

UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES

COURSE TITLE: ELS140 MODERN COMEDY

ASSIGNMENT

REPRESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN TWO COMIC WORKS

EBAN, RITA EBAN

2015/197744

Gender is significant in the description of the self. It is the condition of being man and a woman. Gender refers to the socially constructed concepts of masculinity and femininity as well as the socially accepted relationships between man and woman.

The representation of female gender in *An Ideal Husband* by Oscar Wilde. Women are presented as the weaker sex, whose works are seen as trivial and whose roles are to support the men in all there do and forgive them whenever they go wrong. Even when they strive for higher education or place of importance in the society, they seen as going beyond their limit and this is not really encouraged, they are sometimes mocked.

This is seen in the scene where lady Chiltern comes back from Women's Liberal Association and enters the room where Robert Chiltern and Lord Goring are discussing. When Lady Chiltern enters the scene, and tells the two men she has been at a meeting for the Women's Liberal Association, Lord Goring mocks her and asks if they discussed bonnets. The question of a woman's role in society and marriage constantly arises, and Lord Goring clearly sees women's work as rather trivial. This scene engages with the topic of what a woman's proper role is within society and marriage, as does the discussion between Lady Markby, Lady Chiltern, and Mrs. Cheveley, when Lady Markby argues that the House of Commons is the worst thing to happen to marriage since the higher education of women. As a member of the more conservative part of London society, Lady Markby does not believe in the advancement of women, while Lady Chiltern, as a member of the Women's Liberal Association, clearly does. The differences between these two women, and Lady Chiltern's constant defense of women's rights and liberal values demonstrates that this new, modern perspective of a more independent woman was just beginning to gain strength in the Victorian era. Lord Goring, who often carries the voice and opinions of the author, mocks Lady Chiltern's expectations of moral perfection. Lord Goring finds it a shame that Lady Chiltern cannot accept her husband, faults and all. This analysis of love supports the social values and gender inequality of the Victorian era.

Thus, the play depicts the woman's role of a caregiver and supporter of her male counterparts, a classic Victorian perspective. Much of the play provides commentary on the role of women in society. Sir Robert asks Mrs. Cheveley if she thinks science can grapple with the problem of women, which sets up the play's suggestion that women are highly complex. In the final act Lord Caversham enters, congratulates Sir Robert on his brilliant speech and "high moral tone", and tells him the Prime Minister is hoping Sir Robert will fill his vacant seat in the cabinet. Sir Robert looks proud and triumphant, but after meeting eyes with his wife, he realizes he cannot take the offer. Sir Robert reveals to Lord Caversham that he plans to retire from public life and therefore must decline the offer. In the same act, Lord Goring gives a speech to Lady Chiltern about the role of women in society and in marriage, stressing the importance of supporting a husband in pursuing what he loves rather than stifling his desires. She takes his advice to heart and urges her husband to continue his public service.

Lord Goring often draws a clear distinction between the role of men and women in society and in marriage. In Act III, he thinks to himself that all women should stand by their husbands. Lord Caversham suggests that only men, and not women, are endowed with common sense.

Although many of the male characters have problems with the women, many women have problems with the men. Lady Basildon and Mrs. Marchmont are miserable with their husbands, and fed up with their perfection. Mrs. Markby and Mrs. Cheveley believe that men need education, but doubt their capacity to develop. Lady Markby and Lady Basildon, and Mrs. Marchmont also comment on the role of women. Lady Markby talks about modern women, deriding their higher education, a topic that Lady Chiltern rigorously defends. She explains that in the past, women were taught not to understand anything, but that the modern woman is far more knowledgeable. Thus, women have a complex role within the play. The coexistence of men and women often seems a constant struggle, but one that is ultimately beneficial to all. Lord Goring asks her why she is following Mrs. Cheveley's example in trying to ruin her husband's career potential. At first she does not understand, but Goring explains that Gertrude is driving her husband out of public life by urging him to decline the vacant cabinet seat. He tells her that women are meant to forgive men, not judge them, and that by robbing him of his ambition she will eventually kill his love for her. She responds that Sir Robert wishes to retire from public life, but Lord Goring points out that Sir Robert will do anything to keep Lady Chiltern's love. However, the sacrifice he is about to make is one she should not ask of him. She ponders all that has been said, and finally agrees she has placed him on too high of an altar.

In *Volpone* by Ben Jonson, the female gender is looked down and treated as man's property. Corvino a jealous and greedy man who is ready to do anything to be Volpone's, even if it means being cuckolded. In his house, Corvino reprimands Celia for flirting with a lowly mountebank in public. He brandishes his sword, threatening to stab her with it. He becomes fixated on the idea that Celia will now begin a secret love affair with the mountebank. Celia protests that she never even leaves her room except to go to church. Corvino vows to cover up the window and forbid her from even going within three yards of it. A knock comes at the door and he tells her that if she interferes with his business, he will cut her into pieces.

Corvino believes that Mosca's appearance at his door means that Volpone has died. However, Mosca tells Corvino that Volpone has made a miraculous recovery by taking the *Oglio del Scoto*. Now, says Mosca, the doctors have recommended that Volpone sleep with a woman in order to keep his health. Corvino recommends a prostitute, but Mosca says he does not trust them. Mosca then claims that Lupo, a doctor, offered Volpone his virgin daughter. Taking this as a sign of competition for Volpone's inheritance, Corvino offers up his wife. Mosca tells Corvino that he is certain to be Volpone's heir and that during Volpone's next seizure, Mosca might pull the pillow from behind his head and let him die.

