

Female Creative Energy in Anais Nin's *A Spy in the House of Love*

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Abstract—This contribution offers a careful reading of female sexual power through eastern approaches of Tantra in Anais Nin's *A Spy in the House of Love*. This study attempts to displays women as the creative subjects of desire as it is represented in Anais Nin's *A Spy in the House of Love*. In this novel, female characters struggle to attain their subjectivity in a society that reduces them to objects of male desire rather than allowing them to be the subjects of their own.

Through Tantric view of love and eroticism, women in Nin's novel will be considered as subjects pursuing their own and other-subject's transcendence through love and Eros. They try to attain their spiritual power by recognizing their feminine energy and their female's creative power. Erotism is considered as one of the most direct links to the Divine (Danielou, 1992, 66). Through Tantrism's emphasis on the worship of the feminine energy (Subramuniyaswami, 1993, 834), Nin's female characters can express their inner feelings through their female body.

Keywords- *Tantrism, female creative power, love, eroticism, transcendence*

I. INTRODUCTION

The narrow cultural interpretation of the experience of body has confined women as slaves to all the physical needs of their husbands and has not allowed creative growth producing potential of the body. The roles associated with a narrow concept of women's biological function can lead women to neglect the spiritual dimensions of their personalities, although their own bodies seem to urge them to satisfy these needs. When women have traditionally figured as the objects of desire, they have been alienated from their bodies and from Eros, the creative part of their personalities. As a consequence, they have suffered a loss of spiritual identity. The study points to women's creative power as the way of expressing their real selves.

Woman may find that in resources of their own body, there is some confirmation of the life force within her that requires growth and creative expression. There, she may encounter what Carol Christ has called the great power of the universe and what others like Audre Lorde and Penelope Washbourn have called Eros, the life force of creative energy and vitality. "Sexuality [was] accepted not only as attributes of realistic characters but also as sources of female creative power" (Showalter, 2004, 35). However, women do no experience their lives as mere bodies. Motherhood comes to encompass the whole of a woman's life, leading her to expect that she has no creative possibilities, that she is

destined only to function for the continuation of the human race. The role neglects the spiritual dimension of the bodyself which Nin describe as having the potential to bring a woman into contact with the creative life force, the possibility for change and creativity. The woman perceives life grounded in the instincts as one of freedom rather than as one of bondage to feelings. The woman becomes creative living from the instinctual level, of forming a bridge between the life of the imagination and the natural life; of channeling the feminine energy of the unconscious rather than denying it. Sexuality is a powerful energy that brings consciousness to body and mind. This energy awakens altered sensations that allow us to realize who we are.

II. WRITINGS ON FEMALE CREATIVE POWER

Writing a book about sexual experiences explicitly and shaping clear images of Eros was impossible in nineteenth century. However, as late as 1942, Virginia Woolf noted that no woman writer had yet "told the truth" about the body (1996, 78). Women writers fail to write the truth about sexuality; the erotic dimension of women's experience. Female sexuality is considered as taboo and heterosexual relationship is as their primary focus. Woolf argues that multiplication of the self and the celebration of difference within the self leads to creativity and liberation from sexual prejudice in literature. To think androgynously offers not liberal biological determinism, but freedom to think creatively, with heterogeneity and difference playing a key role in this creative process (1996, 79)

Winnie Tomm outlines an interpretation of eroticism as "an expression of spiritual energy in the body" (1995, 67). Tomm suggests that an essential spiritual force women have available to them is an erotic one. This erotic force, sometimes called Shakti, Kundalini, or the energy of kali from the Hindu tradition (Evola, 1992; Mookerjee, 1988). Tomm advocates, patriarchy for women, an erotic fleshly, fully embodied spirituality. Like Tomm, Dorothy Donnelley (1982) as another voice among many feminists tries to articulate a liberated and body-positive theology. "We must develop an integrated humanity by covering sexuality as a value, a gift and a basis for healthier spirituality (125). Donnelly loves her own body and knows God through her body. Donnelly suggests that "God, then, loves us sexually because God loves us as human (134). Rather than by dissociation from the body, Tolle (1999) claims that it is through the body that transformation occurs. Rick Lewis (2000) also suggests that in human body we have the

potential to awaken and realize the entire universe. He commingles spirit and body.

