

NAME:EZEAPUTA CHINECHEREM

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Gender and sexuality: a study of Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* and Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband*

The issue of gender and sexuality has been a fertile land for literary discourse, little wonder this issue has been one of the major themes writers try to incorporate in their works. The state of ones gender and sexuality is seen as one affecting the psychological conditions of an individual and not just that ,it could also lead to different forms of disequilibrium. Writers have faithfully incorporated certain elements that concern this in their works. And this is evident in their choice and incorporation certain literary elements like; characterization, dialogue, diction, scenarios and some other techniques.

One would be displaying a mere charade if one fails to describe gender and sexuality for a better understanding of this essay. Gender and sexuality is the inner most concept of self as male female, a blend of both . It can also be seen as how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. It mirrors what a

person was assigned at birth. One can either identify oneself either as belonging to the male gender or female gender and in rare cases hermaphrodite. It refers to the widely shared set of expectations and norms linked to how women and men, and girls and boys, should behave. Gender has more to do with the socially constructed roles, behaviour, activities and attributes that are assigned to men and women in any given society. These expectations are not fixed but are continually being constructed and reinforced through social relationships. It seems like a continuum in which there are different degrees to which one transgresses or breaks the social norms related to the ideal “woman” and man. These norms are upheld by a system of punishment and privileges. And they are not only policed, they are also internalized. Gender and sexuality can combine to make a huge difference in people’s lives. It has so many expectations linked to it and as such influences every single thing one does.

Since much is expected from the “gendered-individuals,” they are usually pressurized and hunted with the ideology that they must meet up to expectations. For instance in some contexts, women may be forced to enter marriage against their will, or some may be subject to marital rape or they may be compelled to undergo female circumcision in order to be perceived by society as an “adult woman”. Boys too are told how to behave as men, how to be taken seriously by

their family and community. This alone could put them into being who they didn't want to be.

The intention of this essay, is to explicate how the issue of gender and sexuality is presented and addressed in Ola Rotimi's ***Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again***. And Oscar Wilde's ***An Ideal Husband***.

Prominent among the various approaches adopted by playwrights in their representation of gender and sexuality is Ola Rotimi's facial comical approach in his play. *Our husband has gone mad again*" in the early part of the play before the emergence of Liza, Rotimi presents a group of dumb, docile women, this is in direct contrast with Wilde's *Ideal Husband* where some women are presented as intelligent eg is Mrs Chiltren, who are rendered inactive by a long period of subjugation under the patriarchal culture that has made their oppressed state to look like a natural way of life. The man of the family, Rahman Lejoka-Brown is the god of his own household. His orders are as potent and as final as those of the gods. The ex-military-man-turned-politician prides himself as being more prudent than his father because he (Lekoja-Brown) acquires as many women as he can "handle" unlike his father who had a hundred and fifteen of them. The women are reduced to a mere property. This view coheres with Simon de Beauvoir's observation that "man defines woman not in herself, but as a relative to him, she is not regarded as an autonomous being. He acquires mama Rashida from his late

elder brother, and in addition to the “well bred pigeon” he marries Sikra to meet the demands of his political ambition having realized that Sikra is the daughter of the president of the Nigerian union of market women.

Oscar Wilde’s “ideal husband” presents women as trying to stand up against such subjugation. By presenting women as striving to go into the political sect, he removes the limitations women have. In fact he presents men as being propelled by the women. He emphasizes the strength of women over the men, In Rotimi’s *Our Husband has Gone Mad again* though they live together under the same roof as husband and wives, the man treats them as mere slaves. His communication with them is mostly in the form of commands and orders to which they unreservedly respond “yes, my lord”. The women have neither voice nor choice, neither ambition nor power simply because they are “women”, the funny thing is that in spite all these, and the house is “peaceful” because for then it is a natural thing that a man must be on top of a woman. They are complacent about their subservient position for then, it is a natural state. And it is the gender norm designed by the society in which they live, they have no choice but abide by it. Wilde exposes this default clearly as Mrs. Erylnne is punished for not conforming to the gender norm.

Liza’s presence in Lejoka-Brown’s house however exposes the enslavement of the other women. She has refused to be “doomed to becoming “one of the three sacrificial slaves” in the nauseating clay-walled, gas chamber” of a house all in the

name of a wife. Liza mingles with the other women in order to liberate them from their subservient situation. The fact that the women hold tenaciously to what they have learnt and have also started making use of them at a subjugated position in the end the traditional family breaks up because the husband fails make necessary adjustment to align with the new women who are no longer limited by their gender.

In conclusion one can see that Wilde's "An Ideal Husband" and Ola Rotimi's "Our Husband has Gone Mad Again" faithfully incorporates the issue of gender and sexually. The social expectations accrued to it and its repercussions. The theme of liberation from the limitations placed by the society especially as regards one's gender and sexuality is visited and well explicated.