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TOPIC:

**THE PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN WOLE
SOYINKA'S
"THE LION AND THE JEWEL AND BERNARD SHAW'S "ARMS AND
THE MAN"**

**AN ASSIGNMENT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR THE
COURSE**

ELS 240 (MODERN COMEDY)

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Introduction: The issue of gender and sexuality is a very sensitive one in comedy starting from Aeschylus down to our present day Zainabu Jallo. The fight for recognition and equality raging between the opposite sexes intensifies as the world today is no longer that of the man playing the domineering role with the woman being subservient to him as is obtainable in traditional African societies. As the world keeps on changing her garment, so does the issue of gender which keeps on changing with various dynamics to the gender politics couched in various forms and the attempt to subvert and exploit the situation of one another. The present study, examines the interplay of gender and sexuality as is manifest in the works of two among the greatest dramatists the English pantheon will ever produce- Bernard Shaw and Wole Soyinka in their two respective works- *Arms and The Man* and *The Lion and The Jewel*. As George Meredith has rightly stated in Susanne Langer, "the heroines of comedy are like women of the world, not necessarily heartless from being clear sighted . . . Comedy is an exhibition of their battle with men and that of 'men with them. . .'" (Langer: 460)

Hegemonic Masculinity in Arms and the Man

The dynamics of gender as we know it today is not a biological but rather a social construct systematically designed, established and entrenched in the society affecting the relationship between the male and female sex that today it has obtained the status of an apotheosis in modern literary and social discourse. Connell has rightly observed that "masculinity has no relevance if there is no femininity" and it is only by contrasting the two terms can we give them their meaning. According to Anna Manevik, "...everything that is masculine is not feminine and vice versa. It is not enough just to differentiate between the two groups "men" and "women". Most people would agree that some men seem more or less feminine, and some women masculine. The term masculine and feminine point beyond categorical sex

difference to the ways men differ among themselves, and women differ among themselves, in matters of gender” (qtd from *Masculinities* 69).

following this pattern of thought, critics have come to agree that although changing gender relations might be a daunting task, efforts can be made by writers who according to Emeka Nwabueze, “are involved in tackling the problems inherent in their society...” (123).

Arms and the Man and the Lion and the Jewel

Plot summary

One late night at the end of the 19th century, Raina Petkoff, the daughter of Bulgarian Major Paul Petkoff, gets an unexpected visitor who climbs into her bedroom and presents himself as Captain Bluntschli. He is a Swiss mercenary soldier fighting for the Serbian Army, and now, he seeks refuge from the Bulgarian troops. Despite the fact that Bluntschli fights for the enemy forces Raina feels sorry for him and helps him hide in her bedroom for a couple of hours before he is off again. Raina and Bluntschli meets again when the Bulgarian-Serbian war is over, and it turns out that Major Petkoff and Raina’s fiance Sergius Saranoff have met and made friends with Captain Bluntschli during the war. It does not take long until it is obvious that Raina and Captain Bluntschli are in love with each other and that the feelings between Raina and Sergius have have been built and established on hypocrisy and false ideals. A number of hilarious complications involving inscrutable ironies and vehement arguments follow, and eventually Bluntschli and Raina end up being betrothed to each other, whereas Sergius whose main goal in life ahs been to reach the top of society, finally gives in to his feelings for the servant girl Louka and asks her to be his wife.

The Lion and the Jewel, focuses on three fundamental characters. Baroka, the town Boss of Ilujinle, is the “Lion” in the play. He is a guileful, sixty-two years of age man, who fakes

significance to entice Sidi, the village belle. Sidi is a proud young lady and the Jewel in the play. She is courted by Lakunle, an instructor, who summarily trusts in western societal values and thought system. To lure Sidi, Baroka compliments her, praises her magnificence, and dumbfounds her with sentimental words, plentiful questions and axioms. The triumph of Baroka over Lakunle who ought to have hitched Sidi, however to do as such in light of the fact that he would like to pay the bride price can be viewed as the triumph of African traditional thought over western thought pattern and values. At the final act of the play Sidi tells Lakunle that he is welcome to her wedding. Lakunle trusts that the wedding will be in the middle of himself and Sidi, however she tells him that she has no plan of wedding him rather she will wed Baroka. Lakunle is staggered. Sidi says that in the middle of Baroka and hi, Baroka is still loaded with life yet Lakunle would be likely ‘‘ten years dead’’. Sadiku then gives Sidi her gift and the wedding functions proceeds. A young lady insults Lakunle and he gives her a hot chase while Sadiku gets in his direction. He liberates himself and passes a space in the swarm for them both to move.

Bluntschli, ‘‘the Man’’ Hegemonic Masculinity Incarnated

Captain Bluntschli is ‘‘the man’’ in this interesting play. The man being talked about here does not mean or refer to the conventional understanding of man as would be thought but rather the real and practical hero who is both humane, down-to-earth and at the same time embodying all the admirable qualities of a man who knows what it means and feels like to be on top of ‘‘the valley of the shadow of death’’, a man who has tasted ‘‘madness and folly’’, decorum and propriety, wealth and hunger being a free born but at the same time, not the Emperor of Switzerland and above all a man who has ‘‘spoiled all [of his] chances in life through an incurably romantic disposition’’ and fits perfectly well into Raina’s description of ‘‘a romantic idiot.’’

