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TOPIC

**THE PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND
SEXUALITY IN ANY TWO COMIC WORKS.**

AN ASSIGNMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Over the years, gender equality has been the chant of the day. This is so because women feel they are not treated fair regarding to social construct. The female gender is considered to be under the male gender and therefore is expected to be submissive to the male gender. To be able to elucidate further, what is gender and what is sexuality? Although a lay man uses the two words commonly; sociologically, they are different. Gender as a matter of fact refers to the widely-shared set of expectations and norms linked to how women and men, girls and boys should behave. Unlike sexuality which refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women, gender refers to socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities

and attributes that are assigned to men and women in a given society. these expectations are not fixed but are continually being constructed and reinforced through social relationship and economic and political power dynamics.

Modern comic works as we all know usually present the intricacies of love and money. A critical understanding of modern comic works will reveal that it revolves thematically within the interplay of gender and sexuality. In fact, it builds, compounds, and raises the intricacies of love life and money through the character disposition of gender and sexuality. Virtually, every modern comic work presents women as a central character and usually, - they are made to possess strong wit. For instance, Kate Hardcastle in the Oliver Goldsmith's *"She Stoops to Conquer"*. Their (women) characterization are usually principal and overtly visible even when they are not main central characters. One striking feature or attributes of women in modern comic works is their firm interest to satisfy themselves irrespective of their status or social background. Luoka in *"Arms and the Man"* portrayed this characterization. Women to an extent are seen and pictured as subjects to love and marginalization. Importantly, not all features

listed above are found in all modern comic works. To buttress this, further, we shall do so using Oliver Goldsmith's "*she stoops to conquer*" and Oscar Wilde's "*The Importance of Being Earnest*".

THE PRESENTATION OF GENDER IN OLIVER GOLDSMITH'S "*SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER*"

Oliver Goldsmith's *she stoops to conquer* is an anti-sentimental comic work that addresses the common theme of gender roles and sexuality in different ways; specifically, the play is certainly patriarchal, meaning male centered or dominated. However, there are indications of reversed gender roles. The play in its earnest epitomizes the traditional gender roles of modern comic works by placing women in the center of play's storyline. Traditional gender roles are most easily identifiable in scenes concerning the courtship of Mr. Hasting and Miss Neville and Mr. Marlow and Miss Kate Hardcastle. On the other hand, Mr. Hardcastle and Sir Charles Marlow are predictably the two people perpetuating the patriarchal custom. The play dramatizes how male gender tends to control the affairs of the female gender without considering

their reaction to it. Taking into cognizance how Mr. Hardcastle chooses Miss Kate's husband without putting her feelings first depicts how lowly modern comic works present women. Their feelings are folded to please the male gender, their character must please the male gender and many others. Mr. Hardcastle tells Kate what to wear just to please him and suite his taste and not that of Kate's. Mr. Hardcastle did not only choose Marlow to be Kate's husband but chooses him on the basis of his manners which are in sharp contrast with the lady's expectations of what her lover would be. This is an ideal fact about modern comic works. Female gender is never willing respected especially when they are Maid. Just as Luoka in the importance of being earnest is seen as an object of flirt cum sexuality because she is a maid, Kate Hardcastle is also treated the same by Marlow when he takes her to be a maid. The manner at which he grabs her, talks to her and flirts with her shows how lowly the female gender are taken to be in the modern comic plays. Fundamentally, Miss Hardcastle challenges the traditional gender norms the most which is identifiable in her ironic interactions with Marlow. First while she admires Marlowe's modest and submissive conversational skills,