Audre Lorde in her article "Use of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" evokes the erotic as only a great poet can. For Lorde, the erotic is not a minor power, but the basis for living fully. She says, "The erotic is the life-affirming power that arises from our deepest connection to the fullness of life, to the interdependent web of all existence" (1994, 77). Lorde sees women as having an erotic resource that operates in the realm of female spirituality. She defines the erotic as potential creative energy women use to enhance their lives spiritually. The energy of the erotic through sharing and feeling stirs itself internally within female but manifests itself externally. Lorde offers three specific functions of the erotic: "providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person...the open and fearless underlining of the capacity for joy... [and] to share the power of each other's feeling". According to Lorde, only women who are women-centered, actually develop the courage and determination to tap into the power of the erotic and use it to effect change in themselves and the world (1994, 55-58).

Carter Heyward as a feminist theologian speaks of Eros as "our embodied yearning for mutuality" (Heyward, 1989, 3). She states that "the erotic crosses over among us, moving us to change the ways we are living in relation. Touched by this sacred power, we are never the same again (1989, 5). Sam Keen has spoken of an "erotic metaphysics" in which "Plato and Aristotle both saw Eros as the prime mover of stars, acorns, and the affairs of men [sic]," and Christianity "defined the ultimate reality -- God -- as love," while numerous other traditions and thinkers have given rise to "an erotic vision" which emphasizes the unitive urge of beings, the powers and passions that move toward harmony (Keen, 1983, 26). The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling. In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that provide energy for change. For women, this has meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives (Lorde, 1994, 53). Reynolds argues that "Erotica seeks to return women to their bodies by offering a looking glass and not a distorting mirror. Here women can speak for themselves and by doing so deliver a valuable counter argument for the secrets and silences that typically pass for a woman's sex life" (1990, 276). And Beverly claims that "our sexual deepens and shapes our power of personal being. Our sexuality represents our most intense interaction with the world. It is also a key to the quality and the integrity of our overall spirituality" (2004, 126).

III. FEMALE CREATIVE ENERGY IN HINDU TANTRA

In Hinduism, in contrast to in the West, the female principle is the more immanent and active, animating the male principle, which is more inert and latent. This active female principle has a positive and creative aspect. Within Hinduism, the interchange of male and female qualities, the

incorporation of male and female within one person, alternative sex and gender roles, among deities and humans, are meaningful and positive themes in mythology and ritual (Danielou, 1964, 198). In Tantra, the body as a spiritual substance worth of care and pleasuring like the soul.

In Hindu Tantric, The feminine aspect, Shakti, is the creative energy inherent in men and women which dances upon the horizontal Shiva to give a feminine designation. Shakti is describes in yoga as the life principle of creation and the divine female energy of the universe. As a means of empowerment a Shakti theology built on such egalitarian foundations advocates "power with" and not "power over" relationships (Singer, 1977, 162). Shakti is the active and dynamic aspect of Shiva manifesting the universe in all its multiplicity, without there being a difference between the two except by their perceived qualities. They are inseparable. It is a representation of the macrocosmic, impersonal, absolute reality, a symbol of pure existence in all its qualities that is ultimately qualityless (*Ibid*, 70).

The dance of Shakti and Shiva symbolizes the coming together of the feminine and masculine energies inside a person, as well as the creation of the worlds. The Tantric principle is about giving and receiving energy. Both genders have feminine and masculine principle in them. To live in balance, we need both of these energies to be expressed equally. The dance of ecstasy cannot happen if one of men and women's energies is seen as better than the other. Masculinity and femininity in the human being are two irreducible properties, distinct and different, which produce a dynamism through their interaction with each other (*Ibid*, 228).

