

DEVELOPING A FEMINIST AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL
PRACTICE: AN ANALYSIS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF'S
MOMENTS OF BEING AND CHRISTA WOLF'S
A MODEL CHILDHOOD

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RAQUEL DAVID

**DEVELOPING A FEMINIST AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PRACTICE:
AN ANALYSIS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *MOMENTS OF BEING*
AND CHRISTA WOLF'S *A MODEL CHILDHOOD***

by

Raquel David

**A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master's of Women's Studies
Department of Women's Studies
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ABSTRACT

The intent of this research is to identify the ways in which Virginia Woolf's *Moments of Being* and Christa Wolf's *A Model Childhood* contribute to the development of a method in process for writing feminist autobiographical texts. The analysis of how Virginia and Christa provide critique of dominant autobiographical practices and feminist critique of authoritative cultural discourses aids in determining strategies that could be taken together and used in a feminist autobiographical practice. The theoretical approach taken in the analysis of *Moments of Being* and *A Model Childhood* combines feminist autobiographical criticism, postmodern theory, and Bakhtinian dialogical theory.

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Chapter One

Introduction

From the time I started reading my first novels I became interested in autobiographies; *The Diary of Ann Frank* was one of the first autobiographies I read. For the last eight years I have particularly sought out women-authored autobiographical texts to read. My interest in women's autobiographical writings spurred me on to co-ordinate the activities of a collective group of undergraduate women at University of Waterloo to establish an annual publication. "Voices of Womyn," six years ago. "Voices of Womyn" mostly contains what contributing women writers from both the university and the surrounding community identify as being autobiographical literary and artistic works. My undergraduate thesis in Women's Studies involved examining tropes found in selected autobiographical writings of women who have been labeled as "mad" at some point in their lives, from Charlotte Perkins-Gilman to Evelyn Lau. My current research is rooted in my life-long interest in reading autobiographical texts, and more recently my desire to theorize about autobiographical texts written by women and to think about what a feminist autobiographical practice may entail.

The following paper is the story of my research and it involves analyzing two autobiographical texts as my primary texts: *Moments of Being*, by Virginia Woolf, and *A Model Childhood*, by Christa Wolf. Christa Wolf's text was written in German and was originally published under the title *Kindheitsmuster*. The first English translation was published in 1970 under the title *A Model Childhood* and then it was republished in 1980

and 1984 under the title *Patterns of Childhood*. It was difficult to obtain a copy of an English translation of the text so I settled upon using the earlier translation, *A Model Childhood*. I acknowledge that the more appropriate title is *Patterns of Childhood* and that more recent commentaries on Christa Wolf and her work use the latter version. Instead of referring to Virginia Woolf and Christa Wolf by their last names, as is common practice in academic writing, I refer to them by their first names. Considering that I do not speak German, Woolf and Wolf sound almost the same when I say them out loud, which could be confusing when presenting my research to an audience. My textual analysis will focus upon *Moments of Being* and *A Model Childhood*, but I also use diaries, essays, and works of fiction by Virginia; and essays, and fiction by Christa as secondary texts.

I am indebted to Anne Herrmann for *The Dialogic and Difference: "An/Other Woman" in Virginia Woolf and Christa Wolf*, in which she juxtaposes selected essays, letters, and fictional works by Virginia and Christa. I have been savouring Virginia's and Christa's writings for years, but I had not considered the relationship between their literary practices before I read Herrmann's text. Herrmann models a way in which the similarities and differences between Virginia's and Christa's literary practices can be discussed. Herrmann's project focuses on their use of the figure of "an/other" woman in selected texts. In the last section of chapter five, I consider how Virginia and Christa use the figure of "an/other" woman in *Moments of Being* and in *A Model Childhood*, but my research differs from Herrmann's in that I primarily investigate their autobiographical texts, comparing and contrasting how they represent the "I."

The ways in which the "I" is represented in Virginia's *Moments of Being* and Christa's *A Model Childhood* illustrate narrative strategies that can be used together towards developing a feminist autobiographical practice. I choose to use the term "I" instead of "self" because Christa discusses the importance and difficulty of saying "I" in both *A Model Childhood* and *The Quest for Christa T.* In addition are the following reasons: we address ourselves as "I" rather than "self"; and "I" comes with fewer assumptions attached to it than "self," the use of "I" does not as readily suggest an Enlightenment notion of self. My research involves examining how Virginia's and Christa's autobiographical texts contribute to current feminist autobiographical discourse, and how they provide feminist cultural critique. This is my main research question: how do Virginia and Christa provide critique of dominant autobiographical practices and feminist critique of authoritative cultural discourses through their representations of the "I" in *Moments of Being* and *A Model Childhood*?

In order to examine the main research question and structure the written analysis of the texts, I compare and contrast Virginia's and Christa's autobiographical practices by considering the following four questions: How do they challenge traditional autobiographical practice? What strategies do they use to overcome the limitations of dominant autobiographical practices in writing their autobiographical texts? In what ways do they destabilize the Enlightenment notion of "self," that is the notion of an essential, coherent, unified self? How do they critique and resist authoritative discourses in their respective historical and cultural contexts? The way that I will be using the term "discourse" is taken from James Paul Gee in his article "What is

Literacy?" Gee suggests thinking of discourse as an "identity kit." He thinks of discourses as "socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or social network" (21). The theoretical approach I take in my textual analysis of *Moments of Being* and *A Model Childhood* combines feminist autobiographical criticism and postmodern theory, and in chapter five I also use Bakhtinian dialogical theory.

The spirit in which I engage in my research stems from my history with social justice activism, which includes working with a variety of organizations such as a university women's centre, a peace group, a global community centre, a sexual assault support centre, and a food co-op, to name a few. Working in collaboration with people in the above listed organizations has been important to me because it is work towards what I view as a more socially just world, and it has played an important part in my own education and well-being. Throughout this research and writing process I have been thinking about Margrit Eichler's view of feminist research. She states that "feminist research can be on any topic but it must establish some connection between the topic and the achievement of social justice for women, either in concrete or abstract terms through the manner in which the knowledge is generated" (57). Though my research does not contribute to social justice in an obvious way, I believe it has the potential to do so.

What initially attracted me to reading autobiographical texts written by women was my identification with some of the emotions, desires, experiences, relationships, obstacles, and triumphs they described in their lives. At that time in my life I did not have a community of women to whom I could speak comfortably about the experiences I

had that I believed had everything to do with my being a woman. Like Nancy K. Miller in *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and other Autobiographical Acts*, I also read autobiographical texts for identification with the lives of women “coming to writing” (127). In “The Laugh of the Medusa,” writer and philosopher, Helene Cixous, commands women to write, to stop writing in secret, as though they were masturbating, just enough to take the edge off (81-82). I relate to the experience of writing to take away some tension, but stopping myself short in the way that is described by Cixous. The narratives of women who write about themselves as writers, and about the difficulties they face throughout the process of writing inspire me to go ahead and write. The identification aspect of reading autobiographical texts written by women is significant to me because it is women’s identifying with other women that helps to develop a community in which we can engage with one another.

Creating communities of women readers and writers is an activist part of a feminist project. I think that in continuing with our reading and writing, we should be self-reflexive, able to challenge one another, and able to critique ourselves from within. The dialogue we have with one another helps to build and sustain communities, hopefully enabling the communities to be nourishing and strong. A literary community of women can work together to make women’s voices visible in challenging dominant discourses and creating new and more just ways to think of the world. Virginia and Christa have each contributed to a feminist literary community by making their voices heard, voices that would have customarily been silenced in their respective times. Virginia’s *Moments of Being*, *Three Guineas*, *A Room of One’s Own*, and *Orlando*, and Christa’s *A Model Childhood*, *The Quest for Christa T.*, *Cassandra*, and *Accident: A Day’s News* are just a

few examples of their many courageous texts that either explicitly or implicitly, call for social justice. If women can identify with Virginia in *Moments of Being* as she decentres the Victorian discourse about womanhood, and Christa in *A Model Childhood* as she decentres the Nazi discourse about womanhood, these texts can contribute to a collective vision of a more just world.

For centuries women have written autobiographical texts, but only in the twentieth century have large numbers of these been published and read. In the 1980's there was a breakthrough in scholarship devoted to autobiographical texts written by women (Smith & Watson, 4). My research contributes to this new field. Feminist autobiographical criticism is a field in which the priorities have been to recover female-authored autobiographical texts and to discern differences between them and male-authored autobiographical texts. The primary goal has been to make claims for the existence of a female autobiographical tradition that challenges dominant autobiographical theory.

Currently there are some points of intersection between feminist autobiographical criticism and postmodernism. In order to fulfill a commitment to inclusivity, some feminist theorists are in a process of deconstructing the essentialist gender categories that we have come to rely on in the past; thus, I argue for the developing of a method for a "feminist" rather than "female" autobiographical practice. Using feminist autobiographical criticism along with postmodern theory seems appropriate in theorizing about a feminist autobiographical practice. The choice of a "feminist" rather than "female" autobiographical practice defers the argument over whether there should be a deconstruction or a reconstruction of the subject "woman." Explained in another way, a

feminist autobiographical practice allows for the deferral of resolution to the contradictory position we find ourselves in by using “woman” as a gender category for the means of collective feminist political action, yet acknowledging that “woman” should not be used as a fixed, unitary category if we are committed to inclusivity. Instead of labeling autobiographical practices according to sex, it could be useful to consider autobiographical practices according to the discourse of gender analysis. A feminist autobiographical practice could include a dialogue between traditional autobiographical critics and feminist autobiographical critics.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson write, “As we pursue a feminist theory of women’s autobiographical practices, we might simultaneously pursue a critique of autobiographical practice generally” (41). My research on the autobiographical practices of Virginia and Christa will contribute to the field of feminist autobiographical criticism and to the development of a feminist autobiographical practice. I examine the textual strategies that Virginia and Christa use to critique the act of autobiography and cultural discourses, and I discuss how they model a possible method for a feminist autobiographical practice. An ongoing challenge I have is discerning ways in which my research can reflect Eichler’s concept of action oriented research. The research questions I apply to Virginia’s and Christa’s autobiographical texts are designed to help me make connections between feminist literary work and social justice for women.

The rest of this chapter consists of three sections. The first section contains brief biographical backgrounds of Virginia and Christa; the second section provides background information pertaining to the texts, *Moments of Being* and *A Model Childhood*; and the third section presents my thesis outline which explains what I do in

each of the next five chapters.

Biographical Backgrounds of Virginia and Christa

Virginia lived from 1882-1941. She was born in Kensington and grew up in a Victorian upper-middle class family, the third of four children. During her adolescence she suffered the trauma of the deaths of two much-loved women in her life, her mother, Julia Stephen, and her step-sister, Stella Duckworth. The death of her mother greatly affected Virginia throughout her life. She tells us that her novel *To the Lighthouse* was written to end her obsession with the invisible presence of her mother. Virginia's father, Leslie Stephen, was a Victorian man of letters and the editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Virginia had an ambivalent relationship with her father, simultaneously resenting his tyrannical behaviour while enjoying the attention he bestowed upon her because of her intelligence and interest in reading books that were beyond her years. While Virginia was in her early twenties, her father and favourite brother, Thoby, died.

Virginia spent much time with her older sister, Vanessa, who she shared great intimacy with since childhood. It is apparent in "Reminiscences" and in "A Sketch of the Past" that Virginia felt sorrow over the role of Victorian angel in the house being thrust upon Vanessa after the deaths of their mother and Stella. Their step-brothers, Gerald and George, exerted pressure upon them to go out socially, and to dress and behave as "proper," young Victorian women. Virginia and Vanessa felt confined in their roles as sisters and daughters in their household at Hyde Park Gate, their childhood home,

because they were expected to perform several social obligations. Fortunately, a new, exciting, world of intellectualism opened up for them when they moved to Gordon Square. The death of Leslie Stephen and the move to Gordon Square gave Virginia and Vanessa a new freedom; they no longer had to follow social conventions in their home, and they used their new extra time and space to write and paint. They spent their evenings in the company of artists, poets, and writers from Cambridge, discussing a range of topics, including sex; they formed the Bloomsbury Group. Virginia and Vanessa married men from the Bloomsbury Group, Leonard Woolf and Clive Bell respectively. The two sisters fulfilled their dreams; Vanessa became a painter and Virginia became a writer. Virginia was busy with many activities: writing and reviewing books, teaching at a working women's college, doing office work for the suffrage movement, and visiting and receiving friends. Together with Leonard, she founded Hogarth Press, known for publishing short stories by Katherine Mansfield, poems by T.S. Eliot, and translated writings by Sigmund Freud. Virginia regretted not having had the opportunity to attend university and wrote in both *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* about the lack of education available to women. Throughout her adulthood, she suffered many breakdowns and ended her life in 1941, as anxiety was mounting over a possible German invasion.

Christa Wolf was born in 1929 in Landsberg, Warthe and lived her first sixteen years under the Nazi regime. The small town in which Christa and her brother, Lutz, were raised was in former East Germany, but after the war it became part of Poland. For a short time, Christa and Lutz were separated from their mother, Charlotte Jordan. While Christa and Lutz fled from their hometown with Charlotte's family, Charlotte stayed

behind in hopes of saving their store, house, and belongings. Realizing that there was no hope, Christa's mother fled as well, eventually finding her relatives and children. Christa's father, Bruno Jordan, was fighting in the war. It was mistakenly reported to the Jordans that he had been killed, but some time after the war he was reunited with the family. During the evacuation, Christa saw the war close up and learned that seeing "mangled 'enemies'" on a movie screen is different from personally holding an infant who has frozen stiff, and having to hand him over to his mother" (*Author's Dimension* 12). She worked as secretary assistant to the mayor of a small village her family settled in for awhile at the end of the war. Since 1945 she lived in nine different towns of the republic.

While in her twenties, Christa studied German Literature in Leipzig and Jena, and then married critic and poet, Gerhard Wolf. They have two daughters. In the introduction of *The Author's Dimension: Selected Essays*, writer Grace Paley highlights Christa's efforts towards being the worker-artist that was expected of her and all other artists by the Socialist Party; she worked for some time in a factory (viii). During her studies Christa was also an academic assistant to the East German Writer's Union, in which she has been bitterly disappointed and rewarded; she worked as an editor at various publishing houses; was editor of the periodical *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, and she wrote criticism and essays on new Socialist literature (*Author's* 12-13). She has been called East Germany's "Mother Confessor." As an internationally known prominent writer, she has been both praised and criticized for her works. Her novella, *What Remains*, "was attacked by the press as Wolf's belated attempt to establish herself as a victim of the Stasi (the GDR's secret police)," and the criticism "discredited Wolf in the

eyes of many Germans" (*Parting* jacket cover). Her recent collection of essays, *Parting from Phantoms: Selected Writings: 1990-1994*, discuss how she has grappled with the personal crisis. Recently she was a Getty scholar-in-residence at the Getty Center for the History of Art and Humanities in Santa Monica, California. She currently lives in Berlin with her family.

About Moments of Being and A Model Childhood

Moments of Being, edited by Jeanne Schulkind, is a collection of previously unpublished autobiographical writings by Virginia Woolf that have been selected from archives at the British Library and the University of Sussex Library (9). Schulkind reminds us that these memoirs should be read as works in progress because they are in various stages of revisions. It was common for Virginia to write out one or more rough drafts of a work before typing out complete revisions, sometimes eight or nine times over (*Moments* 9). In the first two memoirs, "Reminiscences" and "A Sketch of the Past," Virginia lovingly describes childhood memories of the important women in her life, her mother, Stella, and Vanessa. "Reminiscences" was written by Virginia at the beginning of her writing career, whereas "A Sketch of the Past" was written near the end of her writing career, two years before her suicide. "Reminiscences" is addressed to Vanessa's first child and is quite short. I examine *Moments of Being* in its entirety, but because "A Sketch of the Past" is by far the longest memoir, a large portion of my textual analysis will focus on it. In "A Sketch of the Past," Virginia describes memories

of her childhood, her relationship with Vanessa, and their passage into adulthood. Virginia interjects her present thoughts of “coming to writing” her memoirs into the narrative. The last three memoirs, “22 Hyde Park Gate,” “Old Bloomsbury,” and “Am I a Snob?” were all written for and read aloud to the Memoir Club, a regrouping of “Old Bloomsbury” who had dispersed during the war (*Moments* 175).

The narration of *A Model Childhood* is complex. *A Model Childhood* is Christa’s recollection of her life as a child until the age of sixteen in Nazi Germany, interweaved with the memories of a fairly recent trip to her hometown with her husband, daughter, and brother, and her present concerns with the writing process of the text between 1972 and 1975. She informs us at the beginning of *A Model Childhood* that in order to write the text she must write her childhood self in the third person, referring to herself by a fictive name, Nelly. She refers to her adult self as “you.” She admits to us that the child she once was is almost inaccessible to her. Her autobiographical text focuses on Nelly’s life at home, school, and the Hitler Youth Organization during the Third Reich. Throughout the narrative, she questions how memory functions and problematizes the role it plays in her autobiographical act.

At a conference entitled “Work Group on Psychomatic Gynecology,” Christa gave a lecture that deconstructed the assumption of “objectivity” and “universal validity” of “scientific medicine.” In this lecture she refers to Virginia’s *Three Guineas*, a response to the question asked of Virginia, how can we prevent war? Christa states that she considers Virginia’s thoughts and questions as astute, radical, and still relevant today (*Author’s Dimension* 82-83). Christa lives in a different sociohistorical context than

Virginia did, yet she shares similar political concerns. Examining the similarities and differences between Virginia's and Christa's autobiographical practices may give us some insight into how we can resist dominant cultural discourses and develop strategies for change in a world where oppression still occurs and wars are still fought.

Thesis Outline

Chapter Two is a review of literary and theoretical works that have informed my research project. The first section of the chapter is a review of literary works that deal either with *Moments of Being* or *A Model Childhood*, except for Nancy K. Miller's *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts* and Jeremy D. Popkin's "Autobiography Versus Postmodernism: Alice Kaplan and Elisabeth Roudinesco." I focus on what some feminist literary theorists have said about the autobiographical texts that relates to my research questions, and I provide commentary on the sources. To conclude the review of literary works, I explain how my research will contribute to the existing literature on Virginia's and Christa's autobiographical texts.

The second section of the chapter is a review of theory and it is divided into four sections. The first section is a review of feminist theory and postmodern theory in general, and their relationship to each other. I discuss what some feminist theorists have to say in the debate over whether the terms "feminism" and "postmodernism" should be conflated into a term "postmodern feminism." Next is a review of Anglo-American feminist literary criticism, which consists of an explanation of how it came to exist and how it has evolved. The third section is a review of feminist autobiographical

criticism. I address how feminist autobiographical critics have problematized some of the assumptions made in traditional autobiographical practice, and the suggestions they have for alternative narrative strategies that they think can be used together as a method for developing a feminist autobiographical practice. The terms "traditional autobiographical practice," "dominant autobiographical practice," and "conventional autobiographical practice" are used frequently and interchangeably in the literature; I use them this way as well throughout my analysis of *Moments of Being* and *A Model Childhood*. The final section is a review of Bakhtinian dialogical theory with an emphasis on his concepts of language, self, and authoritative and internally persuasive discourses. I also examine how Wayne C. Booth and Hermann build upon Bakhtin's dialogism to include gender difference as a factor to consider within that theoretical framework.

Chapter Three presents the methodology I am using and attempting to modify in conducting my research. I begin the chapter by defining how I use the terms "feminist qualitative research," "text," "discourse," and "textual/discourse analysis." Next I outline and explain the methodological steps I used in my research and in writing up the analysis. Part of my research process included reviewing selected studies by other feminist qualitative researchers to examine how they describe their methodology and how they write up their research, so I explain how some of their studies helped me to frame the theoretical and methodological approaches I take in my research.

Chapter Four is an analysis of how Virginia's and Christa's representations of the "I" in *Moments of Being* and *A Model Childhood* provides critique of dominant autobiographical practices. I examine their use of unconventional narrative strategies by

comparing and contrasting how they problematize and demystify the acts of writing and remembering.

Chapter Five addresses how Virginia and Christa provide feminist cultural critique in their representations of the “I.” I discuss how they critique authoritative cultural discourses, the discourse of Victorian society in Virginia’s case, and the discourse of the Third Reich in Christa’s case; how they represent the “I” as struggling among competing discourses, challenging the Enlightenment notion of an essentialist, coherent, unified self; and how they describe the ways that they and their figures of “an/other” woman try to resist authoritative discourses. Following Herrmann and Booth, I apply Bakhtinian dialogical theory to my textual analysis of *Moments of Being* and *A Model Childhood* because of its insistence on the social significance of discourse, its resistance to the reconciliation of opposites, and its embracing of a comparative and ideological interrogation of literary practices (Herrmann 4).

Chapter Six presents my conclusion. I summarize the ways in which Virginia and Christa develop the beginnings of a model for a feminist autobiographical practice by combining the use of unconventional narrative strategies that challenge traditional autobiographical practices with feminist critique of authoritative cultural discourses. Then I discuss the contributions of my research, and I outline further directions for future research that stem from my work. Finally, I briefly outline what might be included in a feminist autobiographical practice.

Chapter Two

Review of Literary and Theoretical Works

This chapter includes a review of literary and theoretical works that have greatly contributed to my research. In the review of literary works I examine what selected feminist autobiographical critics say about Virginia's and Christa's representations of the "I" in *Moments of Being* and *A Model Childhood*, and I provide commentary on the sources along the way. In particular, I focus on discussions concerning the strategies Virginia and Christa use to disrupt the traditional notion of autobiography and to critique authoritative discourses in their respective sociohistorical contexts. To conclude the review of literary works, I explain how my research will contribute to the existing literature on *Moments of Being* and *A Model Childhood*.

