

Chapter Two:

Lina, Maria, Mafouka and Company: The Battle for Gender Identity

Judith Butler's exploration of queer theory in the 1980's and 1990's introduced a theoretical framework for considering non-heterosexual gender identities. By advocating the idea of individual gender construction, Butler suggested that there are far more than two genders, and that this gender variation was demonstrated throughout society.

For those who had read Anaïs Nin's *Erotica* series, this "revelation" must have seemed monumentally unsurprising. In the stories she wrote for a private collector in 1940, Nin had constructed numerous characters whose sexes did not match their gendering.¹ Moreover, Nin's characters had demonstrated varying degrees of individual gender construction, often in the absence of a definitive sexual body.

Before I consider how Nin's *Erotica* prefigured Butler's theory, however, it is necessary to gain a firm understanding of Butler. This especially requires a solid consideration of the terms upon which any queer theory analysis must rely. The first among these is sex. I define the word "sex" as the physical attributes of a human body. Using this definition, I can separate most people into one of two distinct groups, male or female. The sex of those people who have breasts and vaginas is female, while the sex of those people who have penises is male. "Sex," outlined thusly, means the biological construction of the body. Sex can be changed, but only through extensive surgical and pharmacological methods.

Gender, on the other hand, is sexual identity. It encompasses both the sexual preferences of an individual and the way that individual regards himself or herself. The

¹ When he and Nin arrived in New York in the early-1940's, Henry Miller found a job writing pornographic stories for an unnamed collector who was represented by Barnett Ruder, a rare-books dealer. While this was initially easy work, it soon became difficult for Miller, as he was also working on what would become *The Rosy Crucifixion*. Nin stepped in. The collector initially rejected her as a substitute for Miller, but agreed once he had read significant portions of her work. The collector, through Ruder, demanded that Nin eliminate the artistic flourishes that peppered her work. In his words, he wanted only the sex, not the poetry. This infuriated Nin, as she discovered how difficult it was to limit her natural lyricism and deliver the sexual explicitness her patron required.

best-known forms of gender identity in America are divided based on the female and male sexes and the homosexual, heterosexual, and bisexual preferences. The best-known shorthand for gender identity in American society is thus demonstrated by this table, which shows the categories that are made possible by these rather limited sex/gender preference groupings:

Male Heterosexual	Male Bisexual	Male Homosexual
Female Heterosexual	Female Bisexual	Female Homosexual

These pairings, however, are merely shorthand for infinite varieties of gendering, which are based on individual desires combined with societal messages. These groupings, therefore, are insufficient. They fail to encompass the multitude of individual choices, beliefs, and desires which go into making up gender. To gain a firmer understanding of how gendering occurs, it is necessary to examine the influences upon it.

Sex and gender are often equated in American society. Because someone has a certain sex, it is assumed that he or she will be gendered in a certain way. As the multitude of gay and lesbian individuals in American society demonstrates, biology does not determine sexual desire. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler addresses the notion that sex equals gender, and the societal outlook that results from it:

The “naming” of sex is an act of domination and compulsion, an institutionalized performative that both creates and legislates social reality by requiring the discursive/perceptual construction of bodies in accord with sexual difference. Hence...we are compelled in our bodies and our minds to correspond, feature by feature, with the idea of nature that has been established for us...“men” and “women” are political categories, and not natural facts (115).

As Butler points out, the act of naming sex as the defining feature in gender effectively limits the possibilities of gendered beings to their biological functions. Bodies are

perceived as being “in accordance with sexual difference.” This means that, socially, they are not defined by their own desires and realities, but rather by the differences between themselves and the opposite sex.

The idea that sex equals gender becomes one of the primary influences upon individual gender construction. Humans are forced to “correspond, feature by feature, with the idea of nature that has been established” for them by society. Thus, individuals are pressured to develop their personal gendering to fit what society considers natural. The conclusion Butler draws from this societal pressuring is that “men” and “women,” as totalizing terms, are not indicative of the natural establishment of gender in an individual. Instead, these totalizing terms are indicative of an artificial categorization which is required for political, and presumably social, organization.

The political and social effect of the belief that sex equals gender is visible throughout American culture. If sex determines personal identity and potential, then it follows that the potential of men and women is different. Once this idea is established, society can be expected to treat men and women differently. If men are valued more highly, then women will not be able to exercise the same freedoms and rights as men. For much of Western history, this has been society’s traditional viewpoint.

If, however, women are considered the equals of men, and are thus deserving of the same freedoms, then personal identity and potential must be regarded as being independent of sex. As this century has witnessed a vast increase in the freedoms and rights available to women, it would seem to follow that society has grown to view sex and identity as separate functions. Regardless of the logic of this progression, however, Western media continues to suggest that sex and gender are the same.

Butler uses the same term, gender, to refer to society’s gender messages and individual gender construction. Unfortunately, this creates a great deal of confusion, as society’s gender messages are an influence upon individual gender construction. In order

to separate these two issues, therefore, I will use the term “societal stereotypes” to refer to societal messages regarding gender construction.

Societal messages suggest to individuals, almost from birth, what actions and attitudes are expected from people of their sex. These messages are relayed from literally thousands of sources, usually beginning with parents, but ultimately encompassing every means of transmission that society has to offer. Societal messages tell individuals, based on their possession of sexual organs, what is desired of them, and what they are supposed to desire. Thus, a young girl is expected to be “lady-like,” and taught to desire pretty clothes and dollies; while a young boy is encouraged to be a “gentleman,” and expected to desire plastic guns and G. I. Joe action figures.

The assumption that all societal stereotypes are adopted by the individual is naïve. All individuals, regardless of their degree of gullibility, reject many of the contradictory stereotypes which society places on sex. Therefore, it makes sense to consider the difference between societal stereotypes and the individual belief systems that they influence. Individual belief systems are the product of the individual’s decision to accept certain stereotypes as valid, and reject others as false. These belief systems are inevitably based on external messages received from society, but are constructed individually, and thus differ widely from one person to another.

Despite societal pressure, desire is not entirely controlled by the media. Ultimately, desire must derive from the individual, and individual desire plays a major part in defining gender. The first way desire influences gender is in its impact on personal gender identity. While in the process of developing gender, an individual notices what he or she thinks is an admirable trait. The individual then tries to gain that trait, and make it part of himself or herself. In other words, a young boy is impressed by his father’s bravery, and he associates that bravery with being a man. As the young boy grows into manhood, he tries to become brave, and thus manly. Similarly, a young girl may be impressed by a film

ingenué's compassion. Associating compassion with femininity, the young girl will seek to establish that trait in herself.

