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THE NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF 'NON-TRAUMA': THE FANTASY OF THERAPEUTIC INCEST IN ANAÏS NIN'S JOURNAL

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Abstract

Anaïs Nin (1903–1977) is widely known for her erotic fiction, her controversial personal life, and her monumental journal, published in instalments during her lifetime and later in an uncensored version in the 1990s. This unexpurgated edition revealed that she had engaged in an incestuous relationship with her father, the composer Joaquín Nin (1879–1949), in 1933. In her journal, Nin presents the episode through a combination of introspective reflection and explicit detail, while narratively foregrounding what appears to be an absence of the guilt, shame, and trauma typically associated with incest. This article does not take that absence as an objective psychological fact; rather, it examines how Nin's self-representation rhetorically constructs the experience as potentially therapeutic. Within her writing, the sexualization of the father–daughter relationship is framed as a way of reworking earlier narratives of abandonment and emotional injury, a framing that can be read as part of a broader process of narrative control. Accordingly, this contribution analyzes the discursive strategies through which Nin stages incest as "non-traumatic," interrogating the fantasy of healing that emerges within her textual and psychic economy rather than positing the experience itself as emancipatory or curative.

Keywords: Anaïs Nin, American Literature, 20th Century, incest, journal, therapy, trauma, abandonment issues

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Anaïs Nin (1903-1977) is known as one of the most controversial writers of the 20th century, and also as a symbol of "freedom, excitement and discovery" (Evans, 1962, p. 218). Some commentators, for instance Milton Hoffman in the 1970s, went as far as saying that the writer had come to embody "the notion of personal freedom" (2001, p. 310) which made her look as the quintessential liberated woman.

Author of erotic novels and short stories, nonetheless she owes her fame to her journal, which was published in instalments while she was still alive and in an unexpurgated version in the 1990s. The journal is an embodiment of Nin's "preference of the personal to the impersonal, of the subjective to the objective" (Evans, 1962, p. 224) and it contains the very detailed account of her non-monogamous sexual life: she was married with two different men at the same time, she entertained several affairs (with men and women), and she had a brief but intense sentimental and sexual relationship with her own father. The affair with musician Joaquín Nin (1879-1949), who had abandoned his daughter and the entire family when the writer was eleven years old, is quite possibly the most controversial incident accounted for in the journal. The work itself was actually started and conceived as a long letter to her father right after his departure. As Sharon Spencer puts it, "[i]n a strategy that was to become typical, Nin countered a painful loss with a creative act" (1990, p. 58).

Nin reconnected with her father as an adult woman, initiating a relationship that unsettles conventional familial boundaries. While her journal frames the experience as lacking guilt, shame, or regret, this article reads that apparent absence not as an empirical conclusion but as a discursive performance through which Nin reconfigures trauma and agency.

In a study on father-daughter incest, Judith Lewis Herman noted that at the basis of this kind of relationships is always fear of the parent's abandonment and not the attempt to revive an earlier experience of caretaking (Lewis Herman, 2003, pp. 31,57). Moreover, while incestuous relationships are frequently associated with trauma for daughters, Nin's account stages the episode through an affective vocabulary of love, obsession, and desire, framing it as largely untroubled. The unspeakable act committed by the writer and her father loses all the connotates of traumatic experience and becomes—at least apparently—the ideal way to severe the ties with a man who had

mistreated her, her brothers Thorvald and Joaquín, and their mother Rosa Culmell. Once an adult woman, her father became an idealized figure to look for in other men and relationships.

The aim of this contribution is to analyze how Nin deals with the incest taboo in her journal to demonstrate how the therapeutic function of the experience might not have been as effective as it seemed, and how this task was passed on to the journal and the writing process: a practice through which the artist was able to embrace a raw, long, and excruciating analysis of incest and its consequences.

