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Author: Marte Handal

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Supervisor: Janne Stigen Drangsholt

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Abstract

Historically, the concept of *woman* has varied and changed in keeping with the ruling ideology of the time, and this has caused a number of challenges for women. This thesis is a study of how the narrative of the (female) self is expressed in writing and how women attempt to discover their own identity, in concord or in conflict with the dominant ideology in their contemporary society. Incorporating texts from three different centuries, it seeks to investigate whether the dominant ideology manifests itself in writing and if it is evident also in writings by women in our contemporary society. The textual framework is Florence Nightingale's *Cassandra* (1929), followed by Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1928) and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Finally, to compare these texts to our contemporary environment, the thesis will conduct an investigation of Caitlin Moran's *How To Be a Woman* (2011).

Throughout the 150 years that comprise the time span between the main texts to be studied this thesis, the concept of woman has changed immensely. In the nineteenth century, the feminine ideal centred on the family, motherhood and respectability. Consequently, the ideal woman limited or non-existent responsibilities in relation to society as a whole had little or no connection to a functional or responsible role in society. Around the turn of the century, the early women rights movement had achieved important results and women were less restricted by the ideology of femininity found in the Victorian Period. However, the newfound freedom of women became a threat to men and there were still challenges to overcome. During the Second World War, women participated to a great extent within the workforce, however, when the soldiers returned from war, they wanted their jobs back. Thus, in the 1950s the emancipation of women stagnated and most women returned to the domestic sphere and resumed the role of wife and mother that resembled the Victorian ideal. Through the second wave of feminism, this ideal was challenged and in contemporary society the stereotypical role reserved for women is gradually dissolving and women are liberated and free to do what they want. Yet, while women are gaining ground within education, politics and the work force, there are still images of woman that cause concern. Most evident is the sexualized image that is vividly projected through the mass-media.

This thesis investigates how Nightingale, Woolf, Friedan and Moran challenge the ideology in their respective societies and attempt to reformulate what it means to be a woman.

This is why their texts provide an understanding of how ideology both affects women and is challenged by women's writing.

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1 Introduction

The great question that has never been answered, and which I have not yet been able to answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is:

‘What does a woman want?’

Sigmund Freud, quoted in Jones (1955:421)

Historically, the concept of *woman* has varied and changed in keeping with the ruling ideology of the time, and this has caused a number of challenges for women. Although women today have the same opportunities as men, there are still issues that need to be addressed. In our media-governed society women are presented with multiple images of womanhood and the renowned question “what does a woman want” that Freud formulated in the early twentieth century still seems relevant and yet to be fully answered. As long as women live in a culture saturated with social conventions of what it means to be a woman, there will be a pressure for women to conform to certain ideals. This in turn could result in a conflict of identity, between a being’s comprehension of herself and the concept of woman which has been constructed by ideology. This conflict is the reason why women have felt the need to express themselves in writing in the first place, because they feel that there is a gap between what they see as themselves and what they are told that they should be.

The motivation behind this thesis is to investigate how the narrative of the (female) self is expressed in writing and how women attempt to discover their own identity, both in concord and in conflict with the dominant ideology in their contemporary societies. There will be a focus on the problems facing women who are writing themselves, and the uncertainty and psychological strain that is involved in feeling themselves to be different from what society tells them that they are and what they feel and think themselves to be. The alienation of self, experienced by women in the course of history has frequently been combatted through and as writing, and particularly writings of the self. In *Autobiography* (2001), Linda Anderson emphasises the importance of the genre of autobiography in the sense that the personal is also universal. Anderson also discusses how difficult it is to say something general about something for which one does not really have a language. In her view, “autobiography can become ‘the text of the oppressed’, articulating through one person’s experience, experiences which may be representative of a particular marginalized group.” (Anderson, 2001:97). In this

understanding, autobiography becomes both a way of attesting oppression and authorising the subject through her cultural representation.

Hence, texts exploring female lives become particularly important in the way that they frequently have a particularly complex relationship to the social contexts in which they were written. Describing the society in which the writer belongs, becomes a way of finding her own identity. This is something that is seen more in writings by women than by men. This is due to the fact that through history women have had more socially constructed roles attached to their gender than that of men. Women have, as this thesis will attempt to describe, had a greater need to find out how they fit into this environment. What is more, the personal aspect of writing is also something that characterises women's writing in general, and this is something that Judith Gardiner has studied. In *On Female Identity and Writing by Women*, Gardiner found that identity is an important factor in women's writing and she states that "[f]emale identity formation is dependent on the mother-daughter bond [. . .] the maternal metaphor of female authorship clarifies the woman writer's distinctive engagement with her characters and indicates an analogous relationship between woman reader and character" (Gardiner, 1981:349). Furthermore she believes that a " woman writer uses her text, particularly one centring on a female hero, as part of a continuing process involving her own self-definition and her empathic identification with her character" (Gardiner, 1981:357). Clearly, women seem more connected to not only their audience, but also to their own writing as it becomes a representation of themselves.

This thesis aims to investigate how ideology affects women and how this is both challenged and how it manifests itself in writings by women. In order to address this question, I will conduct close readings and comparative analyses of texts from three different periods that lead directly up to our own time. Starting with Florence Nightingale's *Cassandra* (1928), followed by Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), I will finally see how these texts relate to the contemporary study through a focus on Caitlin Moran's *How to be a Woman* (2011). What connects these authors and texts is that the authors all provide a response to the different male attitudes towards female identity in their contemporary society. The texts will be analysed with a focus on the narrative of self and socially constructed roles from a social and feminist perspective. Social theory focuses on commentary and critique of contemporary society rather than explanation. Having a feminist perspective incorporates an approach that critiques and explores societal norms of gender, race, class, sexuality, and other social inequalities (Moi, 1996). Hence, it

seems useful to study, compare and discuss the texts with reference to theory from both these approaches.

The feminist theory employed in this thesis incorporates some of the most classical texts from the twentieth century, such as writings by Simone de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter and Toril Moi. All of these female theorists have projects that run parallel with those of Nightingale, Woolf, Friedan and Moran, and it seems useful to read them in concord to be able to illuminate different perspectives of the process towards trying to say what a woman is. References to Simone de Beauvoir will focus specifically on how her theory of woman as “the Other” relates to what the selected texts present, while Elaine Showalter’s writings are helpful in terms contextualising women’s literature in relation to cultural and social issues. Finally, Toril Moi provides a number of useful theories and concepts in terms of both women as beings and drawing the larger lines of what feminist theory and critique entails. She will be referred to throughout as she incorporates Woolf, Friedan, and de Beauvoir in her vast studies. Furthermore, to describe the society these authors found themselves in, I will use *The Norton Anthology-Literature by Women* (Gilbert & Gubar, 1996), as they have collected and explained women’s literature from the periods I am dealing with. The anthology has also been consulted to investigate how women were portrayed in literature by men in the various periods in question. Other relevant theory and literary works will be referred to when needed.

To guide the reader of this thesis, it is also necessary to clarify some central theoretical terms and concepts. The terms *sex* and *gender* are often seen as divergent ways of describing the differences between women and men. *Sex* marks the biological differences between the two, while *gender* refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviour, activities and attributes that a particular society considers appropriate for men and women (WHO, 2012). Sex and gender is important for this thesis partly because ‘woman’ seems to be a concept that primarily relates itself to ‘gender’ and is more closely connected to ideological structures, while ‘sex’ seems to be a static concept which decides gender in the first place.

Toril Moi also comments on these two concepts and notes that sometimes it is necessary to distinguish between the natural and cultural sex differences, especially when feminist theorists focused on this distinction to avoid biological determinism. In the Victorian period it was thought that because one has a certain sex (female) one must behave and think in a certain way (feminine), which means that gender is conflated into sex. However, in the case of subjectivity theory, that is theories that focus on the ‘self’, this distinction does not work. In her view, the sex/gender concepts are “simply irrelevant to the task of producing a

concrete historical understanding of what it means to be a woman” (Moi, 1999:4), a problem which faces all of the female writers that will be dealt with in this thesis.

In this context, it also seems important to clarify the term *feminist*, which is defined as “an advocate or supporter of the rights and equality of women” (OED, 2012a). Toril Moi suggests that there is a need to recognise the differences between the terms ‘feminist’, ‘female’ and ‘feminine’. Within literary criticism we need to “distinguish between ‘feminism’ as a political position, ‘femaleness’ as a matter of biology and ‘femininity’ as a set of culturally defined characteristics” (Moi, 1996:117). In other words, she claims that if women’s writing is described as feminine writing it will cause a position of marginality in relation to a patriarchal society. Therefore, this distinction between the terms is crucial in literary criticism.

Another term that will be frequently employed is *ideology*, which refers to the way that people think about and see the world (Bennett & Royle, 2009). Ideology defines the subject from the inside and as well as the social norms that people are expected to behave according to. Ideology is closely connected to language as it reflects attitudes and social concepts. Moreover, chauvinist or male-dominated language not only reflects, but also helps maintain sexist attitudes in a society (Fairclough, 2001). One of the problems faced by all the women writers that will be dealt with in this thesis is that language fails to provide them with concepts that adequately describe what it is that they are facing, and that language is saturated with patriarchal thoughts. This appears to be a reason both as to why they struggle so much in their writing and why they must write in the first place. In all of the texts that will be discussed there is a problematisation of the need to find a language and a text that explains both their own situation and, possibly, that of other women.

Because of the conflict that frequently arises out of the influence of ideology and lack of distinction between sex and gender, women have, throughout history, faced challenges regarding their identity. *Identity* may be defined as the distinctive characteristic belonging to any given individual, or shared by all the members of a particular social category or group (OED). The term *identity* will in this thesis be employed as both the internal and subjective, as well as the external and normative. The term, then, both refers to how women see themselves and how they are seen by others. More specifically, identity will be dealt with as the product of social structures and relationship with others. This thesis will address the social forces which shape the ideology concerning women, and the degree of control that women themselves exert over who they are.

According to Vivian Gornick (1978) the battle for women's rights began with Mary Wollstonecraft's publication of *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Here, Wollstonecraft radically and controversially proposed that women ought to make more use of their intellect than what they did as mothers and wives. She also says that women are not treated as human beings, but as women (Gornick, 1978:32). From that point on, the feminist movement fought for equality for women in a number of areas, within education, access to the work force, politics, female sexuality, and women's place within the household. Although Wollstonecraft advocated the self-worth, intelligence, and basic human potential of women in her time, however, feminism did not become an identifiable movement until the late nineteenth century. In Gornick's view, "the conviction that men by nature take their brains seriously, and women by nature do not, is based not on an inborn reality but on a cultural belief that has served our deepest insecurities" (Gornick, 2008). Since that time, about every fifty years, feminism has proliferated, and these individual movements have later been named various waves of feminism.

The first wave of feminism took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and developed out of a society of urban industrialism and liberal, socialist politics. The goal of this wave was to open up opportunities for women, with a special focus on suffrage. Although Florence Nightingale, whose text this thesis will concentrate on from this period, lived and wrote during this first wave, she refused to associate herself with the women's right movement. Yet, in retrospect, her projects and visions show clear resemblance to those of her feminist contemporaries and she is considered a prominent advocate for women's emancipation (Nightingale, 1979). Even though she did not think of herself as belonging to a group, her experiences and thoughts were seen to describe the situation of a large number of women at the time.

This first wave of feminism led to an increase in female opportunities within education and the work force and eventually in 1918, women over 30 were given the right to vote. Two significant women who are directly connected to this first wave are Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir. Woolf has been referred to as the founder of the contemporary debate as she pronounced issues that later feminists returned to. Her most central contribution to feminism was her recognition that gender identity is socially constructed and something that can be challenged and transformed. Through her feminist polemic *A Room of One's Own* (1928) she attempts to reclaim a female tradition of writing. The narrator tries to enter a university library to study women's writing, but, ironically, as a woman, she is denied access. Her response is "[I]ock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that

you can set upon the freedom of my mind” (Woolf, 1929:76) Similarly to Nightingale, her focus is on women’s intellect.

The other prominent figure from this period is the French feminist Simone de Beauvoir, whose ground-breaking and provocative study *The Second Sex* (1949) is seen as the initial effort to challenge human history from a feminist perspective. What makes her so important is, according to Moi, that she

formulates three principles and applies them to women’s situation in the world. First is her foundational insight that man ‘is the Subject, he is the Absolute: she is the Other.’ Man incarnates humanity; woman, by virtue of being female, deviates from the human norm. The consequence is that women constantly experience a painful conflict between their humanity and their femininity (Moi, 2010:2)

De Beauvoir’s ideas then, and in particular her notion of woman as “the other” will be referred to throughout this thesis, while not being dealt with as a primary text.

Interestingly, *The Second Sex* is said to mark the transition from first to second wave feminism as it gave focus to a wider range of obstacles for women, such as sexuality (Selden, Widdowson, & Brooker, 2005). The second wave as a whole is, moreover, said to have been sparked by Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), where she recognised a malaise among contemporary women that she named “The Problem That has No Name” (Friedan, 2010:5). Influenced by de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), Friedan protested against the mainstream media image that reduced women to the role of wife and mother. This wave continued well into the 90’s and was a phase in which the debate broadened to a wide range of issues in an increasingly radical tone. In this phase, sexuality and reproductive rights were principal issues along with a fight against the current ideology that reduced women to objects of beauty dominated by patriarchy to keep them in the home or in dismal, low-paying jobs. The movement also concerned itself with women’s role within the family (Rampton, 2008). Moreover, whereas the first wave of feminism was generally driven by middle class white women, the second phase included women of colour and developing nations in search of sisterhood and solidarity. Feminists wanted to demonstrate the relationship between race, class, and gender oppression. The most influential feminist literary critic from this wave is Elaine Showalter with her book *A Literature of Their Own* (1977). Drawing on the legacy from Woolf, she outlines a literary history of women writers starting with the Brontë sisters with focus on women’s experience. Her view on the female tradition is that it has been neglected by male critics and that women’s writing is different than that of men’s. Showalter

was committed to retrieve the invisible precursors in the literary tradition (Selden et al., 2005).

The third wave of feminism began in the mid-1990s and is continuing in the present. Feminists in this wave sought to debate or even avoid what they perceived as a universal female identity that focused on the experiences of upper-middle-class white women. Concepts of body, gender, and sexuality that the first two waves of the movement identified with male oppression, were further confronted and in accordance with the situation of the contemporary woman (Rampton, 2008). More specifically, women of the third wave tried to avoid the role of victim through their own definition of feminine beauty in order to become subjects, as opposed to objects, of a sexist patriarchy. The music industry and especially the internet provided an arena for these feminists to reclaim derogatory terms, such as “slut”, “bitch” and “cunt” (Heywood & Drake, 1997). As we shall see, these terms have been frequently used by men to describe women in literature and again by women writers in more recent texts, representing an attempt to subvert its demeaning power.

It is also important to emphasise that although the second wave of feminism is said to continue into the 1990s, feminism saw a decline after the late 1970s. The common conception is that women have achieved so much and less focus is put on feminism as a political and personal project. In fact, the word feminist has in some circles become a negatively loaded concept, that is, one that carries negative connotation to such an extent that women are reluctant to use it. This phenomenon is explained by Toril Moi, who claims that

[w]e are witnessing the emergence of a whole new generation of women who are careful to preface every gender-related claim that just might not come across as unconventional with “I am not a feminist, but...”

Moi’s understanding that most young women are reluctant to consider themselves feminists, something that will be brought up in Chapter 4, as this is an important theme in Moran’s *How to Be a Woman* (2011).

As this thesis will examine texts exploring female lives and consider the social context in which they were written, the first chapter begins with a presentation of the characteristic rules of conduct in the Victorian period, that were largely based upon gender stereotypes, rendering it a challenge for women to write their own selves freely. The literary focus of this chapter will be Nightingale’s essay *Cassandra*. In this zealous, feminist essay, Nightingale criticises the lives of idleness and triviality that women were forced to lead in the Victorian

period. *Cassandra* is considered a political work that belongs to the classics of Victorian feminism, alongside John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869), Josephine Butler's *Women's Work and Women's Culture* (1869) and Emily Davies' *The Higher Education of Women* (1866). All these nineteenth century writers examined and challenged the assumptions about the lives and roles of women (Stark, 1979). The reason why I have chosen this text as a starting point for my thesis is that it represents a strong statement against the Victorian belief that the essence of being a woman was to live for others. Through writing this essay, Nightingale seems to find her vocation in life and seems to finally break free from the despairing situation she found herself in.

The constrictions that Nightingale fought against were confronted throughout the twentieth century and gradually women gained more rights, and the second chapter presents the dominant ideology in the first third of the twentieth century. To explore how writing and identity are affected by the social and psychological constraints in this period I will focus on Virginia Woolf's essay, *A Room of One's Own* (1928). Virginia Woolf is recognised as a key figure in literary history, both as a feminist and a modernist. In *A Room of One's Own* she argues that women's creativity has been systematically subdued throughout the ages due to their lack of money and space. She finds that unless the economical discrepancy between men and women is rectified, women's literary achievements will remain inferior to that of men. What is especially interesting about Woolf's text and why it is chosen for this thesis is that she deals directly with writings by women. She sets out to trace a literary tradition for women and explores a language suitable for women.

While women gained more rights than ever before in this the early part of the twentieth century, the post-war era represented a shift in the conception of woman and many returned to the domestic sphere. This will be a point of discussion in chapter three, with particular reference to Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Betty Friedan was an American housewife who, in the 1960's, described the malaise that she and her fellow housewives experienced. She discovered and named "The Problem that Has No Name" and through her book she gave a voice to millions of women who had been suffering in silence (Shriver, 2010). Her relevance in this thesis comes from the fact that she expressed in writing a feminine ideal that affected so many women, yet that no one had articulated before. In addition, her efforts sparked the second wave of feminism and her work is considered one of the most influential non-fiction books of the twentieth century (Meyer & Rohlinger, 2012).

In chapter four, the focus is on the contemporary image of woman, and in particular how this is presented through mass-media. Here, the forceful and personal, yet intelligent

book, *How to Be a Woman* by Caitlin Moran will be addressed. Moran uses her own life to describe womanhood in the twenty-first century and similarly to the three other authors of this thesis, she writes about things that women may have felt and intuited, but which have not been adequately presented in language. Also, through her book she tries to generate a new wave of feminism by pointing out what is still challenging for women in contemporary society. This is why her book has relevance for this thesis.

