

UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA

DEPARTMENT OF ARTS EDUCATION (ENGLISH EDUCATION)

**TOPIC: ROLE OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN ANY TWO MODERN
COMIC WORKS**

***AN ASSIGNMENT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
OF THE COURSE ELS 240(MODERN COMEDY)***

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INTRODUCTION

In our society, starting from the old times women have been placed lower than the men. This is a social ill which is still evident especially in African society, even the Western world are not totally free from this social construct. This is because in our society there is a social construct of gender and sexuality norms. This may be due to the physiological difference between male and female. Men are seen as masculine, they are not ruled by emotion, they are strong and hard working. Women on the other hand are seen as belonging to the home, they are to be ruled by men and therefore are thought to often make faulty or poorly articulated decisions. However, the rise of feminism has suppressed this view which is expressed in Modern Comedy works.

Gender according to the dictionary refers to the widely shared set of expectations and norms linked to how women and men should behave. while sexuality (sex) which refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that defines males and females. In addition, gender can be said to mean the socially constructed roles, behavior ,activities and attributes that are assigned to men and women in any given society. In other words, Gender is a product of learning, experience and indoctrination.

The society is a vital factor in literature and literature is seen as the mirror of life. Comedy is a genre of literature and share in this characteristics. Hence Modern comedy plays are embedded with gender and sexuality.

As pointed out by Encarta dictionary we can pinpoint that sex is more natural than gender in the sense that a child is born with a particular sex but the gender is as a result of the roles the society attaches to the particular sex either male or female

Furthermore, as opposed to tragedy, Modern comedy plays gives freedom to women. Women are given more freedom to act on stage and to fully express themselves. Also, the reward of a hero is usually a woman. Women are being looked at as an object to possess and compete

for. The heroine is seen as a bone of contention between two or more characters. This we see in Bernard Shaw "Arms and the Man" and Soyinka's Lion and the Jewel. The projected women in these two plays are Sidi and Raina, consecutively. The former, by Soyinka represents the African tradition while the latter, represents the Western tradition. According to Aristotle, In his Poetics, Literature is the representation of the world and imitation of life. Tragedy represents the serious world and presents man better than he is, while Comedy represents the unserious world and presents man worse than he is. Relating this to this study, women have been placed as second fiddle but in modern comedy we see a deviation from this norm where women are equally placed with men is well known that literature. This is also evident in this two comic works. Satire is also a vital element of comedy which exposes societal ills with the aim of correcting them. Gender differentiation is seen by these authors, Bernard Shaw and Wole Soyinka as a societal ill, hence should be corrected.

The African culture discriminates and marginalizes women, giving them stereotypical roles such as taking care of the home. This is addressed in Soyinka's, Lion and the Jewel In Africa. Soyinka tries to oppose this by turning the tides around. We see a portrayal of women as object that must be possessed at all cost (the Jewel) Baroka has many wives but still seek to have Sidi. Though Lakunle in the play is deals with love affairs in his attempt to conquer the heart of Sidi ,he still uses procession totally detached from feelings while the actions taken by Sidi are not the straight and direct ones which can bring about changes, they are rather actions designated to avoid men's tricks and behavior, a kind of escape and s protection against men's preposterousness. This is seen by the following dialogue responding moves by Sidi to Lakunle :

Sidi : I have done the fold so high and so tight ,I can hardly breathe(pg 3)

Sidi: give me the pail (pg 4)

Sidi :that I was forced to sell my shame and marry you without price (pg7)

Sidi: while should I ...I would demean my worth to wed a mere village school teacher.

This show how each character, Lakunle and Sidi ,has used material processes to tangible action to express their representation of the world, it can be seen that men are presented as more active and dynamic than women, where ever these processes are used and Lakunle and Baroka are actors, those processes express a kind of control, transformation and domination over the female gender, according to their projects, but when ever women are actors it is to express the sexual influence they have over the male .The following is an example: Sadikou : I did for him ,I the youngest and freshest of the wives ,I killed him with all my strength .i called him and he came and ate me, but no for him ,this was not like other times. Sadikou was I not the flame itself and he the flax on old women's spindle? i ate him up ! race of mighty lions ,we always consume you at our pleasure, we spin you at our whim we make you dance... (pg 32)

The dialogue is selected for the processes they contain and the contributions they bring to portray realities concerning gender issues.

On the other hand, we see something similar in Western culture as portrayed by George Bernard Shaw who also exposes the societal ill for correction. George Bernard Shaw depicts this reality about gender differentiation in his play. George Bernard Shaw shows how women are treated in society and how it limits their development. Bernard Shaw's ideas about feminism and sexual morality make the core of this play. In reading a George Bernard Shaw's play, *Arms and the Man*, one should pay attention to difference between characters of social class and gender or sexes. George Bernard Shaw pictures gender role in characters, Louka, Catherine, Sergius, and other. There is masculinity in Louka's character while annoying Nicola. She reveals her control through her interaction with Sergius. Mrs. Petkoff also shows masculinity in controlling house hold works in absence of her husband Mr. Petkoff. In first act of the play,

Raina is threaded by Bluntschli who runs and escapes from soldiers. He threatens a defenseless woman with his gun and allows her to hide him behind the curtain.