The second section is a review of theoretical literature that has contributed to the theoretical approach I take in my analysis of *Moments of Being* and *A Model Childhood*. There are four parts in the theory review. In the first part I examine various feminist theorists' positions in a debate concerning the relationship between feminist theory and postmodern theory and whether the two terms should or should not be collapsed into a term "postmodern feminism." The second part is a review of how Anglo-American feminist literary criticism developed and how it has evolved. The third part is a discussion of some of the assumptions that have been made in traditional autobiographical practices and how they have been problematized by feminist autobiographical critics. I also point out some feminist autobiographical critics' suggestions for narrative strategies that challenge the limitations of traditional

autobiography. In the last part I review Bakhtin's dialogical theory, concentrating on his concepts of authoritative and internally persuasive discourses, language, and the self. I include a discussion of Wayne C. Booth's "Freedom of Interpretation: Bakhtin and the Challenge of Feminist Criticism" and Anne Herrmann's *The Dialogic and Difference: "An/Other Woman" in Virginia Woolf and Christa Wolf* because they build upon Bakhtin's theory of the dialogic to include gender as a point of analysis.

Review of Literary Works

In *Moments of Being*, Virginia disrupts the reader's expectation of what comprises autobiography. "A Sketch of the Past" begins unconventionally with her proclamation that there are a number of difficulties with writing one's memoirs: the number of different ways that memoir can be written and not knowing how far she differs from other people (72-73). Throughout her narrative of the past, she interrupts to theorize about the act of writing autobiography. Her diaries indicate that she was questioning the limitations of the autobiographical genre throughout her life. In a diary entry on January 20, 1919, before most of the pieces of text comprising *Moments of Being* were even written, she contemplates how she could use her diaries and chides herself for the haphazard writing in her diaries (*A Writer's Diary* 233-234). Shari Benstock points out in "Authorizing the Autobiographical" that through Virginia's attempts to come to terms with the notion of "memoir" itself, "she examines carefully the two presumed essential ingredients ('personal history and narrative'), posing difficult theoretical questions through her own autobiographical practice" (25-26). What is

important to my research is that Virginia deconstructs common assumptions made within a traditional notion of autobiography. Feminist autobiographical critics, Benstock, Sidonie Smith and LuAnne McCracken, have helped me in my research because they address how Virginia problematizes the autobiographical act. In particular, they focus on how Virginia undercuts her own authority as narrator as a strategy she uses to counter an essentialist or Enlightenment notion of self that is prevalent in traditional autobiography. Benstock claims that Virginia challenges the Enlightenment notion of self through her use of an anti-spotlight stance. Virginia “rather systematically cuts out from under herself the props that hold up her authority as an *author*, turning authority back to the matter that constitutes her ‘subject’—and that subject is not necessarily the ‘self’ of traditional autobiography,” explains Benstock (150). According to Benstock, traditional conception of autobiography involves a belief in a writer having conscious control in being able to write a life history grounded in authority. Virginia discredits the notion of “self-consciousness” and the authority that is believed to come with it, and she does this by arguing the importance of the thoughtless, the loose, the unrestrained, the unconscious (Benstock 150).

In “Self, Subject, and Resistance: Marginalities and Twentieth-Century Autobiographical Practice,” Smith also writes about how Virginia problematizes the Enlightenment notion of self. Like Benstock, Smith thinks that Virginia’s autobiographical practice differs from traditional autobiographical practice in that she refuses to take the position of the one who knows and authorizes, thereby relinquishing the power that is assumed to be held by the narrator within a traditional autobiographical practice (20). Unlike Benstock, Smith claims that Virginia represents

an alternative "I" that designates a nomadic subjectivity aware of its location in a sinuous web of intersubjectivity" (20). She elaborates more on this idea in *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body*, stating that the repertoire of memories one has are essential to subjectivity and "as integuments of subjectivity, memories are so many umbilical cords connecting the narrator to the swirl of others surrounding her" (97). The "I" and other join together in a seamless horizon of intersubjectivity (Smith 97). Smith views Virginia's representation of the "I" as her story that is as much the story of others, the story of her mother, father, and her siblings. I like Smith's analysis because it takes into consideration how Virginia was affected by cultural discourses in the social network surrounding her.

McCracken's take on Virginia's autobiographical practice is similar to Smith's. In "The Synthesis of My Being': Autobiography and the Reproduction of Identity in Virginia Woolf," McCracken determines that Virginia follows her father's autobiographical writing methods of structure and style to some extent in "Reminiscences," written by Virginia at the beginning of her writing career; and then breaks away from her father's formal Victorian memoir writing style in "A Sketch of the Past," written near the end of her writing career, two years before her suicide (63). McCracken thinks that unlike Virginia's father, Virginia rejects self-focus by undercutting her authority as narrator and not adopting an egotistical sense of identity. She describes Virginia as viewing the past through her own experience, weaving her sense of her self with the selves of her family; and including as many facets of experience, both her own and her family's, as possible in "A Sketch of the Past" (72).

Virginia's autobiographical practice is similar to the autobiographical practices

described by Nancy K. Miller in *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and other Autobiographical Acts*, and Jeremy D. Popkin in "Autobiography Versus Postmodernism: Alice Kaplan and Elisabeth Roudinesco." The autobiographical practices that Miller and Popkin discuss combine self-representation with theory. Miller outlines possibilities for self-representation through what she calls personal criticism, self-narrative woven into critical argument. An important feature of personal criticism can be its potential for political representativity (2). She cites "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism." by Barbara Smith. and *Landscape for a Good Woman.* by Carolyn Steedman, as examples of texts that articulate the personal and the theoretical together (2-3). Smith's text acts as a plea for the representation of women like herself, as she puts it, members of the black lesbian community; of women across cultures (Miller 2). Steedman's text "elaborates a model of working-class female development through maternal biography" (Miller 3). According to Miller, these two texts illustrate the potential that personal criticism has for providing cultural criticism. If we accept Eichler's definition of feminist research, that it must establish in some way a connection to social justice for women, I agree with Miller that personal criticism can be a useful writing act that entails the reclaiming of theory: turning theory back on itself (5).

Popkin describes an autobiographical practice, academic autobiography, that is similar to personal criticism; it also fuses the personal with the theoretical. Academic autobiography differs from personal criticism in that it is depicted as being personal memoirs that deal with theoretical issues arising out of one's academic work (225). Unlike personal criticism, academic autobiography is an autobiographical practice for academics. What interests me in relation to my research is that in academic

autobiography, the writer is “simultaneously personal and theoretical, to be part of disciplinary discourse and to transcend it” (227). In Popkin’s paper, he examines the parallels between Alice Kaplan’s *French Lessons* and Elisabeth Roudinesco’s *Genealogies*. According to Popkin, what distinguishes Kaplan and Roudinesco as writers of academic autobiography is that in their texts they claim “to be fully conscious of the theoretical debates surrounding autobiographical enterprises and who, indeed, use their reconstructions of their own lives as means of articulating positions in those debates” (227). Ultimately, he is critical of Roudinesco’s text because she does not seem that aware of her project’s own problematic aspects.

I see Virginia’s and Christa’s autobiographical texts as containing some aspects of what Miller describes as personal criticism and what Popkin describes as academic autobiography. Virginia and Christa interweave personal narrative with autobiographical criticism, critique of their own autobiographical act, and critique of cultural discourses. Miller’s and Popkin’s discussions of personal criticism and academic autobiography respectively are useful to me in that they model alternatives to traditional autobiography. My research involves analyzing Virginia’s and Christa’s use of subversive textual strategies and feminist cultural critique to see how taken together they can be considered part of a method for a feminist autobiographical practice.

Like Virginia’s *Moments of Being*, Christa’s *A Model Childhood* disrupts the reader’s expectation of what comprises autobiography. Christa defies the assumption of autobiographical accuracy right away with her disclaimer in the foreword. In Sandra Frieden’s essay “Transformative Subjectivity in the Writings of Christa Wolf,” she analyzes four texts by Christa, including *A Model Childhood*. Frieden’s discussion of

how Christa provides a two-part model of counter cultural consciousness through her writing, a narrated subjectivity which resists normative social values and a narrating subjectivity which refuses the normative functions of literary conventions, is highly relevant to my research questions regarding Christa's autobiographical practice (172).

I agree with Frieden that Christa's *A Model Childhood* serves as a two-fold model of resistance: she exposes individual and social histories, providing critical analysis upon them now as an adult; and she expresses them in a form that defies the assumptions of what autobiography should look like (172-174). Frieden observes that Christa does not narrate in a linear, chronologically structured fashion; she makes no truth claims, does not use "verifiable" data; and she problematizes the use of the pronoun "I," presenting not a unified self but one who questions subjectivity (174, 185). Like Virginia, Christa resists the traditional representation of the "I" as an essential, unified self in her autobiographical practice. Frieden claims that Christa reworks traditional autobiography by "revealing the ideologically concealed gaps in subjectivity and memory which inhere in traditional notions of autobiography" (185). This is another similarity I see between Virginia and Christa's autobiographical practices. Although it is not mentioned by Frieden, I claim that Christa undercuts her authority as narrator by questioning subjectivity and by problematizing the role of memory in narrating in a similar way as Virginia.

Unlike Virginia, Christa experiences a difficulty with saying "I." She begins *A Model Childhood* by telling us that in order to write the text, to not remain speechless, she has to refer to her childhood self in the third person, using a fictive name, Nelly, and to her adult self as "you" (3). Christa's fictive naming and third person address

helps her to write about her childhood, according to Linda Hutcheon, writer of *The Politics of Postmodernism*, because it serves to create distance and to signal that the child she once was is now almost inaccessible to her as an adult (164). "The woman and the girl have different knowledge," writes Hutcheon (164). I agree with Hutcheon, but I think there is more to Christa's using "Nelly" and "you" than just representing the distance she feels between her adult self and childhood self. Frieden views Christa's use of "you" as being necessary for two reasons, to help Christa overcome her speechlessness over the difficulty of saying "I," and also as a strategy to draw readers into the text, since a conventional understanding of "you" would be an address to the reader (175).

In "The Communal Self: Re-Membering Female Identity in the Works of Christa Wolf and Monique Wittig," Kathleen K. Komar also addresses how Christa uses the narrative strategy of involving the reader into her text and how Christa problematizes an essentialist notion of self. Komar understands Christa's project as a rewriting of cultural tradition by reinscribing the female presence that has been overlooked or suppressed (53). Christa does this by replacing women as subjects in a history and community in which women are too often placed as objects (52). Komar's explanation of Christa's desire to see female experience and imagination help mold a new community is helpful to me in seeing more precisely why Christa's autobiographical practice may be considered feminist (52). Komar claims that Christa implicates readers in the task of revising cultural tradition and personal history, and I think that this encourages them to consider gender relations as an important factor in critiquing cultural discourses (53).

The role that memory plays for Christa in problematizing an essentialist notion of self is also considered in Komar's textual analysis, unlike Frieden's. Komar writes that memory of the self in *A Model Childhood* becomes a communal effort in which there is a reuniting of a community of selves. I see Christa challenging an Enlightenment notion of self by producing what Komar describes as "a dialogic narrative in which a community of different voices unite to form an individual self which is also a dialogic or communal self" (45). According to Komar, Christa envisions social relationships to be based on subject-subject rather than subject-object interactions (56). Komar depicts Christa as representing the "I" as part of an intersubjective community by revealing the interactions she has as an adult with her husband, brother, and daughter. Komar's analysis of Christa's representation of the "I" as a communal self is similar to Smith's and McCracken's analysis of Virginia's. Benstock's, Smith's, McCracken's, Frieden's, and Komar's autobiographical criticism of Virginia's and Christa's texts is useful to me in my deliberation over my research question: how do Virginia and Christa provide autobiographical critique and feminist cultural critique in their autobiographical texts?

How My Research Contributes to the Existing Literature

Most of the literary works I reviewed dealt with either *Moments of Being* or *A Model Childhood*, whereas I juxtapose *Moments of Being* and *A Model Childhood* to examine the similarities and differences between Virginia's and Christa's autobiographical practices. Also, I analyze *Moments of Being* in its entirety, whereas the sources I read dealt only with "A Sketch of the Past," except for McCracken who

also analyzed "Reminiscences," in their analyses. I examine how Virginia and Christa offer both critique of dominant autobiography through the use of subversive narrative strategies, and feminist critique of authoritative discourses in their autobiographical texts. My research differs from the already existing literature on *Moments of Being* and *A Model Childhood* in that I focus on how Virginia and Christa model the beginnings of a method for a feminist autobiographical practice by combining autobiographical critique and feminist cultural critique in their autobiographical practices. My research contributes to the developing field of feminist autobiographical criticism and to the development of a feminist autobiographical practice.

Review of the Relationship Between Feminist Theory and Postmodern Theory

Historically feminists have been involved in political activity primarily concerned with changing existing power relations between women and men (Weedon 1). While there is a considerable degree of union among feminists in working towards the goal of eliminating gender inequality, there are many different opinions about how to do the work, how to theorize about it, and even what kind of language to use in describing it. The term "feminisms" probably best represents the plurality of political activity and theory within feminist thought; radical feminism, socialist feminism, anti-racist feminism, ecofeminism, anti-pornography feminism, psychoanalytical feminism, and postmodern feminism are just some examples of terms given to the many strands of feminist thought and practices. Debates even exist over the names that are assigned to the various strands of feminist thought. For example, not all feminists agree on the

relationship between feminist theory and postmodern theory, and whether or not the terms “feminism” and “postmodernism” should be collapsed into a term “postmodern feminism.” I am biased towards thinking postmodern theory has potential to enhance feminist theory and I use it in my own research, but I have come to no conclusion over whether the term “postmodern feminism” best describes the relationship or not.

Postmodernism can be understood as referring to a range of theoretical positions developed from such theorists as Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Louis Althusser, and Jean-Francois Lyotard (Weedon 11, Fraser & Nicholson 21). In her book *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon describes postmodern theory as being primarily concerned with denaturalizing some of the dominant features of our way of life (2). She points out that “those entities that we unthinkingly experience as ‘natural’ (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact ‘cultural;’ made by us, not given to us. Even nature, postmodernism might point out, doesn’t grow on trees” (2). In considering common ground between postmodernism and feminisms, it may be useful for us to remember that feminisms are also entities that we have made and are not “natural” but “cultural.”

In postmodern theory, tools such as self-reflexiveness, parody, and irony are employed for the purposes of social criticism. Hutcheon quotes Roland Barthes as claiming that it is impossible to represent the political, for it resists all mimetic copying, “where politics begins is where imitation ceases” (3). Postmodern theorist and photographer, Victor Burgin explains that the difficulty with the “politics of representation . . . is where the self-reflexive, parododic art of the postmodern comes in, underlining in its ironic way the realization that all cultural forms of representation--literary, visual,

aural--in high art or the mass media are ideologically grounded, that they cannot avoid involvement with social and political relations and apparatuses" (qtd in Hutcheon 55).

Another tool used in postmodern theory is deconstructive criticism. In Chris Weedon's text, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, she describes the practice of deconstructive criticism as coming out of North American literary critics' concern with the "free play" of meaning in literary texts (19). Examples she cites are the rewritings of the meanings of gender and language in the works of some French feminist writers such as Helene Cixous and Julia Kristeva, and the detailed historical analysis of discourse and power in the work of Foucault (19-20). The concept of historical groundedness is also used in the work of some postmodern theorists.

Feminist theory and postmodern theory provide important social criticism. What I view as one of the critical points of intersection in feminist theory and postmodern theory is their interrogation of Enlightenment beliefs. Beliefs rooted in the Enlightenment period are still prevalent in Western culture today, though they are being challenged more and more. Here is a list of what one feminist critical theorist, Jane Flax, takes to be a few predominant Enlightenment beliefs: there exists a stable, coherent self; there are universal truths about what is "natural" to men and women; reason can provide an objective foundation for knowledge, believed to exist independently from historical, social and bodily experience; knowledge acquired from the right use of reason will represent a "truth"; science has been perceived as methodologically neutral and the paradigm for all true knowledge; language is transparent (41).

How gender relations are affected by the acceptance of “universal truths” from the Enlightenment period is examined through varied approaches by feminists. Enlightenment beliefs are problematic to women because in this set of beliefs, according to Flax, only men are thought to be objective, only men are the holders of knowledge, and only men can work within the domain of science. Although the relationship between Enlightenment beliefs and gender relations is being investigated within feminisms, sometimes the same Enlightenment beliefs paradigm is relied upon in the analysis. Flax points out in her essay “Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory”: “We cannot simultaneously claim (1) that the mind, the self, and knowledge are socially constituted and that what we can know depends upon our social practices and contexts and (2) that feminist theory can uncover the truth of the whole once and for all” (48).

My opinion is that it is dangerous for us to laud feminism as yet another “truth.” It may seem appealing to appropriate orderly Enlightenment concepts for the purpose of proclaiming feminism as “the triumph of reason” and “objective truth,” but we may move further ahead by problematizing and deconstructing “truths” that have perpetuated inequality for women and the sexual division of labour (42). For instance, feminists have challenged representations of the body and its subject positions within patriarchal cultural practices. Hutcheon reminds us that problematizing the body and its sexuality is an interest shared by feminist theorists and postmodern theorists, but it is feminists who provided awareness of the construction of the gendered subject (142). Although postmodernism and feminisms have a mutual interest in social criticism and they share certain tools, Hutcheon does not advance the conflation of the terms “feminism” and

“postmodernism.” She argues that postmodernism and feminisms are useful to each other, but the ultimate purposes of each render them unmarriagable because of one conflicting difference: postmodernism is politically ambivalent, it is both complicitous with and contesting of the cultural dominants with which it operates; whereas feminisms have distinct, unambiguous political agendas of resistance (142).

Some feminist theorists argue against postmodern theory having any practical prospects for feminist theory, even if there is some overlap between them. Nancy Harstock claims in her essay "Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women" that postmodernism hinders feminisms because it does not provide adequate theory regarding power. Her perception of postmodern theory is that it does not take into account the understanding of the world that comes from our daily lives as women and that it offers no strategies for altering power relations (159, 170-172). In the last sentence of her essay she states, "To paraphrase Marx, the point is to change the world, not simply to redescribe ourselves or reinterpret the world yet again" (172). She calls for action from what we have learned from theory. Like Hutcheon, she does not see postmodernism as having a specific political agenda but unlike Hutcheon, she does not see postmodernism as having any value to the work of feminists.

Another concern for Harstock is the way universalistic assumptions come creeping back into the work of postmodern theorists despite their desire to avoid universal claims. In her essay "Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender Skepticism," Susan Bordo shares the same concern asserting that "it is impossible for postmodernism to be 'politically correct'"(138). She is critical of postmodern theory for its impossible goal of complete inclusivity in theorizing and she asks a good question,

"in analyzing the relations of diverse axes of identity. . . just how many axes *can* one include and still preserve analytical focus or argument?" (139). Because feminism is an "outsider" discourse, Bordo argues that it "has been unusually attuned to issues of exclusion and invisibility" (139-141).

I see a congruence in desire by some postmodernists and feminists, who, like myself, oppose the notion of universal truths and seek ways to include voices of people who have been marginalized. Whether these goals can be attained or not, they are worth striving for. Like feminist theorists, postmodern theorists critique themselves from within which I think is important; I do not view the fallibleness of postmodernism as a mark against it because no theory can be perfect. Weedon addresses the apprehensions of feminist theorists like Harstock and Bordo. She encourages using "categories such as 'gender,' 'race' and 'class' in social and cultural analysis but on the assumption that their meaning is plural, historically and socially specific. The effects of using such categories will depend on both how they are defined and on the social context in which they are used" (178). We do not have to worry about being "poststructurally correct," a term used by Susan Stanford Friedman, as long as if in practice we use these categories while bearing in mind that they are plural (474). Weedon rejects essentializing "truths" while continuing to use theory strategically "in the interests of understanding and transforming oppressive social relations" (178).

Though I agree with Weedon that we should be wary of relying on universal truth claims and essentializing categories, I bristle at the tone that is used by some feminist theorists in the current charging of essentializing in theoretical debate. Feminist theorist Teresa de Lauretis addresses the problem in her essay "Upping the Anti [sic] in

Feminist Theory” in which she calls for shifting “the controversy from ‘feminist essentialism,’ as a category by which to classify feminists or feminisms, to the historical specificity, the essential difference of feminist theory itself” (78). I agree with de Lauretis that constructing a hierarchy of feminisms gets us no further ahead in our work as feminists. Assessing how postmodern theory can be used alongside feminist theory is important to my current research, but I continue to honour other feminisms. Radical and socialist feminism inspired my initial political actions, and they have provided me with a feminist theoretical foundation upon which my current identity as a feminist has been constructed.

Although I am critical of Harstock’s and Bordo’s view that postmodernism can have no value in the work of feminists, their concerns add to the richness of the debate over whether postmodern theory can or cannot be useful to feminist theory. Perhaps Harstock and Bordo fear that credit due to feminisms may go to postmodernism if we use similar ideas and tools. Flax, clearly a proponent of using postmodern theory within feminist theory and practice, does not use the term “postmodern feminism” in her writing, nor does she discuss whether such a term should exist. Hutcheon thinks that ultimately the purposes of postmodernism and feminisms contest each other, and that they should not be collapsed into what is known as “postmodern feminism.” Harstock and Bordo think there is nothing to gain from using postmodern theory within feminist theory or practice. Nancy Fraser and Linda J. Nicholson state in their article “Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism”: “the ultimate stake of an encounter between feminism and postmodernism is the prospect of a perspective which integrates their respective strengths while eliminating

their respective weaknesses. It is the prospect of a postmodernist feminism” (20). I believe that exploiting, for political needs, the most useful ideas and concepts of postmodern theory can enhance feminist theory rather than diminish it. but does this mean that it is beneficial to combine them into a “postmodern feminism”? In the next section I review the development of feminist literary criticism, including how postmodern theory has affected it.