As a preliminary conclusion, one might claim that what has been embraced by the four authors, and what is also the focus of this thesis, is that they all attempted to challenge and debate the concept of woman. The crucial question, with a clear echo from Freud's query, was and still is "what does it mean to be a woman?" (Murray, 1996). In the following, we will explore the manners in which they all attempt to provide answers to this question.

2 The Victorian Period and Florence Nightingale

2.1 Social conceptions of “woman”

The Victorian era is considered as the typical example of an age of domesticity, symbolised by Queen Victoria, who came to signify a kind of femininity centred on the family, motherhood and respectability. Accompanied by her husband Albert, and her many children in the extravagant but homely environments of Balmoral Castle, Queen Victoria became an icon of late-19th-century middle-class femininity and domesticity. In Victorian Britain, there were few employment opportunities for middle-class women. They were taught trivial accomplishments to fill up days where there was nothing important to do. Prior to and at the beginning of the nineteenth century the ideal had been “the perfect wife”. The perfect wife was an active and vital part of the family and her primary task was childbearing. Women in lower classes were expected to contribute to the family income, but in the middle-classes their contribution was childrearing, food preparations and clothes making. In the upper-classes they would have help with these tasks and would have the role as an organiser of the household. This model for the perfect wife created an ideal that had little or no connection to a functional or responsible role in society.

The predominant ideal was that before marriage a young girl would be brought up to be innocent and without sexual feelings at all. The desire for motherhood was considered innate and girls were kept under her family’s watchful eye in order to be ready for marriage. Once married, she did not work. She had nannies and servants and her social and intellectual growth was confined to family and close friends. She was totally dependent on the economic status of her father and then her husband (Vicinus, 1973). Women’s function in society was also reflected in women’s fashion. Hoop skirts and corsets created a more sexual female body and this emphasised woman’s separation from the workplace. The constricting clothing underlined and symbolized women in accordance with their primary function - as wife, mother and domestic manager (Abrams, 2001).

Women who did not marry had few opportunities in Victorian England and respectable employment for women from solidly middle-class families was largely restricted to work as a school teacher or governess. The working bourgeois woman held an uncharacteristic position in Victorian England: she was a wage-earning, middle-class woman

in a society in which femininity was defined by domesticity and non-participation in the public labour market. Both married and unmarried women kept themselves busy with traditional pastimes: reading, embroidery, music, and traditional handicrafts. Outside the domestic sphere, women participated in charity work as this type of work part was viewed as suitable to the female role of self-sacrifice and service. (Abrams, 2001).

2.2 First-wave of feminism

Although women in the Victorian Period participated in society within charity work and other philanthropic activities, they came to realize that they had little influence and power to change things. This realization became the starting point for a demand for an improvement of the position of women. Women wanted to be able to influence their own fate and the first aim of the women who later was known as the first-wave feminists, was improved education and working possibilities, better working-conditions for those women who worked and finally, to attain the right the vote (Abrams, 2001). Even though this first-wave of feminism came about towards the end of the Victorian Period, it had strong historical origins. According to de Beauvoir, the first woman to “take up her pen in defence of her sex” was Christine de Pizan, who lived in the 15th century (De Beauvoir, 1949:125). Another prominent writer who advocated women’s rights was Mary Wollstonecraft, who published, what was later termed the first feminist treatises, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792. Wollstonecraft is considered the grandmother of British feminism and her ideas shaped the thinking of the suffragettes, who campaigned for the women’s vote (Abrams, 2001). Both Nightingale and Woolf are associated with the ideas of the first-wave feminism, despite the fact that Nightingale rejected to support feminism in her time, and Woolf was reluctant to use the term. In *Three Guineas* Woolf pronounces that the word “feminist” is an obsolete word that should be destroyed, “The word “feminist”, she says, “is destroyed: the air is cleared and in that clearer air what do we see? Men and women working together for the same cause” (Woolf, 1966:101). Nevertheless, these two women have, in hindsight, proved to be significant in the development of modern feminist thought.

2.3 Woman in male literature

The conventional ideas of what it entailed to be a middle class woman were also presented in numerous books and magazines. So-called conduct books differed from traditional texts within medicine and theology, where women were shown to be fixed creatures. Conduct books, on the other hand, were based on a different assumption. The new idea in these texts was that men and women are flexible and can be trained for changing roles and that proper instruction can fashion them into social situations (Holtby, 1978). Although typically written by men, one of the most popular contributors of conduct literature was Sarah Stickney Ellis. This prolific author was advocating suffocating middle-class ideologies of womanhood. In her etiquette books she reminds the wife that her “highest duty is so often to suffer and be still” (Ellis, 1845).

2.4 What, how and why did women write?

At the same time, these conventional ideas were also challenged by many female writers. In *A Woman's Thoughts about Women* (Greenblatt & Abrams, 2006), the novelist Dinah Maria Mulock compares the future of boys and girls when leaving school. The boys can get on with life in contrast with the girls, who “likewise finish their education, come home, and stay at home” (Craik 1828:149). Similarly in *Cassandra* (1928), Florence Nightingale, writes about the cost for women for having nothing useful to do (Greenblatt & Abrams, 2006). The Victorian texts illustrate that the challenges of this period was not only political, economic and educational. They concerned the manner in which women were regarded and how they regarded themselves as members of society.

In *A Literature of Their Own*, Elaine Showalter shows how women's literature has evolved, starting from the Victorian period to modern writing. According to her, the movement can be divided in several stages. Firstly, *the Feminine Stage*, a period beginning with the use of the male pseudonyms in the 1840s and ending in 1880 with George Eliot's death. Secondly, *the Feminist Stage*, from 1880 till the winning of the vote in 1920; and finally *the Female Stage*, from 1920 till the present-day. In the Feminine Stage the literature by women was characterised by the imitation of the governing structures of tradition and an “*internalization* of its standards of art and its views on social roles” (Showalter, 1977:36).

Women writers involved in the Feminine phase were the Brontës, Elizabeth Gaskell, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Harriet Martineau, George Eliot, Florence Nightingale, and the later generation of Charlotte Yonge, Dinah Mulock Craik, Margaret Oliphant, and Elizabeth Lynn Linton. These writers struggled to participate in a public sphere, a male tradition, and many of them felt a conflict of both submission and opposition as is evident in many of their novels (Showalter, 1977).

The novel was the dominant literary form in the Victorian period and women prospered in the novel market and comprised a strong segment of the reading public as well. The newfound commercial power of female novelists became intimidating to the male novelists, and in 1855 Nathaniel Hawthorne complained that his art was being threatened by a “damned mob of scribbling women” (Gilbert & Gubar, 1996:303). However, this did not seem to disturb the production of novels by women, and they thrived in this literary market. These Victorian novels were typically vast in size and through this form the authors tried to characterize a large and comprehensive social world. The governess novel, which typically explored women’s roles in society, became a popular genre of Victorian England. The most famous examples are Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Anne Brontë’s *Agnes Grey* (1847) (Greenblatt & Abrams, 2006, p. 992). Other genres favoured by women writers of the time were private diaries, letters, family memoirs, and fictionalized autobiographies.

The realistic portrayal of social life was emphasised in the Victorian novel, and through the stories of its characters many Victorian issues were highlighted. Moreover, writers gave voice to those who had been voiceless and the debates about political issues affected literary representation. However, the debate concerning women’s role in society was complex. The differing views of female writers are exemplified in texts from the period. In *Lady Travellers* (1845), Elizabeth Eastlake endorses the domestic virtues that are said to be natural to women, but shows their relevance to spheres of activity outside the home. Similarly, Eliza Lynn Linton satirizes the modern woman in *The Girl of the Period* (1868). These traditional views on women are contrasted in fictional characters, such as in *Jane Eyre* (1847). Here, Jane articulates passionately the view that women are not different from men, but need a field of action much as their brothers do. This is also the desire of Miss Barfoot, in George Gissing’s *The Odd Women* (1893), who speaks passionately of the transformation of women’s existence into something that is “quickenened with all of incident, life, fire, and feeling” (Gissing, 1998:283). In non-fiction, another illustration of where the great Victorian women writers represent women’s ambitions close to Miss Barfoot and Jane Eyre’s plea is found. In *Autobiography*, the novelist and political philosopher Harriet Martineau describes

her exhilaration when her brother tells her to devote herself to writing and “leave it to other women to make shirts and darn stockings” (Martineau, 1969:200). Through these texts it is evident that women writers played a major role in shaping the terms of the debate about the Woman Question (Greenblatt & Abrams, 2006).

It seems evident that many Victorian women felt suffocated by the dominant social codes of their society, which ascribed different roles to men and women. For women, in lack of an interactive scene, and their constitutive estrangement from representation, one way of understanding and challenging the patriarchal order was to write. The underlying driving force behind female authorship may possibly have been therapeutic reasons, to find an outlet for frustration and anger, to motivate and inspire people, as propaganda, or practical reasons, that is to earn money, or for purely artistic reasons. This need for an outlet can be exemplified by the words of Charlotte Brontë, who considered writing as an appreciative alternative to teaching. In a private letter to Elisabeth Gaskell she commented on a Westminster Review article on “Woman’s Mission”:

[...] although 'a few Men' with fine sympathies and a strong sense of justice support changing attitudes toward women, the amelioration of our condition depends on ourselves [however, some], evils [...] deep rooted in the foundations of the Social system [...] cannot be changed (B. Taylor, 2001)

In her view, society played a huge impact on the social conditions of women in her time, and after publishing *Jane Eyre*, Brontë stated that she often wished to say something about the "condition of women".

The image of monstrosity is also vividly described in Victorian women’s literature, letters, private notes and memoirs. In these texts women describe how they have to conceal their drive for independence, and how they differ from “normal” women. One example is found in Nightingale’s private autobiographical note, where she records “that as a very young child she had an obsession that she was not like other people. She was a monster; that was her secret which might at any moment be found out” (Woodham-Smith, 1951:6). Similarly, Dinah Mulock Craik argued that going to convent would be better than going to a madhouse:

[...] women with no ties, no duties, no ambition – who drone away a hopeless, selfish existence, generally ending in confirmed invalidism, or hypochondria, or actual insanity! – for diseased self-absorption is the very root of madness. It is a strange thing to say – yet I dare to say it, for I believe it to be true – that entering a sisterhood, almost any sort of sisterhood where there was work to be done, authority to compel the doing of it, and companionship to sweeten the same, would have saved many a woman from a lunatic asylum” (On Sisterhoods, as cited in Showalter (1987:61-62))

Through writing, female madness was explored and the madwoman became an emblematic figure in literature (Showalter, 1987). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar perceive this fictional character of the crazy woman who haunts the margins of nineteenth-century women writers’ texts as a representation of the female author’s anger against patriarchy (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979). Their theory includes the exploration of how female writers had to struggle to attain recognition in a male-centred literary territory. In order to achieve that female authors had to challenge the myths and stereotypes connected to the female sex. Besides the mad woman, or monster, they present the stereotypical woman as an angel and point out how the two types are central parts of female authorship.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was a pervasive cultural link between women and madness. Women were closely associated with irrationality, silence, nature, and body while men were connected to reason, discourse, culture, and mind. The feminist writer, Elaine Showalter, explores in *The Rise of the Victorian Madwoman*, the issue of women and madness in Victorian Britain. Through the views from Freud, Victorian psychiatry linked madness to female sexuality and the periodicity of the menstrual cycle. Due to the belief that madness originated in the reproductive system in women, women were seen as the prime carriers of madness. Thus, the transmission of mental illness was seen as twice more likely to come from mothers than fathers. With reference to *Cassandra* she also explains the psychological effects of family constraints, boredom and patriarchal protectionism. According to Showalter, the conventions of society drove Victorian middle-class women to silence, depression, illness, lunatic asylums and death. Furthermore, she argues that mental illness could be regarded as an appealing escape from the restrictions of the feminine role and a respectable reason for a woman to be alone (Showalter, 1987). In *Cassandra*, Nightingale describes the need for a vocation for women and how the struggle to achieve fulfilment affected them:

What these [women] suffer – even physically – from the want of such work no one can tell. The accumulation of nervous energy, which has had nothing to do during the day, makes them feel every night, when they go to bed, as if they were going mad; and they are obliged to lie long in bed in the morning to let it evaporate and keep it down (Nightingale, 1979:43).

Another conflicting contrast that was challenged by female novelists was that between virgin and whore. This is found in the poem *Aurora Leigh* (1857) by Elizabeth Browning, where Lady Waldemar, the villainess is set against the poem's honourable protagonist, Aurora (Gilbert & Gubar, 1996). As these examples show, fictions by women were haunted by these double images of self-assertion and self-renunciation.

2.5 Exploration of the Victorian self - autobiographies

The genre of autobiography was particularly popular in the Victorian Period. Not only did the publication of autobiographies increase enormously during the era, but also the term “autobiography” was created in this century. Spiritual autobiography was developed in memoirs by pioneering missionary women. Victorian women's writing was especially rich in the field of life writing in this nation that celebrated home, family and private life. The domestic memoirs, for instance, allowed women to write as mothers, daughters, and wives. The memoirs had a domestic focus and included a relational style of self-construction. What this means is that the focus is on the writer's connection to their parents, children or husbands. Through this form, women could represent their lives in terms of respectable feminine plots and such texts were considered valuable for the public because they could widen people's experience of human nature. Yet, the genre did not provide a space for them to develop or challenge their personal or intellectual self.

Why women embraced this genre could be twofold; either, because they valued the private sphere, or, because they had no place in the public sphere. However, this tradition of the domestic memoir put pressure on women writers and it was difficult for those trying to avoid it or to reclaim another tradition. One such writer who found this domestic pattern limiting, was Harriet Martineau. She attempted to write within alternative autobiographical

traditions and to push beyond the limits of domesticity. Along with many contemporaries, she worked to reclaim lost generic autobiographical traditions, namely the primary masculine autobiography either as an account of professional life or the introspective, developmental form. This latter form is also called psychological exploration and contrasts the domestic autobiography (Peterson, 1999).

In psychological exploration, the focus is turned inwards and the emphasis is on the interior characterisation, rather than on the actions of the subject. Through this genre, women found a space to develop and challenge the self and its popularity connects with the newly found interest in psychology. Although women felt the need to explore their intellects and soul it was difficult for them to express this in writing as women were not supposed to have psychology, in the sense that no one was really interested in their thoughts and they were considered dangerous.

Interestingly, many of the novels written by women in this period, such as *Jane Eyre*, were declared autobiographies. In the nineteenth century the genre focused on exploring the author's emotions and development of the self. The popularity of this genre connects with the newly found interest in psychology, and women were not supposed to have psychology in the sense that no one was really interested in their thoughts and they were considered dangerous (Peterson, 1999). Victorian writers were writing the stories of their own lives at a particularly interesting moment in the history of human consciousness: through romanticism the way man thought about and experienced himself had changed. Towards the end of the Victorian Period a radically new model of the human mind was proposed by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Based on nineteenth-century science and Romanticism, his new concepts changed the views on the self, language and culture. His theories created a description of the mind that stressed the major role played by unconscious drives, especially those of sexuality (Landow & Sullivan, 2009). Freud claimed that "normal" gendered consciousness represented a distinct case of neurosis. In his view, "normal" implied the heterosexual male. He introduced the heterogeneous source of infantile sexuality to the service of civilization and the middle-class society and this model was upheld by dominant Victorian institutions and writers.

In relation to the woman question, Freud was the first to recognize the question of "What does a woman want?" His theories did not provide an answer to this; however, he opened up for a theory on femininity (Felman, 1993). For the first time in history, Freud voices that society does not know what a woman is; "what constitutes masculinity or femininity is an unknown characteristic which anatomy cannot lay hold of" (Freud, 1964). According to Toril Moi, Freud's psychoanalysis has provided a whole series of invaluable

concepts: the unconscious, desire, fantasy, identification, projection, transference, countertransference, alienation and narcissism (Moi, 2004).

2.6 Florence Nightingale and Cassandra

Like all writings about the self, Victorian life-writing by women embody the question of how the individual relates to what is outside the self; and the concern with this problematic relationship lies close to the heart of all literature of the age. Furthermore, the self-narratives provided the tools for self-interrogation and self-construction. Through writing the female authors were able to enhance their capacity to become self-absorbed, that is, to become individual (Nestor, 2010). One woman who turned to writing to avoid madness was Florence Nightingale (1820-1910). The polemical tract titled *Cassandra* emerged out of long years of suffering and despair in Nightingale's life and the writing seemed to free her. Through the writing, her despair transformed into rebellion and in the following years she finally succeeded in leaving home and finding her true work.

Returning to the author's own life, she used to get up long before her family, so that she would have time to write. During these early mornings, she filled many notebooks on medical and sanitary conditions in hospitals. This is also probably where *Cassandra* was produced (West, 1933). Overall, section II of *Cassandra* gives the impression that time is a woman's most valuable commodity, and that Nightingale feels deprived. When she was writing on *Cassandra* she did not know what her future would hold and as far as she was aware, it would be spent doing worsted work, reading books and socializing. For a serious minded, gifted and motivated woman such as Nightingale, the thought of playing through life is a wasted life:

Yet time is the most valuable of all things. If they had come every morning and afternoon and robbed us of half-a-crown we should have redress from the police. But it is laid down, that our time is of no value. If you offer a morning visit to a professional man, and say, "I will just stay an hour with you, if you will allow me, till so and so comes back to fetch me;" it costs him the earnings of an hour, and therefore

he has a right to complain. But women have no right, because it is “only their time.”
(Nightingale, 1979:35)

The double standard of the value of a man’s and a woman’s time is clear in this quote and it gives impressions of both sadness and grief. Nightingale’s longing to be useful and fulfilled, have a right to exercise her intellect and abilities, and find time for thought seems impossible in her society. The ideology of separate spheres was a useful approach to achieve control. It suggested that men and women were biologically different and therefore naturally built for separate spheres. Men were seen as naturally active, aggressive, intellectual and sexual, while women were regarded as passive, self-sacrificing, emotional and asexual. This ideology excluded women from having any place in society, with the support of natural laws (Abrams, 2001). It was this ideology that Nightingale suffered under, and through *Cassandra*, she describes the situation in which she lives and how this affects her and women in general.

Nightingale also argues that for women, novels emphasise fantasy as an outlet for emotional and intellectual needs in lack of having these in real life. According to her, the setting in a good novel involves “to place the persons together in circumstances which naturally call out the high feelings and thoughts of the character, which afford food for sympathy between them on these points – romantic events they are called.” (Nightingale, 1979:28). Here, the image of food is used to point to the feelings between the characters in the novel and serves as a fantasy compared to the real life for women. Another fantasy included in the novels is “that the heroine has *generally* no family ties (almost *invariably* no mother), or, if she has, these do not interfere with her entire independence.”(Nightingale, 1979:28). This last comment corresponds to Nightingale’s own life with the constant interference by her mother and sister. Her grief against the ideology in her society culminates Section I in a prayer where she puts faith in God: “Is it Thou, Lord? And He said, It is I. Let our hearts be still” (Nightingale, 1979:28).

