

# THE INTIMATE BOOKS OF ANAÏS NIN: DIARIST AS LETTERPRESS PRINTER

By Emily Larned

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily Larned is an artist, writer, and letterpress printer who has been self-publishing since 1993. She is currently Chair and Assistant Professor of Graphic Design at the University of Bridgeport, Connecticut.

IN DISCUSSION OF THE FORM OF THE BOOK, privacy is often invoked.

Holland Cotter writes, “Books are created for one-on-one interactions.

They are, by nature, zones of privacy.”<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in constructing “a

critical metalanguage for the book as an artform,” Johanna Drucker

emphasizes the intimacy of books: the one-on-one encounter between

maker and reader, the concealment made possible by covers and of

closure, the book’s intrinsic “secrecy, intimacy, privacy.”<sup>2</sup>

GRAPH BY  
VAN VECHTEN



Anaïs Nin (1903–77), an American writer of Cuban-Spanish and French-Danish descent, understood these innate characteristics of books better than most writers, and through the creation of her handmade, semiautobiographical, deeply personal books, created works of great magnetism and power.

Anaïs Nin, a singular figure in twentieth-century letters, is perhaps best known for her close association with Henry Miller, and for her extensive, deeply introspective diary. Transformed by psychoanalysis and a subsequent relationship with Freud’s longtime colleague Otto Rank, Nin wrote surrealist, experimental, and deeply personal fiction derived from her own experiences. For a dollar a page, for a private benefactor, she also wrote sheaves of titillating erotica. With Nin’s permission, these stories were published posthumously. Although the erotic stories increased her notoriety and popularity, they may have diminished her reputation as a serious writer. While during the second half of her life she was married to two men simultaneously, it was her first (and lifelong) husband, Hugh Guiler, whose work as a banker financed her artistic exploits as well as those of Henry Miller and other friends. Guiler, himself an artist and filmmaker, appears to have been an enormously tolerant man, as well as deeply in love with Nin. His request of loyalty from Nin was that she not discuss him in her published diaries; she obliged and he rarely appears. When he is mentioned, it is only as an artist-collaborator under his pseudonym, Ian Hugo. While Nin’s fiction has a mixed legacy, her astonishing diaries, expurgated versions of which entered publication in the 1960s, established her as a significant twentieth-century avant-garde writer and an important feminist figure.

What is less known about Nin is that she was a habitual self-publisher. Throughout her life, she would continuously, obsessively republish a text once it had fallen out of print, creating many different books from one text. The poet and printer Alan Loney distinguishes between the words “text” and “book.” Although the terms are often used interchangeably in English, an author’s text (her words) is mutable of form. This slippery, shape-shifting text is contrasted with the particular material specificities of a physical book. It is these nontextual qualities—the paper, the type, the margins, the size and shape—Loney explains, that he found so compelling.<sup>3</sup> Today when a contemporary reader finds a book by Nin, it is often a slim, inexpensive paperback printed on cheap paper, with a glossy, ill-designed cover strewn with garish colors and art deco type. How different this reading experience is from hovering over the dark, hushed, carefully made letterpress editions produced by Nin’s own hands (fig. 2).

This essay focuses on the period in her life when Nin was an active letterpress printer and publisher, and is intended for an audience of book art practitioners more familiar with printing than with Nin. This

*Figure 1. Portrait of Anaïs Nin (1940) by Carl Van Vecchten, by permission of the Van Vecchten Trust. Van Vecchten’s archive, including his collection of Anaïs Nin’s books, is now housed at the Beinecke Library, Yale University, and was instrumental to this research.*

*Figure 2. Nin at the press in her Macdougall Street studio, 1942. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.*



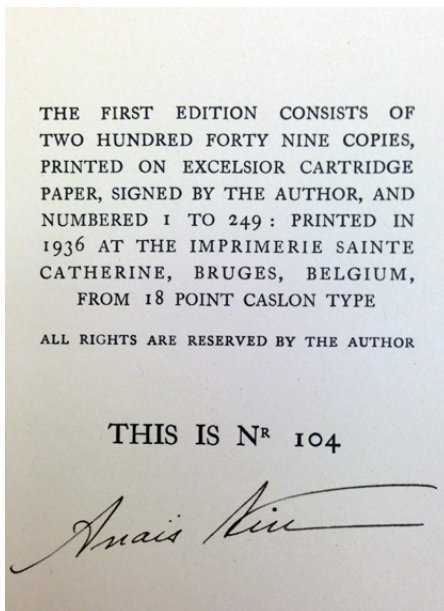
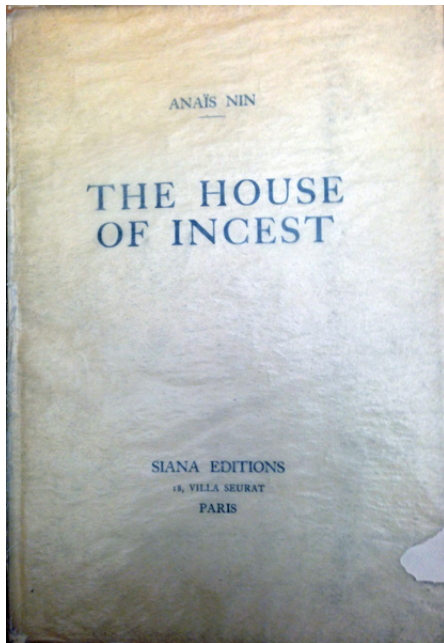


Figure 3. Cover and colophon of *The House of Incest* (1936), Siana Editions, 89 pages, 28 cm, edition of 249. This first edition is designed in a very plain style, with large type (18-point Caslon) and no illustrations. Photographs used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

essay is not a literary analysis of changes in the texts from edition to edition. Instead, it looks at the narrative surrounding the physical books, and at the books' personal stories. Their biographies. These deeply intimate objects, fragments of autobiography embodied by the hand of their author: What are the circumstances that produced them? Why did Nin personally reprint copies of books already published? As an already-published writer, what types of autonomy did she seek through this practice of independent self-printing and self-publishing? How did the meditative discipline of letterpress influence the writing practice of a diarist? And, ultimately, why did Nin stop producing her work in this way?

At the outbreak of World War II, in 1939, Nin fled Paris for New York. She was already the author of three published books. But in her diary she recounted to a friend the "lamentable story" of these titles: "*DH Lawrence: An Unprofessional Study*, published by Edward Titus a few months before his divorce, which caused him to go bankrupt. The book was but partially distributed, half lost, not sent to reviewers, and no royalties, not even copies for myself. Michael Fraenkel loaned me the money to print *The House of Incest*, but lost interest in it when it was out and did not distribute it as he had promised. No reviews. Lawrence Durrell backed the publication of *The Winter of Artifice*. Obelisk issued it a week before the war. No distribution. No reviews."<sup>4</sup>

As one might conclude from the fact that she borrowed money to pay for it, the Siana Editions version of *The House of Incest* (fig. 3) was self-published: Siana spelled backward is Anaïs. Obelisk, a Parisian press founded by Englishman Jack Kahane, famous for his business model that "if a book was banned in the UK or US it would profitably sell in Paris,"<sup>5</sup> published Nin's *The Winter of Artifice* (fig. 4). This book was the third and final in the Villa Seurat series, joining books by Nin's friends Henry Miller and Lawrence Durrell. Kahane was not an enthusiast of Nin's work, and this series was financed either by Durrell or by his wife, Nancy.<sup>6</sup> Kahane died nine days after Nin's book was released; World War II began two days before. *The Winter of Artifice* was, in Durrell's words, "swallowed suddenly in the blackout and the alarms."<sup>7</sup>

*The House of Incest* and *The Winter of Artifice* were both printed in tiny editions, funded by friends, and never distributed. In a sense, they had never been published: they were never made public. After Nin left Paris for New York, she was intensely lonely. She grew increasingly anxious to publish as a way to connect with others. This sentiment may sound disingenuous, but Nin was extraordinarily committed to her readers. In her diaries she often discusses meeting them. She stopped writing fiction toward the end of her life to be able to personally answer all letters sent to her by fans.<sup>8</sup> "That is my essential reason for writing, not for fame, not to be celebrated after death, but to heighten and create life all around me . . . I use the book like dynamite, to blast myself out of isolation." Nin saw her books as "portable bridges" she could "lay down between human beings"<sup>9</sup> and herself. As Henry Miller observed in a letter, "Part of the act of creating is discovering your own kind."<sup>10</sup> Publishing is both making public and making *a* public, a readership. At this time, Nin's intimate writing remained private.