The second way in which desire helps create gender is through attraction to outside stimuli. As individuals discover what they desire, they will try to adopt personality traits that will help them to attract the object of their desire. For example, if the individual feels desire towards a woman, he or she will seek to attract that woman. Assuming that certain personality and gender traits will make him or her attractive to the woman, the individual adopts those traits in order to accomplish his or her goal.

If gendering were a natural function of sex, then it would be acceptable to consider it biologically based. However, because gender is constructed from a fusing of individual belief systems (based on societal stereotypes) with internal desire, it must be regarded as "performative," or individually enacted. Just as actors use their perceptions of motivation, desire, and belief to form a character, individuals use their desires and belief systems to construct their genders. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler justifies this idea of construction of gender by considering those segments of society in which sex does not equal gender:

The construction of coherence conceals the gender discontinuities that run rampant within heterosexual, bisexual, and gay and lesbian contexts in which gender does not necessarily follow from sex (135-136).

By "construction of coherence," Butler indicates the socially-accepted norm of equating sex with gender. This norm ignores, or at least cannot explain, the existence of those individuals whose gendering is not based on their sexuality. In other words, if all men are supposed to desire women, and all women are supposed to desire men, how can we explain men who desire men and women who desire women? The explanation is that, despite societal stereotypes to the contrary, desire has little to do with anatomy.

The next question is, if one assumes that gender is performative, and thus not inherently tied to the body, what does that do to the idea of a permanent interior gender

identity? Does gender identity cease to exist as a reality independent of gender performance? What happens to the idea of gender identity as an unchanging standard on which to base reality? What happens to Polonius' famous admonition, "To thine own self be true?"

Gender identity effectively ceases to be an independent entity. Rather than speaking of actions and statements as being *representations* of gender identity, they essentially *become* gender identity. Individual actions and statements cannot help but "be true" to internal identities, as they effectively *are* internal identities. As Butler continues:

The substantive effect of gender is performatively produced.

Hence...gender proves to be performative-that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be (24-25).

Thus, gender identity is essentially produced by the same actions and statements which are widely believed to be its effects. Gender identity, viewed like this, becomes an effect for which there is no definitive cause.

Returning to the metaphor of the actor preparing for a role, the external actions and statements which suggest internal motivations effectively become the entirety of the role. They suggest the existence of an unchanging internal "core" that motivates them, but that "core" is actually nonexistent. As Butler argues in *Gender Trouble*,

Acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, [by]...signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause (136).

By "signifying absences," one may assume that Butler means that actions, gestures, and desires "signify" a causal internal reality which is actually absent. This internal "identity" is never revealed because it does not exist as an entity independent of its supposed effects.

If we assume that gender is individually performed, then we must assume that individual performers may choose from a wide variety of characters. In so doing, they

may act out an infinite variety of choices, desires, and beliefs. This is relevant to gender identity because the interplay of individually-interpreted societal stereotypes and unique individual desires produce a variety of genders.

Thus, sex is a biological fact, but not the legitimate basis of a personal gender identity. Gender identity is the product of societal stereotypes, filtered by the individual, interacting with personal desire. Once gender is constructed from these raw materials, it is performed through actions and statements that suggest the existence of a personal gender identity to society. This identity, however, does not exist apart from the performance that suggests it.

Perhaps Nin's greatest feat was her construction of characters whose gender identities were antithetical to their biological realities. When she wrote her *Erotica* series in 1940, the belief that sex equaled gender was accepted as fact by society. By creating characters whose bodies and performed genders were at odds, Nin prefigured the discussion of gender identity on which queer theory was ultimately based.

A Multiplicity of Genders: Beyond a Binary Construction

Nin demonstrates the performative nature of gender in two major ways. The first is her inclusion of characters who must construct their own genders because of misleading sexual signifiers. These characters either have gender identities which are at odds with their bodies, or have bodies that do not definitively signify a specific sex. Either way, the individuals must enact external gender performances that demonstrate their gender identities.

In "Artists and Models," the sixth story in Nin's first collection of erotica, *Delta of Venus*, Nin demonstrates individually constructed gender through the male narrator's tale of Mafouka, "the man-woman of Montparnasse" (40). Mafouka is an artist who lives with two women, but spends all of his/her time with men. All of Mafouka's colleagues are confused by his/her sex, as s/he looks like a rather boyish young woman and has a woman's name, but dresses, swears, drinks, and plays pool like a man:

“No one knew exactly what she was. She dressed like a man. She was small, lean, flat-chested. She wore her hair short, straight. She had the face of a boy. She played billiards like a man. She drank like a man, with her foot on the bar railing. She told obscene stories like a man. Her drawing had a strength not found in a woman’s work. But her name had a feminine sound, her walk was feminine, and she was said not to have a penis. The men did not know how to treat her. Sometimes they slapped her on the back with fraternal feelings” (40).

This scene is interesting both because of its description of Mafouka, as well as because of its assumptions about what a man or a woman is supposed to do. As the young male narrator describes Mafouka, he also demonstrates the stereotypes through which he views manhood and womanhood. A man drinks at a bar, with his foot on the railing; plays billiards; wears his hair short and straight; tells obscene stories; and has an assertive drawing style. A woman, on the other hand, does not do these things, has a feminine walk and a feminine-sounding name, and does not have a penis.

Tension is created in this scene when the narrator states that “no one knew what she was.” The narrator’s awareness of everyone’s feelings on the matter suggests that, although no one knows what sex Mafouka is, everyone is talking about it. This is mirrored later when the narrator states that “the men did not know how to treat her.” Men, apparently, should be “slapped...on the back with fraternal feelings,” while women should be treated differently.

The confusion lies in the narrator’s apparent tendency to equate sex with gender. Sexually, Mafouka appears to be female, but his/her gender identity is confusing. S/he acts like a man, in spite of his/her body construction. If gender and sex are the same, Mafouka should act like a woman because s/he looks like a woman. However, they are apparently not the same, and this confuses the narrator.

The narrator's inner beliefs regarding Mafouka's sex are demonstrated in his use of feminine pronouns. Presumably, the narrator uses these feminine pronouns because he is more impressed by Mafouka's predominantly feminine name, voice, and appearance than by his/her actions and clothing. This reliance on appearance further suggests that the narrator equates (apparent) sexual body with gender identity. The narrator further demonstrates his dependence on sexual stereotypes when he queries Mafouka about his/her sexuality:

“‘Mafouka,’ I said, ‘What are you? Are you a man or a woman? If you are a man, why don’t you have a girl of your own? If you are a woman, why don’t you have a man occasionally?’” (41).

