

**UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA  
FACULTY OF ARTS  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND  
LITERARY STUDIES**

**AN ASSIGNMENT WRITTEN IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF THE COURSE ELS 240  
(MODERN COMEDY: MOLIERE TO SOYINKA)**

**DISCUSS GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN  
ANY TWO COMIC WORKS**

**BY**

**NNAH WINNIFRED ADA  
2015/200256**

**LECTURER: MR. ODOH ONYEKA**

**JULY, 2017**

Gender and sexuality is present in most modern comedy works, as it is applicable to both the male and the female sex. Using ‘THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST AND ARMS

AND THE MAN” as a case study to project the view on Gender and Sexuality. Comedy’s major aim, is to induce laughter, and have a happy ending, the plays also have the same characteristics, as the play uses elements of old comedy. For example, it uses satire, because the play satirizes the Victorian era, and it is mostly applied through the use of Gender and Sexuality.

The Victorian era, saw Gender with three distinguishing features; That only two sexes exist; Both men and women are fundamentally different, and mutually exclusive; and that males are superior to females. As it is known, Gender is viewed with the male dominance of the society, because the men are being as the stronger one, and the women subjecting to them. The men are being viewed as the domineering, vibrant and influencing Gender as compared to the females, whom the male get attracted to because of their beauty.

Wilde in his play, showed a contrast in this general accepted belief of men being the domineering and strong gender, and presented the female as actually being domineering, and this was during the Victorian era, as the play was a strong satire against the belief of the Victorian era. He portrayed this attribute of the women being strong, using LADY BRACKNELL, as evident in the play, she is actually the one who determines who and who gets married, as normally it is the duty of the supposed male Gender. Lady Bracknell portrays the attribute of the domineering female gender, who in the play antagonizes everyone, and wants her say to be final, also because of her class, as that is another of the Victorian era. Another character that portrays the stronger female gender is CECILY CARDEW, who tells Algernon Crainoff, when he proposes to her [allegedly claiming to be earnest] that they were already engaged for three months, even when Algernon was in London, and not aware of it. This act by Cecily goes in contrast to how the male gender would behave, as it is the sole responsibility of the man not the female, but Cecily went against it, just to achieve her aim.

Sexuality is also present in the play, as Wilde depicts his lifestyle of being a homosexual, despite being married and having kids. He shows the lifestyle of the Victorian era that believes men have the right to be sexually free, as opposed to women. This is portrayed through Algernon and Jack, with their excuse of going into town to see BUNBURY, that is for Algernon, and Jack going to town to see his imaginary brother EARNEST, whereas it was their excuse to go and live their homosexual lives, even though it was not clearly stated. Critics argue that Bunbury means a male brothel. Another case of sexuality is shown through Gwendolen and Cecily, with them being Victorian women, and with the constraints the Victorian age placed on women, not to be sexually free like the men. They become sexually free with themselves, as each of them having a diary, and writing love-letters about their dream man, unknowingly, it was about their own very self. Cecily writes to her unknown "Earnest", saying all forms of romance, breaking up and engaging herself with him after the breakup. When Algernon comes, she prefers to look at her diary than looking at Algernon. The same thing also goes for Gwendolen, who writes love stories about her dream man, but in contrast, it is to herself, and as someone who travels a lot, she carries her diary with her, just for her pleasure. Sexuality in the play shows the Victorian era, and how they conceived it, with men having their sexual freedom, women having constraints, living a chaste life until marriage, therefore, Gwendolen and Cecily's personal life was their escape route.

Another case of Gender and Sexuality is in the play- ARMS AND THE MAN. Gender roles is being present in the lives of the men. The men are seen as superior to women, therefore it is only the men who go to war, and the women stay at home. Just as in the case of SERGIUS and RAINA, where Sergius go to war because of his rank, and Raina is made to wait for him, also in the case of Paul Petkoff and Catherine Petkoff. The men are placed with more respect, because they are seen as warriors. It is also a satire, as the same men who are being placed as warriors are the ones who don't lead the battle, rather it is the younger ones who lead,

thereby leading to their deaths. This is further clarified in Captain Bluntschli, who runs away from the battle field, despite him being a warrior, and enters the room of a woman. There is also respect for the women, as major Paul Petkoff, tells his wife to settle something, as they would respect her because she is a woman, also in the case of captain Bluntschli, who runs away from the battlefield, to enter a woman's room for safety.

Sexuality is present in the play, as it is also a good thing if the woman remains chaste until their marriage, and this is shown in Raina, who awaits her husband to be, so as to be married to him. The contrast comes out to play in Louka, who gives herself freely to Sergius and they have sex secretly. Louka and Sergius are sexually contrasting to Bluntschli and Raina, as the former have sex with themselves before marriage, leading to their marriage, and the latter remaining chaste, leading to their marriage too.

Gender and Sexuality, remain prevalent in the two works as it shows the belief of Gender roles and sexual lifestyle of that period, as in contrast to the present age. Gender and Sexuality remain tools for satire, as both Shaw and Wilde uses it to project their views, and satirize the high class state and standard of that Era.