2.7 Alterations and publication story

Florence Nightingale wrote *Cassandra* as a part of her three-volume work, *Suggestions for Thought to Searchers after Religious Truth* in the period immediately preceding her departure

for the Crimean war in 1854. At this time in her life, she was struggling with the issue of her own self-definition. However, the manuscript was revised several times before it was privately published as an appendix to Ray Strachey's *The Cause* in 1928 (Showalter, 1981). The alterations made by Nightingale have previously been relatively unknown, however, the different manuscripts are kept in the British Library and in recent years scholars have studied their complex development (see Bostridge, 2005). The alterations that Nightingale wrote can be seen as a direct reflection of the changes in her own life and circumstances along with her personal image of herself. In the first edition, *Cassandra* is a dialogue between two daughters and their parents and clearly points back to Nightingale's own life. In the next edition, *Cassandra* is an autobiographical novel with a mysteriously exotic setting and emphasis on phantoms and enchantment. This focus is a by-product of the author's vivid daydreaming in her younger years, when trying to escape the monotonous family routine. In the published form, revised in the years following her return from the Crimea in 1856, the manuscript is a third-person essay. According to Bostridge, the impersonal essay form of the text

[...]feels as if it has had the life bled out of it, and provides a striking illustration of Nightingale's transformation into a woman of power- but of a type of power which craves anonymity, for religious motives as well as reasons of gender, and which walks invisible, working behind the scenes, to achieve its ends (Bostridge, 2005).

The reason why Nightingale changed *Cassandra* into a third-person essay could be due to the advice given by those who helped her revise it. Instead of turning to other distinguished literary women, such as Martineau, Gaskell or Eliot, she submitted her writing to male intellectuals and scholars of her day. One of them, Benjamin Jowett, an Oxford Professor, was profoundly impressed by the manuscript and noted: "It seemed to me as if I had received the impress of a new mind (Cook, 1:477). Although impressed, his advice was to modify, subdue and especially eliminate her anger. Nightingale reluctantly revised some of the manuscript, but refused to alter the spirit of it. After privately publishing a few copies in 1860, Nightingale never returned to revise and publish *Suggestions for Thought*. According to Showalter, her reason for this was that the book had served its mission. Through writing it she had been able to define her personal philosophy and "she transformed herself from the

ineffectual and tragic Cassandra into the indomitable heroine of the Crimea.” (Showalter, 1981:408). This is also pointed out by Gilbert and Gubar (1996), who claim that Nightingale had written her way out of the female sphere to which she had been confined.

Nevertheless, the essay form of the text was the manuscript that became widely available through the 1928 publication and also the most read edition today. Because of this late publication it is not possible to know if it could have served as an inspiration to Victorian women who lacked Nightingale’s intelligence and courage. However, in Showalter’s view, “Cassandra is one of the most unfortunate sagas of Victorian censorship of female anger, protest and passion” and should be considered “a major text of English feminism, a link between Wollstonecraft and Woolf” (Showalter, 1981:396).

However impersonal the essay may seem, there are several features that indicate that Nightingale was indeed writing about her own experiences. For instance, Nightingale writes about suicide in the first section, in despair against the forbidden sphere of action for women: “One often comes to be thus wandering alone in the bitterness of life without. It might be that such an one might be tempted to seek an escape in hope of a more congenial sphere.” (Nightingale, 1979:25). Not only does this show how desperate Nightingale’s situation was, but it indicates that she is writing about herself. Bearing in mind the publication story of the essay and the previously mentioned quote from a private note where she exclaims; “I have no desire now but to die” (Vicinus & Nergaard, 1989:44), it can be argued that she is indeed speaking of herself. Nevertheless, Nightingale rejects the thought of suicide, because it could lead to rebirth and having to go through life again: “Yet, perhaps, if prematurely we dismiss ourselves from this world, all may even have to be suffered through again.”(Nightingale, 1979:25). To Nightingale, even death is not an escape, in fear of having to go through the suffering again.

2.8 Cassandra – an angry outcry

Florence Nightingale’s *Cassandra* (1979) is an essay which problematize the role of woman in the nineteenth century. The essay deals with different aspects of women’s life in the Victorian society. The first section is a general approach to the issue and the following sections narrow down the scope to specific themes. More specifically, section II deals with the double standard of men’s time versus women’s time. In Section III, Nightingale directly

challenges the issue of domesticity while Section IV deals with marriage. The conflict between a woman's desires and the Victorian duties is the theme of Section V. Section VI is the most radical part of the essay, and here Nightingale argues that Christ's message has to be sent again, and this time as a woman, in order to emancipate women. Finally, Section VII describes how the world destroys women from within, and how actual death is a joy in comparison to life. Nightingale's main arguments throughout the text is focused around family, home and marriage, and how the patriarchal ideas of the time were created by men, but also embraced and accepted by women.

Nightingale, and her sister Parthenope, grew up in a wealthy household and she was used to long travels abroad, lavish parties with her huge family and an army of household servants. She was good-looking, well read and witty. She had a passion for life, loved to travel and enjoyed parties and social life. Thus, she embodied the feminine ideal of the age – a combination of sexual innocence, noticeable consumption, and devotion to family life. However, this was a life that Nightingale grew to loathe. The life that her parents and society expected her to lead was empty and frustrating to her, as is apparent in her many private letters and notes. In 1846, Nightingale wrote:

What is my business in this world and what have I done this fortnight? I have read the 'Daughter at home' to Father and two chapters of Mackintosh; a volume of Sybil to Mamma. Learnt seven tunes by heart. Written various letters. Ridden with Papa. Paid eight visits. Done company. And that is all (Woodham-Smith, 1951:43).

Her detestation for the idle life became a constant source of difficulties with her family, especially her mother and sister. Nightingale craved for a regular occupation but her ambition was obstructed by the opposition from her parents and sister. Her longing for something worth doing filled her private notes from the 1840s and 50s: "A profession, a trade, a necessary occupation, something to fill and employ all my faculties, I have always felt essential to me, I have always longed for, consciously or not"(Cook, 1942:106).

In the author's private life the people closest to her were her mother and sister, and their idle lifestyle provoked her. In a letter to her friend Mary Clarke, a woman who escaped Victorian England by leaving for Paris, she describes her mother and sister:

The whole occupation of Parthe and Mama was to lie on two sofas and tell one another not to get tired by putting flowers into water...It is a scene worthy of Molière, where two people in tolerable and even perfect health lie on the sofa all day and persuade themselves and others that they are the victims of their self-devotion for another who is dying of overwork. (Woodham-Smith, 1951:199)

Despite being educated women, they did not understand or accept Nightingale's thoughts on the restrictions placed upon women in Victorian times. According to Showalter (1987), it was more often the mother and not the father who contradicted and fought their daughters' struggles to achieve independence and autonomy in this period. This was certainly the case in Nightingale's family, and the strong opposition from her mother and sister influenced her greatly. In *Cassandra*, Nightingale describes exactly this:

Mothers, who cradle yourselves in visions about the domestic hearth, how many of your sons and daughters are *there*, do you think, while sitting round under your complacent maternal eye? Were you there yourself during your own (now forgotten) girlhood? (Nightingale, 1979:27)

Nightingale's struggles with her family become evident in the opening epigraph of section I through a biblical allusion; "The voice of one crying in the" crowd, / "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." (Nightingale, 1979:25). This somewhat altered quotation originates from the prophet, John the Baptist in the book of Matthew (Benstock, 1985). Nightingale has used "crowd" instead of the original "wilderness" and this is also emphasised through the unusual punctuation. John the Baptist is wandering in the desert and this suggests that to Nightingale the crowd makes her feel isolated. Even though she is surrounded by people, such as her mother, sister and friends, she feels alone.

Nightingale's hunger for intellectual activities and frustration with the lack of opportunities to fulfil this need, led to a decline in her mental health. In one of her many private notes, she states:

I have no desire now but to die. There is not a night that I do not lie down in my bed, wishing I may live no more. Unconsciousness is all that I desire. I remain in bed as late as I can, for what have I to wake for? I am perishing for want of food - & what prospect have I of better? While I am in this position, I can expect nothing else. Therefore I spend my days in dreams of other situations which will afford me food (Vicinus & Nergaard, 1989:44).

Nightingale would prefer unconsciousness and death over her present existence and through daydreaming she escaped from the restrictions and dullness of her life. She also recorded how she fell into trance-like states as an escape from the boredom of social life. These habits terrified her, and she considered them either a symptom of mental illness or a sin; “I see so many of my kind who have gone mad for want of something to do” (Woodham-Smith, 1951:46). What's more, she wrote “The thoughts and feelings that I have now I can remember since I was six years old”(Woodham-Smith, 1951:6). In the same private note she recorded that she believed she was a monster, incapable of behaving like others. Believing that strangers had to be avoided, especially children, she would periodically refuse to dine downstairs in fear of hurting someone. Thus, from a very early age she thought she was different from those around her, and she was terrified of unveiling her monstrous self. Interestingly, all mentions of mental difficulties vanishes from her private papers after she found her work in the world, namely her lifelong commitment to the profession of nursing (Woodham-Smith, 1951:6).

Another interesting example of Nightingale's view on idleness is the subtitle of *Cassandra* (1979); *Florence Nightingale's Angry Outcry Against the Forced Idleness of Victorian Women*, something that illustrates how Nightingale emphasises the importance of women getting something worthwhile to do. Again, there is a clear link between idleness and madness, and in Nightingale's title, the idleness is *forced* upon women. To Nightingale, women's lack of control over their own lives was a major source for depression and mental illness. She returns to the concept of madness throughout her essay and it seems clear that her personal struggles with mental health motivated her exploration of its causes. .

Through the title of the essay, it is implied that the author sees herself as the Trojan prophetess Cassandra, who was cursed by Apollo when she refused his advances. The consequence of Cassandra's curse was that no one believed her, and her prophetic warnings were ignored. Cassandra's ideas were ineffective, and this was also Nightingale's fear, that her

ideas and views would go unnoticed by her peers. Thus, it is tempting to assume that, through the use of this mythical character in the title, Nightingale saw herself as a woman with prophetic gifts who could predict the future; yet, no one would listen to her. Indeed, Nightingale refers to herself as Cassandra in private letters and notes. After a dinner party at the time she was struggling to convince her parents to let her become a nurse, she wrote; “Poor Cassandra, has found an unexpected ally in a young surgeon of a London hospital” (Cook, 1942:116-117). However, Cassandra is not mentioned in the printed version of the essay, but, in the earlier editions, the final sentences included the heroine:

Oh! Call me no more Nofriani, call me Cassandra. For I have preached and prophesied in vain. I have gone about crying all these many years, Wo to the people! And no one has listened or believed. And now I cry, Wo to myself! For upon me the destruction has come (West, 1962:278)

As a consequence, she rejected their life of thoughtless comfort for the world of social service. The work also reflects her fear of her ideas being ineffective, as were the prophetess Cassandra's. Fearing that one's ideas are not good enough highlights the ruling ideology in Victorian society, namely, that women are less intelligent than men and that their purpose in life is limited to the domestic sphere. In the published edition of *Cassandra*, the only trace of the prophetess is as a first-person female narrator critical of the lack of a female voice in the Victorian period. However, by keeping the title, the prophetess Cassandra still frames the text. With regard to the figure of Cassandra, Monrós Gaspar (2009) argue that Nightingale, through her essay was calling for a knowledge that would give voice to the lost Cassandras in society. This also includes Nightingale's own voice, marginalised and ignored, with no authority over a discourse built on a traditionally patriarchal set of values.

2.9 What is a woman?

Throughout *Cassandra*, Nightingale is questioning and exploring what a woman is. As previously pointed out, she was religious, and naturally, she turns to the Bible for answers. We have already seen that in Nightingales view, women can complain to God, but she goes further in her quest for answers; she says that women fast mentally in trying to obey the laws

of God which warn against “vain imaginations”. The image of fasting mentally is used to describe what happens to women when deprived of something useful to do: “We fast mentally, scourge ourselves morally, use the intellectual hair-shirt, in order to subdue the perpetual day-dreaming, which is so dangerous!” (Nightingale, 1979:27) She longs for food for the soul and the intellect: “To have no food for our heads, no food for our hearts, no food for our activity, is that nothing?” (Nightingale, 1979:41). The image of food being withheld from women is repeated throughout the essay and she mentions it again towards the end of Section I, when speaking of thoughts and feelings in connection with novel reading. As previously mentioned, the largest audience for novels in this period, was women.

Through the use of rhetorical questions, Nightingale interrogates her society, other women and perhaps also herself. Rhetorical questions are frequently used throughout the essay and in the text they function partly as a way of developing the idea of Nightingale’s plea for social reform and partly as a wake-up call for the reader. She challenges the society for forbidding women a public discourse and she points to silence as a symptom of the social malady of the time: “This system dooms some minds to incurable infancy, others to silent misery” (Nightingale, 1979:37). Nightingale explores these questions through an almost accusatory tone towards women, represented both in terms of angry outcries and biblical references.

Nightingale discloses that her real focus of anger is other women. Even though patriarchy is ruled by men, women accept and impose these ideas. Through biblical reference, she starts off with an accusation towards men and then turns to women:

Men say that God punishes for complaining. No but men are angry with misery. They are irritated with women for not being happy. They take it as a personal offence. To God alone may women complain, without insulting Him! And women, who are afraid, while in words they acknowledge that God’s work is good, to say, Thy will be *not* done (declaring another order of society from that which He has made), go about maudling to each other and teaching to their daughters that “women have no passions.” (Nightingale, 1979:26)

This passage implies that Nightingale, being a religious woman, thinks that society has moved away from God’s intentions and that the ideology that they embrace is in stark contrast to His will that women and men be equally fulfilled. Also, she continues “they [women] must act the farce of hypocrisy, the lie that they are without passion – and therefore what else can they say

to their daughters, without giving the lie to themselves.”(Nightingale, 1979:26). The resentment displayed here is not only towards the men that created these rules, but also against women, who in their self-justification and self-deception force this ideology on her and other women.

2.10 What a woman is

As previously quoted, Nightingale asks in the very start of the essay, “why have women passion, intellect, moral activity- have these three – and a place in society where no one of the three can be exercised?” (Nightingale, 1979:25). The way in which women are described here gives the impression that Nightingale has the original thought of male and female equality when it comes to inborn qualities. It seems that her description of the female intellect and need for a vocation in life other than domestic duties are no different from that of men. Throughout the essay, Nightingale describes women in an ambivalent way, due to her turbulent relationship with her mother and sister. She found it hard to genuinely trust other women and her background strongly influenced her view on women. Firstly, she claims that women strive to live by intellect. This is probably a reference to her own situation and she continues to describe the virtues of intellect in an almost poetic manner:

The clear, brilliant, sharp radiance of intellect’s moonlight rising upon such an expanse of snow is dreary, it is true, but some love its solemn desolation, its silence, its solitude – if they are but *allowed* to live in it; if they are not perpetually baulked and disappointed.(Nightingale, 1979:36)

The language she uses here demonstrates how much she values this quality of the mind and she goes on, bitterly stating: “But a woman cannot live in the light of intellect. Society forbids it” (Nightingale, 1979:37). At this point in the essay, Nightingale lashes out at society for not allowing women to make use of their intellect and in her view; this is due to domestic duties. She sees these duties as nothing more than “bad habits” and declares that society is at war with women. To her, it is no wonder that women with intellectual aspiration give in and abandon all hopes for a vocation within this field. What is more, Nightingale blames the family for crushing the spirit in women and sees no hope in her own situation:

The family? It is too narrow a field for the development of an immortal spirit, be that spirit male or female. The chances are a thousand to one that, in that small sphere, the task for which that immortal spirit is destined by the qualities and the gifts which its Creator has placed within it, will not be found (Nightingale, 1979:37).

Not only does Nightingale feel that the family sphere is constricted, but also that the family uses people. Not for what they are, but for its own use. “If it wants some one to sit in the drawingroom, that some one is to be supplied by the family, though that member may be destined for science, or for education, or for active superintendence by God, i.e., by the gifts within.” (Nightingale, 1979:37). Through these claims, Nightingale is criticising the heart of Victorian virtues, that is, the domestic heart and the family. In rejecting the family she is also rejecting society, as the family enforces the ideas of society. She sums up the devastating effects of these ideas thus: “This system dooms some minds to incurable infancy, others to silent misery.” (Nightingale, 1979:37).

Her high level of directness in this section makes it improbable that she would have been able to publish it at the time it was written. The way in which Nightingale condemns the very basis of her society here, shows a tremendous courage and it seems that she is not only arguing on her own behalf, but for oppressed women in general:

It is for common place, every-day characters that we tell our tale – because it is the sample of hundreds of lives (or rather deaths) of persons who cannot fight with society [...](Nightingale, 1979:40)

In Section V, Nightingale deals with the Victorian theme of duty versus desire. Returning again to the intellect and the need to cultivate this, she claims that her current century is especially cruel in denying women this opportunity and she hopes the next century will be better. Nightingale’s present century is especially cruel to women, “because her education seems entirely to have parted company with her vocation; there is no longer unity between the woman as inwardly developed, and as outwardly manifested.”(Nightingale, 1979:50). This split is painful in her view and her grief and sadness is noticeable in this section, not only on her own behalf, but also for all other women in the same situation.