The implication is clear: if a person is male, he pursues women. If a person is female, she pursues men. There is no room in the narrator's view of gender for men to pursue men, women to pursue women, or either sex to pursue both sexes. Moreover, chastity does not seem to be a viable option for the narrator. In closing off these alternate genderings, the narrator suggests that gender equals sexuality and vice-versa.

The narrator's confusion is further complicated when Mafouka tells him that s/he is bisexual:

“Mafouka smiled at me...‘I am, like many artists, bisexual.’

“‘Yes, but the bisexuality of artists is their nature. They may be a man with the nature of a woman, but not with such an equivocal physique as you have.’

“‘I have a hermaphrodite’s body’” (41).

According to the narrator, it is apparently acceptable for a man to have a feminine personality. Given that the narrator challenges the pairing of Mafouka's feminine body and masculine personality, one may assume that he does not accept Mafouka's pairing. Moreover, the narrator's citing of Mafouka's “equivocal physique” further suggests that his

discomfort derives not from Mafouka's unorthodox gendering, but rather from his/her relatively feminine exterior.

Additionally, the narrator demonstrates stereotyping through his failure to consider the sexual side of bisexuality. While he notes that a man may have "the nature of a woman," this verbal construction might suggest that he is talking about personality, not gender identity or sexual desire.

Ultimately, the narrator's confusion is at least partially resolved when Mafouka permits him to see his/her body:

"She took her shirt off first and showed a young boy's torso. She had no breasts, just the nipples, marked as they would be on a young boy. Then she slipped down her slacks. She was wearing a woman's panties...she had a woman's legs and thighs...she was wearing women's stockings and garters...Then she slipped down her panties. And I saw below the delicate curled pubic hair, shaped like a woman's, that she carried a small atrophied penis, like a child's. She let me look at her--or at him, as I felt I now should say.

"Why do you call yourself by a woman's name, Mafouka? You are really like a young boy except for the shape of your legs and arms'" (42).

One can almost hear the narrator's sigh of relief when he is finally able to place a definitive sexual identity on Mafouka. Through the narrator's eyes, in spite of the high voice, feminine underclothes, and feminine-sounding name, Mafouka is apparently a man, albeit a poorly-developed one. The narrator immediately assigns a masculine pronoun to Mafouka, where he had earlier relied on female pronouns. The narrator's apparent resolution of this issue is further demonstrated when he compares Mafouka to a young boy, expressing surprise that Mafouka chooses to use a feminine name.

Mafouka, however, refutes the narrator's reduction of his/her gender to a single, biologically-determined sex. S/he has yet another secret to reveal: "Then Mafouka laughed, this time a woman's laugh, very light and pleasant. She said, 'Come and see'" (42). Mafouka is a hermaphrodite, possessing the primary sexual organs of both sexes. This leads to an inherent problem with stereotyping. As Mafouka's body does not definitively determine his/her biological destiny or, consequently, his/her stereotypical position in society, s/he is left to construct it for him/herself.

Externally, Mafouka constructs him/herself as a stereotypical, heterosexual man, wearing men's clothes, telling obscene jokes, and engaging in masculine pass-times like drinking and billiards. Even Mafouka's attitudes seem to mirror this, as s/he prefers the company of men:

"I do not like the companionship of women. They are petty and personal. They hang on to their mysteries and secrets, they act and pretend. I like the character of men better" (43).²

Like a stereotypical male, Mafouka finds women confusing, mysterious, and secretive; s/he prefers the boisterous nature of men. In fact, s/he seems to cling to the conventional stereotype of women, and thus fails to recognize any positive aspects of their personalities.

As with a stereotypical male, Mafouka's distrust of women does not mean that s/he is not attracted to them. S/he is unattracted to men, and finds women sexually arousing:

"I feel a desire for women only, but I can't take them as a man could. My penis is like a child's - I cannot have an erection...I desire women, but I do suffer, because I cannot take them like a man, and also because when they have taken me like Lesbians, I still feel some dissatisfaction. But I am not attracted to men" (43).

Mafouka is "dissatisfied" with lesbian intercourse. This, however, is where his/her masculine side ends. S/he cannot achieve an erection, sexually engages with lesbians, and

prefers the silky undergarments of women. Moreover, Mafouka demonstrates a willingness to display his/her somewhat feminine body and voice, something a stereotypical man would try to disguise.

Given Mafouka's earlier claim that s/he is bisexual, his/her assertion that s/he is unattracted to men seems odd. Evidently, Mafouka's claim to bisexuality is based entirely on his/her body. This stands in stark contrast to the narrator's construction of bisexuality, which seems to be based on personality. It seems that neither construction is based on the more stereotypical definition of bisexuality as a preference toward congress with partners of both sexes.

Effectively, Mafouka has created a gender which exists somewhere between conventional male heterosexual and conventional female homosexual. While this is troublesome for the narrator and his companions, it does not seem to bother Mafouka. Apart from a certain level of sexual dysfunction, s/he appears to be quite comfortable with his/her personal gendering.

The narrator seems to react to Mafouka's explanation of him/herself with *savoir-faire*, but he still feels the need to explain it as a result of the society he occupies. Rather than simply accept Mafouka's admission and subsequent demonstration, he must philosophically position it as a natural effect of the prevailing attitudes of the day:

“‘You are a real hermaphrodite, Mafouka,’ I said. ‘That is what our age is supposed to have produced because the tension between the masculine and the feminine has broken down. People are mostly half of one and half of the other’” (43).

The narrator is clearly missing the point when he explains away Mafouka's gendering as an externalized manifestation of gender-mixing in society. His own stereotypes of how men and women are supposed to act suggest that, his statements to the contrary, there actually is

² To a great extent, this admission of Mafouka's fits in with the spirit of Nin's time, when it was still not uncommon for groups to separate based on gender boundaries.

not very much gender mixing in his society. Moreover, his desire to position Mafouka as a product of his rather sexist society suggests a need to find some explanation for a person whose very body is an attack on his belief system.

Regardless of the narrator's inability to appreciate it, however, Mafouka effectively constructs a gender for her/himself in the absence of definitive physical sexual traits. This is an excellent demonstration of how Nin negotiates gender based on internal identities and preferences that often exist in spite of, not because of, social mores.

