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TOPIC

THE ROLE OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN MODERN COMEDY IN VOLPONE BY JOHNSON, AND MARRIAGE OF ANNASEWA BY SUTHERLAND.

Sexuality and gender are prominent themes in Shakespeare's plays. Depending on the genre of the play, sexuality and gender are used as either a tool of manipulation, a form of propaganda or sometimes both. During the time of Shakespeare, there was a social construct of gender and sexuality norms just as there are today. There was a hierarchy of sexes and each had their own role in society. Men were masculine, they were not ruled by emotion, they were strong and hard working. Women belonged in the home, they were ruled by men and by their emotions and therefore were thought to often make bad decisions. By blurring the line between sexuality and gender in his plays, Shakespeare deconstructs these norms to display their ambiguity. Masculine men can play effeminate women roles and effeminate women can play masculine men roles. It can be seen in the "volpone", by Johnson. At the time in which the play is set, men were wholly responsible for finance and they were expected to have power over women in relationships, roles that most of the male characters in the play firmly occupy. However, the play also compares male authority, love, sex, and courtship to the social expectations of women by exploring two examples of marriages, one an extreme depiction of an Italian marriage and the other a comedic English relationship.

The Italian marriage is between Celia and Corvino. Though Celia is virtuous, she is kept under Corvino's extremely careful and cruel control. Corvino keeps her indoors almost at all times, and he forbids her, at one point, from even venturing too close to a window. Corvino's rule over Celia is extreme, but it was stereotypical for Italian men to be jealous and controlling of their wives. Likewise, Celia represents the stereotypical renaissance ideal of a woman, she is silent, chaste, and obedient. This is shown to work to both her advantage and disadvantages. Her sterling reputation initially gives her credibility in court, but her testimony is quickly undermined since, as a woman, she was considered to be an unreliable witness. The power of Celia's reputation cannot stand up to the stereotype that women are too hysterical and emotional to be trustworthy and rational, even though the men who argue against her are known to be deceitful. The cruelty of the impossible position in which Celia finds herself in court illustrates that seventeenth century women couldn't win no matter how virtuous, women were considered to be untrustworthy and inferior creatures.

Jonson's position on gender roles can be clarified, to an extent, through an examination of Corvino and Volpone, who both try to exhibit male authority over Celia through sexuality "Corvino attempts to whore her to Volpone, who in turn attempts to rape her". For a while, it seems that Volpone will get away with this rape attempt, as several men during the play conspire to say that Celia is lying about her accusation. At the end of the primary reason for his punishment is his continuous deception of the play's other men, rather than the attempted rape. It's difficult to discern Jonson's ultimate statement about sexual oppression. However, it could be argued that, while he shows sexual oppression and violence to be reprehensible, Jonson believes that the moral lesson about excessive desire and greed. Lust and rape are bad, in other words, but only because they are a form of avariciousness. The

crime Volpone seems most guilty of in the play is excessive greed for money at the expense of Voltore, Corbaccio, Corvino.

Lady Would Be, the second woman in the play, is the opposite of Celia. The play contrasts her marriage to Sir Politick Would Be a quintessentially English Marriage with the Italian marriage between Corvino and Celia. Lady Would Be is more independent than Celia, which reinforces the stereotype that married Englishwomen were given more freedom than married Italian women. Lady Would Be is able to wander Venice on her own, and she is seen without her husband just as with him contrast this with Celia, who is prevented from even leaving her home. Lady Would Be is also a much more talkative than Celia, though the play doesn't exactly suggest that this a good thing. When Lady Would Be visits Volpone, he jokes that she is so long winded that he's being tortured by her "flood of words", and that, though he's only pretending to be sick, she's actually making him ill by talking ceaselessly. Much of this scene, we can note, is taken from an ancient Greek book called "On Talkative Women", suggesting that Johnson might have believed that there was some truth to the stereotype that women talk excessively. Lady Would Be, however, also breaks the mold of a renaissance woman in that she appears to be educated, certainly much more so filled with literary references and allusion that Peregrine is shocked when she yells at him.

The differences between Lady Would Be and Celia illustrate different societal roles for women in Italy and England, which suggests that gender roles are culturally contingent, rather than biologically determined. In this way, the play challenges stereotypical gender roles and assumptions about women, though it sometime affirms stereotype, too. At the very least, Volpone complicates the role of women in society by showing that women like men can be read, virtuous, well educated, and well spoken.

It is also seen in 'The marriage of Annesewa', by Efu Sutherland. In this young girls are not allowed to choose

husband by themselves but their parent choose for them, and some cases they use it as a medium to make money. It is seen in the life of Annasewa and her father Annese. Annesewaa's father choose who will marry her daughter and also use them as a means of getting money. He did this to the extent that he asked her daughter to practice death on the day of her traditional marriage, so that he will collect bride price from all her suitors. Annase also made his daughter's suitors to shower gift and money on his daughter Annasewa without allowing her to decide the person she will collect gift from.