents an image both of and for woman, and that woman in the act of writing creates from a symbolic womb which parallels the physical creation of a child. Nin also subscribes to this idea. In her short piece "The Labyrinth," she describes her diary as a "paper womb" and equates woman's writing with "all that happens in the real womb, not in the womb fabricated by man as a substitute" (quoted in Scholar 41). Nin suggests that where male writers may appropriate the womb as a metaphor for their artistic creation (which in effect is just a re-naming
of the phallus), women have a much more real relation to the womb construct that is "directly connected with woman's life experiences" (41).

Nin strives in her writing to achieve a balance among all the drives that make up her inner psyche. She uses the metaphor of the womb as the source of creativity to unify within her own writing the stereotypically "male" division between mind and body, choosing instead to connect creation with procreation, to meld the pregnant imagination with the pregnant body. Furthermore, she tries to strike a balance between the maternal and the libidinal, between the mothering instinct and erotic desire.

But again, as with language, Nin senses that the feminine erotic remains outside of the phallogocentric system that speaks of it as a negative or as something "beyond." When she compares male erotica with her own, she finds a "great disparity between [his] explicitness and [her] ambiguities" (Delta of Venus xv). Discontent with male erotica as a whole, Nin finds, as she does with Henry Miller's writing, that it omits the imagination and depth perception of female erotic experience, reducing everything to mechanical acts. In her introduction to Delta of Venus, she expresses her own need for a different set of metaphors, even a different language, for the female erotic:

I was...conscious of a difference between the masculine and feminine treatment of sexual
experience...I had a feeling that Pandora's box contained the mysteries of women's sensuality, so different from man's and for which man's language was inadequate. (xv)

Pandora's box serves as a particularly powerful means to evoke the Womb--the closed box that, when opened, releases chaos upon an "ordered" world.¹

Stereotypically, male erotica centers around the gaze, a narcissistic gaze upon one's own phallus, which turns outward upon an other who becomes the object of desire. Male scopophilia defines sexual pleasure in gazing upon the female form, but is undermined by the male subject's "horror" that in the symbolic there is, in fact "nothing to see" (Irigaray 352). Woman, as erotic object in this system, is therefore highly problematic because while she is the other, she is essentially a non-object. As Jacqueline Rose points out in the second Introduction to Lacan's Feminine Sexuality, "the question of what a woman is...always stalls on the crucial acknowledgment that there is absolutely no guarantee that she is at all" (43).

Woman's erotica cannot fit into a symbolic order in which she, as an object, is actually a non-object. Furthermore, the masculine erotic gaze characteristically requires a distance between subject and object. This distance forecloses the possibility of tactile, visceral interaction which characterizes the feminine erotic. Lacan tells us
that the woman is implicated in the masculine erotic by necessity, but she is not a perfect complement to male scopophilia. It is still "elsewhere that she upholds the question of her own jouissance"--her own eroticism (Feminine Sexuality 51). Consequently, this erotic gaze renders female sexuality inactive. Always/already outside of the symbolic system, a woman's eroticism, just like her creativity, revolves around elements that exist outside of the symbolic system. Thus, in formulating her erotic, Nin rejects the male formulation and traverses the boundaries of the phallocentric order with ease because, as a woman, she is not contained within a phallocentric system.

Instead of writing from a scientifically sterile point of view, (as the original male subscriber to the Delta of Venus erotica wished her to do), Nin uses a language in her own diary that "never separate[s] sex from feelings, from love of the whole" (Delta xvi). She thinks it wrong to conceive sex as devoid of "emotion, hunger...personal ties [and] deeper relationships" (Delta xiv), all aspects tied to the primary sexual emotion for Nin--love. Nin explores avenues of erotica for women, eluding the compromise imposed on female sexual identity in men's erotic writing, asserting total control over how she is represented as erotic subject, and placing herself in terms she finds both desirable and appropriate. The auto-eroticism of Nin's diary, a manifestation of her (artistic) Womb, is singularly feminine
and non-objective because through it, to borrow Luce Irigaray’s terms, Nin "touches herself in and of herself without any need for mediation, and before there is any way to distinguish activity from passivity" (This Sex 350).

In Henry and June, Henry becomes an interloper into Nin’s womb both on creative (artistic, imaginative) and physical levels. As Nin and Henry’s sexual relationship intensifies, Henry sexualizes Nin not only by "grounding her in the physical," but also by stressing eroticism on the level of words, of talk rather than sensation, leading her away from the imaginative, narcissistic self-enclosure of her diary.

In response to her first encounters with Henry, Nin portrays him as an aggressive animal and sees herself as his (willing) quarry: "He bites my ears and kisses me, and I like his fierceness. He throws me on the couch for a moment but somehow I escape" (7). Henry’s raw animal nature arouses both Nin’s body and curiosity, but she simultaneously registers an awareness of his masculinity as an intrusion into her own world. His "desire," represented by his penis, functions as the symbol of this violent and threatening intrusion: "...his desire, pointing at me, is like a sword between us" (7). There occurs a telling moment in one of their early encounters when Henry, now grown more bold, attempts to intrude on Nin in a way that is a profound violation on a symbolic as well as physically intimate
level--a symbolic violation Nin feels with near-physical pain:

I tell the truth: woman's trouble. That does not seem to deter him. "You don't think I want that mechanical way--there are other ways." He sits up and uncovers his penis. I don't understand what he wants. He makes me get down on my knees. He offers it to my mouth. I get up as if struck by a whip. (9)

Nin's strong reaction to the idea of letting Henry literally shove his "desire" down her throat, silencing her, suggests that while Nin would admit him into her physical womb, she cannot, on a symbolic level, admit him into the locus of her voice. Henry's actions have repercussions on a deeper, symbolic level. He acts out a symbolic system intruding upon a feminine source of creativity, the "womb-cells of the mind," (Diary, 1934-1939 235) and alienating her from her own jouissance.

Feminine jouissance exists somewhere beyond the order of language. Henry, by way of his words arrests the (over)flow of sensual emotion that inundates Nin during the erotic experience. Henry attempts to put his words into Nin's mouth, grounding her in the symbolic realm of language, as he grounds her in the physical with his body. It is worth pausing here to note that Henry's "violations" of Nin are not totally that--the pleasure with which Nin
receives Henry has to be acknowledged. Henry's phallic language, the "weight and lashing of his writing" (46), paralleling his penis which also "lashes" her, becomes an object of desire for Nin. She is attracted to his language as petit a, containing a sexual energy that serves as a temporary source of satisfaction of her sexual needs.

However, Nin wishes to accept Henry erotically on her own terms, defined by her own body and eroticism, not his. In order to assert dominance in the sexual dynamic, Henry keeps the erotic on the side of the Symbolic, eroticizing the Word, the signifier. His words block the flow of her sensual perception even more effectively than the unenduring penis, and through the Logos, Henry attempts sexual control of Nin. Nin struggles to accommodate the phallocism of Henry both on a physical and psychic level in their erotic relationship. Henry must penetrate on the level of the psyche: "Henry's words press in on me...I taste that violence with my mouth, with my womb" (53). Nin finds an intense eroticism in Henry's language, which has the dual effect of pressing in on her source of language and touching her erotically. In Irigaray's terms, Henry's force which manifests itself through his sexuality and phallic language, "supplants, while separating and dividing that contact" of the (physical, creative) womb with itself "which keeps [Nin] in touch with herself" (Irigaray 352). Hence, Nin begins to fear a break in the flow of her journal, in the
manifestation of her artistic womb-cells: “My journal writing breaks down, because it was an intimacy with myself. Now it is interrupted constantly by Henry’s voice, his hand on my knee” (148).

Although Henry invades the womb, he does not succeed in rending it, destroying it or becoming, as Irigaray might suggest, “an intrusion that distracts and deflects her from this ‘self-caressing’” in the singularly personal form of the diary (Irigaray 351). Henry enters the womb, but by perceiving the erotic through the identity of a mother, Nin empowers herself to take Henry into the womb as a child rather than violating penis, to nurture, surround, feed and ultimately control. Nin, by way of imaginative perception, checks the symbolic interruption, absorbing Henry into her creative Womb as she does into her physical womb. Nin’s erotic desire for Henry is two-fold and inherently conflicting in nature. Almost from the very beginning of their relationship, she sees a soft and vulnerable man on one hand and a forceful, and virtually bestial one on the other. Henry’s child-like qualities kindle very strong maternal instincts in Nin, while the latter aspects arouse Nin at the very core of her erotic being.

