

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Anais Nin (1903-1977)

The Diary of Anais Nin

Anais Nin (pronounced “anna-ees neen”) began her diary in 1914 on a ship from Barcelona to New York. Her mother was a classical singer of aristocratic French and Danish parentage; her father was a Spanish composer and musician. But he was frequently unfaithful and had sent his wife, Anais, and two sons to New York, saying he would join them later. Anais began the diary as a letter to her absent father, whom she loved and admired but feared. It was years before she would see him again.

The diary continued for the rest of her life, finally filling over two hundred manuscript notebooks. It covered her schooling in New York, where her mother turned to giving singing lessons. It chronicled her years in Paris after the First World War, where her husband Hugh Guiler was a banker; her break from him and friendship with Henry Miller; her other friendships and acquaintances with a great number of artists, writers, psychoanalysts, and film-makers; her travels; and her numerous other writings and difficulties in publishing them. For Nin clearly wished fame and success as a novelist and critic (her first book was D.H. Lawrence: An Unprofessional Study), and once turned to writing erotica in order to support herself and raise money to give to friends. She also had conflicting impulses about the diary, which some friends urged her at times to quit. She wrote of it as being like an appeal to her father, a mirror, a window, a drug addiction, an obsession, and a form of dream and revelation of the unconscious. During the Second World War, simply keeping it safe was a serious problem.

Finally, in 1966, she published the first volume of *The Diary of Anais Nin, 1931 – 1934*, based on the manuscript volumes 30 to 40. But it was not a word-for-word transcription. Working with an editor, Gunther Stuhlmann, who, she said late, helped her “with the balance” and “structure” of the narrative, so she did not “get lost in the detailed work,”¹ she had cut out approximately half of the material. She also occasionally moved pieces out of the original order of composition, which itself had sometimes been sporadic, revised more or less- heavily, and even wrote things anew. The original material also included letters to her, excerpts from fiction, excerpts from friends’ diaries. And copies of book reviews; and these she selected, edited, and moved around as well. The result blurs simple distinctions between diary, autobiography, and fiction. Two critics call it “a journal-novel.”² Another prefers to treat it as really an autobiography.³

Volumes 2-6, taking her from 1934 to 1966, appeared over the next ten years (1967-76), and they were edited along the same lines. Volume 7 (1966-74) appeared in 1980, after Nin’s death from cancer in 1977. Between 1978 and 1985, *The Early Diary of Anais Nin (1914-31)*, not edited by Nin, was published in four volumes, “essentially in the form in which it was written.”⁴ It makes a useful contrast with *The Diary*, a basic difference being that most entries in it are dated, whereas in the *Diary* specific dates are dropped and entries are loosely identified only by month and year. Still another version of the diary is in *Henry and June: From the Unexpurgated Diary of Anais Nin* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986).

Representing such a massive work in just a few pages of excerpts is practically impossible. But the following passages give an idea of Nin’s passions for experiment and variety, for studying herself as a woman, and for friendships and social intercourse. The description of her costume for the masquerade “to which we would come dressed as our madness” is also stunning. It is a surrealist image of herself and her diary.

The excerpts below are from volumes 2, 3, and 5 of the six-volume *Diary of Anais Nin* (Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1967-74). Two useful studies of Nin and the diaries are Benjamin Franklin V and Duane Schneider, *Anais Nin: An introduction* (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1979), and Nancy Scholar, *Anais Nin* (Boston: Twayne, 1984). Claudia Roth Pierpont’s “Sec, Lies, and Thirty-Five Thousand Pages” (*The New Yorker* 69 (March 1, 1993): 74-90), is a thoughtful attach on her work.

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1. Duane Schneider, *An Interview with Anais Nin* (Athens, OH: Duane Schneider, 1970), p. 10; quoted in Benjamin Franklin V and Duane Schneider, *Anais Nin: An Introduction* (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1979), p. 170.
2. Franklin and Schneider, *Anais Nin*, p. 176.
3. Nancy Scholar, *Anais Nin* (Boston: Twayne, 1984), p. 15ff.
4. John Ferrone, "Editor's Note," in *Linotte: The Early Diary of Anais Nin, 1914-1920* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), p. ix.

Reading

Winter of Artifice

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