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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES

TOPIC:

**THE PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN EMEKA
NWABUEZE'S "A PARLIAMENT OF VULTURES AND NICCOLO
MACHIABELLI'S MANDRAGOLA"**

**AN ASSIGNMENT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR THE
COURSE**

ELS 240 MODERN COMEDY

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Introduction: The gender issue in literature is as old as literature itself. Comedy as Susanne Langer sees it is an attempt by human beings to restore in them that cosmic equilibrium. The two plays under consideration portray in no uncertain terms the role of men and women in the undoing of the society collectively. The two works are critical of the political and marriage institutions, the fickleness of human beings, the selfishness and the capricious altercation men and women engage in in comedy. Most works have focused on the aspect of gender inequality, the demystification of the inherent power of a woman in relation to the man, the sexual orientation and an attempt to understand power as it is shared between the male and female in society. Emeka Nwabueze's *Parliament of Vultures*'s and Machiavelli's *Mandragola* depict how people employ the Machiavellian principle in order to accomplish their grisly and political motives without any recourse to ethical conduct.

The work will be exploring the trait, objectives and the driving force behind the actions of such characters like Callimaco, Lucrezia, Madam Omeaku, Hon Habamero

Machiavellian Praxis in *Mandragola* and *Parliament of Vultures*

Niccolo Machiavelli, the Italian renaissance political philosopher is well known for his seminal political treatise "The Prince". The argument raised concerning the subjugation of women in John Stuart Mill's essay holds no water when pitted against the present day existential realities where women commandeer the

husbands into dancing to their tune and the man is no longer than a vituperating puppeteer in the hands of his wife. The two plays examine the characters who in order to satisfy their selfish ambitions resort to the beastly way. According to Machiavelli, there are two ways of doing things in the world- one is the lawful or human way, and the beastly or violent way- these two methods leads Machiavelli to assert that when one approach doesn't work one can use the other alternative hence the end justifies the means.

Callimaco and Madam Omeaku as Machiavellian Archetypes

In the play *Mandragola*, we are confronted with a character Callimaco who is an avowed "Honeric" character who brings down Lucrezia from her "virtuous pedestal." Lucrezia's fall is puzzlement. She is the intelligent and virtuous wife who by the play's end not only agrees to commit adultery but murder as well. The real argument here is that the real deception is that Lucrezia does not undergo a conversion- she is of questionable character from the start. Upon examination, her similarity with the Goddess Fortuna reveals a deeper tale being told within the play. Machiavelli uses her to mock the church and St. Augustine in particular, that the free will is no match for goddess.

Madam Omeaku is another Machiavellian character because she joins the bandwagon the "male vulturian cult" in order to bleed the economy dry through their insidious corrupt practices. On the other hand, this young man Callimaco, filled with his lust for Lucrezia, Siro's wife goes to manipulate events to suite

his scheme by prescribing the mandrake for Lucrezia to take with the condition that the first person to have sex with this woman after she has taken the mandrake will die. Finally he succeeds but our critical lens focuses on Lucrezia whom we initially identifies with as a ‘saint’ but she turns out to be no less than a hypocrite.

Madam Omeaku does not lay any claim to any virtue she is the kind of woman that beliefs in ‘bring it let us share now and damn the masses we see her Machiavellian inclination play out in the various passages

Madam: ... you are not ashamed of yourself. What have you achieved with your education? You think that getting Ph.D or teaching in the university is an achievement? How much do they pay you there?... (Vultures 36). While we think that women will be better than men when given power it turns out to be that the female gender is even worse than the male. Madam Omeaku cannot even read and write yet she is a parliamentarian. The members look down on education and as far as Madam Omeaku is concerned the only thing that matters to her is the collection of her salary and allowances and as Lafenwa has stated ‘the quality of human life has greatly diminished and will continue if the like of Madam Omeaku continue to hold on to. It is assumed that when the male fails in his role, the woman corrects him but unknown to the world the woman is the most voracious and greedy being in the world give her power and she lives extravagantly even more than the male.’ As can be seen, the portrayal of

women as not knowing what they want is challenged in this two plays in that Lucrezia knows what she wants and waits for it to come her way while Madam Omeaku plays on with her vulturic stance.

An Analysis of the Political Bandwagon: Implications for Gender

Mrs Omeaku's intention to join politics is motivated by the desire for self-aggrandizement; She is an opportunist who has taken over the political landscape and foisted misgovernance, suffering and deprivation on her constituency. The absence of selflessness and patriotism, attitudes which can lead to good governance is not a recent malady contrary to what many think. It is long standing and deep rooted. In a society where the qualities that produce selfless leaders, and as a corollary lead to good governance are very scarce, there is immanent need for a legislature that can lead to good governance. Considering human frailties in general and our own fixation with power and materialism, the need for a competent legislature to ensure good governance cannot be over-emphasized. The woman that has found herself in a decaying moral political atmosphere ought to raise her voice in protest against the establishment but how can she do that when she herself was picked from her restaurant business into becoming a parliamentarian.

When we read this two women and their relation to the male gender, we discover that the women are made up of the same stuff that men are made up of. We are left with such questions like- what prompts Lucrezia into committing

adultery and agreeing with such wicked plan? Comedy is responsible for representing the weakness in human nature therefore the playwright tells us that the only thing that rules mankind is selfishness. Sostrata wants to have a grandchild by all means therefore she concurs to the plan and arrangement without knowing the real plan. Machiavelli and Nwabueze challenge the traditional belief that men engineer and execute every form of evil while the woman plays a subservient role but it is evident that the female is no better than her male counterpart. These two plays indict society for condoning these attitudes towards acquisition of material things that leads to happiness because the characters attempt achieving their plan through unethical means.

The disposition of men and women in this play reminds us of the comedy of manners where everybody puts on a mask to cover his/her real nature. It echoes Thomas Hobbes whose best-known work, *Leviathan*, describes a situation of unrestrained, selfish and uncivilized competition among participants. In *Mandragola*, Ligurio attempts to outwit and be the greatest beneficiary in their scathing deal while Callimaco strives to sleep with Lucrezia by all means. Siro gets a child at the end of the day, Sostrata gets a grandchild therefore everybody benefits at the end of the day hence "the end justifying the means". This approach to life only makes nonsense of those who are honest in their relation to their fellow human beings and turns them into fools.

Conclusion:

This work has examined the Machiavellian nature of the characters involved in Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* and Machiavelli's *Mandragola* and concludes that the male and female gender are both indicted and responsible for the decay of the modern and renaissance man. This approach takes us back to the garden of Eden where the man and the woman play an integral role in their own fall and consequent expulsion out of the garden.