The original abuse

Father–daughter incest is conventionally understood as a form of abuse. In this specific case, however — perhaps due to the adult age of the individuals involved or the consent the daughter claims to have expressed — the relationship is never explicitly defined as abusive within the writer's journals. This study does not adopt that self-characterization uncritically; rather, it distinguishes between Nin's narrative framing of the experience and the analytical perspective applied here, which recognizes the broader ethical and power dynamics that complicate notions of consent and agency in incestuous relationships. The behaviors that she really deemed as abusive dated back to another era of her life, the one that determines the creation of traumas that will likely leave an indelible trace on the psyche of the future adult. Furthermore, the incestuous act can be considered a rather twisted way to heal the original abuse, to avenge the helpless child she had been, and to fulfill the need to put back in place the missing piece in her emotional life: the love of her father.

Much space in the journal is taken up by memories of Nin's childhood connected with her father's mistreatments. The abandonment of the family, indeed, was only the final act of years of violence that the writer was able to put in a more objective perspective and recognize as vicious acts. Rationalizing the memories, Nin could recognize that "this man of power—her father—once overwhelmed, enslaved [her], dominated [her] life exerted tyranny, and then betrayed [her]. He brutalized [her] childish weakness and dependency" (Nin, 1971, p. 144). Such a statement reveals an apparent clarity and awareness of the dynamics of the relationship, and the true nature of the man.

The person described in the journal is a narcissistic figure, cruel to his family in words and actions, and even more cruel with the daughter because of her gender. As she writes in the wake of the long psychoanalytic sessions with Dr René Allendy (1889-1942), the fact that she was a girl and not a boy made things more complicated, and the father's behavior more sadistic, because the composer did not want a daughter. Whenever Nin describes the father of her childhood, she displays several adjectives that are always synonymous with "overcritical" and "cold". This latter is often symbolized by the color of his eyes—icy blue—always scanning family members, the female ones in particular, in search of flaws and imperfections to punish with a harsh comment (Nin, 1966, pp. 73-76).

There is a recurrent memory that the writer mentions several times in various volumes of the journal: when she caught typhoid fever as a child and risked her life; once she recovered, all her father could do was commenting on her appearance, saying she was ugly (Nin, 1966, pp. 73-76). The only moment that sees a reconciliation between father and daughter is tinged with perversion, but as with many abuses during childhood, its contours are blurred and generate mixed feelings in the abused. Nin remembers her father's passion for photography and how he used to take pictures of little Anaïs naked. She describes those moments as "lovely" (p. 86), as they were the only moments they spent together, and "Nin's only physical and emotional intimacy with her father" (Henke, 1997, p. 124). Yet the gesture bears palpable erotic undertones, and it also involves what Vikki Bell, in a Foucauldian fashion, defines as "the disciplinary power of the Father's gaze", which turns the daughter into a surface, "an object […] whose objectification is revealed by her subjection to the abuse" (1993, p. 69). This sort of "ritual punishment" (Henke, 1997, p. 124), sometimes is administered in the guise of beatings. As claimed by Tristine Rainer, a sort of "apprentice" of Nin's on womanhood and sex, the spankings of the father "had sexualized her too young because he hit her place of pleasure" (2017, p. 89). Rainer also comments on the photographs' incident, pondering that the breaking of the boundaries by Nin's father could be the reason for the writer's own lack of them, and also for her habit of sexualizing everything (p. 253). This is a typical mechanism for survivors of incestuous abuse, because, again according to Bell, the position of the father in the life of the abused daughter makes "his influence predominate amongst the various ways which she could come to understand her self and her sexuality" (Bell, 1993, p. 68).

In both episodes, even if the incestuous dimension remains implicit or incomplete rather than explicitly consummated, a profoundly dysfunctional bond emerges between father and daughter, and "the traditional role of parenting […] is brutally replaced by dismantling, perversity, and pathological bonds" (Alizade, 2005, p. 108).

The narcissism of the man is another feature that appears quite obvious, considering his job and his ever-present female fans, his passion for luxury, his dandyism and social life (Nin, 1966, p. 91). This is something that predictably causes the jealousy of Nin's mother, with whom the author develops a complex relationship of love and hate, identification and utter rejection. Nin places herself between her parents and writes that "what he meant for my mother I also took for myself, yet I had hysterical sorrow when he finally abandoned her" (p. 77).

