

**FACULTY OF EDUCATION
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**TOPIC
THE PESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN ANY
TWO MODERN COMIC WORK**

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THE PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN MANDRAGOLA AND JERO PLAYS

GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN MANDRAGOLA

In the Renaissance, power and agency, which so often were allocated differently according to gender, begin to change. The rise of powerful female monarchs such as Isabel I of Castile and Elizabeth I of England, who served as more than mere figureheads, and brought on periods of marked prosperity to their nations helped alter perspectives in regards to the abilities of females. Isabel I was part of the ruling couple which sponsored Columbus's journey to the New World, which would bring unimaginable success and riches to Spain, so much so that the later collapse of the national economy would leave space for nostalgia for the bygone age of the female ruler. Elizabeth I was later the woman who would destroy the Armada which helped establish that Spanish dominance. More importantly, she represented an important development from Isabel I in the spectrum of female agency, as Elizabeth I, Gloriana, the Virgin Queen, would succeed in all of her endeavors, including the aforementioned destruction of the Spanish Armada, without the assistance of a King, a male counterpart. This changing concept, seen politically, also is reflected in the literature of the time, which demonstrates developments in self-agency in respect to what can or cannot be done by each gender. What we can see in some of these works more is a development of agency in expression, the ability to express desire, specifically, the changes in ways that a female could express desire. Desire in itself becomes an effective metric for the development of gender agency as it creates a smooth gradient from mental to verbal to physical actions. Desire can be identified from its genesis in the character's mind until the physical manifestation of that desire. Expressing desires was also heavily controlled, with clear distinctions being made as to what was allowed and

what was not allowed to be desired by people according to their respective genders, offering clear points from which to analyze desire.

In Mandragola, we find Lucrezia, who has the desire to be a mother, which her impotent husband cannot make her, but also a desire to select a sexual partner other than her husband. She still was not allowed to express this desire, but the audience acknowledges that Lucrezia has such a desire, and accepts it. Throughout the play, this almost silent character, if we compare the amount of lines she is given with her importance to the work, is able to work through a male character, utilizing opportunities which arise in order to change circumstances in her favor. Still, Lucrezia is not able to verbally express her desires. In the play, not only does Lucrezia demonstrate physical agency, committing the deeds which will allow her to achieve her desires, but the specific ways in which those desires are achieved, as well as the circumstances around them alter the overall reading of the gendered backdrop of the characters. Lucrezia reaches past the expectation of her gender by taking personal control over her life and desires, uses a masculine violence to do it, and is justified in her actions. She not only overreaches, but even blurs the genders and does so in a way that both the characters and the audience accept her actions as appropriate.

In Renaissance Italy, through works such as Mandragola, we see that the allowed and expected desires of women had begun to expand from this simple maternal desires to more complex human desires, including sexual desires. Woman who had for so long been seen as the inferior version of man, was now taking on more depth with deeper desires than simple maternity. Feminine desire was often limited in its scope, being restricted on what could or should be desired. Feminine desire in the context of Mandragola, for example, represented a shift from the traditionally accepted desire to be a mother towards a more complete desire as a sexual being wanting agency in selecting her sexual partner. The

labeling of characteristics along gender lines creates a certain exclusivity of that characteristic. A misconception arises that assumes that an individual must possess certain qualities by virtue of his or her respective gender. For example, if a female character were to assert herself and initiate her own desire, hence attempting to emulate masculine desire, she would be causing a disconnect and acting inappropriately in accordance with her gender. This is obviously ridiculous, although it is very much the reality seen in Mandragola

GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN JERO PLAYS

Soyinka in the opening of the play, *Trials of brother Jero* revealed to us how women are used to attract members and to 'prejudice the councilors who came to divide the beach. Women are also arranged 'to shake their bosoms in spiritual ecstasy' in order to gain occupation of beach sides for worship. This goes on to show that women are used as mere tools of oppression to take an advantage of. Some still use women for such today and sadly some women see themselves as tools that could be manipulated such self aggrandizement.

Women were also depicted as sources of trouble. Prophet Jero, the main protagonist regards women as a nemesis. He sees women as his own weakness. Jero in his own words sees women as -Daughters of Discord, which could bring ruins on one's head. Jero prefers to remain single as a panacea to running a scandalous ministry! Such is the societal attitude of keeping trouble away if you have nothing to do with women. It quickly reminds one of the old saying-no woman, no cry. Women are also depicted as trouble-makers, just the way Amope was made to make trouble with her husband and when she was making an effort to make Jero paid her, her

money being owed her, Amope was cast to be a trouble maker even while agitating and fighting to be paid money owed her.

However, the women seem to rehash what the society thinks of them as we also see Amope and the unnamed woman trader , having an unnecessary altercation. There was no basis for such outbursts yet both of them could not make a peaceful bargaining and this is part of the ways women are perceived as mere trouble makers.

Besides using women as baits to attract worshippers, a typical example of sexual feminism, women are also used to score some cheap selfish points. Jero deliberately forbade Chume, a member of his church, to beat his wife, so that the man (Chume) would still be coming to the church and when the prophet wanted to get rid of the man, he encouraged him to beat the poor woman, so that his debt would be forgiven.

Women are portrayed as tools and baits. In political parlance, women are used to gain some weights and not necessarily because they are seen as equal to men. When women are nominated for political reasons, like the Deputy Governorship positions, they are just strategically placed to remind the society that women are around the corner, otherwise why has no woman emerged as a governor of a state in Nigeria?

Later on in the second play, Jero's *Metaphors*, we see how women are only celebrated to score some selfish points. Rebecca, in the second play was sweet tongued to resign from her government work as a Secretary to pick up a job in the church. Here, women are portrayed as no deep thinkers about career development and future.