Review of Feminist Literary Criticism

In his second edition of *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Terry Eagleton asks what is the point of literary theory (169-170)? Can literary theory have any value in a world in which there are pressing matters such as the amount of money spent on nuclear arms, and there are poverty-stricken Third World countries? Is it not the case that the majority of literary theories have strengthened rather than challenged the assumptions of the current power system? Eagleton writes, “Indeed literary theory is less an object of intellectual enquiry in its own right than a particular perspective in which to view the history of our times” (170). His view is that literary theory has a most particular relevance to our political system because wittingly or not it can sustain and reinforce its assumptions (171). I think that literature and theorizing about literature can also work in the opposite way, to oppose and resist dominant discourses within a political system, and help us to move toward a just society. In this sense, research in the field of feminist literary theory can be viewed as making connections between the topic and achievement of social justice for women that is integral to feminist research

as defined by Eichler.

“Reading literature is valued by subordinated groups as a way of coming to terms with the experience of oppression, not as something natural but as socially produced,” says Weedon (144). She backs up her point with the example of the early British labour movement. Less well-known working-class writing and socialist classics provided alternative ways for understanding working-class oppression and help in developing strategies for change (144). In *Moments of Being* and in *A Model Childhood*, women are offered Virginia’s and Christa’s portrayals of their ways of being in and understanding the world that advocates social justice.

Contrary to what traditional critics would have us believe, literature cannot be read “straightforwardly”; therefore, literary theory is political, there has just been a blind reluctance to recognizing it. Feminist literary criticism developed as a field from which gender analysis could be applied to literary studies and it can be viewed as a means to resisting the academic myth that “pure” literary theory exists. In her article “Feminist Literary Criticism: How Feminist? How Literary? How Critical?,” Susan S. Lanser states that:

[F]eminists called into question the standards of value and the material conditions according to which texts are written, published, interpreted, preserved, and canonized. Arguing that writing and reading are not neutral acts but are produced through complex conscious and unconscious social processes, feminism insisted that textual meaning is not limited either to what an author ‘intended’ or to the interpretation advanced by a particular critical community. (4)

Feminist literary critic Susan Gubar, co-author with Sandra M. Gilbert of the highly influential text, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, outlines four stages in the evolution of Anglo-American feminist literary criticism in her article "What Ails Feminist Criticism?"

Gubar cites the first stage of literary criticism as "critique," as used by Elaine Showalter, another early, prominent, feminist literary theorist. Within a feminist literary context, critique meant investigating the construction of sexual ideologies and the images of femininity contained in texts. Feminist literary critics provided readings of texts that "stressed the manner in which the work of art participated in the construction of debilitating or liberating sexual ideologies, influencing or influenced by authors, publishers, and readers" (Gubar, *What Ails?* 882). The first stage of feminist literary criticism began with the critique of male-authored canonical texts and continued on with noncanonical texts, and challenged the notion of a canon, which led into the second stage.

The second stage of feminist literary criticism is described by Gubar as the recovery of female literary traditions. Feminist scholars, dubbed as "gynocritics" by Showalter, studied the methodologies of recovery; what images or themes women writers seemed drawn to, what particular authorial strategies they used, what gender related standards were visible in the publication and reception of their books, and what the distinctive reading patterns of women were (883). The assumption was that there was a distinct difference between how women and men read and write.

The engendering of differences encapsulates what Gubar describes as the third stage of feminist literary criticism. She uses the term "engendering" to describe how feminists brought in factors other than gender; like race, sexuality, religion, economics,

and region, to bear upon differences (884). Scholars occupied in critique began to pay attention to images of both femininity and masculinity, heterosexuality and homosexuality (884). Race was also considered a factor in the production of texts. There was a recovery of literary traditions of Native American, Chicanas, Asian Americans, and especially African Americans (884). The third stage, engendering of differences, worked to bring forward disparities among women and brings us to the fourth stage, what Gubar views as the current stage of feminist literary criticism.

Metacritical dissension is how Gubar describes the fourth stage of feminist literary criticism. Her concern with our being in this stage is that "self-reflexive theorizing about criticism undermined the term 'women' upon which feminist literary practice previously depended" (886). As we know, the debate continues within feminist discourse about the use of gender categories. Do gender categories tell us anything? What can they tell us if they have no ultimate meaning as thought within postmodernism? Can feminist theory exist without the use of gender categories? Who decides whether gender categories should be used or not?

Feminist literary critic Toril Moi arguably works within the fourth stage of feminist literary theory, as described by Gubar. Moi has much to say about the Anglo-American and French approaches to feminist literary theory in *Sexual/Textual Politics*. In Moi's critique of Gubar and Gilbert's *The Madwoman in the Attic*, she claims that their main thesis is this: 19th century woman writers had a difficult path within their situation of patriarchy in which the author is defined as male, so to overcome their "anxiety of authorship," they found their "distinctive female power" (59). Moi explains that Gilbert and Gubar believe there is such a thing as a "distinctive female power," "but that this

power, or voice, would have to take a rather roundabout route to express itself through or against the oppressive effects of the dominant patriarchal modes of reading" (59).

Gilbert and Gubar's conviction that "the female voice is a duplicitous, but nevertheless true, and truly female voice" entails the notion that the character is the author's double, which follows from the work of Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics*. Described by Moi as surely the world's best-selling PhD thesis, *Sexual Politics*, published in 1969, is considered a precursor of all later works of Anglo-American feminist literary theory (24). The view that the female text is the author was prevalent in early feminist autobiographical criticism as well; many feminist critics have followed Millet and Gilbert and Gubar's lead in attempting to uncover the female writer's 'truth' within textual analysis (61). Moi warns against what she views as the realist bias of Anglo-American feminist literary criticism. An insistent demand for authenticity can reduce all literature to rather simplistic forms of autobiography and can even clash with another demand she sees, the representation of female role-models in literature (46-47).

Moi notes that currently feminist readers desire female role-models in literature. According to her, feminist readers do not only want to see their own experiences mirrored in fiction, they want to identify with female characters who are impressive, possessing a positive sense of female identity, what she terms as role-models (47). This clashes with the demand for authenticity because, in reality, there are many women who do not authentically emulate strength and self-actualization as female characters (47). I agree with Moi that feminist readers most likely want to identify with female characters, but I disagree with Moi that feminist readers want "role-models" who

are strong and impressive. I think there are many readers who welcome diverse female characters with whom to identify. I relate to Moi's uneasiness with the realist bias of Anglo-American feminist literary criticism, but this is changing, apparent within the present dialogue among feminist literary critics. It is my view that the stage of metacritical contention has contributed to forming current thought in the field of feminist autobiographical criticism. As I discuss in the next section where I review feminist autobiographical criticism, realist readings of autobiographical texts as directly mirroring the experiences of the narrator are being challenged.

Review of Feminist Autobiographical Criticism

Historically women's autobiographies have been given scant attention. Estelle C. Jelinek, editor of a collection of essays, *Women's Autobiography*, published in 1980, is credited by Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson, Liz Stanley, and Bella Brodzki for producing the first major academic feminist theorising of autobiographical writing (10, 91, 12). Jelinek states that, "Autobiography is etymologically and in practice the story of a person's life," a broad definition that can allow for elastic boundaries regarding what constitutes autobiography (xxii). She echoes the "gynocritics" stage of feminist literary criticism, illustrated by Gubar as the second stage of feminist literary criticism in which it was believed that there was a distinct women's tradition of reading and writing practices. She contends that there is a literary tradition in which women write autobiography and that women write autobiography differently from men (xi).

Jelinek's general observations regarding the differences between men's and

women's autobiography are that women emphasize to a lesser extent the public and professional aspects of their lives; women are often silent about feelings of hate, love, fear, and sexuality; women project a self-image that reveals self-consciousness and a need to sift through their lives for explanation and understanding; women's life narratives are often not chronological and progressive, but disconnected and fragmentary (7,8,13,15,17). As mentioned earlier, the idea that there are essential differences between how women write and how men write is now being challenged within literary criticism.

Jelinek destabilizes the assumption that a stable self resides in autobiography, which remains a springboard for other theorists' work. Smith and Stanley follow Jelinek's lead in being critical of how the "self" has been constructed and represented in autobiography. They problematize the notion of an essential self, synonymous with a modern and an Enlightenment notion of self, believed to include a unitary, stable, impermeable core. This Enlightenment notion of self that is being questioned within feminist autobiographical criticism and postmodern theory has gone unquestioned within traditional autobiographical criticism. The assumption that the life of the "self" "can be narrated, represented, and that the representation, like the self controlling it, is coherent, unified" is being reassessed within feminist autobiographical criticism (Smith, "Self, Subject, and Resistance" 11).

In her essay "Self, Subject, and Resistance," Smith tells us that the postmodern theoretical terminology for "self" is "subject." "In process, a site of dialogue with the world, others, memory, experience, and the unconscious, the subject is implicated in sinuous webs of intersubjectivity. . .," Smith writes (15). Though Smith rejects the

notion of a modern, essentialist self, preferring to conceptualize the “I” as being constructed among competing discourses instead, she claims that we are active agents who are influenced by some discourses more than others (18).

In *The auto/biographical I*, Stanley also gives us her perspective on what the “self” is, suggesting that “it is a fabrication, not necessarily a lie but certainly a highly complex truth: a fictive truth reliant on cultural convention concerning what ‘a life’ consists of” (243). She argues that “social life is by definition theorised by those who live it,” citing “real” events like loving and hating, work and holiday, and rape and assaults. Surprisingly, though she seems to find postmodern theory useful to her own theoretical work, she seems to be hesitant in trusting some feminist theorists who are heavily influenced by postmodernist and deconstructionist thinking. She is concerned that feminisms were founded upon the view that women are different from men, but some postmodern critics disagree with this view, claiming that it encapsulates outmoded essentialism (241). Her fear is that this particular postmodern view denies the material socially constructed realities of gender; therefore, it puts an end to feminisms. She claims that “feminist postmodernists” may be “in danger of forgetting or even denying that this ordinary and extraordinary material world exists and is prime--not the world of texts” (93-94).

Elizabeth Yeoman, a professor in education, disagrees with Stanley’s sharp distinction between the “material world” versus “texts” (personal communication, 2000). I agree with Yeoman’s suggestion that because texts potentially play as much of a role in discourse as lived experience, it is difficult to separate out the material world and the

world of texts; they are interdependent. "Text" can be considered to entail a broader meaning than just a body of words in a book. In the next chapter I elaborate on how I use the term "text."

Rejecting the modern notion of "self" is only one point of common interest within feminist autobiographical criticism and postmodern theory. Stanley presents two more characteristics she has discerned from feminist autobiographical texts that also satisfy a postmodern criterion and provide critique of traditional autobiographical practices. The rejection of the view that the individual writer inscribes some quintessential truth may be shared by feminist autobiographical critics and postmodern theorists (14-15). The Personal Narratives Group, comprising women from various disciplines who explore the role of women's personal narratives in the creation of feminist theory, confronts the modernist notion of authorship. They challenge the realist analysis of feminist autobiographical texts by renouncing the reading of texts as though the identity, experiences, and emotions written about directly mirror women's actual material lives. According to the Personal Narratives Group, the "truths" in life narratives do not reveal the past as it actually was, yet they can provide ways of understanding the world. They rethink the division between subjectivity and objectivity (261, 263). Weedon provides an extensive discussion of subjectivity in *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. She defines "subjectivity" as referring to "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (32).

Insistence on intertextuality is the third characteristic that Stanley assigns to innovative feminist autobiography. What is intertextuality? Moi, drawing on French

feminist theorist Julia Kristeva, claims that intertextuality is used “to indicate how one or more systems of signs are transposed into others” (156). Herrmann presents Kristeva’s concept of intertextuality as being a relation not just between texts but between subjects who themselves are written and read; intertextuality occurs in the “in between” of texts (17). In *Critical Practice*, Catherine Belsey describes intertextuality as the subject’s recognition of similarities and differences between a text and all the other texts a subject has read (21). Stanley elaborates on the third characteristic often shared by feminist autobiographical critics and postmodern theorists saying that it is “an insistence on intertextuality and a focus on language in use, particularly on the formation and perpetuation of discourse as sets of ‘voices’ speaking referentially to and about each other” (15)

Stanley also outlines four elements of a “method” and a “form” for producing feminist autobiographical texts. The first element Stanley describes as part of a method for writing feminist autobiographical text is an anti-spotlight stance. An anti-spotlight stance is understood as a “rejection of a reductionist spotlight attention to a single unique subject”; attention is paid to context and to the subjects’ position within their social networks (250). The second element is a contingent stance. Feminist autobiography should recognize that facts and arguments are contingent and acknowledge that the writing is from a particular viewpoint, that of the author (Stanley 250). The third element, an anti-realist stance, has previously been dealt with in my discussion of rejecting the notion that autobiography directly mirror actual material lives. The fourth element comes from the ideas and analyses of feminist sociology and includes “an *a priori* insistence that auto/biography should be treated as composed by

textually-located ideological practices--including of course auto/biography produced by feminists--and analytically engaged with as such" (253).

Stanley uses the term auto/biography throughout *The auto/biographical I* to indicate that she disagrees with the distinction between the genres of autobiography and biography. According to her, feminist autobiography should "self-consciously mix genres and conventions--fact, fiction, fantasy, reality, biography and autobiography, self and others, individuals and networks should not only coexist but intermingle in ways that encourage, not merely permit, active readership" (247). Developing the means for a more active readerly engagement is important to her and she sees the crossing and re-crossing of all generic boundaries as one way to accomplish that goal (254-255). I consider involving the reader in active engagement with the text and traversing conventional boundaries between different genres of writing as a possible fifth and sixth element in Stanley's method for producing feminist autobiographical texts.

Stanley discusses what she thinks characterizes feminist autobiography, but she still asks herself the question, is there a feminist autobiography? Her response is, "well, there might be" (255). Regardless of her doubt over whether feminist autobiography exists or not, she has clear ideas about what it should contain. It is my view that a method is in process for writing feminist autobiographical texts and the narrative strategies described by Stanley provide a few good possibilities for a method. I do not think that the elements Stanley outlines should be taken together and seen as defining an absolute feminist approach to writing, nor do I think they must be present in order for a text to be called feminist autobiography. My research is meaningful to me because I am participating in the dialogue regarding the development of a method for a feminist

autobiographical practice.

Review of Bakhtinian Dialogical Theory

The concept of dialogism is central to *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* by Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian cultural theorist who lived from 1895-1975. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist are the translators and Holquist is the editor of Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Holquist stresses throughout the text that within Bakhtinian dialogism there can be no monologue, that dialogue knows no resolution, and that it is infused by heteroglossia. The term "heteroglossia" is defined in the glossary as that which insures the primacy of context over text. At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions—social, historical, meteorological, physiological—that will insure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions (428). Holquist describes dialogism as "the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia. Everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole—there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others" (426).

According to Bakhtin, language is a world view which operates in heteroglossia and is stratified according to such factors as age, history, social level, institution, and family (263, 271, 290-292). New socially typifying "languages" are formed through the interaction and intersection of various social languages (Bakhtin 282, 291). Although there may be a reigning "correct language" that works in opposition to social

heteroglossia, language is never really unitary (Bakhtin 270, 288). In the article "Freedom of Interpretation: Bakhtin and the Challenge of Feminist Criticism", Wayne C. Booth explains Bakhtin's notion of language as being "a kind of ideology brought-into speech" (51). Booth maintains that an important element in Bakhtin's dialogic imagination is his concept of our selves being made up of a collection of languages laden with values that we inherit through many different sources such as parents, education, religion, class, profession, etc. (51-53).

Bakhtin views the tendency to selectively assimilate the discourse of others as being significant in an individual's ideological becoming, in the most fundamental sense (341-342). He distinguishes between two opposing types of discourses that determine the very bases of our ideological interrelations with the world: authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse. Authoritative discourse is made up of privileged, uncriticized language infused with past authority that demands we make it our own; it permits no play with its framing context (342, 424). He writes that 'the authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it. . . It is so to speak, the word of the fathers. Its authority was already *acknowledged* in the past. It is a *prior* discourse" (342). Internally persuasive discourse, as opposed to authoritative discourse, is affirmed through assimilation and is tightly interwoven with "one's own word" (345). "The semantic structure of an internally persuasive discourse is *not finite*, it is *open*, in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever new *ways to mean*," notes Bakhtin (346).

There is a an intense interaction between authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse: “an attempt to assimilate more into one’s own system, and the simultaneous freeing of one’s own discourse from the authoritative word, or from previous earlier persuasive words that have ceased to mean” (424-425). Bakhtin depicts the process of our ideological becoming as an intense struggle. Surprisingly, Bakhtin likens the language of authoritative discourse to the language of the fathers and names several social factors that determine the stratification of language, yet he does not name gender as a contributing factor to the hierarchy of languages or to our ideological becoming. Having said that, I consider Bakhtin’s dialogical theory relevant to my discussion of how Virginia and Christa expose the struggle among competing discourses and the ways that they try to resist authoritative discourse in their representations of the “I.” I also appreciate Booth’s work because he provides a clear review of Bakhtin’s concept of language and self, and he highlights the omission of gender difference analysis within dialogic theory.

Herrmann moves beyond Booth in *The Dialogic and Difference: “An/Other Woman” in Virginia Woolf and Christa Wolf* where she couples dialogism with feminisms. Her text has informed my project in a few ways. Textual analysis is her main methodological approach, so her research serves as an example of how textual analysis can be conducted. Unlike my research, Herrmann’s focuses on selected essays, letters, and fiction by Virginia and Christa. Even though she does not use *Moments of Being* and *A Model Childhood*, I can borrow from her analysis of Virginia’s and Christa’s use of the figure of “an/other woman” in their literary practices. “The figure of “an/other woman” makes it possible for the woman writer to rewrite ‘the

feminine' in the form of a female subjectivity, by inscribing herself in her own text as gendered and as fictional subject," she writes (3). I examine how Virginia and Christa use the figure of "an/other" woman in their autobiographical practices, focusing on how they use her in their discussions of how to resist authoritative cultural discourses.

Herrmann explains Bakhtin's dialogical theory as representing "the struggle between opposing discourses arising out of different contexts, either semantic or sociohistoric. . . the dialogic resists the reconciliation of opposites by insisting on the reciprocity of two or more antagonistic voices" (15). It is significant to feminist theory, but by no means limited to it, that the dialogic posits the other as another subject rather than an object, and that the power differential occurring in the relation between the two subjects be taken into account. A "female dialogic" is the term coined to refer to her reworking of Bakhtinian dialogism. She creates a "dialogue between Bakhtin's dialogic and sexual difference as it is currently being debated within feminist critical feminist theory," and argues that the result is "a female dialogic, not as synthesis but as struggle" (27).

By introducing the dialogic, she establishes a dialogue that avoids the double bind that some feminist critics find themselves in when trying to reconcile their ideological position with their theoretical knowledge. A contradiction exists between the deconstruction of the subject and the construction of a female subjectivity that centres on the problem of referentiality (4). She questions "Does 'woman' refer to an entity in the real world, a reference based on the assumption of a fixed gender identity and the possibility of its reflection in language, or does 'woman' refuse a referent, as does 'the feminine,' by signifying the disruption of meaning which follows the deconstruction of

the sovereign subject?" (5). Rewriting the debate as a dialogue allows for a deferral of resolution.

Herrmann also uses the dialogic to justify drawing comparisons between Virginia's and Christa's literary practices when they take place "against the background of the differences between a British and a German national history, capitalism and socialism as political and economic systems, and modernism and postmodernism as moments in the history of aesthetics" (4). She states that:

The comparison itself is predicated on the dialogue between Woolf and Wolf about the implications of women writing, as well as on the dialogic nature of their particular discourses, on their dialogue as women writers with the discourses of a dominant culture, and on my own dialogue as a feminist reader with their discourses and with those of a gender-blind theory, the dialogic. (4)

I have considered her uses of the dialogic in conducting my research. My project differs from Herrmann's in that it involves using the dialogic in order to establish a dialogue between traditional autobiographical critics and feminist autobiographical critics.

Chapter Three Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology I am using and at the same attempting to modify in conducting my research. To begin, I define the following terms as they are used in this paper: “feminist qualitative research,” “text,” “textual analysis,” and “discourse analysis.” Next, I outline and describe the methodological steps I employ throughout the process of my textual analysis of *Moments of Being* and *A Model Childhood*. In the explanation of my methodology, I discuss how particular feminist qualitative research studies have informed the methodological and theoretical approaches I take in my research.

Definitions of Terms

I consider my research to be feminist qualitative research. While quantitative research typically begins with a hypothesis and ends with a conclusion, qualitative research begins with questions and ends with hypotheses. Generalizability derived from conclusions of “objective” scientific research is what has made quantitative research seem more credible over qualitative research; however, this view is shifting among some academics. Feminist and postmodernist researchers who now question “objectivity” generally privilege qualitative research over quantitative research. The self-reflexiveness of qualitative research is attractive to them. To me, when researchers combine self-reflexiveness about the research process with the recognition of their own subjectivity, qualitative research is as credible as quantitative research.

What makes particular research “feminist research”? As mentioned in the introduction, Eichler states that “feminist research can be on any topic but it must establish some connection between the topic and the achievement of social justice for women, either in concrete or abstract terms through the manner in which the knowledge is generated” (57). Feminist researcher, Patti Lather, agrees with Eichler that research is feminist *only* if it is linked to action. In *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, edited by Shulamit Reinharz, Lather suggests that “our intent must consciously be to use our research to help participants understand and change their situations” (175). Though Eichler’s and Lather’s notions of feminist research could be considered essentialist, I agree with them. The majority of textual/discourse analysis studies that informed my research come from the field of critical media literacy and critical pedagogy both of which are action oriented. I do not use participants in the same sense that many of the researchers that have informed my research do, but I like to think of my readers as participants.