As Nin grows accustomed to Henry’s strong physical presence and finds that she can accommodate his desire sexually, she begins to see Henry’s sexual drive—and its manifestation in his penis—as something beyond even his
control. She, on the other hand, has a sense of control over her own body, and pities Henry for his apparent lack of control in his expression of desire for her. For Nin, the intruding penis loses its menacing qualities and becomes more of an awkward impediment of the male species: "When I see that I have let him be aroused, it seems natural to let him release his desire between my legs. I just let him, out of pity...He understands my pity for his ridiculous, humiliating physical necessity" (9-10). Swiftly shifting away from the eroticism of predator-prey roles, both Henry and Nin begin to sense that she has become the accommodator, an object of desire who controls her subject. The pity Nin feels for what she now sees in Henry as physical weakness heralds the maternal feelings which she soon begins to develop for him.

After Nin shifts her perspective of Henry's desire as a phallic force wielding a sword-like threat to an object of pity, she fully and willingly accommodates Henry's physical weakness, and this sense of accommodation redefines her self-image as lover: "Men need other things besides a sexual recipient. They have to be soothed, lulled, understood, helped, encouraged, and listened to" (11), in a word, mothered. She perceives her relationship with Henry as that of a mother and child. She comments on his "soft white hands" and a "head, which looks too heavy for his body" (52-53) and when she couples with him, she "lose[s]
the sense of separate beings" (76), as a mother with child, experiencing a unity of male and female only found in the pre-Oedipal realm. Nin’s maternal instincts do not kill all the emotion she feels toward Henry, but simply transform it from surface sexual desire into maternal tenderness, attentiveness and compassion: "What I could have found ridiculous only touched me with its humanness...When I saw him naked, he appeared defenseless to me, and my tenderness welled up" (64).

As a result of her maternal instinct toward Henry, he ceases to have erotic power over her. While Nin’s physical womb encompasses Henry, her creative Womb envelops him completely as a child she creates in her writing, no longer vulnerable to influences by Henry’s will. Surrounded by the womb-like bower of Louveciennes, "petal-lined...golden, with walls of new-born leaves, blossoms...hoary ivy, mistletoe" (148), the "right and fitting" environment (60) for Nin’s nurturing sensibilities, her writing flourishes and Nin (re)produces Henry in her own journal: "I will fill it with Henry. The journal... will be filled with Henry" (148). Nin internalizes the protective, nest-like surroundings of her home into her journal, where Nin may in essence carry Henry in her journal, as if pregnant with him, (re)creating him as her child. As it happens, the love Nin feels for Henry is now so steeped in the maternal that she can find "no other way of loving...Henry than filling pages with him
when he is not here" (149). Her love is constituted by her mothering of him--of holding him inside of the narrative womb.

But the question remains, what happens to the erotic when it is so fused with maternal desire? Can a mother, on the level of eroticism/desire be satisfied by a child? We can say that Nin's eroticism is very closely tied to the maternal, but once she effectively creates Henry as a child, she begins to direct her erotic desires elsewhere, with the same intensity with which she used to desire Henry:

Beautiful women and handsome men arouse fierce desires in me...I want to bite into life, and to be torn by it...What Henry is tired of, I am hungry for, with a brand new, fresh, vigorous hunger. (179-180)

Soon after Nin records this in her diary, Henry experiences impotence for the first time in their relationship. By passively absorbing his masculine force and (re)creating it into a child, Nin escapes the intrusion of Henry's subjectivity and becomes "strong, sure of [her] actions, refusing to be impressed by others" (185) and able to portray herself, both in her erotic life and in her journal, according to her own impulses.

As Nin's physical and creative wombs are so closely linked in her psyche, the ability to write the erotic experience is almost the same as creating it on a physical
level. Nin takes control of erotic language, wresting it from the paternal symbolic to create her own, albeit problematic, erotica from the maternal womb. This adds new, deeper dimensions to the traditional construct of erotica, giving the erotic a shape that appeals more to a feminine sensibility in line with theories of *l'écriture feminine*. Nin turns the erotic inward, to the primal drives, creative instincts, and complicated relationships between people. Nin's identity as erotic subject is powerful, loving, multilayered and creative. Through it, Nin expresses "a restlessness at what [she] terms the enforced passivity of women" (176), and creates an erotic that derives its power from an active passivity, an ability to accommodate, absorb and appropriate the force that penetrates it.
1. According to the myth, Pandora was a beautiful woman to whom Zeus gave a box containing all the ills of humanity. When she, out of curiosity, opened the box, all the evils escaped out into the world. In Woman and the Demon, Nina Auerbach identifies Pandora as a woman of great power: "Pandora...has the power to effect a dark transformation that injects an innocent world with evil" (48). This myth goes hand in hand with the myth of Eve, another woman driven by curiosity to loose chaos onto the world of men, while also being the mother of all humanity.
Chapter 3: Shattering the Mirror: Subjective Reality in *Ladders to Fire*

What may seem unreal or invented in my writing is the natural outcome of dramatizing the conflict between the conscious and unconscious self. What we are accustomed to accepting as familiar is the external appearance of reality. The external story is what I consider unreal.

---Anais Nin, *The Novel of the Future*

One of the primary issues Nin wrestles with continually throughout her diary is fictional realism versus reality. Nin’s perception never falls within the bounds of traditional "realism" and she struggles to define an image of reality as one which embraces both the objective and subjective. Nin carries this narrative technique over into her fiction, arguing that her ideas about the novel (the word literally means "something new"), exists in a constant state of becoming—running parallel to more modern conceptions of reality.

Nin believes that only in synthesis of the external and internal can one really achieve an accurate rendering of reality. She takes significant steps towards such a
synthesis by focusing on the "emotional reality perceived via the senses" (Deduck 51), as depicted in her continuous novel, Cities of the Interior. Nin sees the overflowing, spontaneous functioning of the mind as reality's genesis: "...the dream is the key, the source, the birthplace of our most authentic self" (Deduck 120). Nin perceives Cities of the Interior a much more accurate metaphor for reality, a much more qualifiable "realism": "Man is not a finite, static, crystallized unity. He is fluid, in a constant state of flux, evolution, action and reaction, negative and positive" (Novel of the Future 193). In Cities of the Interior, reality is not only constantly being created, but it also exists on multiple, synchronic levels. In addition, Nin perceives a traditionally "realistic" novel form with a beginning, middle and ending as having no basis in reality. She did not "finish" her novels because many issues in her own life were not yet, nor ever could be resolved, so to "resolve" them in her fiction felt like an incompleteness: "Perhaps a novelist is through with a character when he is finished with his novel. I was not" (Novel 161). Ladders to Fire, the first novelette in her continuous novel, serves both as an introduction to its central characters, Lillian, Djuna, Sabina, and Jay, who reappear throughout Cities of the Interior, and as a rendition in microcosm of the world as a whole. Like the rest of Cities of the Interior, Ladders to Fire flows
virtually unbroken, without page numbers or chapter divisions.²

The first half of Ladders to Fire culminates with a music concert in which Lillian, the main character, plays a piano concert, giving full expression to her inner turmoil, "heavy with unspent forces" (72). This particular moment in the narrative contains the image of the mirrored garden that is central to Ladders to Fire because it illustrates the perceptual limitations of all the novel's characters. The mirrored garden acts as a metaphor for Nin's sense of the "real" and serves as an illustration of her overall aesthetic form.

We see the garden through the eyes of the character Djuna,³ who Nin positions in a liminal place between Lillian's conservatory and the garden beyond, between the realm of art and nature. The conservatory houses artificial nature wherein the women, perfumed and costumed, resemble "a hothouse exhibit" (71). On one level these women emulate nature, but their presence also augments artifice, for they are "candied in perfume, conserved in cosmetics" where "all the violence of naked truths has evaporated" (73).

In contrast to this contrived scene, the garden beyond emits "an air of nudity" with "all the truth of...the moisture, and the worms, the insects and the roots, the running sap and the rotting bark" (73-74). It represents a natural eden, with earth, air, and water, renewal and decay,
the beautiful and the grotesque inhabiting the same space. It is a chaos in which opposites exist side by side. In his essay "Anais Nin’s 'Quest for Order,'" Paul Grimley Kuntz sees her "both-and" structure of nature as an "order" which is "vital, organic, the order of flowing processes, and not the mechanical order reflected in the regular ticking of a clock with its hands that sweep the circle without reference to events or feeling" (205).