Raina: Who's there? Who's there? Who is that?

A man's voice: (in the darkness, subduedly, but threatening) Sh-sh! Don't call out or you'll be shot. Be good; and no harm will happen to you. Remember. If you raise your voice my pistol will go off.

Raina: Yes.

Man: Well, I don't intend to get killed if I can help it. Do you understand that?

Raina: I suppose not. Some soldiers, I know, are afraid of death.

Man: All of them, dear lady, all of them, believe me. It is

our duty to live as long as we can, and kill as many of the enemy as we can (Act I, 10).

Nicola is a principle male servant of Petkoff household and Louka is beautiful maid and Nicola's fiancée. Nicola has his ambitions and wants to be a businessman. When he realized that Sergius has romantic desire to Louka, he decided to have Louka as a customer rather than a wife. So he encourages her to engage with Sergius.

“Louka: I believe you would rather be my servant than my husband. You make me more out of me. Oh, I know that soul of yours. I must believe in my own way. [Sergius comes in. he checks himself a moment on seeing Louka; then goes to the stove]. Nicola: oh, sir, thank you kindly. I was speaking to this foolish girl about her habit of running up here to the library whenever she gets a chance, to look at the books. That's the worst of her education sir: it gives her habit above her station. Louka: without looking at Sergius, begins to arrange the papers on the table. Sergius: looks at her sleeve and says shall I cure it? Louka: you can't cure it now. Sergius: quite sure? [He makes a movement as if to take her in his arms](Act III, 61).

George Bernard Shaw believes Nicola used Louka as an object for gaining his wish as Bluntschli who used Raina as an object to save himself. Here, Shaw illustrates the condition of women in society and the way they are behaved by men. Nicola is satisfied for achieving a customer like Louka in his business rather than worry about his fiancée. He is ready to separate from Louka and encourage her to do it only for his ambitions. On the other side, Sergius prefers Louka to Raina when noticed Riana's hidden secret of chocolate cream soldier. He announced his engagement with Louka who is a lady like Raina now .Again, Shaw says that "Sergius utilized Louka as a mean for understanding Riana's secret when Raina was in the way of going out of house. The structure of act II is more serious. Mr. Sergius tries to make love with Raina but she leaves the room and Louka enters. She tells Raina secret to him without saying the name of his rival. Sergius tries to understand it while he accidentally bruises Louka's arm. He apologizes but Louka asks him to kiss her arm.

Sergius: who is my rival?

Louka: A gentleman has no right to hurt a woman under any circumstances. I beg your pardon.

Sergius: That sort of apology may satisfy a lady. Of what use is it to a servant?

Louka: No, I want my hurt made well (Act II, 41).

Mrs. Petkoff also shows masculinity in controlling house hold works in absence of her husband Mr. Petkoff. It can be understand of servant's conversation.

Nicola: Be warned in time,

Louka: mend your manners. I know the mistress. She is so grand that she never dreams that any servant could dare to be disrespectful to her; but if once suspects that you are defying her, out you go.

Louka: I do defy her. I will defy her. What do I care for her?

Nicola: If you quarrel with the family, I never can marry

you. It's the same as if you quarreled with me!

Louka: You take her part against me, do you? (Act II, 25).

George Bernard Shaw further shows the vulgarity and impoliteness of the Petkoff towards women when Raina explains that Bulgarians of good standing people in our position wash their really hands nearly every day or the time, Petkoff blames his wife's chronic sore throat on washing her neck every day.

Catherine: Oh, my usual sore throats; that are all. Petkoff: [with conviction] that comes from washing your neck everyday. I have often told you so" (Act II, 38). His lecture on the foolishness of frequent bathing is a sign from George Bernard Shaw that how wealthy men behave with women..

CONCLUSION

The term "Modern" means a new way of doing this. It is seen as a deviation from the traditional way of doing thing. Comedy uses satire as a means to an end. Satire is a form of literature which exposes social ills with the aim of correcting it. Gender and Sexuality is a social construct which should be corrected. I acknowledge the fact that the male sex is different from that of the female as a result of the physiological features. However, God created both sexes with distinct features to complement each other not to claim superiority. Hence Modern comedy writers such as Wole Soyinka and Bernard Shaw express this through literature which is a true representation of life. This however, explains the rationale behind women's role as the main drivers of comedy, thus, placing gender and sexuality as a vital construct in Modern Comedy Literature.