The Primordial Distortion: Sidi and the Power of the Eros

R. Sethurman (2004) observes that the femme- fatale in Yoruba transcendentalism and vagueness society is not an unceasing power following up on men and women but an explosion of the forces of the darkness within people. This explosion forces the Yoruba man and woman to recognize and overcome, by the constant exercise of will and control, the menacing maul of chthonic strength yawning ever wider to annihilate his or her being. (qtd in Falola and Boahen 162)

Based on the primordial distortion, a number of critics particular from the female calibre believe that the Lion and the Jewel totally distorts the picture of the African woman. Ambu Muhammad posits “Soyinka presents women in a degrading picture. Women with little brain to understand a simple thing as in the case of Sidi, a female central character also in the same play who tags Sidi as a woman with smaller brain than him, since she refuses to marry him unless he pays the bride price”. We may not totally agree with Muhammad because if Lakunle has asserted that Sidi is a woman of “smaller brain” than him, then we are left with the crucial question- on whose and what parameters are intelligence measured? Taking the side of traditional African values, one clearly sees the deliberate subversion made by playwright to refute in outright terms the idea that western ideologies are superior to African traditional values because as Sidi’s question to Lakunle unveils,

Sidi: [*throws him off.*]

The weaker sex, is it?

Is it a weaker breed that pounds the yam

Or bends all day to plant the millet

With a child strapped to her back?

All these abilities, inherent in a woman reveals the power of the eros as a “weaker brain” cannot exhibit such ingenuity in organizing the home when the man is not there, running around attending to domestic chores and at the same time responds positively and actively in bed such a creature cannot be regarded as being inferior to “the man”.

The power of the eros which as Chinweizu has said in Anatomy of female power, that the hand that rocks the cradle, rules the world in tandem with Freud’s theory, comes to a head when one looks at the disposition of Lakunle in front of Sidi manifesting those repressed sexual desires which emanated from the impulsive Id being extended to Sidi’s body.

Lakunle: *[looks, and gets suddenly agitated.]*

And look at that! Look, look at that!

[Makes a general sweep in the direction of her breasts.]

Who was it talked of shame just now?

How often must I tell you, Sidi, that

A grown up girl must cover up her. . .

Her . . . shoulders? I can see quite. . . quite

A good portion of- that! And so I imagine

Can every man in the village, idlers

All of them casting their lustful eyes where

They have no business . . .”

From the foregoing, it is evident that the Id impulse in Lakunle is so strong that the super-ego had to act as a check on him. Whereas Lakunle imagines every man in the village an

idler, casting their lustful eyes on Sidi, he inadvertently reveals and projects although surreptitiously what Freud identifies as the ‘*seething tumultous cauldron*’ (qtd in Orabueze, 2011). It can be argued while interrogating the silences in every work of art, that Lakunle must have felt a burning desire to grab and ravish Sidi on the spot nevertheless the ‘reality principle’ which demanded control and propriety stepped in immediately to act as a check on his psychosexual instinct.

It surmises us to say in the strongest terms that the ‘*agitation*’ and ‘*the general sweep in the direction of Sidi’s breasts*’ was only the limited natural response and reaction Lakunle could take to assuage the romantic attraction he was drowning in as he applies the reaction formulation which is the willful replacement of suppressed emotions with opposite ones. In the same instant, Lakunle diverts his interest and substitutes ‘the idlers and villagers’ for himself and actually imagine them being the very people carrying out the act which he at the present is engaged in this is the principle of ‘selective perception’ which is the ability of the mind to concentrate only on comfortable phenomena and block out unpleasant or opposite ones. Hence we see that it gives Lakunle comfort and satisfaction to actually place the aforementioned group of persons in his shoes and makes every conscious effort to avoid recall.

Looking at it from the projection principle, which is also known as ‘shifting blame’ it becomes apparent that the only escape route for Lakunle the respected village teacher is to ‘deny the negative feelings and attribute them to other persons.’ (Nnanna 142)

There is therefore no gainsaying the fact as to Chinweizu’s assertion coming at a head with that of George Meredith, that comedy is the battle between the male and female personality and here, we do not mean not the physical but the emotional and psychological battle.

In the gender politics and power structure obtainable in the two plays, it becomes evident that whereas Bluntschli is the towering masculine figure in arms and the man, Sidi represents the restored female being in eternal harmony with the cosmic order engendered by the power of the eros.

Conclusion

The present study does not claim to have taken an exhaustive view of the different shades of gender and sexuality as contained in these two works hence surrendering to Northrop Frye's assertion that "literature is an inexhaustible source of new critical discoveries and would be even if new works cease to be written" (Anatomy 47). In the Bible, the high priest embodies and represents the spirit and collective attitude of the children of Israel. In the episode where Joshua the high priest stands before the Angel of the lord and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him for the reason of the filthy garment he is putting on, the literary critic knows that Satan is actually resisting the whole of Israel whom Joshua the high priest represents (Zech 3:1-3) just as a clown can come and perform in the presence of Queen Elizabeth of England and if the clown has not performed impressively can say i.e. (Queen) "we are not amused" meaning that she, embodying the collective taste and desire of England, can say and we interpret it as "England is not amused".

It is in following this tradition that Bluntschli becomes the incarnation of the idealized male in all his absurdities and perfections, male chauvinism and the constraints of personality while Sidi is the silent but muffled and shrill voice who incarnates in the female personality the collective desire to insist on the energy both latent and manifest in the "other".

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