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TOPIC:

THE PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN

ANY TWO MODERN COMIC WORKS.

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Introduction

Gender has to do with the fact of being female or male, especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences.

Sexuality on the other hand is the activities connected with a person's sex.

The presentation of gender and sexuality in wole soyinka's "lion and the jewel"

In the village of 'Illunjinle' women play a subservient and domestic role. This is shown through the character Sadiku who is the wife of King of the village, Baroka. Women are expected to be obedient to the men of the village and to cater to them by all means. The way they dress, behave and speak are controlled by the men. Sadiku does this by maintaining the household and raising the children and catering to her husband's needs. For example when he was pretending to be sad from allegedly losing his manhood she massaged his feet. **It was even her duty to fetch new wives for her husband.** Sadiku can only speak when given permission. This was shown when she entered the Kings bedroom and addressed him as 'My Lord' and only continued speaking after he said 'You have my leave to speak.' Men in the village are seen authoritative and educated. King Baroka is a fit example. His intelligence is seen through his ability of successfully ruling a village thus far and in return this brings great authority to his name. His authority is also shown in the way he has great control over all his wives and the way in which they obey without hesitation. As seen in the scene where

Baroka and 'favorite' laid in bed and she was plucking his armpit hairs desperate of his approval and when she hurt him he sent her away abruptly. His intelligence also is depicted when his cunning plan to capture Sidi is revealed.

Men are seen as authoritative and educated. Baroka, for example, at his old age has many wives and is still known as the King of the Village. He shows his authoritative behavior with his wives. He demands and receives; instructs and shuns. Proof of this is when he told his youngest wife to pluck his arm pit hairs. She did not do it right and was asked to leave him. The wife had no choice but to obey. Furthermore, Baroka proves that he was educated by the way he seduced Sidi into intercourse. He used his wits and wisdom to catch Sidi's attention and in the end his intelligence allowed him to successfully conquer the jewel.

In 'The Lion and The Jewel', in the story's village 'Ilujunle', women are subjected to playing a subservient and domestic role, as opposed to the men who are expected to be authoritative and educated figures. This statement can be easily proven using two main characters 'Sidi' and 'Lakunle'. Lakunle was the village school teacher which meant he was quite well educated as opposed to Sidi, who was like many women in the society Lakunle referred to as 'Bush girls' because of their illiteracy. We see here the imbalanced spread of education between men and women in this society, men had the upper hand in education, while women were expected to look after the home and husband. Lakunle continuously belittled Sidi, by making constant remarks about how she was less intelligent and weaker than he was, simply because she was a woman, and he felt no remorse in saying such

things to her because he felt justified in what he was saying and did not even see it as offensive, it was a common known fact to the men in their society; women were worth less than men, they were uneducated and all they were worth was reproduction and servitude to the man and his household. The most unorthodox part about these conversations that Lakunle had with Sidi is that they were in an effort to obtain her as a wife. He insulted her and begged her to marry him in the same breath.

Sidi on the other hand did feel a bit wounded by his remarks, she responded by reminding him of all the work women were expected to do in the community like pounding yams and carrying children and how it was ludicrous to call women the weaker sex. This shows how Sidi truly felt about the role of women in their society, she truly felt that there was nothing wrong with living in servitude to the men and she even felt a bit proud of the fact that women were able to endure so much; she did not feel oppressed in the slightest bit. She felt that Lakunle was out of place and disrespectful for thinking of it from that angle, in her opinion the men deserved to be served and have the highest authority because that was just the norm, but that did not mean that women were worthless. Despite Lakunle's insults, Sidi still agreed to marry him if he paid the price. It was as simple as that in their society, there was not a lot of love and romance involved in marriage. A man simply had to pick a girl from the community that he liked and pay her family a certain price if she was a virgin, (if she wasn't then he did not even have to) and a few years or even months later he could go out and repeat the same process again and obtain as many wives as he so desired. The women had no say, they were just to submit to their husbands and be accepting of his other wives.

Overall in my opinion, in the village of Ilujunle women lived in servitude to

the men and the household but they did not feel oppressed by this, it was quite the opposite; they felt empowered.

The presentation of gender and sexuality in Oscar Wilde's "an ideal husband"

In *An Ideal Husband* we follow the story of Mr and Mrs Chiltern, whose seemingly perfect life and marriage are threatened by the vicious Mrs Cheveley, enemy of Mrs Chiltern, who blackmails Mr Chiltern for a scandalous deed he committed years ago. Mrs Chiltern is presented to us as the epitome of a respectable Victorian woman; she adores her husband and plays an important role in his career as his supporter and trustee (though it is important to note that her role in his career is solely done from the sphere of the private home). Mrs Cheveley on the other hand is by no means a traditional woman. She is presented as rapacious and independent and in stark contrast to Mrs Chiltern: emotionally cold. It is interesting to note at the beginning of the play how the main characters are introduced and described. Examining the introductions of Lady Chiltern, Mabel Chiltern and Mrs Cheveley as well as those of Sir Robert Chiltern and Lord Goring we find quite contrasting usages of adjectives and other descriptive words.