Women dream till they have no longer the strength to dream; those dreams against which they so struggle, so honestly, vigorously, and conscientiously, and so in vain, yet which are their life, without which they could not have lived; those dreams go at last.(Nightingale, 1979:49)

The discouragement and hopelessness of this passage is profound and in a desperate state, Nightingale finds answers in her faith:

Jesus Christ raised women above the condition of mere slaves, mere ministers to the passions of the man, raised them by this sympathy to be ministers of God. He gave them moral activity. But the Age, the World, Humanity, must give them the means to exercise this moral activity, must give them intellectual cultivation, spheres of action. (Nightingale, 1979:50)

Her claim here is that the oppressive bond put on women was not intended by God and that society must allow women to exercise all their abilities. As seen in previous sections, Nightingale turns to other women and gives an appeal for change:

Oh! Mothers, who talk about this hearth, how much do you know of your sons' real life, how much of your daughter' imaginary one? Awake, ye women, all ye that sleep, awake! If the domestic life were so very good, would your young men wander away from it, your maidens think of something else?
The time is come when women must do something more than the "domestic hearth," which means nursing the infants, keeping a pretty house, having a good dinner and an entertaining party. (Nightingale, 1979:52)

2.11 What a woman is not

In Cassandra, one theme that is discussed is marriage. Nightingale questions whether there is such a thing as a true, noble union where man and woman come together as one. In her view, it is no surprise that happy marriages are few and far between, when all conversation and interaction between them is trivial. She points out, that women are seen as equal during courtship because they have power, but not afterwards. In- depth conversation is seen as improper before engagement and after marriage conversation becomes meaningless and trivial. Despite the shortcomings of this establishment, many women see marriage as the main or, even, only event of their life. Nightingale goes so far as to compare the actions of young women to that of prostitutes: “The woman who has sold herself for an establishment, in what is she superior to those we may not name?” (Nightingale, 1979). Consequently, in the nineteenth century the concept and ideology of woman changes when she marries. Before marriage she has some kind of power, while after becoming a wife she is under her husband’s statute. This, to Nightingale is not what a woman was created for.

The root of Nightingale’s issues with marriage is the inequality between men and women. Men have an interest in making sure women remain domestic: “[...] a man would think, if his wife undertook any great work with the intention of carrying it out, - of making anything but a sham of it – [...] that he would not have so good a dinner – that she would destroy, as it is called, his domestic life”. Nightingale was convinced that married women had even less possibilities to have a fulfilled life, that she turned down a proposal from a man she in fact had feelings for. Her refusal to marry the intellectual and social reformer Richard Monckton Milnes was agonizing, yet necessary to her. Her private notes reveals;

I have an intellectual nature which requires satisfaction, and that I would find it in him. I have a passionate nature which requires satisfaction and that would find it in him. I have a moral, an active, nature which requires satisfaction and that would not find it in his life. Sometimes I think I will satisfy my passionate nature at all events, because that will at least secure me from the evils of dreaming. But would it? I could be satisfied to spend a life with him in combining our different powers in some great object. I could not satisfy this nature by spending a life with him in making society and arranging domestic things. (Woodham-Smith, 1951:51)

She considered marriage as only an extension of the constricting life with the family and in her view, “voluntarily to put out my power ever to be able to seize the chance of forming for myself a true and rich life would seem to me like suicide.” (Woodham-Smith, 1951:52). Later in life, when highly trained nurses would marry, Nightingale considered it a desertion; “Oh God, no more love. No more marriage, O God.” (Woodham-Smith, 1951:44).

2.12 What a woman is because society says so

Nightingale says what society states a woman is and the double standard of masculine versus feminine time is dealt with in *Cassandra*. Nightingale opens with another epigraph, this time with an allusion to Emily Brontë’s *The Prisoner* (1846). This poem is about an oppressed woman who welcomes suffering, because it means one is alive. This thought is developed in the following lines:

Give us back our suffering, we cry to Heaven in our hearts – suffering rather than indifferentism: for out of nothing comes nothing. But out of suffering may come the cure. Better have pain than paralysis! A hundred struggle and drown in the breakers. One discovers the new world. But rather, ten times rather, die in the surf, heralding the way to that new world, than stand idly on the shore! (Nightingale, 1979:29)

These are strong words, and underline what she has claimed earlier, the need to overcome the idleness and passivity that ruled women’s lives in the nineteenth century. Through struggling, fulfilment is possible. She goes on to discuss how women have no time to themselves and therefore no chance of accomplishing anything of worth. She raises the question:” Is man’s time more valuable than woman’s? or is the difference between man and woman this, that woman has confessedly nothing to do?”(Nightingale, 1979:32). In the following lines, Nightingale interprets women’s time and it is evident that she is not only confronting men, but also at the women who accept this double standard:

Women are never supposed to have any occupation of sufficient importance *not* to be interrupted, except “suckling their fools;” and women themselves have accepted this, have written books to support it, and have trained themselves so as to consider

whatever they do as *not* of such value to the world or others, [...] They have accustomed themselves to consider intellectual occupation as a merely selfish amusement, which it is their “duty” to give up for every trifler more selfish than themselves. (Nightingale, 1979:32)

Furthermore, the author states the few exceptions where it is appropriate for a woman to have an occupation, and these are “Widowhood, ill-health, or want of bread” (Nightingale, 1979:33). Neither of these three explanations were applicable to Nightingale, so in a somewhat optimistic way she continues: “In some cases, no doubt, an indomitable force of character will suffice without any of these three, but such are rare” (Nightingale, 1979:33). To Nightingale it seems that in her contemporary society it is impossible for women to satisfy their intellectual or occupational desires, and the conflict between duty and desire is a concept construed by men.

Section VI provides a shocking outbreak on society and its view on women. In previous sections, Nightingale has challenged society’s construction of marriage and family, but in this section she goes beyond controversial arguments to radical and shocking attacks on Victorian values: “The next Christ will perhaps be a female Christ. But do we see one woman who looks like a female Christ? Or even like “the messenger before” her “face,” to go before her and prepare the hearts and minds for her?” (Nightingale, 1979:53). Through these shocking words she tries to make her contemporaries stop and reconsider their own view and to go from the abstract to the personal. Although she is not saying that there will be a second Christ, but that his message must be sent again through a woman. To her, this is how things can change. She is fully aware of the strength of her words, so in a sarcastic tone she utters: “To this will be answered that half the inmates of Bedlam begin in this way, by fancying that they are “the Christ.”” (Nightingale, 1979:53). Thus, implying that a female Christ would be deemed insane as so many other women in the mental institution of Bedlam.

In the closing section of the essay, the mood is heartrending. Through the words of a dying woman, Nightingale focuses again on the suffering felt by women in life and how actual death is welcomed. The dying woman declares to her mourners:

Oh! If you knew how gladly I leave this life” and “the world will be put back some little time by my death, she says you see I estimate my powers at list as highly as you can; but it is by the death which has taken place some years ago in me, not by the

death which is about to take place now.[...]Free – Free – oh! Divine freedom, art thou come at last? Welcome, beautiful death! (Nightingale, 1979:54-55)

In these finishing lines, Nightingale emphasises the agony she and her fellow Victorian women suffer in society, by not being able to make use of all their abilities. In a moving and sad way, she claims that physical death will be welcomed, because they have been dead all their lives and that freedom will be achieved in heaven. It seems that the only way to give freedom to women in life is to redefine society and it's thoughts on women.

Nightingale's challenge of the ruling ideology of her time is both successful and moving. By using her own personal experiences, although rather hidden in the text, she attempts to find solutions to the oppression of women. Interestingly, after writing *Cassandra*, Nightingale moves away from this theme and finds her true vocation in life; nursing. It is possible that by recognising and writing about how poor the situation for women was in the nineteenth century, she was able to break free from it. Reflecting when *Cassandra* was published, her writing served little for her contemporary society, and although her work is considered an early feminist work in retrospect, she was not able to publish it in her own time.

However, Nightingale did not only improve her own situation . Using funds given to her by the general public, she founded the Nightingale School and Home for Nurses at St Thomas' Hospital in London in 1860. Thus, creating a new profession for women that was accepted and well paid in a society in desperate need of ways of earning a decent living for women. Therefore, the contribution Nightingale made to the advancement of women in her own time was not only vast but also recognized. Lord Stanley, a contemporary, distinguished politician, and a good friend of Nightingale, remarked:

Mark what, by breaking through customs and prejudice, Miss Nightingale has effected for her sex. She has opened to them a new profession, a new sphere of usefulness [...] a claim for more extended freedom of action. I do not suppose that in undertaking her mission, she thought much of the effect which it might have on the social position of women. Yet probably no one of those who made that question a special study has done half as much as she towards its settlement. (Cook, 1942:305)

If we look at what Nightingale achieved through years of suffering and struggle against contemporary ideology, it is tempting to claim that she found herself in and through the writing. As mentioned above she did not revise and publish *Cassandra* and she was able to

dedicate herself to an occupation that fulfilled her aspirations and intellectual needs. Although she found her vocation in life she continued to write in impressive quantities, hardly comparable to what writers produce in one lifetime. As the next chapter will show, this search for identity and self-discovery is similarly a main theme of the early nineteenth century where Virginia Woolf was a prominent literary figure.

3 Virginia Woolf

In the years following Nightingale's *Cassandra* both cultural ideology of gender and women's literature were transformed, especially between the years 1880 and 1939. This modern period included a scientific revolution, development of mass communication, a disruption of traditional religious ideas and a widespread sense of intellectual doubt and social alienation (Berman, 1983). Soon after the death of Edward VII in 1910, social and political changes overtook England and caused a shift in patterns of deference, class and gender relation. His reign had been short, yet he served as a link between Queen Victoria and the modern monarchy. The turn of the twentieth century represented a break with Victorian values, and the transition that followed included a radical change in human character along with a change in the concept of woman (Paul, 1987).

3.1 Woman in the Modern Period

The new culture of the Modern Period provided increased female power. Not only had women achieved the vote after a long-lasting struggle, but they also entered a number of professions. For example, during the 1920's the number of women working outside the home increased by almost fifty percent, including in significant professions such as law, social work, medicine, and engineering. This proved the opportunity for women to make use of the intellect that Nightingale pledged for in the previous century had now slowly transpired. The impact of the technological and intellectual advances in the early twentieth century included women of all classes. Working women increasingly accessed trade unions and social welfare programmes, while middle- and upper class women entered universities and professions in increasing numbers. As a result, women were less restricted by the ideology of femininity found in the Victorian Period. (Gilbert & Gubar, 1996). As my first chapter showed, the ideology of the previous period prevented women from entering into higher education and professional work in addition to limited access in society in general.

3.2 New Woman as a threat

The new-found female power became a cause of anxiety among men, and to use Gertrude Stein's words: "In the nineteenth century men were confident, the women were not, but in the twentieth century the men have no confidence" (Stein, 1973:5). While women were experiencing an era of exuberance, men experienced an age of anxiety. The differing reactions to the changing society, besides the altered position of women, could be attributed to the fact that men who had been brought up in the now comparatively serene Victorian Period found it difficult to adapt to the technology of the new age. Perhaps most threatening of all was the idea that women were no longer willing to stay in their traditional place, and this caused a number of men to feel powerless and marginal.

The prominent male writer, D.H. Lawrence wrote countless misogynistic poems and stories. He held women responsible for most social ills and implied that modernism was an apocalypse set in motion by powerful and dominant women. In one verse he pronounces, "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, / but the women are my favorite vessels of wrath." (Herbert, 2002:453). By describing women as "vessels of wrath", Lawrence implies a general element of destructiveness in all female ambition. The women he pointed to were particularly the newly liberated intellectual or literary women, also known as "the New Woman". In Lawrence's opinion, these women were flawed and even potentially evil.

D. H. Lawrence also describes this male anxiety in his essay *Matriarchy* (1929): "The modern young man talks rather feebly about man being master again. He knows perfectly well that he will never be master again" (Lawrence, 2004:103). Women on the other hand, had not experienced the Victorian society as stable and organised, and thus welcomed the new age with enthusiasm. Due to this apprehension about female power, modernist male authors produced a largely negative image of women. Male novelists, such as D.H. Lawrence, tended to blame women for the sense of lost mastery and through the early years of the twentieth century much of the literature seemed obsessed with what women should – and should not – be. It was even indirectly proposed that women had collaborated with the new technology to reduce men socially and sexually.

3.3 Flapper as a new woman

One of the “New Women” that troubled these male authors was, in their view, the destructive female, namely the flapper. The flappers were women who wore short skirts, bobbed hair, and who danced and drank and displayed disregard for what was considered acceptable female conduct. These women broke social and sexual norms and were considered brazen for their makeup, smoking, and driving. Also, this type of “New Woman” was someone who did not comply with male desire unless she wanted to herself. In literature produced by men they were frequently portrayed in negative terms. Samuel Beckett, for example, presented obscene female figures in his poem "Whoroscope" (1929) and in Henry Miller's writing, women were frequently described in terms of body parts. Miller's prostitutes were typically called “cunts” and he also refers to women in this manner in the autobiographical text *Tropic of Capricorn* (1938).

You can forgive a young cunt anything. A young cunt doesn't have to have brains. They're better without brains. But an old cunt, even if she's brilliant, even if she's the most charming woman in the world, nothing makes any difference. A young cunt is an investment; an old cunt is a dead loss. All they can do for you is buy you things. But that doesn't put meat on their arms or juice between their legs (Miller, 1961:117)

Interestingly, Miller's use of this specific body part does not only objectify women, it also reduces them to one particular function, namely one that clearly has to do with man's sexual pleasure. The rebellion of women against sex servitude that started in this period and that came to follow was, according to Margaret Sanger, the most important social development of modern times (Sanger, 1920). Another interesting aspect here, is that these male authors not only feel threatened by the flapper, but by women in general. More specifically, they feel threatened by the writing woman.

3.4 Female writer as a new woman

Not only did men feel threatened by the liberated woman, but they were also negative towards female writers, as we have seen in the works of D.H. Lawrence. Implicitly he saw destructiveness in all female ambition and especially the intellectual and literary woman. Perhaps, the most threatening aspect of this “New Woman” was that she would think for herself and put her thoughts into writing. His attitudes came to influence the writings of other male authors, such as William Butler Yeats, Earnest Hemingway, William Faulkner and Nathanael West. The latter included the following curse of female writers in *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933), where a group of men are talking about the increasing number of women writers:

"And they've all got three names," he said. "Mary Roberts Wilcox, Ella Wheeler Catheter, Ford Mary Rinehart..." Then some one started a train of stories by suggesting that what they all needed was a good rape. "I knew a gal who was regular until she fell in with a group and went literary. She began writing for the little magazines about how much Beauty hurt her and ditched the boy friend who set up pins in a bowling alley. The guys on the block got sore and took her into the lots one night. About eight of them. They ganged her proper..." (West, 1962:82)

Interestingly, this passage shows that a literary woman was not considered normal and that female writers need to be rectified or fixed by means of male sexual violence.

Moreover, the narrator in *A Room of One's Own* cites a male literary critic who claimed that “female novelists should only aspire to excellence by courageously acknowledging the limitations of their sex” (Woolf, 1929:75). She surprises her audience by informing them that this was not written a century ago, but in 1928. Although admitting that this judgment on female writing was more prominent in the nineteenth century, Woolf points out that it still represents a vast body of opinion. The narrator exemplifies this with reference back to her own encounter with the university where she was refused entrance to the lawns and library: “I refuse to allow you, Beadle though you are, to turn me off the grass. Lock up your libraries if you like: but there is no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind” (Woolf, 1929:76). This focus on intellectual freedom for women is clearly something that both Nightingale and Woolf share in their feminist struggles.

In this rather misogynistic landscape, the only “good women” in male literature were either the young girls who had not yet become women or the few women who sacrificed themselves to the need and desire of men. Both these groups of females was distinguished by

their lack of self-will, vulnerable passivity and qualities that seemed (for their creators) lacking in real-life women. One example of a young girl not yet grown into a woman is Hemingway's Littless, the juvenile tomboy heroine of *The Last Good Country* (1972). She is worshipped for her impassionate loyalty and intense innocence. The other group of good women, those who sacrificed themselves to men is exemplified in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), where Rose of Sharon offers her breast milk to a starving drifter she has never met before (Gilbert & Gubar, 1996:1220). These modernist male portrayals of women could have served as an inspiration for female writers to describe real women. Arguably then, female writing in this period came as a consequence of this construction of womanhood because there was a strong need to rectify the image of woman. If women are in fact only children and selfless angels, this means they are objectified to a certain extent and denied a true humanity. Thus, the concept of woman represented in male literature could be part of the motivation behind women's writing in this era

3.5 What, how and why did women write?

In the early twentieth century, female writers had, for the first time, a tradition of women's writing behind them. The achievement of powerful writers such as the Brontë's, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Emily Dickinson often proved to be a source of anxiety, however. Their talents seemed overwhelming to literary women of this generation and they may have questioned whether their own art would meet the standard of their great forerunners (Bloom, 1997). However, it was also empowering to writers such as Virginia Woolf, because the literary tradition behind them gave them confidence in their own writing, thinking that any gifted woman could become an author (Bloom, 1997). As previously mentioned part of the reason why women wrote was to rectify what men had written about them and show a more complex picture of the woman. Although the works of these modernist women paralleled that of their male counterparts in modes and genres, themes and techniques differed.

Female novelists were particularly concerned with the exploration of women in general, but also of their achievements. One example of this is Agatha Christie's brilliant detective Miss Marple who came across as both smarter and stronger than her male detective Hercule Poirot, the latter often portrayed as vain and effete. Through their strong women characters, female authors created and celebrated female strength (Gilbert & Gubar,

1996:1226). The women who wrote more experimental texts also generated similar concepts about female power. Through the pen of notable writers such as Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, Gertrude Stein and Zora Neale Hurston, heroines proved their powers. These women writers did not, however, limit themselves to describing positive female role models. Through literary essays and other genres they questioned the nature of writing itself, and tried to trace the traditions for women within language, aesthetics and conventions (Gilbert & Gubar, 1996). The literary project that the female writers of the early twentieth century were engaged in can be described as, for the first time in history, the task of outlining the views and challenges of the increasing female intellectual community.

Although the social conception of woman had changed, the question of “what is a woman” remained unknown territory. As we have seen, women were vividly described in literature by men, yet this image did not embody real women. The image was more what men wanted the woman to be, rather than a reality. However, as women themselves did not fully understand what it was to be a woman, their writing became a way of exploring the nature of the female self. One writer, who truly committed herself to challenging the contemporary ideology of woman, was Virginia Woolf. Through assigning alternative meanings to the word “woman” and presenting a language suitable for women, she critiqued the patriarchy and presented new thoughts and actions concerning women (Rosenman, 1989). This point was also made by the novelist Winifred Holtby in her critical study of Virginia Woolf’s work from 1932:

When Virginia Woolf wrote of women, she wrote of a generation as adventurous in its exploration of experience as the Elizabethan men had been in their exploration of the globe. (Holtby, 1978:91)

Here, Holtby points out that the women Woolf wrote about were exploring all aspects of the world and also appreciating their own intelligence, reason and sensibility. This newfound female community seemed important to Woolf and is evidently in line with the thoughts brought on fifty years earlier by Nightingale.