Over the next three years, Nin found that getting published in America proved even more difficult than it had been in Europe. An old friend, Cresse Crosby of Black Sun Press, made plans to publish Nin's work, but the books never materialized. With larger publishers, Nin found a literary culture focused by war on politics and realism, and inhospitable toward her introspective work of psychoanalytic surrealist fiction. Publishers such as



Duell, Sloan & Pearce said her writing was “marvelous” but only suitable to be “published in a limited edition.”<sup>11</sup> Nin interpreted Houghton Mifflin’s rejection as an assessment that “the inner life is so trivial.” She wrote, “It is people’s inner demons which will create wars . . . it is the inner demon of a man which makes history. But America is still looking for the devil outside.”<sup>12</sup>

Nin had never intended to become a printer-publisher of her own work. Perhaps she wouldn’t have bought a press if she didn’t have the additional motivation of helping her boyfriend. For years, Nin had funneled her husband’s money to support Henry Miller and other artist friends. Her decision to establish a press was motivated by her maternal attitude toward her current lover, Gonzalo More. She was compelled to secure for him productive and meaningful work. He, a chronically underemployed communist from a wealthy Peruvian family, was intrigued with printing. His brother was a newspaper publisher, and as a self-employed letterpress printer, More would be both proletarian workman and romantic artisan. In December of 1941, Nin and More found a treadle-operated platen press for \$75 (\$1,072 in 2015 dollars). “The man said we could turn out Christmas cards on it, but not fine books,” Nin wrote, but “Gonzalo was sure it would work.”<sup>13</sup> Nin borrowed \$75 from one friend, and \$100 “for type and trays” from another. Then there was only the space to find: she delighted in a third-floor attic of a very old wooden house at 144 Macdougall Street in Greenwich Village: “It was a skylight studio, ideal for the work . . . it was old, uneven, with a rough wood floor, painted black, walls painted yellow.”<sup>14</sup> Rent was \$35 a month; in comparison, she paid \$60 a month for her apartment at 215 West Thirteenth Street. Nin and More bought “end paper, small lots which are not usable by big publishers, but ideal for us. Good paper.”<sup>15</sup> By January the press had been delivered to the new space, and they borrowed a book from the library on how to print. They decided that More would design and Nin would typeset; the first book they would publish was a new edition of *The Winter of Artifice*, her most recent work.

This new book was not a simple reprint of the Villa Seurat edition. The opportunity to revisit the text brought about a thorough rewriting, and a reconsideration of the collection as a whole. Nin substantially edited the text. She entirely removed the first story (based on her relationship with Henry Miller), making what had been the second story, “Lilith,” about her incestuous relationship with her father, the book’s primary piece. This story was recast from first person to the third: the “I” became “she.” Interestingly enough, Nin does not discuss these editing decisions in the diary. What she does discuss, in brilliant detail, is the influence of typesetting (fig. 5) on her writing and her pleasure in working at the press (figs. 6, 7):

Typesetting slowly makes me analyze each phrase and tighten the style.<sup>16</sup>

The words which first appeared in my head, out of the air, take body. Each letter has a weight. I can weigh each word again, to see if it is the right one.<sup>17</sup>

Take the letter O out of the box, place it next to the T, then a comma, then a space, and so on. . . . The writing is often improved by the fact that I live so many hours with a page that I am able to scrutinize it, to question the essential words. In writing, my only discipline has been to cut out the unessential. Typesetting is like film cutting. The discipline of typesetting and printing is good for the writer.<sup>18</sup>

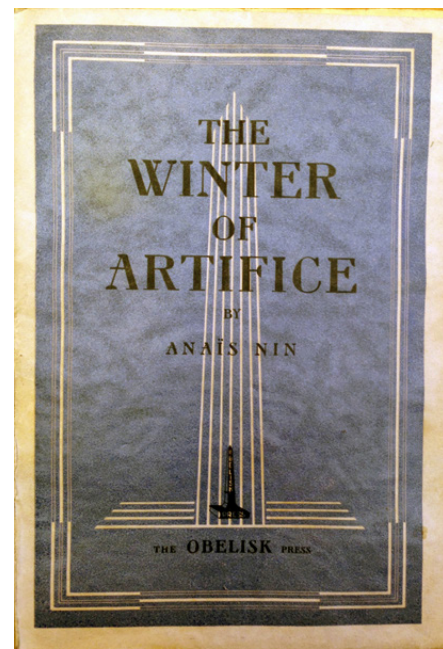


Figure 4. Cover of *The Winter of Artifice* (1939), Villa Seurat series by Obelisk Press, 239 pages, 30 cm, unverified edition size. The Beinecke Library gives the edition as five hundred copies, but its catalog record for this title is identical to that for Nin’s 1942 self-published edition (including listing the size as 22 cm, which is incorrect) and therefore may also be an error. This book is in the Villa Seurat series style: the other books by Lawrence Durrell (*Black Book*) and Henry Miller (*Max and the White Phagocytes*) are identical in design except for the color of the covers. Miller’s book was printed in one thousand copies, but as he was a more established writer than Nin or Durrell, he may have commanded a larger print run. (Obelisk had published Miller’s infamous *Tropic of Cancer* in 1934). Photograph used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.



Figure 5. Nin typesetting *Winter of Artifice* (1942) in the Macdougall Street studio. It appears that she typeset while seated. Photograph used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.



Figure 6. Nin printing *Winter of Artifice* in the Macdougall Street studio, 1942. Photograph used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.



Figure 7. Nin printing the covers for *Winter of Artifice*. In her diary, Nin mentions the difficulty of finding a bindery that would accept a job of unusual size and in a small edition. She does not name the bindery in her diary or in the colophons of her books. Photograph used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