One more narcissistic feature that Nin recognizes is the man's habit of wearing a virtual mask that makes him charming with strangers, while hiding his real provocative nature, all too often displayed within the household, leading to arguments and fights always witnessed by the kids, who get used to them without understanding their reasons (p. 212). Yet all the toxic features of the man are not enough to produce a complete rejection of him; quite to the contrary, as an adult, Nin questions herself on why her father's insufficient love should remain indelible (p. 77). It is a typical dynamic, one she shares with her mother who, despite the abuses and cheatings, could not help but recognizing the husband's "power of illusion" that made her unable to love someone else, as "they all seemed so prosaic and plain and homely beside him" (Nin, 1971, p. 149). Consequently, the abandoned daughter needs a strategy to fill the void left by such a fierce yet irreplaceable figure: someone familiar who would act as a surrogate father for her, but with a happier outcome.

In search of a surrogate father figure

The study by Lewis Herman mentioned earlier in this chapter describes a typical dynamic in cases of father–daughter incest, namely the impossibility for the daughter to relinquish the father's fantasy even when the erotic attachment itself is abandoned. The daughter is encouraged to "persist in the fantasy" that another man— "older, stronger, richer, more powerful"—will eventually possess her, thus reproducing a fundamentally submissive relationship (Lewis Herman, 2003, p. 57). This dynamic appears inescapable

for Nin, who not only marries a slightly older man, Hugh Guiler (1898–1985), but repeatedly engages in relationships with men embodying the feared and idealized paternal features of her childhood. Unsurprisingly, much of her psychotherapeutic experience revolves around this dysfunctional paternal bond.

The sessions with Dr. Allendy bring this relationship into sharp focus, prompting Nin to analyze their conversations and ask herself: "If only I could be freed of this quest for the father. Father? Savior? God?" (Nin, 1971, p. 164). Within this apparently simple enquiry lies the essence of her lifelong search for a figure capable of rescuing her. The juxtaposition of God and father is revealing: both are imagined as distant, unattainable authorities. Equally significant is Nin's rebellious stance toward religion—particularly Catholicism, given her father's Spanish background. In her journal she recalls that at sixteen she rejected religion entirely, blaming God for refusing to grant her the reunion with her father she so desperately desired. God appeared deaf to the pleas of a girl who felt "fatherless in a strange country" (p. 72). This rejection of moral authority may partly explain her later refusal of conventional sexual restraint.

Therapy with Allendy illuminates several aspects of her relationships with men, especially her instinctive attraction to older figures capable of guiding and protecting her in the absence of her father (p. 80). At the same time, it lays the groundwork for the incestuous dynamic. After one session, Nin records Allendy's interpretation of her original trauma. Remarkably, his initial reflections do not focus on the photographic episode or the spanking; instead, he links sexuality to her father's abandonment of the family. As a child, Nin may have internalized the notion that a father leaves because of sex—that tours, travels, and mistresses are more seductive than domestic stability. According to Allendy, these experiences "may have created in [her] a certain obscure feeling against sex" (p. 81), a claim that appears paradoxical given Nin's later sexual openness. Only subsequently does he address the camera incident, viewing it as a reinforcement of his diagnosis. The paternal gaze behind the lens, he argues, generated in Nin an obsessive desire to charm, expressed through coquettishness and vanity (p. 87). Every attempt at seduction becomes, in his reading, an attempt to captivate the father. Nin herself internalizes guilt for his departure, imagining that she was not lovable enough. The solution, therefore, becomes transformation: she would "become interesting," acting "as a courtesan,"

because by the age of nine she had already experienced failure and felt compelled to seek alternative ways to attract men (p. 91).

Although this dynamic might seem self-evident, it resurfaces with renewed complexity when Nin begins another therapeutic relationship with Otto Rank (1884–1939), who eventually becomes her lover. Rank situates her case within a broader pattern, observing in many patients "a constant need of a mother, or a father, or a God," which he interprets as a sign of emotional immaturity. Nin recognizes herself in this description, admitting that she sought strength in men she symbolically identified as "the father" (Nin, 1967, p. 26). Rank himself becomes one such figure, yet she eventually claims to have rejected him and "conquered the need of a father" (p. 50). The assertion, however, remains questionable. Soon afterward, another man assumes the same symbolic role: the novelist Henry Miller (1891–1980). Older than Nin and sharing with Joaquín Nin the striking feature of blue eyes, Miller embodies a bridge between childhood memory and adult desire (Nin, 1966, p. 78). Through him, Nin appears to reenact the paternal relationship with the possibility of a different, more hopeful outcome.

