

The presentation of gender and sexuality in any two modern comic works

Gender simply represents how an individual feels and expresses their gender typically, through masculinity or femininity. Sexuality on the other hand refers to all sexual attitudes and behaviours in an erotic nature. The relationship between gender and sexuality is not static, it is fluid and changing. Some factors that contribute to situational gender and sexuality are culture and custom. For some nations, it is customary for men and women to behave in certain ways that are considered unacceptable elsewhere. Societal role theory dictates that people are products of societal social roles set in place through cultural traditions, whereby society instructs all individuals what roles are appropriate for which individuals under particular circumstances. In the western context, this can be seen particularly through the historic gender division of labour where men and women have their own particular roles assigned to them through sex, and that these roles are typical and desirable of their particular sex.

As regards to this presentation, we are going to examine these arguments using Soyinka's *Lion and the Jewels* and *Volpone* by Ben Jonson. Soyinka presents a young beautiful girl, Sidi, over whom two men are fighting in order to win her heart. The first one, Lakunle, symbolises modernity and western culture, the second, Baroka, the village chief symbolizes traditional culture. Both play all tricks to convince Sidi to accept their project of marriage but it is Baroka who wins and

marries her at the end. Lakunle is pleased with his education and academic achievement and actively uses this advantage to corner Sidi to his side but Sidi struggled rooted in the tradition, asserts, that he must pay the Dowry before any marriage could be possible. Lakunle rejects this idea and qualifies it a barbaric, uncivilized, outdated etc. Baroka on the other side with the help of his elder wife Sadiku, uses all sorts of flatteries, sweet words and the lie that he has lost his manhood to get Sidi in trap. In considering the issue of gender, we can consider that the participant roles are played by Lakunle, Baroka, Sidi and Sadiku in which the first two are represented as actors, doing something tangible and Sidi and Sadiku, most of the time as characters who are the goals or the beneficiaries of those actions performed by the male characters. Let's consider the following examples ; Lakunle: Sidi, a man must prepare to fight alone (p 6), Lakunle: Sidi, my love will open your mind. Lakunle: Sidi, I must show you the grandeur of towns (p,9). Sidi: every time, your actions deceive me making me think that you merely wish to whisper something in my ear. Lakunle: we buy saucepans for all the women (pg 37).

Lakunle as it can be seen, is the actor of most actions expressed by the material processes and Sidi is the goal and or the beneficiary most of the material processes are strict actions directed towards Sidi. All in all, though Lakunle in this opening scene is dealing with love affairs in his attempts to conquer the heart of Sidi, he still uses processes totally detached from feelings. On the other hand, the actions taken by Sidi are not the straight and direct ones which can bring about changes.

They are rather action designated to avoid men's tricks and behaviour, a kind of escape and self-protecting against men's preposterous. It can be seen that men are presented as more active and dynamic than women. All men's actions are directed to women who are the goals or the beneficiaries. In the same vein, Baroka and choices of processes in his exchange with Sidi, Sadikou and his other wives portray a man of authority and of action most directed towards Sidi, Sadikou and other characters this is exemplified in the following utterances in which Baroka appears; Sadikou: Baroka swears to take no other wife after you. Sidi: Baroka merely seeks to raise his manhood above my beauty (p 21). All the material process identified in the above utterances can be read as presenting Baroka (male gender) in a dominating position, the beneficiary of his. In most of the society, men are occupied in the public spaces where they are positioned as professionals and women are seen as sex objects. This explains why Lakunle and Baroka are seen as professionals and actors while the women appear as the learner.

However, in Jonson's *Volpone*, most of the play characters are men who operate in the traditionally male sphere of commerce. At the time in which the play is set, men were wholly responsible for finance and they were expected to have power over women in relationship, roles that most of the male characters in the play firmly occupy. The play compares male authority, love, sex and courtship to the social expectations of women by exploring two examples of marriage, one an extreme depiction of a renaissance woman (marriages) and the contemporary woman (marriages) and the contemporary ones.

The Italian marriage is between Celia and Corvino. Though Celia is virtuous, she is kept under Corvino's extremely careful and cruel control, Corvino keeps her indoors almost at all times and he forbids her at one point from even venturing too close to a window. Corvino's rule of Celia is extreme, but it was stereotypical for Italian men to be jealous and controlling of their wives. Likewise, Celia represents the stereotypical Renaissance ideal of a woman; she is silent, chaste and obedient. This is shown to work to both her advantage and disadvantage. Her sterling reputation initially gives her credibility in court, but her testimony is quickly undermined since as a woman, she was considered to be an unreliable witness (even to a crime of which she was a victim). The power of Celia's reputation cannot stand up to the stereotype that women are too hysterical and emotional to be trustworthy and rational even though the men who argue against her are known to be deceitful. Jonson's position on gender roles can be clarified to an extent through an examination of Corvino and Volpone, who both tried to exhibit male authority over Celia through sexuality (Corvino attempts to whore her to Volpone, who in turn attempts to rape her). For a while, it seems that Volpone will get away with this rape attempt as several men during the play conspire to say that Celia is lying about her accusation. At the end of the play Volpone is punished, but it seems that the primary reason for his punishment is his continuous deception of the play's other men rather than the attempted rape. However, it would be argued that while he shows sexual oppressions and violence to be reprehensible, Jonson believes that the oppression of women is

less important than the moral lesson about excessive desire and greed. Lust and rape are bad in other words but only because, they are a form of avariciousness. The crime volpone seems most guilty of in the play is excessive greed for money at the expense of voltore, corbaccio, and corvino.

On the contrary, lady Would-Be, the second woman in the play is the opposite of celia. The play contrasts her marriage to sir politic would-Be _ a quintessentially English marriage - with the Italian marriage between corvine and celia. Lady Would-Be is more independent than celia, which reinforces the stereotype that married English women (contemporary women) were given more freedom than married Italian women. Lady Would-Be is able to wander venice on her own and she is seen without her husband just as often as with him (contrast this with celia who is prevented from even leaving her home). Lady would -be is much more talkative than celia, though the play doesn't exactly suggest that this is a good thing. When lady would-be visits volpone he jokes in aside that she is so long-winded that he's being tortured by her "flood of words", and that, though he's only pretending to be sick, she's actually making him ill by talking ceaselessly.

The difference between celia and lady would-be illustrate different societal roles for women in Italy and England which suggests that gender roles for women in renaissance and modern era which suggest that gender is contingent, rather than biologically determined. In this way, the play challenges stereotypical gender roles and assumptions about women, though it some times affirms stereotypes too. At the very least,

volpone complicates the role of women in society by showing that women like men can be well read, virtuous, well educated and well spoken.