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Date: 18th July 2017

Course: Modern Comedy

**The Presentation of Gender and Sexuality in Moliere's *The Miser* and
Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel***

Introduction

In literature, we have drama as one of the major genres. Comedy in itself is one of the types of drama. Comedy is a type of drama or other art form the chief object of which, according to modern notions, is to amuse. This might not have any relevance but since works to be used are seen as comic works hence the definition of comedy above. Sexuality comes to us in a variety of ways either as it is in relation to sexual activity or in sexual orientation. It can be deduced that these two perceptions is directly related. Sexual activities are influenced by sexual orientations. Sexuality can also be seen in the light of Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English as things people do, think and feel that are related to their

sexual desires. Gender as seen in Longman Dictionary is the fact of being male or female. It can also mean the mental analogue of sex: one's maleness (masculinity) or femaleness (femininity). It can be seen as a sociocultural phenomenon of the division of people into various categories such as 'male' and 'female', with each having associated clothing and stereotypes.

Looking out for the presentation of gender and sexuality in a work or environment one consider both the way sexual activities are portrayed and this way will not but show actually the sexual orientation available there in. So one has to consider the way being a male or a female is presented while doing this the cultural and social role assigned them, and the stereotypes involved. In this assignment, the ways which maleness and femaleness comes in the texts and the ways in which sexual orientation is presented is what would be considered. To do this task, Moliere's *The Miser* and Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* are going to be used.

Texts synopses

The Miser

This particular play by Moliere tells about an extra—ordinarily stingy man Harpagon. Harpagon has two children who are in love but their father's indifference to their decision and choice becomes something of worry to them. Elise is in love with Valere and Cleante in love with Marianne. Their interest

clashes with that of their stingy father who wants Marianne for himself and would rather that an old widow who will pay enough dowries marries his son Cleante. He also wants the daughter to be married off to Anselm a rich old man around.

Valere enters into the service of Harpagon and praises everything he does in order to win his favour. The son conniving with La Fleche steals Harpagon's box where he hid his money. In the end it is revealed that Anselm is the father of Valere and Marianne, and the happy man at realizing this, decides to let the young generation have what they want, even at the cost of covering the expenses.

The Lion and the Jewel

Soyinka presents an African village experiencing the breeze of western civilization. In this village Ilejunle, lives a village school master, Lakunle who is wooing the village most beautiful girl, Sidi. Sidi became the envy of all eyes after a journalist came to take photograph of her. The magazine comes out with Sidi being revered even up to the point of a goddess. At first she does not have any problem with Lakunle marrying her but demands that Lakunle goes and pays her bride price to her parents. Lakunle refuses.

The Baroka being envious of Sidi's fame as a young woman, having the magazine middle page all to her, and he the king sharing a portion with the village latrine becomes angry and thinks that the only way of subduing Sidi is by marrying her.

The trickster of a man decides to use his first wife, Sadiku and through her is able to get. He tricks and deflowers Sidi in the end and marries her.

Gender and sexuality in the Plays

In Moliere's *The Miser*, one would see a society where the women pay dowries before they can be married. Harpagon while telling his son about the lady he wants to marry says, "There is only one little difficulty; I am afraid she has not the fortune we might reasonably expect." (p.12) Here even though Harpagon is a stingy man, that cannot make one shy away from the role giving to female in this society. Harpagon wants to marry her but considers the wealth of the woman. In the same page, Harpagon tells Elise that he would want Cleante to marry a widow whom it is presumed would have enough money and be able to bring a fat dowry. He tells Elise also that he will give her to Anselm. It will later be understood the Anselm has not intent of collecting dowry from the girl. This is the social construct in the text as it relates to marriage. The marriage depends on the lady's ability to pay the dowry and this can only be altered in an extreme case as shown by Anselm's refusal to collect dowry.

Looking at *The Lion and the Jewel* one sees something sharply different because in this text, it is seen that Lakunle wants to marry Sidi. He bores Sidi with talks she considers as crazy because Lakunle only fantasizes about taking her to cities, but

neglects the paramount this which would decide or determine if their wishes as lovers would ever come true – the bride price. She says, "... I shall marry you today, next week or any day you name. But pay my bride price." (p.7) We see in this play a society where whether marriage takes place or not depends entirely, on the man's ability to pay the bride price. It is directly opposite to what is obtainable in *The Miser*.

In *The Lion and the Jewel*, women are perceived as those their opinion really does not count. There it existed in many manifestations, it can be seen that even though Sidi on her own at some point in the play upholds her pride as being a woman, her opinion never counted much otherwise, the stupid Lakunle could have listened to her but he does not because in the society of the play, it can be deduced that women are always to be influenced by the decision their masculine counterpart makes. At sixty plus, the Baroka has up to three wives and still plans to have more. The wives have to enjoy the demeaning privilege of plucking the hair in his arm-pit. As if that is not degrading enough for the female gender we could see in the text that his interest in Sidi arises because he sees how famous Sidi is becoming after the advent of the journalist and would not stand it. From Lakunle to Baroka are what we expect from other men in the society, because they represent both the young and old, the educated and the uneducated.

The Miser contrasts highly with the above, because according to Harpagon, he would give Cleante to the widow and since one gives at most times what is requested of them, it can be right if it is said that the widow requested to marry Cleante. In this society it seems right for both genders to have interest in each other and then move on to express it, although Harpagon has already chosen Anselm for his daughter the text shows that Elise at least has the gut to make a choice which she stood by till the end. She wants to be with Valere and they confessed their love for themselves to each other. This is different in *The Lion and the Jewel* because even if Sidi had affection, she could not take sides. In *The Miser*, it can also be seen that a man is entitled to one wife and the woman, one husband.

But the issues experienced that is completely general in the two texts are that women are invariably made objects which men are to struggle for and possessed. Women are shown to bring up conflict which has been recognized as *Oedipus complex* by Sigmund Freud in his psychoanalysis. In *The Miser*, it is discovered that Harpagon and his son Cleante are struggling for Marianne. Cleante feigns dizziness and withdraws immediately he discovered that his father has interest in the girl he loves. (p.12) But in the end the son becomes victorious and owns Marianne in the end.

In *The Lion and the Jewel*, Lakunle and a man old enough to be father struggles for the same girl. Sidi becomes something that can be merely possessed. It is also

pertinent to remember that the Baroka already has many wives, so adding Sidi increases the number of his wives and also diminishes her importance leaving her at the mercy of a man who is to decide what becomes of her in the remaining years of her life. It is surprising she chooses to share a man with so many other women than picking Lakunle but the play might have an intention. Lakunle actually fools himself with his fantasies because he shows little regard for the culture presented in the text; a system where payment of bride price is the most important thing required for acquiring a lady.

We also see in this play that the women are presented as a group susceptible to tricks. Baroka deceives the open-mouthed Sadiku and tells her that his manhood has failed him. First Sadiku represents a gender that can be tricked off and also a gender that talks more than necessary. Sidi goes to mock Baroka and becomes a victim to his tricks. Baroka tells her that her face will be in the stamp and that had a great deal of effect on Sidi, as his speech goes on Sidi becomes captured. At a point, “She lets her head fall on the Bale’s shoulder.” (p.54)

Conclusively, it would be said that this does not exhaust the whole issues on gender and sexuality present in both text. But one would have in mind after reading this text that in general, women are more of object to struggle for and possess, but most especially in *The Lion and the Jewel* one sees a society where men are the lords of everything.

Reference

Moliere. *The Miser*: Project Gutenberg, 2014.

Soyinka, W. *The Lion and the Jewel*. London: Oxford University Press, 1963.