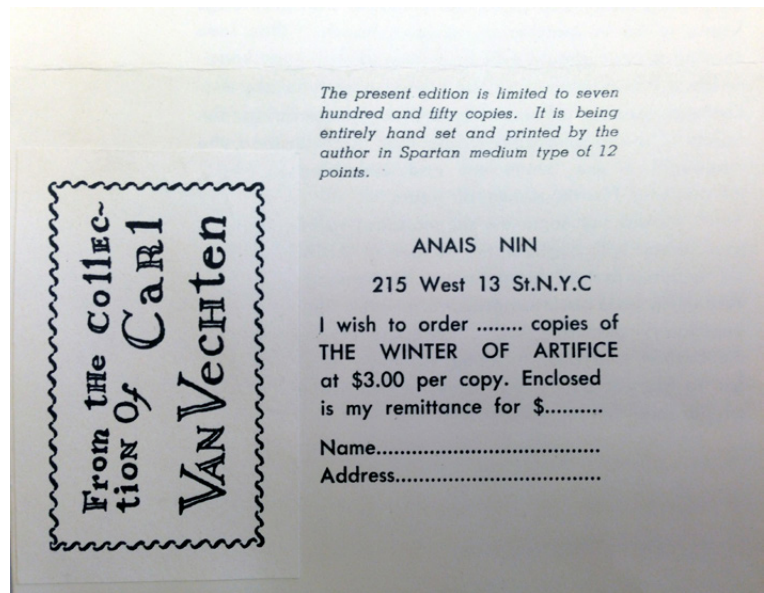
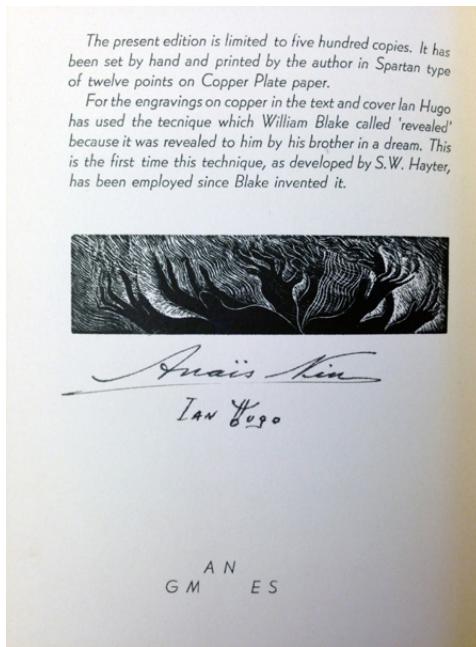
Nin found that “while I typeset one book, I am already writing another book. As fast as I typeset I also relive many periods of my life not included in this book.”<sup>19</sup> In a manner familiar to many contemporary practitioners, the slow deliberation of typesetting freed her mind creatively, allowing her to pursue the next project as she produced the current one. Still, the work was slowgoing. When she began, it took “an hour and a half to typeset half a page.”<sup>20</sup> But instead of feeling frustrated, she wrote: “The creation of an individual world, an act of independence, such as the work at the press, is a marvelous cure for anger and frustration. The insults of the publishers, the rejections, the ignorance, all are forgotten. I love the studio. I get up with eager curiosity. The press is a challenge. We make mistakes.”<sup>21</sup>

Misreading the library book, they thought “oiling the rollers” meant applying oil *on* the rollers. They couldn’t print for a day. Nin set a page too loose and the type fell from the chase, pried on the floor. She writes, “We learned the hard way, by experience, without a teacher. Testing, inventing, seeking, struggling. . . . We dreamt, ate, talked, slept with the press.”<sup>22</sup> Nin and More read all the books about printing in the library. When not printing, they studied the history of typefaces. “The press mobilized our energies, and is a delight. At the end of the day you can see your work, weigh it, it is done, it exists.”<sup>23</sup> Nin wrote:

I want to work. The relationship to handcraft is a beautiful one. You are related bodily to a solid block of metal letters, to the weight of the trays, to the adroitness of spacing, to the tempo and temper of the machine. You acquire some of the weight and solidity of the metal, the strength and power of the machine. Each triumph is a conquest by the body, fingers, muscles. You live with your hands, in acts of physical deftness. You pit your faculties against concrete problems. The victories are concrete, definable, touchable. A page of perfect printing. You can touch the page you wrote. We exult in what we master and discover. Instead of using one’s energy in a void, against frustrations, in anger against publishers, I use it on the press, type, paper, a source of energy. Solving problems, technical, mechanical problems. *Which can be solved.*<sup>24</sup>

When *Winter of Artifice* was complete, it was sold at Frances Steloff’s Gotham Book Mart. Nin wrote, “The book created a sensation by its beauty. The typography by Gonzalo, the engravings by Ian Hugo were unique.” Within a month, “Without advertising or reviews, the entire edition sold.”<sup>25</sup> According to the diary, this edition comprised three





hundred copies. The book's colophon (fig. 8), however, claims there were five hundred copies. Regardless of the final edition size, the intended run was much larger: the advance prospectus (fig. 9) boasts of an edition of seven hundred fifty books. This same prospectus offers *Winter of Artifice* for three dollars a copy (forty-three in 2015 dollars).

The book possesses a disarming beauty. Perhaps because of Nin's lasting legacy, and the care and attention she lavished on both the writing and the physical production of the book, it radiates what Drucker describes in *The Century of Artists' Books* as "an auratic quality, an often inexplicable air of power, attraction, or uniqueness . . . a mystique, a sense of charged presence."<sup>26</sup> While not an artist's book, Nin's book is powerful as an artifact. Like many auratic books, it is deeply tied to her "personal history."<sup>27</sup> The entrenched *intimacy* of this book, of its deepest psychological roots, its autobiographical stories, Nin's painstaking rewriting of it while at the type case: all the eccentricities or so-called errors of the book feel urgent and necessary.

Gone are the ample proportions of the Villa Seurat series; the trim size of Nin's handmade edition is considerably more portable. This new edition is darker, more intimate, more personal, with a surprising heft. The cover (fig. 10) is a dark and smoky engraving by Ian Hugo (Nin's husband Hugh Guiler) that wraps around, encompassing front, back, spine. Both the spine and the front cover are titled with loose, free hand-lettered script as part of the engraving, emphasizing the deeply personal nature of the book. Opening the book reveals a substantial bottom margin, a full five centimeters, nearly double the top and outer margin (fig. 11). The typeface is a medium-weight sans serif, Spartan Medium 12 point, creating a black, austere, and modern-looking page. Spartan Light italic is used for emphasis and for some interior monologues; in comparison, its lighter color on the page looks anemic and gray. New paragraphs are gently indicated by an em space. Nin uses the typing convention of two spaces—or perhaps an em space—after all punctuation, resulting in typographic rivers throughout the book. Hyphens have been substituted for quotation marks to indicate dialogue. Likely there were insufficient apostrophes and commas in Nin's cases to set the dialogue in the conventional manner. The presswork is uneven throughout, varying from too light to too heavy. Hugo's six copper line engravings were printed relief using William Blake's technique, according to the colophon (fig. 8). They are printed in black ink, two to three inches in size. They mostly pose as chapter heads or tails, but one is inserted into the text block such that the text awkwardly wraps around it. There are widows and orphans and typos, such as "sadi" for "said" (p. 35), and incorrect word breaks such as "na-mes" (p. 20). Neither Nin nor More was a native English speaker,

Figure 8. Colophon of *Winter of Artifice*. Of the initials at the bottom of the page, the identities of GM and AN are clear, but who or what is ES? Used by permission of the Anais Nin Trust.

Figure 9. Advance prospectus for *Winter of Artifice*, offering it for pre-sale for three dollars a copy. Here the edition is cited as 750 copies, while the book's colophon states 500 and Nin's diary claims 300. Used by permission of the Anais Nin Trust.

