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TOPIC: THE PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN ANY TWO COMIC WORKS

The Presentation of Gender and Sexuality in J P Clark's *The wives Revolt* and Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and The Jewel*

Gender and sexuality are recurring element in literary works which have formed a discursive formative in literary criticism. Gender is a term which is used to mean the cultural difference of women from men based on biological division between male and female, but in this case, gender and sexuality may be synonymously used.

Society seems to assume that sex is the same thing as gender. But feminist theorists believe that is a learned quality not necessary a biological fact. Webster Roger (1996) argues that "sex is a term which can be used to indicate the biological differences between men and women but gender signifies the socially constructed differences which operate in most societies and which lead to form of inequality, oppression and exploitation between sexes."

There are certain practices which are assumed to be good by tradition, legislation, religion or society but which are not favourable to women. For example, female genital mutilation , the payment of bride price, polygamy and widowhood in parts of Africa, the dress code and the code of privacy in Muslim middle East. These are some of the issues addressed by female writers and feminist, however, another big challenges facing women is that the issue if gender is marginalized. In Western society and culture, the male is placed at the centre while the female is dumped at the periphery and this also true of African culture. Simone De Beauvoir as quoted by W. Rogers (1996:74) expressed that:

Humanity is male and man defines woman
not in herself but a relative to him, she is not
regarded as autonomous being... she is defined
and differentiated with references to her: she is
Inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the
subject: he is the absolute- she is the other.

Women are assumed to be relatively weak, passive and dependent individuals, object of sexual desire meant to please and satisfy men's lust. They are also assumed to be less rational and more emotional than men. However, feminism seeks to change society's mind about women not being about to fend for themselves and also to achieve greater freedom for women to work and remain economically and psychologically independent of men.

It is on the above background that we discuss J P Clark's *Wives Revolt* and Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*. In these two plays, we shall examine the issue of gender and sexuality. In J P Clark's *Wives Revolt*, it is the issue of inequality and the marginalization of women by men that gives rise to the conflict. In this play, the oil company feels it is only fair that they should compensate the owners of the land where they operate in the Niger-Delta and they do so by paying certain amount which the Erhu wariens themselves know about. The people after several debates in their village assembly presided over by the elders and attended by the women, they shared the oil money in three main categories: (A) the elders of the town (B) men in all their age groups and (C) women in all their age grades. This sharing formula is not favourable to women and they protest against it. They rather demand that the oil wind fall be divided into two equal parts, one for them and the other to all the men which include the elders. With this protest which the men regard as not being in line with their ancient custom, a battle line is drawn between the men and the women which the result is that the women abandon their civic duties and allegedly resort to witchcraft and other bad forms of African mysticism by assuming the shapes of goats to terrorize law abiding citizens. The men in a bid to stop them, burn the ownership of goats in the society and the women go into exile as a result of leaving the men alone to do the house chores and take care of the children as well. The women later reconsider their position and decide to go back after being harmed individually with a contagious disease as a result of their sexual activities; the men grudgingly accept them back, cure their diseases and compensate them.

What this tells us is that, women's voice in the matter of public concern should be respected and not disregarded. We can also see how the men suffer in the play for lack of diplomacy and ability in handling women's affairs.

In Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*, we are presented with two opposing characters, Lakunle and Baroka, which gives rise to conflict of cultures. Lakunle is a symbolic character who represents the modern culture; his modern life is reflected in all he do. In his dressing, he goes about in an old style English suit, which is undersized and he preaches table manners to Sidi, his dream girl:

Together we shall sit at table
Not on the floor and eat
Not with fingers but with knives

And forks and breakable plates.

He dislikes traditional marriage in which the wife is under her husband and he hates more the payment of bride price, which seems like someone is purchasing a property:

To pay the bride price would be

To buy a heifer off the market stall

You'd be my chattel, my mere property.

What Lakunle wants is a marriage in which the husband and wife are equal. In addition, he wants his wife to imitate the white ladies in appearance and behaviour. It is obvious that Lakunle is madly in love with Sidi, he expresses his love by going to the funny extent of spilling water on his clothes in an attempt to carry water for Sidi and at other times, a bundle of wood. Sidi on her part is not moved by all these efforts by Lakunle, she abuses him instead by calling him a mad man and she insisted on the payment of her bride price.

Baroka on the other hand represents African culture. He is the custodian of the customs and traditions of his people. For instance, he hates the new culture because it does not respect tradition, which is the foundation of African culture. In other words, he hates the equality of men and women. He says:

I do not hate progress, only its nature which makes all roofs and faces look the same...

It's quite clear that each of the two men wants to marry Sidi by all means. It is the publication of Sidi's picture that sparks off the conflict between them. In the end, Baroka cunningly succeeds in seducing Sidi and marrying her through a clever plan by making Sadiku believe that he is impotent who later reveals it to Sidi and in an attempt to mock Bale visits him and she ends up being seduced. Baroka later marries Sidi to add to his already existing wives indicating how naturally polygamous he is which suits his belief that men are greater than women.

From the above analysis, we can see that the two plays discussed presents the issues of gender and sexuality which gives rise to binary opposition of men and women. But in *The Lion and the Jewel*, the playwright suggests that African and European cultures should come together for progress which is because two cultures stand to benefit from each other. In the way, men and women cannot exist in isolation, they complement each other.

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