

UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA NSUKKA

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY  
STUDIES

AN ASSIGNMENT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT FOR THE REQUIREMENT OF THE  
COURSE ELS 240 (MODERN COMEDY: MOLIERE TO  
SOYINKA

TOPIC:  
THE PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY  
IN ANY TWO COMIC WORKS

A STUDY OF EFUA T. SOUTHERLAND'S *THE  
MARRIAGE OF ANANSEWA* AND MOLIERE'S *THE  
MISER*

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The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines gender as the fact of being male or female, especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences, not differences in biology. The second term in this topic which is sexuality is defined by the same source as the feelings and activities connected with a person's sexual desires.

MH Abrams in his Glossary of Literary Terms state that while sex( a person's identification as male or female) is determined by anatomy, gender(masculinity or femininity in personality traits and behaviour)can be largely independent of anatomy, and is a *social construct* that is diverse, variable, and dependent on historical circumstances.

Gender has to do with the qualities that make one person a female and the other a male and these qualities are determined by society.

From time past and even presently there is a hierarchy of sexes and each had their own role in society. Men are thought to be masculine, they are not ruled by emotion, and they are strong and hard working. They are thought to be the bread-winners, protectors and defenders of their families. Women on the other hand belonged in the home; they are ruled by men and by their emotions and therefore are thought to often make bad decisions hence women are not allowed to hold or occupy high positions that require a lot of physical and mental responsibilities in society.

A woman is thought to be feminine, the weaker sex and her place within doors, her business completely domestic. Women themselves accepted this divorce between the private (feminine) and public (masculine) sphere. Women have been thought unfit for any serious business thereby leaving them to the place of just complementing the male counterpart. In

several places they are used as objects for honouring the valour of men. Funny enough! We find this even in the Bible where David inquires of what will be given to whoever kills Goliath and is told that such man will be given Saul's daughter Michah for marriage '*and the Israelites said, have you seen this man who has come out? Surely he has come out to defy Israel; and the man who kills him the king will enrich with great riches, and will give him his daughter...*' so we see that even from the creation of the world women have been placed below the male.

Apart from the things mentioned above, women are also used as objects of satisfying the lustful and worldly desires of men as we shall see in the works we are about to study in this research. Sexuality and gender are used as a tool of manipulation, a form of propaganda or sometimes both.

The issue of gender and sexuality is a very serious issue in comedy and even in our society from the ancient to the present times. During the Restoration Period, women were not allowed to act on stage.

In Southerland's *The Marriage of Anansewa* we see how a father uses his daughter as a means of moving from his low status to the upper class of his society. As we see in the following lines: '*...it is coming soon to those born on Wednesday, mind you. To the Kwekus and Ekuwas. And my name is Kweku. Tell me, how many times have I missed going to church because there is nothing in my pocket to deposit in full view of the public? Finally, when I breathe my last and die, will my coffin be drawn in a fine, private hearse instead of a municipal hearse? Will the people who come to my funeral eat salad and small chops and drink good whisky instead of chewing bits of cola and drinking cheap gin and diluted Fanta? Tell me.*' From this statement we see that all the running around is not just for the sake of getting a husband for his daughter but to better his life. The father considers his daughter incapable of making the right choice of a husband so he takes it upon himself to get the 'best'

for her. But behind this we see a desire to enrich himself and improve his social and economic status.

In her attempt to reject her father's plans Anansewa cries that her father is about to sell her. She makes this statement because she has been denied the right to choose her own husband and is about to be forced to marry one old chief. We see this in the following lines: " *How exasperating! Oh, my father is selling me; he is selling me... but let me tell you bluntly, I'll never comply. I will not let you sell me.*" Thus, though she cannot escape her father's smartness and tricks she makes her little effort to defend herself.