The inner fusion of feminine and masculine... takes place in both [partners], "embodying the soul and ensouling the body"... The aim of real Tantra is to take the "heat" of sexual ecstasy, the Shakti, and illuminate the whole of life through it, thereby pacifying the negative emotions and bringing both beings into a more and more tender daily harmony, a more stable and rich and exquisite mutual honoring and poise" (Harvey, 1995, 333-4). In man and woman there is "a union of the active and the passive, procreation and conception from which all mundane life and bliss are derived (Singer, 1977, 162). Shiva as the inert and passive aspect of being and consciousness of the universe represents the static male principle.

In Hindu Tantra, Shiva is thought to be abstraction until he is united with the energetic principle of Shakti, the goddess. Shakti is the "I" of "Shiva", the energy and source of his power of creation (Danielou, 1987, 112-113). Shiva is only completely himself when he is joined to Shakti. Without Shakti, he is invalid and a form without life, as inanimate as a corpse. "If Shiva is united with Shakti, he is able to assert his powers as Lord; if not, the god is not able to stir" (Singer, 1977, 178). Shiva as the neutral, uncreative substratum of the universe, divides into substance and energy, male and female principles. When they unite, a spark appears as the beginning of erotic desire, Kama, which is the source of the flow of life. Kama is the origin of manifestation, the union of Shiva and Shakti, the basis of reality. Duality is when "existence and consciousness unite, union is pleasure and in this pleasure

lies their purpose ... Separate existence of them (is) an appearance" (Danielou, 1964, 203).

The path of Tantra thus is a spiritual one, which appreciates the experience of sexual and sensuality as a conscious meditation, as a flowing together of the physical, erotic, a cosmic energies. The spiritual part of Tantra is to use sexual energy, not only to merge ecstatically with others, but also through him or her to become one with the cosmos or God. The basic foundation belief of Shakta philosophy is that there is the feminine element at the root of every creation. In yogic philosophy, Shakti brings his creative energy into physical existence. By means of the Kundalini practice, Shakti rises up through the body to be united in an embrace with Shiva, thus merging material with spiritual energy and awakening Shiva within the human mind. Shakti is viewed as the emerging of powers emanating from each person. Kundalini yoga offers a method for raising the level of consciousness in the person who is able to experience it and who has been adequately prepared for it. This yoga is a method for internalizing sexual potency and the energy derived from it. (Singer, 1977, 175)

Shakti is worshiped and cultivated as a power that can lead to spiritual liberation. The basic foundation belief of Shakta philosophy is that there is the feminine element at the root of every creation. Shiva and Shakti are always together. Two forms of energy (fire and moon) start acting and reacting against one another. These two in one depend each other and without the other they cannot survive. According to Tantrism, without the feminine path and its energies, enlightenment for either sex is impossible (*Ibid*, 179)

IV. FEMALE DESIRE IN ANAIS NIN'S A SPY IN THE HOUSE OF LOVE

Sexual revolution and the second wave of feminism enabled postmodern women writers' new frankness about the body. They claim that erotica can be sexually liberating forms of expression for women and will reinstate the traditional subject/object, dominant/submissive roles that have historically constituted an oppressive system of sexual relations. No female modernist had successfully disrupted the male subject/female object positions as well as Anais Nin. This late-modernist woman writer did create explicit narratives of female desire and sexual awakening. She is a pioneer of a new literary genre- female-authored erotica. Her definition of women's desire is not as a mirror image of men's.

Anais Nin insists on the need for proportion between intellect, body, and emotion in the human psyche, a balance between the inward-looking and the outward-looking faculties, or psychological functions, in Jung's terminology. When in the fallen condition, these faculties/functions get separated, become displaced and even metamorphosed into different selves: the inward man withers and the outward becomes a mere shell of himself.

