Classic Poetry Series

Anaïs Nin

- poems -

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Anaïs Nin (February 21, 1903 – January 14, 1977)

Anaïs Nin was born in Neuilly, France, to artistic parents. Her father, Joaquín Nin, was a Cuban pianist and composer, when he met her mother Rosa Culmell, who was a classically trained singer in Cuba of French and Danish descent. Her father's grandfather had fled France during the Revolution, going first to Saint-Domingue, then New Orleans, and finally to Cuba where he helped build that country's first railway.

Nin was raised a Roman Catholic and spent her childhood and early life in Europe. After her parents separated, her mother moved Anaïs and her two brothers, Thorvald Nin and Joaquin Nin-Culmell, to Barcelona, and then to New York City. According to her diaries, Volume One, 1931–1934, Nin abandoned formal schooling at the age of sixteen years and later began working as an artist's model. After being in America for several years, Nin had forgotten how to speak Spanish, but retained her French and became fluent in English.

On March 3, 1923, in Havana, Cuba, Nin married her first husband, Hugh Parker Guiler (1898–1985), a banker and artist, later known as "Ian Hugo" when he became a maker of experimental films in the late 1940s. The couple moved to Paris the following year, where Guiler pursued his banking career and Nin began to pursue her interest in writing; in her diaries she also mentions having trained as a flamenco dancer in Paris in the mid-to-late 1920s. Her first published work was a critical evaluation of D. H. Lawrence called D. H. Lawrence: An Unprofessional Study, which she wrote in sixteen days. She also explored the field of psychotherapy, studying under the likes of Otto Rank, a disciple of Sigmund Freud.

Nin left Paris in the late summer of 1939, when residents from overseas were urged to leave France due to the upcoming war and returned to New York City with Guiler (who was, on his own wish, all but edited out of her diaries published in her lifetime and whose role in her life is therefore difficult to gauge). During the war, Nin sent her books to Frances Steloff of the Gotham Book Mart in New York for safekeeping.

Personal life

According to her diaries,Vol.1, 1931–1934, Nin shared a bohemian lifestyle with Henry Miller during her time in Paris. Her husband Guiler is not mentioned anywhere in the published edition of the 1930s parts of her diary (Vol.1–2) although the opening of Vol.1 makes it clear that she is married, and the introduction suggests her husband refused to be included in the published diaries. Nin appeared in the Kenneth Anger film Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome (1954) as Astarte; in the Maya Deren film Ritual in

Transfigured Time (1946); and in Bells of Atlantis (1952), a film directed by Guiler under the name "Ian Hugo" with a soundtrack of electronic music by Louis and Bebe Barron. The diaries edited by her second husband, after her death, tell that her union with Henry Miller was very passionate and physical, and that she believed that it was his child that she aborted in 1934.

In 1947, at the age of 44, she met former actor Rupert Pole in a Manhattan elevator on her way to a party.The two ended up dating and traveled to California together; Pole was sixteen years her junior. On March 17, 1955, she married him at Quartzsite, Arizona, returning with Pole to live in California. Guiler remained in New York City and was unaware of Nin's second marriage until after her death in 1977, though biographer Deirdre Bair alleges that Guiler knew what was happening while Nin was in California, but consciously "chose not to know".

Nin referred to her simultaneous marriages as her "bicoastal trapeze". According to Deidre Bair:

[Anaïs] would set up these elaborate façades in Los Angeles and in New York, but it became so complicated that she had to create something she called the lie box. She had this absolutely enormous purse and in the purse she had two sets of checkbooks. One said Anaïs Guiler for New York and another said Anaïs Pole for Los Angeles. She had prescription bottles from California doctors and New York doctors with the two different names. And she had a collection of file cards. And she said, "I tell so many lies I have to write them down and keep them in the lie box so I can keep them straight."

In 1966, Nin had her marriage with Pole annulled, due to the legal issues arising from both Guiler and Pole having to claim her as a dependent on their federal tax returns. Though the marriage was annulled, Nin and Pole continued to live together as if they were married, up until her death in 1977.

After Guiler's death in 1985, the unexpurgated versions of her journals were commissioned by Pole. Pole died in July 2006.

Nin often cited authors Djuna Barnes and D. H. Lawrence as inspirations. She states in Volume One of her diaries that she drew inspiration from Marcel Proust,André Gide , Jean Cocteau ,Paul Valéry, and Arthur Rimbaud.