The range of what can be considered text has widened; no longer does text necessarily refer only to written material. Wendy Morgan explains in *Critical Literacy in the Classroom* that “whatever in our social environment can. . . construct a meaning through shared codes and conventions, signs and icons” (29). Reinharz says, “[T]he only limit to what can be considered a cultural artifact--and thus used as a ‘text’ for research--is the researcher’s imagination” (146). The following are some interesting examples of texts used for analysis that I came across in my literature review: fashion, shopping malls, adult’s and children’s films, plays, children’s role playing games, and soap-operas.

The notion of what is text has been expanded by researchers in the fields of critical media literacy, critical pedagogy, cultural studies, anthropology, and literary studies. According to the discipline researchers are working in, the examination of texts may be called content analysis, discourse analysis, archival research, deconstruction, and textual analysis, to mention only a few possibilities (148). With my particular interest in feminist literary criticism, I choose to use the term textual analysis to refer to my research because it is the term most commonly used in the field. In *Texts, Facts, and Femininity*, Dorothy Smith states that textual analysts worked from the presupposition of the inertia of the text, the dead text. Instead of analyzing dead text, she argues for analyzing active text, an operative part of a social relation that is activated by the reader (121). She points out that we find texts such as forms, brochures, cheques, drivers' licenses, newspapers, and advertisements operative in many ways on a daily basis (122).

In analyzing texts, one must take competing cultural discourses into account. What is discourse? According to the *Random House Dictionary* installed in my computer, the primary definition of discourse is "communication of thought by words; talk; conversation." Like the word "text," "discourse" has evolved to take on broader meaning. James Paul Gee suggests that we think of discourse as an "identity kit." He defines discourse as "a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network'" (21). In *Feminisms and Pedagogies of Everyday Life*, Carmen Luke asserts that the fact that discourse can be transformed into

merchandise is a fundamental requirement within contemporary capitalist logic (169). Several of the texts analyzed in the research studies I read are examples of discourse as merchandise, such as clothing and teen romances.

Foucault claims that "it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together" (qtd. in Gore 56). He explains in *Archaeology of Knowledge* that we should no longer treat discourses as only composed of groups of signs because they do more than use signs to designate things; we should consider them as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak (49). He asserts that "discursive practices" must not be confused with the expressive operation by which individuals formulate an idea, nor with the competence of speaking subjects when constructing grammatical sentences; "but as a body of anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic area, the conditions of operation of the enunciative function" (117).

The historical rules that Foucault refers to are expressed and upheld through various daily practices such as choosing the clothes we wear and performing the mannerisms and gestures we use in conversation. There are also discourses that challenge dominant discourses which are referred to as counter discourses. Counter discursive practices are set up in opposition to dominant discursive practices. For example, Virginia sets up counter discursive practices to Victorian discursive practices at the evening Bloomsbury meetings where she decides not to wear white-satin and seed pearls, not to display proper manners befitting of a woman, and not practice the

art of proper societal conversation (*Moments* 205-206). I discuss in more detail how both Virginia and Christa adopt counter discursive practices in Chapter Five.

Explanation of Methodology

My topic of research came out of a conversation with one of my thesis advisors, Phyllis Artiss, a professor in English and Women's Studies. We were talking about our favourite women writers when Virginia Woolf and Christa Wolf came up in our conversation. Artiss recalled Herrmann's *The Dialogic and Difference: "An/Other Woman" in Virginia Woolf and Christa Wolf*, in which Herrmann compares Virginia's and Christa's literary practices. I read Herrmann's text, discussed her work with Artiss, and decided that I would like to compare and contrast Virginia's and Christa's autobiographical practices. My research topic would be on feminist autobiography and I would use Virginia's *Moments of Being* and Christa's *A Model Childhood* as my primary texts. Because I do not know German, my concern was that I would have to use English translations of Christa's original texts, which are written in German. I recognize that some of the linguistic richness is lost because I am reading translated texts, but it seems to me that the approaches I am taking in analyzing the texts are important even though this limitation exists.

Next, I conducted a review of literature on Virginia's and Christa's autobiographical texts specifically, and on textual analysis research studies and feminist autobiographical criticism; these texts are what I consider to be my secondary texts. I did a review of selected feminist textual analysis studies to get ideas about how other

researchers describe their methodology and how they write up their research. The problem was that many of the researchers who analyzed literary texts, as what I wanted to do in my research, did not provide a detailed description of their methodology. Throughout my research process, I have modified a social science approach to textual analysis. During the literature review process I thought about what research questions I wanted to examine and why. I considered the purpose of my research and how it differed from the literary works that I read that dealt with *Moments of Being* and *A Model Childhood*. I determined that the purpose of my research is two-fold: to examine the ways that Virginia and Christa problematize traditional autobiographical practices in their texts, and to examine what contributions they make to a method in process for writing feminist autobiography.

The next step included finding emerging patterns from my sources, naming categories for the patterns, and coding them accordingly. This included finding emerging patterns from the theoretical, methodological, and literary works I read that pertain to my topic. I wrote notes on every text that I read that had relevance to my work, and then read my notes over and over to find emerging patterns. Later, I came up with categories for the patterns I found so that I could code my data. My notes consist of ideas and page referenced citations from the literature. I used asterisks beside notes to highlight what was particularly important to my project.

I also made notes on *Moments of Being* and *A Model Childhood* and referenced all citations. I used a numbering system to code my data. For example, I coded my notes regarding Virginia's and Christa's texts using (1) for the points that pertained to their critique of traditional practice, and (2) for their critique of authoritative discourses,

then I used letters to code the data even further. The letter categories represented each of my research questions which constituted a particular section in my analysis chapters, for example, notes on how Virginia and Christa problematize memory in chapter four were coded as (1b). I also marked all the important pages in each text that I would probably need to refer to in writing each chapter section. I chose a colour for each section in both of my analysis chapters. On each tab I would write a key word or two to trigger my memory regarding what quotation or idea I wanted to use to support my analysis. Better organizing what I needed from my sources was an ongoing process. Throughout the research process I have been referring back to my notes to find theories and citations to support my analysis of the autobiographical texts.

The methodological approach I take to writing this paper is inspired by feminist researchers, Aretha F. Ball, Valerie Walkerdine, and Meredith Rogers-Cherland, who are in the field of critical media literacy. Like their textual analysis research, mine is framed as a story that I hope will be engaging to the audience. Ball's study, "Text Design Patterns in the Writing of Urban African American Students," begins with her declaration in bold, "**This is a tale. . .**" (253). In *Daddy's Girl: Young Girls and Popular Culture*, Walkerdine states that, "I want to tell a different story from the ones already told... My purpose then has to be named, for it has importance in the strategy of my attempt to tell a different story" (25). She also reminds the reader that there is no "true" story to be told from research (189). Rogers-Cherland states in *Private Practices: Girls Reading Fiction and Constructing Identity*, "I have seen people and events in the light of my own belief systems, experiences, and discourses, and I have told what I hope is a

compelling and authentic story that is consistent with what I believe about the world”
(2).

Like Ball, Walkerdine, and Rogers-Cherland, I present my research as a story that I have constructed, in which, like all researchers, I am the narrator; I do not present my research as the ‘truth.’ I open my research by identifying myself and describing my research background. After I outline my research problem and the questions I consider in my textual analysis, I discuss why I choose to examine how Virginia and Christa represent the “I” in their autobiographical texts. I identify the purposes and biases in my research, insofar as I am aware of them. I explain, for example, that my interest in autobiographies arises from my love of reading such texts, particularly ones written by women, and from my participation in social justice activism. I also include a review of the literary works of other feminist critics who deal either with *Moments of Being* and *A Model Childhood*, a review of theoretical works that I use in my textual analysis. I explain the ways their work relates to and differs from mine and what I contribute to the already existing literature. Throughout my textual analysis of Virginia’s and Christa’s autobiographical texts, I give definitions of the terms and concepts that I use, and I weave in passages from my primary and secondary texts. I conclude by summarizing the main points of my research and outline further implications for future research.

Another part of my methodology has been to write in a journal from the beginning of the thesis proposal stage until the present. I think that writing in a journal has helped me to be more self-reflexive about the research process which is important in conducting qualitative research. Many of my journal entries begin with a description of my surroundings, and a little about what is happening in my life. I write about how I am

feeling about my project, what I am concerned about, ideas I can add to my analysis, discussion of books I have read or talks I have gone to that link to my work, and what I have left to do on my project. Journaling has been a useful motivation tool for me. Generally I feel better after writing about what I am finding stressful at the time, which in turn helps me to concentrate better in my work. The informal writing in a journal helps to free me to sort out my thoughts and have the courage to write them because I feel less pressure than when writing during my designated thesis work time. Unlike Virginia in her diaries, I do not chide myself for haphazard writing, I just let it flow with no worry. Though I do not present any of my journal writings in this paper, some of the theoretical ideas that I discuss in my textual analysis were initially formulated in my journal.

My textual analysis consists of comparing and contrasting *Moments of Being* and *A Model Childhood* by drawing upon other literary works and theory to support my analysis of Virginia and Christa's autobiographical practices. I present my research as a narrator, like Virginia and Christa and the feminist researchers I named earlier, who is aware of my own subjectivity; I try to write as authentic an account of my research as possible, but I cannot claim it as being the truth. The autobiographical entries in my journal helped me to work out ideas and to be self-reflexive about my research process and myself as a writer, which in turn helped in reminding me that my research contributes to already existing literature on feminist autobiography. It is part of a bigger story that is in process.

Chapter Four

Analysis of How Virginia and Christa Critique Dominant Autobiographical Practices

Sandra Frieden, from The Personal Narratives Group, summarizes what she and other feminist theorists such as Stanley, Smith, and Watson have said in their critiques of dominant autobiographical practices. According to Frieden, the elements that comprise conventional autobiography are “linear narration of a chronologically structured life story; a claim to truth, often documented by “verifiable” data; and the unproblematic use of the pronoun *I* to represent a seemingly continuous past and present self, with scarce (if any) reference to the act of writing” (174). I juxtapose *Moments of Being* and *A Model Childhood* in order to examine how Virginia and Christa destabilize some of the common assumptions that exist in traditional autobiographical texts. Throughout most of *Moments of Being* and throughout all of *A Model Childhood*, Virginia and Christa subvert all three of the conventions mentioned by Frieden. They use a non-linear narrative form; they do not make truth claims; they do not use “I” to refer to a continuous, coherent self; and they reflect upon the autobiographical act of writing several times in their representations of the “I,” providing a critique of dominant autobiographical writing practices and of authoritative cultural discourses.

This chapter is divided into two sections and it is an analysis of the narrative strategies Virginia and Christa use to resist dominant representations of the “I.” In the first section I compare and contrast how they reflect upon and problematize the act of writing their autobiographical texts. In the second section I examine the similarities and differences between how they problematize the act of remembering, destabilizing the

assumption that what is presented in their text is objective autobiographical “truth.”

Throughout both sections I discuss their use of the following narrative strategies:

resisting the position of authority as authors, disrupting chronological time through non-linear narrative forms, adopting an anti-realist stance, and involving the reader in the texts. I think it is important to look at how these strategies are employed by Virginia in *Moments of Being* and Christa in *A Model Childhood* because taken together along with their use of feminist cultural critique, they model the beginnings of a method towards a feminist autobiographical practice.

Problematizing the Act of Writing Autobiography

Except in “Reminiscences,” which follows her father’s formal Victorian memoir writing style to a great extent, in *Moments of Being* Virginia offers a critique of some common assumptions made in traditional autobiographical texts (McCracken 63). I think that “A Sketch of the Past,” in particular, can be viewed as her response to the many memoirs she has read and perhaps even to her own first memoir, “Reminiscences.” In “A Sketch of the Past,” the second and most lengthy memoir in *Moments of Being*, Virginia tells us that she has read many memoirs and that many are failures (73). She begins “A Sketch of the Past” unconventionally by reporting that as a memoir reader, she is aware of several difficulties with writing one’s memoirs (72). Two difficulties she cites right away are the large number of memories she has, and the various ways memoirs can be written (72-73).

Not far into "A Sketch of the Past," Virginia points out that another difficulty with writing her autobiographical text is that she is engaged in writing the biography of friend and writer, Roger Frye, at the same time. She says that she finds it hard to balance the time she feels should be spent on writing Frye's life with writing her own life. It is apparent that she was frustrated with writing Frye's biography from these comments: "As it happens that I am sick of writing Roger's life, perhaps I will spend two or three momings making a sketch," "I write by fits and starts by way of a holiday from Roger," and "The drudgery of making a coherent life of Roger has once more become intolerable, and so I turn for a few days' respite to May 1895" (72, 84,94). "A Sketch of the Past" was written on the side, whenever she felt she could spare the time or badly needed relief from writing Frye's biography.

Even though writing "A Sketch of the Past" was meant to be Virginia's treat to herself while fulfilling her commitment to writing Frye's life, she expresses regret at not being able to spend the amount of time necessary to write her autobiographical text the way she would like to. She writes, "I have no energy at the moment to spend upon the horrid labour that it needs to make an orderly and expressed work of art; where one thing follows another and all are swept into a whole. Perhaps one day, relieved from making works of art, I will try to compose this. But to continue. . . ." (84). Part of her motivation to write "A Sketch of the Past" came from her frustration with the constraints she had to deal with in writing a traditional biography of Frye. In "A Sketch of the Past," she was free to challenge limitations of genre and to highlight what she viewed as gaps that needed filling in most conventional auto/biographical texts she read. She relinquishes some of the power that is assumed the narrator has by writing about the

difficulties in she has in the autobiographical process. Like Virginia, Christa problematizes the act of writing her autobiography from the beginning of *A Model Childhood*. The first obstacle Christa describes is assuming the voice she wants in telling her childhood memories. She opens the text by stating that the dilemma was crystalized: "to remain speechless, or else to live in the third person. The first is impossible, the second strange. . . " (3). She decides to refer to her childhood self as "Nelly" and to her adult self as "you," a practice she continues with throughout the narrative. She writes, "As in so many times during the last eighteen months, when you were forced to learn: the difficulties haven't even begun. As always, you would have ignored anyone presumptuous enough to tell you so" (3). Another problem she describes is deciding how chapter one should begin. She discloses that there were many previous drafts of chapter one that had started differently; they had started with the flight to her hometown, when the child was sixteen, with the working process of memory, but most of them began as this final text does now, with the memory of saying "I" to herself for the first time in her life (5).

At the end of chapter one, the text that remains after the other numerous reported attempts, Christa ruminates over whether it will really do. She recounts lying in bed trying to sleep when suddenly sentences begin to form in her head that she hopes will be usable beginnings, and will help to set her tone. After deliberating over the sentences, she is encouraged to find that "in the morning the sentences still held up--although they had to be taken out later, of course--but the tone remained. Still refusing to believe, you started one more time. You felt that you were not free to control your

material. But at the same time you realized in a flash that you couldn't expect any fast results, that it would be a long period of plodding and doubt" (22). She displays relief over having successfully found a consistent tone to adopt in her narrative but seems disillusioned by the strenuous work ahead of her. Christa's husband, whom she refers to as H., warns her to be cautious about her dangerous desire for associations, for wanting to include everything that seems relevant, and then feeling overwhelmed with trying to find a form in which it is still possible to express herself (21-22). She realizes that not everything can be described and recorded, but she says she has "fits of discouragement in the face of the thicket which cannot be disentangled and which devours the very second in which you place the period at the end of this sentence" (93-94). She also resists the position of authority as author by confessing to the struggles she experiences while writing her autobiographical text.

Although Virginia and Christa open their autobiographical texts in a similar way, by acknowledging that the process of writing will be challenging, there is a difference between how they describe their initial approaches. If Virginia experienced false starts and wrote several other beginning drafts, she did not write about them. Despite her concerns about how one should write autobiography, she declares that "without stopping to choose my way, in the sure and certain knowledge that it will find itself--or if not it will not matter--I begin: the first memory" (72). Seemingly confident, she plunges on ahead with writing. Virginia claims that a difficulty with writing her text is that there are so many ways it could be written, but she quickly finds her form and continues to use it throughout the text. Not far into the text she announces, "2nd May. . . I write the date, because I think that I have discovered a possible form for these notes. That is, to make

them include the present--at least enough of the present to serve as platform to stand upon" (83-84). On May 15, 1939, she writes, "The little platform of present time on which I stand is, so far as the weather is concerned damp and chilly" (94). She divides the text into sections and begins each one by marking the date and locating herself in the present before moving ahead with her narrative of the past.

While engaged in the final editing of her biography of Frye, Virginia admits to wondering whether she will complete her autobiographical project. She questions,

Shall I ever finish these notes--let alone make a book from them? The battle is at its crisis; every night the Germans fly over England; it comes closer to this house daily. If we are beaten then--however we solve that problem, and one solution is apparently suicide (so it was decided three nights ago in London among us)--book writing becomes doubtful. But I wish to go on, not to settle down in that dismal puddle. (111)

Writing openly about how her context negatively affects her ability to write is another example of how she uses an anti-authoritative narrative stance. She challenges the assumption in traditional autobiographical practices that authors are fully in control over the outcome of their texts. As it turned out, the last entry of "A Sketch of the Past" was written about four months before Virginia drowned herself. Jeanne Schulkind, editor of *Moments of Being*, claims in her editor's note that "A Sketch of the Past" would have been completed and would undoubtedly have been considerably revised and extended if she had lived (70). It was Virginia's practice to keep writing, and then revise later; often her husband Leonard read her work and gave suggestions for changes, then she would complete many more drafts before she considered the text to be final.

Christa also expresses feelings of doubt about whether she will complete *A Model Childhood*. She writes about the double suicide of M., a friend and teacher of her daughter Lenka, and his girlfriend, a nurse. It is Christa's belief that they killed themselves because they were unable to "pretend" to live anymore (105-108). She claims that most likely M's perception of her was that he thought her ability to live on and be productive was testimony to her not having felt enough and taken seriously enough the events of the past, making her a deserter. Even though she suffered from occasional bouts of depression, she was able to keep on working while M. remained idle. In the midst of describing her friend M., she interrupts the narrative to stop and take a hard look at her writing, and states that, "A number of pages were written in this unconcentrated fashion, it wasn't at all certain that you were going to write this book" (109). About half-way into the text Christa mentions feeling skeptical about how she is managing her writing material. She writes that:

Gradually the notebooks, diaries, notes--overlapping and superimposing on each other--are piling up on desk; your limited time is being used up by a work whose outcome remains doubtful; a growing stack of paper is putting you under increasing pressure. Meanwhile, you're becoming more and more aware of your inability to manage, in the sense of "to interpret," the steadily proliferating material (the water, called forth by the sorcerer's apprentice, carried by the broom, threatens to inundate everything). (194)

As Christa's husband, H., has pointed out, the narrative form that Christa uses in *A Model Childhood* is complex. Hutcheon describes it this way, "the writing is said to take place between 1972 and 1975 but it uses as a frame an earlier trip back to her

native town in order to study the even more distant past of her 1930's and 1940's childhood," and it is full of passages that are "metafictive representations of the act of trying to tell the story of the past of her self and her country, both in the present and during the trip to Poland. . . ." (164). Christa critiques the use of a linear narrative structure that is common to traditional autobiographical texts; her vision is that the structure of the experience coincides with the structure of the narrative. She thinks that:

This should be the goal: fantastic accuracy. But there is no technique that permits translating an incredibly tangled mesh, whose threads are interlaced according to the strictest laws, into linear narrative without doing it serious damage. To speak about superimposed layers--"narrative levels"--means shifting into inexact nomenclature and falsifying the real process. "Life," the real process, is always steps ahead; to catch it at its latest phase remains an unsatisfiable, perhaps an impermissible desire.

(272)

Christa's complicated narrative form indicates that she is determined to layer the text with as many connected threads of thoughts and experiences as she can disentangle.

Although Christa appears to have many misgivings regarding the writing process of her autobiographical text, more so than Virginia, it is evident by the following passage that she too has a method in place to organize her material:

From the beginning this chapter had been earmarked to deal with the war; like all the other chapters, it has been prepared on sheets with headings such as Past, Present, Trip to Poland, Manuscript. Auxiliary structures, devised to organize the material and to detach it from yourself by this system of overlapping layers, if not

by the simple mechanism of cause and effect. Form as a possibility of gaining distance. Forms of gaining distance, which are never accidental, never arbitrary.

The blunt capriciousness that exists in life has no place here. (164)

She chooses the form she uses in *A Model Childhood* to help her to organize her content, and to express it in an interesting way that challenges traditional autobiography.

In this section I examined how Virginia and Christa problematize the act of writing. I argued that they challenge traditional representations of the “I” through their use of a non-linear narrative form and an anti-authoritative narrative stance. I claim that they encourage active readership by disrupting chronology to take readers behind the scenes, so to speak, involving them with the actual creation of their texts, and by bridging the gap that traditionally exists in the relationship between the writer and the reader. In the next section I examine how they problematize the act of remembering in writing autobiography.

Problematizing the Act of Remembering

Neither Virginia nor Christa presume that as narrators they are fully in control of recounting the “truth” of the past; they reveal that they are often subject to memory, not necessarily an authority over it. They recognize that what they write is contingent on their own particular memory and viewpoint. They work towards constructing an authentic representation of the past but they make no claims to autobiographical truth, unlike many writers of traditional autobiographical texts. In *Moments of Being* and in *A*

Model Childhood, Virginia and Christa respectively deconstruct assumptions in dominant autobiographical practices regarding memory, thereby disrupting the reader's expectation that what the autobiographer is presenting to her is an objective and true account of their lives.

