

PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN MOLIERE'S *TARTUFFE* AND OLA ROTIMI'S *OUR HUSBAND HAS GONE MAD AGAIN*

Gender according to M.H Abrams et al in their *Glossary of Literary Terms* is the masculinity or femininity in personality traits and behavior. Gender studies have an obvious overlap with feminist criticism, gay and lesbian studies; the distinguishing attribute of gender studies has to be their special attention to the roles of male and of varying conceptions of masculinity, in the course of social, political and artistic history. The issues of gender and sexuality are indispensable and quite controversial in virtually all modern comedy plays. It is a social construction that is diverse, variable and dependent on historical circumstances. Gender criticism analyses differing conception of gender and their role in writing, reception, subject matter and evaluation of literary works.

Gender studies are indebted to the social historian Michel Foucault, who analyzed all sexual identities, whether perceived to be normal or transgressive , as constructed and reconstructed in various eras of social discourses under the impulse of the power-drive and power-competition.

As at the time Moliere wrote *Tartuffe* (1664), gender inequality was prevalent. Women were relegated to low social statuses. They were meant to take orders from the men. Also, women are seen to be more of possessions, satisfying their husbands after the day's activities. During this time period women were looked at much differently than they are today. Women were supposed to be subservient to the men in their life.

However, Moliere presents a different scene about the feminine characters in the play. *Tartuffe* both challenges and supports traditional gender stereotypes for women. The character, Dorine is a case study here. She has many characteristics throughout this play that I found to be very comical but at the same time noble. I believe that Dorine's character challenges the tradition roles for women. Dorine is considered to be Mariane's servant or lady in waiting. Dorine's character in this play is very honest and blunt. But for the men, they have weaknesses that are even thought to belong to the women. Orgon for instance is easily gullible. Tartuffe (the trickster) deceives him but Orgon thinks him a holy and trustworthy man. Even when Cleante and Dorin want to dispose the hypocritic nature of Tartuffe to him, he refuses to believe them. But Dorin cannot be beguiled. She is observant and clever to see the true nature of Tartuffe. She proves that to be high-headed is not to be high-minded.

Again, Dorine is honest, outspoken and courageous. She does not hold back what she is thinking. She has no problem telling Mariane, Orgon and Tartuffe how she feels. This was very unusual behavior for women in this time, especially for a lady in waiting.

The first encounter I am going to talk about is that between Dorine and Orgon. Orgon is trying to have a private conversation with his daughter and Dorine walks in and interrupts. In Act II, Scene II we see Dorine speak her mind about Mariane marrying Tartuffe. Starting around line 13 we see a Dorine interrupt Mariane and speak on her behalf:

ORGON. "Daughter, I mean it; you're to be his wife."

DORINE. "No, don't believe your father; it's all a hoax"

(2.2. 12-14)

Back in these times no women would speak back to a man like that, let alone someone they worked for. This demonstrates her bold character. Dorine and Orgon's arguing goes back and forth for the rest of the scene. Around line 86 we see Dorine keeps interrupting Orgon and he is getting very angry as in the conversation below

ORGON. "Don't interrupt me further. Why can't you learn That certain things are none of your concern?"

DORINE. "It's for your own sake that I interfere.

For every comment, statement or question that Orgon throws out during this scene Dorine has a witty response very quickly.

Sexuality features when Tartuffe wants to sleep with Orgon's wife, Mariane. He also wants to marry Emire Orgon's daughter without having true love for her. Here, love is not seen as a noble ideal but as a way to satisfy one's sexual appetite. Sexuality is not condoned in this kind of society.

In the issue of sexuality, women are seen as the weaker sex. Sexuality is influenced by gender. Sex here is about how you feel and how you choose to identify yourself. Whereas the men are domineering and stronger, capable of hiding their emotions, women are portrayed to be feeble and unable to mask their feelings.

In the play, *'Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again'* by Ola Rotimi, we are presented with men with overbearing spirit. This is evident in the character of Lejoka Brown, the play's protagonist and his contemporaries in the National Liberation Party. They parade themselves as honorable and respectable men in the society where as, they are

incapable of genuine representation. Men who should be seen as public figures, become not only disappointment to the society but also to their families where they have primary functions. Lejoka Brown for instance is deficient in myriad ways. He lacks the acumen of a democratic leader. He cannot as well manage his family well. He shows his military prowess by issuing order to his wives and denying them freedom to speak. This makes them deny him their support and have quarrels with him. This of course is a scandal; a weakness to an executive chairman thus his down fall. Such domineering spirit can also be seeing in the character of Orgon in *Tarfuffe*.

Sexuality is quite acceptable in terms of culture in *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again*. The religion (Islamic) of Lejoka Brown condones one to marry as many wives as possible. For this and for his political reasons, he marries three wives. Liza on realizing that Mama Rashida and Sikira are his wives gets mad at him for he has never disclosed this

issue to her. As Lejoka tries to pacify her anger with 'an egg treatment', a coinage by Gideon Okonkwo which means to treat her delicately and with feeling of love, she resists him. She refuses to be deceived and take command from him. Also, Liza wants fair treatment, not to be used as a property. According to her, 'men and women are born equal.' With this attitude, she empowers the women in the house. Sikira inspired, capitalizes on this and becomes powerful to the extent of contesting for a post in National Liberation Party.