



Unexpurgated was the work published under Anaïs Nin's name after her death edited to create a sexed-up version of herself?



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Compromising positions

Laura Frost wonders if a calculatingly ambitious author's erotic adventures were sexed up by others

Writing an Icon: Celebrity Culture and the Invention of Anaïs Nin

By Anita Jarczok

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If the ambition for literary celebrity were conceived as a continuum, Elena Ferrante would be at one extremity and Anaïs Nin at the other, "a steel humming-bird...determined to be famous", as Nin's biographer Deirdre Bair described her subject. It's ironic, then, that the author of the Neapolitan novels has been hounded like Greta Garbo, while Nin's reputation has languished. A sensation when the first volume of her epic *Diary* appeared in the late 1960s, Nin was a cultural icon throughout the 1970s. However, the posthumous publication of her unexpurgated diaries revealed unsavoury details (including bigamy and an affair with her father), and a number

of high-profile takedowns led to the tarnishing of Nin's star.

But perhaps there's a reversal of fortune afoot. Ohio University Press has been reissuing Nin's works of fiction (full disclosure: I have written an introduction for one of the volumes), Sky Blue Press published a volume of newly discovered Nin erotica, two recent stage performances have focused on Nin, and a flurry of articles have made the case for her relevance as a female maverick for the internet age.

Anita Jarczok is an adept guide for the reconsideration of Nin, neither diminishing nor overinflating her subject. While there is a case to be made for considering Nin's fiction alongside Modernist writers such as Jean Rhys and Djuna Barnes, Jarczok's interest lies specifically in how Nin crafted herself and was, in turn, crafted by the literary marketplace and celebrity culture, and how she became a "fallen icon".

Taking up the perception of Nin as "a devout manipulator,

a liar, and a master of self-

promotion", Jarczok examines the ways in which Nin cultivated her image: for example, how she leveraged her relationship with the much more famous Henry Miller, and how, when submitting her diary manuscripts to prospective publishers, she appended a list of the well-known people about whom she wrote. However, Jarczok also asks: why shouldn't Nin have been ambitious? Why is she maligned for the same brazen self-promotion that was admired when practised by, say, Andy Warhol?

While Jarczok's detailing of Nin's successive revisions of her work may be of interest mainly to hard-core Nin fans and scholars, the chapter on "Success, scandal, sex, and the search for the 'real' Anaïs Nin" is a crucial contribution. She points out that "Nin as a sexpot" emerged only in the wake of the posthumous, unexpurgated diaries, including *Henry and June* and *Iceberg*, and that "not a single obituary mentioned Nin as a high priestess of sexual emancipation". Jarczok makes the fascinating case that the eminent editor John Ferrone,

along with Nin's husband Rupert Pole, "dramatically changed Nin's self-presentation" to one that was much more "preoccupied with sexuality" than the writings she herself approved. "A new vocabulary enters this purportedly unexpurgated diary. Nin ticks,

masturbates, swallows sperm..." In essence, Jarczok calls into question how much of the work published under Nin's name after her death represents the "real" Nin, and how much of it was a fabrication of others seeking to promote a sexed-up version of her. It's a bold argument that needs to be taken seriously. If Jarczok is right, it will have everything to do with determining whether Nin will remain "a major minor writer", as Bair called her, or if she emerges as an important voice for our moment.

Laura Frost is formerly associate professor of literary studies at Yale University and at The New School for Liberal Arts, New York City, and author of *The Problem with Pleasure: Modernism and Its Discontents* (2013) and *Sex Drives: Fantasies of Fascism in Literary Modernism* (2001).