In "A Sketch of the Past," after Virginia outlines what gets left out of many memoirs, she moves on to describe the memories she has of her early nursery years. In the first four pages that she devotes to her first memories, she mentions feeling ecstasy and rapture four times (73, 74, 75, 76). Colours, sounds, lightness, darkness, flowers, the air, and her mother's lap were all delights to her as a young child (73-76, 91). She thinks that maybe it is characteristic of memories of early childhood to be stronger than memories of adulthood because "later we add to feelings much that makes them more complex; and therefore less strong, less isolated, less complete" (76). In the following passage she theorizes about her early childhood memories:

Those moments--in the nursery, on the road to the beach--can still be more real than the present moment. . . I can reach a state where I seem to be watching things happen as if I were there. That is, I suppose, that my memory supplies what I had forgotten, so that it seems as if it were happening independently, though I am really making it happen. (75)

Her analysis of nursery memories is complex. She implies that her memory fills in gaps that she doesn't remember, as though there were different layers of memory at work, some she has conscious control over accessing and some that she doesn't; yet it is she who is remembering, and as narrator she controls the act of writing her memories.

Later she explains that scene making is her natural way of marking the past:

A scene always comes to the top; arranged; representative. This confirms me in my instinctive notion--it is irrational; it will not stand argument--that we are sealed vessels afloat upon what it is convenient to call reality; at some moments, without a reason, without an effort, the sealing matter cracks; in floods reality; that is a scene--for they would not survive entire so many ruinous years unless they were made of something permanent; that is a proof of their 'reality.' (156)

The scenes of the past she writes about seem to come to her arbitrarily, not purposely or consciously. She describes them as "floating incidents," which makes memories sound like they are continuous and fluid, not final products (86).

Virginia's association of contentment and delight with her early memories of preindividualization, as described by Smith, are in contrast with her memories of later childhood (*Subjectivity* 88). Virginia does not pin down dates, but as a child of about six or seven, she recounts feeling fear, guilt, and shame about her own body. These feelings carried into her adulthood and left her with discomfort at the idea of even powdering her nose in public or being fitted for a dress. She describes two strong memories as being connected to each other, and as having influence over her rendering of her body as a source of humiliation. One memory is of her ambivalence towards gazing into a looking glass in the hallway of her home; she had the desire to look at herself, yet she felt guilty when doing so. The other memory involves sexual abuse. In "A Sketch of the Past," she discloses that her step-brother, Gerald Duckworth, fondled her under her clothes when she was a young child (76-77). In "22 Hyde Park Gate," she

discloses that her other step-brother, George Duckworth, was sexually inappropriate, which was when she was in her early twenties (193).

The memories of resentment she felt towards having no control over being touched sexually as a child may have exacerbated resentment she felt towards having no control over the changes happening in her body as she grew older. Smith writes that:

In the mirror she sees reflected a bounded, totalized body, a body captured in the gaze. Hard-edged, impermeable, confined, that body lacks the fluidity, the openness, the permeability identified with her earliest memories, ones that she says provided her with rapture and ecstasy. Here body and background, ground and figure, are dramatically separated from one another (*Subjectivity* 88)

I agree with Smith that Virginia's guilt over gazing into the looking glass most likely stems from her discomfort with the transition of her body from childhood of nondifferentiation to young womanhood of overdetermined sexual identification (88).

Like Virginia, Christa also analyzes her memories of early childhood years in *A Model Childhood*; however, unlike Virginia's first memory of blissful sensations as a preindividualized, prelinguistic being, Christa's first memory is of the wonder of discovering language and individuality at age three ("A reasonable child forgets her first three years") (14). Virginia begins writing her past with meditations upon nursery memories of feeling connected to her mother; whereas Christa begins with an "epiphany of separateness," the memory of feeling distinct from her mother, the moment she said "I" to herself for the first time in her life (5). Saying "I" to herself represents a separation and differentiation of self from others and from one's environment (Komar 49). Christa

remembers Nelly saying "I" again and again to herself, knowing that the thrilled shock it gave her must be kept secret. Even if this memory is "slightly worn at the edges," Christa claims it to be authentic because there was no one around watching Nelly make the discovery of being an "I," distinct from the others (5). This leads her to conclude that one problem with remembering one's childhood accurately is that outside witnesses often supply us with our childhood memories (5).

Virginia and Christa are similar in idealizing their earliest memories and theorizing about why they do. Christa imagines the fate of an old, brown family album left behind when her mother finally decides to abandon their house and store, after Nelly, her brother, and their extended family had already left (26). Was the album lost during the looting of abandoned houses, or was it burned by the subsequent Polish occupants of the house? Favourite photos can leave indelible marks in one's memory according to Christa, and one photo, in particular, is at her disposal on demand. The photo is of herself as a three year old, waving at the camera, her body naked, wreathed only with oak-leaf garlands. She suggests that, "The littler the happier--perhaps there's really something to it. . . the richness of childhood everyone feels may only be the result of the constant rethinking we devote to it" (27).

Virginia's and Christa's descriptions of early childhood memories focus only on feelings of happiness, but their descriptions of their older childhood memories also include feelings of guilt. A source of guilt for Virginia is her body, and for Christa it is her personal and national past. It is nearly impossible for her to remember any event in her childhood without thinking about what was happening politically at the time. In her essay, "Reading and Writing," she reconstructs a memory of lying peacefully amongst

potato plants with a lizard sunning itself on her belly, and ignoring the calls to her from home (32-33). At that moment she remembers feeling happy, even though a war was happening and people were being killed right then. "Guiltily I admit that I am unable to feel guilty about being happy: the innocent forerunner of those mixed feelings which, more than all else, are the signs of adulthood," she writes (*Author's Dimension* 33). She was aware that happiness was not what she was supposed to feel, but that she would always remember the strength of the emotion.

It appears that the enchantment of that day when she was lying in the furrow of a potato field had a deep impact on Christa because not only does she record the incident in her essay, she also brings it up in *A Model Childhood*. In "Reading and Writing," she admits that she did not tell the story "objectively"; it isn't possible. Instead of becoming discouraged, she decides to tell the story; that is, "to invent something faithful to the truth, based on her own experience" (*Author's* 33). In both the essay and in her autobiographical text, the memory leads her to question the role of memory. She wonders how many encapsulated vaults a memory can accommodate before it must cease to function, how much energy it takes to seal away these memories in which the walls may finally crumble, and what would become of us if we unlocked the memories and let them spill (*A Model* 69)? "But memory's recall--which incidentally varies markedly in people who seem to have had the exact same experience--may not be a matter of biochemistry, and may not universally be a matter of choice. . . if this were not so, some people's assertions would be accurate: documents could not be surpassed; the narrator would therefore be superfluous," she thinks (70).

In her essay, "writing autobiography," feminist theorist bell hooks shares an anecdote that is helpful in understanding Virginia's and Christa's approach to problematizing the role that memory has served in conventional autobiographies. When venturing to write her own autobiographical text, hooks recounts having conversations with her siblings about particular incidents she was recalling. She observed that together they would often remember a general outline of an incident but that for each of them the details were different (430). These talks with her siblings alerted her to and constantly reminded her of the limitations of autobiography. "of the extent to which autobiography is a personal story telling--a unique recounting of events not so much as they have happened but as we remember and invent them" (430). For example, one occasion in which she swore her memory of playing with her brother in a wagon was the "truth and nothing but the truth," she called her mom to verify the details, only to find out they never had a wagon, it was a wheelbarrow (431).

Like hooks, Virginia and Christa are aware of the limitations of autobiography: that the "I" cannot be represented objectively, and that it is impossible to tell "the truth and nothing but the truth." As I discussed in chapter two, anti-realism has been used by other feminist writers to unsettle the reader's expectation of autobiographical "truth," to open up new, imaginative possibilities for representing the "I," and to challenge received notions of objectivity and truth for quite some time. How do Virginia and Christa overcome the confines of memory in order to reconstruct a narrative of their past? They both dream, they make up, they invent. Virginia and Christa present memories as subjective, providing new ways of understanding women's lives and ways of being in the world.

The use of an anti-realist narrative stance is demonstrated by Virginia in her representation of her very first memory. She remembers sitting on her mother's lap "in a train or in an omnibus," and seeing the flowers on her mother's dress, which were "purple and red and blue, I think, against the black; they must have been anemones, I suppose" (72). She states, "Perhaps we were going to St Ives; more probably, for from the light it must have been evening, we were coming back to London. But it is more convenient artistically to suppose that we were going to St Ives, for that will lead to my other memory. . ." (72). She admits to not knowing the true details of the trip, but instead of recording only what can be considered verifiable truth, she chooses for the sake of art to write what satisfies her aesthetic sensibility.

Throughout "A Sketch of the Past," Virginia gives the impression that memory is uncontrollable and fallible, especially her memories of her mother who has been dead for forty-four years. She says that she must go on describing what she can remember now because her memory may still weaken further (90). With tenderness she recalls her mother's lap, dress, voice, beauty, and even directness; then she stops to reflect upon the act of remembering. She asks herself, "can I get any closer to her without drawing upon all those descriptions and anecdotes which after she was dead imposed themselves upon my view of her?" (92). Virginia questions what can remain real of her mother who died "without leaving a book, or a picture, or any piece of work-apart from the three children who now survive and the memory of her that remains in their minds? There is the memory; but there is nothing to check that memory by; nothing to bring it to ground with" (95). She asserts that it is "difficult it is to single her out as she really was; to imagine what she was thinking, to put a single sentence into her mouth! I dream: I

make up pictures of a summer's afternoon" (97). When she tries to think about her mother being happy, she acknowledges that she has "no notion, not a sound or a scene has survived from those four years" (99).

Although Virginia recognizes that she cannot remember her mother exactly as she was; it is important to her to give the reader as comprehensive and accurate a portrayal of her mother as possible, memory is subjective. I agree with Smith that it is evident in Virginia's undertakings to describe her mother that she rejects the tendency to pin down and to claim to know other people and their lives: she constantly undercuts her attempts to understand the "other" (*Subjectivity* 100). Like Christa, even though Virginia realizes that her memories are not objective she goes ahead with writing about the cherished past that included her mother.

Another time in which Virginia adopts an anti-authoritative stance along with an anti-realist stance is when she recounts summers spent in St. Ives, a place where many of her favourite memories originated. She reminisces about Mrs. Adams, the fisherwoman who used to bring fish and lobsters in a basket to their kitchen, then pauses to ask herself, "Can I be remembering a fact when I think I remember a long thick fish wriggling on a hook in the larder, and that Gerald beat it to death with a broom handle?" (145)

In Virginia's portrayal of her relationship with her brother, Thoby, she prefers to capture the boisterous spirit in which they interacted during their intellectual sparring, rather than be exact about when he was coming and where he was coming from for his visits. Thoby was two years older than Virginia, and she and her family had no way of

knowing that he was going to die when he was twenty-six. The closeness Virginia and Thoby shared, particularly because of the deaths of their mother and Stella; his protectiveness over her; and the passion he demonstrated during their arguments about Shakespeare were all cherished by Virginia. She imagines with fondness that if he had lived he would have been Mr. Justice Stephen, a lover, a husband, and a father, with several books to his credit, though more of a character than a success (153). When thinking about the last time she saw him on a visit from university, she writes, "Then I thought only of the moment: him there in the room: just back from Clifton: or from Cambridge; dropping in to argue with me. It was, whatever date I give it, an exciting moment. . ." (153-154).

Christa acknowledges explicitly that "The past--whatever the continuously accumulating stack of memories may be--cannot be described objectively" (164). In the preface to *A Model Childhood*, Christa declares that:

All characters in this book are the invention of the narrator. None is identical with any person living or dead. Neither do any of the described episodes coincide with actual events. Anyone believing that he detects a similarity between a character in the narrative and either himself or anyone else should consider the strange lack of individuality in the behaviour of many contemporaries. Generally recognizable behaviour patterns should be blamed on circumstances.

What is interesting is that while she includes in her preface a disclaimer of autobiographical truth, she also includes passages of text from public documents such as newspapers, her daughter's text book, radio newscasts, advertisements, and fiction to supplement the memories she records in her efforts towards authenticity. Christa

crosses and re-crosses generic boundaries even more freely than Virginia. Christa successfully blends the genres of fiction, history, and autobiography in order to achieve ambiguity in her representation of the "I." Her autobiographical practice encourages active readership and demonstrates an ingenious way that autobiographical texts can be written.

Like Virginia, Christa speculates over whether some events she recalls happened the way she remembers them or whether they even happened at all. For instance, she is uncertain about whether she was allowed to attend her cousin Manfred's christening (73). This uncertainty comes from her reasoning that the memory preserves numerous fragments of various family celebrations that rarely apply to one specific occasion (73). Does she remember being there or did she invent the occasion while writing the text? She decides that it is most probable that Nelly forced her parents to take her and asserts that Nelly's impression that a baptism was inscrutable, depressing, and even a little indecent is important because it would prove more than anything that she was there. But after having said that, she claims that even the engraved memory of a doll in black and green silk pyjamas and a remarkably good butter crumbcake doesn't necessarily prove that she was there at the christening or that it even took place (74-75). Though she supplies many details of the event, she is unsure about whether or not it actually took place.

The act of remembering is reflected upon and problematized by both Virginia and Christa. They reject a realist view of autobiography, common among traditional autobiographical critics and some feminist autobiographical critics, and instead they emphasize the subjectiveness of memory. Both try to achieve accuracy (Virginia's

description) or authenticity (Christa's description) in narrating the past, but they write into their texts that memories cannot be relied upon as truths.

In problematizing and demystifying the autobiographical writing act and the role that remembering plays in it, Christa and Virginia challenge common assumptions in dominant autobiographical practices. In this chapter I have shown how they resist the position of authority as narrators, disrupt chronological time through non-linear narrative forms, adopt an anti-realist stance, and involve the reader in their respective texts. In the next chapter I examine how they also provide feminist cultural critique. I discuss their critique of what authoritative cultural discourses said about womanhood, the tension they felt as a result of their inner struggle between competing discourses, and their descriptions of how they and their figure of "an/other" woman tried to resist authoritative discourses. I argue that by taking together their critique of dominant, essentializing practices in representing the "I" and their feminist critique of cultural discourses, they provide us with a model for writing feminist autobiographical texts.

Chapter Five

Analysis of How Virginia's and Christa's Autobiographical Practices Provide Feminist Cultural Critique

In the previous chapter I addressed how Virginia and Christa challenge common assumptions in traditional autobiographical texts regarding the acts of writing and remembering. In this chapter I examine how Virginia and Christa critique not only autobiographical practices but also cultural practices in their autobiographical texts. I compare and contrast how they provide feminist cultural critique in their discussions of how authoritative discourses affect girls and women. Though neither Virginia nor Christa call themselves feminists, I consider their critique of authoritative discourses to be feminist because they critique what is said about socially prescribed roles for women and women's sexuality. In my analysis, I follow Herrmann's lead by investigating how Virginia and Christa use the figure of "an/other" woman in writing about their own dialogized relations to authoritative discourses and in illustrating how authoritative discourses can be subverted. Virginia uses her older sister, Vanessa, as "an/other" woman in her autobiographical text, and Christa uses her mother, Charlotte. The theoretical framework this textual analysis is based upon draws from feminist autobiographical criticism, postmodern theory, and Bakhtin's dialogical theory.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section is an overview of Virginia's and Christa's feminist critiques of authoritative cultural discourses. I begin by discussing Virginia's critique of authoritative discourse in Victorian society, especially what was said about the role of women and their sexuality, and the effect this had on her and Vanessa as young women. Then I discuss Christa's critique of authoritative

discourse of the Third Reich, what was said about the role of girls and women and their sexuality within the new order, and the effect it had on Nelly and Charlotte. The second section is an examination of how Virginia and Christa represent the "I" as being situated among and in dialogue with competing discourses that cannot be reconciled. Their representation of the "I" as a dialogic self challenges the Enlightenment notion of an essential, unified self that is dominant in traditional autobiographical practices. I compare and contrast how they reveal the inner tension the "I" experiences in its struggle between assimilated authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse, which Bakhtin views as being fundamental to an individual's ideological becoming (341-342). In the last section, I address how the inner struggle between opposing discourses leads Virginia and Christa and their figures of "an/other" woman to use counter-discursive practices in trying to resist authoritative discourses.

Feminist Critique of Authoritative Discourses

In *Moments of Being*, Virginia gives a detailed explanation of how womanhood was constructed within Victorian authoritative discourse. Her autobiographical practice offers a critique of the way that social conventions, the division of labour, and sexuality depended upon strictly defined gender relations, "women must be pure and men manly," in dominant Victorian culture (165). She describes the pressure she and Vanessa felt in their positions as daughters and sisters in a traditional upper-middle class Victorian family, with a highly educated father who was himself a writer. In writing about Victorian society, she conjures up similar imagery to that used by American poet

and writer, Sylvia Plath in the 1950's, of living in a bell jar. Virginia writes, "Hyde Park Gate in 1900 was a complete model of Victorian society. If I had the power to lift out of the past a single day as we lived it about 1900, it would give a section of upper middle class Victorian life, like one of those sections with glass covers in which ants and bees are shown going about their tasks" (161). The tasks that Virginia refers to are strictly divided according to gender.

A metaphor for Victorian society used by Virginia was that of society as a machine. the "great patriarchal machine": in order to keep the machine running, strict gendered social codes had to be followed. She informs us that the "great patriarchal machine" was made up of prizes and honours that came along with school reports, scholarships, triposes, and fellowships, all of which were important to her father and available only to men (167). "Every one of our male relations was shot into that machine at the age of ten and emerged at sixty a Head Master, an Admiral, a Cabinet Minister, or the Warden of a college," she claims, except for her step-brother George. She marvels at how George learned the rules of the "social machine" so well, that by playing assiduously "he emerged at the age of sixty with a Lady Margaret for wife, with a knighthood, with a sinecure of some sort, three sons, and a country house" (167-168).

Unlike men who are shot into the patriarchal machine, emerging with many benefits, women are caught in the machine. Virginia writes about the plight of women: "the machine into which our rebellious bodies were inserted in 1900 not only held us tight in its framework, but bit into us with innumerable sharp teeth" (166). She also maintains that, "society in those days was a perfectly competent, perfectly complacent, ruthless machine. A girl had no chance against its fangs. No other desires—say to

paint, or to write—could be taken seriously” (171). Virginia describes several tiresome tasks that she and Vanessa were expected to perform in their socially prescribed roles as women within the household and within society. As the women in their family, Virginia and Vanessa were expected to sit back passively and applaud the Victorian men in their family while they jumped through intellectual and social hoops (168). While men were active in the public sphere, women were relegated to the private sphere, the household; thus, the engaging opportunities that the world of intellectuals and/or society held for men were not available to women.

Another trying task that Virginia and Vanessa had was performing the roles of proper young ladies at teatime. Virginia claims that the tea table, rather than the dinner table, was the centre in Victorian family life (130). In “A Sketch of the Past,” she takes us step by step through a typical teatime. Wearing the right attire and practicing the art of conversation were of great importance in fulfilling the social obligations that were salient to authoritative discursive practices in Victorian society. “Victorian society began to exert its pressure at about half past four,” Virginia tells us (163). Both she and Vanessa had to “be tidied and in our places, she at the tea table, I on the sofa. . . instantaneously we became young ladies possessed of a certain manner. . . We learnt it partly from remembering mother’s manner; Stella’s manner, and it was partly imposed upon us by the visitor who came” (163). She continues saying, “We should first make conversation. It was not argument, it was not gossip. It was a concoction, a confection; light; ceremonious; and of course unbroken. Silence was a breach of convention” (163). The Victorian social code was strong, “Nobody ever broke the convention. If you listened, as I did, it was like watching a game. One had to know the rules” (164).

In Victorian society women were expected to be married and to fulfill the duties of running a household, to be "Angel in the House." Virginia coined the term "Angel in the House," after a heroine in a poem, to refer to the "proper" position for women in middle to upper-class Victorian society. In a lecture entitled "Professions for Women," delivered to the National Society for Women's Service in 1931, Virginia characterizes an "Angel in the House" like this:

She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it—in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all—I need not say it—she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty—her blushes, her great grace. (Barrett, ed., 357)

The following is a list of Victorian discursive practices that she and Vanessa were expected to perform: wearing proper attire for the tea table, the drawing room, and parties; listening to and approving of George's views and beliefs, and joining him in social engagements; carrying on society conversation; taking visitors on walks; and applauding the achievements of the men in their family were training for them in taking on the role of angel in the house when they themselves were married and had a family.

How did the Victorian notion of angel in the house affect women's views of their bodies and their sexuality? Virginia divulges having had negative emotions when her body changed in the transition from girlhood to womanhood. She refers to herself as a

child as “the little creature,” and describes the changes in her body as being “driven on,” “the little creature driven on as she was by growth of her legs and arms, driven without her being able to stop it, or to change it, driven as a plant is driven up out of the earth, up until the stalk grows, the leaf grows, buds swell” (89). Her description of going through puberty focuses on the lack of control she had over the transformation of her body. Although she stresses that she was proud and pleased by the fact that femininity was very strong in her family and that the women in her family were famous for their beauty, she could not overcome feeling shame and fear over her own body (77).

