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TOPIC:

**THE PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN THE
IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST BY OSCAR WILDE AND THE LION
AND JEWEL BY WOLE SOYINKA**

AN ASSIGNMENT

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BY

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Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities connected with being male and female, the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, and the relations between women and between human beings. Either of the two sexes (male and female), especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones. The term is also used broadly to denote a range of identities that do not correspond to established ideas of male and female.

Sexuality is seen as that which is characterized by sex or sexual activity. In most African societies, the female gender is subdued and reduced as a sex object and culturally seen as object of sexual satisfaction, to serve others and seek definition through being secondary to men and only good for domestic chores and seen also as a baby making machine, and male counterparts are seen as superior and overall head in all things. Sexuality can be seen as an expression of sexual receptivity or interest especially when excessive.

GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST BY OSCAR WILDE AND THE LION AND THE JEWEL BY WOLE SOYINKA

In importance of being earnest, Oscar Wilde deals with something unique about his contemporary age. Algernon, who is a character that seems to represent Wilde himself, is a reflection of Wilde's thought on the suppression of sexual identity, where he creates an alter-ego named Bunbury in order to act out indulgences outside of his normal life (which is an allusion to the way Wilde had separate his private and public self, and hide his true sexual identity). Though both sexual and social identity are closely intertwined, it is evident that through 'the importance of being earnest' Wilde makes two distinct connections: that the aristocratic society had fixed views and roles for both men and women when it came to jobs, education, and social interaction, and that sexual identity and desires were to be suppressed because their effects on society did not fit Victorian standards.

Oscar Wilde was gay in a society stifled by social conventions and governed by very tough laws and homosexuality. Nevertheless, some critics have argued that the playwright dared include homosexual connotation in the text. However, I would argue that more generally, despite

very little room for maneuver, he managed brilliantly to challenge the social norms, sexual stereotypes and gender representation of his time while pleasing aristocratic London socialites.

However, having stated that women do not enjoy the position that they deserve in society doesn't mean that Oscar Wilde finds women superior to men and that society would benefit from their presence in the public sphere. In the play, Algy and Jack are idle and lazy, but morally the women are not better than them: like them, they are idle, lie, cheat and are interested in money.

Actually, the play portrays real anxiety gender because it raises the difficult about the meaning of masculinity and femininity, yet always in an ironical and derisive tone. For instance, when lady bracknell interviews jack smokes because 'a man should always have an occupation of some kind. It is a reversal of stereotypes about women's activities. In Act II that the home seems to be the proper sphere for the man, which might have sounded funny and absurd to a Victorian audience, although less so to modern one. Therefore, if it is ridiculous to state that for men, why shouldn't it be equally ridiculous to state that for women? Gwendolene then continues 'and certainly once a man begins to neglect his domestic duties he becomes painfully effeminate, does he not? And I don't like that.' So just as Gwendolene, heterosexual women are not supposed to like effeminate men (whereas homosexual men might). Here, Oscar Wilde used a paradoxical punch line to explode the myths about gendered fixed identities and preferences.

More seriously, what people maybe did not understand and forgive him was that by making his "coming out" during the trial he had disrupted the sexuality and gender order. The latter concept did not exist in Wilde's time and was first developed by Jill Mathews in 1984 in her study of the historical construction of femininity. According to her, the idea of gender order gives recognition to the fact that every known society distinguishes between women and men, while allowing for variations in the nature of the distinctions drawn. This approach emphasizes the idea that patriarchy may not be universal and leaves room for transformation of gender because they are regarded as a process subjects to resistance as well as conformity. This way of viewing things seems to suggest that the gender order may be disrupted and changed, and Oscar Wilde was certainly one of the first ones to do so in his life and by using theatre as a means of expression for his questioning and mockery of both the sexuality and gender orders.

In the lion and jewel by Wole Soyinka, Women have not been given the adequate respect they deserve. In the current context of social change in which men and women's social roles are being deconstructed and women are now taking up position in public space. Wole Soyinka's works can be criticized from a gender and sexuality view. In lion and the jewel, women are really considered the second sex, essentially created for serving men. The Lion and the jewel cannot only be considered about representation of African customs and traditions in some of their aspects and the influence of the modern world on Africans, but also about gender. The way Soyinka has represented women makes them male-dominated creatures and/or creatures to whom things are done (goals and beneficiaries)

Wole Soyinka's works can also be criticized from a feminist view; in *The Lion and the Jewel*, women are really considered the second sex, essentially created for serving men, and in *The Road* there is no female character at all. On the other hand, Euba claims that when women appear in Soyinka's works they appear in a dramatized womanhood, because they are manifestations of the Yoruba goddesses Oya, Yemoja, and Oshun, which represent beauty, love, sensual power, etc.

In fact, if a literary work can be seen as works of women/men who are specifically sensitive to the language of their time, its social and cultural embodiments, and who use the skill of language to make their vision of life permanent, then any attempt to critically appreciate aspects of female and male representations in works by the iconic figure of African literature will be of useful interests and very fascinating.

The analysis considers the whole play from the opening to the end by focusing on some dialogues between Lakunle, Sidi, Baroka, and Sadikou. Each move of the dialogues is selected for the processes they contain and for the contribution they bring to portray realities concerning gender issues.

In this opening scene entitled morning, the analysis has shown how each character, viz. Lakunle and Sidi, has used material processes, processes of tangible actions to express

their representation of the world. 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/and the beneficiaries.

In the same vein, Baroka' & choices of processes in his exchanges with Sidi, Sadikou and his other wives portray a man of authority and/of action most directed towards Sidi, Sadikou, and other characters.

the beneficiaries of his actions (swear to take, raise his manhood) being Sidi and Sadikou. He even boasted professing his invincibility in the objective that both women will be influenced which is, to some extent, a selfish attitude.

The use of the above-mentioned material processes along others {make, do) is a symbol of men's occupation of the public space where men are positioned as professional, and women as learners.

A quick analysis of how the processes 'make', and 'do' are used in the play reveals important findings. Wherever these processes are used and Lakunle and Baroka are actors, those processes express a kind of control, transformation, and domination over/of the female gender according to their projects. But whenever women are actors, it is to express the sexual influence they have over the male.

...I did for him, I, the youngest and freshest of the wives. I killed him with all my strength. I called him and he came at me, but no, for him, this was not like other times. I, Sadikou was I not the flame itself and he the flax on old women's spindle? I ate him up ! Race of mighty lions, we always consume you, at our pleasure we spin you, at our whim we make you dance. . . (p. 32).

Or by restricting women's ability and competences to only making men suffer or offend them:

That the play characterizes women as object of male character's attention is evident. All in all, women in *The Lion and the Jewel* do not take initiative, they undergo it. Men take

it. They are the doers of the actions. Most of their actions are designed to occupy the public space (teacher and chief). They act overtly. Most of the time, whenever men are actors, the female are the goal and/ or the beneficiary. But when it comes that women take action, it is the negative aspects of it female characters when they use mental processes express their worries and feelings, and thoughts about the male characters while the male ones express their thoughts and feelings about practical matters.