3.6 A Room of One’s Own

Virginia Stephen was born in 1882 into a literate and articulate family with a significant tradition of autobiographical writing going back several generations. She had free access to her father's library and her early attempts on writing were encouraged. This provided her with a fascination with life-writing, but also hesitancy towards many of its conventions and principles. The traditional masculine narrative within this genre was especially problematic for Woolf and as we shall see, she experiments with narrative and language to construct a different subject. Through her experimentation, she rejected the concept of an essential male human identity. (Anderson, 2001). Although fond of her father, she remarked in her diary that had her father not died "his life would have entirely ended mine. What would have happened? No writing, no books: - inconceivable." (Gilbert & Gubar, 1996:1315). This shows, that from an early age, writing was crucial to Woolf, and as Gubar & Gilbert suggest, Woolf's childhood experiences had provided her with several rewards in relation to her literary achievements, teaching her "not only how to write but how not to think: not to think like a Victorian, not to think like an "insider", not to think like what she called "a patriarch"" (Gilbert & Gubar, 1996:1318).

In the years subsequent to her father's death, her ambitions to write became a reality and she came to be an influential part of the intellectual circle, later known as the Bloomsbury Group, and it was in this circle she met her future husband, Leonard Woolf. In an early memoir, Woolf gives her own description of the Bloomsbury gatherings:

We were full of experiments and reforms [...] We were going to paint, to write, to have coffee after dinner instead of tea at nine o'clock. Everything was going to be new; everything was going to be different. Everything was on trial
(Rosenbaum, 1995:359)

The group shared modern attitudes towards feminism, pacifism, and sexuality and many of their ideas on human society seemed beyond radical. For example, their sexual ethics, such as a noncritical assessment of homosexuality, freedom to have multiple romantic partners and an appraisal of androgyny, were unheard of in society and part of the group's experiments. The strong environment of equality between the members created a space where reforms could be discussed and everything could be put on trial (Goodwin, 2011). The dominant ideologies from the previous century needed to be questioned and through her relationship with her husband and the other members of the Bloomsbury Group Woolf was finally able to focus on

her writing. By the mid 1920's she was a renowned author, literature critic and feministic thinker in England.

Writing was not only an artistic and political outlet for Woolf, it was also highly personal. This personal importance of writing comes across in her letters, diaries and memoirs. As she wrote in her diary, "I was in a queer mood, thinking myself very old: but now I am a woman again—as I always am when I write." (Woolf & Bell, 1980:56). In her own words she defines her womanhood through writing and its significance seems crucial to her. Also, the passage above suggests that through writing she feels like a "woman" and not just "me". This is interesting as she is trying to find an escape from patriarchy in literature by promoting androgynous writing, yet on a personal level, writing makes her a woman again. Another account that underlines her close bond to writing is found in several diary entries where she considers her own thinking and art: "I am I; I must follow that furrow, not copy another. That is the only justification for my writing and living" (Woolf, 1985:347) and possibly even more clearly in this passage: "I thought, driving through Richmond last night, something very profound about the synthesis of my being: how only writing composes it: how nothing makes a whole unless I am writing" (Woolf, 1977:161). A final example comes towards the end of her life where her personal dependency on writing was still present. In her suicide letter to her husband she explains that she began feeling that she had lost her ability to write, and as a consequence unable to fully exist. She had "a conviction that her whole purpose in life had gone. What was the point in living if she was never again to understand the shape of the world around or, or be able to describe it?" (Woolf, 1980:4). To Woolf, being able to write is as essential as life itself and a purpose for her to live and she sees no separation between life and writing.

Furthermore, Woolf's accounts of her own writing comprise a strong fullness of self, even an expansion of self. Through writing she discovers and defines herself as "a woman", an "I" and also a sense of "being". The distance between the self and being, seems to Woolf as something that can be rectified by writing. This in turn, connects well with what Holtby described as women's "exploration of experience" (Holtby, 1978:91).

Despite her intellectual force in literary circles of London, Woolf perceived herself an outsider in many ways and most of all because she was a woman. Her writings suggest that she was preoccupied with reconstructing a distinctive female artistic tradition. The tradition she opposed was predominantly male, lacking a unique feminine legacy. To her, the female literary tradition was one of marginality and in *A Room of One's Own* she promotes the possibility of a distinct feminine style, but at the same time she emphasizes that the greatest

writers, are able to see the world equally from a man's and a woman's perspective, in other words androgynous. As Ellen Rosenman explains, Woolf explicitly rejected the devaluation of the feminine in literature that left the woman writer with the destructive choice between being "only a woman" or "as good as a man" (Rosenman, 1989:642)

Along with *Three Guineas* (1938), *A Room of One's Own* (1929) is considered Woolf's best-known nonfiction works, and they both examine the difficulties that female writers and intellectuals face due to the lack of means and intellectual freedom (Rosenman, 1989). *A Room of One's Own* was based on a speech Woolf was asked to give to female students on the subject of "Women and Fiction". The title of the essay originates from Woolf's main point that, "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (Woolf, 1929:6). Woolf argues that thought and creativity is an essential part of the material conditions in which they take place, and this claim is the thesis of the entire essay.

3.7 What is a woman?

Woolf gave her speech to female students, and in the long opening paragraph, she describes and exemplifies her own methodology in addition to her relation to her subject, her audience(s), and herself in the writing (Annas, 1985):

The title women and fiction might mean, and you may have meant it to mean, women and what they are like; or it might mean women and the fiction that they write; or it might mean women and the fiction that is written about them; or it might mean that somehow all three are inextricably mixed together and you want me to consider them in that light. [...] Lies will flow from my lips, but there may perhaps be some truth mixed up with them; it is for you to seek out this truth and to decide whether any part of it is worth keeping. If not, you will of course throw the whole of it into the waste-paper basket and forget all about it (Woolf, 1929:5-6)

Through this opening paragraph, Woolf stresses the importance of founding one's conclusions in personal experience. The reader, or audience, is responsible for reaching conclusions and it

is up to them to examine arguments and opinions that are presented. Her claim is also that the process of reasoning is as important as the conclusion that comes from it (Annas, 1985). What this shows is that to Woolf, there are no certain truths; rather, all truth is relative and subjective. This also relates back the ideas shared by the Bloomsbury Group, namely that “everything was on trial” (Rosenbaum, 1995:359). Both social and cultural traditions must be re-examined and those who are out of date should be rejected. It seems like no one knows what the truth about woman is, because no one has looked for it yet. The previous passage from the essay is also significant in relation to personal experience in writing. Again, Woolf meditates upon how “the self”, “the being”, “the I” and “the woman” relate to each other, and she emphasises the importance of personal experience. She underlines that she will not provide the audience with a definite answer, rather present them with her own ideas. The passage also suggests that Woolf avoids talking about women as a group, in an attempt to reject the gender hierarchy. Her focus on women’s own experience and the personal would then provide less limitation for women in society as well as in writing.

While Woolf concentrates on the material aspects that women need to actually be able to write, *A Room of One’s Own* also concentrates on exploring the territory of Woman as such. “Women” Woolf writes, “have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size. Without that power probably the earth would still be swamp and jungle” (Woolf, 1929:37). In her opinion, woman has throughout history functioned as a specially constructed mirror that men narcissistically use to enlarge themselves. Historical male heroes insist on claiming women’s inferiority to enlarge their own power. Thus, women have no lives or occupation of their own and therefore reflect a double image of the man.

Although the conditions for women writers have improved, Woolf still finds that not all Victorian ideals have disappeared. In *Professions for Women* (1931), a shortened version of a speech she held before the National Society for Women’s Service, she urges her audience to move beyond what society expects them to be and become an individual:

Outwardly, what is simpler than to write books? Outwardly, what obstacles are there for a woman rather than for a man? Inwardly, I think, the case is very different; she has still many ghosts to fight, many prejudices to overcome. Indeed it will be a long time still, I think, before a woman can sit down to write a book without finding a phantom to be slain, a rock to be dashed against. And if this is so in literature, the

freest of all professions for women, how is it in the new professions which you are now for the first time entering? (Woolf, 1942:4)

Woolf asserts that women now have access to most professions, yet there are still hindrances from the past for women to overcome. Here, Woolf goes to the core of her understanding of “woman”. These “ghosts” from the past are the main challenge and the reason why women need to explore the self rather than the globe, as this is still unknown territory. They need to figure out who they are – not only as women, but as women, beings and I, to be able to reach intellectual and artistic freedom. Yet again, she stresses the importance of the personal experience, and she calls for a consideration of multiplicity.

Woolf also directly addresses the issue of what a woman is, but admits that she does not have the answer:

Ah, but what is "herself"? I mean, what is a woman? I assure you, I do not know. I do not believe that you know. I do not believe that anybody can know until she has expressed herself in all the arts and professions open to human skill. That indeed is one of the reasons why I have come here out of respect for you, who are in process of showing us by your experiments what a woman is, who are in process of providing us, by your failures and successes, with that extremely important piece of information (Woolf, 1942:3)

Only through writing and entering all professions will the “mystery of woman” be revealed. Her statement illustrates that women need to express themselves and experiment with the concept of woman. Here, too, Woolf disputes a fixed category of “woman” and to avoid this categorisation, she urges women to focus on their individuality.

Central to Woolf’s life and work was the notion of woman as something abstract with no real place in reality and to her; this idea was been created by patriarchy. “In a hundred years” she wrote, “all assumptions founded on the facts observed when women were the protected sex will have disappeared” (Woolf, 1929:42). In *A Room of One’s Own* she adopted the sexual ethic of androgyny from the Bloomsbury Group to “escape from the confrontation with femaleness or maleness” (Showalter, 1977). In other words, she tried to achieve a

balance between male self-realisation and female self-destruction (Selden et al., 2005). This view of a constructed womanhood echoes Simone de Beauvoir's pursuit of the myth of woman in *The Second Sex* (1949). In it, she counts of all women who ever lived, only three female writers; Emily Brontë, Woolf and "sometimes" Katherine Mansfield to have explored "the given" (De Beauvoir, 2008). Her own argument was that women became "the other" in society through gendered myths of womanhood. To her, this mystification was used as an excuse to organise a patriarchal society. Furthermore, she states that "woman does not always "understand" man; but there is no such thing as a masculine mystery" (Lodge & Wood, 2008:99). Woolf's recognition that gender identity is socially constructed and something that can be challenged and transformed resulted in a rejection of a feminine consciousness.

3.8 Why are women not represented in the literary world?

In Woolf's view, women's situation changed at the beginning of the twentieth century alongside the shift in human relations:

All human relations have shifted – those between masters and servants, husband and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, politics, and literature. Let us agree to place one of the changes about the year 1910 (Woolf, 1978:5)

Shari Benstock argues that Woolf sees human nature as hidden and that "[f]or Woolf, human nature figures itself as a female – misread, misused, taken for granted by the patriarchal assumptions of the culture in which she silently, secretly moves." (Benstock, 1985:11). This is significant because it is one of the reasons why Woolf chose to write about women in the first place. Throughout the essay Woolf explains what women need to be able to write fiction, however, the problematic "true nature of women and the true nature of fiction" remain unresolved. Here, as in the opening paragraph of the essay, Woolf describes an issue, and requires the reader or audience is to make their own conclusions. Nonetheless, Woolf points out that because human condition has changed, literary practice need to a change as well.

Consequently, and central to Woolf's feminist vision, she called for women to become a centre of the literary tradition, rather than at its margins (Benstock, 1985:12).

Even though this view on women's situation held historical truth, Woolf's claim was radical at its time. Not only did it put accomplishments of women in a new and positive light, but it also made readers and audience realise the harsh realities about their society. Towards the end of *A Room of One's Own* she gives her own personal opinion on women; "The truth is, I often like women. I like their unconventionality. I like their completeness. I like their anonymity" (Woolf, 1929:109). She claims a space for women writers and uses the grim female literary tradition as a starting point for her arguments. To Woolf, the act of writing became a room of one's own for women and in her view there would be no limits to a woman's achievements if womanhood would cease to be a protected occupation (Woolf, 1929). Evidently, the title of this essay is ambivalent.

Similarly to Nightingale, she also analyses the difference between male and female writing. To her, the reason why the literary production by women suffers is that women have been denied access to colleges and public spaces. This is exemplified by the narrator's own experience in her encounter with The Beadle, an Oxbridge security official who reminds the narrator that only men can access the grass:

His face expressed horror and indignation. Instinct rather than reason came to my help, he was a Beadle; I was a woman. This was the turf; there was the path. Only the Fellows and Scholars are allowed here; the gravel is the place for me. Such thoughts were the work of a moment. As I regained the path the arms of the Beadle sank, his face assumed its usual repose, and though turf is better walking than gravel, no very great harm was done. The only charge I could bring against the Fellows and Scholars of whatever the college might happen to be was that in protection of their turf, which has been rolled for 300 years in succession they had sent my little fish into hiding (Woolf, 1929:8)

To explain why women historically did not have access to the literary world, Woolf shows the contrast between women as characters in fiction rather than writers. She goes back to Shakespeare's time and utters: "For it is a perennial puzzle why no woman wrote a word of that extraordinary literature when every other man, it seemed, was capable of song or sonnet" (Woolf, 1929:43) In order to highlight how society systematically has discriminated against

women, Woolf introduces the imagined sister of William Shakespeare. Through Judith Shakespeare she contrasts how Judith's talents are underestimated because she is a woman, while William's talents are recognized and encouraged:

it would have been impossible, completely and entirely, for any woman to have written the plays of Shakespeare in the age of Shakespeare. Let me imagine, since facts are so hard to come by, what would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted sister, called Judith, let us say. Shakespeare himself went, [...] to the grammar school, where he may have learnt Latin [...] Ovid, Virgil and Horace [...] and the elements of grammar and logic. [...] Very soon he got work in the theatre, became a successful actor, and lived at the hub of the universe [...] Meanwhile his extraordinarily gifted sister, let us suppose, remained at home. She was as adventurous, as imaginative, as eager to see the world as he was. But she was not sent to school. She had no chance of learning grammar and logic, let alone of reading Horace and Virgil. She picked up a book now and then, one of her brother's perhaps, and read a few pages. But then her parents came in and told her to mend the stockings or mind the stew and not moon about with books and papers (Woolf, 1929:48-49).

Judith is a writer, but is secretive about it, and eventually she kills herself. According to Woolf, talent is essential to achieve Shakespeare's success; however, because women are treated unequally, a female Shakespeare would not have achieved such success. The tragic figure of Judith Shakespeare creates a powerful contrast to prove the point that women are denied the same educational rights as men. She concludes her line of thought:

any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside a village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at (Woolf, 1929:51)

Although the conditions for women had changed, the repressive ideal of women represented by the "Angel in the House" was still potent in the early twentieth century. Woolf saw this as a direct threat to the expression of female talent and in *Professions for Women* (1931) she

wrote: "Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer" (Woolf, 1942:3).

3.9 What do women do in writing?

Woolf argues that due to the limited possibilities for women in past times, women did not find themselves in writing. As previously stated, Woolf claimed that women either respected the male style of writing or angrily challenged it. She felt it was necessary to ask the question of what is a woman in order for women to become successful literary artists. Woolf's concern with the damaging effects of the misogynistic conception of women is dealt with in *A Room of One's Own*. In the essay, Woolf tries to construct a critical historical account of women writers and states that there is a lack of a necessary literary tradition. She found that before the eighteenth century there was no evidence of women in general. The position of women made them almost invisible in educational, literary and historical documents. When Aphra Behn proved that women could earn money through writing towards the end of the eighteenth century, a change came about. Middle class women began to write, however, the lack of a female literary tradition affected women's writing in such a way that the quality of their writing suffered. As Woolf states, "masterpieces are [...] the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people" (Woolf, 1929:66). Woolf's argument is that women have not had the opportunity to learn the craft of writing and therefore not mastering it as well as male writers. She uses George Eliot as an example, describing how she had to live secluded from the world because of her relationship with a married man:

Had Tolstoy lived at the Priory in seclusion with a married lady "cut off from what is called the world" however edifying the moral lesson, he could scarcely, I thought, have written *War and Peace* (Woolf, 1929:71)

Woolf discovers that the conditions for women affected their writing and one consequence she observes is that anger frequently appears in writings by women. She mentions the 17th century poet Lady Winchelsea who was "bursting out in indignation against the position of women" (Woolf, 1929:59), yet was also a writer of pure poetry. Woolf concludes:

It was a thousand pities that the woman who could write like that, whose mind was tuned to nature and reflection, should have been forced to anger and bitterness. But how could she have helped herself? I asked, imagining the sneers and the laughter, the adulation of the toadies, the scepticism of the professional poet. She must have shut herself up in a room in the country to write, and been torn asunder by bitterness and scruples perhaps, though her husband was of the kindest, and their married life perfection (Woolf, 1929:61)

In Woolf's analyses of the literary background that could be found in this century, she examines Charlotte Brontë and Jane Austen who both struggled to find time, place and money to write. Woolf quotes passages from *Jane Eyre* (1847), and concludes that "anger was tampering with the integrity of Charlotte Brontë the novelist. She left her story, to which her entire devotion was due, to attend some personal grievance. She remembered that she had been starved of her proper due of experience"(Woolf, 1929:73). She claims that bitterness and anger will not be taken seriously by the reader and that it makes women poor artists; however, she understands that female writers turned to these sentiments in their writing. In Woolf's view, Austen's writing was free from anger, and therefore preferable to Brontë. She compares *Jane Eyre* with *Pride and Prejudice*, and claims that "anger was tampering with the integrity of Charlotte Brontë the novelist" (Woolf, 1929:73). To her, Brontë writes foolishly and in rage where she should write calmly and wisely. Her conclusion is that "She will write of herself where she should write of her characters. She is at war with her lot." (Woolf, 1929:70).

This is especially interesting, as we have previously seen, because Woolf set out to find a distinct female literary tradition, yet here she criticizes Brontë for writing of herself. Moreover, as Showalter (1982) proposes, Woolf's warning against writing in anger also includes anxiety of the implications for women to behave in a manner deemed unsuitable by society. This fear came from her studies of earlier women writers and the consequences they faced when protesting. Possibly, she continues, this fear could be why Woolf developed a theory that viewed anger and protest flaws in literature (Showalter, 1982). What is more, it also has something to do with Woolf's view that women either write in respect of or challenge to the male style.

In Woolf's critique of writing in anger she also refers back to Nightingale. In a passage she writes "Florence Nightingale shrieked aloud in her agony" (Woolf, 1929:57)

followed by a footnote that points to *Cassandra*. As described in my first chapter, Nightingale tried to write herself out of the confining female sphere and although she changed *Cassandra* from a personal to a third-person essay, her emotions still remain visible in the text. Woolf on the other hand, recommends the writer to focus on the characters and not on her own struggles. It is her understanding that the position of women has affected women's writing up until the nineteenth century, with the exception of Emily Brontë and Jane Austen.