Virginia tells us that her discomfort with her body developed into a life-long complex. She confides in the reader that she felt guilty when viewing herself in a looking-glass, as discussed in the previous chapter, and that she disliked having to try on clothes. “Everything to do with dress--to be fitted, to come into a room wearing a new dress--still frightens me; at least makes me shy, self-conscious, uncomfortable,” she writes (76). Women's clothing was closely scrutinized in Victorian society; it was important that for any occasion a woman be appropriately dressed. In “A Sketch of the Past,” she recalls how George would inspect the clothing that she and Vanessa were wearing. This is her description of one of those times:

He looked me up and down for a moment as if I were a horse brought into the show ring. Then this sullen look came into his eyes; the look with which he expressed not simply aesthetic disapproval; but something that went deeper. It was the look of moral, of social, disapproval, as if he scented some kind of insurrection, of defiance of his accepted standards. I knew myself condemned from more points of view than I could then analyze. As I stood there I was

conscious of fear; of shame; of something like anguish--a feeling, like so many, out of all proportion to its surface cause. He said at last: 'Go and tear it up.' He spoke in a curiously tart, rasping, peevish voice; the voice of the enraged male; the voice of which expressed his serious displeasure at this infringement of a code that meant more to him than he could admit. (165)

In "Am I a Snob?" she talks about what she considers a loathsome venture, going to a shop to buy clothes. She professes that she hates buying suspenders because "you must visit the most private room in the heart of a shop; you must stand in your chemise. Shiny black women pry and snigger. Whatever the confession reveals, and I suspect it is something discreditable, I am very shy under the eyes of my own sex when in my chemise" (228). Wearing proper dress was an important element of authoritative discursive practice in Victorian society, so even though she hated buying clothes, she hated being badly dressed more.

Virginia attributes part of her guilt and shame over her body to her experience of being sexually abused by Gerald when she was very small, younger than the age of six, and by George when in her early twenties (77). Near the beginning of "A Sketch of the Past," she recounts Gerald exploring her body, his hands steadily going lower and lower, and her hoping that he would stop, stiffening and wriggling as his hand explored her private parts (77). It occurred to her that historically there have been women who have suffered sexual abuse, that she was not an individual case. This is her analysis of the situation:

This seems to show that a feeling about certain parts of the body; how they must not be touched; how it is wrong to allow them to be touched; must be instinctive.

It proves that Virginia Stephen was not born on the 25th January 1882, but was born many thousands of years ago; and from the very first to encounter instincts already acquired by thousands of ancestresses in the past. (77)

One night after Virginia had accompanied George to a party, he entered her room when she was almost asleep. He whispered to her not to be frightened, told her not to turn on the light, called her "beloved," and flung himself on her bed and took her in his arms. In "Old Bloomsbury," Virginia attests again to how George would fling himself on her bed and cuddle and kiss her. Later he justified his behaviour to her doctor as acts of kindness to comfort her when her father was fatally ill (198). She had no more control over when Gerald or George would touch her in sexually inappropriate ways than she had over changes to her body. Virginia's memories of childhood sexual abuse represent "female selfhood shackled to the female body and engendered through specific social, cultural, and historical conditions" (*Subjectivity* 88, 91).

The evening prior to the above mentioned evening in which George came to Virginia's room, she had gone with him, Mrs. Popham of Littlecote, and Lady Carnarvon to a play with French actors. The finale was a realistic scene portraying a man in heavy pursuit of a woman in order to have sex with her. Virginia's party was shocked by the play, and afterwards everyone stood up in silence, including George, because they did not want to discuss what they had just seen. She describes a man who they knew there as "amazed and considerably amused that George Duckworth and Lady Carnarvon of all people should have taken a girl of eighteen to see the French actors copulate upon the stage" (191). George's character and the role he played in Virginia's and Vanessa's lives were held in high esteem by society, but Virginia says that nobody knew that he

sexually fondled both of them. She concludes "22 Hyde Park Gate" with the following passage: "Yes, the old ladies Kensington and Belgravia never knew that George Duckworth was not only father and mother, brother and sister to those poor Stephen girls; he was their lover also" (193). Although George was sexually inappropriate with Virginia and Vanessa, Virginia claims that he would have never spoken to a girl about sex, nor would Gerald (115).

Virginia tells us that Jack Hills, Stella's husband, was the first person, to talk openly and deliberately about sex with her (115). When she was fifteen, he explained that there was a glaring difference between the Victorian view of men's and women's sexuality. "He told me that young men talked incessantly of women; and 'had' them incessantly," and that unlike women whose honour rested upon chastity, men's "sexual relations had nothing to do with honour. Having women was a mere trifle in a man's life and made not a jot of difference to their honourableness," she writes (115). It wasn't until Vanessa and she were adults and were part of the Bloomsbury Group that they were able to have candid conversations about sex.

In *A Model Childhood*, Christa presents the discourse of the Third Reich through her childhood self, Nelly, and through her present adult self. Unlike Virginia in her critique of Victorian culture in *Moments of Being*, Christa combines gender relations analysis with race relations analysis to her critique of the culture of Germany in the Third Reich. She tells us that racial purity within the white race was the goal of Hitler's new order. Unity, truth, and bravery are highlighted throughout her narrative as the three main virtues that Nazism claimed itself to be built upon; hatred was taught alongside these virtues. She recalls Nelly lying in bed repeating the following motto to herself in

order to recite it at the next morning's flag salute: "You must practice the virtues today which nations need if they want to become great. You must be true, you must be brave, you must form a single, great, noble comradeship with each other" (200). Hitler said that it was important to achieve the common goal that "within a hundred years the swastika will become the life blood of the German nation," and for Nelly, the demonstration of powerful unity among the German people held an appeal (99).

Text from songs, mottos, Hitler quotations, teachers' declarations, squad leaders' chants, radio segments, advertisements, and newspapers all contributed to the authoritative cultural discourse of Christa's childhood, and she intersperses samples of these cultural artifacts throughout her narrative. According to Christa, the song "From the Me to the We," by Heinrich Annacker, captures the spirit of unity that was central to Hitler's discourse. Here is a select verse from Annacker's song that Nelly sang while serving the Hitler Youth organization:

*The me once seemed to be the central pole,
and all revolved around its woe and weal.
But growing humbleness helped to reveal
that you must aim your eyes upon the whole.*

*And now the me is part of the great We,
becomes the great machine's subservient wheel.
Not if it lives—but if it serves with zeal,
decides the worth of its own destiny. (191)*

Although it has more sinister intent, this verse remembered by Christa contains a similar society-as-machine metaphor to describe German society as what Virginia used to describe Victorian society.

Christa recalls her overly zealous squad-leader Mickey leading the songs with

fervour, her loud, straining voice yelling across the field, "To be German means to be true!" (193). Bravery unto death was extolled as a virtue according to the Hitler Youth organization's beliefs. Another verse from a song that Nelly remembers from her days with Hitler Youth was, "Onward, onward, fanfares are joyfully blaring. Onward, onward, youth must be fearless and daring. Germany, your light shines true, even if we die for you. . . ." (193). Upon remembering the song as an adult, Christa captures the irony in the passage "Our flag will lead us to eternity, our flag means more to us than death" by stating that the songs proved to be right, at least in part: many of those who sang them are dead (193).

"My will is your faith" is one of many powerful direct quotations from Hitler that Christa interjects in the text. Death was the penalty for people, like Communists, who were not "faithful" to the Führer. The Nazi idea of faith was rooted in the discourse of Christianity, which was exploited to fortify Nazi discourse. During a Monday morning religion lesson, Nelly recalls her stern and judgmental teacher, Herr Warsinski, asserting that Jesus Christ would surely be a follower of our Führer were he once again to walk this earth (102). Shockingly, on another occasion he declared that "A German girl must be able to hate Jews and Communists and other enemies of the people. Jesus Christ would today be a follower of the Führer and would hate the Jews" (128). As pointed out by Nelly's math teacher, Maria Kranhold, nobody had been lied to about the most important issues. She says to Nelly:

Hadn't Hitler demanded more Lebensraum [living space] for the German people from the very beginning? To any thinking person, that meant war. Hadn't he repeated over and over that he wanted to exterminate the Jews? That's what he had done, as much as he could. He had declared that Russians were subhuman, and that's how

they had been treated, by people who wished to believe that they were. (391)

German girls were taught to be tough and above all else, able to hate. When asked in class which girls washed their chests in ice-cold water, to steel themselves as befits a German girl, Christa says that Nelly did not raise her hand. Nelly disliked being a disappointment to Herr Warsinski, but her conscience could not let her claim that the cold water from their tap at home was ice-cold (100). When she told this to her mother, her mother was quick to point out that the water coming out of their tap was cold, so why didn't Nelly just say that she did wash in ice-cold water. Nelly was hard on herself. She did not agree that the water was ice-cold; therefore, she did not think she deserved the recognition of being a German girl who washed in ice-cold water. At an evening celebration of the solstice with the Youth garrison, Christa writes that Nelly was exhausted and cold, and "at the end she cried because "it was just too much for her." Otherwise, she rarely cried, "A German girl does not cry" (130). Directly after Christa points out the importance of girls not crying, she writes, "but it's all about whether or not a person can hate" (130). She does not talk explicitly about what German boys were taught, but it is interesting to me that the German girls were expected to show traits that in many other contexts are stereotypically expected from boys.

"The athletically disciplined person of either sex is the citizen of the future," quotes Christa from Adolf Hitler (100). Nelly was good at athletics, belonging to the ten best in the local Jungmädel team, and participating in the Hitler Youth district contests (176). Some of the major characteristics that gained young women praise in the Third Reich were in stark opposition to those described by Virginia in Victorian society. Christa depicts the ideal German girl during Hitler's reign as being brave, strong, hearty, and able to hate; whereas

Virginia depicts the ideal Victorian girl as being dependent, well-adorned, quiet but knowing the art of conversation, and charming. Some of the characteristics expected of young Victorian women and young German women were similar, like being self-disciplined and self-sacrificing.

Women's opportunities were more limited in Victorian society than in German society when Nelly was growing up. Especially during the war, women were needed within the public sphere while men fought in the war. On the trip back to Christa and her brother's hometown in 1971, Christa asks Lutz whether he knew about their mother's life-time desire to be part of the medical profession. He replies that he did. Christa tells us that their mother Charlotte repeated until her dying day: "Something in the line of medicine would have been just right for me. I bet you anything I'd have been good at it" (19). Christa deliberates over Charlotte's desire to be part of the medical profession:

You always agreed that she would have been good. Of course, your father has always scolded her for building castles in the air: Can't you ever be satisfied? Neither of you told her: Why don't you do it, then! Children don't like their mothers to change their lives. In 1945 she might have had the opportunity. In 1945 they would have trained even a woman who was no longer young to become a midwife.

In the village? says Lutz. Well, no; that's just it. (19)

A contrast between Virginia's critique and Christa's is that while Virginia directly outlines and problematizes the advantages men had over women in Victorian society, Christa brings forward what seems to have been an injustice to her mother, but she does not elaborate upon it. Christa uses the narrative strategy of involving the reader into her text, compelling them to construct their own analysis. She guides the reader into considering gender as a

point of analysis, but unlike Virginia, she does not offer explicit feminist critique.

A conversation between Nelly and Charlotte about a dream Charlotte once had provides another glimpse into how women were affected by the discourse of German society during the Hitler regime (51). Charlotte dreamt she was a child spending a vacation at a family cottage. In her dream it was Sunday and she was called upon, as was the weekly tradition, to sing her song for the family and neighbours. When she gets up to sing, she can't remember it, and her Grandfather, who never sings, has to start singing in order to cue her. He confuses the song, so she can't sing along, even though she feels terrible and ashamed. Her grandfather walks out in a rage and he, "the righteous man," goes down to the local tavern to gamble in broad daylight. In her dream, it is she, Charlotte, who is to blame for everything. Charlotte told Nelly that "she always woke up thinking one thought, which must still have been part of her dream: It's all wrong" (51).

Later in the text, Christa brings up the dream that held so much significance to her mother again, wondering whether the night she dreamt it was on March 17, 1933, the day of the National Socialist takeover in their hometown, then Landsberg. Charlotte tells Christa when she is an adult, that she had been tempted to get up in the middle of the night to write down the important, unforgettable dream she had thirty years ago. She seemed to regret not writing it out, perhaps feeling as though she did not pay the proper attention to it. Insistently, she asks her daughter how she could get up in the middle of the night, she, a grocer's wife, and write down a dream? "How could I?" she asks (51). Charlotte expresses defiance over her identity as a grocer's wife. The tone of the question "how could I?" seems tinged with disappointment for not having tried to be something other than a grocer's wife, yet she seems adamant that there was no choice.

Christa says that Nelly recognized her mother's hard work. One afternoon at a birthday party, the mother hosting the party got off the telephone with her husband who was at work and had told her he would check in on them later. The mother said to Nelly, "Oh these poor men. Does your father work that hard too?" (130). Nelly surprised the mother with her reply, "Quite hard, but maybe my mother works even harder," to which the mother responded, "Isn't the child priceless?" (130). During the war, Christa's father Bruno was called off to fight, and Charlotte was left with the grueling task of raising her two children and tending to their store on her own. The mother at the party was doing what Virginia described herself and Vanessa doing, sitting back and applauding the activity of the men around her. Nelly did not participate in praising the work of men as she was expected to, but she did not realize that she was challenging the belief that men worked harder than women and that they deserved praise for it. The incident at the party indicates that there may be some similarity between the way that women were affected by the discourse of Victorian society and the way they were affected by the discourse of the Third Reich.

Much like Virginia, Christa complains about people not having been open with Nelly regarding sexuality. What Nelly learned about women and sexuality mostly stemmed from snippets of conversations that weren't meant for her ears, and she could not always fully understand what was being said. Christa writes, "For instance, Nelly's confused ideas about the origin of babies turned out to be totally wrong. And it was impossible to get information from the family circle" (138). Nelly's only access to information on the taboo topic of sex was to piece together information herself by trying to listen to adult conversations containing what she called "glitter words," that is words that adults used that made their eyes glitter when they uttered them. "One had to watch their eyes, not their

mouths, when they spoke, to find out which words one couldn't ask about," Nelly concluded (57).

According to Nelly, "oversexed," "alien blood," "sterile," "eugenic way of life," and "venereal diseases" are examples of glitter words. As a young child, she hears her mother declare that a neighbourhood girl who was barely seventeen, walking with the baker's apprentice in the evening, is oversexed. Charlotte asserts that, "The girl is oversexed, even a blind man can see that. Outside smart, inside a tart. . ." (58). One day while her father was reading the paper, he mentioned the words "alien blood" and "sterile" from an article talking about the law for the prevention of genetically unfit offspring (60). Nelly also overheard her parents talking about schools educating children in a eugenic way of life, that is a healthy person would be forbidden to marry a person with venereal diseases, consumption, and mental and hereditary illnesses (61). Usually when a word like "sterile" or "venereal disease" came up in conversation, Nelly would be sent to her room. Christa says that what Charlotte does tell her daughter about sexuality concerns what Nelly is prohibited from doing. One evening Charlotte was peering out of a window at Nelly walking home with a wounded soldier. She ensured the good-bye was not unduly long, and afterwards she informed Nelly, who was fourteen at the time, that soldiers who were to be sent to the front had no consideration for anybody (247). Charlotte forbade Nelly to see the soldier again.

Having received very little information regarding sexuality, Christa says that Nelly was very confused when she spotted a clean and neatly dressed man who pulled "something long and whitish from his pants, and pulled and pulled making it longer and longer, a whitish, disgusting snake that Nelly has to stare at, until she manages ten, twenty steps,

and the spell is broken, and she can run, tear, streak off" (134-135). She remembers him looking at her with a sucking look, and instead of turning around like she wanted to, "his sticky look dragged her, as though by a string" (134). When she got home, she didn't tell Charlotte because,

[S]he immediately filed her experience, which she really didn't understand, among those occurrences that demanded to be treated with strict, absolute silence. Why? That's one of those practically unanswerable questions, because the answer couldn't be supported by anything tangible, it would have to depend on glances, a fluttering of the eyelid, a turning away, a change of an unfinished or falsely finished gesture: in short, those numerous details which determine more strictly than laws what must be said, and what must be irrevocably held back, and by what means. (135)

Nelly's initial reaction to witnessing the man masturbating in the park bears some similarity to Virginia's reaction to being sexually fondled by George. Neither of them had any control over what was happening, nor could they do anything to stop it, and both kept silent about the incidents. Their not telling anyone could be attributed to the general silence about sexuality in the authoritative discourses of their respective cultures.

It wasn't until Nelly was sixteen and she was lying beside her Aunt Trudy on a straw mat in an emptied out classroom after evacuating their home, that she heard a story regarding sexuality, and the harm that can come from the enforced silence on the subject. When her Aunt Trudy was young, she became pregnant with a sailor who disappeared afterwards. She felt she had no choice but to have an abortion because she had to keep her sexual encounter a secret from her mother. "Don't you ever come home with a fatherless brat!" was her Trudy's mother's warning to her daughters (208). Trudy tells Nelly

that she had a "greater fear of her mother than that of death. The Jordans always were a decent family" (208). The abortion was performed by a midwife in the same room as Trudy's sister, and it was so painful and bloody, Trudy left tooth marks on her pillow. After the abortion, she was no longer able to have children. Before marrying her husband she told him about the incident, and he forgave her and never spoke of it again; he was considered a noble being (208). Later he had an affair with "the redhead" at a time when "the government was so keen on children" (208-209). The court system of the Third Reich believed that a German man should live with a woman who can bear him children, so Trudy's husband was encouraged to leave her (209). As in Victorian society, women had more restrictions placed upon them regarding sexuality than men.

Although Nelly did not receive open, honest education regarding sex, it was she who gave Lutz his first lesson about "the facts of life." Christa recounts the exchange between Lutz and Nelly--he asks how children are made, she pretends to be morally concerned and makes him promise that he won't repeat what she tells him, and then "finally, the longed for information, revealed in three or four sentences--the extent of her knowledge" (213). Christa writes that Lutz's reaction was, "Oh, so that's how they do it. . . A tone between disappointment and satisfaction. An even balance of the two. If you remember correctly, there was, above all, a trace of male supremacy mixed into that tone" (213). While in the process of writing *A Model Childhood*, Christa recalls a dream that she had one night. She saw herself as a man with features and abilities that she lacked in reality. She writes, "It seemed that you could do anything you set your mind to" (276). She does not write as explicitly as Virginia about disadvantages that she experienced as a result of her gender, but her recording the dream implies that she has been affected by gender inequality.

Unlike Virginia, who uses the term “patriarchal” to describe Victorian society in *Moments of Being*, Christa does not use it to describe the Third Reich in *A Model Childhood*, yet both provide feminist cultural critique in their autobiographical practices. As examples of how women are affected by the patriarchal discourse of Victorian society, Virginia cites the pressure that she and Vanessa felt over having to behave like “proper” young ladies at social functions; the rewards that only men could receive from excelling in the world of intellectualism that are not available to women; the role that women had to fulfill as self-sacrificing angels in the house; and the belief that women should remain pure, that is they could only have sex with their own husbands, while men could have sex before they are married. Christa also provides examples of the results of a society that has internalized the authoritative discourse of patriarchy. Her examples include the male supremacy Nelly detected in the tone of her brother’s response to her lesson on sex; her mother’s hard life as a grocer’s wife during the war; her mother feeling as though she had no choice but to give up her dream to be in the medical profession; her comrade’s mother not taking into account that there were women who worked as hard as men; and German law justifying that a husband could leave his wife if she can bear no children.

Representing the “I” as Being Situated Among and in Dialogue with Competing Discourses

I have compared and contrasted how Virginia and Christa provide feminist cultural critique in their autobiographical practices by describing socially prescribed roles for women, and discussing how women’s sexuality was affected by fulfilling these roles.

Now I examine, in Bakhtinian terms, how they present a dialogue between authoritative and internally persuasive discourses. In *Moments of Being* and in *A Model Childhood*, I see Virginia and Christa as representing the "I" as being situated among competing discourses, unable to reconcile them.

Virginia exposes the contradictions in her life while fulfilling her role as daughter and sister in an upper-middle class Victorian family, in which most of the men are great intellectuals; and the tension these contradictions create for her. She expresses her struggle between the competing discourses of Victorian society and the world of intellectualism by describing the tension she feels among the following selves: a daughter who wanted to impress her intellectual father; a daughter who resented her tyrannical father; a sister who had to act like a proper young lady and fulfill social obligations with her step-brothers; a sister who was sexually fondled by her step-brothers; a sister in league with her sister against the men in their house; an independent woman who no longer follows the rules of Victorian society that she does not want to follow; and a writer and intellectual who was part of the infamous Bloomsbury Group.

Next I discuss how Christa reveals occasions in which Nelly felt as though she were made up of different girls and the tension she experienced as a result. Similar to Virginia, Christa writes about the lack of reconciliation among Nelly's childhood selves: her self as a well-behaved daughter; her self as a mischievous older sister; her self as a student who worked hard to impress her teachers; her self as a devoted member of the Hitler Youth; and her self as a non-conforming, young girl who valued her individuality, who was thrilled with her first realization of being a separate "I." Christa describes the

tension Nelly felt as she struggled among competing discourses: Hitler's discourse that promoted unity and procreation among German people who were not Jewish, and hatred against people who were Jews or Communists; her mother's counter discourse to the discourse of the Third Reich; and her own internally persuasive discourse that would not allow her to completely conform to the expectations of others. Christa also writes about the tension she feels as an adult who is a mother, wife, sister, and writer who is narrating the past of her childhood self that she feels is almost inaccessible to her now.

There is no resolution among the selves that make up the "I" represented by Virginia and Christa in their autobiographical texts. They write about the inner tension that the "I" experiences as it struggles between opposing discourses, which is fundamental to their ideological becoming according to Bakhtin (341-342). Both challenge the Enlightenment notion of the self as seemingly continuous, stable, coherent, and essential as traditionally represented in dominant autobiographical practices. Instead they present a dialogical self, a collective of the many selves that are situated among competing discourses they have taken in since birth (Booth 51). An important element in their autobiographical practices involves adopting an anti-spotlight stance; that is, they consider the "I" in relation to the social network within which they lived rather than in isolation.