The three main female characters are introduced mainly in terms of appearance. Both Mabel Chiltern and Mrs. Cheveley are described with flower-references: Mabel Chiltern as

"the apple-blossom type" and having "all the fragrance and freedom of a flower"

and Mrs Cheveley as wearing "heliotrope" and looking "rather like an orchid" Moreover, the women are described in generally "soft" terms.

Reading instead the introductions of the men we find descriptions like, in Sir Robert Chiltern's case, "A personality of mark, deeply respected by the many", his manner being that "of perfect distinction" and "one feels that he is conscious of the success he has made in life" . Moreover, his intellect is mentioned, as well as his will-power. It should be noted however, that also in his case appearance is commented on, though the effect is less superficial and "soft" as the comments of looks are complemented by those of his personality. It is also noteworthy that Wilde writes that "Vandyck would have liked to have painted his head" whereas Mrs Cheveley is described as being "a work of art" , thus we can conclude that instead of being *looked at*, as in the case of Mrs Cheveley, Sir Robert Chiltern should be *painted*, which denotes power and status. Moving on to the introduction of Lord Goring, which is rather short, we almost immediately encounter a comment on his intellect, "he is clever". Furthermore, we learn that "He is fond of being misunderstood. It gives him a post of vantage" which already in getting to know his character gives him an image of superiority.

Returning to art references, it is quite interesting to contrast the references used in the female versus male character descriptions. Lady Chiltern is described as a "woman of grave Greek beauty" Mabel Chiltern as a "Tanagra statuette" and Lady Cheveley as "a work of art" This can be compared to Sir Robert Chiltern, whose description states that "Vandyck would have liked to have painted his head" and the description of Lord Caversham (even though he is not a main character) that says of him "Rather like a portrait by

Lawrence”, it becomes quite clear that the references in the introductions of the female characters refer to what could be considered rather sensual, fragile art while those of the male characters are portraits, which one could argue has connotations much more of power and seriousness than of sensuality and fragility. What comes to mind when examining the female characters in *An Ideal Husband*, is how the women are presented to us as quite stereotypical.

Felski writes that “Woman is always a metaphor, dense with sediment meanings”

, what stereotypes and metaphorical meaning can we find in the two major characters of Mrs Chiltern and Mrs Cheveley?

Mrs Cheveley’s character is that of a fallen, dangerous woman. What makes her a threat to male authority is the fact that she transgresses the role she is expected to take as a woman in Victorian society, which was being the perfect “Angel in the house”. Already in her description, it is made clear that she does not conform to the customary role of Victorian women, as she shows “the influence of too many schools” as opposed to the traditional good woman. Her ambition and her talent for partaking in the same scheming power games traditionally found in the closed male sphere challenge and pose a threat to the traditionally divided social spheres of male and female, the public and the private. In order to gain access and reputation in the typically male sphere of politics, she has to be immoral, using blackmail as her way in, while the men can rely on their intelligence. Because of her meanness, she is granted no pardon or salvation, which finally forces her into exile. It is interesting to compare her case with that of

Mr. Chiltern, who in his past has committed wrongdoings by breaking the law but is forgiven because he, has a heart” while Mrs Cheveley is punished merely for her persona being perceived as that of pure evil and greed with no possible salvation from anyone.

Furthermore, the appearance of Mrs Cheveley too conforms to the stereotype of the fallen woman. She is described as having much make up on, with highly coloured red lips that match her ”Venetian red hair” and rouge, something which at the time would be considered decadent and associated with immorality and the world of prostitution and acting.

Mrs Chiltern too challenges male authority. She transgresses the contemporary gender boundaries by attempting to control the actions of her husband, who is part of the public (political) male sphere, and through being politically active herself albeit be it in the Women’s Liberal Association. Despite her posing a threat to male authority in one way, she falls back into the traditional role of women in another. As an example, in the final Act, she shows no sign of disapproval at Lord Goring's highly conservative and derogatory speech:

”A man’s life is of more value than a woman’s. It has larger issues, wider scope, and greater ambitions. A woman’s life revolves in curves of emotions. It is upon lines of intellect that a man’s life progresses . . . A woman who can keep a man’s love, and love him in return, has done all the world wants of women, or should want of them.”