Reversal of Fortunes: When Men Act Like Women and Vice-Versa

The second way in which Nin demonstrates the performative nature of gender is her inclusion of characters who act in ways which do not conform to what society would expect of them, based on their bodies. In other words, these characters act based on their personal gender identities, and consequently their actions are occasionally at odds with what would be expected of their bodies. By including such characters, Nin highlights the dominance of internal realities over external sexuality in determining gender.

Butler suggests that gender is, while partially a product of individual belief systems, which are largely based on social mores, primarily a product of internal desires. Consequently, sexuality, and societal perception of it, while a reality, is not the preeminent force in determining gender identity.

In several of her stories, Nin demonstrates the idea that the sexual body, which is *physically* real, is often not as important as the intangible gender identity, which is perceived as unreal. In "Mallorca," the fifth story in *Delta of Venus*, a narrator of indeterminate sex tells the story of the sexual awakening of Maria, an eighteen year old Mallorcan girl. The tension in this story is initially established by the narrator's suggestion that Mallorcan society is very conservative:

The Mallorcan women were very inaccessible, puritanical and religious...Most of them did not believe in swimming at all and left this to the shameless European women who spent the summers

there...They thought of Europeans as nudists, who waited for only the slightest opportunity to get completely undressed and lie in the sun like pagans. They also looked with disapproval on the midnight bathing parties innovated by Americans (32).

According to the narrator, Mallorcan women are notably prudish, choosing to exclude themselves from foreign society, and to avoid swimming and displays of the flesh. Moreover, by stating that Mallorcan women are “inaccessible,” as opposed to the “shameless European women,” the narrator suggests that they avoid interaction with vacationing Americans, particularly those of the opposite sex. This is certainly borne out in the case of Maria, the primary character of the story.

One night, Maria is walking on the beach near a sheltered cove, and discovers that someone is swimming alone there:

A fisherman’s daughter of eighteen was walking along the edge of the sea...her white dress clinging to her body...She came to a hidden cove where she noticed that someone was swimming. She could see only the head moving and occasionally an arm. The swimmer was quite far away. Then she heard a light voice calling out to her, “Come in and swim. It’s beautiful.”...“Hello, Maria,” it called, so the voice knew her. It must have been one of the young American women who bathed there during the day (32).

This scene establishes the societal stereotypes that Maria accepts. To demonstrate her unmarried status, Maria is wearing a white dress, which symbolizes virginity. Because Maria assumes that the swimmer is female, she apparently only interacts with the women who visit Mallorca. Otherwise, she would not be so quick to assume that the swimmer is female merely because the swimmer knew who she was.

Maria also demonstrates her adherence to stereotypes through her interpretation of the swimmer. The swimmer's "light voice" convinces Maria that she is talking to a female. This suggests that Maria only associates light voices with women.

Maria's assumption is reinforced when she asks the swimmer:

"Who are you?"

"I'm Evelyn," said the voice, "come and swim with me!"

It was very tempting...She took off her dress...She slid into the water and began her long easy strokes toward Evelyn (32-33).

Based on her ability in the water, Maria is apparently one of the few Mallorcan women who chooses to swim. She is convinced that the swimmer is Evelyn. This is evidenced by her willingness to disrobe and go swimming. Furthermore, the fact that Maria swims toward Evelyn demonstrates that she is not threatened by the swimmer.

Maria's continuing use of stereotypes is further demonstrated when she and "Evelyn" play together in the water:

Evelyn swam under the water, came up to her and gripped her legs. In the water they teased each other. The semidarkness and the bathing cap made it difficult to see the face clearly. American women had voices like boys (33).

Just as the narrator stereotypes Mallorcan women in the beginning with his/her assertion that they are "very inaccessible, puritanical and religious," it is clear that Maria also stereotypes American women. Her assertion that "American women had voices like boys" suggests that, to a Mallorcan woman, the voices of American women have a deeper timbre, or merely that she is culturally unable to imagine swimming with a man.

Maria's stereotypes are further demonstrated as she continues to frolic with "Evelyn:"

"You're beautiful, Maria," said the deep voice, and Evelyn kept her arms around her. Maria...did not feel breasts on her friend, but,

then, she knew young American women she had seen did not have breasts (33).

Maria's assertion that American women do not have breasts is an ethnic stereotype. As the narrator's introduction seems to suggest, Mallorcan women conflate the "European" and "American" women who come to vacation on Mallorca. Further, although Maria apparently hears a "deep voice," and acknowledges a lack of female physical attributes, she nevertheless accepts the swimmer's declaration that s/he is "Evelyn."

If we assume a hyper-innocence for Maria, then her stereotype of American women is largely androgynous. She believes that they have comparatively deep voices and do not possess breasts. Using this construction, Maria believes "Evelyn" to be female even in the absence of what she considers definitive sexual signifiers. "Evelyn," however, soon reveals that s/he is a man:

Suddenly what she felt between her legs was not a hand but something else, something so unexpected, so disturbing that she screamed. This was no Evelyn but a young man, Evelyn's younger brother, and he had slipped his erect penis between her legs (33).

Maria's confusion regarding the nature of her companion is, of course, resolved with the unveiling of Evelyn's brother, but this confusion still raises some questions. By unveiling Evelyn's brother's sex from the point of view of a non-American, Nin demonstrates that sex, as it is defined by exterior signifiers, is far from a precise differentiation. To an outsider, such as Maria, some females may be indistinguishable from males, and vice-versa.

At first, Maria resists Evelyn's brother's advances. However, her initial reaction seems only the product of a social construct:

She screamed, but no one heard, and *her scream was only something she had been trained to expect of herself*. In reality his

embrace seemed to her as lulling and warming and caressing as the water...She swam toward shore, and he followed. They fell on the sand...and the sea came and washed over them and washed away the virgin blood...From that night on they met only at this hour (33-34, italics mine).

After her initial programmed reaction, Maria does not seem afraid of Evelyn's brother. In fact, she even acknowledges the "training" which taught her to scream. Moreover, she returns repeatedly to Evelyn's brother on the beach. Because the narrator has emphasized the prudishness of Mallorcan women, Maria's actions, especially in her pursuit of sexual activity, displays Maria exceeding her gender identity as constructed by her culture. Mallorcan culture seems to equate a female sexual body with what it considers stereotypical female gendering. One aspect of that gendering is sexual prudishness. If Maria ceases to display prudishness, then she effectively overturns the traditional gendering of her culture, and thus, at least partially, constructs her own individual gender.