Journals

Anaïs Nin is perhaps best remembered as a diarist. Her journals, which span several decades, provide a deeply explorative insight into her personal life and relationships. Nin was acquainted, often quite intimately, with a number of prominent authors, artists, psychoanalysts, and other figures, and wrote of them often, especially Otto Rank. Moreover, as a female author describing a primarily masculine constellation of celebrities, Nin's journals have acquired importance as a counterbalancing perspective.

Previously unpublished works are coming to light in A Café in Space, the Anaïs Nin Literary Journal, which most recently includes "Anaïs Nin and Joaquín Nin y Castellanos: Prelude to a Symphony—Letters between a father and daughter."

So far fifteen volumes of her journals have been published.

Erotic writings

Nin is hailed by many critics as one of the finest writers of female erotica. She was one of the first women to explore fully the realm of erotic writing, and certainly the first prominent woman in the modern West to write erotica. Before her, erotica written by women was rare, with a few notable

exceptions, such as the work of Kate Chopin.

According to Volume I of her diaries, 1931–1934, published in 1966 (Stuhlmann), Nin first came across erotica when she returned to Paris with her [husband,] mother and two brothers in her late teens. They rented the apartment of an American man who was away for the summer, and Nin came across a number of French paperbacks: "One by one, I read these books, which were completely new to me. I had never read erotic literature in America… They overwhelmed me. I was innocent before I read them, but by the time I had read them all, there was nothing I did not know about sexual exploits… I had my degree in erotic lore."

Faced with a desperate need for money, Nin, Miller and some of their friends began in the 1940s to write erotic and pornographic narratives for an anonymous "collector" for a dollar a page, somewhat as a joke.(It is not clear whether Miller actually wrote these stories or merely allowed his name to be used.) Nin considered the characters in her erotica to be extreme caricatures and never intended the work to be published, but changed her mind in the early 1970s and allowed them to be published as Delta of Venus and Little Birds.

Nin was a friend, and in some cases lover, of many leading literary figures, including Henry Miller, Antonin Artaud, Edmund Wilson, Gore Vidal, James Agee, James Leo Herlihy, and Lawrence Durrell. Her passionate love affair and friendship with Miller strongly influenced her both as a woman and an author. Nin wrote about her infatuation with the Surrealist artist Bridget Bate Tichenor in her diaries. The rumor that Nin was bisexual was given added circulation by the Philip Kaufman film Henry & June. This rumor is dashed by at least two encounters Nin writes about in her third unexpurgated journal, Fire. The first is with a patient of Nin's (Nin was working as a psychoanalyst in New York at the time), Thurema Sokol, with whom nothing physical occurs. She also describes a ménage à trois in a hotel, and while Nin is attracted to the other woman, she does not respond completely (229–31). Nin confirms that she is not bisexual in her unpublished 1940 diary when she states that although she could be attracted erotically to some women, the sexual act itself made her uncomfortable. What is irrefutable is her sexual attraction to men.

Nin's first unexpurgated journal, Henry and June, makes it clear, despite the notion to the contrary, that she did not have sexual relations with Miller's wife, June. While Nin was stirred by June to the point where she says (paraphrasing), "I have become June," she did not consummate her erotic feelings for her. Still, to both Anaïs and Henry, June was a femme fatale—irresistible, cunning, erotic. Nin gave June money, jewelry, clothes, oftentimes leaving herself broke. In her second unexpurgated journal, Incest, she wrote that she had an incestuous relationship with her father, which was graphically described (207–15). When Nin's father learned of the title of her first book of fiction, House of Incest, he feared that the true nature of their relationship would be revealed, when, in fact, it was heavily veiled in Nin's text.

Later life and legacy

The explosion of the feminist movement in the 1960s gave feminist perspectives on Nin's writings of the past twenty years, which made Nin a popular lecturer at various universities; contrarily, Nin disassociated herself from the political activism of the movement.

In 1973 Anaïs Nin received an honorary doctorate from the Philadelphia College of Art. She was elected to the United States National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1974. She died in Los Angeles, California on January 14, 1977 after a three year battle with cancer Her body was cremated, and her ashes were scattered over Santa Monica Bay in Mermaid Cove. Her first husband, Hugh Guiler, died in 1985, and his ashes were scattered in the cove as well. Rupert Pole was named Nin's literary executor, and he arranged to have new unexpurgated editions of Nin's books and diaries published between 1985 and his death in 2006.

Philip Kaufman directed the 1990 film Henry & June based on Nin's novel Henry and June: From the Unexpurgated Diary of Anaïs Nin. She was portrayed in the film by Maria de Medeiros.