Nin elevates the female status of equality and harmony at large, thus revising the misogynistic views of women whose value is lost in the matrix of male-dominated codes of creation of the world. Nin considers a special place for active role of female's divine power. She proclaims the crucial

significance of female sexual activity for changing the male- usurped foundations for a balanced and life-sustaining living (Brennan, 1992, 68). In Nin's *A Spy in the House of Love*, Sabina as a female character precisely accepts and celebrates her sexual identity as a woman that leads her to find her realization as an actress. Sabina does not subordinate the traditional masculine codes as well as the traditional function of women. Nin voices the traditional male-constructed paradigm of the "weak sex," situates Sabina as a woman in relation to men. She revises patriarchal tradition and gives significance for a woman by placing her at the center of artistic meaning and value production. Sabina takes on a role culturally and traditionally prescribed for a male artist, thus claiming her rights as a creative force both in art and in life. For Nin, woman becomes the symbol of culturally-sustained exchange of individual desire and choice. She uses creative manifestation of Sabina's active position in life and in art: a woman is seen as a fearless independent thinker and self-sufficient individual who can make her own choices and be responsible for making them.

Nin strives to resituate and necessitating the emergence and validity of woman as an actress, musician, singer and dancer; a creative woman. She tries to give private sphere to women and vitiate marking women as "angel of the house". She claims that woman must "sever herself from the myth man creates, from being created by him": although the woman's creative struggle is not an individualistic one, not based on the presence of a transcendental ego, she must develop a creative identity that reflects her fundamental differences from men—"she has to struggle with her own cycles, storms, terrors which man does not understand" (Brennan, 1992, 70). Sabina articulates her postulation of female difference as an actress. Nin alludes to the spiritual and creative side of art. Dance and Music is spiritual creativity and is part of Sabina like breathing. The dance of Sabina and Mambo is akin to dance of Shakti and Shiva in Tantrism.

Mambo held Sabina firmly, so encompassed that every moment they made was made as one body. He held her head against his, with a physical finiteness, as if for eternity. His desire became a center of gravity, a final welding... her eyes into his, his eyes thrust into her very being.... Fever shone in his face like moonlight. She knew he had desired her (59).

Sabina, however, is ambivalent about its benefits for a woman-artist, for she feels powerful. To fictionalize love and project its power to all without experiencing it on a personal level seems to be a creative mutilation. Sabina is about to (re)discover her femaleness as a source of creativity. But her independent, unified self is bounded by the family. Having lost her mother and been raised by her father, she is trained to fulfill the desires of men like Alan; situated herself within the ideology of the strictly divided domains of power distribution. Ellen Moers in her book *Literary Women* and Helena Michie in her work *The Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women's Bodies* both comment on female creative power as an assertion of self, a physical effort that provides a outlet for otherwise repressed physicality and may signal the woman's struggle for personal independence (130 and 40-41).

Nin purposefully posits the female on the same level of significance and validity as men. She brings in a marginal character of the 'Angel in the House'. Sabina opposes the traditional restricting and confining image imposed one. She tries to get rid of it, for it ruins the reasonable idea of womanhood. The masculine is present within Sabina but she is unconscious of his being there; hence she cannot relate to him, nor, by the same token, can he relate to her. This asymmetrical relationship, which is also unconscious, is necessarily passive (Singer, 1977, 160). Thus, the masculine element in Sabina is oppressed and rejected. Tantra asserts that the sense pleasure and the joy should not be suppressed (*Ibid*, 179). Since Sabina's masculine and feminine side do not have interaction with each other, she cannot attain her spiritual transcendence.

Though Sabina born of authentic Eros and kali power, she can only attains some level of spiritual; fulfillment through the bodily and sexuality. She has some way to go in her journey to a spiritual perspective. Nin's explorations in the spiritual realm lead her further away from patriarchal Christianity and toward more gender-balanced perspectives of Hinduism in which emphasis is on human body as a microcosm of the cosmic hierarchy and the union of feminine and masculine energy. Sabina's body is not in harmony to lead the union of her feminine and masculine principle in herself, but she tries to empower her female creativity.