Similarly, Evelyn's brother's demonstrates a certain level of individual gendering. By posing as Evelyn, by utilizing what he knows Maria perceives as his rather androgynous exterior, the brother constructs a sexual persona which allows him to seduce Maria. In American culture, posing as one's sister in order to seduce a woman would be considered shameful not only for its exploitative nature, but also because by doing so, the brother accepts and embraces the potential femininity of his own body. By lightening his voice when he calls to Maria, by claiming to be Evelyn, he effectively admits that his external sexual body and voice are capable of a certain level of femininity.

Thus, even though the ultimate goal of both Maria and Evelyn's brother's actions is traditional heterosexual intercourse, their sexual union is the effect of self-defined gender identity construction on the part of both lovers. For Maria and Evelyn's brother, the actions that they take to effect sexual intercourse exceed what is considered permissible

behavior for their genders. In exceeding this permissible behavior, they are required to construct their own interpretation of their gendering.

This transposing of gender identity is also demonstrated in “The Veiled Woman,” the ninth story in *Delta of Venus*. In this work, George, a young adventurer, engages in a sexual exploit that ultimately reconstructs his personal gender identity, at least temporarily. The story begins as George visits a bar and notices a couple:

At the next table he noticed a very handsome and stylish couple, the man suave and neatly dressed, the woman all in black, with a veil over her glowing face and brightly colored jewelry...The neatly dressed man began a conversation with George, who now had a chance to observe the woman at length and found her even more than beautiful. But just when he expected her to join the conversation, she...glided off. George was crestfallen. His pleasure in the evening was gone (76-77).

In this scene, Nin gives the reader an introduction to the personality of George. He is clearly a heterosexual male who is not averse to becoming involved with strange women. This is demonstrated by George’s immediate fascination with the beauty of the veiled woman, and his intense disappointment when she leaves.

After the veiled woman departs, her male companion buys George a drink. As they sit and talk, the reader learns more about George’s personality:

Now George had a weakness in common with many men; when he was in an expansive mood, he loved to recount his exploits...He hinted that as soon as he set foot in the street some adventure presented itself, that he was never at a loss for an interesting evening, or for an interesting woman (77).

Nin portrays George as a stereotypical misogynistic young rogue. He apparently seeks adventure largely through sexual exploits with strange women. In her demonstration of

George's carefree attitude toward his sexual conquests and his interest in this new woman, Nin suggests that he does not seek a deep personal attachment with his lovers. This fits the traditional gender stereotype of a man.

George's companion is looking for exactly this type of person, as he tells George:

“That is what I expected of you the moment I saw you. You are the fellow I am looking for. I am confronted with an immensely delicate problem...There is a woman who is wealthy and absolutely beautiful - in fact, flawless...She is interested in a man she has never seen before and never will see again. And for this man she will do anything...If you would like to come with me, you could perhaps solve your financial difficulties for a week, and, incidentally, perhaps, your desire for adventure” (77-78).

This speech demonstrates the man's assessment of George. When he states that the woman he works for is “wealthy and absolutely beautiful - in fact, flawless,” he appeals to both George's greed and his lust. Moreover, his statement that the woman he works for is not interested in seeing George again after their involvement suggests that he believes that George does not wish to have any contact with the women he seduces. Finally, the promise of money and adventure is clearly based on a belief that George is both greedy and shallow.

The man's assessment is not far off the mark. George agrees, and he and the man get in a taxi:

George flushed with pleasure. They left the bar together. The man hailed a taxi. In the taxi, he gave George fifty dollars. Then he said he was obliged to blindfold him, that George must not see the house he was going to, nor the street, as he was never to repeat his experience (78).

George is, stereotypically, eager. He does not deeply consider the man's proposal, or the danger it might hold for him. Rather, he is "flushed with pleasure" as he gets in the cab and embarks on his adventure. In the cab he receives his pay, a happy, and temporarily blinded, prostitute.

The taxi stops in front of an apartment building, and George meets the veiled woman he saw at the bar:

The woman who had been at the bar entered the room...He had to hold himself in check. He could not yet believe that this beautiful woman was *offering herself to him*, a complete stranger (79, italics mine).

Nin uses this initial impression to demonstrate George's stereotyping of women. It further demonstrates his intellectual density. Although he is treated like a prostitute, George is unable to believe that a woman could seek sexual intercourse for the sake of adventure, as he does. He only sees "that this beautiful woman was *offering* herself to him." Even George's perception that the veiled woman is "offering" is extremely flawed. She is not *offering* herself, but rather *buying* him.

George, ever the stereotypical man, wonders how he can best turn this situation to his advantage:

He had only one night to give all his lover's gifts. He was never to see her again. Could it be he might find the secret to her nature and possess her more than once? He wondered how many men had come to this room (79).

Ever egotistical, George mentally assembles "all his lover's gifts" in the hope of possessing the veiled woman. Clearly, he has forgotten that she has purchased, and thus, "possesses" him. He wonders how he can ensure that he will be asked back, and, in a final display of his ignorance of the situation, George indulges in a little stereotypical jealousy, wondering how many men have been here before him:

He was in a bedroom with a canopied bed set on a dais. There were furs on the floor and vaporous white curtains at the windows, and mirrors, more mirrors (79).

The veiled woman takes advantage of this carefully orchestrated setting, watching herself and George in the mirrors. She encourages him to do so as well: “Then she pointed to the mirror and said, laughing, ‘Look, it appears as if we were not making love...’” (82). In ordering George to look in the mirror, the veiled woman takes charge of the sexual encounter, further illustrating George’s secondary status.

The experience ultimately ends and despite George’s use of all his “lover’s gifts,” he is not asked to give a repeat performance:

Despite the intensity of their lovemaking, when he left, she did not ask him his name, she did not ask him to return. She gave him a light kiss on his almost painful lips and sent him away. For months the memory of this night haunted him and he could not repeat the experience with any other woman (83).

George discovers what it is like to be used, possessed, owned, and even exploited. The experience “haunts” him. This, in itself, is a transgendering of sorts. For the first time, it is George who pines away for an ex-lover. However, this recognition is only the beginning of George’s acquisition of stereotypically feminine gender traits.

As George later learns from an acquaintance, his role in the transaction is considerably less than even he imagined:

He told George the spectacular story of a scene he had witnessed...He had been taken to a mysterious house, into a sumptuous apartment, and concealed in a dark room, where he had seen a nymphomaniac making love with an especially gifted and potent man...His friend described the woman George had made love to...He also described the canopied bed, the mirrors,

everything. George's friend had paid one hundred dollars for the spectacle (83).