But in this garden, mirrors have been situated "among the bushes and flowers as casually as in a boudoir" (74). They are there to reflect the garden, so that one can observe the garden without actually looking at it. This suggests that Lillian, (and perhaps the artificial, static concert goers), cannot bear the naked truth nature evokes. She thus imposes constraints upon it by framing the garden within the boundaries of a reflective surface, alien to the garden itself, representing cold, removed observation. The mirrors attenuate the sensual impact of the garden, so that people who gaze into the mirrors are insulated from the truth and revelation the garden offers in itself. The mirror reflects only that which Lillian dares to see.

The mirror in the garden is metaphor for Lillian's fear of her own excessive, chaotic nature. The mirror orders and limits the extent of her identity, reflecting an illusion of self-imposed order. Fear of nature, nature in chaotic excess, haunts Lillian because she fears the possibility
that she is more than the simply "complete" image the mirror gives her. If we equate the mirror with the symbolic order, Lillian fears the possibility of her own jouissance. If she looked beyond the mirror, beyond the symbolic, she would see the structurality of the structure which binds her. She is unable to face the reality of her imprisonment and learn to transcend it—to get in touch with her own excess.

As Djuna contemplates the conservatory and garden, she understands the source of Lillian's torture (though not her own). If Lillian were brave enough to face nature on its own terms, she could free herself from the torment she harbors within; she would see the possibility of reconciliation between conflicting natures, the erotic and maternal, masculine and feminine, aggressive and passive. But in this world of artifice, Lillian, like the other characters in Ladders to Fire, operates as one of "the humiliated, the defeated, the oppressed, the enslaved" (74) whose "misused and twisted strength" (74) remains bound and repressed by an imposed objectivity. To "mask the presence of that which [one] fears (nature in himself)," only leads to deformed or destructive eruptions," just as Lillian "plays the piano with too much strength" (Novel 48). Her unexpressed emotions burst through the surface of the controlled symbolic order with non-verbal, emotional bursts of music.

Nin wishes to depict her characters' psychological
reality, where each is trapped within his or her own subjectivity and unable to come together in relationships because none can reconcile inner with external reality: "Lillian is violent and cannot free herself by action because she has no awareness, Djuna becomes bound by her understanding and cannot rebel, Sabina seeks to act out her fantasies and is caught in a web of multiplicity" (Novel, 68). Jay works as a pivotal character around whom the women revolve and against whose character their own is illuminated. Nin juxtaposes characters against one another to illustrate what she calls "the law of relativity" (Novel 64), according to which a person's identity, far from being static in every situation, changes according to their position in relation to others. In a Lacanian framework, one's subjectivity is only defined by an other. Similarly, Nin explores "the contrast in behavior of the same character toward many others, in intimacy, in contrast to behavior in the world" (Novel 64). Furthermore, she uses this relational definition of the characters to portray more accurately their psychological struggles with external reality.

As the main character of Ladders to Fire, Lillian embodies turbulence. Always in full movement, she exists in a constant state of intensity, leaping continually from point to point of heightened perception, "always poised on the pinnacle of a drama, a problem, a conflict. She seem[s]
to trapeze from one climax to another" (1). The composite images surrounding Lillian ascribe to her the symbol of earth, but a prehistoric earth, one "in constant fermentation" (1), in the process of becoming, still forming in cataclysmic, volcanic movement. Her incendiary nature consumes every object with which she comes in contact, everything "violently marshalled, challenged, forced to bloom, to cook, to boil" (1-2) around her. Lillian, like an explosion, stirs things up, incites movement, change and chaos, but destroys as she creates: "everywhere, after the storm of her appearance, there was emotional devastation" (2). She leaves a wake of scarred remains behind her. Chaos tortures her, and "like nature," her inner self swamps her, overtakes her, "suck[ing] her into miasmas, into hurricanes, into caverns of blind suffering" (16).

Yet in the center of this volcanic personality lies a cold, quiet void--her desire: "In the center of this turmoil [lay] the dream of a ghost lover, a pale, passive, romantic, anaemic figure garbed in grey and timidity. Out of the very volcano of her strength she gave birth to the most evanescent, delicate and unreachable image" (3). This ethereal image serves as the source of both Lillian's pain and desire. By "giving birth" to this "ghost lover," she creates her own pain out of the womb of her mind. In keeping with other of Nin's writings, including *Henry and June* in which she "births" Henry, the womb serves as both
the receptacle of desire and metaphoric locus of creative impetus. Gerard, Lillian's first lover, comes to embody pain and desire, existing as the void, the "extinct volcano" (4) into which Lillian endlessly pours her love. Passive and timid, Gerard remains under the control of his mother, who has already consumed him, and he fears the same consuming power in Lillian. Because of the resemblance between his mother and Lillian's nature, he rejects Lillian because "to possess Lillian was like possessing the mother, which was taboo" (5-6). Lillian's maternal reflex problematizes her love relationship.

Within the storm of conflict and doubt that plagues Lillian in her interactions with Gerard, Gerard himself is destroyed and Lillian's self-created illusions take his place: "...the real Gerard receded, faded, vanished and was reinstated as a dream image" (8). Turning her perception inward, Lillian recreates, even mythologizes Gerard as the "ghost lover" who initially lay dormant and incorporeal within her. As with the mirrored garden, Lillian ascribes a bounded, corporeal image to this core of emotion, and thus feels Gerard's absence with pain that does not only spring from ordinary heartbreak, but also from her deep, inner core of need to which she gave the name, Gerard.

In time, Lillian finds herself able to resume her power, becoming "again the warrior" (8), but this time with a force tainted by panic: "she felt so insecure about her
own value it became of vital importance to convince and win over everyone to her assertions" (8). Lillian exists on a self-created battlefield with her own fear as the enemy. She denies herself "all the sources of feminine pleasure: of being invaded, of being conquered" (9), repressing her emotional needs. Lillian's repressed and unsatisfied desires become a silent force that threatens to destroy her. In a particularly intense moment of anxiety, Lillian experiences an "asphyxiation of pain, the horror of torture whose cries no one hears" (10). What Lillian glimpses is the reality behind the structure of "reality" formed around her. What emerges is a desire that transcends the boundaries of the symbolic order and language. Like "a voiceless woman screaming in a nightmare" (11), she cannot utilize the strength she possesses, cannot assert a voice, a power, in a society in which her very nature is constrained.

Lillian's home manifests the "mysterious poison" of constraint that seeps into her mind. Her home, though touched by her own creative hands, does not belong to her, but to a patriarchal construct: "It suited her husband and her children. It was built for peace" (17). Lillian's explosive creativity holds no power here where the social constraints of wife, home, and family reign. She realizes that the "privileges" granted her as a woman, "the house, the complete family," (10) are themselves "subtler form[s] of torture" that "instill war where there was no apparent
war [and] torture where there was no sign of instruments" (10).

The threat Lillian feels flows as a steady undercurrent, a quiet, elusive distress that she cannot quite identify: "Larry is happy...The children are well. Then what can be the matter with me? How can anything by the matter with me if they are well?" (20). She feels like a stranger to them all, and because she feels so removed, she perceives the inhabitants of her house only as two dimensional, "not present and warm but actually a family album" (19), plastic images of perfect domestic happiness and peace. Nanny, the family maid, presides as the guardian angel over the fixed, sterile eden: "...she defended its interests, she hovered, reigned, watched, guarded tirelessly" (18). The serenity of the domestic scene leaves little chance for rebellion, but Lillian's quiet revolt is both characterized and sung by the cricket that lodges itself in the floorboards of her room and only sings when Lillian's clandestine lover is with her.

To Lillian, the total lack of any movement or creative outlet at home begins to resemble hell more than heaven. Her husband Larry talks about his wife as the static image of the person she was ten years ago. He dotes on that image and "delight[s] in reviving scenes out of the past" (21). Lillian's apprehension grows as the police discover a man next door living with the body of his wife, six-months dead,
lying stretched out on his bed with the "odor of death, the image of death...everywhere" (21). Just as this young man lives with his dead wife, Lillian’s husband lives with an image of her long since departed.

Within this deathly prison, Lillian’s unconscious revolt begins to manifest itself in her body. She becomes ill, poisoned by the "friction, lacerations and daily duels with her beloved jailers...the monotony of her prison...the poverty of the nourishment" (23). She feels empty, in Nin’s words, because she "cease[s] to take nourishment from the underground rivers of the psyche" (Novel 15), and her physical illness erupts as a physical manifestation of her alienation. When Lillian finally leaves her family, she does so in order to save her own life. For Lillian, her subterranean conflict is so overpowering that it renders the physical world a meaningless shell.