The radical change in human character in the early twentieth century that has been described above was vividly analysed by Virginia Woolf and by looking at the changes in both the inner and outer lives of human beings she tried to describe what came before and what was to come. This ambiguous vision is described by Janis M. Paul who explains that:

the controlling emotion in Virginia Woolf's fictional vision is ambivalence – between society and individuality, between past and present, between traditionalism and experimentation, between externality and internality – in summary between Victorianism and Modernism (Paul, 1987:7)

So, Woolf's writing can be viewed as a modern insight of character and characterisation, as well as a polemic account of the human condition in a time of change between the Victorian and Modernist Periods. Returning yet again to the thoughts Woolf brought forward on the Bloomsbury Group, namely that "all things were going to be different" (Rosenbaum, 1995:359) this also included beliefs on human condition. Furthermore, this ambivalence presents itself in the way that Woolf is not able to come up with any truths. She does not have access to any answers on the subject. Fascinatingly, Woolf's own writing has also been characterised as influenced by anger and literary critic John Batchelor stated that "there is no question that by contrast with *A Room of One's Own* (in which lightness of touch is never lost) *Three Guineas* is a shrill and angry work" (Batchelor, 1968:1). What this demonstrates is that Woolf's theory of writing without the influence of anger was challenging to achieve, even in her own work.

At this point it will prove helpful to ask what anger *is* and what it does. To Woolf, this emotion was more elusive than other emotions such as "interest, confusion amusement, boredom" (Woolf, 1929:33) and Brenda Silver argues that her response to anger is caused by culturally constructed truths that condemn women's anger in addition to silencing feminist critique. In her view, anger is a "submerged truth" to Woolf and therefore both difficult to

express and impossible to name (Silver, 1991). In this respect, anger becomes a powerful tool in gender ideology, and Woolf's analysis of anger in *A Room of One's Own* serves as a way of understanding the way women struggle with the need to express anger in a society that denies and represses this emotion in women (Helal, 2005). This view on women resembles the concept of woman as "angel" that women struggled with in the previous century and this was the concept Woolf wanted to eradicate. Apparently, this gender ideology still prevailed at the beginning of the twentieth century.

How should women write?

There could also be a material cause for anger appearing in texts by women. The novel was, in Woolf's view, a preferable genre for women writers in the nineteenth century due to their circumstances. They had less time, space and money than their male counterparts and women would have to write in the common sitting-room. Here, she also quotes Nightingale and her famous complaint that "women never have an half hour...that they can call their own" (Woolf, 1929:67) For them, Woolf claims "it would be easier to write prose and fiction there than to write poetry or a play. Less concentration is required." (Woolf, 1929:67). Here, anger would be caused by frustration with the lack of opportunity to write. Nightingale's call for time and Woolf's call for a physical and mental space to write seem essential in connection with women's anger. If these material conditions were available to women they would be able to concentrate on their writing.

Furthermore, Woolf is not only concerned with a physical space for women to be creative; she also explores a language suitable for women. Through the use of imaginary women writers, like Mary Carmichael, she explains how women must try to find their own language as a female language has not been used before. Her point is that women should not write like men, neither in form nor in theme. The values of women differ from the values of men and these values are, according to Woolf, transferred from life to fiction. However, in society and literature the masculine values prevailed and had to be taken seriously. In the literary world women had to write as men and not as women. Only a few writers refused to give in to the structures of patriarchy, and as Woolf declares:

What genius, what integrity it must have required in face of all that criticism, in the midst of that purely patriarchal society, to hold fast to the thing as they saw it without shrinking. Only Jane Austen did it and Emily Brontë [...] They wrote as women write, not as men write (Woolf, 1929:75)

To Woolf, it seems vital that women find their own language and have the courage to use it in their writing. Through their own language they can find a metaphysical space where they can exist.

On the issue of genre and language, it is also interesting to note that although the novel was the preferred genre for women, both Nightingale and Woolf wrote vividly through the essay form. According to OED, the word essay comes from the French word meaning, “to try” and the genre is an attempt to write about any subject matter aiming to capture an interesting thought, experience and insight from it. One reason why both writers choose this genre could be its free form that allowed them to explore and offer their opinions, concerns and interests from a personal point of view. Woolf, on her part contributed to redefining the essay through her writings and analysis on the form itself. In *The Modern Essay* (1925) she gives her opinion on the objective of the essay; “a good essay must draw its curtain round us, but it must be a curtain that shuts us in, not out” (Woolf, 1925:211). So, to Woolf, the goal of the essay “is simply that it should give pleasure [...] It should lay us under a spell with its first word, and we should only wake, refreshed, with its last.” (Woolf, 1925:211&222). Up until now, we have seen how Woolf investigated women in literature in the past, however, she also considers her contemporary female authors, and finds that there are almost as many books written by women as by men, and also that women do no longer only write novels. She proposes that women may begin to use writing as an art and not as a method of self-expression. As described previously, Woolf considered writing as self-expression necessary in previous centuries due to the condition of women. However, times have changed and so has women’s writing. To prove her point, she uses writing by her imaginary author Mary Carmichael and reads out the passage that says: “Chloe liked Olivia”. With this, Woolf tries to place real issues of women’s lives into literature, rather than at the margins. She underlines the fact that “sometimes women do like women” and that “Chloe liked Olivia perhaps for the first time in literature” (Woolf, 1929:81). A major point is that Woolf uses the word *sometimes* here. Again, her focus is with the personal experience and not “woman” in general. Woolf finishes her line of thought by expressing to her audience:

If Mary Carmichael knows how to write, and I was beginning to enjoy some quality in her style; if she has a room to herself, of which I am not quite sure; if she has five hundred a year of her own-but that remains to be proved-then I think that something of great importance has happened (Woolf, 1929:83)

To her, this is a turning point for women's literary production and only by including all aspects of the nature of woman, as well as all kinds of women in fiction, will the patriarchal literary tradition be dismantled.

What we have seen so far, then, is that both Woolf and Nightingale shared a belief in freedom of women's intellect, yet a changing ideology of womanhood allowed Woolf to further challenge social and economic obstacles to female ambitions. Woolf advocated for a new definition of womanhood and femininity and she looked forward to "in a hundred years [...] women will have ceased to be the protected sex. Logically they will take part in all the activities and exertions that were once denied them" (Woolf, 1929:41-42). The next chapter will examine whether Woolf's challenge is realised in the middle of the twentieth century.

4 Betty Friedan

4.1 Woman in the post-war era

In the decades that followed the Second World War, women's emancipation resulted in a number of opportunities for women. Education was now an option for all and as women had worked during the two wars, they had become accustomed to a life outside the home.

However, when the soldiers returned from war, they wanted their jobs back and this made most working women redundant. As a consequence, and especially in post-war America, the image of woman that was described in glossy magazines, taught in schools and embraced by society was one whose role was to seek fulfilment in the home. In this milieu, women were educated by self-declared experts on how to find a potential husband, and keep him, and encouraged to desire the destiny found in their own femininity. Through a husband, children and homemaking, their true potential would be fulfilled, according to the stereotype (Radek, 2001). This stereotype echoed traditions from the past, such as within the structure of patriarchy, where the ideology of woman as domestic goddess and Freudian ideas that saw the female as secondary to the male. It was considered unfeminine to have aspirations of higher education and a career, and the independence that the first wave feminists fought for in the beginning of the twentieth century seemed like a lost cause. The conventional and pretty image where women should only seek meaning through their family was so strict that those women who wanted to seek a profession would be pitied and described as neurotic, unfeminine and generally unhappy (Friedan, 2010).

In this environment where culture as a whole told women that they were content and lived perfect lives, Betty Friedan, also a middle-class housewife, was not only capable of detecting that women as a whole are not happy, but also capable of putting a name to something that has thus far been unnameable. It is precisely this that all of the writers I deal with in this thesis have in common - all of them have put into words problems that have no name. Because they are women they have been forced to create their own writings - in order to put into words what woman really is as a person in real life and not just as an abstract ideal that has been created by men in a patriarchal ideology.

4.2 Betty Friedan and *The Feminine Mystique*

While the role of woman as mother and wife was glorified and embraced outwardly, underneath the surface “the problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women” (Friedan, 2010:5). The reason why women did not enunciate this problem was because they did not know that it was a feeling that they shared with others and that it was something that could be said out loud. This problem, a sense of dissatisfaction that so many women quietly suffered from, was eventually described by Betty Friedan as “The Problem that Has No Name” (Friedan, 2010:5). Betty Friedan, a middle-class American woman who herself was an educated house wife, was the first to describe and name this problem. Her own experience as a housewife made her question the discrepancy between the realities of women’s lives against the image that they were trying to conform to. She named the image “the feminine mystique” and set out to examine the origins of this mystique and what effects it had on women.

What she found was that the conventional image and psychological assumptions about women, was far from the truth, and that a number of women had asked themselves in silence “is this all?” (Friedan, 2010:5). What she also found was that even though this was a common problem among countless American women, nothing had been written about this in the numerous texts written for and about women. All she could find was experts telling women that as a housewife and mother she would find true feminine fulfilment. From this discovery, Friedan introduced “The Problem that Has No Name” and through her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), she managed to change the consciousness of her contemporaries, both in America and the rest of the world. There is a resemblance here, to what the narrator of *A Room of One’s Own* experienced when she went to the library to find books about women, but only found books that had been written by men (Woolf, 1929:66). The books that both Woolf and Friedan found did not really provide any sense of information about what a woman was, but only what she should be.

4.3 The Problem that Has No Name

Through *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan declares her conviction that “The Problem that Has No Name”, which is found in the widespread discontent of women, has a very definite cause, and actually makes women ill. In her view, the problem of identity is significant and women experience a restriction of growth that is caused by and maintained by the feminine mystique. The “feminine mystique” was, in Friedan’s view a kind of ideological idea that provided women with a “sexual role” that they should try to conform to, but which really restricted their growth:

As the Victorian culture did not permit women to accept or gratify their basic sexual need, our culture does not permit women to accept or gratify their basic need to grow and fulfil their potentialities as human beings, a need which is not solely defined by their sexual role (Friedan, 2010:58)

The search for human identity is, in Friedan’s understanding, not a new phenomenon. On the contrary, humans have experienced various kinds of identity crises throughout history. What was described in theology, sociology and psychology, was man’s search for identity, and not woman’s. Women, Friedan continues, have never been expected to grow up and find their own human identity, and this is because theorists and conventions have stated that woman’s identity is destined by biology and anatomy (Friedan, 2010). Again, the issue of conventional thoughts on femininity and womanhood has consequences that reach far beyond the individual woman. In the middle of the twentieth century, women were, and still are considered “the other” and not permitted to search for and determine their full human identity. This is also what de Beauvoir voiced when she described the mystery of womanhood, where the mystery is projected onto the woman. Due to woman’s reproductive function becomes a symbol of life and in the process is deprived of all individuality (De Beauvoir, 2008).

“Women”, Friedan holds, “had to suffer this crisis of identity, which began a hundred years ago, and have to suffer it still today, simply to become fully human” (Friedan, 2010:59). Interestingly, Friedan identifies the starting point for this awareness in women around the time that Nightingale wrote *Cassandra*. As my first chapter showed, she, too, struggled with her own self-definition and found her identity in and through writing. One such example is where Nightingale exclaimed that “the Age, the World, Humanity, must give [women] the

means to exercise this moral activity, must give them intellectual cultivation, spheres of action (Nightingale, 1979:50). To her, it was impossible for women to develop their individual self in the patriarchal society of the Victorian Period. Woolf also meditates upon the issue of women finding their own identity, when she laments the lack of a female tradition, which prevents women from establishing any ideals that show them what they should become.

Similarly, Friedan found it necessary, as herself one of these women, to find her own identity in and through her own writing. This differs from the experience of men, who can refer themselves to the writing of other men, but for women it is necessary to *make* their own texts. We first saw this in both Nightingale and Woolf and it now continues to Friedan. It seems possible to argue that the lack of a female tradition that Woolf talked about has serious implications for women far beyond the literary tradition itself.

4.4 Where did the image come from?

Through the hard struggles of the first-wave feminist, women had, as we have seen, achieved the opportunity to seek both an education and a career. To Friedan, “this is the real mystery: why did so many American women [...] go back home again, to look for “something more” in housework and rearing children?” (Friedan, 2010:49). She calls this a paradox, because it narrowed women’s sphere, whilst the human world was opening up to them. She also questions why women conform to this constricting image when they finally have the opportunity to become more equal to men. “Why” she asks “should she accept this new image which insists she is not a person but a 'woman' by definition barred from the freedom of human existence and a voice in human destiny” (Friedan, 2010:49). Clearly, Friedan sees this new and accepted image of woman as a set-back in the battle for equality. In *The Feminine Mystique*, she attempts to trace where the image of woman as a pretty homemaker came from.

Firstly, as previously mentioned, women became redundant in the work force when the soldiers returned from war. The reason why women accepted this, Friedan suggests, was partly the change in spirit of the general American after the war. Prior to, and during the war, people had the courage to fight, but after the war “[t]he American spirit fell into a strange

sleep; men as well as women [... were] bewildered and frustrated by change – the whole nation stopped growing up” (Friedan, 2010:149).

Instead of dealing with the issues that were wrong in society at this post-war period, theorists and therapists turned inwards, and to human behaviour for answers. Here, Freudian theories created an escape to the extent of absurdity in the shape of “process within process, meaning hidden within meaning, until meaning itself disappeared” so that “the hopeless, dull outside world hardly existed at all.” (Friedan, 2010:150). Subsequently, with a sharp echo from the past, a different concept of the family, and especially mothers, emerged. Now, the mother could be blamed for everything that was wrong within family, with reference to Freud’s psychotherapy. Unfortunately, this image of woman as potential root to a number of problems made the feminine mystique a belief system embraced by society. This is a similar situation to the tremendously important role that women played in the Victorian society. Although women did not have any power, the whole social structure depended on them. Without them, it was as though society would just fall apart.

Secondly, this image was created and upheld by advertisements, novels, newspapers, television and, especially, by women’s magazines. Friedan took on an extensive research of women’s magazines from the post-war period and found that they portrayed woman as “young and frivolous, almost childlike; fluffy and feminine; passive; gaily content in a world of bedroom and kitchen, sex, babies, and home”(Friedan, 2010:23). The contents of the magazines did not, however, contain reference to the world outside, despite the fact that this was a time of constant change and exploration. This was also a contrast to the way women were portrayed prior to the war. In 1939, magazines referred to the “New Women, creating with a gay determined spirit a new identity for women – a life of their own” (Friedan, 2010:25). Here, Friedan's view connects well with Woolf when she claimed that women need a room of their own to be creative. For Woolf, it was essential that women gained access to material and physical goods, in order for them to reach creative and personal independence. Traditionally, the opportunity of becoming independent had been monopolized by men, and both Woolf and Friedan emphasize how important it is that women are allowed to be independent human beings. As Friedan points out, women in the 1960’s still were disadvantaged in this area, thus unable to be fully satisfied as humans.

But in the 1950’s, magazines contained virtually no articles on women who were not happy housewives, and one editor told Friedan that “if we get an article about a woman who does anything adventurous, out of the way, something by herself, you know, we figure she must be terribly aggressive, neurotic” (Friedan, 2010:36). Evidently, in the 1950’s, the

feminine mystique had developed into an established ideology and women who tried to free themselves from this were seen as unfeminine and mentally disturbed.

Why this ideal had such a powerful effect on women throughout the 1950's and 60's was, in Friedan's view because "the feminine mystique" was supported and upheld by sociologists through functionalist theories. What this meant for society was that institutions were studied in terms of functions within its own society; hence, the scientific value was questionable. Through "giving an absolute meaning and a sanctimonious value to the generic term "woman's role", functionalism put American women into a kind of deep freeze" (Friedan, 2010:100). Sociologists tried to "protect" women against the threats that would follow if they assumed true equality with men. Countless leading theorists within functionalism described how "[t]he woman's fundamental status is that of her husband's wife, the mother of his children" (Parsons, 2010) and presented a cultural definition of femininity where woman was merely someone's wife and mother. Again, this concept of woman is closely linked to that from past times, and even though the rest of society was rapidly changing, the functionalist theories prevented women from doing the same (Friedan, 2010).

At this point it is fitting to look at a theory on femininity from the feminist writer Helene Cixous. In her essay *Sorties* (1975) she talks about how men and women are placed within a binary of opposition; male/female, masculine/feminine and active/passive. This, by her analysis, comes from the fact that "thought has always worked by opposition". Cixous emphasises that maleness is described in terms of activity, while femaleness is described in terms of passivity (Cixous, 1986:349). In both Friedan's and Cixous' view, the ideology of the feminine mystique renders women passive and this is also what we saw in my first chapter, where passivity was a key concept in the definition of woman. Ultimately, this view makes it difficult for women to break free and find their own identity, as the ideal has been around for such a long time and is embedded in society.

In Friedan's analysis of the feminine mystique, she found one theorist, Abraham Maslow, who had studied women in relation to ego, self-esteem and strength of self. Interestingly, his research was conducted in the late 1930's, that is, before the feminine mystique became omnipotent. However, his research was not particularly acknowledged at the time, and his results did not influence popular psychological theory. Nevertheless, what he found contrasted the conventional images of femininity, in that he saw a distinction between the levels of strength or dominance in women and how this challenged. High-dominance women scored high on self-confidence, self-assurance and self-esteem as opposed to low-dominance women. Moreover, he found that

high-dominance women were not “feminine” in the conventional sense, partly because they felt free to choose rather than be bound by convention, and partly because they were stronger as individuals than most women (Friedan, 2010:256)

His theory showed that women who felt strong in themselves were able to break from convention and were active instead of passive. This, of course, contrasts the conventional ideal of femininity. For Friedan, the studies and theories from Maslow became an important source in the search for a new identity for women, and her vision is closely linked to his theories.

4.5 Why did Friedan write her book: The loss of self

For decades, women were caught in what Friedan called “the housewife trap”. As previously stated, the world was rapidly changing, although this did not apply to women. The concept of human psychology also changed in this period and there was a heightened focus on “the basic human need to grow, man’s will to be all that is in him to be” (Friedan, 2010:250). Many prominent thinkers identified the human need to grow from within to reach their full human potential and the principle was “that man is happy, self-accepting, healthy, without guilt, only when he is fulfilling himself and becoming what he can be” (Friedan, 2010:250). Whereas these new psychological thoughts were both modern and an advance in regards to the understanding of humans, the research and analysis did not include women. Realization of one’s entire being was seen as key to a contented existence, yet what women experienced as housewives was the opposite of self-realization. Friedan claimed that “women in America are not encouraged, or expected, to use their full capacities. In the name of femininity, they are encouraged to evade human growth” (Friedan, 2010:255). In consequence, they eradicated themselves to the point to self-destruction.

