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**THE PRESENTATION OF SEXUALITY AND GENDER IN THE
IMPORTANCE OF BEING ERNEST AND THE ARMS AND THE MAN**

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PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ERNEST BY OSCAR WILDE

In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the question of each gender's role in society often centers on power. In the Victorian world of this play, men have greater influence than women. Men make the political decisions for their families, while women work around the house, quietly taking care of the children. Men are valued for their intellect and judgment, while women are attractive to men for their beauty and chastity. However, Wilde raises interesting questions about gender roles in *The Importance of Being Earnest* by putting women (like Lady Bracknell) in positions of power and by showing that men (i.e., Jack and Algernon) can be irresponsible and bad at decision-making.

Algernon and Jack's un-gentlemanly behavior and trivial pursuits can be seen as comic and deliberate in making men seem less powerful and serious. Algernon is also a little too concerned with clothing to come across as masculine. This can be seen when he criticizes Jack by saying that he had 'never known anyone to put so much effort into dressing and to produce so little effect'. Algernon also says in Act two when talking to Cecily that he wouldn't trust Jack to buy his outfits as he has "no taste in neckties". Algernon is dandy, making him un-masculine and a bit of a joke in the eyes of the Victorian audience. A time in the play when we see women as having more power than men is in the character Lady Bracknell, she is strong and blunt even coming across as a bit intimidating we get the feel that even Algernon is afraid of her as he would rather make up a fake man than tell her that "he cannot have the pleasure of dining" with her.

Another strong female character we see is Gwendolyn. She is feminine in some aspects like how she wanted the proper engagement (she makes Jack propose formally), but at the same time she can be seen as more masculine than Jack especially because she is quite assertive. Gwendolyn is also breaking stereotypes as when her mother tells her to wait in the carriage but she defies her, were as most girls at this time would not even dare to disobey their mothers. A good example of Gwendolyn being assertive is when Jack is made to propose to her properly. Even though Gwendolyn knows exactly what he is going to ask her and she even tells him that she is going to accept him before he proposes, Gwendolyn insists on a proper proposal, which is absurd. Gwendolyn is clearly going to be more and more like her mother as she matures we see Algernon mention this when he says that a girl's worst flaw is that "they will end up just like their mothers".

Her mother, Lady Bracknell, is probably the most masculine character in the play. She is very pompous and the most assertive of all the characters. She has the power to stop Jack from marrying Gwendolen and has the ability to boss the male characters of the play around. Lady Bracknell's masculinity is funny because it is almost absurd. She is seen as lacking some more feminine characteristics like sympathy for example she has no sympathy for Bunbury who she claims "should just make up his mind whether he is going to live or die". She gives Jack no condolences when he says that he had "lost" both his parents, instead she says that he was careless, and when he explains that he was found she appears to be outraged and shocked giving us the impression that she has control over the situation.

Lady Bracknell has the upper hand over all the main characters in the play. After the examination of the female characters it can be concluded that the female characters are not really typical Victorian women than are Algernon and Jack typical Victorian men. Oscar Wilde has created characters that challenge the Victorian views of gender relations and this is what causes the play to be so funny. The characters are not what you would expect and can be seen as over exaggerated stereotypes of gender roles at the time.

Oscar Wilde places the male gender in a higher esteem. Looking at Jack though not the biological son of Sir Thomas Cardew is found worthy of being the legal guardian of his supposed niece ignoring other female characters in the play such as Miss Prism who on a neutral ground could have been more worthy for the post of the guardian of young Cecily, being older and obviously more experienced than Jack.

It is also important of note, the role of Algernon. Algernon Moncrieff, Lady Bracknell's nephew, is a languid poser of the leisure class, bored by conventions and looking for excitement. He, too, leads a double life, being Algernon in the city and Ernest in the country. Oscar Wilde here presents the male gender as being cunning, Algernon after learning of Cecily from his friend Jack, he picks full interest in her when he also learns of her wealth and beauty, he surreptitiously writes down Jack's country home address on the cuff of his sleeve as Jack calls it out for Cecily after they've promised themselves of each other's undying affection and love, without them knowing. He shows up at Jack's country home posing as Jack's wastrel brother Ernest to meet Cecily in the garden. He even goes as far as arranging with the rector Dr. Chasuble to be re-christened as Ernest.