While Lillian resides in the world of stasis, she rebels against the constraint, but when confronted with chaos, she turns around and tries to delineate boundaries of meaning around herself, like the mirrored garden, creating physical symbols in an effort to construct psychological meaning. However, in this process, she loses her own identity, which exists somewhere beyond. When she meets Jay, a child-like, unfocused creature, her constructions become more elaborate. She wishes to escape the limitations of her domestic life, but in her desire for Jay, she only
trades one imposed identity for another.

Lillian structures her relationship with Jay on a model resembling that of the phallic mother-figure and child. Borrowing Jacqueline Rose's terms, Lillian's "maternal body becomes the receptacle of the drives [of] the child" Jay (Feminine Sexuality 37). Jay lives by luck and sensuality, playing in the world with the abandon that springs from feeling his "mother," Lillian, close at hand. He lives purely for the sensual, "evad[ing] rehearsals, strain, fatigue, effort" (48-49). Jay depends upon Lillian to keep his life together, and as she sews and mends Jay's clothing, she makes a tapestry from the fragments of time they spend together. In effect, she sews her and Jay together. She binds the whole relationship, "sewing together little proofs of his devotion out of which to make a garment for her tattered love and faith" (52). While Jay continually harms their relationship through his capriciousness, Lillian follows behind him tirelessly mending it "that he might keep some of their days together" (52).

In this relationship, just as in her relationship with Gerard, Lillian plays the active role, always in movement and activity, while the object of her desire grows ever weaker in proportion to her exertion. Lillian works like a devoted mother to the selfish child, as "the panoply on which he [rests]" (53). His helplessness makes him the "homme fatale" (53) for a woman who feels compelled to
mother, who cannot find any other way to love him than to mend his clothing and life continually.

Contemplating her husband Larry in retrospect, Lillian wonders why she could not love him, and yet continues to feel a profound attachment to Jay. Larry "stood erect and self-sufficient, and manly" (54) while Jay is weak: "a man who limps and whom one instinctively wishes to sustain" (54). Because Larry did not need Lillian, he did not call out to the mother in her; he did not arouse her love. While Larry made love to her to be satisfied, "renewed," Jay comes as if to be reborn, creating the same sense of fullness and oneness in Lillian "she had with her child" (55). Jay gives Lillian the present moment—the sensuality of the now where no death lurks, the "moment of utter and absolute tasting of food, of color, [the] moment of human breathing" (55). The erotic and the maternal meld together in Lillian's feelings for Jay, and it is precisely the encroaching of the maternal instincts upon Lillian's desire that makes Jay affect her so profoundly. Jay penetrates her womb "not only as a lover; not merely to satisfy his desire but to remain within her" (55).

In this way, Lillian's maternal feelings for Jay spill into the erotic, reaching nearly orgasmic proportions. She feels a passion that, "annihilating desire and becoming desire," (50) sends her into "waves of passion," an intoxication. She abandons herself to Jay's self-
abandonment and confuses sexual feeling with being needed. However, Lillian soon realizes she mistakes sex and physical warmth for love: "His voice was warm like the voice of feeling...one might think it was love. But it was just a physical warmth, like the summer. It gave off heat like a chemical, but no more" (120)--the artifice of love with no real substance. But she does not come to this realization before Jay has dissolved a great part of her identity, and she has grown totally dependent upon him.

Jay’s sensuality touches Lillian singularly, and he works on her like a drug: "His presence took all the straining and willing out of Lillian...melting and softening, bearing joy and abundance" (47). Jay somehow possesses the power to control his participation in the world, leaving the scene "as soon as the pleasure vanish[es] and reality begins" (49). Jay often pulls Lillian into the chaos with him. Sitting at a cafe with him, Lillian experiences a sense of oneness, of boundless perception. The wine she drinks pours "down the throat of the world" and the street on which they sit seems like "a field washed by a river." Lillian senses a primality in the celebrating students who surround them "like savages dancing around a stake" (79).

Lillian soon realizes that Jay does not set her free. The sensual chaos Lillian experiences when she spends time with Jay is simply a vicarious perception. When she sits in
the same cafe alone, she is aware of previously unnoticed, sobering delineations in the scene around her: "The street is separated from the restaurant by little green bushes she had not noted before...Everything now happens outside, and not within her own body. Everything is distant and separate" (80). Lillian initially believed that Jay would set her sense of perception free, but instead he entraps it. She now depends upon him like an "iron lung," (80) without which she cannot survive. Lillian, "thrown into the life of Jay...,[does] not acquire freedom within herself. It simply [makes] her overdependent on the person who gave her this "freedom" (Novel, 74). It seems that while Jay has the ability to gaze at the chaos of the garden, Lillian can only see a second-hand reflection of the world through him.

But Jay himself does not remain free of boundaries on his perception. In his own way, he is just as entrapped as Lillian. Faustin, Jay’s nemesis and symbolic opposite who speaks through "a rigid mask of sorrows," incites Jay to exert a more rational control over his life. Faustin says that chaos, or embracing that which one accepts as chaos creates a construct in itself: "...yours is no real freedom but an illusion of freedom, or perhaps just rebellion. Chaos turns out to be the greatest trap of all in which you’ll find yourself more securely imprisoned than anyone" (77). Faustin, in this way, sees not just what the mirrors reflect but the mirrors themselves, knowing that what Jay
accepts for naked truth, the chaos of real, natural being, is only seen through the mist of his imagination. Chaos comprises a construct in which he moves: "He felt that any attempt at understanding [was] a threat to the flow of life, to his enjoyment. As if understanding would threaten the tumultuous current" (78). Jay caroms away from the boundaries of his own constructed "chaos."

The images Jay paints and his perception of the world melt together, "issuing from one to fall into the other," standing "now with, now without, frames" (96). Jay perceives a disturbing resemblance between his art and life. As he walks through the city he sees blind old men, half-men on rolling boards propelled by their hands and those with "iron bars on their hearts and stones on their feet carrying the balls and chains of their obsessions" (96). The artist paints what is already there, making it more compelling through paint but still only "keep[ing] accounts" of the brutality exchanged between people (98). In this section, as Sharon Spencer points out in Collage of Dreams, Nin "alludes to the unsatisfying distortions of the single point of view in art...He has captured the only part of...nature to which he can feel related. Jay uses 'the violent colors of reality'" (92). His creations possess the chaotic, magnificent violence of nature, but he replaces animals and plants with human beings: "Fear became muscular twistings like the tangled roots of trees...The entire drama took
place at times in stagnant marshes, in petrified forests where every human was a threat to the other" (92). But even these images seemingly in flux are "stagnant" and "petrified." His painting, rather than depicting freed nature, reveal "only [Jay's] inner life,...his own 'particular jungle' (Spencer 34).

As Jay paints, images of scarring and pain lie at his feet: "Circles of red wine on the floor. Stains. The edge of the table was burnt by cigarette stubs" (58). Nin uses essential images of the outer world to characterize Jay, depicting the circles of red stains to evoke images of a larger circle, a blood-like circle of pain in which he encloses the world that functions as a womb-like enclosure surrounding him.

Jay frames Lillian like one of his paintings; he locks her in their room--boxing her in like a painting, walking away as if from his own finished work. Lillian psychologically resembles one of his images: "...where her heart had been there was now a large hole; no heart or blood beating anymore but a drafty hole" (119) like the ones Jay fills with a "rubber pump or watch" (92).

Jay's chaotic nature possesses a profound power to destroy; when he speaks, his language breaks apart, "bursting its boundaries...[and] the moment it [takes] too rigid a form he [begins] to laugh, spraying it, liquefying it in a current of gaiety" (76). Jay's artistic vision also
has the power to dehumanize others. Though Djuna strongly exudes femininity, Jay does not see her as a sensual woman, but as a work of art. Jay imposes upon her a dream image of a woman not real but "transparent, like the mist of perfume" she splashes on herself (62). In this way Jay annihilates Djuna through his imagination. He views her world as a Byzantine painting, made of that gold "which seem[s] on the verge of decomposing, as if each grain of dust held together only by atoms [is] ever ready to fall apart like a mist of perfume" (63). Djuna's sensuality disappears in Jay's mind, "the human essence evaporating where the dream installs itself" (63).