In *Henry and June*, she writes: "When I listen, I am a child, and Henry becomes paternal. The haunting image of an erudite, literary father reasserts itself, and the woman becomes small again" (1986, p. 100). The boundaries between father and lover blur further when she contemplates meeting her father once more, imagining that she might finally experience their "sensual sameness" and hear from him the same obscenities and brutal language she admires in Henry (p. 111). It is precisely at this moment—when the paternal and erotic figures converge—that the most controversial episode of her biography begins.

The 'Father Story': The Illusion of a Non-Traumatic Account

"I find my father again when I'm a woman" writes Nin (1966, p. 190) in the section of her journal titled 'Father Story': the complete account of her affair with this pillar figure of her existence. The feelings connected to the reunion are analyzed in detail, especially when she writes that at her age she can see the man for who he is: a human being, and no more the "cruel, strong, hero, famous musician, lover of women, triumphant" (p. 190) deity she used to know. She also recognizes that when they meet again, she does not need a father anymore, and she deludes herself into thinking that "there is no possibility of

fusion between father and daughter" (p. 190) but only one between man and woman. She has a fulfilling life, yet the child in her is still looking for a father. As Lewis Herman claims, what drives the incestuous relationship is "the adult's parental power and the child dependency" (2003, p. 70), even when the child is an adult herself. A proof of it is the fact that for years she has kept writing a journal that had been initially created as a long letter to her father when she was eleven, and at the eve of her first meeting with him she pens in a letter to Henry Miller that "[t]he damn journal should end with Wednesday when my father comes to Louveciennes" (Stuhlman, 1987, p. 168), as if the journal had exhausted its main function.

When they meet, as Nin writes in May 1933, the man before her is full of grace and youthfulness and "a gust of imponderable charm" (1966, p. 202). His narcissistic features are immediately visible when he displays his "supreme, open egotism" and wraps his daughter in "webs of talks, defenses against unuttered accusations" regarding his love for luxury and his life in general (p. 202), probably as a late excuse for his previous actions.

The immediate reaction to meeting the man is also the feeling that she is in the presence of a double of herself, someone "who will answer questions" (p. 204). Which contradicts what she writes later: "I had always lived not to be my father" (p. 204). The writer claims she had not wanted to be him, and she had always struggled to have a more honest life with real values, fleeing the aristocratic and dandy milieu in which her father lived. But, as claimed by Suzette Henke, what happened was exactly the opposite, as being unable to possess the absent father, "she was forced, psychologically, to become him" (1997, p. 125), emulating his libertine life, "imbibing his fierce sexual independence, along with his egotism, mendacity and aesthetic sophistication" (p. 125). The creative dimension of the emulation is also present, since she uses another medium—the word instead of music—in order to be an artist as he was. Henke goes on defining Nin's creative efforts as a "gesture of aesthetic compensation" through which she relives her life "in the mode of art, creating herself anew in a guise that will be acceptable" for her father and her many lovers (p. 126). The power of identification is recognized by Nin herself when she talks to her brother Joaquín and he negatively judges their father, something that makes her feel judged too, since "father lives in a non-human world, but so do I" (Nin, 1992, p. 166). Yet she cannot help but notice that she and her father "understand each

other miraculously" (Nin, 1966, p. 209), therefore she can conclude that they love and need each other, and all the bad feelings are "annihilated in one day" (p. 212).

The incestuous relationship begins with Nin's *illusion* that her act of seduction grants her agency and reverses the power dynamic, allowing her to believe she has "finally achieved mastery over the master of her heart" (Henke, 1997, p. 127). Yet this sense of mastery remains structurally fragile, since the father–daughter hierarchy—marked by age, authority, and prior emotional conditioning—cannot truly be undone. She writes, enthusiastically, that she has "gifts for [her] father, and he craves them" (Nin, 1992, p. 168), as if their bond could become symmetrical and mutually negotiated. However, the apparent reciprocity masks a persistent imbalance: the relationship continues to operate within a framework shaped by paternal authority and by Nin's longstanding desire for recognition. The belief in equality is therefore a defensive fantasy rather than an actual redistribution of power.

