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TOPIC:

**THE PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND
SEXUALITY IN TWO MODERN COMIC
PLAYS**

**An ASSIGNMENT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE COURSE ELS240 (MODERN
COMEDY)**

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INTRODUCTION

In literature as in life, division of gender roles as a defining factor in the construction of social norms and acceptable behaviour existed long before the renaissance and is still prevalent today. These socially created expectations serve to determine, and many cases limit, masculine and feminine behaviour.

Here, I will be using; Soyinka's lion and the jewel and Niccolò Machiavelli's *La Mandragola* as comic works in presenting gender and sexuality.

LION AND THE JEWEL BY SOYINKA

Nowadays, it is actively recommended to include aspects of gender in whatever project we undertake. The present article is an attempt at probing the language used by male and female characters in Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* to see how gender issues are grounded in the play to let it play its didactic role. The aim is to pinpoint the way female and male are represented through a lexicogramatical analysis with a special focus on its transitivity system as suggested by Halliday (1994) to enter Wole Soyinka's characters' inner and outer world as they use language to enable them 'to build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of what goes on around them and inside them' (1994:106). That Soyinka considers or does not consider women or just recounts the situation of women in Yoruba traditional societies is what is at stake in this study.

The results of the investigation in the light of transitivity and Critical Discourse Analysis shows that Soyinka, consciously or unconsciously has represented male characters as strong, powerful and metaphorically as a lion, a symbol of irresistible power. They are also portrayed as initiator, doer of something, and commander in chief, the king while their female counterparts (Sidi, Sadikou) are represented as goals and/or beneficiaries of men's actions and associated with processes of sensing and of emotion.

Wole Soyinka examines several gender issues throughout the play *The Lion and the Jewel*. One of the most significant gender issues in the play concerns the role of women in society. Soyinka depicts how women are treated as property in Yoruba culture through the payment of the bride-price. Men are free to buy as many wives as they can afford (as seen in the character of Baroka) and women occupy a lower social status than men. Throughout the

play, women are valued for their outward appearance and sensuality. Sidi becomes relevant only after her beauty is displayed in a foreign magazine, and Sadiku reminisces about her days as a young woman, when she was the Bale's favorite. Women are also portrayed as the less intelligent gender, which is evident in the way that both Sidi and Sadiku fall for Baroka's trick.

On the side of sexuality, One of the main themes is the idea of sexual impotence on the part of Lakunle, a young and modern man who is vying for the affections of Sidi, the village beauty. The opposition in this quest is "The Bale" the old lion of the village. Lakunle attempts to be committed to his cause of seeking modernity and making social changes, and hopes that this will be enough to attract Sidi to him, but he is unable to actually effectively flirt with her and half-plays at platonic love for her. The Bale, on the other hand, is wise and cunning and despite his old age, proves to be more than a match for Lakunle in winning the heart and affection of Sidi.

So the conflict of modern and sophisticated vs. perhaps someone traditional but crafty is a theme, as is the underlying importance of sexual power and influence compared to the overt image created or projected by people.

NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI'S LA MANDRAGOLA

In Niccolò Machiavelli's *La Mandragola*, fortune is always seen from a male point of view. The term fortune, meaning chance or luck as an external or arbitrary force affecting human affairs, is often used in these works yet Lucrezia is not—the female character—is able to control her own destiny. Each woman's life, and its set course, is controlled by feelings of weakness, fear and intimidation that stem from being seen, not as a woman, but as an object to be possessed. Objectification, a notion central to feminist theory, has been roughly defined as the perceiving and/or treating a person, almost always a woman, as an object. For Lucrezia, it is the result of sexual objectification that terrorizes and objectifies her. The objectification of this woman and how that sustains the privilege and power of the heroic rapist is what this assignment examines. It arrives at this conclusion through the Lucrezia suffer the bulk of the objectification in *La Mandragola* as she is a prize to be conquered and won. Her personal situation is defined by the result of a man's fortune—for good or bad—and by the determination of his will.

Lucrezia has nothing to do with the success or failure of Callimaco's plan. She has no say in the matter and in order to achieve success Callimaco only has to convince Lucrezia's husband, Messer Nicia, that the plan he has put forth is a good one. Once in Lucrezia's bedroom, Callimaco is able to force himself upon her. Sex is something that men do to women; men take the initiative, make things happen, and control the event. This case is no exception and only after he has had his way with her body, does Callimaco take a chance and tell her the truth about himself. Through the ages, imperial conquest, deeds of valor and expressions of love have gone hand in hand with violence against women in both thought and in deed. Despite the fact that this is the first time that Callimaco and Lucrezia have actually spoken, he claims to be madly in love with her and unable to live without her caresses that he has only just had, or better put, that he has only just taken.¹⁸

Although Lucrezia is the central figure of *La Mandragola*, she has the fewest lines of any character in the play, this symbolizes the inferior nature of woman, In fact, Lucrezia has so little to do with the action that most of what the reader learns about her comes not from firsthand information but from what the other characters say about her. In Ariosto's epic poem,

What separates the men from the women in *La Mandragola* is the feeling of vulnerability with which the women are repeatedly left. From a young age, learning dependence and helplessness, rather than self-assurance and self-reliance, becomes one of the primary tasks of female socialization. Males instead, learn early in life to view aggression as a resource that can move them toward targeted goals in the public arena. They are conventionally trained to use competition and aggression as a means to accomplish their goals. Whether it is through scheming or pure violence, the male's end goal is to claim the object of his desire

Lucrezia is the object that Callimaco must have and will stop at nothing to possess. Lucrezia's life is ruled by those around her and it is not until she allows herself to be possessed by Callimaco that her situation begins to improve. In exchange, however, Lucrezia gives up her humanity. Her status is reduced to that of a thing, a mere sexual instrument. Callimaco, who always has a kind word when it comes to Lucrezia, is obviously not interested in her because of her high moral character. He seems best able to express his true feelings when speaking with the devious Ligurio, a man who will do anything to improve his own situation. When talking to Ligurio, Callimaco offers no praise of Lucrezia instead only

his need to possess her. His love is an expression of the lover's physical needs and his selfishness is made clear throughout the play.

While the lives of Lucrezia appear to have taken a turn for the better, this was only possible because all of the men have already lived out their own fortunes. Throughout the works Lucrezia is objectified and vilified for not immediately giving in to men's desires. Callimaco represent the only choice that she has to gain some control of her own situation and to live out their lives in peace and security. As Brownmiller aptly states: "Female fear of an open season of rape, and not a natural inclination toward monogamy, motherhood or love, was probably the single causative factor in the original subjugation of woman by man, the most important key to her historic dependence, her domestication by protective mating." To say that Lucrezia made her choices for any other reason than safety and security would be to deny the existence of the heroic rapist and the perpetual state of fear that he creates.

CONCLUSION

It is instilled in young boys from the moment they realize that being a male comes with certain innate privileges including the right to buy a woman's body "When young men learn that females may be bought for a price, and that acts of sex command set prices, then how should they not also conclude that that which may be bought may also be taken without the civility of a monetary exchange?" It is through the experience of sexuality that women learn about gender, female subordination and male power.