Djuna, like her spiritual element water, evaparates when exposed to the heat of Jay's imagination. Again, the image of mist appears. What he considers "real" springs from the imagination, and he must see an image through a Byzantine mist in order for anything to have reality. Like the mirrored garden, nothing has reality without a filter or artifice imposed upon it, the "mist of perfection" (74).

Djuna wears her identity "like a starched, undulating petticoat" (16), indicating her characteristic restraint. Djuna controls her inner self through a sort of epistemological self-domination; "art, aesthetic forms, philosophy [and] psychology" (16) control her nature. Like Lillian, Djuna suffers constraints placed upon her by the foreign discourse of patriarchal religion which defines
femininity for her as the madonna, the all-sacrificing non-individual, content in the disturbingly edenic world created for her in religious texts. Djuna experiences profound guilt whenever she feels pleasure, a condition that results from her impoverished childhood: "no matter how small a pleasure I wanted to take during the day it was followed by catastrophe" (26). She comes to believe that all pleasures have a price exacted in pain. While she possesses powers of heightened perception through which "one's chaos [is] illumined, transfigured" and in which "every object acquire[s] significance" (12), a discourse other than her own diffuses her minutely detailed perception into universals that absorb her own individuality: "...pain became not personal, but the pain of the whole world...ugliness became not a personal experience of ugliness but the world's experience with ugliness" (13).

This diffusion of personal experiences affords Djuna a "large airy understanding of life" (13) which appears as a too benevolent, too all-encompassing perception of "naked truth." Inside the "inner chambers" from which Djuna draws her universals reside "old men of religion" who have "blessed" her with their wisdom of "rituals illumined with the light of eternity" (13). They represent the discourse of the fathers who incite her to "forego the human test of experience" (13) and rely on passive objectivity. They have left indelibly a "subtle threat such as lurked in all the
temples, synagogues, churches--the incense of denial, the perfume" of sensual experience, "burnt to sacrificial ashes" to a god of objectivity and repression, "transmuted into guilt and atonement" (14). Along with these images, Djuna also holds within her the "haunting mother image forever holding a small child" who dreams of an idyllic life," an eden of "peaceful laughing animals" (14). Yet the small child always appears with eyes closed and remains forever "afraid to awaken" (14).

Both Djuna and Lillian share a potential energy that never finds release. Djuna appears as a complement to Lillian, for their natures connect "like a joyous encounter of equal forces" (11). Like Lillian, Djuna rejects passivity, remaining continually ready and waiting for new experiences, yet never really achieving action. Together, Lillian and Djuna move as identical forces: "...they arrive primed for high living, primed for flight, for explosion, for ecstasy, for feeling, for all experience" (11). In this sense, they also share frustration, for there is a profound difference between priming oneself continually for experience and actually experiencing.

Forming an alliance that insulates them from their individual torments, with "no moments of indifference, fatigue, or misunderstandings" (16), the natures of Djuna and Lillian are more free and they can examine their own strengths and weaknesses. Lillian feels profound guilt for
asserting a "masculine" strength over Gerard—guilt for transcending the female stereotype. Together the two women create, their own reality by replacing rituals of the "old men" with their own: "by constant signs, gifts, expressions...an exchange of visible affection (15). Their relationship has "the aspect of a primitive figure to which both enjoy[s] presenting proofs of worship and devotion" (15) and they worship together with impunity and fulfillment with "no moments of indifference ...no eclipses, no doubts" (15-16).

But their closeness is not enough for Lillian who actually wishes to become Djuna so that she may communicate with men the way Djuna does. Lillian wishes to trade her domineering masculine nature for Djuna's femininity and to live vicariously through her. Lillian feels the need to depend on Djuna's eyes to observe that which she lacks the courage to gaze upon herself, unaware that Djuna feels just as shackled.

Sabina, the character who rounds out the female triptych in *Ladders to Fire*, appears as the perfect melding and synthesis of Jay and Lillian. She possesses traits of both. Like Lillian, Sabina glows in images of fire-like intensity. She dresses in red and silver, the colors of a fire engine: "The first time one looked at Sabina one felt; everything will burn!" (98). When Lillian first sees Sabina, she feels strongly attracted to her seemingly familiar
beauty: "She wanted to say, I recognize you" (99). Sabina possesses the ladder to fire, to which "the orderly alignment of the city [gives] way" (98). While the fire engine provides ladders to escape the fire to safety below, Sabina’s ladder leads from the "orderly alignment of the city" up to fire, leading out of safety into an inferno above ordinary experience.

Like Jay, Sabina embraces the chaos within her: "...there was in her no premeditation, no continuity, no connection...She carried herself like one totally unfettered who was rushing and plunging on a fiery course" (99). Her identity splinters into those of many women, many lives, both real and imaginary, almost as if she embraces all possible experience: "Sabina appeared as the woman with gold hair, and then altered to a woman with black hair, and it was equally impossible to keep a consistent image of whom she had loved, betrayed, escaped from, lived with, married, lied to, forgotten, deserted" (100). Jay hates her initially, for in her he sees a female version of himself: "In Sabina’s fluctuating fervors he met a challenge: she gave him a feeling of equality. She was well able to take care of herself and to answer treachery with treachery" (103). This sense of equality seems to be what Lillian longs for but never attains with men.

Lillian and Sabina make love, but realize that what they both desire cannot be achieved through an embrace--they
want to be each other. Lillian represents Sabina’s lost youth. Sabina embodies all Lillian’s squelched passions she longs to unleash. When they come together, they stop: "Their bodies touched and then fell away, as if both of them had touched a mirror, their own image upon a mirror...Sabina had merely touched her own youth, and Lillian her free passions" (115). This episode strongly reflects and epitomizes how Lillian functions through mirror reflections of reality.

We have seen how Lillian’s sexual relationships works through mirror images that function, as they do in the garden, to inscribe a disordered reality and remove the observer to a "safe" distance. But in the encounter between Lillian and Sabina, there is a desire for a total union of differences, and then the mirror seems to be too firmly in place to achieve sameness. This notion relates back to Nin’s ideas about novelistic form in which one achieve a melding of internal and external reality by breaking the mirror, breaking its boundaries and shattering its images into fragments. Nin espouses a structure (or a non-structure) that parallels many French Feminists’ ideas about breaking out of an ordered symbolic system which is superimposed upon the Real.

In the last section of Ladders to Fire, Nin sets up a scene in which she attempts to undercut an agent of the Symbolic, namely "the Chess Player," revealing the
limitations inherent in deriving meaning solely from a superimposed structure. The ending of Ladders to Fire takes place at the Chess Game Party. The top floor of Lillian and Jay's apartment squares off into a chess board pattern. The Chess Player, an otherwise anonymous yet powerful figure, arrives ahead of the other guests. He amuses himself by moving people from square to square on the chess board, juxtaposing different individuals to see who would stay in the game and who would be ejected from it. He seems at first glance to exert total control over the party: "What his game was no one knew, for he was content with the displacements. He would then stand in the corner of the room and survey the movements with a semitone smile" (135). But he represents the removed, objective observer (writer) and inscriber/creator of reality. He believes he is in control of the party-goers' destiny, but unbeknownst to him, the principle action explodes internally, from within the party-goers themselves. Though a powerful figure, the Chess Player is the most blind character all. He serves as the final component to Nin's argument, at least in this book, against the validity of "realism."

During this game, the three principle "pieces," Sabina, Lillian and Djuna all encounter the Chess Player and one by one are taken out of the game, but not by him. They vanquish themselves through their own inner wars. Sabina, collapsing "because she has no center" (Spencer 85), becomes
lost "somewhere along the frontier between her inventions, her stories, her fantasies, and her true self" (133). She glimpses her own inner chaos: "Sabina, who [has] many selves, is also self-less because she is too frightened to live from the deep core or center of her self" (Spencer 85). Lillian finds herself alone on a square, and, with no one paying attention to her, "commits her daily act of destruction" (136), an "invisible hara kiri" (137) in which her self-esteem crumbles to nothing: "Every word, smile, act, silver jewel, lying on the floor...Nothing to salvage...A little pile of ashes from a bonfire of self-criticism" (137). These two women take themselves out of the game with no help from the Chess Player.

