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## THE PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN “THE LION AND THE JEWEL” AND “THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ERNEST”

In “**the lion and the jewel**” gender is culture based. 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, Sadiku) are represented as goals and beneficiaries of men’s actions and associated with processes of sensing and of emotion. In this book women are considered the second sex, essentially created for serving men. How Baroka and Lakunle treat their female counterparts is quite telling of how they perceive themselves: intelligent, powerful and incarnation of authority but while male characters are interested in how they are, it is what they look like that seems to interest the female characters. Sidi is presented as a girl gifted with beauty in the play. That is what lakunle resorts to when he refers her to the jewel. She is the jewel of the village. Women in the play are more preoccupied by what they look like than by how they are. Women is represented in a degrading picture. Lakunle tags sidi as a woman with smaller brain than him, since she refuses to marry him unless he pays the bride price, and when lakunle senses that sidi is not happy with his attitude instead of consoling her, he worsen the situation by saying “please don’t be angry with me. I didn’t mean you in particular and anyway, it isn’t what I say. The scientists have proved it. It’s in my books. Women have smaller brain than men that’s why they are called the weaker sex (page 4). Women are portrayed as property that men can inherit this is confirmed through sadiku, who tries her best to convince side to marry her husband baroka so that sidi would be the last wife and when he dies she will be the first wife of the new bale who inherits the deceased bale’s property including all his wives (page 20). Lakunle also says women pictured in an indecent manner would be pointed in newspaper in order to show the progress of their society (page 37). Women are relegated as marriage match makers, and as wives whose husbands are tired of and their only importance is to find other wives for them, as in the case of sadiku a wife of the bale who almost throughout the play keeps ups and downs in order to woo sidi for bale.(page 20,23). Also in demonstration of how gender is perceived in the lion and the jewel. The male and the female characters may be viewed as stereotypes of two different worlds where man and woman do not get in agreement concerning their opinions. Therefore they live in constant conflict for not accepting each other’s views. This is shown in the following excerpt where sidi, sadiku and lakunle seem not to accord their views.

Sidi: suddenly am glad to be a woman. We won! We won! Hurry for womankind!

Lakunle: I will have you know that I am a man (pp 33-34).

Men view woman as objects that they must possess at all cost (the jewel), male are the dominators and women the dominated women are victims of both their sexual and national identities whereas men represent the male dominance and the sustainability of the patriarchal system. Side ask for the bridal money in order to emphasize her virginity since the money is a traditional and cultural symbol for a woman's chastity, which for sure is another handcuff for women's emancipation both sexually and bodily. Therefore side as the guardian of her traditions and culture, cannot possess her own sexual autonomy over her body. The play from the beginning to the end focuses on some dialogues between lakunle, sisi, baroka and sadiku each more of the dialogues is selected for the processes they contain and for the contribution they bring to portray realities concerning gender issues. In pg 6 lakunle can be seen as the actor of most of the actions expressed by the material process and sisi is the goal and beneficiary. Most of the material processes are stride actions directed towards sisi. All in all, though lakunle in this opening is dealing with love affairs in his attempt to conquer the heart of sisi, he still uses processes totally detached from feeling. On the other hand, the actions taken by sisi are not the straight and direct ones which can bring about changes. They are rather actions designated to avoid men's tricks and behaviors, a kind of escape and self protection against men's preposterousness. Men are presented as more active and dynamic than women which is known by the characters of lakunle and sisi. Baroka's exchange with side, sadiku and other characters. The play characterizes women as object of male character's attention, the women in the lion and the jewel do not take initiative, they undergo it, men take it. They are the doers of the actions. Most of their actions are designed to occupy the public space (teacher and chief). They act overtly. Female characters express their worries and feelings and thoughts about the male characters while the male ones express their thoughts and feelings about practical matters. Lakunle is described as intelligent, modern and wise. Baroka derides women and considers them as his subordinate is an open secret in the play but this can go beyond human understanding. It can be seen that lakunle uses some possessive attributes like "a smaller brain than mine," "ignorant girl, bush girls, uncivilized and primitive bush girl" to describe sisi and how he conceives women in general, and a huge list of attributes to describe how his people's culture (a savage custom, barbaric, outdated, humiliating) etc. it is evident that lakunle derides women and his own culture. Sidi is not the only character to undergo lakunle's degradation. Sadiku is also one of his victims. Baroka describe women by playing on their intelligence and by considering them as an

exoteric object (eye's delight) and unable to think for better, the favorite (baroka's latest wife) is the token and the circumstance at her usual place beside my door is the valve. This can be read as an expression of baroka's authority and dominating power over his wife since the later should be present whenever the chief is there at a prescribed place (beside his door).