What appears to Nin as triumph is instead the ultimate narcissistic gratification for the father, who can "physically embrace his own genetic model and copulate with himself" (Henke, 1997, p. 128). Even when she imagines herself as the initiator, the dynamic reinforces his centrality, turning her gesture into confirmation of his symbolic dominance. The narcissistic dimension of the relationship is something Nin partially recognizes—but also aestheticizes—when she poetically concludes that "father, the creator, had to give birth to the woman to whom he would give his soul, and he could only give his soul to his own image, or to the reflection of it, the child born from him" (Nin, 1992, p. 248). The language of creation and mirroring underscores how her supposed empowerment remains tethered to paternal validation rather than genuine autonomy.

This apparently triumphant union ultimately produces a defeated subject, one who reconstructs "the elusive Prince Charming of her dreams in ever more idealized images" (Henke, 1997, p. 129). In a letter written during the early phase of their reunion, Nin articulates the depth of her emotional investment:

> […] all the discoveries I have made about your life and about you correspond to what I so deeply wanted them and you to be. I realized that I searched dimly for them in others, but you, only you, feel a great void that I found in the world. […] when you came back, reality became beautiful, completely satisfying (Nin, 1992, p. 168).

The language of fulfillment reveals how the fantasy of mastery collapses into renewed dependency, exposing the enduring asymmetry at the heart of the relationship.

Even the appellations she gives her father later are only a consequence of this idealization, since he becomes "the lion, the jungle king, the most virile man I had known" (p. 212).

What starts the seductive dance between father and daughter is the following dialogue, which confirms once again the identification of the woman with her father:

> "I don't feel toward you as if you were my daughter".
>
> "I don't feel as if you were my father".
>
> "What a tragedy. What are we going to do about it? I have met the woman of my life, the ideal, and it is my daughter! I cannot even kiss you as I would like to. I'm in love with my own daughter!"
>
> "Everything you feel, I feel" (p. 208).

The act itself is not lived (and reported on the journal) with particular moral preoccupations except for an "inner holding-back" (p. 210) which keeps the writer from reaching the sexual climax. While the following discussion engages with explicit material drawn from Nin's own narrative voice, it does so from a critical and analytical perspective that neither normalizes nor aestheticizes the dynamics of incestuous abuse. As Ruth Charnock claims, "rather than displaying the obvious signs of trauma that we have come to expect from the incest narrative such as dissociation, blame and recrimination, the 'Father Story' is ambiguous in its tone" (2014, p. 56). Numerous are, instead, the details she mentions about her father's anatomy and his transgressive actions that arouse them both. The way they conceive the act is not unusual, as claimed by Miriam Alizade: incest for some people "is not a source of taboo or horror but of desire, upon which they act without any thought for the psychic consequences to the person whom they draw into forbidden intercourse" (2005, pp. 101-2); also, Lewis Herman reports a series of interviews to victims of incest abuse who claimed to have experienced sexual pleasure in the incestuous encounters (2003, p. 86).

The illusion of being the one who is in control of the relationship is ever present in the first days, when Nin writes that: "it was he who was preoccupied with enchanting me. It was he who talked, who was anxious, who displayed all his seductions. It was I who

was being ported, magnificently" (1992, p. 210). Later, during a brief separation, when she receives a letter from him, she still thinks that he is the one with deeper feelings for the other, and so she speculates: "is it possible that my father should love me more than I love him? is there always to be an inequality of some kind?" (p. 223). The inequality she mentions, the eternal asymmetry between herself and her father, is a precise symptom of how the experience she recounted in the journal was only apparently a triumph: a way to win back the love of the person who had caused her so much sorrow as a child. But the feeling of being loved by him even more than she loves him is an illusion that brings about fluctuating sensations of insecurity and contempt for the man. The cognitive dissonance she experiences in the immediate aftermath of the incest is what allows her to finally disengage from a man who is not able to love her in a healthy way. But is it also a way to detach herself from his poisonous influence?