Not only does George discover that he was observed while he had sex with the veiled woman, he was paid less to act than the observers paid to view him. Moreover, the inclusion of the multiple mirrors suggest the possibility that he was observed by more people than just his friend. Finally, "poor George" recognizes what the reader has long known:

Poor George. For months he was wary of women. He could not believe such perfidity, and such play-acting. He became obsessed with the idea that the women who invited him to their apartments were all hiding some spectator behind a curtain (83).

Although the reader may well wonder at the lasting impact of this episode, George at last has the intellectual capacity to be wary for "months," to be chastened and transformed, at least temporarily.

By transforming a stereotypical male adventurer into a sexual phobic, Nin effectively demonstrates a destruction of one of the gender stereotypes of her culture. The bold, brave, and virile man, who is essentially following a socially constructed gender identity, becomes fearful, suspicious, and distrusting, qualities antithetical to his persona. By adopting these qualities, George's gender identity is effectively transformed, at least for a time.

As an alternative to George's shallow and apparently temporary regendering, Nin offers us a female character in "Sirocco," the fifth story in *Little Birds*, who seems to experience a discontinuity between her external façade and her internal gender identity. The story begins with a narrator vacationing in Deya, a resort town in Mallorca. The narrator becomes fascinated by two women who live together:

Whenever I went down to the beach in Deya I saw two young women, one small and boyish, with short hair and a round,

humorous face; the other, like a Viking, with a regal head and body (47).

The narrator is particularly preoccupied by the “Viking.”³ He later describes “the tall one” as “beautiful, with heavy eyebrows, thick dark hair, and light-blue eyes densely fringed. I always looked at her with wonder” (48).⁴ The image that emerges of the Viking is a beautiful woman who is regal and statuesque. She seems imposing and powerful. When the narrator first sees her, she is contrasted with her housemate. Although the housemate is more traditionally androgynous, her smaller size makes her appear more stereotypically feminine than her counterpart. By contrasting the two housemates, Nin plays with the reader’s presuppositions about gender identity and physical appearance. In Western society, “Viking” and “Regal” are words that usually suggest an “imposing” façade, regardless of any other adjectives that are attached. “Imposing” women are not stereotypically regarded as feminine, however, as the stereotypical “feminine” woman is submissive and petite.

One day, the narrator is caught outside when the Sirocco, or wind storm, hits. The two women who live together invite him into their house to wait out the storm. While there, the Viking tells the narrator a story about her life. She had grown up in a small western town, and had always dreamed of going to China. She married a man who had lived there, and they moved to China together. She soon noticed that he rarely spent the night with her:

³ I have chosen to refer to the main character of this story as “the Viking,” as her name is never given, and this is the most striking description given of her. Furthermore, the narrator repeatedly refers to her as “the Viking,” or “the Viking Princess.”

⁴ The narrator’s gender is never given in the story. However, Nin suggests that s/he may be a male when “the Viking” talks to the narrator “with her eyes lowered, trying not to see the face of the priest” (49). Given the implicit comparison between the narrator and a priest; the fact that Nin was a Catholic, and would thus be most likely referring to a Catholic priest; and the fact that Catholic priests are inevitably male, this might suggest that the narrator is male. In the absence of any conflicting clues, I have decided to consider the narrator male for the convenience of this analysis.

My husband would stay a little while with me and then leave me. I began to notice sounds that came from the next room... occasionally a stifled murmur...I got up noiselessly and opened the door. I saw then that my husband was lying there with two or three of the servant girls, caressing them. In the semidarkness their bodies were completely entangled. When I came in he chased them away. I wept (50).

The Viking was deeply hurt by her husband's infidelities. She asked him why she was not enough for him. His answer indicates first that he is unfaithful to her because he is accustomed to Chinese women:

“My husband said to me, ‘I have lived so long in China I am used to them. I married you because I fell in love with you, but I cannot enjoy you as I do the other women...and I can't tell you why.’

“But I pleaded with him to tell me the truth, pleaded and begged him. After a moment he said, ‘They are so small sexually, and you are larger...’” (50).

We soon discover that this woman, who seems notably imposing, even in Western society, chose to marry a man who preferred to “live” in the far East, thus exacerbating the size differential. Her husband's response plays on what must have been the Viking's deepest personal insecurities. She ignores her pain, however, and begs her husband to tell her what she can do to gain his love. As she explains, “I was so desperate and so jealous that I promised I would do anything that he asked of me” (50).

Thus, the Viking, whose size and demeanor make her appear inadequate to her husband, is forced to demonstrate her femininity through her use of traditionally feminine methods of persuasion. She begs her husband to explain his sexual rejection of her. When he does so, she agrees to do whatever he wants. By permitting her husband to use her as

he wishes, the Viking demonstrates a sexual submission which seems to be at odds with her external appearance.

The Viking's husband promises that he will only have sex with her; however, regardless of the pain it causes the Viking, he soon returns to his Asian lovers:

“He swore to me that...he no longer wanted his Chinese women. But I would lie awake at night listening for sounds in his room...Once or twice I am sure I heard them...I became obsessed...Finally I reached such a state of anxiety that I grew ill, began to lose my beauty. I decided to run away from him” (51).

The Viking, imposing on the outside, is clearly experiencing a great deal of pain and insecurity. Although one might expect a woman of the Viking's stature to display a streak of sexual dominance, her submission indicates an almost pathological feminine dependency. Additionally, her statement that “I...began to lose my beauty” demonstrates a stereotypically female prioritization.

The inconsistency between the Viking's external appearance and internal motivation seems to be resolved when the character meets a man who is not afraid of her stature. After she runs away from her husband, she meets a young American writer in a hotel in Shanghai. After she has sex with the young American, she states:

“When I was with my husband I had been made to feel ashamed of my height, strength. This man called it all out and enjoyed it. I felt free. He said, ‘You are a tigress. I love that’” (51).

Sex with the young American apparently resolves the Viking's image problems. She is allowed to display her strength and height, and is not made to feel inadequate for these stereotypically masculine physical attributes. Thus, the intervention of a character who does not assume that her imposing exterior houses an inadequately feminine gender identity permits the Viking to express her internal gendering.

Another aspect that certainly must be considered here is the differential between the Viking's two consorts. In contrast to her husband's perception of the Viking as imposing, she considered him to be "an Oriental," and thus a link to the country she loved:

I had heard that he lived in China...I was marrying
China...Somehow I was in love with China, so much that it
seemed to me that my husband was no longer a white man
but an Oriental (49).

In the West, Asian men are traditionally considered small. Nin demonstrates that the Viking's perception of her husband as "an Oriental" does not, however, take that into account, as she describes him as "tall, lean, about thirty-five, but he looked older" (49). This suggests that the Viking's characterization of her husband is based on her desire, not his reality.