The idea of sexual potency on the part of lakunle, a young and modern man who is vying for the affections of side, a village beauty. The opposition in this quest is the bale the old lion of the village, lakunle is unable to actually effectively flirt with side 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 side. There is underlying importance of sexual power and influence sexuality is seen in the first scene of the play entitled "morning", the village girls tell sisi that she has become famous because her image is throughout an entire magazine the girls discuss how many pages of the magazine her picture takes up, lakunle counts 3 and sisi says "one leaf for every heart that I shall break (page 13), sisi looks at her images and comments about her velvet skin. She pushes out her breasts and says, "there is a deceitful message in my eyes beckoning insatiate men to certain doom. And teeth that flash the sign of happiness, strong and evenly, beaming full of life" (page 22). Sidi comments portray how she views her sexuality as a weapon to entice and bring doom upon men who become infatuated with her beauty. She mentions that she is looking forward to breaking men's hearts and views them as her opponents, in Yoruba culture, the payment of the bride price is a very important custom sisi understands that her worth has elevated and views her virginity as a treasure. Initially, she refuses to marry baroka because of his age, but eventually she becomes his bride after he cunningly seduces her. Side views sexuality as a weapon, men as her opponents and her virginity as a treasure to be sold only to the highest bidder.

Also, "**in the important of being Ernest**" wilde presents gender roles by putting women (like lady Bracknell) in positions of power and by showing that men can be irresponsible and bad at decision making. Lady Bracknell, Gwendolen and Cecily reverse gender role stereotypes by exercising power and control over the opposite sex. The domineering figure of lady Bracknell is seen. She exhibits strong administrative qualities and controls her domestic as well as outside affairs. Throughout the play, her

character is a challenge to the strict segregation of gender roles defined by the accepted social norms. In her interview with Jack, she usurps the role of the father and holds an extremely powerful position by being concerned with the way things should be defined by her. She comments on the side of Belgrave Square where Jack's house is located "the fashionable side. I thought there was something. However that could easily be altered?" (page 243). Jack is a bit confused if Lady Bracknell means that the fashion or the side of the house could be changed to which she replies: "both, if necessary, I presume" (page 243). She wants all the things to be settled according to her wishes. It is her authoritative nature that demonstrates a reversal of the customary male dominated society. Her logical reasoning and rational analysis of Jack's personality during his interview with her proves that she can look beneath the surface of things. Jack is pushed into a corner by Lady Bracknell when he answers one of her questions about his general knowledge of worldly affairs to which he replies in a retreating tone. "I know nothing, Lady Bracknell" (page 242). She is confident, bold and witty and she proves herself to be worthy of the position she enjoys. She carves out a powerful status for herself in the house by driving Lord Bracknell out of her sphere of serious business. She states that he is sent to bed whenever the dinner table numbers are all out "fortunately he is accustomed to that" (page 238). She manages to solve all the problems herself without any support from the male members of the house. It is observed that she holds a moral and social supremacy in the household by withholding information of Gwendolen's flight from her father and insists that men must always be kept in the dark. Lady Bracknell poses a threat to the possible match between Jack and Gwendolen (page 245). But it is only through her patronage that everything is settled in a desirable way. Also, Gwendolen and Cecily take charge of their own romantic lives, while the men stand by watching in a relatively passive role. They enjoy a freedom of expression and action, they dominate the romantic relationships. Both the girls play the major role in their love stories. Gwendolen is self-assertive like her mother instead of being discouraged by the repulsive behavior of her mother towards Jack, she rebels against her openly by telling him, "but although she may prevent us from becoming man and wife, and I can marry someone else, and marry often, nothing that she can possibly do can alter my eternal devotion to you" (page 248). Gwendolen challenges the conventional idea that women should be the ones at home cooking, cleaning and raising children. "outside the family circle, papa, I am glad to say, is entirely unknown. I think that is quite as it should be the home seems to me to be the proper sphere for