Nin focuses on developing a poetics that seeks to express the ways in which the female body reflects the female mind (Papachristou, 1976, 58-59, 63). She spiritualizes not only the physical aspect of erotic passion between the two lovers, but more importantly, she validates the female corporeal experience as means to accessing the spiritual ecstasy of transformative vision. Nin seeks wholeness of spiritual, emotional, and physical elements through which women transcend their relationship with the others. Jung suggests that "we moderns are faced with the necessity of rediscovering the life of the spirit; we must experience it anew for ourselves. It is the only way in which we can break the spell that binds us to the cycle of biological events" (Jung, 1941, 140).

Nin asserts that in order to feel true eroticism, one must move beyond the physical into feeling and emotion. She thinks of spirituality as creativity. Women cannot achieve their enlightenment if they have instable subjectivity. She felt that it was the only way she could combine love and physical pleasure in her erotic writings. Unlike men, Nin asserts that women "need the words [...]the gestures which make the sensual act a particular one, not anonymous and purely sexual" (Reynolds, 1990, 3). In her opinion, it is women that will have to create an erotic genre in which sex is "linked to emotions to love, to a selection of a certain person" (*Ibid*, 8-9). This is exactly what Nin endeavored to accomplish: she wanted "to show all the relationships and establish fluid connections beyond sex...[to] reach the instinctive and intuitive connections" (Karsten, 39).

In keeping with Sabina's exciting, incendiary image, Nin allows her to glow in images of fire-like intensity. She dresses in red and silver, the colors of a fire: "The first time

one looked at Sabina one felt, everything will burn! (*A Spy in the House of Love*, 7). As the desirable woman, Sabina energizes those around her with the heat and revelation of sexuality. But many times, when women have wanted to reveal the facets of their sensuality, they have been suppressed (Reynolds, 1990, 4). Women have been discouraged from revealing their sensual nature (*Ibid*, 5). Anaïs Nin feels a distinguishably feminine creative force within herself as her female characters. She rewrites the erotic experience not only from a woman's experience and point-of-view to subvert the male depiction of the erotic experience that has reinforced the objectification, domination, and oppression of women's sexuality. Nin shows that love as well as art is a form of feminine expression and freedom (Evans, 1968, 304).

V. CONCLUSION

Nin acknowledges that *A Spy in the House of Love* was "the first study of a woman who tries to separate love from sensuality as man does, to seek sensual freedom" (5). Eros in Nin's novel creates the love which gives pleasures life, and also preserves life. The erotic expression of Nin, then, is far more than a celebration of sexuality and sensuality. It is an embrace of life-force and Earth energies. Nin tries to revise the figure of the feminine body as mute, awaiting for entrance into culture. The purpose of Nin's depictions of female erotic intensity redeems female sexuality. Erotic is a basic trait for development of the whole self.

The novel represents psychological fragmentation experienced by Sabina in her quest for self-realization through a series of unfulfilling love affairs. Sabina is described as a woman on fire, a woman about to be consumed by the raging fever of her sexual desire (Evans, 1968, 149, 158; Papachristou, 1976, 66). Nin says that Sabina seeks wholeness by the fever of desire with fusion of mind and body (Evans, 1968, 160-1). Sabina's desire in her body is described as: "she had a "feverish breathlessness" and "sat as if she could not bear to sit for long... drank hurriedly... smiled so swiftly that he was not even certain it had been a smile". Fragmented quality of her relationships seems to be paralleled by "changes in her personal appearance" (*A Spy in the House of Love*, 3,5). Femininity shows itself in Sabina only in the presence of men, either in response to the man's desire or, quite as often, as the expression of her own desire to conquer him (Harding, 2001, 156). However, Sabina can not properly acknowledge her dual masculine and feminine nature. She loses contact with her masculinity. Sabina appears as ideal women to men, but she is actually the most removed from their true selves which should consist of feminine and masculine elements held in balance. It would appear that the woman who embodies feminine energy would be a real woman, someone to be happy rather than unfulfilled. Sabina's feminine side is strengthened through her creativity and seeking pleasure in being actress. However, like all Nin heroines who fail to experience self-satisfaction, Sabina lacks balance due to her

failure in acknowledgement of the masculine faculty within herself.

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