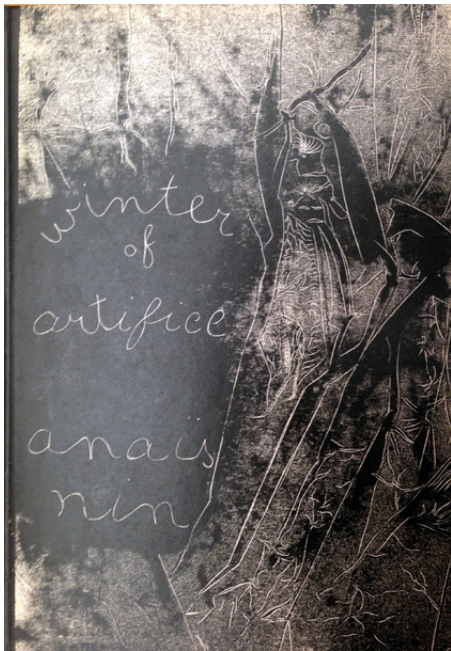


Figure 10. Cover of *Winter of Artifice* (1942), 156 pages, 22 cm, edition of five hundred copies. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

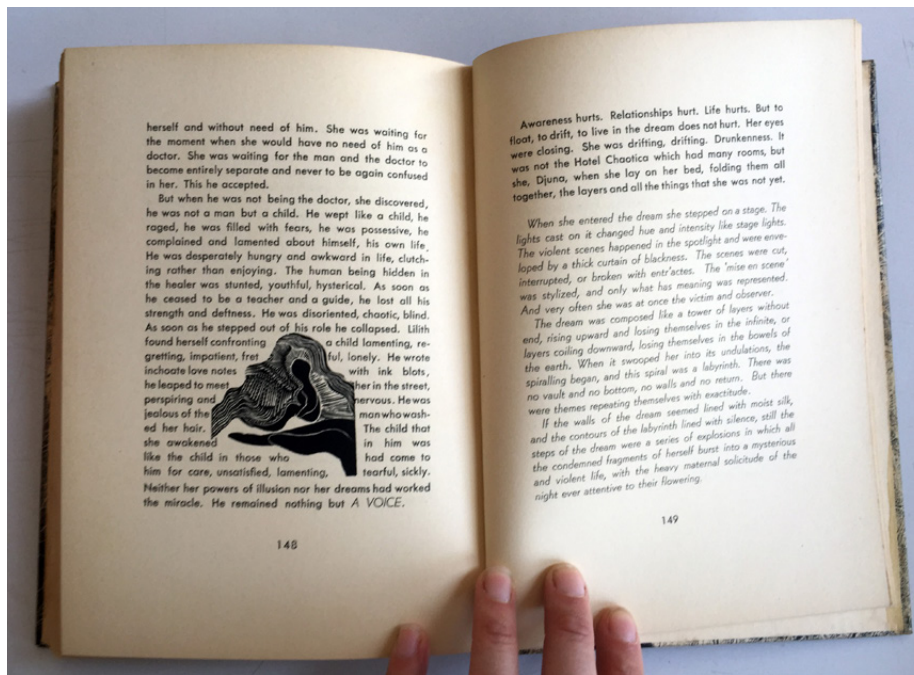


Figure 11. Spread from *Winter of Artifice*. Note the awkwardly tight text wrap around the image, and the surprising use of light italic for emphasis. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

and Nin sometimes fretted over her command of what she called “technical” English. Many of the book’s design decisions appear to be motivated by pragmatism, and the gestalt of the book is a power difficult to articulate. Holland Cotter wrote of Emily Dickinson’s handmade fascicles that in addition to their intimacy he was struck by their “independence of mind, the self-sufficiency, the self-confidence.”<sup>28</sup> While markedly different from Dickinson’s works, this spirit also imbues *Winter of Artifice*.

Nin established the press to print her own work, but she was also interested in publishing other artists and writers in her circle. In her diary she mentions that her press printed books by Max Ernst and Hugh Chisolm, but she does not discuss the details of their production or their titles. She found operating the press as a business difficult. By June of 1943, the rent was four months overdue.

Nin’s next self-published book was a collection of older, fantastical stories she had written before the Spanish Civil War, *Under a Glass Bell* (fig. 12). These stories had been previously published in little magazines. In the front matter, Nin writes, “Acknowledgement is here made to the editors of *Twice a Year*, *Experimental Review*, *Purpose*, *Matrix*, *The Phoenix*, *Diogenes*, *Delta Seven* for permission to reprint stories first published in their pages.”<sup>29</sup> According to the book’s colophon, Nin handset the type, and the Gemor Press designed and printed it.

Of Nin’s self-published letterpress editions, *Under a Glass Bell* is the masterpiece. While *Winter of Artifice* has auratic power, *Under a Glass Bell* is extraordinarily compelling. A narrow and slim volume, its proportions are more elegant than its predecessor’s. The book has a genuinely intimate, magical quality. Its cover is another dusky, inky wraparound engraving by Ian Hugo, but this time without his lettering identifying the title or the author on the cover or spine. A 10-point Bernhard Gothic Light italic type is used consistently for all text throughout. Nin spelled out the page numbers in the same type but in a smaller size, and while doing so made at least one endearing typo (fig. 13). Despite the narrower trim size, *Bell’s* column measure is 21 picas to *Winter’s* 23: the margin was reduced more than the line length (fig. 14). Still evident is a generous bottom margin, but the other margins have become far tighter and often vary. The text block is very tight to the outer edge when illustrations accompany the text. There are eleven more illustrations than in *Winter of Artifice*, and they are inserted awkwardly close to the text block: these spaces are too



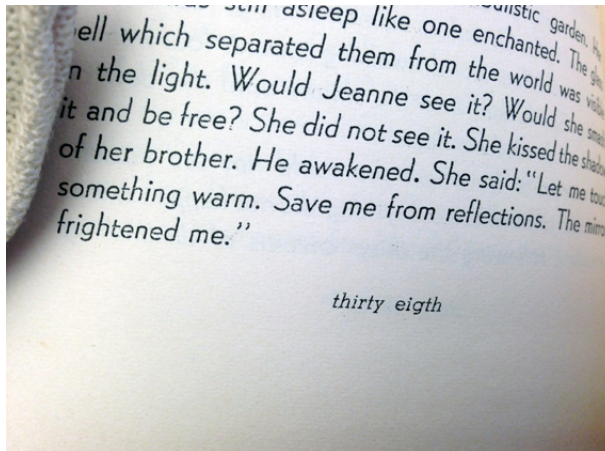
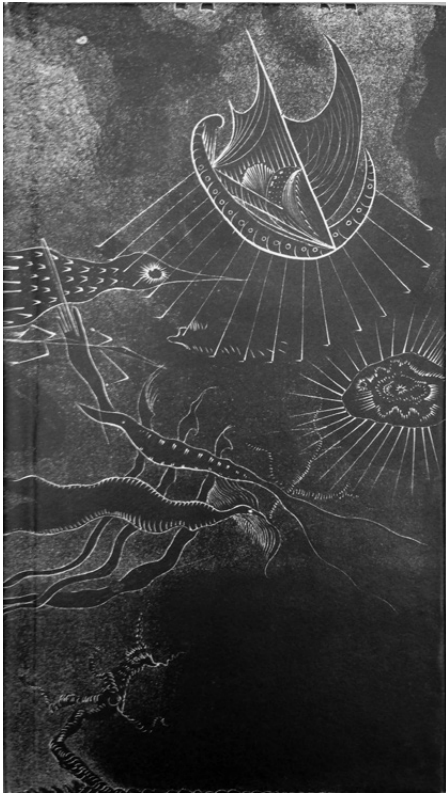


Figure 13. Under a Glass Bell. Endearing typo in the spelled-out folio. There is at least one other typo, on page 83: “eyelashss” for “eyelashes.” Photograph used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

Figure 12. Cover of Under a Glass Bell (1944), Gemor Press, 83 pages, 22 cm, edition three hundred. In addition to the gorgeous wraparound cover by Ian Hugo, the book contains seventeen of his engravings from copper plates. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