Eserleri:

Waste of Timelessness: And Other Early Stories (written before 1932, published posthumously)
D. H. Lawrence: An Unprofessional Study (1932)
House of Incest (1936)
Winter of Artifice (1939)
Under a Glass Bell (1944)
Cities of the Interior (1959), in five volumes:
Ladders to Fire
Children of the Albatross
The Four-Chambered Heart
A Spy in the House of Love
Seduction of the Minotaur, originally published as Solar Barque (1958).
Delta of Venus (1977)
Little Birds (1979)
Collages (1964)
The Early Diary of Anaïs Nin (1931–1947), in four volumes
The Diary of Anaïs Nin, in seven volumes, edited by herself
The Novel of the Future (1968)
In Favor of the Sensitive Man (1976)
A Literate Passion: Letters of Anaïs Nin & Henry Miller (1987)
Henry and June: From a Journal of Love (1986), edited by Rupert Pole after her death
Incest: From a Journal of Love (1992)
Fire: From A Journal of Love (1995)
Nearer the Moon: From A Journal of Love (1996)

Risk

And then the day came,
when the risk
to remain tight
in a bud
was more painful
than the risk
it took
to Blossom.

Anaïs Nin

The Diary of Anaïs Nin, Volume 1: 1931-1934

"Am I, at bottom, that fervent little Spanish Catholic child who chastised herself for loving toys, who forbade herself the enjoyment of sweet foods, who practiced silence, who humiliated her pride, who adored symbols, statues, burning candles, incense, the caress of nuns, organ music, for whom Communion was a great event? I was so exalted by the idea of eating Jesus's flesh and drinking His blood that I couldn't swallow the host well, and I dreaded harming the it. I visualized Christ descending into my heart so realistically (I was a realist then!) that I could see Him walking down the stairs and entering the room of my heart like a sacred Visitor. That state of this room was a subject of great preoccupation for me. . . At the ages of nine, ten, eleven, I believe I approximated sainthood. And then, at sixteen, resentful of controls, disillusioned with a God who had not granted my prayers (the return of my father), who performed no miracles, who left me fatherless in a strange country, I rejected all Catholicism with exaggeration. Goodness, virtue, charity, submission, stifled me. I took up the words of Lawrence: "They stress only pain, sacrifice, suffering and death. They do not dwell enough on the resurrection, on joy and life in the present." Today I feel my past like an unbearable weight, I feel that it interferes with my present life, that it must be the cause for this withdrawal, this closing of doors. . . I am embalmed because a nun leaned over me, enveloped me in her veils, kissed me. The chill curse of Christianity. I do not confess any more, I have no remorse, yet am I doing penance for my enjoyments? Nobody knows what a magnificent prey I was for Christian legends, because of my compassion and my tenderness for human beings. Today it divides me from enjoyment in life."
p. 70-71

"As June walked towards me from the darkness of the garden into the light of the door, I saw for the first time the most beautiful woman on earth. A startling white face, burning dark eyes, a face so alive I felt it would consume itself before my eyes. Years ago I tried to imagine true beauty; I created in my mind an image of just such a woman. I had never seen her until last night. Yet I knew long ago the phosphorescent color of her skin, her huntress profile, the evenness of her teeth. She is bizarre, fantastic, nervous, like someone in a high fever. Her beauty drowned me. As I sat before her, I felt I would do anything she asked of me. Henry suddenly faded. She was color and brilliance and strangeness. By the end of the evening I had extricated myself from her power. She killed my admiration by her talk. Her talk. The enormous ego, false, weak, posturing. She lacks the courage of her personality, which is sensual, heavy with experience. Her role alone preoccupies her. She invents dramas in which she always stars. I am sure she creates genuine dramas, genuine chaos and whirlpools of feelings, but I feel that her share in it is a pose. That night, in spite of my response to her, she sought to be whatever she felt I wanted her to be. She is an actress every moment. I cannot grasp the core of June. Everything Henry has said about her is true."

I wanted to run out and kiss her fanatastic beauty and say: 'June, you have killed my sincerity too. I will never know again who I am, what I am, what I love, what I want. Your beauty has drowned me, the core of me. You carry away with you a part of me reflected in you. When your beauty struck me, it dissolved me. Deep down, I am not different from you. I dreamed you, I wished for your existance. You are the woman I want to be. I see in you that part of me which is you. I feel compassion for your childlike pride, for your trembling unsureness, your dramatization of events, your enhancing of the loves given to you. I surrender my sincerity because if I love you it means we share the same fantasies, the same madnesses"

Anaïs Nin