Djuna alone confronts the Chess Player and experiences trouble when she tries to break through his defenses by questioning the efficacy of his manipulations: "She saw him before his crystallization, saw the incident which alchemized him into wood, into a chess player of geometric patterns...But the Chess Player was irritated. She addressed a man he did not recognize" (140). Through his own pain, like the other characters, the Chess Player fashioned himself as the ultimate orderer of reality, but in actuality simply removes himself from participation in the "party," in emotional interaction. The truly significant events of the evening elude him completely.

Anais Nin's Ladders to Fire, depicts components of her
philosophy of the novel and those of l'écriture féminine on many levels—not only by way of the innovative "continuous novel" form, but also in the highly subjective psychological battles of the characters she depicts: "I wanted to enter and remain within the characters, to describe only what they saw and felt, hoping to achieve a more intimate knowledge of them" (Novel 59). She writes Ladders to Fire as an experiment to "build bridges and bring opposites together" (Kuntz 204), speculating on whether opposites can really come together as one, even if the opposites "are order and disorder themselves" (Kuntz 204). And since the novel is continuous, the speculation, the exploration into these questions, also continues.
Endnotes

1. Patricia Deduck, in her book *Realism, Reality, and the Fictional Theory of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Anais Nin* suggests that the traditional formulation of "reality" in novels lagged behind every other modern conception of reality accepted today, including those of philosophy, physics, and modern science which should compel writers to "seek a more specified and subjective concept of reality" (2).

2. I have had to number the pages myself to avoid confusion when citing quotations.

3. While it is never directly referred to in her own commentary, Nin most likely named the character Djuna after the writer Djuna Barnes, of whom Nin was an avid fan. Although Barnes' highly flamboyant personality was certainly worth depicting in a novel, it does not appear that Nin used any more than Barnes' name in the formulation of the *Ladders to Fire* character--their personalities are not pointedly similar.

4. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir notes the importance of mirrors as agents of order for women's identity: "outside these narrow limits, things are a disordered chaos; the world is reduced to this sheet of glass wherein stands resplendent an image: the Unique. Each woman, lost in her reflection, rules over space and time" (594).

5. "Psychic states select their stage set with great economy...There are physical gestures, and objects which
reverberate in our sensory computer because of the emotional experience associated with them" (Novel 52).

6. Bettina Knapp characterizes Djuna as embodying "the element water, that unfathomable preformal unconscious sphere...The primeval ocean circulates throughout her being and within her fluid domain she stores her secrets, wisdom, and arcana." (Anais Nin, 105). Like still water, Djuna is calm on the surface, but her depths hold invisible mysteries.
Conclusion: In Search of The Woman

My mind searches vainly for some remembrance which is older than any remembrance.

--Henry Miller, Black Spring

This conclusion attempts to gaze beyond Nin’s own philosophies about writing to examine the ramifications of certain assertions or attempts in representation made by Nin in her diary and fiction. At this point, it will be necessary to untwist two threads at issue in Nin’s work that hitherto have been intertwined, *I'ecriture feminine* and feminine sexuality. Nin works throughout her writing toward a clarification of both elements. However, creating a gendered text and arriving at a clear view of feminine sexuality are not equally difficult tasks. Nin seems to grasp the nature of the essence of feminine text naturally; in fact, she finds it difficult to write any other way. But the trouble she experiences with regard to feminine sexuality finds its source not just in her own way of inscribing and representing the world, but in Nin’s own position in the Symbolic Order.

A feminine text is one that remains outside of
traditionally formulated constructions of history, and, in a sense, outside of cultural formulations. To write within those formulations, especially those of western culture, would be to don the vestments of patriarchy, to capitulate to inscription by an other. In *Laugh of the Medusa*, Helene Cixous writes, "Women must write through their bodies...wreck partitions, classes, and get beyond the ultimate reserve discourse" (342). Cixous ultimately exhorts women to take it upon themselves to create a text marked by the feminine: chaotic, iconoclastic, and outside of the various cultural, social and historical symbolizations of the Symbolic Order.

Cixous advocates transcending the hegemony of a linear time, a component of the historical symbolizations. In "Women’s Time," Julia Kristeva writes about the disharmony between the feminine and this linearity:

Female subjectivity...becomes a problem with respect to a certain conception of time: time as project, teleology, linear and prospective unfolding: time as departure, progression and arrival--in other words, the time of history. (192)

Women’s time, according to Kristeva, is traditionally represented as a cyclical pattern, more tied to the biological workings of the female body and to the natural world order, like seasonal change and turning planets.
In both her diary and in her novels, Nin writes intuitively within a markedly feminine time continuum, which defies inscription in a linear "beginning-middle-ending" framework. The characters in her novels move outside narratively "realistic" time with a sort of immortality from book to book. Nin herself moves through her diary, as well as through her novels, with no strong regard for epochs or chapters, spilling over conventional boundaries with a sort of feminine excess, a feminine jouissance. Certainly, the feminine quality of Nin's writing manifests itself on many levels, including the way it asserts its own voice to express hidden elements usually suppressed, such as the feminine erotic, and asserts a fierce sense of value in narrative explorations "often attacked as small, subjective, personal" (Nin, Novel of the Future 38).

Nin also dares to step off the pedestal of objective, "realistic" writing and down onto the level of individual subjectivity--seeing characters from within, capturing what she sees as the elusive flow of images that characterize a person more truly than actions, or cultural and historical classifications. Through the tortured psyches of Sabina, Djuna and Lillian, Nin vividly illustrates that feminine sexuality and subjectivity have been heretofore imposed upon women, and her female characters rail against those formulations, signifying that the feminine subject is more than simply a construction of discourses. In closer
examination of Nin’s text, we find evidence of this foreclosure even as it manifests (or does not manifest) itself in her depiction of her own identity as well as that of her female characters.

Just as she strives for an essentially feminine text, Nin also reaches for an essence of woman--an essence that, ultimately, may not exist. Throughout her work, Nin was "driven into the subconscious to search for the essence" of things (Novel of the Future 55). But when she approaches the question, what is the essence of Woman? she finds the answer untenable. So although Nin grasps or gives a voice to feminine text, she never resolves the enigma of the essence of The Woman. Unable to capture a total essence of womanhood, Nin shows that as much as women are products of history and culture, they are also alienated from the possibilities these discourses violently foreclose. Nin’s writing thus points to this beyond, although blindly, suggesting the existence of a left-out excess of feminine subjectivity. In her depiction of June Miller, Nin notes that June, a primal, purely feminine being, eludes any concrete definition: "I could not grasp her core" (Henry and June 14). Though she does succeed in shattering the mirror that inscribes the garden, to see June as a "startlingly white face, burning eyes...color, brilliance, strangeness" (Henry and June 14), Nin cannot synthesize Woman into a single essence. Nin seems to have in her mind
an unarticulated idea of Woman, but when she tries to distill it down, she comes upon barriers that serve to confuse and limit her own identity. The barriers she faces are the boundaries of possibility offered to her from inscription within the Symbolic Order.

Kristeva lays out the three "universalist" possibilities of female identity within the Symbolic Order: the first derives its identity from the image of the Virgin. "Failing that, [woman] can atone for their carnal jouissance with their martyrdom" constituted by the identity of the whore (or magdalene). And "between these two extremes" lies the third and final possibility for feminine identity, "the mother," who bears and nurtures children "in the name of the father" ("About Chinese Women" 145-146). The only symbolic identities for women then are the virgin, the whore and the mother. A woman seemingly cannot identify herself beyond those essential identities while remaining within the symbolic order. What this means is that by virtue of their subjectivity, women are necessarily foreclosed from the "rest" of their identity--the excess components that are not included within the mythic triplex.

It is important to acknowledge that this mythic triplex is indeed a constructed one, constructed, by, for, and within the dominant discourse--a discourse that continually denies the possibility of a feminine erotic identity. The fantasy of the virgin Nin inherits is primarily a Christian
formulation, a formulation of woman that denies sexuality itself, either by denying libidinal desire or allowing for desire only by virtue of its repression for the sake of the Father. The mythic virgin remains mythic for all women because "by depriving her of sin" the myth "deprive[s] her of death," (Kristeva, "Stabat Mater" 164) thereby ultimately depriving her of humanity itself.

