

Name: Ezema Micheal Chikadibia

Dept: English and Literary Studies

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Name of Lecturer: Mr. Odoh Onyeka

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Topic: The Presentation of Gender and Sexuality in Any Two Modern Comic Works.

Introduction:

Human sexuality is the quality of being sexual, or the way people experience and express themselves as sexual beings. This involves biological, erotic, physical, emotional, social, or spiritual feelings and behaviors. Because it is a broad term, which has varied over time, it lacks a precise definition. The biological and physical aspects of sexuality largely concern the human reproductive functions, including the human sexual response cycle. Someone's sexual orientation can influence that person's sexual interest and attraction for another person. Physical and emotional aspects of sexuality include bonds between individuals that is expressed through profound feelings or physical manifestations of love, trust, and care. Social aspects deal with the effects of human society on one's sexuality, while spirituality concerns an individual's spiritual connection with others. Sexuality also affects and is affected by cultural, political, legal, philosophical, moral, ethical, and religious aspects of life

Gender is the range of characteristics pertaining to, and differentiating between, masculinity and femininity. Depending on the context, these characteristics may include biological sex (i.e. the state of being male, female or an intersex variation which may complicate sex assignment), sex-based social structures (including gender roles and other social roles), or gender identity

Sexuality describes the whole way a person goes about expressing himself or herself as a sexual being. It describes how important sexual expression is in a person's life, how one chooses to express that sexuality, and any preference one may have towards the type of sexual partner they choose. The way we choose to behave sexually is as individual and complicated as the ways we choose to dress or earn a living. Human sexuality rarely falls into neat categories or lends itself to simple labeling, but rather is a rich and complex area of human experience.

The Presentation of Gender and Sexuality in Pygmalion and The Importance of Being Earnest

The title of Shaw's play is taken from the myth of Pygmalion. In this story, Pygmalion scorns all the women around him and makes a sculpture of his ideal woman. The sculpture is so beautiful that he falls in love with it and it comes to life. By titling his play after this story, Shaw calls attention to questions of femininity and gender. As Pygmalion sculpts his ideal woman, so Higgins and Pickering mold Eliza into an ideal lady. These two narratives show how unrealistic and even unnatural the expectations that society often has for women are. Pygmalion's perfect woman can only be attained with an artificial construct, a sculpture. Similarly, the ideal noble lady of British society in the world of Shaw's play is a kind of fake, only a role that Eliza must learn to play. Pygmalion can thus be seen as showing how oppressive unrealistic ideals of femininity can be: to attain these ideals, Eliza has to be coached, disciplined, and taught. She has to pretend to be someone other than who she really is.

The play further explores gender roles with its other female characters. As it is set in the early 20th century, before women gained many basic rights and privileges, the play's other female characters—Mrs. Pearce and Mrs. Higgins—are largely confined to their respective households. Nonetheless, they both play important roles. Mrs. Pearce ensures the functioning of Higgins' household and reminds him of his own manners. And Mrs. Higgins takes Eliza in when she leaves Higgins and Pickering, and helps resolve things at the play's conclusion. These two characters thus demonstrate how women might still exert some agency within an oppressive Victorian society. But despite any redeeming aspects to women's roles in the world of the play, they ultimately cannot escape the constraints of their sexist world. At the end of the play, Eliza must choose between living with Higgins, living with her father, or marrying Freddy. In any case, her future can only be under the control of a man of some sort. She tells Higgins that she desires independence, but—although she is a strong character—we never see her actually obtain her independence in the play. Eliza is greatly transformed over the course of the play, but it would take even greater transformations of society itself in the 20th century for women like Eliza to have real independence.

In the Importance of Being Earnest, question of each gender and sexuality roles in society often center on power. In Victorian world, man had greater influence than women. Man made the decision for their family while women worked around the house. Wilde raises interesting questions about gender and sexuality roles in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, decision-making. The traditional views of gender and sexuality relations in the Victorian era was that men were active, mainly assertive and economically independent while women were assumed to be passive, pliant and dependent. I believe that Oscar Wilde does challenge these traditional roles deliberately to make humor out of these characteristics and to make fun of the conventional roles of society. The two main male characters; Jack and Algernon cannot really be regarded masculine or at any rate both of them do not fit the criteria for what characteristics a stereotypical Victorian man would be they are both what people at that time would call “dandy’s”

Algernon and Jack's ungentlemanly behavior and trivial pursuit can be seen as comic and deliberate in making men seem less powerful and serious. Algernon is also a little too concerned with clothing to come across as masculine. This can be seen when he criticizes Jack by saying that he had ‘never known anyone to put so much effort into dressing and produce so little effort’ Algernon also says in Act two when talking to Cecily that he wouldn't trust Jack to buy his outfit as he has ‘no taste in neckties’ Algernon in short, is ‘dandy’ making him unmasculine and a bit of a joke in the eyes of the Victorian audience.

A time in the play, when we see women as having more power than men is in the character of Lady Bracknell. She is strong and blunt even coming across as a bit intimidating. We get the feeling that even Algernon is afraid of her as he would rather make up a fake man than tell her that ‘he cannot have the pleasure of dining with her’

Another strong female character we see is Gwendolyn. She is feminine in some aspect like how she wanted the proper proposal but at the same time she can be seen as more masculine than Jack especially because she is quite assertive. Gwendolyn is also breaking stereotypes as when her mother tells her to wait in the carriage but she defies her, as most girls at the time would not even dare to disobey their mother in Victorian era. A good example of Gwendolyn being assertive is when Jack is made to propose to her properly even though Gwendolyn knows exactly what he is going to ask her and she even tells him that she is going to accept him before he proposes, Gwendolyn insists on a proposal, which is absurd. Gwendolyn is clearly going to be more and

more like her mother as she matures we see Algy mentions this when he says that “a girl’s worst flaw is that they will end up just like their mother.

Lady Bracknell is probably the most masculine character in the play. She is very pompous and the assertive of all the character. She has the power to stop Jack from marrying Gwendolyn and has the ability to boss the male character (Algy and Jack) of the play around. Lady Bracknell’s masculinity is funny because it is almost absurd. She is seen as lacking some more feminine characteristics like sympathy for example, she has no sympathy for Burberry who she claims “should just make up his mind whether he is going to live or die”. She gives Jack no condolences when he says that he had ‘lost’ both his parents, instead she says that he was careless, and when he explains that he was found, she appears to be outraged and shocked giving us the impression that she has control over the situation.

Lady Bracknell has the upper hand over all the main characters in the play. After the examination of the female character, it can be concluded that the female characters are not really typical Victorian women that Algernon and Jack typical Victorian men. Oscar Wilde has created a character that challenge the Victorian view of gender and sexuality relations and that is what causes the play to be so funny. The characters are not what you would expect and can be seen as over exaggerated stereotypes of gender and sexuality roles at that time.