

UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA

FACULTY OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES

TOPIC:

**PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN TWO MODERN COMIC
PLAYS**

AN ASSIGNMENT

**WRITTEN IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENT FOR THE COURSE: ELS 240 (MODERN COMEDY)**

BY

RICHARD, DESTINY .C.

REG. NO.: 2015/203146

LECTURER: MR ODOH ONYEKA.

JULY, 2017

Presentation of gender and sexuality in La Mandragola.

In the La Mandragola, the plot revolves around Callimaco and his single-minded objective of having sex with Lucrezia, the young, beautiful married wife of a much older man named Nicio. The fairly standard (and I think non-controversial) interpretation of the play is that Lucrezia stands for the Italian principality, and the various characters' conspiracy to gain sexual access to Lucrezia as standing for political machination to control Italy. Clearly, this interpretation of the play sees politics in explicitly gendered terms: political success, however conceived, is a woman. And inevitably the metaphors for achieving political success is couched in sexual terms. And the implication of this is that one must pursue political success like one would pursue a woman: with cunning, wiles, deception, and sometimes even force. This gendered view of politics is also evident in The Prince, because Machiavelli says that man must struggle against the goddess Fortuna, either through cunning, or with force. As he writes in The Prince, men must wrestle with Fortuna and force her into submission. "It is better to be impetuous than cautious, because Fortuna is a woman and it is necessary, in order to keep her under, to beat and maul her...She more often lets herself be overcome

by men using such methods than by those who proceed coldly...therefore always, like a woman, she is the friend of young men, because they are less cautious, more spirited, and with more boldness master her." Again, it becomes very clear that for Machiavelli, politics is gendered. And this raises the question which I brought up at the beginning of the post: would it matter at all that much for a woman to attain the highest political office if the way we talk about politics is still in very gendered terms I don't have a clear answer for this question, but what is clear to me is that HRC and her supporters talk about her campaign in these terms. HRC herself

constantly speaks of herself as a fighter that never quits, tough enough to roll with the punches, and all these other kind of very masculine metaphors. But I wonder if a woman's becoming the president is truly a substantive victory for women in general. If we really want to make gender a non-issue in politics, then perhaps we ought to re-think politics. It might be necessary that for this process to start, it must first be possible for a woman to attain the pinnacle of political success. But if we continue to think in terms of gender when we talk about politics, then how much have we moved beyond sexism? as which shape Lucrezia's role, the importance of her desire, and the real situations which dictate that everything must be as it is. One of the most surprising details about the play is the relative silence of Lucrezia.

II. Niccolò La Mandragola : Unexpressed Desire Machiavelli, so infamous for his work of political theory, *Il Principe*, demonstrated his ability for understanding the deeper undercurrents of real situations. Rather than accepting the dynamics of life at a shallow level of cause and effect, he looks further into the realities surrounding him to understand underlying reasons which drive those causes and effects. Machiavelli was also a successful playwright of comedies. One in particular, *La Mandragola*, a story recounting a scheme involving various conspirators who concoct a ruse involving a supposedly deadly potion of Mandrake root, infidelity, and murder, all to allow for one man's sexual conquest of another man's wife, garners particular attention. It was, by all accounts, his most famous and successful play. In fact, this play brought him more fame during his time than his political writings. In this play, we find Callimaco, a young man returning to Florence from France in order to find a woman of whom he has heard so much about, Lucrezia, wife of Nicia. His desire for this woman about whose beauty he has heard much drives him to enlist the help of a friend, Ligurio, in order to trick Nicia into allowing Callimaco to bed his wife Lucrezia. The play becomes increasingly more complicated and increasingly fun

ny, but one thing remains prevalent, and that is the idea of desire. Throughout, the common theme is desire: Callimaco's desire for Lucrezia, Nicea's desire for a son, Ligurio's desire to laugh at the expense of Nicea, etc. All characters have desires which are explicitly stated, except for Lucrezia. My purpose then is to find what this desire is, and how this desire drives the action of the play. Despite the centrality of the character to the plot of the work, she is rarely present, and when she is present, she rarely speaks unless spoken to. She first appears in Act III Scene 10, over half first. She first appears with her mother who is attempting to convince her to participate in the mandrake plot. Sostrata has the first line, to which Lucrezia responds with doubts, before being somewhat dismissed by Sostrata who tells her, "Io non ti so dire tante cose, figliuola mia. Tu parlerai al frate, vedrai quello che ti dirà, e farai quello che tu dipoi sarai consigliata da