Binary opposition, which signify things and then define the other as a negation or an opposite, characterize the structure of such symbolic formulations of women. The mythic whore exists as the companion to virginity as the only "possible" context for the libido. But even in this formulation, what exists is not so much the desire of the whore, but desire for the whore. The whore represents the object of desire, a completely pliant object that functions only to satisfy the desire of the other and, therefore works as a primarily masculine, heterosexual construct. Women are victimized by such definitions for the only desire allowed the woman is her desire to fulfill the other--to be the best object she can. The virgin and whore, though in one sense opposite, closely resemble each other in their characteristic element of sacrifice of the body for a masculine other. And both of these formulations, in turn, closely resemble that of the mythic maternal figure.

In Kristeva's terms, "motherhood is the fantasy that is nurtured by the adult...of a lost territory... [that]
involves less an idealized archaic mother than the idealization of the *relationship* which binds us to her... an idealization of primary narcissism" ("Stabat Mater" 161).¹ The maternal myth remains the most pervasive and, in some sense, affectionately regarded construct of the triplex of feminine identity, but that affection emanates out of a nostalgia for a lost state of plenitude, out of a primary narcissism in which one has not yet experienced the lack that moves one into the Symbolic Order. But this fantasy serves to foreclose a woman’s desire in that (much like the formulation of the whore) the mother only wishes to satisfy the desire of the other. And without a desire of her own, the mother is denied even gender, because just like her child, she cannot have sexual differentiation without desire. Thus, the nostalgically constructed myth of motherhood forecloses a woman’s own subjectivity and desire.

So beyond these three archaic fantasies of feminine identity, Nin has little to draw upon to define her own identity and that of her female characters. In *Henry and June*, Nin begins by trying to reconcile the identity of writer within the identities of woman she has available. The conflict of definitions she experiences crystallizes when she writes, "I think highly of faithfulness. But my temperament belongs to the writer, not to the woman" (12). The identity of "woman" and that of "writer" are for Nin initially mutually exclusive. The writer must not be
feminine because she is who is inscribed, not who does the inscribing. However, throughout her dialogues with Henry Miller, Nin gradually realizes the existence of her own marked text—the flowing, visceral, chaotic prose of the feminine voice.

When she then attempts to write about her own erotic nature—one of the primary subjects of her prose—Nin begins to become aware of the boundaries of the symbolic construction of the feminine. She writes in the introduction to Delta of Venus: "I was...conscious of a difference between the masculine and feminine treatment of sexual experience...man's language [is] inadequate" (xv). Man's language, heretofore the only language available to her, is inadequate to express the feminine erotic precisely because it denies, forecloses, the possibility of the feminine erotic by virtue of the three mythic constructions available.

Nin herself does not seem able to write about her own eroticism without falling into the role of mother in her relationship with Henry Miller. While allowing him to penetrate into her womb, Nin feels the need to encompass him in the womb symbolically, as a mother does a child. She beings to see Henry not as an object of libidinal desire, but maternal desire. Henry becomes an object "to be soothed, lulled, understood, helped, encouraged, and listened to" (Henry and June 11). Thus Nin transforms her
desire from her own satisfaction to the satisfaction of Henry's needs. She derives "a tremendous and selfish pleasure out the gift of money to him" (13), and she seems to exist in a fantasy of mother for Henry. But this internalization of the maternal fantasy sacrifices her own erotic desires, leaving them unaddressed: "When I see that I have let him be aroused, it seems natural to let him release his desire between my legs. I just let him out of pity" (9-10). Pity for a helpless thing hardly constitutes erotic desire. Because Nin identifies her relationship with Henry as one of mother and child, the erotic nature of their relationship is eventually shut down not only by the sacrifice of erotic desire but also in simple foreclosure by the incest prohibition.²

Henry's desire is infantilized and he loses his masculinity by virtue of his regression into a state resembling primary narcissism. As he becomes the child fulfilled by a fantasy mother, he loses his desire, his identity as a man, and therefore his sexual identity. This foreclosure of erotic desire by the maternal fantasy shows the inadequacy, the impossibility, of the role of mother encompassing the feminine erotic, because of the taboo of incest. Nin cannot address the nature of her erotic relationship with Henry without drawing on the maternal fantasy of womanhood, because the language of the free, pure feminine erotic has been foreclosed from the Symbolic and
has not yet been articulated.

In Nin’s relationship with June Miller, we see a continuation and complication of Nin’s crisis about feminine identity. Nin desires June, but at first has difficulty articulating a feminine desire for the feminine. Nin feels the need to place either herself or June into the masculine role so that they can desire each other in a way in line with traditional sexualities. But because this arrangement is grossly artificial for both women, they continue to vacillate between the two stereotypical roles. At one moment, June becomes "protective" and Nin submits to what she sees in June as "strange, manlike strength" (17). The next moment, the sex roles reverse: "I held June’s hand firmly...I was the man" (24). Nin’s initial response to her desire for June is to fit it within a hierarchical, symbolic structure with active and passive elements, a structure attributed to traditional heterosexual relations. But the instability and problems of such interactions demonstrate the inherently feminine nature of their interaction, a nature Nin does not immediately recognize.

Eventually Nin realizes that her desire does not fit Symbolic formuli: "I have...wanted her to love me with...the senses that only women have. It is a soft and subtle penetration" (18) wholly unlike the vigorous penetration characteristic of the masculine erotic. Nin’s desire for June does not fit the Symbolic construct
primarily because her desire is one of identification rather than objectification. Nin entertains a fantasy of June as The Woman, an elusive, unrepresentable being who has no real center, and she both idolizes and identifies with her. Nin also sees June as a part of herself that has been missing: "'You carry away with you a reflection of me, a part of me. I dreamed you, I wished for your existence. You will always be a part of my life. If I love you, it must be because we have shared at some time the same imaginings, the same madness" (15). The two women soon acknowledge their wish to be each other, to become unified into a whole being, The (essential) Woman. But nearing the threshold of this unification, (which is literally as close as the women can come together, by virtue of their individual subjectivity), Nin glimpses the death inherent in such a unity and therefore steps back into the Symbolic. Through her creativity, Nin moves June from a position of identification to a position of objectification in the character of Sabina.

In Henry and June, the maternal myth ultimately shuts down Nin's desire for Henry, so Nin is obliged to reject the maternal fantasy in order to retain her desire. But when her desire finds potential in a non-maternal formulation with June, one which remains outside of all masculine formulations of feminine desire, the terminus seems to be death--the foreclosed unification into a whole being, the elusive essential Woman. Nin is thus left with a lack,
inarticulate desire forbidden for the subject, yet somehow still demanding articulation.

To get a more illuminated picture of Nin's struggle with feminine identity, one may turn to its fictional representation Nin's creative works. In her diary, Nin does not directly address the sense of anguish inherent in the awareness of her foreclosure from herself. But this frustration rises clearly to the surface in many of her novellas, including Ladders to Fire. One can speculate that Nin's frustration and resentment towards the limitations placed on feminine identity are too close to her to be dealt with in the immediacy of her diary. It is only when she steps back from her diary and into the realm of fiction that these issues become manageable enough for her to explore them.

A central image painted early on in Ladders to Fire, is that of a nameless, "voiceless woman screaming in a nightmare" (11). Because Nin ties this image to Lillian, and more generally to feminine subjectivity, this voiceless woman represents something more specific than the general anomie of Edvard Munch's The Scream. Nin's image is pointedly female; the anguish is an anguish of woman still foreclosed, still relegated to silence. Working within the medium of feminine text, Nin reveals the sacrifice made by women to the Law of the Father, the sacrifice required of them to enter the realm of the Symbolic. She realizes that
women have an excess of identity that is denied articulation. Thus Nin depicts her female characters as elemental components of an elusive and untenable unity of Womanhood.

In *Ladders to Fire*, the three female characters, Lillian, Djuna and Sabina, deal with variations of the same issues Nin does herself. These women suffer from the constraints placed upon their identity and the sense that they can see the limits of, but cannot see beyond, that inscription. In her description of Lillian, Nin gives voice to the inadequacy of the "constructed" woman:

> Lillian, guided by her background, her mother, her sisters, her habits, her home as a child, her blindness in regard to her own desires, had made [her home and marriage] and then lived in it, but it had not been made out of the deeper elements of her nature, and she was a stranger in it. (18)

Lillian suffers, as does Nin herself, from an internalization of the maternal myth. The shut-down of the erotic Nin experiences with Henry Miller materializes as a cycle repeated by Lillian. And Lillian’s internalization of the maternal myth acts as a symptom of her repressed erotic desire, symbolized only by a cricket hidden in the floorboards of her room.