Like her husband, the Viking's young American consort is large, as she states that he is "a tall man, heavy, tremendously dynamic" (51). Moreover, the young American seems willing to accept the Viking as an equal: "[he] treated me as if I were a man, a companion" (51). Unlike her husband, the American demonstrates to the Viking that he does not consider her imposing size to be a problem: "Once he got drunk in my room and we began to wrestle together like two men...He spared me no tricks" (51).

When we meet her, however, the Viking is with neither her husband nor her young American writer, and she is not in either America or China. Instead, she is in an liminal place, an island in the Mediterranean, living with another woman. This suggests that, given the differential between how her respective male companions treated her, the Viking feels the need to reconsider her position, both geographically, and as a gendered individual. Viewed this way, Deya is a "neutral zone," in which the Viking has the freedom not only to determine who she is, but also where she wants to be.

"Sirocco" demonstrates to the reader that, just as a petite feminine exterior does not necessarily denote feminine gendering, a more imposing exterior does not denote non-

feminine gendering. Gender is established based on individual choice and desire, not socially-constructed ideals.

Life in Process: Gender Construction in Action

Perhaps the greatest danger in suggesting that gender is individually constructed is the tendency to solely demonstrate this through the “finished product.” In other words, an author who chooses to suggest that gender identity is individually negotiated must be careful to avoid only showing this through characters whose gender identity construction is already completed, as “completion” seems to negate the idea of “negotiation.”

Nin avoids this trap by including characters who are in the earliest stages of negotiating their internal gender identity. Perhaps her best demonstration of this process occurs in “Lina,” the second story in *Little Birds*. The story centers around Lina, a friend of the female narrator, who visits the narrator in Paris. In describing Lina, the narrator focuses on her sensuality:

She has a face that proclaims her sensuality...but instead of yielding to her eroticism, she is ashamed of it. She throttles it. And all this desire, lust, gets twisted inside of her and churns a poison of envy and jealousy. Whenever sensuality shows its blossom, Lina hates it...She wishes nobody would make love because she can't do it (23-24).

Apparently, Lina is very “sensual,” but unable to accept it within herself. Because she cannot “yield” to it, she “throttles” her own “eroticism,” presumably attempting to destroy it. Rather than accept her own inability to indulge her sensual side, Lina envies and hates those who submit to their own desires.

In reading this description of Lina, however, one must remember to consider the source. The narrator expresses her opinion of Lina in the first paragraph, but does not seem to be entirely honest with the reader. She seems to be comparing Lina to herself, a woman who is eager to explore her sensuality and eroticism.

Moreover, the narrator seems to have her own designs on Lina. Not only does she suggest that she is attracted to Lina with her suggestion that Lina's face "proclaims her sensuality," but she invites Lina to stay with her, and shows that she is paying considerable attention to her friend's attire:

She bought herself a black lace nightgown like mine...She said she had bought the nightgown for a lover, *but I saw the price tag* still fastened on it. She was ravishing to look at because she was plump and her breasts showed where her white blouse opened (24, italics mine).

Apparently, the narrator is very interested not just in what Lina has bought, but in what it will contain. She notes the plumpness of Lina's breasts, and how they are visible to her. Further, she notices the tell-tale price tag which suggests that Lina is lying about having bought it for a lover, unless the lover, at least in Lina's fantasy, is the narrator.

Lina apparently is seeking to associate with the narrator by wearing clothes that are identical to hers. Furthermore, by suggesting that she has purchased the nightgown for a lover, and because the tag remains, Lina may be indicating that she has bought it to impress the narrator. This claim of a lover is a lie, as Lina would have removed the price tag if she had worn the nightgown. Since she has clearly not worn the nightgown, the "lover" suggested, for whom it was purchased, is the narrator.

Lina begins making demands on the narrator. She expresses dislike for the narrator's male lovers:

She began by asserting that she hated my lovers, Hans and Michel. "Why?" I said. "Why?" Her reasons were confused, inadequate...What did she want? (24).

Once again, the reader has only the narrator's perception. Without full knowledge of Lina's reasons for disliking Hans and Michel, we must rely on the narrator's assertion that the reasons are "confused" and "inadequate." The possibility that the narrator is

trustworthy is further bolstered by her seemingly legitimate confusion. She apparently does not seem to know what Lina wants of her. If the narrator is being honest with the reader, this scene suggests that Lina desires the narrator, because she wants the narrator to avoid the other people who mean something to her.

The narrator also seems to be growing more attracted to Lina, as she is increasingly fascinated by Lina's open sensuality:

She always looked as if she had just come from lying in bed with a lover, or as if she were just about to lie down with one. She had circles under her eyes and such a great restlessness, an energy smoking from her whole body, impatience, avidity (24).

The same woman who "throttles" her sensuality always looks to the narrator like "she had just come from lying in bed with a lover"; this ongoing war with her sensuality is apparently the cause of Lina's "restlessness" and the "circles under her eyes." The narrator further explores the cause of Lina's distress:

If her mouth, body, voice, were made for sensuality, its true flow was paralyzed in her...Between her legs she was impaled upon a rigid pole of Puritanism (24).

According to the narrator, Lina is "paralyzed" inside, unable to express the desire and eroticism she feels. Additionally, the assertion that Lina is "impaled upon a rigid pole of Puritanism" suggests that she has an almost sexual relationship with her own prudery.

At this point, the narrator's nearly obsessive observation and construction of Lina makes it apparent that the narrator is attracted to her. Lina, however, still has not given a definitive sign that she is physically attracted to the narrator. This changes after Lina criticizes the narrator's lovers:

She did everything to seduce me. She liked our kissing on the mouth. She held my mouth, and excited herself, and then drew away. We had breakfast together. She lay in bed and raised her

leg so that from where I was sitting at the foot of the bed I could see her sex. While she dressed she dropped her chemise, pretending that she had not heard me come in, and stood naked for a moment, then covered herself (24).

Lina's kisses and exposes herself in an apparent attempt to arouse the narrator, but is unwilling to consummate the mutual attraction.

The possibility that Lina is only playing with the narrator is eliminated when Lina becomes jealous because the narrator admires another woman:

We went out together and I admired the woman who was singing in the little café. Lina got drunk and was furious with me. She said, "If I were a man, I would murder you."

I became angry. Then she wept and said, "Don't abandon me. If you abandon me I am lost."

At the same time she raved against Lesbianism, saying it was revolting, and [she] would not permit anything but the kissing.