The incest aftermath

The detachment from the father figure in Nin's life is not an immediate result of the incest, as she needs to live again the whole story to come to the final conclusion that the presence of the father is a detrimental one. But the process is long and excruciating because it causes moments of cognitive dissonance where the writer oscillates between love and hate for the parent, in an evident desire to hold on to the good in him. In certain moments she struggles to find plausible justifications for his behavior, reckoning that, for instance, his habit of beating his children might have been a 'cultural' mode of child rearing deriving from his Spanish roots, or perhaps something he had undergone himself with his father, a military man who used to beat him as a child. Analyzing her childhood once again, Nin finds glimpses of "good": when he bought her a compass, or worked on her bedside when she was sick, and the loveliness of his letters from France when she was 12 or 13 years old and lived in New York (1966, p. 176). But eventually she realizes that the seduction of her father started as a revenge for the first trauma of abuse—and also as a sort of therapy—yet it generated more layers of trauma that needed to be worked on with the help of her therapists: Dr Allendy first, and Dr Otto Rank later. This latter was also the only one reckoning that sleeping with her father could have had some sort of therapeutic function (Henke, 1997, p. 107).

The confusion generated by the act makes her wonder: "how far back does the crime date? What was the crime"? (Nin, 1992, p. 166), highlighting a difficulty for the

woman to make a distinction between abuse and normal behavior, and struggling to isolate the "real" crime committed by her father (or by the both of them).

There is a glimpse of confusion and wrongness in the whole situation after the first intercourse, when Nin ponders that:

> I was poisoned by this union. […] I had the man I loved with my mind; I had him in my arms, in my body. I had the essence of his blood in my body. The man I sought throughout the world, who branded my childhood and haunted me. I had loved fragments of him in other men: […] and the whole was there, body and face so beautiful, so ardent, with a greater force and more sensuality!
>
> This man's love, because of the similitudes between us, because of the blood relation, atrophied my joy. […] the sperm was a poison, a love that was a poison… (pp. 209-10).

The belief that the union is a dangerous and wrong one becomes even stronger when the two are separated and she starts detecting his pathological lies, and for that she reckons it is better to part for good (p. 232). But only a few pages later Nin is again immersed in her obsession for the man, not wanting anybody but him and living in the fear of not having loved him enough as he deserved (p. 244).

The feeling of being the other's double is what gives Nin some lucid moments where she claims that she is immune to all his deceptions, as "[her] double cannot deceive [her]" (p. 304) another delusion that ends up devoured by the same old mechanism between them, which also included the daughter's jealousy for his "cunt choosing" and his trips. Nin breaks up with him before one of such trips, in order to "make him suffer before he made [her] suffer" (p. 314). She even goes as far as informing her father's young wife Maruca that she intends to ask her husband Hugo for a divorce in order to marry Henry Miller (p. 322). In this way, Nin is sure that the woman will inform her father about such intention, causing his jealousy. The first real fracture with the father opens when she writes in her journal:

> […] battle won only for myself. Final parturition. Nascence of difference between father and me, therefore birth of my own isolated individuality. Father failed me. When he got ill after a scene, when he let me call with pity, when he came down with a tragic, theatrical air to say, "in front of Maruca I wish to prove that I ordered a double compartment" thus missing completely the great issue between us. All the rest he failed to see. He took refuge in Maruca's image of him as simple, loyal, truthful, honest man. […] I gave up; I wept. We were reconciled while I parted from all my hopes, my desire for an absolute and honest relationship. He wants gay lies.

> He is weak and puerile. He talks another language. I sought a match again—and found only differences (p. 315).

In this section, cognitive dissonance emerges as a central interpretive framework through which Nin's behavior can be understood: the simultaneous awareness that her father is not the idealized double she once imagined and the persistent emotional attachment that prevents an immediate rupture. Her writing reveals the gradual dismantling of a fantasy constructed over decades, as she attempts to sever ties with a man who ultimately fails to embody the mirrored self, she believed him to be. At the same time, both here and in the previous passage, father and daughter employ remarkably similar strategies of emotional manipulation, most notably triangulation, by involving third parties in their conflicts, such as Henry Miller and Maruca. This dynamic reinforces the cyclical nature of their bond, since triangulation, often associated with narcissistic relational patterns, involves the strategic use of a third person "to prove their point, gain power or hurt the other" (Rosenberg, 2013, p. 143).