At the beginning of *Ladders to Fire*, Lillian attempts a relationship with the "smiling, passive, static" Gerard
Because he does not ultimately fulfill her desire, she does not leave him but tries to draw him to her by satisfying him as a mother figure. For Gerard, Lillian and the memory of his mother become one: "they acted for him, they fought for him, they never let him alone. He was merely possessed" (6). Gerard, sensing the inherently incestuous nature of this relationship, retreats from Lillian in fear and disgust.

In her relationship with Jay, Lillian once again finds no other way to relate but in the identity of mother. She sacrifices her own libidinal desires for Jay's, and ultimately constructs a fantasy of primary narcissism, in which the plentitude, the narcissistic jouissance of Jay, the child, becomes her own: "This passion, warmer, stranger than the other passion, annihilating desire and becoming desire, a boundless passion to surround, envelop, sustain, strengthen, uphold, to answer all needs" (50). But soon Lillian is faced with the realization that she can never fulfill all of Jay's demands, and ends up trailing behind him, "sewing their days together...their words together, their moods together, which he dispersed and tore" (52). She thus becomes trapped in the role of mother, lamenting the end of the fantasy of unification with her child, now suffering guilt for not being a mother who was "good enough."

Lillian also soon realizes that a part of her desire
has been exterminated in this formulation: "she had lost a very large part of herself, annihilated an entire portion of her personality, sacrificed to him" (58). Through the character of Lillian, Nin not only portrays the problematic nature of a "maternal" erotic, but also shows how one cannot possibly locate essential femininity in the maternal, since the maternal includes within it an inherent sacrifice of desire.

Nin further develops the idea of sacrifice in her depiction of Djuna. Like Lillian, Djuna internalizes a symbolic inscription of her identity. Djuna identifies strongly with the virgin myth. Nin portrays Djuna surrounded by religious images: "hierarchic figures, religious symbols...Old men of religion, who had assisted at her birth and blessed her with their wisdom (13). Born thus of like the mythic virgin Athena, Djuna is denied a sense of greater humanity. Her torture springs from this aspect which simultaneously denies or prohibits her eroticism:

There had lurked in these secret chambers of her ancestry a subtle threat such as lurked in all the temples, synagogues, and churches--the incense of denial, the perfume of the body burnt to sacrificial ashes by religious alchemy, transmuted into guilt and atonement. (13-14)

As the image of immortal virgin, Djuna feels compelled to deny the excesses of her identity annihilated by this
inscription. Jay idolizes Djuna in this form, seeing her as a gold Byzantine painting with "the condition of emptiness and blackness underneath the gold powder" (63), that void underneath hiding the excess of Djuna's identity that Jay, as an agent of her inscription, can not, will not see, "the essence... evaporating where the dream installs itself" (63).

Like Djuna, Sabina exists as an object, but rather than an object of sterile, religious devotion, Sabina embodies a multiplicity of mysterious, desirable female personas drawn from various masculine fantasies of the erotic woman: "How all the other loves clung to Sabina's body... How they made her heavy with the loss of her self, lost in the maze of her gifts. How the lies, the loves, the dreams, the obscenities, the fevers weighed down her body" (114). None of these personas are really her own, so Sabina clings to a multiplicity of fake identities to hide the absence of a real one. She plays the role of fantasy woman for so long that the reality of who she is and what she desires for herself all but fades into oblivion. But she has no other way of coming to terms with the natural eroticism which is such a major component of her personality.

Each of these female characters embodies one of the three primal fantasies of womanhood symbolized in the Symbolic Order and all three women, in individual fashion, suffer a foreclosure, almost an amputation, of a great part of their identity, which remains largely unarticulated. And
these three characters each share a symptom of their incompleteness with Nin through the desire to become unified with another woman to become, somehow, whole. Lillian wishes to become Djuna, fantasizing that Djuna has the means to save her from annihilation: "Lillian...was drowning, and it was Djuna who was able always at the last moment to save her and in her moments of danger, Lillian knew only one thing: that she must possess Djuna" (33). Much in the same fashion, Sabina sees elements in Lillian that she feels could fill the void in herself, and Lillian regards Sabina in the same light: "They both wanted to exchange bodies, exchange faces. There was in both of them the dark strain of wanting to become the other, to deny what they were, to transcend their actual selves" (114). While Nin simply refracts and repeats elements of her own identification with June, all these identifications are symptomatic of a desire for unity—in Lacanian terms, a phallic identification with The Woman, a fantasy of wholeness in which jouissance would overwhelm any desire and alienation.

Like Nin and June, the three characters in Ladders to Fire attempt to achieve this unification through lovemaking, but the image of unity they desire is actually psychic rather than physical, and thus remains unsatisfied. In touching each other, they only touch what they are—constructed, incomplete women: "Their bodies touched a mirror, their own image upon a mirror" (115). In order for
this imaginary unification into The Woman to take place, it would have to take place on the level of each of the women individually through their own psyches--something which cannot be achieved in the sexual union of women's bodies.

This phallic fantasy of an essential woman means a death of subjectivity--a death of the individuality of the subject, suggesting that even if all women could unite into one essence, the diversity of feminine experience would itself be foreclosed. According to Kristeva, the notion of Woman "essentially has the negative effect of effacing the differences among the diverse functions or structures which operate beneath this word" ("Woman's Time" 193). Nin backs away from the notion of a unification with June because the resulting state of jouissance would not only kill her desire to write, but would also, from a psychoanalytic point of view, kill her in the consummation of the death drive.

Ultimately Nin is not completely able to grasp an essence of The Woman, either for herself or her female characters. She does, however, achieve a series of revelations concerning feminine identity through her writing. First, she realizes that women can, and do, have a relation to language in the Symbolic which is different from a man's--that is why her text can be marked as feminine. One of the reasons Nin strives for a writing of her own is in search of a definition of women by women. If one controls the language, one controls the formulations
symbolized by that language. Nin realizes that the socio-cultural-historical formulations of womanhood and reality in general are simply that--arbitrary constructions imposed upon the Real. She is able to see the nature of these constructions by way of the foreclosure and prohibitions placed upon herself and other women. She shows the boundaries and incompleteness of these constructs through her own resistance to them and, further, she depicts the diverse ways these constructions can limit a woman's identity through the characters in her fiction. However, it is crucial to recognize, in light of these issues, that any alternative psyche or history of women she gestures toward reinforcing the constructs already in place. At best, a woman writer can merely sustain an acute awareness of the sacrifice of identity made in order to have subjectivity.

The pervasive issue throughout Nin's conflicts involves women's erotic nature--that which springs wholly from the feminine self. Nin returns to the erotic nature of women again and again without, perhaps, being completely aware of the fact that an essence of woman may lie in the realm of her own eroticism. For as long as an erotic emerges through the fantasy of the whore, it generates masculine constructions of eroticism based on masculine fantasies. And while Nin seems compelled to conflate the maternal with the erotic, woman as mother simply raises another problem for her. She does not discover a way in which to give
Desire back to the mother for the Symbolic denies the mother "the right to pleasure, to sexual experience, to passion,...the right to speak, or even to shriek and rage aloud" (Irigaray, *Corps-a-Corps: In Relation to the Mother* 18).

Thus the feminine erotic remains one component of feminine identity that escapes inscription in the Symbolic, precisely because it was always repressed or denied existence. If one could learn to articulate the nature of a women's erotic, one might in turn begin to understand the essence of The Woman. Until that time, we can only apprehend the essence of Woman as necessarily a non-essence, irreducible beyond a pluralistic, chaotic conglomerate of identities like those found in *Ladders to Fire.* If we hold this to be an accurate picture of womanhood, The Woman cannot be reduced any farther than to the heterogeneity of the Many.
Endnotes

1. Primary narcissism in general terms is that archaic, mythic stage in which the child and mother are completely enmeshed into one unit prior to the mirror stage. The mother emerges as a separate individual only insofar as she shows a desire for something other than the child. The child then realizes his/her subjectivity. For this to happen, there has to be some index of the mother’s desire for something else. This constitutes the opening of symbolization.

2. For more on the incest prohibition, see Freud’s text Totem and Taboo.

3. In Feminine Sexuality, Lacan states: "Demand in itself bears on something other than the satisfactions which it calls for...This is manifest in the primordial relation to the mother, pregnant as it is with that Other to be situated some way short of any needs which it might gratify" (80). That is, the Other, the place of the Other which is occupied by the mother for a certain time, is not a place of fulfillment (the "good enough mother"), but is situated short of fulfillment of needs. It is the Other as not-whole (O).


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