When Hans saw her he said, "the trouble with Lina is that she is a man" (25).

The word "admired" is somewhat vague. Perhaps the narrator expressed an attraction to the singer, or perhaps she merely noted that the singer was pretty. Regardless, Lina becomes jealous, and raves at the narrator, stating that "If I were a man, I would murder you." This statement suggests two things. First, it indicates that Lina is deeply attracted to the narrator, and feels a great deal of possessiveness towards her. Second, it suggests the stereotypes which have influenced Lina's construction of her gender. In Lina's worldview, only men can commit murder. Not considering herself a man, Lina is unable to punish the narrator as she would like. Further, when the narrator grows exasperated

with Lina, she begs the narrator, “Don’t abandon me. If you abandon me, I am lost.”⁵ Melodramatic as this line may seem, it not only indicates how much Lina cares about the narrator, but also that she is willing to resort to a stereotypically feminine mode of control to maintain her friend’s affection. Right after threatening the narrator in a traditionally masculine manner, Lina does an about face and uses a traditionally feminine mode of persuasion. This suggests that Lina is unsure about which stereotype is appropriate for her.

Lina’s confusion is further demonstrated when she raves against lesbianism. While she is attracted to the narrator and wants to have an exclusive relationship with her, she is unable even to consider consummation. This fits in with Hans’ suggestion that Lina is a man. Hans is reacting to Lina’s possessiveness, homophobia, and jealousy with the easiest available stereotype. In Hans’ reading of her, if Lina displays these characteristics, she at least reacts like a man. Lina’s conflicting verbal and physical displays are, therefore, gender ambiguous. Lina apparently desires sexual intercourse with the narrator, but because she is disgusted by homosexuality, she remains in the position of having to suppress the very urges that seem to define her.

Lina’s gender negotiation is further demonstrated when the narrator asks her what she wants from their relationship:

“What do you want, Lina, what do you want?”

“I want you to not have lovers. I hate it when I see you with men.”

“Why do you hate men so?”

“They have something I don’t have. I want to have a penis so

⁵ Nin’s father, Joaquín Nin y Castellanos, left her mother, Rosa Nin, for another woman when Nin was eleven. In the process, he abandoned Anaïs and her two brothers, Joaquín and Thorvald. This had an immediate effect upon Anaïs, leading her to cling to family members and her personal possessions with almost psychotic intensity. In the long run, it led her to be terrified of abandonment for the rest of her life. Consequently, one may assume that Lina’s repetition of “Don’t abandon me. If you abandon me, I am lost.” is not just melodrama, but a reflection of Nin’s own deepest fears.

that I can make love to you.”

“There are other ways of making love between women.”

“But I won’t have it, I won’t have it” (26).

Lina’s hatred and jealousy toward men for what she perceives as their relative privilege is given a blatantly Freudian exposition when she declares that “I want to have a penis so that I can make love to you.” This suggests that Lina has bought into a sexual stereotype, namely that only men can make love to women, and vice-versa. This stereotype, which reflects the traditional “sex equals gender” belief, is at the heart of Lina’s sexual repression. This repression is further indicated when she once again vehemently rejects lesbianism, repeating “But I won’t have it, I won’t have it.”

As if this was not enough, Nin complicates Lina’s ambiguous gender by having the narrator and her lover, Michel, drug and then seduce her. The narrator, less complicit than might later be assumed, asks:

“What did you do, Michel?” I felt quite drowsy myself.

He smiled, “I burned a Japanese incense that makes one sleepy. It’s an aphrodisiac. It is not harmful” (26).

Under the influence of the incense, Lina is caressed and undressed by the couple:

She knew what I was doing but she was enjoying it. She kept her mouth on mine and her eyes closed and let Michel and me undress her completely...She let Michel kiss her between the legs and insert his penis...she began to moan (26).

Once again, we are left to rely on the narrator’s interpretation of events. She claims that Lina enjoyed the experience and “began to moan.” Her interaction with Michel is surprising, given Lina’s earlier statement that she hates men. This scene seems to suggest that the “aphrodisiac incense” allows Lina to sexually negotiate her conflicting desires for heterosexual sex with another woman. In a sense, Michel and the narrator together

combine into a perfect lover for Lina. This is further illustrated when Michel and the narrator attempt to have sex in Lina's presence:

When she had enjoyed him, he wanted to take me...She threw herself on me with a sexual fury, caressing me with her mouth and her hands (27).

Lina will not allow the two who together make an acceptable lover for her to interact. She seems to aggressively deny them their desire for one another, and, in fact, to deny them individuation.

Nin does not, however, offer resolution to Lina's character:

When we came out on the street, Lina and I, holding each other by the waist, she pretended not to remember anything that had happened. I let her. The next day she left Paris. (27)

The conclusion of this story seems dishonest in light of the very real problem it apparently investigates. Lina's involvement with and pleasure from the combined Michel-narrator "lover" offers a gender resolution that, although complex, could have been further displayed. It is as if Nin stepped away from the typewriter and Jane Austen sat down. Austen, in turn, sought to wrap up Lina's difficult problem in a simple resolution and a *deus ex machina*. Sexual repression? Gender ambiguity? Send in an aphrodisiac incense and an orgy, followed by a quick departure! That should resolve everything!

This resolution, quick, ordered, and clean, resolves nothing. Lina doesn't appear to have worked through her envy of men, her lust for women, or her homophobia. Her sexual identity is still unresolved, and her gender ambiguity remains because she still has not found a way to marry her internal belief structures with her desires. In short, Lina remains a character in search of an individually-constructed gender who has been cheated out of it by an author in search of a quick fix and a tidy ending.

Conclusion

Nin's consideration of gender play is not as impressive for its coherence as for its prescience. Her consideration lacks the explicitness and clarity of later American writers on the subject, including Butler, but the operative word here is "later." She was among the first, if not the first, anglophone author to consider this topic. Additionally, her exploration of it was human and artistic, not theoretical and mechanical, as with the later gender-construction theorists.

Ultimately, Nin argues, individuals do not just construct their own identity, but also their own gender. They do this through acts, gestures, and statements, in short, the performances that they make for the society around them. Viewed thusly, Nin seems to suggest that gender identity is not permanent and unchanging, but rather mutable, and subject to change.

This perspective is particularly impressive because Nin wrote these stories in the 1940's, a time when the concept of gender-construction was not even considered, for an audience that believed quite strongly in gender stereotypes. By subverting the gender/sex stereotypes that her patron subscribed to, Nin subverted his beliefs. By publishing the stories she extended the subversion to her society.

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