

UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA NSUKKA  
FACULTY OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES

TOPIC:

THE PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN ANY  
TWO MODERN COMIC WORKS.

AN ASSIGNMENT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENT OF THE COURSE (ELS 240) MODERN COMEDY:  
MOLIERE TO SOYINKA.

BY

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According to Susan Brownmiller in her book "AGAINST OUR WILL" she says "As man conquers the world, so too he conquers the world".

Looking at gender and sexuality in Niccolo Machiavelli's *La Mandragola* and "A woman of no importance" by Oscar Wilde"

In *Mandragola*, fortune is always seen from a male point of view. The term fortune, meaning chance or luck as an external or arbitrary force affecting human affairs, is often used in these works yet Angelica, who is the principal female character, is unable to control her own destiny. Her life, and its set course, is controlled by feelings of weakness, fear and intimidation that stem from being seen, not as a woman, but as an object to be possessed.

In *Mandragola* a woman is a prize to be conquered and won. Her personal situation is defined by the result of a man's fortune for good or bad and by the determination of his will.

Lucrecia, in *La Mandragola*, her role is to provoke the "pazzia" of Callimaco, who would have undoubtedly ended up like Orlando in *ORLANDO FURIOSO*, where he is not able to fulfill his sexual desire with Lucrecia. These women are continually left waiting to find out what their fate will be because they have no meaningful say in the matter. Their options are only to submit or resist, never to instigate.

In the play we see that Lucrecia has nothing to do with the success or failure of Callimaco's. She has no say in the matter and in order to achieve success Callimaco only has to convince Lucrezia's husband, Messer Nucio that the plan he has put forth is a good one. Once in Lucrezia's bedroom, Callimaco is able to force himself upon her. Sex is something that men do to women; men take their initiative, make things happen and control the event. This case is no exception and only after he has had his way with her body, does Callimaco take a chance and tell her the truth about himself.

Through the ages, Imperial conquest, deed of valor and expression of love have gone hand in hand with violence against women in both thought and indeed. Despite the fact that this is the first time that Callimaco and Lucrezia have actually spoken, he claims to be madly in love with her and unable to live without her carcasses that he has only had, or better put, that he has only just taken.

In the words of Callimaco, Lucrezia is "honestissima et al tutto aliena dalle cose d'amore" were it not for all the pressure from outside forces, Lucrezia would never have sinned. At this point in the story all the forces are working against her. In order to do what she thinks is right, Lucrezia would have to go against the wishes of her husband, her mother, her doctor and her priest. If she continues with the plan they have laid out for her, she will be forced to make a cuckold of her husband. Yet as authority figures emanate an aura of rightness and their actions cannot easily be

challenged, what else can Lucrezia be but wrong if she resists the will of those around her. As socialization teaches that men know best, Lucrezia eventually gives in. The only reason, however, that the opportunity arose for her to go against what she believed to be right was because of her unparalleled beauty. Although Lucrezia is the central figure of *La Mandragola*, she has the fewest lines of any character in the play. In fact, Lucrezia has so little to do with the action that most of what the reader learns about her comes not from first hand information but from what the other characters say about her.

Lucrezia is the object that Callimaco must have and will stop at nothing to possess. Lucrezia's life is ruled by those around her and it is not until she allows herself to be possessed by Callimaco that her situation begins to improve. In exchange, however, Lucrezia gives up her humanity. Her status is reduced to that of a thing, a mere sexual instrument.

When Lucrezia cannot become pregnant, she alone must shoulder the blame. Her husband, Messer Nicia, tries everything possible to cure his wife of her supposed infidelity and yet he will not consider the possibility that he could be the cause of the couple's pregnancy problems. In certain cultures a woman's erotic capital is closely tied to her fertility. For Lucrezia, her problems come from her inability to become pregnant. She is seen as a lesser woman because she cannot provide her husband with an heir. Even though Lucrezia's problem stems from her husband's

sterility, she is to blame for the failure of conception. Lucrezia submits to the hectic rapist in order to improve her situation.

Callimaco has taken title of lucrezia's body, a great sexual convenience as well as a testament to his intellectual stature and in return he has to assume the burden of protecting her from potential harm. This is what Callimaco promise lucrezia. He has gained access to her body and in return she is given the protection and security that her situation previously lacked. After being under the control of others, lucrezia finally has a chance to gain some control over her own situation and it is an opportunity that she will not let slip away. She expresses her new found boldness by tricking her husband into giving Callimaco a key to their house. After Messer Nicia introduces Callimaco to lucrezia, she guides the conversation to the end that she has planned.

While the life of lucrezia appear to have taken a turn for the better, this was only possible because all of the men have already lived out their own fortunes.

Gender and sexuality, could also be seen in Oscar Wilde. "A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE" This text is concerned with gender roles and the sexual double standards of the nineteenth century.

In "A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE" Wilde exposes through piercing wit, the hypocrisy of a society which scorns and punishes a woman for her sexual

misdemeanors but applaud and grants honors to the man in question. The play centers on the then publically damning revelation of Mrs. Arbuthnot's long concealed secret. She conceived a child out of wedlock by a middle age man named Lord Illingworth, who uses his charm to keep his appearance up after his numerous flirtations with various women. He doesn't value the moral qualities in women. He doesn't value the moral qualities in women, he regard woman simply as a toy, for him marriage is certainly not becoming. Twenty years of romance make a woman look like a ruin; but twenty years of marriage make her something like a public building for him man should be the only thing that should be worship he doesn't believe in the existence of Puritan women, for him there is no woman in the world who would not be a little flattered if one made love to her and by this, this is what makes woman so irresistibly adorable. Even when Mrs. Allonby ask him if he thinks that there is no woman in the world who would object to being kissed, he put it to her that her that he will win over miss worse, women are being seen as an object to toy with, without minding their emotion as was seen in Mandragola, women are being seen as adoring failures that men leans on them. There are the Laurel's to hide their baldness.

He consider Mrs. Arbuthnot "A woman of no importance" showing he doesn't really care what happened to her after they pated way's more than 20 years earlier and that he doesn't care what happened to their child.

But when the child Gerald had grown into a man, the supposed George who is Lord Illingworth, want the boy to work for him, and when the woman (mother) the cross and the broken heart at a tender age to train him decided that he (Gerald) will not go with him (Lord Illingworth), He tend to be the one making the decision for both the boy and the mother. He tends to have right over his life, without considering the decision of his mother, because for him, he is doing the right thing.

And she is only left to cry out her sorrow. "I have only had one thing to love me, only one thing to love. You have had a life of joy and pleasure, and success. You have been quite happy, you have never thought of us. There was no reason according to your view of life, why you should have remembered us at all. Your meeting us was a mere accident, a horrible accident. She pleads in the heart of a broken mother and a broken father with which the name Gerald came for Lord Illingworth not to take the only thing that gives her joy."

Note: It is a truism that women are been seen as object of possession, or an object to use and abandon, as we have seen in both lucrecia's and Mrs. Arbuthnot both women are suffering from the domineering attitude of men towards women.