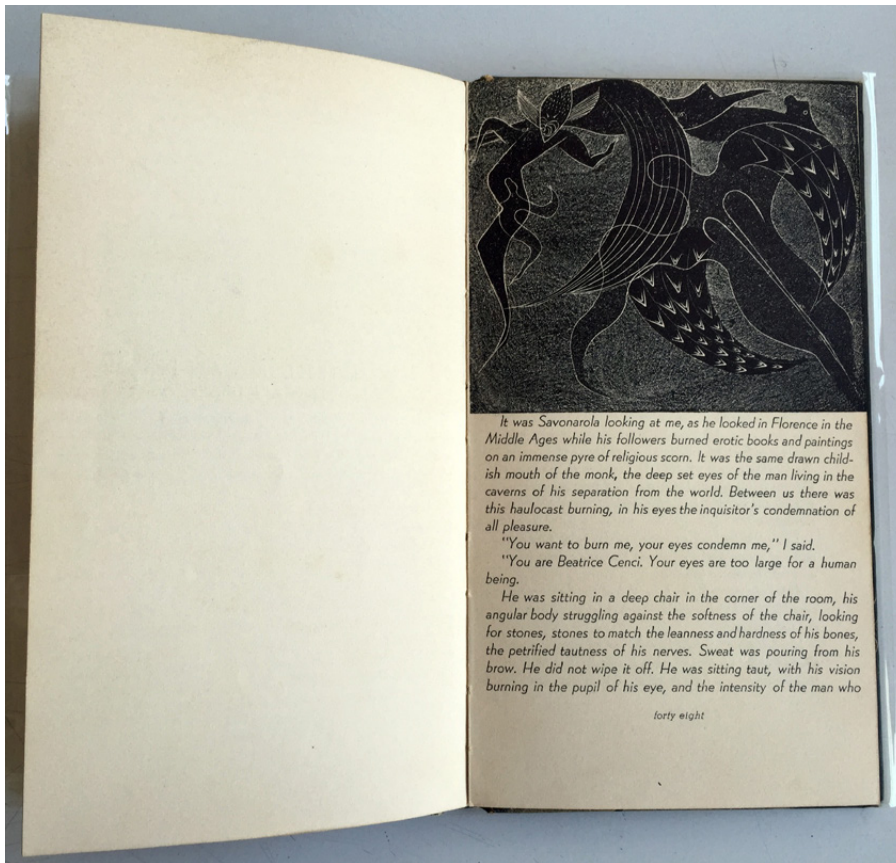


Figure 14. Page spread from Under a Glass Bell, with blank verso. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.



tight and not fully integrated with the design. A blank verso greets each story's minimal title page, and a blank verso repeats on the following spread while the story begins on the recto. This generous use of space results in flashes of blank pages when flipping through the book. But despite its idiosyncrasies, or perhaps because of them, *Under a Glass Bell* succeeds in creating its own gorgeous world for Nin's intimate, confessional, dreamlike stories.

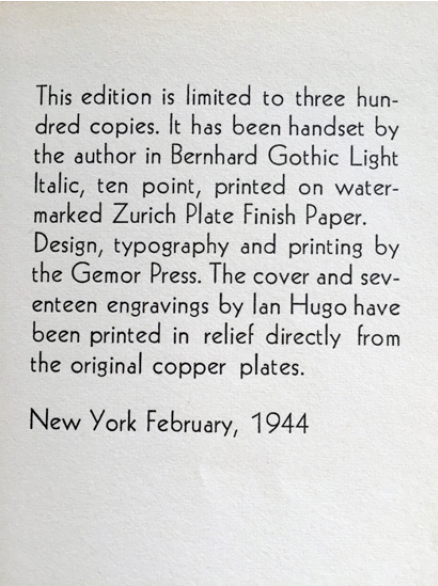
Nin's and More's achievement was very well received. *Under a Glass Bell*, which was favorably reviewed by Edmund Wilson in the *New Yorker*, sold out in three weeks. The brisk sale motivated them to create a second edition in Linotype, with fewer illustrations, in a much larger edition of eight hundred. But despite these triumphs, Nin reported, "The money from the sale of the book did not relieve the economic pressures."<sup>30</sup>

At this time, More told Nin that he was not satisfied working as a printer; he still felt a failure; he did not want to continue operating her private press. Nin's selfless motive for maintaining the press vanished. She felt "utterly sad."<sup>31</sup> The press was in crisis and its future was uncertain.

Nin decided to make "Gonzalo the head of a commercial press, able to print whatever came his way. It would be his press, bear his name, and he would have the freedom to use it as he wished . . . his friends will say 'that is Gonzalo's press.' It would no longer seem like an extension of my work."<sup>32</sup> Nin borrowed money from a bank, and they bought a bigger press and moved the shop to a small, two-story, green house recently vacated by *The Villager*, a Greenwich Village newspaper, at 17 East Thirteenth Street, for sixty-five dollars a month. Nin immediately mourned the loss of her studio: "Gonzalo did not realize how difficult it was for me to relinquish the intimate personal press, not open to the public. But I think it was necessary for him to be free and dissociated from my work and romantic projects."<sup>33</sup>

It was only then, according to her diary, that the press adopted the name Gemor Press, for Gonzalo More. But Gemor Press is already the imprint named in the first edition of *Under a Glass Bell* (fig. 15). This book was printed before More's crisis, the bank loan, the purchase of the bigger press, and the move to East Thirteenth Street. The exact chronology of these events and More's ownership of the press is unclear.

In a letter at this time, Henry Miller wrote to Nin, "Your two books from your own press are causing a stir everywhere. You should never have to hand-set type again. People should come to you, and they will, offering to do this work for you. Have faith."<sup>34</sup> In this letter, Miller appears to be ignorant of Nin's passion for the processes of typesetting, printing, and bookmaking. Perhaps Miller, in his self-assumption, misread Nin. But six months after the establishment of More's commercial press, Nin wrote that she was "smothering under the weight of the press": no longer autonomous, no longer just producing her own work and that of her friends, she now felt alienated from her labor at what had become More's press. "Now I work at the press instead of being self-sustaining. If I left Gonzalo alone, would the press collapse? It is I who go there in time to receive the delivery of paper. It is I who pull the proofs for the exigent French client due at four o'clock. It is I who clean the machine left dirty by Gonzalo the night before. Gonzalo likes to design the books, to talk with the clients. As soon as there is a mountainous job, he leaves it to me."<sup>35</sup>



This edition is limited to three hundred copies. It has been handset by the author in Bernhard Gothic Light Italic, ten point, printed on water-marked Zurich Plate Finish Paper. Design, typography and printing by the Gemor Press. The cover and seventeen engravings by Ian Hugo have been printed in relief directly from the original copper plates.

New York February, 1944

Figure 15. The colophon of *Under a Glass Bell* clearly names Gemor Press, despite Nin's claim that the name came later. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.



ave to begin where everything begins, in the b  
and in the shadows. I have to begin the stor  
n's development where all things begin: in nat  
e roots. It is necessary to return to the origi  
ion, which is woman's struggle to understand  
nature. Man struggled with nature, fought  
nts with his objectivity, his inventions, and mast  
Woman has not been able to organize her  
, her simoons, her tornadoes, her obscuranti  
se she lacked the eye of consciousness. She  
. Man did not help her in this because his i  
ions, whether psychological, or intellectual  
e, did not seize her. And she could not speak  
f.  
ay marvellous women speak for themselves in t  
toic action, integrating the woman, mother,  
monious relation to history, to larger worlds o  
cience. But many more, when entering actio  
on, followed man's patterns and could not c  
or integrate within them the feminine par  
elves. Action and creation, for woman, was  
an imitation of man. In this imitation of man  
contact with her nature and her relation to man.  
n appears only partially in this first volume, bec  
e woman at war with herself.

Still, as More accepted the commissions that Nin found herself executing as an “assistant,” they also published Nin’s new book, *This Hunger* (fig. 16), in September of 1945.

