

ANDROGYNY AND DOMINANCE:
GENDER CONSTRUCTION IN ANAÏS NIN'S *EROTICA* SERIES

by

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(Abstract)

Anaïs Nin's *Diary* and her fiction have been lauded by critics for their imagery, Freudian allusions, and creativity. What has not been considered, and is equally important, is her *Erotica* series, *Delta of Venus* and *Little Birds*. These books, her most popular, not only address the issues that she covers in her other works, but also ask questions about how humans are gendered, and consider the degree to which individuals construct their own gender identities. In exploring these questions, she presages not only the theorists who effectively deconstruct her message, but also the gender-bending society which inspired them.

Queer theory is particularly effective for considering the sexual messages with which Nin populates her writings. Much as Judith Butler de-emphasizes totalizing gender roles, Nin allows her characters to occupy multiple gender roles. Thus, Nin's female protagonists often take on the sexual positions generally granted to men in American society. Conversely, her male characters are often relegated to less-empowered roles. Although these shifts might not seem particularly impressive in our more liberated society, they were undoubtedly surprising in Nin's day. Moreover, it is impressive that these role-reversing characters were created over forty years before the advent of queer theory, and long before the popular rise of the Feminist movement.

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