

The Letters

LETTER 01

I'M IN LOVE WITH N.Y.

Anaïs Nin to Henry Miller

3 December 1934

Born to Cuban parents in the Parisian suburb of Neuilly-sur-Seine, celebrated diarist Anaïs Nin spent her early years moving around Europe and was eleven years old when she, her younger brothers and mother left Barcelona and set sail for New York City, Nin's father having abandoned the family. It was on this long journey that she began to write her now-famous diaries. Nin went on to study and work in New York until 1924, at which point she returned to Paris with her new husband, Hugh Guiler. It would be another ten years until Nin saw New York again, this time in the company of noted psychoanalyst Dr Otto Rank, her therapist and lover. Soon after returning to the city, she wrote a letter to another man with whom she was romantically linked, who was still in Paris: Henry Miller.

THE LETTER

Barbizon Plaza Hotel
6th Ave. & 58th St.
Dec 3, 1934

Henry:

I rushed you a note the other day and have not been able to write a line for myself since. Have let things take their course and since making money for the rent was the first item on the list I accepted the enormous amount of work required by the [Psychological] Center. Next weekend I see about the dancing.

Meanwhile, I'm busy all day, like a big business woman, and then every night somebody says: "Let us show you New York." Americans are like Spaniards. So I have seen shows, Broadway, lunch on top of the Empire State, a dance hall in Harlem, movies at Radio City. I'm in love with N.Y. It matches my mood. I'm not overwhelmed. It is the suitable scene for my ever ever heightened life. I love the proportions, the amplitude, the brilliance, the polish, the solidity. I look up at Radio City insolently and love it. It is all great, and Babylonian. Broadway at night. Cellophane. The newness. The

vitality. True, it is only physical. But it's inspiring. Just bring your own contents, and you create a sparkle of the highest power. I'm not moved, not speechless. I stand straight, tough, and I meet the impact. I feel the glow and the dancing in everything. The radio music in the taxis, scientific magic, which can all be used lyrically. That's my last word. Give New York to a poet. He can use it. It can be poetized. Or maybe that's a mania of mine, to poetize. I live lightly, smoothly, actively, ears and eyes wide open, alert, oiled! I feel a kind of exhilaration and the tempo is like that of my blood. I'm at once beyond, over and in New York, tasting it fully.

I don't know if I am telling you enough. I write you between telephone calls, visitors, letters etc. I don't hear myself writing. The only missing element is time. It is rare! We are flying. One goes for the weekend to Washington. One flies to Chicago in four hours. Rank has to go for lectures all over, and leaves me in charge . . .

Write me at the Barbizon. They never send up the mail. I call for it. It is quite safe.

A.

‘I LOVE THE
PROPORTIONS, THE
AMPLITUDE, THE
BRILLIANCE, THE
POLISH, THE SOLIDITY.’

— *Anais Nin*

LETTER 02

THE BLESSINGS OF PURE AIR

Ambrose Kingsland to Common Council of NYC

5 April 1851

Ambrose Kingsland was sixteen years old when he and his brother founded the successful sperm oil business that would cement the family's already considerable fortune. Arguably, however, his greatest achievement was this letter written decades later in 1851. The population of New York City was expanding at an incredible rate, and as Kingsland approached middle age he yearned to direct his energy and experience towards the fast-evolving city he loved. And so, Ambrose Kingsland ran for mayor, winning by a margin of close to 4,000 votes. One of his first acts as the 71st Mayor of New York was to write to the city's council to recommend that they locate and purchase land on which could be built a public park 'on a scale which will be worthy of the city'. The council agreed; the wheels were set in motion. Eight years later, in the winter of 1859, Central Park – designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux – opened to the public.

THE LETTER

TO THE HONORABLE, THE COMMON COUNCIL:

Gentlemen: —

The rapid augmentation of our population, and the great increase in the value of property in the lower part of the city, justify me in calling the attention of your Honorable Body, to the necessity of making some suitable provision for the wants of our citizens, who are thronging into the upper wards, which but a few years since were considered as entirely out of the city. It seems obvious to me that the entire tongue of land south of the line drawn across the [City Hall] Park, is destined to be devoted, entirely and solely, to commercial purposes; and the Park and Battery, which were formerly favorite places of resort for pleasure and recreation, for citizens, whose residences were below that line, are now deserted. The tide of population is rapidly flowing to the northern section of the island, and it is here that provision should be made for the thousands whose dwellings will, ere long, fill up the vacant streets and avenues north of Union Park.

The public places of New York are not in

keeping with the character of our city; nor do they in any wise subserve the purpose for which such places should be set apart. Each year will witness a certain increase in the value of real estate, out of the city proper, and I do not know that any period will be more suitable than the present one, for the purchase and laying out of a park, on a scale which will be worthy of the city.

There are places on the island easily accessible, and possessing all the advantages of wood, lawn and water, which might, at a comparatively small expense, be converted into a park, which would be at once the pride and ornament of the city. Such a park, well laid out, would become the favorite resort of all classes. There are thousands who pass the day of rest among the idle and dissolute, in porter-houses, or in places more objectionable, who would rejoice in being enabled to breathe the pure air in such a place, while the ride and drive through its avenues, free from the noise, dust and confusion inseparable from all thoroughfares, would hold out strong inducements for the affluent to make it a place of resort.

There is no park on the island deserving the name, and while I cannot believe that any one can be found to advance an objection against the expediency of having such a one in our midst,

I think that the expenditure of a sum necessary to procure and lay out a park of sufficient magnitude to answer the purposes above noted, would be well and wisely appropriated, and would be returned to us four fold, in the health, happiness and comfort of those whose interest[s] are specially intrusted to our keeping — the poorer classes.

The establishment of such a park would prove a lasting monument to the wisdom, sagacity and forethought of its founders, and would secure the gratitude of thousands yet unborn, for the blessings of pure air, and the opportunity for innocent, healthful enjoyment.

I commend this subject to your consideration, in the conviction that its importance will insure your careful attention and prompt action.

A. C. KINGSLAND, MAYOR.