*This Hunger*, a collection of psychological portraits of female characters, immediately departs from the style established by the first two books. Gone, too, is the auratic power. While *This Hunger*’s interior is illustrated with five prints by Nin’s loyal husband, the cover type and illustration are printed in burgundy ink, losing the dusky richness of the previous covers printed in black. Hugo’s illustrations, this time from woodblocks rather than copper engravings printed relief, are less rich, less smoky and dreamlike, less atmospheric. For the first time type (rather than Hugo’s lettering) appears on the book’s cover: Huxley, a popular art deco face. Most tellingly, the book was not handset by Nin. Instead, she published a limited-edition portfolio of Hugo’s woodblock prints to finance the purchase of Linotype slugs for the edition.<sup>36</sup> However, Nin was very involved in the book’s printing: “Today, after printing heavily and hard, I felt the machine giving me back strength. I felt the lead, too heavy to carry, giving me back power. I left the work elated.”<sup>37</sup> This book was Nin’s largest edition to date: one thousand copies. Perhaps foreknowledge of the work required by such a large edition resulted in a comparatively lackluster volume. In particular, the printing is rather poor (fig. 17).

Within two months of *This Hunger*’s release, publishers began calling Nin: Random House, Harper’s, Viking. But they were not asking to publish her stories as they stood. Instead, one said, “Yes, you have great talent. But do you think the next book might be . . . more of a novel . . . according to orthodox forms?”<sup>38</sup> Another elaborated on the specific developments they’d like to see: a novel “with a beginning and an end.”<sup>39</sup> Nin wrote: “I am both happy and sad. I do not like their world, their values. I want to keep my sincerity. It means a harder battle, not like the one with my small press, my debts, overwork, but one against values I do not believe in. . . . The struggle with money and the press is nothing compared with the more subtle struggle against accepting money for compromising.”<sup>40</sup> She rejected all the publishers’ offers, until her new friend, a very young but very well-connected Gore Vidal, recommended her to Dutton. She signed a contract

Figure 16. *This Hunger* (1945), Gemor Press, 183 pages, 21 cm, regular edition of one thousand copies. The colophon also mentions a “deluxe” edition of fifty copies, not held at the Beinecke. It is unclear if this deluxe copy is the same as the “portfolio of prints” that Nin discusses in the diary. Regardless, Nin reported that the book sold out in three months. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

Figure 17. *This Hunger*. Detail of less-than-optimal inking. Image used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.



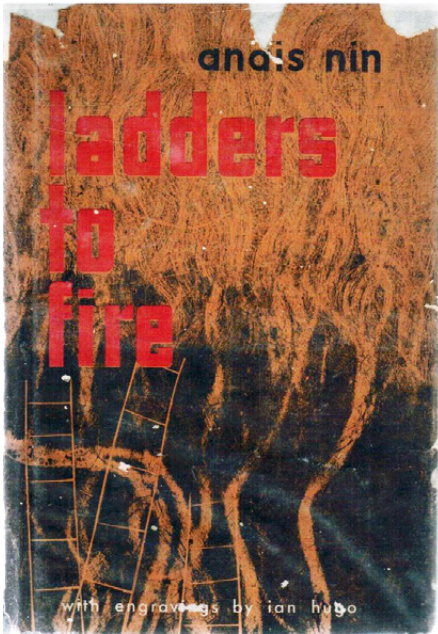


Figure 18. *Ladders to Fire* (1946), Dutton, 213 pages, 21 cm. This trade book retailed for \$2.75, in comparison with Nin's limited-edition, privately printed books, which were priced at \$3. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

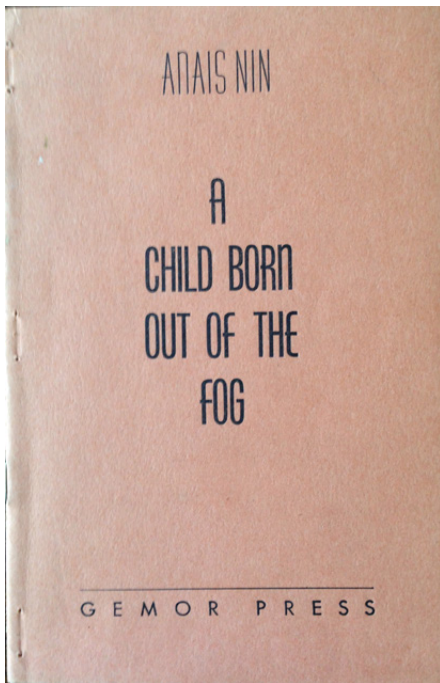


Figure 19. *A Child Born Out of the Fog* (1947), Gemor Press, 20 cm, 6 pages, no edition size mentioned. A small pamphlet, this book does not indicate that Nin was involved in its production. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

with Dutton for future novels, without compromise and with a thousand-dollar advance (thirteen thousand in 2015 dollars).

But working with a mainstream publisher was not without its problems. When Nin first received her new book, *Ladders to Fire* (fig. 18), she opened the box with great excitement, only to be deeply disappointed by the cover, which she found tawdry. "I was not pleased by the jacket. I had given Dutton a beautiful smoky engraving of a fire with a white ladder running through it. It has been printed in the orange color of cheap imitation-orange candy."<sup>41</sup> Still, she preferred a larger audience to total aesthetic control. And it was just in time. A month after the publication of *Ladders to Fire*, in November 1946, she recorded in her diary that the "press collapsed under a mountain of debts. Corroded by Gonzalo's irresponsibility. Even to move out it was I who had to do the packing, sorting, filing, cleaning."<sup>42</sup> The big press was sold to pay debts, and the smaller one More took home, where he continued to print small jobs.

The Gemor Press edition of *A Child Born Out of the Fog* (a short story about a biracial child, which was rejected for being too controversial) and a new edition of the 1936 *House of Incest* both bear 1947 dates and presumably were printed by More, without Nin. Neither work includes a colophon. Nin's involvement with the production of the books is not mentioned in the individual works or in her diary.

*A Child Born Out of the Fog* (fig. 19) is a short story printed as a twelve-page pamphlet (the story unfolds over just six numbered pages). With centered art deco type on an orange paper cover, the story is unaccompanied by illustrations, a rarity for Nin. The story was inspired by the children of two different biracial couples in Nin's circle: "I went to see Nancy, the Negro guitarist, and their child. Their life touched me so much I sat down and wrote a story . . . I also had in mind Richard Wright and Helen, and their child."<sup>43</sup> While Nin only mentions writing the story in her diary and does not discuss its publication, in a note in the front of the pamphlet she writes: "This little sketch, which is here first presented to the public, is being published in this form because we agree with the magazine editors who pronounced it 'exquisitely written', while questioning their dictum that 'because of its subject matter its publication at this time would not be wise.'"<sup>44</sup> (This story was included in future reprint editions of *Under a Glass Bell*.) The back cover announces Dutton's edition of Nin's *Ladders to Fire* available for \$2.75, while the last page of the pamphlet announces the forthcoming republication of *House of Incest* by Gemor Press available for preorder for \$3.