Nin's position increasingly reflects a condition frequently described in survivors of narcissistic abuse: an acute awareness of cognitive dissonance that does not immediately translate into liberation. She recognizes the discrepancy between her emotional investment and the reality of the relationship, yet continues to struggle against her own perceptions and desires. This internal conflict becomes explicit when she resolves to disengage:

> I begin a letter to my father and I am stopped by sobbing. Frustration and despair. He is no father. I love an image of him which does not exist. When he is away this image begins to obsess me. I know that when he is near it is just misery" (1992, p. 367).

The passage crystallizes the paradox of cognitive dissonance: the simultaneous coexistence of insight and attachment, clarity and emotional dependence. Rather than a sudden awakening, Nin's separation unfolds as a gradual renegotiation of perception, in which the recognition of illusion becomes the necessary—though painful—precondition for autonomy.

So, Nin severs the ties with the father physically and materially, and more than a decade after the affair she could reflect upon the relationship detecting the attenuated influence of the man in her life. "I no longer fear the shallowness of my father when I give

time to take care of my body, lie in the sun, swim, learn to drive a car" she writes in the spring of 1948 (Nin, 1974, p. 30), appreciating the separation between herself and her supposed double, that insane identification "which had to be broken" (Nin, 1966, p. 283). Even the mother figure, defied and criticized many times, comes to occupy a new place in her ever-evolving scale of values, because she considers that "[she] swerved from admiration of [her] father's values to that of [her] mother's. But [she is] slowly finding [her] own" (p. 50), revealing an inner fight for individuality and separation from her inadequate—in different ways—parental figures. Yet all these evolutions and steps towards overcoming the trauma turn out to be useless ones when she is confronted with the death of the parent. The unresolved issues with a figure she had abandoned years before resurfacing when life itself—or death—brings a forced closure to a story that was not closed at all. Nin's father dies on October the 20th, 1949, in Cuba, alone and poor, and she cannot help but report the event in her journal in a mournful entry:

> Hurt was so deep, the shock so deep, the sense of loss so deep, it was as if I died with him. I felt myself breaking, falling. […] I wept and felt the loss in my body, this terrible unfulfilled love. Never to have come close to him, never to have fused with him. […] I should have overlooked his immense selfishness. I should have sacrificed my life to him as he wanted me to. […] I cannot accept his death. It will never heal. Because it was an incomplete, and aborted, an unfulfillable relationship. One can accept death when it comes as a culmination, a natural death. But something here, this failure, was like an artificial surgery. Amputation, not natural death (Nin, 1974, p. 70).

In the moment of her father's death, she retrieves once again the memory of him taking pictures of her and her brothers, quite possibly the original trauma, the most confusing one:

> No memory of tenderness or care, and yet my mother tells me that he took thousands of photographs of us, naked. He was full of aesthetic admiration for his children. It was the only moment in which he showed interest. The moment of photography was the only moment we received attention. […] did he bring out the woman's coquettishness in the little girl? Eyes of the father behind a camera. But always a critical eye (p. 70).

The cognitive dissonance returns to twist the memory of those moments as the ones that brought them closer, but at the same time the ones that showed how shallow and superficial—purely aesthetic—the relationship of Joaquín Nin with his children was: a narcissistic one where he could only love his own physical reflection on them. This

memory remains unresolved, as does the whole relationship, which will never reach proper closure.

Conclusions

The therapeutic function of art—writing, specifically—is widely acknowledged, and for Anaïs Nin it became a guiding philosophy: self-healing through creativity (Rainer, 2017, p. 266). She publicly maintained that both writing and psychoanalysis allowed her to overcome the trauma of her father's abandonment and to achieve forgiveness. Yet Rainer's account complicates this narrative, suggesting that such resolutions remained, at least in part, self-delusional. Near the end of her life, Nin reportedly continued to weep over her father, speaking of "the wound he'd inflicted still not healed" and of the enduring guilt associated with "replacing her mother in his bed" (p. 296). The lingering presence of these emotions challenges the image of closure she projected and underscores the persistence of unresolved trauma.