It is Virginia's view that "public opinion; what other people say and think; all those magnets which attract us this way to be like that, or repel us the other and make us different from that; has never been analysed in any of those Lives which I so much enjoy reading, or very superficially" (89). She demonstrates that she does not adopt the same egotistical sense of identity common to her father's traditional Victorian autobiographical

style, but rather considers herself in relation to others as part of a social network of people. Her use of an anti-spotlight narrative stance is feminist because it indicates her awareness of the influence of the people around her, the consciousness of other groups impinging upon her (89). She states that, "If I were painting myself I should have to find some--rod, shall I say--something that would stand for the conception. It proves that one's life is not confined to one's body and what one says and does; one is living all the time in relation to certain background rods or conceptions" (81).

Virginia's background mostly consists of the competing discourses of the world of intellectualism and of Victorian society. She acknowledges that she simultaneously participated in and objected to the discourse of Victorian society in her role as daughter and sister in an upper-middle class family. She also admits that after having learned the rules of the game of Victorian society so thoroughly, she and Vanessa never forgot them and never completely gave up playing the game, even when they were no longer forced to by their family. Virginia believes, "It is useful. It has also its beauty, for it is founded upon restraint, sympathy, unselfishness—all civilized qualities" (164).

The notion of "angel in the house," used to refer to white middle-class women only, was central to the discourse of womanhood in Victorian society. In "Reminiscences" and in "A Sketch of the Past," Virginia remembers her mother and Stella as women who were beautiful, strong in character, and self-sacrificing in their roles as Victorian angels in the house. Virginia's narratives of their lives are written with love and respect. She also has praise for Vanessa and her ability to carry out the duties of the angel in the house after the deaths of their mother and Stella, but she expresses sorrow over how different her sister's life would have been as a young woman, had she

not been forced into the position. In "Reminiscences," she imagines that Vanessa would have been more carefree, questing about her mother, trying one experiment after another, arguing, painting, making friends, etc. (63). Instead, when Vanessa was a young woman, she was tied down to running the household, serving their tyrannical father and, at times, fulfilling social obligations such as dinners and dances with Gerald and George.

Fortunately, Vanessa only had to fulfill these duties for a short time, before their father died and they moved to Gordon Square. Throughout *Moments of Being*, Virginia brings up the tension she felt between the authoritative discourse of proper Victorian society rising out of drawing rooms and from tea tables, and from the parties George and Gerald took her to; and the discourse of intellectualism that rose out of the books in her father's study, her lessons, and in her adult years, the gatherings of the intellectual men of the Bloomsbury Group. Even Virginia's room in her childhood home evoked strong opposing emotions in her. She describes the room as having a living half and a sleeping half:

[Y]et they were always running together. How they fought each other; that is, how often I was in a rage in that room; and in despair; and in ecstasy; how I read myself into a trance of perfect bliss; then in came--Adrian, George, Gerald, Jack, my father; how it was there I retreated to when father enraged me; and paced up and down scarlet; and there Madge (a family friend) came one evening; and I could scarcely talk for happiness; and there I droned out those long solitary mornings reading Greek. . . And it was from that room Gerald fetched me when father died. There I first

heard those horrible voices. . . . (136)

In "22 Hyde Park Gate," Virginia describes arriving home after a dreadful evening out with George at a party; he informed her that she was wanting in practice in how to behave to strangers. Before going to sleep she recalls wondering:

Was it really possible that tomorrow I should open my Greek dictionary and go on spelling out the dialogues of Plato with Miss Case? . . . I felt old and experienced and disillusioned and angry, amused and excited, full of mystery, alarm and bewilderment. In a confused whirlpool of sensation I stood slipping off my silk stockings over the back of a chair. Many different things were whirling round in my mind — diamonds and countesses, copulations, the dialogues of Plato, Mad Dick Popham and 'The Light of the World.' Ah, how pleasant it would be to stretch out in bed, fall asleep and forget them all! (193)

The following passage is another reflection upon the contradictions in her life:

There were so many different worlds: but they were distant from me. I could not make them cohere; nor feel myself in touch with them. And I spent many hours of my youth restlessly comparing them. No doubt the distraction and the differences were of use; as a means of education; as a way of showing one the contraries. For no sooner had I settled down to my Greek than I would be called off to hear Georges' case; then from that I would be told to come up to the study to read German; and the gay world of Kitty Maxse would impinge. (173)

In concluding "A Sketch of the Past," Virginia muses that the divisions in her life were curious. She states that in the drawing room the patriarchal society of the Victorian age was in full swing; but while downstairs there was pure convention, upstairs there was

pure intellect (167, 171).

Virginia's relationship with her father was another source of tension. She discloses feeling rage towards him when he used to display tyrannical behaviour towards Stella, and then Vanessa, and feeling frustration with not being able to communicate her angry feelings towards him. Her relationship with her father was one of ambivalence. While she had anger towards her father, she also had admiration for his critical mind and she enjoyed the attention he bestowed upon her because of her intelligence. His pride in her was evident when she read books that were beyond most children's understanding, and she recalls feeling as though the two of them shared something special together. She states, "And I remember his pleasure, how he stopped writing and got up and was very gentle and pleased, when I came into the study with a book I had done; and asked him for another" (123-124). She resented her father for accepting the conventions in Victorian societal discourse and using them as an excuse for his abusive behaviour, but she also appreciated him for offering her the discourse of intellectualism that was traditionally only available to men.

Christa, like Virginia, also represents the "I" as struggling among competing discourses. Christa depicts Nelly as a self-reflective child who was in dialogue between opposing discourses, and experienced tension as a result. Nelly mostly conformed with and excelled at what was expected of her at school, and at the Hitler Youth gatherings, but Christa also reveals that Nelly's thoughts were sometimes in opposition to what she was taught to believe. Unlike Virginia's text, beginning with memories of prelinguistic moments in the nursery, and then skipping forward to memories of herself as a woman who is critical of Victorian discourse, Christa's text concentrates on her memories of

childhood from four to sixteen years old. Most of *A Model Childhood* is based upon her years as a child who is just developing critical consciousness. When Nelly was five, Christa remembers her having mixed feelings during a large gathering of people hoping to see the Führer during his visit to the Ostmark district where she lived. People were drinking lemonade and beer, and calling out for the Führer according to the urging of the patrolling sound truck, in a display of powerful unity. Christa writes, "Although it frightened her a little, she was at the same time longing to hear the roar, to be a part of it" (45). Christa remembers Nelly feeling anxious, a mixture of excitement over and fear of being part of a strong, unified movement.

There are a couple of instances in the text where Christa recalls Nelly's tension as resulting in her having the sensation of being made up of very different girls. Even as a young child, "Nelly realizes that she is several different girls, a morning girl, for instance, and an afternoon girl. And that her mother, who has taken the well-scrubbed afternoon girl by the hand, to go to a pastry shop with her, on one of her rare afternoons off, hasn't the faintest idea of the existence of the morning girl!" (103). Her mother didn't know that just that morning she had taught Lutz a poem, "Did you see the man walk past / in a dark-blue coat / His shirt is bulging from his ass / with a heavy load. . . ," and that she made him take an oath that he would never recite it out loud (103). In the afternoon of the same day, she was appeasing her mother by pretending to read the sign on the café, even though she already knew the name, just to appear intelligent (103). The morning girl challenged authoritative discourse by teaching her little brother a verse that she knew she was not allowed to say, while the afternoon girl acted as though challenging the words of authority would never enter her mind.

Another time that Nelly feels as though she has split into two is at a birthday party held for her classmate Lori Tietz, the daughter of a wealthy noodle factory owner. At the party, Lori's father asks Nelly what her grades are, and then sighs and wonders aloud why Lori's are not as good. Christa writes that the explanation was on the tip of Nelly's tongue, Lori was dumb and lazy (131). Lori's parents ask Nelly if she would like to come do homework with Lori every once in awhile, and they promise that hot chocolate and games in Lori's beautiful playroom will be waiting for her when she comes over.

According to Christa, Nelly sees right through the Tietz's bribe. She writes:

Now Nelly experiences--not for the first time but hardly ever as strongly-- that she splits in two; one Nelly is innocently playing "The Jew has slaughtered a pig, which part of it d'you want!" while the other Nelly watches the others and herself from the corner of the room, and sees through everything. The other Nelly sees: they want something from her. They're calculating. They've invited her in order to steal something from her that they can't get any other way. Nelly, fused into one person, suddenly stands in the hallway and puts her coat on. (131-132)

Christa describes Nelly feeling as though the Tietz's were trying to steal something away from her with their request, so she fibs and says she has a stomach ache and that she must get home.

Christa also writes about Nelly's inability to reconcile her sense of duty to "serve" with Hitler Youth, and her uneasiness with how the organization was run. At first she threw herself into the singing, the athletics, the outdoor activities, and eventually even the role of a leader. Christa remembers the excitement Nelly felt when learning the word "comradeship" for the first time at Hitler Youth (189). Comradeship was stressed in the

discourse of the Third Reich, a loftier kind of life was the promise that comradeship held for the Germans, according to Hitler. The children were expected to participate in rigorous activities like athletics and hikes, so in comradeship they could display their fitness and endurance. When the day came for a cross-country hike that fell on the same day as Nelly's mother's discharge from the hospital, Nelly refused to let her father ask the Hitler Youth leader if she could be excused, even though she had been looking forward to her mother's return and secretly hated the hikes anyway (190). Being stubborn, she would not allow her grandmother to bandage her heels, even though she was prone to getting blisters, and she would not tolerate any criticism of the hike.

On the outside it appeared as though Nelly served the Hitler Youth with zeal, but on the inside she did not always feel comfortable with her role, or with what went on in the organization. On one occasion she had sent a written admonition to a girl from her Jungmädel unit who rarely showed up for "duty." Sometime later she ran into the girl and her mother on the street, and the girl's mother took issue with Nelly, telling her that a young girl like herself had no right to give her daughter orders. Christa remembers that, "Nelly just stood by, instead of insisting on her rights, hastily agreeing with the mother, because the side of her that was not standing in the street, but was looking down on the incident, was telling her that she ought to be ashamed of herself" (228). The sensation of looking at herself was common to Nelly, Christa tells us. One side of Nelly spoke to the other side "because she had developed the habit of watching herself walk and talk and act, which meant that she had to judge herself incessantly" (228). In Bakhtinian terms, we could say that one side of Nelly represented authoritative discourse and the other side represented internally persuasive discourse, and that the

tension that existed between the two sides is fundamental to her ideological becoming.

Another example of Nelly experiencing tension between a side of her who desired to serve Hitler Youth with no questions, and the side of her who was critical of the organization, occurred when a comrade, Gerda Link, was caught stealing marks from another comrade's coat pocket. The leader declared that Gerda had brought disgrace upon the honour of the Hitler Youth. Christa remembers Nelly thinking that she should feel only disgust with Gerda's action and enthusiasm for her having been dismissed from the organization, but she feels anxiety and even fear instead. For the entire winter afterwards, she did not serve with the organization; instead she obtained a doctor's note that exempted her for reasons of "chronic weakness of the upper respiratory tract" (193). She had become disillusioned with the organization. As an adult visiting her hometown with her family, Christa realized after leaving a café that was near the Hitler Youth house that, "Nelly never walked into that house without being overcome with fear and never walked out without a feeling of relief" (232).

Some aspects of the discourse of the Third Reich went unquestioned by Nelly because they overlapped with aspects of her internally persuasive discourse, particularly her belief that she should be hard on herself. We still see Christa being hard on herself throughout the process of writing her autobiographical text. Parts of Nelly agreed with the emphasis on the importance of German girls demonstrating strength, self-discipline, and self-sacrifice. Christa tells us that Nelly was always wanting to impress her teachers, Herr Warsinski and Juliane Strauch. Their ardent faith in Hitler's vision for the German nation caused them to be strict and strident, which appealed to Nelly, in their teachings of how to properly follow the Führer. Nelly remembers Herr Warsinski barking

out, "Our Führer works day and night for us and you can't even keep your traps shut for ten minutes," demanding that the children display the appropriate amount of self-discipline and respect for Hitler. Even though Nelly often felt she was a disappointment to Herr Warsinski, Christa claims that Nelly loved him (98).

Dr. Juliane Strauch was Nelly's history and German teacher; she was in charge of the library; and she was the leader of the National Socialist Women's Organization, playing an important role in the care of refugees, with Nelly to help her with auxiliary tasks. Christa goes into great detail about how Nelly spent a lot of effort in trying to impress Juliane Strauch, even more than Herr Warsinski. Nelly refers to her beloved teacher as Julia. "Julia! Julia!" Charlotte would say, "if Julia asked you to jump out the window, you'd jump, right?" (221). Julia was a role model for Nelly at first. Christa points out that among the women that Nelly knew, "not one led a life Nelly would have wished or might have imagined for herself: except Julia" (221). Julia insisted that she be addressed as "Frau Doktor" rather than as Fräulein, and she was the only female intellectual that Nelly knew. The fact that Julia found it unnecessary to be married and to contribute children to the German nation was also unusual among women that Nelly knew. Nelly was devoted to Julia, eager to meet her demands. Nelly was also strategic, knowing that Julia was not easily flattered. In order to ensnare the demanding teacher, she had to use subtle "looks, gestures, words, lines that lay within a hair's breadth of her true emotions, without ever fully blending with them" (225).

At the beginning of their relationship, Nelly was always in agreement with Julia, and was constantly seeking ways to win her favour. Later, she felt tension between how she treated Julia and how she felt towards her. Nelly first realized that she did not

always agree with Julia when she heard Julia sing a verse from a Nordic hero legend, "Accursed be the female race/ all treachery and lying/ 'tis for two wenches' smooth white faces/ that Burgundy lies dying. . ." (222). While Julia looked Nelly full in the face, Nelly saw that Julia hated being a woman; Nelly had to admit that that was not at all the way she felt herself (222). Thereafter, Christa writes that following the highpoints of exaltation when Julia would acknowledge her efforts with a hand on her shoulder or a nod, Nelly "collapsed on the stairs to her classroom and felt overcome by a sadness which frightened her and which she refused to acknowledge. It wasn't right that moments of the greatest bliss always ended in emptiness" (225). When Julia finally pronounced that she and Nelly knew what they meant to each other, a moment Nelly had vainly waited for, it lost its magic because Nelly began to have the suspicion that Julia was calculating.

Some aspects of the discourse of the Third Reich conflicted with Nelly's inner emotions at times. She struggled to summon up the hatred upon which Hitler's regime was built. Christa writes, "Nelly's hatred of Jews and Communists isn't quite as spontaneous as it should be--a defect that must be concealed" (128). On some occasions it was difficult for Nelly not to feel compassion, even though she was taught that it was inappropriate. Christa remembers Nelly feeling uneasy when she snuck off to watch the fire at the synagogue. She describes it as the first ruin Nelly had ever seen and she "couldn't help it: the charred building made her sad. But she didn't know she was feeling sad, because she wasn't supposed to feel sad. She had long ago begun to cheat herself out of her true feelings. It's a bad habit, harder than any other to reverse" (159-160). Nelly watched "the Jews" going into the burning synagogue, risking their lives

to save their treasures. What ran through Nelly's mind from what she had been taught was, "The Jews are different from us. They're weird. Jews must be feared, even if one can't hate them. If the Jews were strong now, they'd do away with us all," but she had not fully internalized it. Christa recalls that, "It wouldn't have taken much for Nelly to have succumbed to an improper emotion: compassion" (160).

Another time that Christa remembers Nelly realizing that she may not be able to fulfill her duty in hating Jews is when she overhears a family friend talking about "a Jew bastard" who was in his class when he was young. He tells Nelly's parents that he and each of his classmates would walk by the boy's desk and sock him one, "it was instinct, say what you will" (133). Upon hearing this, Nelly imagines "the Jew boy" as someone she knows, and everyone socking him one, including her. Then she thinks, or would I? She knows she absolutely must because it is her duty, but she cannot picture herself doing it. When thinking about the scenario, she discovers that she would not want to find out whether or not she would be able to do her duty. She comes to the conclusion that she could not hate someone she knows, "It's her fault. 'Blind hate,' yes, that would work, would be the only way. Seeing hate is simply too difficult" (134). Nelly views her inability to hate anyone she has been ordered to hate as a defect in herself because it is a duty that is expected of her and every other follower of the Führer.

Like Virginia, she adopts an anti-spotlight stance in narrating her memories. She challenges the Enlightenment notion of self by representing the "I" of her childhood as recognizing herself as a separate being, yet at the same time considering herself in relation to the social network surrounding her, a communal self. An important element in Christa's autobiographical practice is providing critique of the authoritative discourse

of Hitler as a warning about what can happen in a Fascist state; one of the ways that she achieves this is by exposing Nelly's inner struggle between competing discourses.

Resisting Authoritative Discourses

I think that Virginia and Christa represent the "I" as being situated between competing discourses that sometimes overlap, but sometimes are in direct opposition with each other. At times, the intense inner struggle that they experience leads them to directly challenge authoritative discourse through counter discursive practices. One difference between *Moments of Being* and *A Model Childhood* is that Virginia reflects on both her childhood and adulthood, whereas Christa focuses only on her childhood until the age of sixteen. Virginia uses the figure of "an/other" woman, Vanessa, to emphasize her own dialogized relation to Victorian discourse. She does this by describing situations in which she and Vanessa subverted the social conventions and codes of Victorian society, mostly beyond their childhood. Christa, on the other hand, gives more examples of her mother directly confronting the discourse of the Third Reich than herself because *A Model Childhood* is Christa's reflections upon Nelly's journey to her ideological becoming and to her ability to critique and resist cultural discourses. One similarity between Virginia's and Christa's autobiographical practices is that both provide feminist cultural critique through writing about their own or "an/other" women's experience with challenging authoritative discourse.

Virginia's critique of the strict gendered social codes in Victorian discourse involves describing her own and Vanessa's resistance to them. Starting from their

childhood, Virginia speaks of her relationship with Vanessa as being one in which together they tried to resist the socially prescribed roles placed upon them as upper-class Victorian women. As children they were what Virginia calls tomboys, "we played cricket, scrambled over rocks, climbed trees, were said not to care for clothes and so on" (76). She figures that part of her looking-glass shame probably came from the sexual abuse she suffered, but part of it also stemmed from the tomboy code that Vanessa and she shared since they were young children. According to the tomboy code, it would not be appropriate to enjoy looking at oneself in the mirror because it is what women are supposed to do. As they matured into adulthood, they continued to "form a close conspiracy" at Hyde Park Gate. Virginia informs us that, "In that world of many men, coming and going, in that big house of innumerable rooms, we formed our private nucleus" (157). When George implored Virginia to speak with Vanessa about what he viewed as inappropriateness in her relationship with Jack after Stella's death, Virginia felt honoured that he singled her out for help; however, after she heard Vanessa's side, she "at once wobbled from George's side to her side" (155). Virginia undermined George's authority in order to support Vanessa.

In "Reminiscences," Virginia recollects how Vanessa was thrust into the role of angel in the house after the death of her mother and of Stella. People immediately acclaimed Vanessa to be "the divinely appointed inheritor of all womanly virtues, and with a certain haziness forgot her grandmother's sharp features and Stella's vague ones, and created a model of them for Vanessa to follow, beautiful on the surface, but fatally insipid within" (64). Suddenly Vanessa had become her father's angel in the house. While she was competent at smoothly running the household after Stella died, she did

not wholeheartedly accept her role.

Virginia stresses in "A Sketch of the Past" that while Vanessa had to serve their father, she resisted the 'angel' role of trying to please and comfort him. Virginia's portrayal of a recurring scene between her father and Vanessa on "bad Wednesdays" illustrates some of what Vanessa had to endure. Every Wednesday it was Vanessa's duty to present the account of the household expenditures to their father. Her father would then go through "an extraordinary dramatisation of self pity, horror, anger. . . if instead of words he had used a whip, the brutality could have been no greater" while Vanessa would stand and wait in silence until he was done ranting (158). Had any of his sons been the one to give him the books, Virginia asserts that he would not have made such a violent display. He showed no shame, indulging in his rage before a woman because "woman was then (though gilt with an angelic surface) the slave" (159).

Virginia saw her father as having a dependence on women, always needing a woman to act before and to console him. She attributed her father's actions to the Victorian view that women's role was to be angel in the house. In "22 Hyde Park Gate," Virginia writes that her mother believed that all men required an infinity of care (180). Her Aunt Mary once whispered to her that her father was one "of those men who cannot live without us. And it is very nice for us that it is so." He was accustomed to the women in his life embracing the existing beliefs regarding gender relations in Victorian culture. Although Virginia's mother and her Aunt Mary participated in perpetuating the belief that women's sense of purpose came from serving men and from the amount of importance placed upon that role, Virginia and Vanessa were critical of it (159).

Virginia attributed her father's need for praise from women to feelings of failure

as a philosopher, and his attitude toward women. Her view is that her father acted brutally towards Vanessa because he had "an illicit need for sympathy, released by the woman, stimulated; and her refusal to accept her role, part slave, part angel, exacerbated him. . . ." (159). Vanessa's silence on Bad Wednesdays was a form of resistance. While their father hurled abuses at Vanessa and implored her to have pity on him, Virginia describes Vanessa as standing there like a stone until he would write out the cheque they needed for the household expenditures. Vanessa's silence made him feel ashamed of himself, and he would say to Virginia afterwards that she must think him foolish.

Virginia also writes about Vanessa's unwillingness to please George. He believed that part of Vanessa's role was to accompany him to dinners and parties that they had been invited to. In "A Sketch of the Past," Virginia recollects George flinging himself on his knees, sobbing, and begging Vanessa "in the name of her mother, of her grandmother, by all that was sacred in the female sex and holy in the traditions of our family to accept Lady Arthur Russel's invitation to dinner, to spend the week-end with the Chamberlains at Highbury" (186). Virginia writes that "the more Vanessa resisted, the more George's natural obstinacy persisted" (187). Vanessa's refusals to invitations were looked upon as acts of subversion by her family. Their Aunt Mary sided with George: both considered Vanessa to be callous, selfish, and unwomanly (187).