Anansewa feels disappointed by her father when she discovers that he has been collecting gifts from the four chiefs on her behalf so that when the day finally comes for all of them to come and claim her as wife she is confuse and cannot take her father serious when he tells her that all the chiefs are coming. She says "... *I know that it's only one chief we are expecting to come, as for the other three chiefs, my father , you made them take their minds off me long ago, remember. Right at the beginning, you refused to accept gifts from their hands.*" But little did she know that he has just done the opposite of what she anticipated. When reality finally dawn on her she says ' *I am calling you 'father' to tell you that if what has happened is that you've been telling me a lie, I'll be deeply shocked.*"

In this same work we also see the various reasons that drive most men to marriage. Varying reasons are pointed out in this work by which most men are being motivated to marry. Chief of the Mines, however, is concerned with how to give his children born to him by his other wife a good training and believes Anansewa was going to carry out that duty very well so he decides to marry her against the advice of his councilors. Chief Sapaase reason for wanting to marry Anansewa is so that he will replace her in place of his ugly wife whom he plans to send packing when she (Anansewa) arrives.

In the same vein we find a similar situation in Moliere's *The Miser*. Here, Harpagon will not allow his daughter Elise to marry Valere because for him he is poor even though he is the one that rescued her from drowning. And will not approve of Cleante's marriage to Marianne because he is interested in her. So when Cleante and Elise meet him to talk about marriage he says, *A little patience, if you please. You need not to be alarmed. I know what is good for you both, and you will have no reason to complain of anything I intend to do.* This is just how women are placed with the belief that they are incapable of making good decisions hence they must rely on the men in their lives.

In this work we also see the various reasons that motivate men to marry. Though Harpagon is rich his greed is so much that he wants to marry Marianne because of her wealth. Thus, when he talks about her with his children he says, *there is one little difficulty; I am afraid she has not the fortune we might reasonably expect.* He knows Marianne is rich but not as much as he desires. Cleante thinking that his father is planning this marriage for him cries out; *oh, my father, riches are of little importance when one is sure of marrying a virtuous woman.* He never knew that his father is actually interesting in marrying Marianne for himself. he goes on to say; *I beg your pardon. Only there is this to be said: that if we do not find as much money as we could wish, we may make it up in something else. Well, I must say that I am very much pleased to find that you entirely agree with me, for her modest manner and her gentleness have won my heart; and I have made up my mind to marry her, provided I find she has some dowry.*

This is the point where Cleante discovers that his father's motives were not really in favour of him and he begins to react. However, Harpagon discloses that he has a particular woman he has arranged for Cleante to marry, a widow for that matter. And to Elise he says *...and you I shall give to Mr. Anselme.* The dominance of men has given them such power and freedom to do whatever they feel like doing concerning the female.

Apart from these two works this issue of gender and sexuality is also present in so many other comic works as Moliere's *Volpone* where we see that a Volpone's lustful desires could cause him to fabricate a lie that it is only the presence of a woman that will cure him of a disease. He uses it as a means of having his way on the woman. Thus when Mosca brings *Corvino*, *Celia's husband the news he is so overshadowed by the wealth he is expecting to inherit from Volpone and immediately summons Celia saying; Believe it, I have no such humour, I . All that I speak I mean; yet I'm not mad; nor horn-mad, I see you? Go to, shew yourself obedient, and a wife.*

*Mosca tells Corvino that; they (the physicians)all resolved that to preserve him, was no other means, but some young woman must be straight sought out, lusty and full of juice to sleep by him.*

Women have been presented in such a way that leaves them no reasonable place in society but as objects in the hands of males. Thus in William Wycherly's *The Country Wife* the character Doriant says that *a mistress should be like a little country retreat near the Town, not to dwell In constantly but only for a night and away; to taste the town better when a man returns.* I.e that the only duty of a woman is to satisfy the desires of the man.

However, in his time Shakespeare try to bridge the gap set by society between the male and female which cut out women from the scene of drama when he use women who were masculine to act the roles of males such as Sarah Bernhardt who acted the role of Hamlet in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in 1899 and males who looked feminine to act female roles. Such as Mark Rylance acting Olivia's part in *Twelfth Night* in 2002. By doing this Shakespeare did not just proof that female can be as good as male in anything but also that they can even be better.



PICTURE OF SARAH BERNHARDT AS HAMLET



MARK RYLANCE AS OLIVIA