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**THE PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN ANY TWO MODERN
COMIC WORKS OF YOUR CHOICE**

Gender describes the characteristics that a society delineates as masculine or female gender is not determined biologically but constructed socially.

Sexuality covers a broad spectrum and is also deeply personal, it includes

- Understanding the sexual feelings and attractions we feel towards others not who we happen to have sex with.
- It is much more than body parts and sex (though it includes it too).
- It includes our gender role (the idea of how we should behave because we are male or female)
- Sexuality includes our identity (the core sense that we are male or female).
- It includes our sexual orientations
- It includes our body experience
- It includes our sexual experience, thoughts, ideas and fantasies.
- It includes the way in which the media, family, friend, religion, age, life goals and our self esteem shape our sexual selves it includes how we experience intimacy, touch, love, compassion, joy and sorrow.
- Sexuality is expressed in the way we speak, smile, stand, sit, dress, dance.

Using the importance of being earnest by Oscar Wilde and Arms and the Man by Bernard Shaw, we will discover to what extent is gender and sexuality in this comic play and this will be done by looking at gender roles and sexuality.

In the importance of being earnest the question of each gender roles centres on power. In the Victorian world of this play men have greater influence than women; men make the

political decisions or their families while women work around the house quietly taking care of the children. Men are valued for their intellect and judgement while women are attractive to men for their beauty and chastity. However Wilde raises interesting questions about gender roles in the play by putting women (Lady Bracknell) in positions of power and by showing that men i.e. Jack and Algernon can be irresponsible and bad at decision making. The traditional views of gender relations in the Victorian era was that men were active, manly, assertive and economically independent whilst women were assumed to be passive and dependent. Oscar Wilde challenging of these traditional roles is to make humour out of these characteristics and to make fun of the conventional roles of the society. The two main male characters Jack and Algernon cannot really be regarded as masculine, this can be seen when he criticizes Jack by saying he had never known anyone to put so much effort into dressing and to produce so little effect. Algernon also says in act two when talking to Cecily that he would just never trust Jack to buying his outfits as he has no taste in neckties. Algernon is dandy making him not masculine and a bit of a joke in the play. A time in the play when we see women having more power than men is in the character of Lady Bracknell, she is strong and blunt even coming across as a bit intimidating, even Algernon is afraid of her as he would rather make up Bunbury than telling her he cannot have the pleasure of dining with her. Another strong female character is Gwendolen, she is feminine in some aspects like when she wanted a proper proposal from Jack but at the same time she can be seen as more masculine than Jack especially because she is quite assertive. Gwendolen is also breaking stereotype as when her mother tells her to wait in the carriage she defies her where most girls at that time wouldn't dare disobey their mother. Another example of being assertive is when she requested a proper proposal even after accepting before the proposal, even Algernon mentions she will be more like her mother when she matures when he stated "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 has the power to stop Jack's marriage to Gwendolen and ability to boss the male characters of the play around, she lacks sympathy this is seen when she tells Algernon that it is time Bunbury makes up his mind whether to live or die, she gives no condolence to Jack when he says he is an orphan instead she calls him careless and gives a shock on learning how he was found in a handbag. Oscar Wilde created characters that challenge the Victorian views of gender relations, the characters are not what you would expect and can be seen as over-exaggerated stereotypes of gender roles at the time.

Also in *Arms and the Man* we also see the reversal of gender roles by Shaw using the characters of Louka, Cathrine, and Sergius. We can observe Louka's masculinity by provoking Nicola and her firmness has been heightened through her interaction with Sergius and requesting a marriage proposal if he is not a coward. Catherine has a touch of masculinity in her dominating part over household works in the absence of Mr. Petkoff, on the other hand she lacks firmness before Bluntchili, he can stand up steadily neither before Raina nor before Louka. There is a frail touch of effeminacy.

Coming to sexuality using *Importance of Being Earnest* Wilde uses the element of Bunbury to despite sexuality, according to some critics Bunbury can serve as sexuality exhibited by Algernon who uses it to escape social obligation. They used the meaning of the name Bunbury which has a relationship with the meaning of a brothel of men existing at that point in time. Also it is rumoured that Wilde the author of *Importance of Being Earnest* is homosexual in nature and he uses it to exhibit his identity but he was arrested right after the play was showcased to the audience.