the man. And certainly once a man begins to neglect his domestic duties he becomes painfully effeminate, does he not? And I don't like that. It makes men so very attractive (page 266). Here, Wilde overtly shows that women can occupy positions of power and usurp the traditional gender roles. In the play, both Gwendolen and Cecily are viewed as smart, persistent and in pursuit of goals in which they take the initiative. Gwendolen follows Jack to the country an atmosphere rather alien to her experiences, and Cecily pursues Algernon from the moment she lays eyes on him. Gwendolen escapes from her dominating mother, Lady Bracknell, Cecily outwits Jack by arranging for Algernon to stay, and she also manages to escape Miss Prism to carry on a Tryst with her future fiancé. The first moment Cecily meets Algernon, she firmly explains her identity with a no nonsense reaction to his patronizing comment. For both women, appearance and style are important Gwendolen must marry a man named Ernest simply because of the name's connotations, Cecily believes Jack's brother is a wicked man, she thinks the idea sounds romantic. The women are the strong characters who are firmly in control. Cecily and Gwendolen discuss, changing gender roles in their conversation about male domesticity, indicating their belief that "home seems to me to be the proper sphere for the man." Marriage remained most woman's; primary goals and occupation. In an urge to follow her romantic associations, she defies the norms of the family life as well as those of the society. She is seen more masculine than Jack because she is quite assertive. Which can be seen when her mother tells her to wait in the carriage but she defies her, she also makes Jack propose to her properly. Her mother is probably the most masculine character in the play. She is very pompous and the most assertive of all the characters she has the power to stop Jack from marrying Gwendolen and has the ability to boss the male characters around. She is lacking feminine characteristics like sympathy for example she has no sympathy for Bunbury who she claims "should just make up his mind whether he is going to live or die". She gives Jack no condolences when he says he had lost both his parents, instead she says he was careless, and when he explains that he was found she appears to be outraged and shocked. She stands against her mother's will by planning to follow Jack to his country house and keep in touch with him daily: "it may be necessary to do something desperate that, of course, will require serious consideration. I will communicate with you daily" (page 248). She takes charge of her love life and is more active than Jack, it is she who gives courage and confidence to him against Lady Bracknell's discouraging attitude. Jack and Algernon do not fit the criteria for that characteristics a stereotypical Victorian man

would be they are both called “dandy” Algernon and Jack. Jack’s gentlemanly behavior and trivial pursuits make them seem less powerful and serious. Algernon is also a little too concerned with clothing to come across as masculine. He criticizes Jack by saying “I had never known anyone to put so much effort into dressing and to produce so little effect in act two when talking to Cecily that he wouldn’t trust her to buy his outfits as he has “no taste in neckties”. Algernon is dandy, making him unmasculine. Lady Bracknell is portrayed as strong and blunt even coming across as a bit intimidating we get the feel that even Algernon is afraid of her as he would rather make up a fake man than tell her he cannot have the pleasure of dining”.

Sexuality can be seen in Chasuble and Prism’s flirting and coded conversation about things sexual. Jack and Algernon’s honest and natural acknowledgement of their desires justify their actions. Throughout the play Algernon’s insatiable appetite for muffins reflects the unfulfillment of his sexual hunger, but he doesn’t adopt any negative way to satisfy his physical needs. Wilde’s portrayal of Dr. Chasuble in human colors questions the strict doctrine of celibacy retained by the church. Dr. Chasuble pursues his present human need when he says, “were I fortunate enough to be Miss Prism’s pupil, I would hang upon her lips” (page 252). His argument in favor of celibacy seems weaker in the pretext of his strong natural desires, on one hand Canon tries to convince Miss Prism about the rules of the church by saying “the precept as well as the practice of the primitive church was distinctly against matrimony” (page 255), but all this is a vague attempt on his part in the presence of a more attractive option which he cannot resist. He goes out to have a walk with Miss Prism in the garden, “with pleasure. Miss Prism, with pleasure, we might go as far as the school and back” (page 252). His sexual desires are directed towards Miss Prism.