With rising demand for her books, Nin decided to reprint *Incest* when she could not locate any more copies of the original edition. She asked a friend in Belgium to track down copies, and he discovered that at one warehouse "all their English books were burned." At the printer Sainte Catherine Press, "all their English books were hidden from the Germans and they would have to search for them. Today I went back to see them and they haven't even a printer's copy."<sup>45</sup>

The new edition of *House of Incest* (fig. 20) has a much smaller trim size than its 1936 predecessor. It is just shy of *Under a Glass Bell*'s proportions but lacks that book's refinement. Its cover is brick red and awkward, with a heavy initial cap and a centered design that is not centered on the cover but instead pushed left toward the spine. Inside the book, spaces

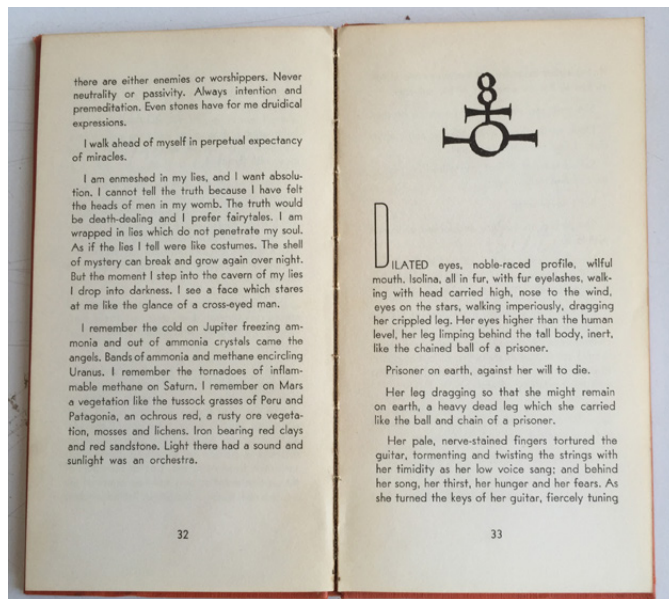
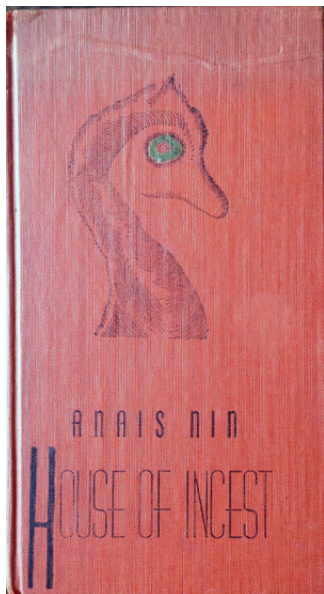


Figure 20. House of Incest (1947), regular edition, Gemor Press, 52 pages, 21 cm, edition of one thousand. Note the awkward cover design. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

Figure 21. Spread of Gemor Press's House of Incest, regular edition. With Huxley initial caps and the chapter-head graphic devices, the interior of the book has a more conventional aesthetic appeal than the first two books. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

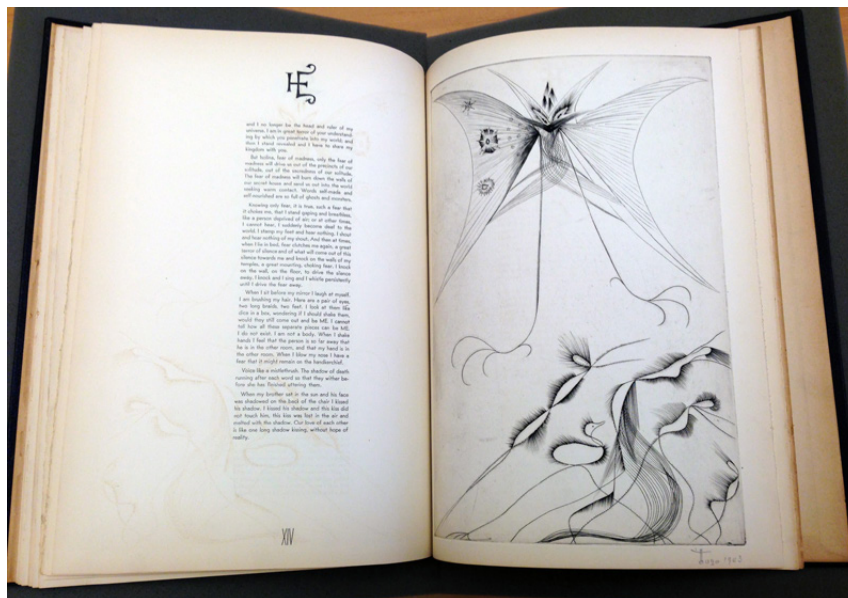
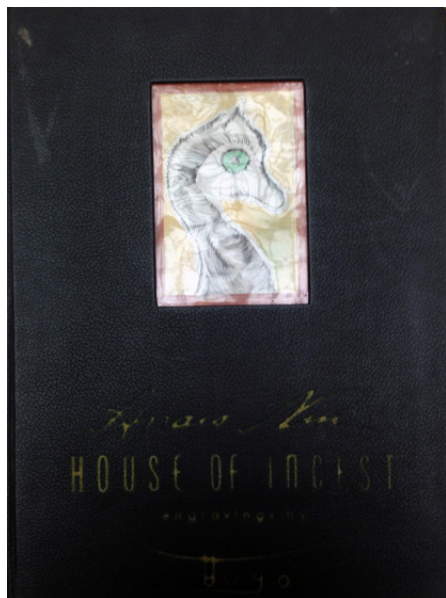


Figure 22. Cover of the deluxe edition of House of Incest (1947), Gemor Press, 21 pages, 43 cm, edition of fifty. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

Figure 23. Spread from the deluxe House of Incest. The deluxe edition uses the same typographic forms as the regular edition but stacks them into long columns on an enormous page. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

around the em dashes are sloppy, and the presswork is uneven, although there is definite appeal to the typography within spreads (fig. 21). The only illustrations are astrological-like devices used as chapter heads. Set in 12-point Bernhard Gothic Light, the book is more conventional in appearance than *Winter of Artifice* and *Under a Glass Bell*.

While not discussed in the diary, Gemor Press also published a limited “deluxe” edition of *House of Incest* (fig. 22), likely to raise funds to produce the large regular edition of one thousand copies. The composed forms from the smaller edition are stacked two-up into long, narrow columns on a generous page in the rather cumbersome “deluxe” version (fig. 23). The Beinecke’s copy from the edition has not aged well. The paper has foxed, and the inset cover illustration is peeling. Its full-page etchings by Ian Hugo are spidery and bewitching but lack the dreamlike, dark intensity of his illustrations in the earlier books. The less involved Nin was with the books, the more they suffered. More and Nin’s relationship was in decline and ended by the following year.

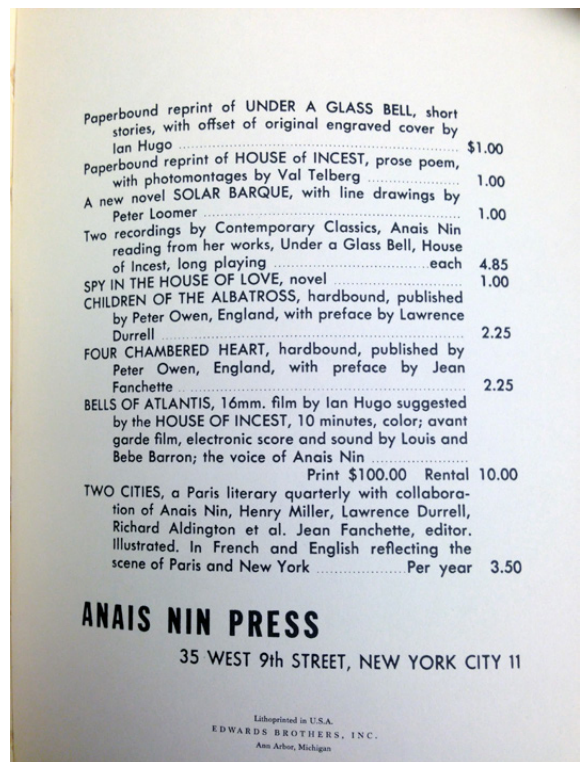
Nin’s efforts in letterpress and self-publishing connected her to an American audience and ultimately to a large publisher. While she enjoyed typesetting, printing, and operating a private press, she found the work unsustainable and was grateful for the recognition and





Figure 24. Paperbound reprint of *House of Incest* (1958), Anaïs Nin Press, 72 pages, 22 cm. While the photomontage illustrations by Val Telberg are all new to this edition, the type is not: Nin made offset plates from the original typeset books. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

Figure 25. From the back of *House of Incest* (1958), a list of available titles from the Anaïs Nin Press. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.



audience granted by an established publisher. But how did the slow meditative discipline of letterpress influence Nin’s writing practice? And why did she entirely stop producing work this way—why not get another press, for her own independent projects and enjoyment?