To Friedan, this poses the clue to “the problem that has no name”. She finds that

[t]he transcendence of self, in sexual orgasm, as in creative experience, can only be attained by one who is himself, or herself, complete, by one who has realized his or her own identities. The theorists know this is true for man, though they have never thought through the implications for women. (Friedan, 2010:263)

This implies that as long as women are denied the opportunity to find their true self they will not be able to fulfil their human potential. The ideology of the feminine mystique ignored this potential for fulfilment in women and this was, according to Friedan, what caused the frustration. She found the conventional image of woman so alarming that she stated that it “has succeeded in burying millions of women alive” (Friedan, 2010:273). If we go back to Nightingale we find that this is similar to what she wrote in *Cassandra* where she claims that the world destroys women from within and that she speaks on the behalf of “the sample of hundreds of lives (or rather deaths) of persons who cannot fight with society” (Nightingale, 1979:40). As shown in chapter two, Woolf also focused on female identity as a necessary foundation for creativity. What this proves is that women’s search for self-definition was disregarded in all three author’s contemporary society and women’s struggle to find themselves still exists in the last part of the twentieth century.

The situation that women found themselves in, however, was paradoxical because even though they were supposed to feel content, women became angry. At the same time anger was seen to be unfeminine and, as a result, unnatural, which meant that women were constricted by their society and forced to choose between complying with the feminine ideal and being characterized as mentally disturbed.

4.6 Killing off the feminine mystique

To Friedan, the solution to “the problem that has no name” has to come from within women themselves. They need to confront “the housewife trap” and stop deceiving themselves by clinging on to it. Nevertheless, facing the problem is not enough and she finds that it is crucial that women ask themselves “what do I want to do” and through the answers she will find herself. She emphasises this when she writes that

[o]nce she begins to see through the delusions of the feminine mystique – and realizes that neither her husband nor her children, nor the things in her house, nor sex, nor being like all the other women, can give her a self – she often finds the solution much easier than she anticipated (Friedan, 2010:274)

What Friedan points out is that a woman cannot find her identity through her family or others; she has to find it within herself. By killing off the feminine mystique, she can start to listen to her own voice and find out how she really is and what she wants in life. Friedan continues to say that “woman today must think of herself as a human being first” and not only as a wife or mother and “make a life plan in terms of her own abilities, a commitment of her own to society” (Friedan, 2010:278). What Friedan points to her is what she finds to be the key to the problem of identity, namely an active engagement in society.

If a woman commits herself to a real purpose outside the home, for example through a job where she can make full use of her abilities, she can find her identity. Friedan bases her conclusion on the previously discussed psychological theories that found this to be crucial to men. In her view, the same beliefs should apply to women (Friedan, 2010). Again, this correlates to what Nightingale longed for in the nineteenth century, when idleness was cherished in women. She detested the thought of doing “worsted work” (Nightingale, 1979:36) and Friedan also brings this up when she discusses how women are encouraged to take up “arts” as it can be practiced within the home. However, Friedan exclaims, “the idle ceramics do not bring that needed sense of self when they are of no value to anyone else” (Friedan, 2010:283). To both Nightingale and Friedan, it seems vital that women commit themselves to something that is of value, not only to themselves, but also in society.

What Friedan then discovered and examined in the decades that followed the Second World War started a revolution and as Nicholas Lemann put it “[f]eminism...began with the

work of a single person: Friedan” (Friedan, 2010:back cover). From this period came the battle for equality for women, and the next chapter will discuss whether Friedan’s work is now a mere historical artefact, or if it still is of relevance to women’s search for a self-definition in our contemporary society.

5 Caitlin Moran

In the previous chapters we have seen how ideology has affected women from the nineteenth century up until the middle of the twentieth century. Although the three texts dealt with so far have obvious differences both in form and content, they all show how women tried not only to find, but also to create, their own identity in a society that had strong beliefs about womanhood. Nightingale struggled in the Victorian Period with the “separate spheres” ideology and the image of woman as an idle “angel in the house”, while Woolf described how gender identity is socially constructed and tried to challenge this view. Finally, Friedan defined “the problem that has no name”, namely the strong, yet unexpressed, feeling of frustration among suburban housewives in the 1950’s.

As we have seen, Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) sparked the beginning of the second-wave of feminism. In the years that followed, women fought for rights in all areas, however, there was a specific focus on the “experience” of women. The social observer, Alvin Toffler, described the change in this period as “future shock”, which refers to the psychological state of both individuals and entire societies that results from “too much change in too short a period of time” (Toffler, 1984:10). The rapid change in attitudes towards most traditional categories caused a sort of social paralysis, as most conventional concepts, including gender, were questioned or annihilated (Toffler, 1984). What Toffler does is to explain what happened in society in the period following the Second World War. Everything was changing at such a speed that woman, along with the rest of society found it hard to keep track.

5.1 The Sexualised Woman

Despite the focus on women's rights and experience, many male writers produced biologized and sexualised images of women in the 1970s. In many ways, the traditional images of angel and monster, virgin and whore, lady and madwoman were relentlessly eroticised. While woman in the nineteenth century had been idolized into a being of purity and lack of passion, the second half of the twentieth century saw a strong focus on women as sexual beings. This also affected how women were represented in literature by men. Yet again, the thread from

prominent male writers that we saw in chapter 3 was taken up and the male literary tradition seems to disregard the feminist waves that have been taking place.

The tradition that goes back to writers such as Henry Miller and his theology of the “cunt” and D.H Lawrence’s self-scarifying heroine of *The Woman Who Rode Away* (1926) was continued in the portrayal of women in later twentieth century literature. One example comes from the work of the British poet Roger McGough, where the speaker in his poem “The Newly Pressed Suit” (1971) positions himself as the hero and places the heroine “gently upon the bed/ like a newly pressed suit.” Then, the hero turn into a villain and “step[s] into the poem [...]with a cruel laugh/Rape the heroine” (McGough, 1971:34) to bash the hero out of the heroine and the rape continues through a number of stanzas. Although McGough apparently intended to be ironic, his depiction represents an unambiguous resemblance to what we saw in male literature in the first quarter of the twentieth century and specifically to Nathaniel West’s words “[t]hey ganged her proper” (West, 1962:82). The resentment towards the autonomous woman seems prevalent in contemporary male literature and could be viewed as a reaction against women’s increasing rights and opportunities in society.

The sexualisation and dehumanising of women in the second half of the twentieth century also included male thought about women writers. Woolf's efforts to help women be literary artists in their own right seem to have failed to fully materialize in this period. In 1966, the work of Jane Austen that Woolf treasured was described by Anthony Burgess as a failure. In his opinion Austen’s writing “lacks a strong male thrust” (Heilbrun, 1992:32). Not only does his description have a sexual connotation, but it also contradicts the very characteristics of Austen’s writing, that Woolf considered as a literature free of bitterness and anger, and therefore a proper piece of literary art. Likewise, the novelist and literary critic William Gass claimed that women writers “lack that blood congested genital drive which energizes every great style” (Heilbrun, 1992:32).

A more recent account of women writers was given by the Nobel Prize-winning British author V.S Naipaul. He was asked in an interview in 2011 if he considered any female author his match. He responded negatively and added that “I read a piece of writing and within a paragraph or two I know whether it is by a woman or not. I think [it is] unequal to me” (Fallon, 2011:10). He continues to explain his criticism of women’s writing stems from their “sentimentality, the narrow view of the world”. Jane Austen’s writing is scrutinized, too, and he professes he “couldn't possibly share her sentimental ambitions, her sentimental sense of the world” (Fallon, 2011:10). The arrogance in his comments is clear, but, more thought-provoking is the fact that he implicitly considers women as “the other”. The sentiments that

Naipaul does not “share” and understand in women’s writing automatically becomes a flaw, in his view. This is exactly what de Beauvoir described in *The Second Sex* (1949), where she shows that woman is what man is not, namely “the other”, and implicitly inferior to man. The views on women presented here, indicates that the modern woman still face challenges when it comes to contemporary ideology of womanhood. Also, the comments made by these writers render woman as either a singularly sexual object or a being who is fully governed by her feelings. This in turn, also renders her different from the male, who is the sexual subject and therefore rational. Man, then, is perceived active while woman is passive, in.

5.2 Mainstream media image of woman

In the period that has followed the Second Wave of feminism, the mass media has become a very important source of influence to the contemporary image of woman. Although media, such as newspapers, magazines and television, played a role in the periods we have already discussed, it does not compare to the contemporary media environment. The Internet has, in the last three decades, opened up a new world to society and come played a significant role in contemporary ideology.

The common stereotypical image of woman in the media was recently described by UNESCO. According to their study, the media often “portray[s] women as objects of male attention – the glamorous sex kitten, the sainted mother, the devious witch, the hard-faced corporate and political climber” (White, 2009:4). The study also found that popular magazines, aimed at both men and women, portrayed women with bodies that the average woman is unable to attain whereas a majority of the featured stories associated a woman’s success and happiness to either catching or satisfying a man (White, 2009). These images of woman bear a strong resemblance to the Victorian concept of woman as either angel or whore that Woolf was ardent to destroy. It is also similar to what Friedan found in magazines from the 1950’s and the perception of women who stepped out of the sphere of domesticity. Likewise, it is identical to the binary system that was put forward by Cixous.

According to Caroline Heilbrun the female writers of the first third of the twentieth century transformed the writing of women’s lives. What these women expressed were things that women earlier had not been allowed to voice and this led to a positive change for the following generations (Heilbrun, 1988). Through her autobiographical writings, Woolf

suggested alternative feminine versions of selfhood and in our contemporary society and the genre of autobiographical narrative is used in a corresponding manner today. Not only in book version, but perhaps even more commonly in digital and social media. Media and particularly through the Internet form an idea of woman, but women also use the media, as the Internet to mediate themselves.

It seems then, that even though women have come a long way, especially within education, work and politics, modern women still struggle with conventional and restricting gender ideology. According to Toril Moi, the issues that troubled women in the nineteenth century are still relevant for women today. More specifically, the problem then and now is to understand what it is to be a human being loosened from ideological restrictions. In her view, this is still an issue for modern women (Moi, 2002). Although, she continues, women have succeeded in loosening the grip of sexist ideology, there is still the challenge of “acknowledging woman as a human being without converting her into an abstraction, and without stripping her of her femaleness” (Moi, 2002:158). Although Moi acknowledges that there are still challenges for women to overcome, she claims that the sexist ideology is weakened in society. If we consider the image of woman in media that has been described above, this argument is debatable.

5.3 Contemporary life writing (what, how and why do women write?)

In the 1970's women's literature came to exist as a separate category and gained increased scholarly interest. Alongside this growing interest, attention was also given to other authors and genres that had been historically marginalised. This re-evaluation of what was considered literature was prompted by the Second Wave feminism (Spender & Todd, 1989). According to Anderson, the internet has played a significant role in shaping new autobiographical forms (Anderson, 2001:123) . Through social media, such as Facebook and personal blogs, people have discovered a new way of communication (Rettberg, 2008). Through blogs, the author's life is presented in a diary style. However, there is a distinction between the personal blog and the diary. In a private diary all parts of life might be documented, whereas in a personal blog the posts represent selected slices of the blogger's life and are intended to be read by others (Rettberg, 2008). In this, there is an interesting link between traditional autobiographical essays and personal blogs, which can both be seen as narratives of self, or more specifically as

online self-expression. Through stories and narratives the reader is given an insight into the author's life.

Autobiographies and blogs can both be viewed as texts that have different layers. On the one hand they present readers with a certain kind of identity, presenting the writer as someone with certain defined characteristics. On the other hand, they could also be seen as texts through which the writer explores and defines her own self, thus trying to find herself in and through writing. Another interesting aspect that is related to life writing in the media is the fact that through the internet and the social media, this genre is open for everyone. One no longer needs to struggle to become published, as the internet is easily accessible. What this means is that more women than ever before have a chance to have their voices heard. One of those voices is Caitlin Moran, who, not only has published books, but is a frequent user of social media such as Facebook, Twitter and her own blog, caitlinmoran.co.uk.

5.4 Motherhood as a social construct

Toril Moi argues that “motherhood is a socially constructed institution regularly used to legitimize women's oppression” (Moi, 1999:41). In her view this represents a biological determinism that is one of the most repressive obstacles in the struggle to understanding what a woman is. In her essay, *What is a Woman* (1999) she argues that a woman who does not have children is a failure in contemporary social ideology. Another influential observation of how motherhood functions as means of oppression comes from Carol Gilligan. Through her studies she found that women

often have recourse to the strategy of excluding themselves for the sake of others, so as to live up to the idolizing but self-serving patriarchal image of femininity – or womanlihood – as sheer nurturance and selflessness (Gilligan, 1991:9)

What this image of femininity does then, is to claim that woman has a choice of either conforming to the ideal of motherhood or be rendered selfish. This echoes the ideals from the past that Nightingale, Woolf and Friedan struggled with. What Moran does, as we shall see is to actually to say things that contemporary women feel and think on some level, but which

have not been said publicly before. This is why she belongs to the same tradition as Nightingale, Woolf and Friedan.

5.5 How To Be a Woman

Caitlin Moran is a British modern-day feminist in her thirties, with a journalistic background within the music industry, who is known for her columns in *The Times* and more recently for her polemic books *How To Be a Woman* (2011) and *Moranthology* (2012). While Moran's writing is academic and intellectual, she also employs humour and this technique of mixing humour, private and honest stories, angry outbursts with intelligent and serious matters, has placed Caitlin Moran at the centre of contemporary feminist writers. The book has been given a number of awards, amongst them, the Galaxy book of the year award in 2011. Moreover, *How To Be a Woman* also received great reviews, and famous feminist author Germaine Greer, whose *The Female Eunuch* (1970) is one of the key texts of the second wave of feminism, describes Moran as a "genuinely original talent" (Greer, 2011). Similarly to Nightingale, Woolf and Friedan, Moran uses writing as a way of expressing her thoughts and finding herself. Through *How To Be a Woman* (2011) we are introduced to her extensive diary writing and she analyses them in retrospect as a method of understanding herself as a woman. She has been writing from a very early age, and won her first prize as a writer at the age of 13 and has since received many awards. For most of her career she has been a columnist, so it is obvious that writing has been an important part of her life.

Caitlin Moran's book *How To Be a Woman* (2011), deals with issues that concerns every modern woman. Her text is partly a memoir with extracts from her diary and personal anecdotes from her life, stretching from her childhood till adulthood, yet also it is also an academic and historical exploration of what a woman is. It includes important aspects of the history of women, statistics and continuous reference to prominent people both in history and contemporary society. Most of all, it is a conscious-raising text that emphasises the continued importance of feminism within our own culture and society. In her mission to "reclaim the word 'feminism'" (Moran, 2011:80) she explains how a survey found that only 29 percent of American women and only 42 per cent of British women would consider themselves feminists. In her view, all women are feminists. She questions her fellow women: "Do you

have a vagina?” and “Do you want to be in charge of it?” If you said yes to both, Congratulations! You’re a feminist.” (Moran, 2011:79). In response to the survey she goes back to basics and addresses the respondents:

What do you think feminism IS, ladies? What part of “liberation for women” is not for you? Is it freedom to vote? The right not to be owned by the man you marry? The campaign for equal pay? “Vogue,” by Madonna? Jeans? Did all that good shit GET ON YOUR NERVES? Or were you just DRUNK AT THE TIME OF SURVEY? (Moran, 2011:80)

Clearly, Moran is convinced that deep down all women are feminists and in her humorous and conversational style she tries to make the readers agree. Moran’s view corresponds with Moi’s definition of what a feminist is, namely someone who supports the new women’s movement from the second part of the twentieth century. Moreover, Moi has come to the conclusion that although most men and women share parts of the feminist view, few actually call themselves feminists. Thus, Moi also advocates for women to participate in the still needed struggle for women’s equality and claims that the task as feminists “is to prevent the patriachs from getting away with their habitual trick of silencing the opposition. It is up to us to make the struggle [...] an explicit and inevitable item on the cultural agenda” (Belsey, 1997:132).

Despite the continuous need for feminism, Moran still finds that the 21st century is a good time to be a woman. Different waves of feminism have given women the right to vote, access to education and the workplace in addition to the introduction of contraceptives and free abortion laws. These issues were the ones that both Nightingale and Woolf discussed in their time and Moran acknowledges that although women have come a long way, there are still unresolved questions. To her, women should not be content with their standings in society, because patriarchy is still around. To use her words; “an old-fashioned feminist “consciousness raising” still has enormous value” (Moran, 2011:11). It still has value because modern women still encounter the patriarchy; however, issues of society concerning women are not dealt with by women, “unless”, according to Moran, “they are very, very drunk”(Moran, 2011:11). Instead, on subjects such as abortion, cosmetic intervention, birth, motherhood, sex, love, work, misogyny and fear, women do not voice their true opinions and rather internalize societal views. This in turn, affects women’s peace of mind and transfers to female inequality (Moran, 2011:13). Moran sums up the contemporary views on womanhood;

“a culture where nearly everything female is still seen as squeam-inducing, and/or weak – menstruation, menopause, just the sheer, simple act of calling someone “a girl”” (Moran, 2011:62)

The main purpose of Moran’s project is to figure out how she can become a woman. Early on she realises with horror that there is a gap between how she perceives herself and how she should be as a "woman": “[o]h God. I just don’t have a clue. I don’t have a clue how I will ever be a woman” (Moran, 2011:8). Her diary reveals that Moran comes to this realisation when she is 13 years old and has just entered puberty. She humorously recalls that she was not prepared for puberty and found it an “inappropriate present to give a child [...]oestrogen and a big pair of tits” (Moran, 2011:9). To her, puberty was something unexpected and she had not given it thought “until [her] hand was forced, eventually, by [her]pituitary gland” (Moran, 2011:9) Before this, she records, she was a child and did not attract attention to her body, in fact she hardly noticed it herself. Suddenly, when the hormones kicked in, she had to deal with her own body changing, and consider who she wanted to be as a woman. Moran also draws in De Beauvoir and her famous quote “One is not born a woman – one becomes one” (Moran, 2011:8). Moran’s response to this is that de Beauvoir “didn’t know the half of it” (Moran, 2011:8). As she herself had experienced, there is no handbook to guide you and it is particularly difficult to figure this out in an environment where women’s “victories are considered threatening, incorrect, distasteful or- most crucially of all, for a teenage girl – simply uncool” (Moran, 2011:11). Furthermore, it is interesting to dwell on the fact that this is still, according to Moran, the status in our contemporary society. The current hesitation found in people to call themselves feminists is not only down to the terms negative connotation. On the contrary, there is a widely shared notion that women have won their battle for equality, and therefore there is no need for feminism anymore. What Moran does in her book is to point out that this argument is false.