Even when Nin "presented herself in control of her adult reunion with her father" (Rainer, 2017, p. 299), the asymmetry of their relationship remained evident, revealing her less as the agent of seduction than as its subject. Her attempt to frame the incestuous relationship as a "Nietzschean fantasy," in which artists exist beyond conventional morality, can be read as a narrative strategy aimed at reconciling desire with transgression. Rather than dissolving the trauma, this aestheticization appears to have reworked it into a symbolic framework that allowed the experience to be narrated without fully confronting its psychological cost.

Nin's enduring need for paternal recognition led her, as Rainer argues, "to the trauma of adult incest" (p. 301), a trauma that demanded inscription in the diary despite promises of secrecy. Writing became both confession and survival mechanism: when she realized that there was "no one [she] could tell about [her] father," she felt "suffocated," and only the act of recording the experience allowed her to breathe again (Nin, 1992, p. 216). The diary thus emerges as a paradoxical space—simultaneously a site of self-fashioning and a repository of unresolved conflict—where healing and illusion coexist.

If writing as a therapy was not an effective tool, what was it? According to Henke, there is a lot of sophistication even in the journal, which cannot be seen as a pure and unmediated product but as a rather self-conscious instrument to gain the love of the

audience, as she had once looked for the love of the "absent and idealized parent of childhood fantasy" (Henke, 1997, p. 121). Moreover, Wayne McEvuly analyzes the sense of the journal meticulously, and partly reaches the same conclusions as Henke's when he claims that "Nin's diaries are fiction, even if true" because "the sense of reality is the artist's creation […] and the fact becomes the myth which it always was but which without the artist's –one is tempted to say compassionate—intervention and inventions it would never have become" (1971, p. 166). According to McEvuly, what the diary creates is

> a fellowship of the abandoned […] which is perhaps at once the most intimate and the most universal of human bonds, that which even in a last analysis, could not be broken, for the basis of its being is not willed or chosen or invented or even created but rather woven into the fabric and texture of our existence (p. 166).

Mediated or not, truthful or otherwise, writing remains, nonetheless, a tool to attempt giving an order to a relationship that had no order whatsoever. As Nin writes in her journal: "whenever I feel sadness about father, I write. When I yearn for him, I write. When I feel regrets, I write" (Nin, 1992, p. 328). So, even if tinged with literary sophistication, there is probably no better way to get to the core of the artist than through the journal because, as claimed by Evelyn Hinz "she perceives life through aesthetic eyes and […] consequently art is her natural mode of expression. Many artists record their experiences with a view to eventually transmuting them into art: with Nin the transmutation is immediate" (1975, p. 122).

The function of the journal is probably best described by Sharon Spencer when she writes that: "[…] a diary can liberate one from incarceration, whether of the body or the psyche. In its pages the prisoner can maintain contact with all the dimensions of the self that have been denied expression and, by implication, life. The diarist can affirm those parts of his total being that are suppressed, inhibited, or split off from the center, the self. More, the diarist can bring to light secret thoughts and desires, recognize the authenticity of the veiled dimensions of the self, and actually reassure itself of its very existence" (1971, p. 249).

All these functions are reduced to a supposed truth, that of a woman trying to heal herself from trauma and simply recounting the ups and downs of a process that, evidently, is always in progress. As human as it is, the reality of recovery might shift every day according to thoughts and events, and what readers of the journal can do is

appreciate the process and not the final result, which remains a mystery that died with the writer. The journal, as Nin writes in a very honest admission, "paints my father each day anew, with changes, paradoxes, contradictions, growth, and in these oscillations lies the truth" (1966, p. 204). This article has sought to demonstrate how Nin's writing constructs a space where trauma, desire, and narrative self-fashioning intersect, revealing cognitive dissonance and the persistent search for paternal recognition. It does not claim to resolve the psychological truth of Nin's experiences, nor to impose a definitive diagnosis, but rather to illuminate the ways in which her journal transforms lived conflict into a complex literary and therapeutic practice whose eventual outcome remains necessarily open.

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