For the first year in Vanessa's role of angel in the house, Virginia says that George was usually the victor in their arguments over whether Vanessa would accompany him to the social affairs that they were invited to. Virginia claims the problem was the disparity between how Vanessa looked on the outside and what she

felt on the inside. She was only eighteen and beautiful in a white satin dress and jewels, “. . . a touching spectacle, an ornament for any dinner table” (186) According to Virginia, Vanessa only had passion “for paint and turpentine, for turpentine and paint” (186). When Vanessa came home from an engagement, she would tell Virginia about how boring it was being dragged from party to party, not knowing anyone. Vanessa loathed going out in the evening, performing the role of a proper young lady. Virginia recounts one evening when Vanessa sat through the entire evening without opening her mouth at a select party given by Lady Arthur Russel. Vanessa's silence was looked upon as a breach of convention by George and the others at the party. This was another instance in which Vanessa used silence, as she did when presenting the books to her father on Bad Wednesdays, as a strategy to resist the socially prescribed role of a upper-middle class Victorian woman.

On another occasion, Vanessa quarreled at length with George over whether she should have to attend a party with him. She got into the hansom with him, but they were both in an agitated state and never made it to their engagement. In the long run, Vanessa won the battle because George never asked her to go out with him again. He blamed Vanessa's behaviour for his not being happy at home, and then started asking Virginia to accompany him in the evenings instead. Virginia soon became tired of going out with him, so she disappointed him with her behaviour as well.

After the death of their father, George's marriage, and Gerald's moving to a bachelor flat, Vanessa sold their childhood home, 22 Hyde Park Gate. Vanessa decided that she, Virginia, Adrian, and Thoby, should leave Kensington and move to Bloomsbury. “We were full of experiments and reforms. We were going to do without

table napkins, we were to have [large supplies of] Bromo instead; we were going to paint; to write; to have coffee after dinner instead of tea at nine o'clock," writes Virginia (201). Virginia and Vanessa set up counter discursive practices to the authoritative discursive practices of Victorian home life. It was at 46 Gordon Square that the Bloomsbury Group formed and began to meet regularly. Meetings of the Bloomsbury Group, a group comprising Thoby, his intellectual writer friends from Cambridge, and Virginia and Vanessa provided the Stephen girls, as Virginia describes herself and her sister at that time, with the discourse of Cambridge intellectualism.

In "Old Bloomsbury," Virginia recalls Vanessa and herself being "in a twitter of excitement" when Thoby's friends first came to Gordon Square because they had heard many colourful stories about them. Their first meeting was late at night and Virginia says "the room was full of smoke; buns, coffee and whisky were strewn about; we were not wearing white satin or seed-pearls; we were not dressed at all" (205). Neither of the young women were dressed in fine clothes to meet these men, and none of their usual conversation openings seemed to do. The men had no "manners" in the Hyde Park Gate sense and most of them were not even attracted to women (205-207, 211). Virginia's and Vanessa's participation in the Bloomsbury Group was an act of subversion: they were blatantly defying socially acceptable Victorian discursive practices by their lack of proper dress, their meeting with a group consisting only of men, and their talking candidly with men about sex. One night Mr. Lytton Strachey pointed a finger at a stain on Vanessa's white dress and questioned, "semen?" (212-213). After that "sex permeated our conversation. The word bugger was never far from our lips. We discussed copulation with the same excitement and openness that we had discussed

the nature of good," Virginia writes (213). The meetings with the Bloomsbury Group revolutionized Virginia's and Vanessa's views about marriage. They no longer thought that fidelity was the highest form of marriage, but rather that both men and women could have lovers on the side. Their move to 46 Gordon Square opened up a whole new world for them, one in which they could participate in the discourse of intellectualism, and could devote themselves to their crafts.

Unlike Vanessa who used silence as a strategy to resist Victorian discourse, Charlotte, the figure of "an/other" woman in Christa's text, spoke out in disagreement with the discourse of the Third Reich, both in her home and in public. At the beginning of *A Model Childhood*, Christa establishes Nelly's relief and thankfulness over her family's membership with the Nazi party. She remembers the happiness of her parents overflowing onto Nelly, and lists the following emotions that were conjured up:

[R]elief (the unavoidable step has been taken without having had to be taken on one's own); a clear conscience (the membership in this comparatively harmless organization—the Navy storm troops—could not have been refused without consequences. What consequences? That's too precise a question); the bliss of conformity (it isn't everybody's thing to be an outsider, and when Bruno Jordan had to choose between a vague discomfort in the stomach and the multi-thousand-voice-roar coming over the radio, he opted, as a social being, for the thousands and against himself). (42-43)

Even though her parents appeared to be joyful, her memory suggests that her father felt some apprehension regarding the discourse of the Third Reich, and as the narrative unravels, there is evidence that Charlotte even defied it to the point of putting herself in

danger.

Not only within her own family, but also in public, Charlotte was heard a few times speaking out against the discourse of the Führer. Upon hearing that Herr Warsinski told his students that Jesus would today be a follower of the Führer, Christa recalls her asking her husband, "Don't you think it's pretty strong stuff he's dispensing to the children in religion?" (128). Her husband's admonishing retort was, "Just let him say what he wants. You can't stick your nose into everything!" (128) In 1944, Charlotte was talking in the store to three customers whom she thought she knew well, one of whom held a leadership position in the National Socialist Women's Organization. Charlotte announced, "We've lost this war, even a blind man can see that" (165). Three days later two men came to their house to inquire about what she had said that day at the store. Shaking with fear, which Nelly did not notice at the time, her mother replied "Never! Never did I say a thing like that. The war lost! Somebody must have misheard, and I mean mis-heard!" (166).

"The hell with your Führer," a remark made by Charlotte in front of the mailman delivering draft notices could have caused her even more trouble (166). Christa recalls Nelly wondering why her mother said "your Führer," and her father again warning Charlotte that her talk could cost them their heads. He told the mailman not to take his wife seriously because her nerves weren't the best (167). Charlotte's exclamation was an act of subversion against authoritative discourse; Nelly understood it as her mother deserting the Führer, who every German was supposed to have complete, unquestioning faith in.

During the war, Charlotte tended the store by herself and with a vengeance. One

winter evening, two policemen came to the store to remind Charlotte of closing time; she responded like this:

[S]he hurled her enormous bunch of keys at his feet with a grandiose flourish:

There, why didn't he lock up the store himself. Why didn't he take it over right now, lock, stock, and barrel, that would be fine with her, in fact she'd be delighted!

Why didn't he report her. Why didn't he close the store and look for a different manager. She, Charlotte Jordan, would love to take it easy for once and sit on her ass and live off her allowance as a soldier's wife. . . ." (200)

Christa remembers Charlotte's look of triumph as the policeman stepped back toward the door, motioning for her to calm down (200). "The state was obviously saddling her with more than she could be expected to handle, and oddly enough, this made it lose some of its power," Christa says about her mother's state of mind (200).

The riskiest act of subversion performed by Charlotte was placing some linen scraps, diapers, and old flannel cloths into a basket to be given to a Ukranian maid of a Major's wife to pass on to a friend giving birth in the foreign labourers' barracks (68). Nelly was not told what was going on at the time when the Ukranian maid first came over to their house asking for her mother; she didn't learn about the incident until long after the war. Nelly's mother never found out if the infant lived, but it was likely that the baby died lying in the rags in the women's camp. Christa recounts, "Great care had ben taken to eliminate all signs that might betray the origin of the rags in which the child was to be wrapped. No monogram, God forbid; otherwise, the two gentlemen who came to call on Charlotte Jordan two years before the end of the war would have appeared sooner" (68). Charlotte undermined the discourse of the Third Reich through her

counter discursive practice, trying to save a foreign labourer's baby. Instead of displaying the hatred she was commanded to show, she displayed goodwill at the risk of her own life.

"Force won't milk a bull" was one of Charlotte's favourite sayings (91). She, herself was like a bull, and Nelly was a lot like her (91). According to Christa, Nelly inherited her mother's strong will and stubborn streak. Nelly also resisted authoritative discourse on a few occasions. One evening, after a frustrating class with Herr Warsinski, Nelly demonstrated that she had the rage of a bull by throwing five pots of geraniums, one by one, out the nursery window, and then refusing to sweep up the pieces from the sidewalk (91). Christa writes that Nelly was beside herself with rage because Herr Warsinski had said that the Führer is spelled with a capital F. She disagreed because he had told them before that everything that could be seen and touched should be capitalized in the German language. Nelly argued that she could neither see nor touch the Führer; it was in 1936 before the use of television. Herr Warsinski demanded that she be sensible because even though she hadn't, she could.

Hating what she saw as a contradiction, Christa says that Nelly tested her teacher by not capitalizing the noun "cloud," on the grounds that it could be seen but not touched. Everyone else in the class capitalized "cloud" and was rewarded by being allowed to laugh at her good and loud (92). "But how can Nelly give in when she knows she's right?" Christa questions. Christa recalls Nelly's act of rebellion, taking the initiative to capitalize the noun "rage" "even though rage can neither be seen nor touched nor heard nor smelled nor tasted. She is finally listening to reason" (92). She was defiant, standing her ground even though she loved Herr Warsinski and always

wanted to impress him.

Nelly also subverted the discourse of the Third Reich by keeping silent regarding information that she had about the Jordan's maid. On the trip to their hometown, Christa asks her brother Lutz whether he remembers Elvira, their maid when they were children. She informs him that Elvira was from a family of Communists. Elvira told Nelly that they had cowered in their basement apartment and wept on the evening of the Communist flag burning on March 17, 1933, the day of the National Socialist takeover. For some reason, Nelly decided not to tell anyone what Elvira confided in her, even though it made her uneasy. To Nelly, "Communists were people whom SA men knocked down in the streets or mowed down with sniper bullets... Communists raise their fists, shouting "Red Front!" (52).

When Christa tries to figure out why Nelly did not disclose what Elvira had told her, she thinks that it was not so much to protect Elvira and her family, since it never occurred to Nelly that they had not afterwards been converted to faithful supporters of the Führer, but that it was to enlarge her own secret realm (57). Her mother used to tell Nelly that she was as transparent as a pane of glass, and that Nelly must tell her everything (57). It was important to Nelly to resist her mother's authority by concealing Elvira's secret, even if it countered what she had assimilated through authoritative discourse. Reflecting upon Elvira again later in the text, Christa claims that Nelly knew "instinctively" not to pass on Elvira's announcement that she and her family had wept on the evening that the Communist flags were burned because Nelly had realized that adults were avoiding sentences containing the word "Communist" (67).

A time that Nelly was in direct conflict with what she knew she should not

question occurred while she was reading an article in the paper, "Schwarze Korps," forbidden by her parents to read. The article was about,

tall blond blue-eyed SS men being brought together with brides of similar background for the purpose of producing a racially pure child, whom the mother then offers to the Führer as a gift, as the "Schwarze Korps" approvingly stressed. (Not a word that the same organization was engaged in large-scale child theft in the countries occupied by the German Army.) You clearly remember that the author of the report sharply or mockingly attacked the outmoded prejudices that found fault with the above conduct, conduct worthy of idealistic German men and women. (223)

Christa remembers Nelly thinking no, not that, "It was one of those rare, precious, and inexplicable instances when Nelly found herself in conscious opposition to the required convictions she would have liked to share" (223). Her mother was always warning her not to "throw herself away" and here the article was requesting her unconditional submission for the sake of the Führer. Christa recalls Nelly thinking that "anything connected with her sex was complicated to the point of being unbearable" (223). In reflecting upon this childhood incident, she asks an important question: how could Nelly have known that under the conditions she was in guilt was a necessary condition for inner freedom (223)?

After the war, Nelly worked in the mayor's office of a village they were living in at the time. It was her job to receive people in the office, and to give notices to people who were forced to evacuate parts of the village to make room for Soviet units. When the mayor was replaced, so was Nelly, by the new mayor's own daughter. Christa recounts

Nelly performing her last duty, to be present for the two days that a young Soviet woman doctor was examining all the German women in the village for venereal diseases. The women waited in a line outside the house where the examination took place, and Christa says that Nelly watched as men walked past them, grinning (367). Inside, several of the women cried. Christa writes that it was a significant experience for Nelly because, "for the first time Nelly saw how women were made to pay for the things men did to them" (368). Rape of women by soldiers was not uncommon during the war.

Although the village was being run by the Russians, Nelly had the courage to try to persuade the doctor to make exceptions, for the pastor's wife for instance, but to no avail. The doctor made it clear that Nelly would not even be able to vouch for herself because she believed that German women were pigs. Nelly opposed the doctor's view that all unmarried women should be virgins. Christa writes that "the vehemence with which Nelly opposed this concept taught her that she believed differently. But since when? And how? She no longer seemed to know herself. She loathed the oilcloth-covered sofa on which the women lay down, one after the other, as though on a conveyor belt. She didn't know what to do with her rage" (368). To me, the moment that Nelly sees that the women's suffering through the examination process is unjust represents her awareness of a feminist critical consciousness.

Virginia's and Christa's autobiographical practices consist of naming ways in which cultural discourses can be subverted. Virginia uses Vanessa as an example of "an/other" woman who disagreed with, and challenged the gendered social codes and division of labour in Victorian society. Virginia describes herself and Vanessa as having

been tomboys when they were children, playing sports and not caring about their clothes; and as adults they continued to share a close conspiracy that involved confiding in each other about their frustrations with their roles at 22 Hyde Park Gate household, and their desires. Together they moved to 46 Gordon Square as adults to fulfill their desires to write, paint, have intellectual conversations with writers and poets, and cast away certain social conventions such as taking tea at nine o'clock and wearing white satin. A new world was introduced to them where Victorian conventions regarding sexuality were dismissed and sex was discussed openly and frankly, and they reveled in it.

Christa writes about her mother's displays of disrespect for the discourse of the Third Reich as acts of subversion. Charlotte showed contempt for the authoritative word of Hitler in front of her family, the mailman, customers in her store, and even police. Speaking out against Hitler in public, and providing linen for a baby of the "enemy" were dangerous acts of subversion that could have led to severe punishment. Christa also writes about Nelly's acts of resistance: throwing the geraniums out the window in rage over her debate with Herr Warsinski regarding the capitalizing of certain nouns, not telling anyone about Elvira's secret, and trying to convince the Russian doctor that not all the women in the village had to be examined for venereal diseases. Although Christa does not explicitly make a connection between Charlotte's acts of rebellion and Nelly's, I think that Christa uses Charlotte as "an/other" woman who influenced her ability to critique and resist cultural discourses.

Moments of Being and *A Model Childhood* are examples of autobiographical texts

that contain feminist cultural critique. Virginia and Christa not only critique the authoritative cultural discourses that they grew up with, they reveal their struggle with them and the contradictions they saw in their lives as a result. Virginia writes about feeling as though she inhabited two different worlds while living at 22 Hyde Park Gate. There was the world in which she read her father's books, learned Greek, and debated with Thoby about Shakespeare; and the world in which she had to wear white satin, possess a certain manner befitting to a proper young woman, and hear women like her Aunt Mary claim that it is good that men like Virginia's father needed women the way he did. Virginia even describes her room as being divided into two halves that symbolized the two worlds, and how she experienced the opposing feelings of rage and bliss in that room. Christa does not talk about Nelly feeling as though she lived in two different worlds. Instead she writes about feeling as though she was made up of different girls, one who was eager to conform to what was expected of her at home, school, and Hitler Youth meetings; and one who was aware of herself as a being separate from others and who wanted to maintain her individuality even if it meant being naughty or secretive.

Virginia and Christa challenge the Enlightenment notion of the "I" as an essential, unified self found in traditional autobiographies. They use an anti-spotlight stance as a textual strategy in representing the "I" as a dialogic self, or communal self, that is affected by a social network of people around them. *Moments of Being* and *A Model Childhood* present Virginia's and Christa's memories of their journeys through the process of their ideological becoming, which led to their acts of subversion. They and their figures of "an/other" woman adopted counter discursive practices that were in

opposition to authoritative cultural discursive practices. For example, when Virginia and Vanessa moved to Gordon Square they drank coffee after dinner instead of tea, they often stayed up until one in the morning having heated discussions during the Bloomsbury Group gatherings, and Virginia exclaims that she even smoked a cigarette one evening (203). Christa describes Charlotte speaking out against the Führer, even in public, on a few occasions; hurling her store keys at a policeman's foot in frustration with all the work she had while her husband was fighting in the war; and axing the Führer's picture before she evacuated her home. Nelly refused to spell Führer with a capital F, she acquired a doctor's note to be excused from Hitler Youth when she was in disagreement with their forms of discipline, and she tried to persuade the Russian doctor not to check all the German women for venereal diseases.

Chapter Six Conclusion

I consider Virginia's and Christa's autobiographical practices to be courageous acts of subversion. They challenge dominant, essentializing practices of representing the "I," and they provide critique of authoritative cultural discourses along with discussion about how they adopt counter discursive practices to oppose them. Both use non-linear narrative forms; and an anti-authoritative stance, an anti-realist stance, and an anti-spotlight stance at times as narrative strategies that resist the notion of traditional autobiography. By problematizing and demystifying the acts of writing and remembering throughout their accounts of the past, disrupt chronology and they resist the position of author as authority. They also stimulate active readership by bridging the power differential gap that commonly exists in the relationship between writer and reader; a strategy that could be useful in a method for a feminist autobiographical practice. Virginia's and Christa's autobiographical practices exemplify ways to break through the limitations of the traditional autobiographical genre and they encourage women to identify with their lives, maybe even motivating some women to engage in their own autobiographical writing.

Virginia's and Christa's use of anti-realism also challenges the tradition of presenting memories as objective autobiographical truths. Virginia and Christa are critical of the role that memory plays in conventional autobiographies. They closely identify the acts of remembering and writing, and they present their memories as subjective. In her description of her memory of her first trip, Virginia admits to writing

that the destination was St. Ives, not because she is sure that it was, but because she likes it best aesthetically, and it helps to lead her into the next memory she wants to describe. She also admits to dreaming some of the details she gives about an afternoon spent with her mother. In a vividly detailed description of a christening of her baby cousin, Christa is ambiguous about whether she actually attended the event or whether it even took place. In the preface of *A Model Childhood*, Christa denies autobiographical accuracy of the text. Virginia and Christa (even more so than Virginia) cross and recross generic boundaries to blend the genres of autobiography, fiction, and history, modeling a new way for women to write their life stories.

Virginia's and Christa's autobiographical practices also contribute cultural critique that can be considered feminist because they deconstruct notions of womanhood in authoritative cultural discourses; for Virginia it was the discourse of Victorian society, and for Christa it was the discourse of the Third Reich. Both foreground socially prescribed roles for women and discuss how these roles affected women's sexuality. Through their use of an anti-spotlight narrative stance, they reject a reductionist spotlight attention to the self as a single unique subject that is found in conventional autobiographical texts. They consider themselves in relation to their family and to a social network of people, challenging an essentialist notion of self.

The use of the figure of "an/other" woman is another example of Virginia's and Christa's employment of an anti-spotlight stance. They discuss the counter discursive practices that they or their figures of "an/other" woman, Vanessa and Charlotte, drew upon in trying to resist the roles expected of them by Victorian society and by the Third

Reich. Virginia writes about how Vanessa used silence as a form of resistance against her father's rage and her step-brother's pressuring her to accompany him to parties, whereas Christa writes about Charlotte speaking out against the discourse of Hitler as a form of resistance in her home and in public, as well as trying to save the infant of a foreign labourer who worked in a camp.

Virginia describes herself and Vanessa breaking out of the shackles of Victorian womanhood when they moved to Gordon Square. They broke the social conventions that they grew up with in order to focus on their respective arts of writing and painting, and they entered the world of intellectualism that was conventionally closed to women. Christa describes an occasion in which Nelly had to be present for the venereal disease examinations of all the German women who lived in her village that was taken over by the Russians at the time. She considers it the time in which she learned that women had to pay for what men did to them. She tried to persuade the Russian female doctor that not all the women had to be checked and she opposed the view that all women who were not married should be virgins. Virginia and Christa display unambiguous political agendas of resistance in their autobiographical practices.

Moments of Being and *A Model Childhood* offer us new ways of understanding women's lives in Victorian society and in the Third Reich respectively. I think that because Virginia contests and deconstructs Victorian discourse regarding womanhood and because Christa does the same to Nazi discourse regarding womanhood, their autobiographical texts contribute to a collective vision of a more just world. My research may not obviously establish a connection between the topic and the achievement of social justice for women, that Eichler sees as being important to feminist research, but I

think that it does contribute to the creation of communities of women readers and writers which enables women's voices to be heard. Women's literature and women theorizing about women's literature has the potential to subvert authoritative discourses in current social and political systems, helping us to move towards a more just society for everyone.

There are further directions for future research that stem from my work. There are more questions that I would have liked to consider, but were beyond the scope of my project. The following is a list of questions that could be investigated in the future: When you take into account current politics of remembering, what are some possible ramifications of Virginia's and Christa's use of anti-authoritative and anti-realist narrative strategies in autobiographical texts that contain disclosures of sexual abuse and war crimes? Are there possibilities of therapeutics for women in writing autobiography? If we are recognizing a need to critique cultural constructions of "woman" then shouldn't we critique "feminist" as well, and if so, should we continue to develop an autobiographical practice that we have categorized "feminist"?

My research contributes to current feminist autobiographical criticism and to the development of a method for writing feminist autobiographical texts. Such a method might include the following strategies: using non-linear narrative forms; adopting anti-authoritative, anti-real, and anti-spotlight strategies for stimulating active readership and bridging power gaps between writer and reader; developing a sense of aesthetic truth as opposed to the traditional notion of "objective" truth; exploring dreams; blending the genres of history, fiction, and autobiography; providing cultural critique that

deconstructs authoritative cultural discourses of womanhood; developing a conscious practice of writing cultural critique; and exploring women's usage of silence and speaking out as forms of resistance.

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