To describe woman, Moran honestly and graphically show both the lenient and harsh realities of womanhood. Subjects such as menstruation, masturbation, motherhood, birth and abortions are vividly described down to explicit details. This candidness is somewhat aching, but, importantly, it primarily serves as a redefinition of female stereotypes in society. She describes the parts of womanhood that have been considered taboo or unnecessary to speak of. When talking about her own experiences when discovering masturbation she concludes; “I can’t wait to tell everyone, except I will never tell anyone, because this is the biggest secret ever. Even more secret than periods [...]” (Moran, 2011:26-27). In the same candid manner, Moran deals with women’s pubic hair, and how maintaining it has become a routine part of

self-care. In her view, the freely available porn culture and the industry standard music videos, have led both men and women to assume that women should remove most or all of their pubic hair. To her this is a cause of concern, especially since “it just happened – and we never thought to discuss it.” (Moran, 2011:47). To further this point of women “giving in” to stereotypes concerning genital grooming, she quotes a statement from sex-columnist in *The Times*, Suzi Godson; “Any woman who dares to be less rigid in her styling [...] risks being labelled as bucolic, unsanitary or possibly French” (Moran, 2011:48). Moran uses comparison to underline her view on the matter: “Can you imagine if we asked men to put up with this shit? They’d laugh you out the window before you got halfway through the first sentence.” (Moran, 2011:48).

Another issue that defines a modern woman is fashion. Unlike men, Moran points out, women are what they wear, and their wardrobe decisions are more made of duty than of taste. In her view, putting up with painful underwear and high heels is an act of insanity. However, she points out that this is “all a symptom of women’s continuing demented belief that, at any moment, they might face some snap inspection of their ‘total hotness’” (Moran, 2011:97). Her point here relates to Victorian views from the nineteenth century, where fashion constricted women’s activities and the fact that women were supposed to always look their best. Then, as now, uncomfortable clothes and shoes are worn by most women, but the reasons for wearing them have changed. While women in the Victorian era had less influence on their own decisions, the modern woman, according to Moran, chooses high heels because the fashion industry and the media proclaim that it makes their legs look thinner. To Moran, being a woman has not become an easier task than it was in the previous centuries, yet you are not allowed to voice how this makes you feel (Moran, 2011:210).

Women’s appearance is interchangeable with who they are in our society, Moran argues. Being able to dress appropriately in every situation is

One of the presumed Skills Of A Woman – along with being “better” at doing laundry, naturally suited to being at home all day with a baby, and not really minding that men are considered to be funnier (Moran, 2011:210)

The presumptions of womanhood outlined above are, Moran argues, still prevalent in our society, although more subtly than before. She describes other presumptions of women, namely the idea that women need to be able to flirt;

The idea that women should *have* to flirt in order to get on is just as vexing as any other thing women are supposed to have to do – just as be thin, accept 30 per cent lower wages and not laugh [...] when they have food in their mouth (Moran, 2011:122)

Here, Moran emphasises that she is genuinely opposed to the notion that women “have to” do certain things as this is impossible to live up to and not something that men encounter to the same degree.

On the issue of motherhood, Moran declares that somehow society has created the idea that being “a thinking, creative, productive and fulfilled woman” simply is not enough. It seems, to her, that no action will ever be seen as equal to that of giving birth. Again, she compares this societal view to that projected towards men. To make her point that this does not apply to them, she lists great childless men like Da Vinci and Beethoven and how they are not seen to have missed out on a vital aspect of existence. What society needs is “more women who are allowed to prove their worth as people; rather than being assessed merely for their potential to create new people” (Moran, 2011:245). To achieve this, she suggests that feminism needs to help society rid itself of this baby-focus. The focus should rather be on what women are in themselves and what they are going to accomplish.

5.6 Hidden sexism

While these assumption of what a woman is are still prevalent in our society, Moran claims, they are difficult to detect. “These days” she says “sexism is a like Meryl Streep, in a new film: sometimes you don’t recognise it straightaway” (Moran, 2011:128). She describes the blunt sexism that women experienced before the second-wave feminism in the early 1960’s where it was direct and “all, 'know your limit’s women,' 'make us a cup of tea, love' and 'Look at the rack on THAT” (Moran, 2011:129). “These days” she continues “a plethora of shitty attitudes to women have become diffuse, indistinct or almost entirely concealed” (Moran, 2011:130). She exemplifies this by describing how women today must laugh along when encountering sexism, because the men are only “having a laugh”. This in turn, she compares with what has happened to racism, anti-Semitism and homophobia in society; “modern sexism has become cunning. Sly. Codified.” (Moran, 2011:130). In this respect, it is harder

for women to object to sexism than what was the case fifty years ago. However, Moran, presents her own solution to such defence. She suggests that women ask themselves if what they encounter is polite, and if not, rather than calling it sexism, they should call it manners. In that way, the modern, codified misogyny can be solved (Moran, 2011:131).

The problems that Moran here points to would also be difficult for Nightingale, Woolf and Friedan to say, state and enunciate. Although the attitudes towards women in their time were less subtle, it was not acceptable for women to object. Also, it is not a coincidence that Friedan refers to her own project as “the Problem that Has No Name”. Interestingly, according to Deborah Rhode, this problem has now become “the ‘no problem’ problem”, implying that the reluctance to speak up on behalf of women from Friedan’s time has reoccurred. (B. W. Taylor, Rush, & Munro, 1999:121). Nevertheless, all these women were pioneers in that they said things that had not been named before, just as Moran is doing today.

5.7 Current status of women

Similarly to Woolf, Moran also explores “the given” or what de Beauvoir named, “woman as the other” although she has a different view of what caused it. To her, the low status of women stems from the fact that we throughout history have fallen short on major achievements compared to men. This is why men born at the end of the Victorian period pre-feminism see women as unequal and second-class citizens. They are raised to regard woman as “the other”. In our society, these men are powerful figures in both business and government positions, and in Moran’s view, “[t]he entrenched bias against the working, liberated female will only die out when they do” (Moran, 2011:134). Her vision on this matter corresponds with Woolf’s idea that women could not write as well as men in the beginning of the twentieth century, due to a lack of a powerful female literary tradition. Woolf reinforces her argument by inventing Judith Shakespeare and given the circumstances of the treatment of women of her time, she claims there is no way even talented women could match men in literary achievements. Similarly to Woolf, Moran urges women to contest the constructed ideas of womanhood and primarily this can be achieved by reclaiming feminism.

According to Moran, “the main place where our perception of women is currently being formed” (Moran, 2011:247) is through various female icons. To exemplify this, she presents Katie Price as an icon who “has come to embody a whole nexus of female issues”

(Moran, 2011:248) and thus an important part of the celebrity culture. Price was initially convincingly portrayed as a feminist icon by the media, due to her celebrity and economic status. However, what Moran found when she interviewed her, was a successful, yet self-absorbed, woman who had absolutely no interest in current issues. Although Price's public image plummeted within a few years, she nevertheless represents a phenomenon in society. The concept of woman is represented by celebrities such as footballer's wives and sexualized female pop-icons. Moran's greatest concern with this is the way these female icons are written about in the media, which is in a hugely reductionist and damaging way. In a disproportionate manner, the focus is on the appearance of female celebrities compared to their male counterparts. Through emphasising their looks, weight, clothes, in addition to their physical and mental health, the focus is steered away from their achievements and they are yet again reduced to merely a body. The consequence that follows this coverage of female icons, especially for young, impressionable reader is

that if she were a creative and ambitious woman, who worked hard, got some breaks and , somehow, managed to rise to the top of her profession and become as famous as these women in a still male-dominated industry, the paps would come for her, and make her feel just as shitty as Cheryl Cole. (Moran, 2011:266)

The demeaning view on the creative and ambitious woman is, according to Moran, still part of contemporary society. She concludes her line of thought on female icons in the media with the strong statement that it is “a fucking depressing state of affairs” (Moran, 2011:266).

As we have saw in Chapter 2, Woolf found that women lacked a literary tradition and that this caused women to be less successful writers than men. On a similar note, Moran states that “Nearly everything so far has been the creation of men” as women “have no Mozart; no Einstein; no Galileo; no Gandhi. No Beatles, no Churchill no Hawking, no Columbus.” (Moran, 2011:135). To her, there is no use trying to deny this fact, as this will only “give strength to the belief that women simply aren't as good as men, full stop” (Moran, 2011:135). Instead, women should concentrate on what they can do to rectify the current status of women. Western women have the opportunity to do bring about change, without risking imprisonment or death. To her, half the battle will be over when women are being honest about how they are.

5.8 Moran on anger

Similarly to Woolf, Moran also brings up how women are not expected to show anger. To illustrate this, she discusses how female politicians along with most women are judged on their looks and how they are “not allowed to say that this makes you grumpy, or angry” (Moran, 2011:210). Moreover, in relation to her own quest to becoming a proper woman, she lists the things that would blow her “pretending to be a proper woman cover” and getting angry is one of them. Clearly, the contemporary ideal of woman still does not include women showing her anger. Moran contradicts this view, and suggests that women should reclaim the concept of strident feminists and that they should proudly acknowledge this out loud. If they cannot do this they are “basically bending over, saying, ‘Kick my arse and take my vote, please, the patriarchy’” (Moran, 2011:72). In Moran’s vision the only way to move beyond the current fixed notions on womanhood is to reject to conform to them and to speak openly about them. Consequently, a woman not being allowed to show anger is only one of the notions that need challenging in our society. What we see here then is that Moran takes a different standpoint to anger than Woolf, who recommended that women disguise their anger. Woolf’s view is described by Shoshana Felman as an inadvertent fear of falling short of feminine ‘propriety’, pointing to the impossibility of appearing angry and remaining ‘feminine’ (Felman, 1993:128-129). Felman argues that Woolf was constantly conscious of being overheard by men, and therefore not able to break free from the constrictions upon women writers. Moran, on the other hand, openly challenges these constrictions and makes way for women to be and say whatever they want.

With this, Moran is expanding the concept of women, saying that there is no conflict between being a woman and being angry. Throughout her book, Moran challenges the restrictions that ideology continues to place on us, implicitly stating that it is unfeminine to have body hair, choose not to have children, and being angry. Thus, she shows us that while we think of ourselves as liberated and free, the narrow definition of femininity that Woolf encountered is still largely present in our own contemporary society.

5.9 Mission completed?

Moran set out to figure out how to be a woman. In the postscript of her book she discusses whether or not she has succeeded. Firstly, she finds that there are parts of being a woman that she has yet to figure out. She mentions teenage children, menopause and family bereavement as things she still has not experienced and ironing, driving and maths as things she is not good at. However, she stops herself from finding more things she is unable to do, as she is against the female habit of finding shortcomings with themselves and not allowing themselves to be content. What is especially interesting here is that she is talking about attitudes among women and not men. Implicitly, she is saying that women need to take responsibility for their own well-being in society and allow themselves to be comfortable in their own skin. Moran then asks herself if her project has succeeded and that she knows how to be a woman. Her answer is confirmative and the most important revelation she has come to through writing her book is

to just...not really give a shit about all that stuff. To not care about all those supposed 'problems' of being a woman [...] Yes – when I had my massive feminist awakening, the action it provoked in me was a ...big shrug. (Moran, 2011:298)

Through acknowledging and pronouncing her feminist self, she feels that she has found her true self. Her project now, then, seems to be to help other women become truly liberated. She also admits that the title of her book is misleading, as she does not advocate the notion that it is woman's primary concern to fit any socially constructed category. Her take on this is that all people, men and women, should be considered 'the guys', in the sense that everyone is in society *together*. In her concluding remarks, she gives her honest and final thoughts:

what I really want to be, all told, is a human. Just a productive, honest, courteously treated human. One of 'The Guys' (Moran, 2011:309)

Moran's project of finding out how to be a woman, and finally realising that she does not want this after all, connects well with what Judith Butlers famously uttered, "all gender is a

performance” (Butler, 1999:23). Femininity for her is something that is always performed and completely a social matter with identity manifested in performativity. Understandably then, Moran chooses to move away from the performance of being a woman and rather considers herself as “one of the guys” or just human. Hence, the result of her writing is the same as what Nightingale, Woolf and Friedan found, namely that basically they feel like and want to be human beings.

6 Conclusion

This thesis has been a study of the narrative of the (female) self as expressed in writing, and how women attempt to discover their own identity, both in concord and in conflict with the dominant ideology of their contemporary societies. The aims have furthermore been to explore how ideology has tended to affect women *as* women and how this is manifested in writing. I have tried to get a further understanding of these issues through close readings and comparative analyses of Florence Nightingale's *Cassandra* (1928), Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and Caitlin Moran's *How To Be a Woman* (2011). By examining these texts and relating them to feminist and literary theories I have found that the restrictions on women in these different periods were all manifested in their writings. Although the image and ideal of womanhood varied in all periods, it is strikingly clear that the one thing that these ideals had in common was that they created relatively great limitations for women, both in allowing them to forge a human identity and in enabling them to become active social and cultural subjects.

All four texts from each of these periods try to approach the problem of woman from different perspectives, yet all with a point of departure in their own selves and from an autobiographical perspective. Nightingale wrote *Cassandra* at a time of despair in her life, as she detested the forced idleness that was being presented to her as a recipe for middle-class women's lives. This then, resulted in her angry outburst *Cassandra* where she debates and challenges all the restrictions on women that she herself suffers under. She also challenged the limitations of women related to their intellect and found that women needed to make full use of their brains to lead full lives. While her text is a third-person essay, the manuscript had been altered three times, from a dialogue that was closely related to her own life into an autobiographical novel, before it was finally published in 1928. Although not a clear autobiographical text, it is evidently linked to the author's own life and through writing it Nightingale moved away from the condition of woman and found a vocation for herself. This then, signals that she did, in fact, find herself through the process of writing, and thus was able to free herself from the restrictions imposed on her by her family and society as a whole. As we all know, she is now mostly known as the woman who created the profession of nursing.

Woolf, on the other hand, wrote from both a literary, social and personal perspective and her modernist view that everything was up for debate and change manifested itself in her writings. Woolf challenged the traditional masculine narrative, by experimenting with narrative and language to construct a different subject. She rejected the concept of an essential male human identity and favored the androgynous mind in writers, thus developing further Mary Wollstonecraft's appeal to see females not only as women, but as human beings. Woolf suggested that instead of seeing women as one homogeneous group, one should focus on heterogeneity and the personal and held that this would provide less limitation for women in society as well as in writing.

Through the first two chapters it becomes clear that both Woolf and Nightingale shared a belief in the importance of freeing women's intellect from the ideological constraints to which it was subjected, yet a changing ideology of womanhood allowed Woolf to take her challenges to social and economic obstacles to female ambitions further than Nightingale. Woolf also went further in advocating a new definition of womanhood and femininity.

As we have seen, however, in spite of the optimism found particularly in Woolf's writings, all battles were not won by the mid-twentieth century. Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* provided an understanding as to why women moved away from the new-found opportunities in the 1950's. Friedan was herself one of those women who chose to be a housewife instead of participating in the work-force. However, she was unhappy and through her research and writing she found that she was not the only one suffering and named the psychological state that plagued middle-class women "The Problem that Has No Name". Not only did her book become a best-seller and a major influence to both women and the feminist cause, but she also discovered herself in the process. Her insights into women's need for self-realisation on similar terms with men have earned her a fundamental position in the history of feminism. She analysed her own life and through it found truths that are even relevant for women today.

Friedan's continued relevance seemed even clearer when I discussed Moran's *How to Be a Woman*, as she brings up many of the same issues in her descriptions of our contemporary society. Moran's text proved that feminism is still needed 150 years after Nightingale wrote *Cassandra*. Although feminist tracts, such as the writings by de Beauvoir, Woolf and Friedan have influenced and helped improve the conditions for women in many areas, and aided them in forming an identity partly loosened from the ideological ideals in their own time, women still face a number of challenges in our own contemporary society. Moran's personal, yet universally directed writing represents and formulates women's issues

that have not been described publicly before, in similar ways to the other main authors. Nightingale provided a ferocious attack on the Victorian family, while Woolf spoke out in a provocative way of the social and material conditions required for the writing of literature. Friedan, then, questioned the idealized role of domestic housewife in her contemporary society. In one way or another, their courage and power of speech led to a number of positive changes for women, as they gave voice to a marginalized group.

What all these writers share is a strong hope for the future of women. Nightingale professed that through a female Christ, people will see the truth and that this would lead to liberation and emancipation of women. Woolf anticipated a future where women could take part in all activities once denied them and Friedan was positive towards the next step in human evolution, where women would become complete. Similarly, Moran predicts a future where woman is just “one of the guys” and ruling the world “half the time” (Moran, 2011:308)

In conclusion, it needs to be emphasised that the texts examined in this thesis cannot be regarded as representative of all women. Nightingale and Wolf belonged to the cultural and social elite, while Friedan and Moran are associated with the middle-class. What follows from their position in society is that they are addressing and talking about a particular segment of the female population. Nightingale, for one, did not speak on behalf of the suffering poor or working-class women of her Victorian society and Friedan has also been criticised for talking only about white, upper- and middle-class women (Shriver, 2010). This, in turn is a problem with the feminist cause in general - there are a lot of women on the globe, and it is problematic, if not impossible, to talk about everyone at the simultaneously. This last point is arguably one of the reasons why these writers chose to base their writing in their own experiences.

While autobiography supplies few certainties or answers, its study leads us to engage with some of the most intractable and important cultural questions of our time. Autobiography, or, what has been referred to as 'the radical use of autobiography', has traditionally been used to provide voices for marginalised selves. Julia Swindells has an optimistic view of these radical uses of autobiography, suggesting that “[it] now has the potential to be the text of the oppressed and the culturally displaced” (Swindells, 1995:7) adding that “women, black people, working-class people – have more than begun to insert themselves into the culture via autobiography, via the assertion of a ‘personal’ voice, which speaks beyond itself.” (Swindells, 1995:7). My hope for this thesis is that it has provided a good basis for future studies within the field of women’s writing in contemporary society.

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