Seeing as Mrs Chiltern is politically active in the Women's Liberal Association as well as an advocate of higher education for women it is quite surprising that she does not confront Goring about his view of women as inferior. Possibly even more surprising is the fact that she repeats part of his speech to her husband, implying that she has been enlightened by Goring's words and will thus withdraw her demand that her husband leaves politics because of his corrupt past. She expresses her insight, "You can forget. Men easily forget. And I forgive. That is how women help the world. I see that now". This passage of the text encourages readers to interpret Mrs Chiltern as having "learned her lesson" on how to properly act as a good woman. Initially she, according to Victorian customs that is, took too much control over her husband by demanding his retirement from public life. Lord Goring's speech stresses that if she was to go through with her demand she would not only end her husband's career, she would also "kill his love" for her and basically his whole existence. Taking Goring's words into consideration it is probable that Lady Chiltern starts to question the consequences of her demand as her own life is entirely attached to that of her husband. What sort of life would she have to live if she no longer had a husband who loved her? Would she have to get a divorce, leading her to be seen as a "fallen woman" and possibly become an outcast in the very society that had once admired the perfect life and marriage of the Chilterns? It could be suggested that thoughts like this drove Mrs Chiltern to accept the conventional role of a good Victorian woman, "realizing" that she should stand by her husband and forgive his wrongdoings, as her life is secondary to that of her husband. The robot-like way in which she repeats Goring's words further encourages this theory. The text seems to display to us how Lady Chiltern (and many other women of Victorian society) were indoctrinated

into accepting and adopting patriarchal ideas of what women should be like. In this way the text is ambiguous, as on the surface it seems to support Goring's patriarchal words, though reading between the lines we find social criticism brilliantly camouflaged by Wilde drawing attention to how hard it was for women to break contemporary gender boundaries, as well as how female independence could be feared as it meant losing all security in one's life.

The women are presented to us as all sharing one underlying fault, emotion. In contrast to men such as Mr. Chiltern, who seems to possess "an almost complete separation of passion and intellect, as though thought and emotion were each isolated in its own sphere through some violence of will-power", the life of a woman (as Goring expresses it) "revolves in curves of emotion". Mrs Cheveley and Mrs Chiltern both rely on their intelligence in their own different ways. In order to blackmail Mr Chiltern, Mrs Cheveley needs to put emotion aside and use her intellect for her schemes to work. Similarly, Mrs Chiltern uses her intellect when advising her husband regarding politics, as well as in her own political engagements. Taking then into account Goring's words that "It is upon lines of intellect that a man's life progresses" it becomes evident that both Mrs Cheveley and Mrs Chiltern undermine the patriarchal notion of femininity as being driven solely by emotion. This critique becomes further evident in that Mrs Cheveley turns the "irrationality" of women into a power, saying that

"The strength of women comes from the fact that psychology cannot explain us."

. Of course, this statement could be read as rather derogative, however taking into consideration the sharp woman that she is it could be argued that she, in fact, uses the contemporary view of women and undermines it, attempting instead to use it in her own favour.

Furthermore,. In *An Ideal Husband*, women's connection to men is constant, which reveals the underlying patriarchal power at play. Lady Chiltern's image as the pure and loving wife relies on Mr Chiltern's need for a moral "white image of all good things", a mascot, to stand by his side. For her, Mr Chiltern provides a glimpse into the male sphere of politics. By being his trustee and advisor, she is allowed to enter male territory, even if it is only in the private sphere of the home. Furthermore, it is much likely that Mrs Chiltern gains power in her own political aspirations by being the wife of a prominent politician. For example, in Act II coming home from a meeting with the Women's Liberal Association, she tells her husband that his name was "was received with loud applause" The text emphasizes that Robert Chiltern is highly respected and admired, something which assuredly profits Mrs Chiltern. Likewise, Mrs Cheveley is inseparable from man considering that the only way for her to gain reputation or any sort of power is through blackmailing a man, using the information she has of his past deeds. Moreover, even though she is not a traditional Victorian woman and portrayed as more independent than Mrs Chiltern or Mabel Chiltern, she still has to seek financial security in men. It is quite probable that her past engagement to Lord Goring was mainly for financial reasons. In Act III, Mrs Cheveley is having a conversation with Lord Goring about the past.

Furthermore, one of the reasons that Mrs Cheveley earns the fortune she does is because of her former friend and possibly also a lover, Baron Arnheim, left her his fortune after his death, thus it becomes clear that Mrs Cheveley's position relies on the men in her life.

Finally, both Mrs Chiltern and Mrs Cheveley, moral opposites and very different kinds of women, are put in their place by men. It is Lord Goring who in the end of the third act reveals Mrs Cheveley to have stolen a diamond brooch. Equally, it is Lord Goring who talks Mrs Chiltern into standing by her husband again, taking back her demand of his retreating from politics and public life. *An Ideal Husband* is undoubtedly an ambiguous play, it both undermines and supports patriarchal agenda. It is a play of stereotypes and distinct divisions between male and female authority, as well as private and public spheres. Characters such as Mrs Chiltern and Mrs Cheveley transgress the contemporary gender boundaries, though in the end they more conform than reject the roles they have been given because of their gender. Still, it should be noted that the women, maybe not so much Mabel Chiltern, are still women of strong minds and of intellect. They may be trapped in the clasp of patriarchy but they are well aware of their situations and rely much on their intelligence, which is how they get away with denying their own stereotypes.