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COURSE TITLE: MODERN COMEDY: MOLIÈRE TO SOYINKA

**TOPIC: THE PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN WOLE
SOYINKA'S LION AND THE JEWEL AND OSCAR WILDE'S AN
IDEAL HUSBAND.**

INTRODUCTION

Gender has been defined as: The commonly shared expectations and norms within a society about appropriate male and female behavior, characteristics and roles. Gender can be considered a social and cultural construct that differentiates females from males and thus defines the ways in which females and males interact with each other. These roles and expectations are learned and they can change over time as well as vary within and between cultures.

Sexuality refers to people's sexual interest in and attraction to others, as well as their capacity to have erotic experiences and responses. Sexuality may be experienced and expressed in a variety of ways, including thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, practices, roles, and relationships. These may manifest themselves in biological, physical, emotional, social, or spiritual aspects.

GENDER AS PRESENTED IN THE TWO PLAYS

The distinct roles and expectations of the two sexes are highlighted in the two plays with the males being on the preferential side. In Soyinka's play, women are placed second to men with demoralizing roles assigned to them. Sadiku, the senior wife of Baroka, is subjected to the task of convincing young maidens like Sidi to accept the bale as their husband. Sadiku uses various means to bring Sidi to accept Baroka. As the senior wife of the bale, one will feel that it is only right to give Sadiku an atom of respect; but reverse is the case. Sadiku does not even command respect from the village teacher Lakunle who calls her all sorts of sorts of degrading names.

The society also portrayed by Soyinka is one that is not in support of a woman growing in fame more than the men. And so we see Baroka try to marry Sidi not because he loves her but so that she might be order him. Sidi, the village

beauty has grown popular via her photographs which were taken by the 'horse man', whereas Baroka's picture is placed beside the village latrine; this angers the 'lion' and then decides to thwart this growing popularity of a mere village girl over him. This shows us the picture of what marriage is for the male counterparts; a way of subduing the females. The 'favorite', Baroka's youngest wife is placed by the door of the house like a dog waiting on his master; this is the extent at which women were put down. Lakunle continues to delay his marriage to Sidi simply because he is reluctant to pay the bride price. To him, bride price was an unnecessary aspect in a marriage ceremony. Now we all know that in Africa especially, the issue of bride price is an undisputable rite; in fact without, there is no marriage.

Women are thus expected to be obedient to their husbands; 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 King's 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. On the contrary, women are naïve and shallow minded; they are shown to be busybodies. This is shown in the character of Sadiku who goes about telling anyone that cares to listen that the bale has gone impotent. Sidi in her shallow mindedness devices a plan to mock and ridicule Baroka but ends up being defiled; this way, Baroka's desire prevails by way of his marriage to Sidi.

In Oscar wilde's an ideal husband, very similar situations on the distinct roles and place of men and women are projected. Lady Chiveley, who deviates from the normal role and place of women in the society is condemned. Expectedly, a woman's place is in the kitchen, gossiping and engaging in frivolous activities such as organizing and attending parties as seen in the characters of lady Gertrude Chiltern and lady Basildon and Mrs. marchmont .

Mrs. Cheveley is projected as the play's *femme fatale*. She bitingly witty, fabulously well dressed, ambitious, opportunistic. These are usually traits reserved for men. Mrs. Chiverely is into politics and divorced twice she is repeatedly the

described as the product of "horrid combinations," evoking her dangerous deceitfulness. Whereas Lady Chiltern is pure and undivided, admirable housewife who cares more about her marriage, Mrs. Cheveley is defined by deception, artifice, and falsehood.

Robert Chiltern represents what the society expects men to be. Unlike women whose places are beside and second to their husbands, a man should be ambitious, successful, be in authority and wield power. This is their place and so anything contrary is not welcome. So in the play, we see women talk about how obsessed their husbands are with politics. The Earle of Caversham continuously calls his son Lord Goring names fit for a failure; lord Goring is not interested in politics and so is seen as a failure by his father.

From the foregoing, a woman's is not expected to be 'overly' ambitious rather she should be concerned more about domestic issues otherwise, she would lose her 'rightful' place. Whereas, men should be in authority over everything, including women.

SEXUALITY AS PRESENTED IN THE TWO PLAYS

Mabel flirtatiously matches Lord Goring's wit and dandiness throughout the play and their somewhat unconventional union serves as a foil to the other marriages and would-be engagements that compose the plot. Mabel, sir Chilterns

younger sister has overly taken to Lord Goring; she is eager to always be in his company. Tommy, Mabel Chiltern's suitor continues to make advances and endless proposals to her; 'Well, Tommy has proposed to me again. Tommy really does nothing but propose to me. He proposed to me last night in the music-room, when I was quite unprotected, as there was an elaborate trio going on'.

Lord Goring is portrayed as a dandified bachelor; he is over thirty years yet does not have interest in marriage. All he wants to party around; Lady Chiltern in her erotic and witty laden words wants Lord Goring to take her back and marry her but he refuses. From her dialogue with Lord Goring, she sees sex and marriage as a tool to get what she wants and not necessarily for love.

Lakunle the teacher is in love with the village belle and continuously pesters her for marriage even though he did not want to pay the bride price. Baroka uses various means including trickery to get Sidi into marrying him. Sidi is deceived into believing that Baroka is impotent, she goes there in a bid to mock him but ends up in his bed. Sidi professes that though Baroka is old, he is stronger than Lakunle and every other young man.

Through these plays, we are presented with the society's belief and value of the concepts of gender and sexuality and how each one of the characters respond to them.

