

# Nin's 'Delta of Venus' presents sensitive view of sex

By David Wood

*Delta Of Venus: Erotica* by Anais Nin Bantam, \$2.50

There are endless stories of visionary artists struggling and inspired in Paris, their greatness only known inside the circle of their artist-friends, who let minor masterpieces go for the price of a meal or for a pittance that they might buy a bottle to share among comrades. So many stories, it is less the exception than the rule.

## book review

It is in its way tragic, yet not so tragic that the artworks do not mostly, eventually, and to someone's profit, surface for public perusal and preservation. One example of such a stolen and recovered gem is *Delta of Venus* by Anais Nin, out now in paperback for the first time. Back in 1940, her money down, Anais Nin joined with Henry Miller, her celebrated lover, in supplying drafts of erotica to an anonymous patron Henry had been

told of. They wrote for a dollar a page. Even at that thankless wage the buyer griped. "Concentrate on sex," he demanded, "Leave out the poetry... Just story-telling, no analysis, no philosophy."

### Erotic summary

Anais agonized to comply. But in the end she submitted him a letter in place of another erotic summary. "Dear Collector," the letter read in part, "We hate you... You have taught us more than anyone I know how wrong it is not to mix sex with emotion, hunger, desire, lust, whims, caprices, personal ties, deeper relations that change its color, flavor, rhythms, intensities... aspects which are the fuel that ignites it. Intellectual, imaginative, romantic, emotional. This is what gives it its surprising textures, its subtle transformations, its aphrodisiac elements."

But for a woman whose soul is art, the poetry could not be entirely voided from her narrative, only hidden. As a result her several stories are classics in that inglorious genre usually sanctioned to hack writers. Neither brazenly sexy or lusty, her pornography is sensitively libidinous.

### Sensual ambience

Neither makedly mechanical or photographic, her blue scenes are clothed in sensual ambience. Not explicitly

worked, she lets ambiguity play, a true expression of emotive sex. Her characters are more than engaged bodies of flesh. They have senses and sensitivities. They have submerged inside hearts and minds real enough to be mysterious.

Nin's concise, glinting prose-style, stripped of judgment or bare statement, raped of analysis and philosophy, has effectually the narrow scope of a key-hole. She only suggests the situations, the forces, the acts, the bodies, which are incidentally twined together, seducing readers to enter in their own sexuality to fill in what is left open. The sketchiness of the stories evokes in reading an uncertainty and speculation like what accompanies actual sexual encounter.

Some of the stories are but sensual nothings, others are obsessive to exhaustion, some simple anecdotes, others case-histories of widening, pulsing sexualities. Few have beginnings, none have ends. The reader is aroused to seek knowledge and resolution in them, but is spurned. They remain only physical fact. As in the sexual act, one can sense in the stories a fertility, a multi-leveled virginity, an endearing perversity, that tempts an instinct to plunge and impossibly possess them.

### Various drives

Unlike typical pornography, where sex is a conquest and fulfillment, *Delta of Venus* shows it as a network of endless roads for various drives. It shows sex as an individual's inherited vulnerability, one's senses being the victim and reward of one's drives. Nin suitably uses the imagery of man "stabbing" at woman's "wound", while in another instance it is a "wild wind" discovering a "flower."

Sex is not graphic. It is sensual. It is not simply the contact of genitalia, hands, and mouths. It is the play of senses. It is vision, smell, moods, attitudes, places, surprise, fear, subconscious embodiments, karmic associations, creative invention, symbolic ritual, disguise, always new, always allure to more curiosity, forever mysterious, singular yet in everything.

It is an orchestration unique in experience, traditionally private, a conversation not of words. "The language of sex," writes Nin, "had yet to be discovered."

# Dylan, Star Trek top interest list

Each year it's the same—students compare courses and find one is in biology, another in freshman English, a third is taking the Philosophy of Bob Dylan.

### The Philosophy of Bob Dylan?

Yes. Also the Philosophy of Star Trek, the Philosophy of Psychic Phenomena, the Philosophy of Sport, the Meaning of Death, the Meaning of Suicide... the list goes on and on.

All are courses offered by UNL's philosophy department. Each lasts five weeks and is worth one credit hour.

Professor Robert Anderson, who interchanges teaching mini-courses on the Philosophy of Bob Dylan and the Philosophy of Star Trek with Communism vs. Religion and the Philosophies of the American Revolution, Ayn Rand and Martin Luther King, said the courses are offered in response to a survey taken to determine student interests.

### Already interested

While some people might wonder what value such courses have, Anderson said each is useful because it acquaints students with philosophy and gives them some basics in that discipline while pointing out that they are already involved in philosophy through their interests. An initial interest in one of the mini-courses may lead students to a more advanced class, he added.

Last spring and during summer school, Anderson offered the Philosophy of Star Trek, and is now teaching the Philosophy of Bob Dylan. He said he decided to teach the courses because both topics were rated high on a survey of student interests.

"I looked into each and found—somewhat to my surprise—that there is certainly enough philosophy there for a one-unit course," he said.

In the first class of each course, Anderson explains what philosophy is and what its parts are. Students then move ahead with their particular interests.

Anderson said that in the Dylan course, the growth of Dylan's philosophy is traced from his early life and idols, through his protest songs to the present.

### Performer and philosopher

The many aspects of Dylan draw a wide range of students to the class.

"Some see him primarily as a performer and are oriented to his less philosophical works," Anderson said. "Others think of him as a social critic and want to get at that more deeply. I find it interesting that when I offered the course last fall, the enrollment was about 70, and this year it's about 100."

If the variety of students drawn to the Dylan course is wide, the range of students attracted by the variety of mini-courses is wider, Anderson said.

"For example, the Star Trek students on a whole are different from those who take the philosophy of Bob Dylan. The former see everyone in the class as a fellow participant in the world of Star Trek."

This feeling of participation in the world of Star Trek is one of the reasons Anderson says the series' popularity continues.

### Ongoing adventure

"In space, the adventure goes on and on, encountering other peoples, making discoveries. Captain Kirk (a Star Trek character) calls it 'the last frontier.' Star Trek appeals to children at ages of three and four who like the characters and the gadgetry, but it appeals to NASA grownups too," he said. "It's an expression of the attitudes of the space scientists themselves. They believe in this. It's a happy fictional experience of what they expect

to find in space."

Anderson identifies three areas Gene Roddenberry, Star Trek's creator, philosophized on in the series for class discussion. They are racial intolerance, war and the idea of paradise. His class also discusses how the series' three main characters—Kirk, Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy—represent three aspects of self which can war with each other.

The philosophy of Star Trek drew the largest enrollment of any other philosophy mini-course, Anderson said. Some students would like him to offer Star Trek II to explore the secondary literature written by Star Trek fans.

"To a lot of us, Star Trek seems more than fiction," Anderson said. "In a way it's real. We can't explain it."

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