

**UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA**

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**DEPARTMENT OF ARTS EDUCATION**

**EDUCATION/ENGLISH**

**TOPIC:**

**“THE PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY:**

**“WOLE SOYINKA’S JERO PLAYS AND MOLIERE’S**

**MISANTHROPE.”**

**AN ASSIGNMENT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT**

**FOR THE COURSE**

**ELS 240 (MODERN COMEDY)**

**BY**

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**Introduction:** Comedy has been approached from different angles by literary scholars from the very beginning in Greece as far as we know it in the western world. The first group of western scholars who developed a theory for art as a whole were Menander, Horace and Aristotle in his *Poetics* written thousands of years ago incorporating Socratic and Platonic ideas. The beginning of modern comedy can be very fluid to grasp beginning with the discovery of America, scholars have argued that the discovery of America is one of the main determinants of the break from old to new comedy while others, holding a divergent view points to the French revolution as the major propelling force for modern comedy. Following this line of argument is equally another school of thought who is of the view that Charles Darwin's evolution theory has much to do with the break from the traditional way of viewing life to the modern. Various scholars recently have equally disagreed with the three schools of thought mentioned above and posits two new incidents that have shaped the way men and women view their world the first school of thought, is the psychoanalysts followers of the renowned Austrian psychologist Sigmund Freud and the modernists quickly disagree with this school claiming that the second world war dominates history and will ever remain the major reason for a new world view.

Inasmuch as we do not disagree with these postulations, it naturally seems desirable to note that literature is a fluid entity ready to cast itself into a particular mode just to achieve its purpose. The very two plays under consideration are exemplars of the dramatic genre Moliere's *Misanthrope* can be subsumed under the mode of great comedy while Wole Soyinka's *Jero* plays is a satiric comedy in the sense that it satirizes the circumstances and societal structure that is responsible for breeding such social misfits.

### **Alceste'and Bro Jero as Social Misfits**

The play *Misanthrope* will be analyzed by portraying in lucid terms, the relationship existing between Alceste and Celimenes with other female characters. Alceste we can say embodies the dead ethical ideals and mores of the society and is frustrated when his expectations of honesty from the society turns to boomerang the major departure from this characters mode of thought and Bro Jero is that Jero manipulates the ills of society to his own economic and social advantage. The very catastrophe that Alceste plunges into could have been averted if Celimene had accepted to follow him and run away. Now as Lakunle points out to Sidi in *The Lion and the Jewel* that ‘a man needs a woman by his side in the battle . . . at least one who can understand, it becomes apparently clear that Alceste couldn't have been more in need of company than that which Celimene would have offered him.

The company of the woman is very indispensable to the man. In the Bible, God opens Adams eye and he saw his need of a woman, men are very independent beings but when it comes to matters relating to the opposite sex, they become soft and baby like.

Although Celimene has a putrid moral disposition, yet Alceste finds himself hopelessly and incurably in love with her and she happens to be the very replica of those vices which he (Alceste) loathes in the society.

### **Understanding Power**

Our traditional conception and understanding of power, has fooled us into thinking that power resides with the male gender, whereas at bottom, ‘the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.’ Known philosophers in history couldn't resist the temptation to get addicted to the female body even though they tried- the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, hated

women with all passion yet that did not prevent him from impregnating them. Jean Paul Sartre, after all his wrestling with life and meaning, found the company of the fellow writer Simone de Beauvoir irresistible and as Sampson in the Bible would say, "she pleases me well". Now what does this tell us- Adam forfeited his place with God i.e. his relationship with God just to be by the side of the woman; that is what I call power. According to Marianne Williamson, "when a woman rises up in glory, her energy is magnetic and her sense of possibility contagious." This is typified by Amope Jero's wife who in spite of her cantankerous proclivity has more will and courage than her husband Brother Chume. As is evident in "The Misanthrope", Alceste was ready to damn society and all it could offer and joyfully start a new union and civilization with Celimene and that no doubt would have made up for all his defied societal expectations.

Bro Jero couldn't have achieved such magnificent success in his affectations ministry if not for the help of the woman supplementing Williamson's view that "when a woman conceives her true self, a miracle occurs and life around her begins again. Philinte, Alceste's friend finds true companionship and love with Eliante the very girl that scouted for the hand of Alceste in marriage.

### **The Triad: Synthesizing Amope, Celimene and Alceste**

Celimene and Amope embody the very unbreakable will of the female gender. Whereas Celimene uses her own for evil ends, Amope, being a traditional African wife must claim that which belongs to her and cannot allow Bro Jero escape with her money.

The woman indeed plays the role of a stepping stone for the man in whatever endeavour he finds himself hence the age old saying that beside every successful man, there is a woman. In the same vein, beside every failed man, possibly there is a woman. The power of the woman therefore can either be used to achieve evil or good all directly influencing the man. When a

woman is head bent on frustrating or rendering a man useless, she employs every means at her disposal to do it and when a woman is head bent on uplifting a man, she will do everything virtually possible (as legally as possible) to achieve it. The power latent in a woman is what these two playwrights tend to uncover employing different means.