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DEPT. ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES

GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN MODERN COMEDY

Gender is the state of being a male or a female to make social or cultural difference. Sexuality entails how individuals decide to sexually express themselves is various orientations. Gender and sexuality refers to social concepts on how men and women should think, feel and act. It refers to femininity or masculinity of a person's role and behaviour as defined by the society.

On gender presentation in modern comedy, comedy constantly pushes the boundaries of the socially acceptable by transgressing and therefore expanding the boundaries of traditional gender representation, new modes of femininity and masculinity emerge in those plays in line with the changes of this time. In traditional comedy, men are presented to be masculine. They are not ruled by emotion, they are strong and hardworking. Women, on the other hand, are presented to belong to the home. They are ruled by men and by their emotions, and therefore were thought to often make bad decisions.

However, modern comic works especially those of Moliere, presents a contrary view on gender and sexuality. Moliere's Tartuffe, functions not just as a religious satire but also a satire on societal unfair treatment to women. He uses several female characters to critique the social structure that oppose females so unfairly, and through the female characters, demonstrates that females are capable of much more. After all, it is the female character that utilizes logic and cunning to bring out Tartuffe's unmasking and succeeds where the men failed to do so. Hence, it is through the female characters' insistency that guides the family through Orgon's foolish decisions and Tartuffe's scheme.

Mariane is portrayed as an obedient and submissive female who refrains from outwardly expressing her opinion. In this respect, she is the most conventional character of her time. She reflects what the traditional society finds acceptable in women

and displays what function women played within a hierarchical system. The scene where Mariane expresses her disdain towards her father's plan only to have it utterly dismissed by Orgon shows the dilemma most women at that time faced. Their voices were largely unheard even though it is rational and morally right. Women were expected to hold blind obedience towards men even though men's decisions can lead to an unfavorable outcome like that of Orgon.

However, through Dorine and Elmire, Moliere presents women of the modern society who are emancipated, defy conventional standards with tremendous vigor and enthusiasm. They are highly outspoken characters. Dorine, the maid of the family, outwardly expresses her opinion despite her role as a maid. She openly expresses that Tartuffe is a fraud defiantly towards Orgon with reason and understanding in which Orgon seems to lack. Dorine's absolute disregard for her position combined with her rational ability to see through Tartuffe's scheme communicates Moliere's argument that women should pay no heed to their position within the hierarchy since they are capable of using logical reasoning and making rational decisions, just as much as even more so than men. In addition, Elmira is shown to display a great degree of intelligence through her subversion of authority and using social conventions to convince her husband of Tartuffe's scheme. She uses cunning to expose Tartuffe by advancing on Tartuffe with Orgon hidden. This ultimately leads to Tartuffe's demise, as well as, Orgon dismissing his plans for his daughter. Thus, Moliere demonstrates that women are capable beings who deserve more than what the patriarchal hierarchy deems them.

In modern comedy, women are presented as objects whose possession is sought after as a prize or reward. Orgon wants his daughter married to Tartuffe not because the daughter loves Tartuffe but because he wants to use her to reward Tartuffe for his presupposed righteousness. Efua Sutherland's the marriage of Anansewa presents the society's view of women as an asset to their families. Ananse uses his daughter Anansewa as a tool to enrich themselves. He uses her to manipulate the wealthy men of the society so as to obtain favour from them. He promises his

daughter's hand in marriage to four different wealthy men in town without each knowing about his rival. At the end, he gives his daughter to the 'highest bidder'. Men are presented to be in power, and their decisions are binding to all whether decisions taken are logical or not. Orgon is clearly the head of his family /household although the rest of the family has much better sense than him. Moliere satirizes this arrogance of Patriarchal who feel superior to other in their family simply because of their position. Orgon refuses to listen to his wife Elmire, and Dorine over Tartuffe's hypocrisy. He also completely dominates his children, ordering Damis out of the house because he has dared to malign Tartuffe by reporting the religious man's attempts to seduce his stepmother. He also want to give Mariane to Tartuffe in marriage even without her consent. This character is also seen in Moliere's The Miser. Harpagon uses his aristocratic power as the head of this household to dominates. He undermines Elise's feelings and chooses a husband for her. He also tries to marry Marine, who is in love with his son Cleante.