Kate is determined to teach him a little confidence. With her wit, she is able to bend or bring out the man she wants to fall in love with. This hence tells us that women in modern comedy are usually interested in satisfying in themselves - Kate indeed satisfied herself at last. In other words, instead of complying with sir Charles and her father's expectations of Marlow, she purposely pursues her original goal of instilling confidence in her suitor which demonstrates her rejection of patriarchal English society. does this make Kate a feminist? As we can see in the play, Marlow's new found confidence comes from Kate's intentional decision to stoop. Of course, she takes on the assertive typically male role in order to win Mr. Marlow's affections while Mr. Marlow bashfully slips into the submissive typically female role. More so, Goldsmith present gender and sexuality to contradict the 18th century enlightenment era just to bring about laughing comedy. Both Marlow and Kate are aristocrats- Kate as enlightenment age expect should be submissive and obedient while Marlow should appear as intellectual and a man not just a gentle man. But contrarily, this play present gender in a twisted manner. Marlow is rather male contradicting the masculine male in contrast to Kate

who is an expressive female that boldly defies the aspect of silent women. Goldsmith uses Kate as an instrument of wit. Her act of stooping and conquering is unmatched. To get what she wants she did the necessary without minding her father's disposition. This to a very large extent makes her superwoman.

Moreover, sexuality in the play quite forsakes the normal etiquette. It is only normal for a man to court or "pursue" a woman but in the play, it appears Kate happens to be the "pursuer" by the way she devised means to get Marlowe to herself. The interplay between Hastings and Neville in the comedy also present to an extent gender inferiority in the play. The future of the young lady is in the hands of Hardcastle's family. Tony, a male must give way for her to marry who she longs for. This typically shows how women are made to be weak in the play. And the Tony in question does not regard her and makes jest of her.

THE PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN "*THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST*" BY OSCAR WILDE

Importance of being earnest shares similar approach with she stoops to conquer in the way both plays treat gender and sexuality. The play is a satire of the Victorian era which is most importantly applied through the use of gender role reversal (ridicule to expose traditional gender value). The question of each gender roles in society as per in the importance of being earnest often centers on power. In the Victorian world, men had greater influence than women. Men made decisions for their families while women worked around the house. However, in the play, Wilde presents gender in the reversed way by putting women (like lady Blacnell in the play) in position of power and by showing that men can be irresponsible and bad at decision making. The traditional view of gender is that men are active while women are passive but in this play, that fact is not the case. The two men characters, Jack and Algernon cannot really be regarded as a masculine man. The way Wilde present Jack and Algernon ungentlemanly behaviour and trivial pursuit can be seen as comic and deliberate in making men seem less peaceful and serious. Unconventionally and unlike she stoops to conquer, we see a woman having power than men in the character of lady Blacnell.

She is strong and blunt, even coming across a bit intimidating. We get the feeling that even Algernon is afraid of her as he would rather make up a fake man than tell her that he cannot have the pleasure of dining with her. Another strong female character whose attitude to an extent is considered wittily is Gwendolen. She is feminine in some aspect like how she wanted proper engagement (she makes Jack propose formally) but at the same time, she can be seen as more masculine than Jack especially because she is quite assertive.

Lady Blacnell is probably the most masculine character in the play. She is very pompous and the most assertive of all characters. She has the power to stop Jack from marrying Gwendolen and has the ability to boss the male characters of the play around. However, she is seen as lacking some more feminine characteristics like sympathy for Bunbury who she claims should just make up his mind whether he is going to live or die. Instead of her to commiserate with Jack when he said he lost both parents. She rather tells him he was careless. Lady Blacnell has upper hand over all the main characters in the play. After the examination of the female characters, it can be deduced that the

female characters are not typically Victorian women and that Jack and Algernon are not typical Victorian men.

On the idea of sexuality, there is little similarity between the importance of *Being Earnest* and *She Stoops to Conquer*. We can see that the same manner in which Kate Hardcastle indirectly “pursues” Marlow in order to shape him to the person she wants him to be, Gwendolen of the *“Importance of Being Earnest”* directly or indirectly pursues Jack based on the name he bears which is Earnest.

CONCLUSION

Gender and sexuality are indeed at the heart of modern comic works. This is evident taking the manner in which it is weaved in the two plays used in this discussion. *She Stoops to Conquer* and *Being Earnest* are both comedy of manners and through the chronicles of gender and sexuality satirizes the sentimental comedy and Victorian society respectively.