lui, da noi, da chi ti vuole bene" [I can't explain all this to you, my dear. Speak to the friar, you will see what he tells you, and then you will do as you have been advised by him, by us, and by everyone who loves you] (consider the relative silence Lucrezia, but Mandragola 22023). We should here also note the subtle dismissal of her words which serves as a mechanism of silencing as well to ask Michel Foucault calls us to examine who can and cannot speak and "how those who can and those who cannot speak...are distributed" (27). We see character silence, she is silent for the scheme, keeping secrets. However, Lucrezia, the wife who is spoken for, is silenced differently, silenced by the fact that others have the voices to speak for her. Lucrezia's concerns, which is This correlates to Sostrata's to do what she is advised by others response to, silencing her from even saying her opinions to herself, or at the very least being told not to follow her advice. In the context of Initiative and Resultant genderization, Lucrezia is

being to assume a Resultant role, which, when combined with the lack of stage time and dialogue given to the character, it seems that her Initiative desires are not necessarily respected. This is not to say, however, that she does not have her own initiative desires. In this first speaking scene, she does state her doubts rather than simply submitting to the will of Sostrata. While these concerns are not respected, it must be noted that we do see that she has her own independent thoughts. Looking earlier in the work, we hear from Nicea a moment when Lucrezia demonstrated that sense of independence. When talking to Siro in Act II Scene Five, after attempting to have his wife produce a urine specimen, he describes her reluctance to do so, stating, "Quanta fatica ho io durata a fare che questa mia mona sciocca dia questo segno!...come io le vo' far fare nulla, egli [what a job it was to get that silly woman to give me this urine!...whenever I try to do something about it, she gives me a hard time] (Mandragola 193, Pocket Machiavelli 447). This initially can be played off as simply a husband complaining about his wife, in a typical fashion for a comedy. After all, by this point Nicea has already been established as a bit of a fool, and the plot hinges largely on the supposed gullibility and foolishness of Nicea. Essentially, he is viewed as being so impotent, he cannot even get respect from his wife. The emphasis seems to be on Nicea's lack, rather than on Lucrezia's boldness. In another moment recounted by Nicea, we are told of a time when Lucrezia would go to Santa Annunziata. She had been told that if she were to go to the first Mass there for forty mornings, she would get pregnant. However, a friar began to approach her in such a way as to make Lucrezia decide to not return to the church anymore. It is insinuated that this friar was approaching her sexually, which in turn would most likely yield the result of getting her pregnant. This did not appeal to her, though, and she left. Here we again have a moment of Lucrezia asserting herself, but again it is pai

nted in a way which avoids emphasizing the boldness of Lucrezia. In the first instance, with Nicea and the urine, the emphasis is on Nicea's weakness as a man and husband, and Lucrezia's boldness is ignored. In the situation with the friar, Lucrezia's boldness in rebuking a man, a clergy member nonetheless, is ignored because it is done as part of a morally correct action. She was bold in order to protect her fidelity to her husband. Still, it should not be ignored that the audience is being given subtle hints about Lucrezia's desires. What is seen is a demonstration of the bind between desire and expression. There is a recognition of the presence of desire in relation to Lucrezia, but a severe restriction in her expression or manifestation of her desire. Lucrezia has initiative desires, but is only allowed to verbalize those in certain situations, when they can be justified. Her predominant initiative desire by the end of the play relates to having sexual partners aside from her husband Nicea. Callimaco directly states his desire to have an affair with a married woman to characters like Ligurio, but Lucrezia cannot simply say it. She must wait for the proper opportunity to arise which would allow her to express her desire without compromising her character or overstepping her restrictions.

Presentation of gender and sexuality in "wives revolt"

In the "Wives revolt" by J.P Clerk, the female gender were treated as though they don't belong to the society, in Erhuwaren street in urhobo they have a share which they always get from the government but the male share it among themselves and not only that they asked the women to drive their goats out of the village giving reason that some of them turn to goats in the night, they were not given the opportunity to contribute to the new rule and they implemented it giving them days to do that, the women got angry and had to protest, they left their community and went to Tothemort hoyara which is their enemy but their they faced another challenge of sexuality, a woman by name ighodayen who is known as the most gorgeous made of honor infected them by sitting on the

toilet before them and infected them with a disease called crosspiece which is a pain in their vagina