Oscar Wilde ironically places a lady in a position of authority, lady Bracknell is young Gwendolen's mother. Wilde places the female gender in the person of Bracknell in a position

that matters. He places the female gender which is generally regarded as the weaker gender, in such a way that she has to give her consent before Jack could move on with Gwendolen. She also asks Jack to stop all form of association with her daughter after she finds out that Jack was adopted leaving Jack with no other option than to give Gwendolen the address of his country home.

Wilde also presents the female gender as an emotional gender. This he does using Cecily, Jack's ward who was always lost in fantasy, always fantasizing about Jack's supposed brother, Ernest. She's also lost more in ecstasy with the name Ernest. She falls in love with him even without getting to see or hearing from him.

The interest of both gender also gets to clash, Wilde gets to place the interest of the female and male gender at logger heads. This he does by presenting Lady Bracknell as indisposed to giving her consent on Jack's marriage to her daughter because he was adopted. This prompts Jack as the legal guardian of Cecily to refuse to give his consent on Algernon and Cecily's union else Lady Bracknell agrees to his. Lady Bracknell finally does agree when she finds Jack's paternity.

**PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN THE ARMS AND THE MAN
BY GEORGE BERNARD SHAW**

George Bernard Shaw pictures gender role in characters, Louka, Catherine, Sergius, and other. There is masculinity in Louka's character while annoying Nicola. She reveals her control through her interaction with Sergius. Mrs. Petkoff also shows masculinity in controlling house hold works in absence of her husband Mr. Petkoff. In first act of the play, Raina is threaded by Bluntschli who runs and escapes form soldiers. He threatens a defenseless woman with his gun and allows her to hide him behind the curtain.

In the play, arms and the man the female gender is able to speak out for herself. Louka during her conversation with Nicola, the young man she was originally engaged to before he discovered that she had her on Sergius. She tells him that she can't marry him because she doesn't want to remain in the lower class and saw an opportunity with Sergius, Raina's fiancée.

Nicola is a principle male servant of Petkoff household and Louka is beautiful maid and Nicola's fiancée. Nicola has his ambitions and wants to be a businessman. When he realized that Sergius has romantic desire to Louka, he decided to have Louka as a customer rather than a wife. So he encourages her to engage with Sergius. "Louka: I believe you would rather be my servant than my husband. You make me more out of me. Oh, I know that soul of yours. I must believe in my own way.

George Bernard Shaw believes Nicola used Louka as an object for gaining his wish as Bluntschli who used Raina as an object to save himself. Here, Shaw illustrates the condition of women in society and the way they are behaved by men. Nicola is satisfied for achieving a customer like Louka in his business rather than worry about his fiancée. He is ready to separate from Louka and encourage her to do it only for his ambitions. On the other side, Sergius prefers Louka to Raina when noticed Riana's hidden secret of chocolate cream soldier. He announced his engagement with Louka who is a lady like Raina now. Again, Shaw says that "Sergius utilized Louka as a mean for understanding Riana's secret when Raina was in the way of going out of house. The structure of act II is more serious. Mr. Sergius tries to make love with Raina but she leaves the room and Louka enters. She tells Raina secret to him without saying the name of his rival. Sergius tries to understand it while he accidently bruises Louka's arm. He apologizes but Louka asks him to kiss her arm.

George Bernard Shaw further shows the vulgarity and impoliteness of the Petkoff towards women when Raina explains that Bulgarians of good standing people in our position wash their hands nearly every day and time, Petkoff blames his wife's chronic sore throat on

washing her neck every day. “Catherine: Oh, my usual sore throats; that are all. Petkoff: [with conviction] that comes from washing your neck every day. I have often told you so” (Act II, 38). His lecture on the foolishness of frequent bathing is a sign from George Bernard Shaw on how wealthy men behave with women. For these people there is no difference between high and low class of women.

Bernard Shaw also presents women here as a people of class and power. Catherine is of greater influence in the play than her husband in the family, she refuses captain Bluntschli from marrying her daughter because she believed that he had no fortune and she didn't want her daughter to suffer, but is greatly convinced of Sergius being the right man because of the much she believed he had. She gives in when she learns of captain Bluntschli's wealth and fortune and of course Sergius is nowhere close to him. Her husband Paul Petkoff gives in without much ado.