According to her diaries, Nin wrote her fiction in the morning and her diaries at night. Her fiction was a distillation, a recombination, a reimagining, a reinterpretation of events also recorded in the diary. Of *This Hunger*, Nin explains in her diary: “Trying to extract complete characters from the maze of the diary. Trying to construct a story. But a novel is the opposite of life. Discovery that characters are revealed in fragments, not all at once; and during our lifetime we rarely make a synthesis. I cannot work in the artificial form of the novel. I have to follow free associations from another source, to trace character not in its outward manifestations but in its underground life, in the development of its night life.”<sup>46</sup>

Nin wrote mostly short experimental fiction, not novels. And while she saw her fiction as art, she did not elevate it above the diary. Writing the diary—and famously rewriting and rewriting and heavily editing the diary—she considered her greatest achievement. Both acts of writing materialize the immaterial. And this too is the process of a writer setting her own type: just as immaterial words in one’s head are given solid form with one’s hand, so does a fleeting life take physical form in a diary. A diary’s medium is time. Typesetting, Nin wrote, takes time. “The evenings pass. I get panicky. Time is passing. Time, time, time.”<sup>47</sup>

When Nin was crossing over from Paris to New York in 1939, she had a layover in Bermuda. While there she explored the stalactite caves, which she described as “a dream born out of a continuity impossible to an artist. We were never given a million years as the lime and water were to achieve such castles, spirals, turrets, flowers, gems. All carved out of time and stillness.”<sup>48</sup> Our time is limited, and as Nin wrote in a letter, “I am more interested in living than in writing.”<sup>49</sup> And she was more interested in writing than in typesetting. Toward the end of her life, Nin wrote of letterpress, “The physical work was so overwhelming that it interfered with my writing. That is the only reason I accepted the

offer of a commercial publisher and surrendered the press. Otherwise I would have liked to continue with my own press, controlling both the content and the design of the books.”<sup>50</sup> The acts of hand typesetting and printing were too time-consuming to pursue as part of her practice. In 1947 her fellow writer and printer William Everson wrote in the announcement establishing his Equinox Press, “As a creative man, the richest thing I can do is to write a poem, and the next is to print it.”<sup>51</sup> But for Nin, creating the physical form of a self-published book was not an integral part of her work.<sup>52</sup> Ultimately, she was more interested in the writing, the creation of the text, than in the printing and production of the book. And so the letterpress era of Nin’s life drew to a close with the shuttering of the press in 1947.

While she no longer had a printing studio, self-publishing remained a great passion for Nin. Toward the end of 1947 she visited Black Mountain College and enthusiastically encouraged students to print their own work. Faculty member M. C. Richards wrote, “We found a stash of type in an old building and gradually unscrambled and cleaned it. Anaïs Nin, who was printing her own books in NYC, came to help us set up our print shop and to talk to writing students.”<sup>53</sup>

Through the next decade, she continued to self-publish. Disillusioned with Dutton and with other commercial publishers, and with her self-published limited-edition books long out of print, Nin republished them as paperback editions (fig. 24), printed from offset plates made from the original handset books but often with new illustrations. No longer hiding behind Siana Editions, she established the Anaïs Nin Press (fig. 25) to distribute these works. But this too came to an end. By the late 1950s, Nin approached Alan Swallow of the literary Swallow Press to reprint her entire list, including titles old and new.

It was a fortuitous partnership, as Swallow Press (now operated by Ohio University Press) continues to keep Nin’s work in print, just as she did while alive.<sup>54</sup> But first, in the 1960s, Swallow Press collaborated with Harcourt Brace Jovanovich to publish in a trade edition the highly original and visionary work that Nin had been trying, unsuccessfully, to get published for thirty years: her diary, which she had kept tirelessly since the age of eleven (fig. 26). Published in a series of seven chronological installments, this heavily edited version of her epic, two-hundred-volume manuscript cemented Nin’s place in twentieth-century letters—handset or otherwise. ■



Figure 26. Anaïs Nin in a vault with volumes of her diary in its original, manuscript form. Photograph by Marlis Schwieger by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.



## NOTES

1. Holland Cotter, introduction to Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books* (New York: Granary Books, 1994), xii.
2. Johanna Drucker, "A Critical Metalanguage for the Book as an Artform," in *Talking the Boundless Book: Art, Language, & the Book Arts*, edited by Charles Alexander (Minneapolis: Minnesota Center for Book Arts, 1995), 27.
3. Alan Loney, *The Books to Come* (Victoria, TX: Cuneiform Press, 2012).
4. Anaïs Nin, *Diary of Anaïs Nin, Volume Three 1939–1944* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1969), 259.
5. Neil Pearson, *Obelisk: A History of Jack Kabane and the Obelisk Press* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 2.
6. *Ibid.*, 459. Kahane's son claims that Nin paid for Durrell's book and Durrell paid for Nin's in the Villa Seurat series. Pearson believes Durrell's wife paid for the entire series.
7. Nin, *Diary, Volume Three 1939–1944*, 7.
8. Sady Doyle, "Before Lena Dunham, there was Anaïs Nin—now patron saint of social media," *The Guardian*, April 7, 2015: <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2015/apr/07/anais-nin-author-social-media>.
9. Nin, *Diary, Volume Three*, 174.
10. *Ibid.*, 309.
11. *Ibid.*, 47.
12. *Ibid.*, 229.
13. *Ibid.*, 179.
14. *Ibid.*, 180.
15. *Ibid.*, 181.
16. *Ibid.*, 182.
17. *Ibid.*, 192.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*, 185.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, 186.
25. *Ibid.*, 196.
26. Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books*, 93.
27. *Ibid.*, 99.
28. Cotter, xii.
29. Anaïs Nin, *Under a Glass Bell* (New York: Gemor Press, 1944), unnumbered front matter.
30. Nin, *Diary, Volume Three*, 308.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*, 309.

34. Anaïs Nin, *The Diary of Anaïs Nin, Volume Four 1944–1947* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), 11.
35. Ibid., 31.
36. Ibid., 64.
37. Ibid., 78.
38. Ibid., 103–104.
39. Ibid., 105.
40. Ibid., 103.
41. Ibid., 162.
42. Ibid., 165.
43. Ibid., 145.
44. Anaïs Nin, *The Child Born Out of the Fog* (New York: Gemor Press, 1947), unnumbered front matter.
45. Nin, *Diary, Volume Four*, 34.
46. Ibid., 28.
47. Nin, *Diary, Volume Three*, 254.
48. Ibid., 10.
49. Nin, *Diary, Volume Four*, 177.
50. Anaïs Nin, “The Story of My Printing Press,” in *The Publish It Yourself Handbook*, edited by Bill Henderson (New York: Pushcart Press, 1988), 31.
51. William Everson, *On Printing*, edited by Peter Rutledge Koch (San Francisco: The Book Club of California, 1992), 1.
52. A paraphrase of Eric Kraft’s testimonial about his own work in *The Publish It Yourself Handbook*, edited by Bill Henderson (New York: Pushcart Press, 1988), unnumbered front matter.
53. M. C. Richards, “Excerpts from ‘Black Mountain College: A Golden Seed,’” in *Black Mountain College: Sprouted Seeds: An Anthology of Personal Accounts*, edited by Mervin Lane (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 172.
54. Swallow published a new edition of *Under a Glass Bell* as recently as 2014, and it continues to publish many other works by Nin. However, it appears that a variety of publishers (Mariner Books, Harvest Books, Sky Blue Press) also continually publish works by Anaïs Nin. Swallow does not maintain exclusive rights.