Corvino, convinced that Celia must sleep with Volpone in order to secure his inheritance, tries to patch things up with Celia. He tells Celia that he didn't mean the things he said. He tells her he is not jealous and that he will show it to her if she comes with him to a feast at Volpone's. Corvino forces Celia nearer to Volpone's bed. Corvino threatens to flay her and string her up if she does not obey him.

In its broadest sense "sexuality" describes the whole way a person goes about expressing himself or herself as a sexual being. It describes how important sexual expression is in a person's life, how one chooses to express that sexuality, and any preference one may have towards the type of sexual partner they choose. The way we choose to behave sexually is as individual and complicated as the ways we choose to dress or earn a living. Human sexuality rarely falls into neat categories or lends itself to simple labelling, but rather is a rich and complex area of human experience.

In *An Ideal Husband* [Mabel Chiltern](#), sister to Robert Chiltern is attracted to Lord Goring and she does everything possible to be by his side whenever the opportunity presents itself. In act one during the party Lord Caversham, father to Lord Goring enters and asks for his 'good-for-nothing' son, he speaks ill of Lord Goring saying he leads an idle life. She asks him why he speaks so ill of [Lord Goring](#), and Lord Caversham explains that his son leads an idle life. Mabel Chiltern disagrees, and Lord Caversham calls her charming. She loves him even though act unserious and leads an idle life. Both are attracted to each other while Mabel waits for Lord Goring to make the move, he is scared she might feel the same way. Lord Goring arrives. He is a British dandy, one who plays with life, dresses well, socializes extensively and likes to be misunderstood before. Lord Goring then turns to Mabel Chiltern and the two easily fall into a flirtatious banter. Vicomte de Nanjac interrupts and asks Mabel if he may escort her to the music room. She is clearly disappointed and tries to get Lord Goring to follow them, but he remains in the Octagon room.

At the end they finally share their feelings and he proposes to her. Mabel asks Lord Caversham if he can make his son behave more appropriately, but he responds by saying he has no influence over his son. Lord Caversham exits, leaving Mabel and Lord Goring to themselves. Mabel says people who fail to keep appointments in the park are horrid, and Lord Goring agrees. However, he tells her she must remain with him, because in her presence he cannot help but feel pleased. He then tells her has something to say and asks her to be serious for once. He declares his love and asks if she can love him in return, thus proposing marriage. Mabel quickly replies that she thinks it silly that he does not know how much she loves him, especially since the rest of London knows it. They kiss, and he tells her he was afraid of being refused.

In *Volpone*, Mosca mentions [Celia](#)'s name in passing. he describes Celia's beauty using the imagery of gold, Mosca purposefully appeals to Volpone's greatest desire.

Mosca even uses the word "cherries". to describe the sweetness of Celia's cheeks - the same word the Volpone used to describe how he tempts his would be. Volpone enters in the guise of Scoto of Mantua, a well-known mountebank. Upon his platform, Volpone clears the name of Scoto and advertises his oil, *Oglio del Scoto*, as an elixir. Ironically, while doing so, Volpone notes that gold is powerless to heal bodily afflictions like colds, and that good health is priceless. He also claims that he despises money. After pretending to offer his elixir at a discount, he asks for a handkerchief as a favour from a member of the audience. Corvino's wife Celia, who had been watching from her window above, tosses her handkerchief down to Volpone. Volpone tells her he will repay her with a magic powder. Corvino enters the public square and furiously breaks up the mountebank demonstration. Back at Volpone's house, Volpone swoons over Celia. Volpone tells Mosca to use his fortune in whatever way he needs in order to win Celia. Before he heard of Celia, Volpone was obsessively protective of his gold. Now that he has seen her for himself, he is willing to give Mosca any amount of gold in order to bring Celia to him. In fact, he does just that, for, as a belated consequence of bringing Celia to his house, Volpone is tricked out of his fortune by Mosca. Volpones does all these in order to get Celia, his desires increased upon seeing Celia and he decide to do everything possible to make Celia his even if it means using his money which he so much treasure.

Corvino forces Celia nearer to Volpone's bed. Volpone thanks Corvino for offering his wife, but says that he is too far gone for it to do any good. He implies that Corvino will be his heir. Celia says she would rather drink poison or eat burning coals than lie with Volpone. Corvino threatens to flay her and string her up if she does not obey him. Mosca tells him that she might be less modest if he left.

As soon as Mosca and Corvino leave, Volpone jumps off the couch and tells Celia that it was her beauty that cured him and transformed him into a mountebank earlier in the day. He tells her he is able-bodied and sings a song to prove it. The theme of the song is similar to Robert Herrick's poem "To The Virgins, To Make Much Of Time." Still, she says she hopes lightning strikes her face. Volpone asks, "Why droops my Celia As soon as Mosca and Corvino leave, Volpone jumps off the couch and tells Celia that it was her beauty that cured him and transformed him into a mountebank earlier in the day. He tells her he is able-bodied and sings a song to prove it. The theme of the song is similar to Robert Herrick's poem "To The Virgins, To Make Much Of Time." Still, she says she hopes lightning strikes her face. Volpone asks, "Why droops my Celia?" He then tries to seduce her by showing her the fortune that will be hers if she consents to be with him. Celia answers that her innocence is all the wealth she needs and that if she loses it, she will have lost everything. Volpone elaborates on the rich life he can offer her. Celia replies, "If you have...any part that yet sounds man about you...Do me the grace to let me 'scape. If not, / Be bountiful and kill me" She again asks to be tortured in gruesome ways.

