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ARTICLE DE RECHERCHE

Gender Issue in Guirgis's Play The Last Days of Judas Iscariot: a Survey

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Résumé

Étant donné que The Last Days of Judas Iscariot, la pièce de théâtre de Guirgis s'articule sur plusieurs questions, elle nécessite des études scientifiques et littéraires, notre préoccupation majeure dans cet article est d'examiner comment la question du genre est constatée et appliquée par l'auteur au regard des rôles attribués aux différents acteurs et actrices. La question du genre est particulièrement constatée lorsque le dramaturge fait d'un récit biblique un procès dans lequel il implique des juges, des avocats, et des témoins.

Mots-clés :

Abstract

The Last Days of Judas Iscariot, a play by Guirgis, is a platform of various issues, it necessitates deep scientific and literary studies, our chief concern in this paper is to examine how much the gender issue is tackled and applied by the writer regarding the roles assigned to respective actors and actresses. The Gender issue is particularly observed when the playwright made a biblical account of a trial and has brought in judges, lawyers, and witnesses.

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Introduction

Gender is one of the most approached issues in literary criticism today. The relationship between men and women is no longer sex-based as it was the case in

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feminism approach, but is capacity-based. Men and women are equally judged according to what they are capable of performing in the community. Sunderland (2004: 14) for instance, argues that "While one use of gender indicates particular grammatical properties for a language, the use of gender with which we are concerned here is about humans and entails any differences between women and men being socially and culturally learned, mediated and/or constructed". Lazar (2005: 5) in his turn considers gender as an overall total relation that includes all other social relations more particularly power relation. Power is to be understood here as "the ability of one person to influence the behavior of another (Holmes, 2005: 32)". Nevertheless, power should also be understood as fluctuating. That is, there is a possibility for power to take different forms for an individual at different times (Sunderland, 2004: 9). The Last Days of Judas Iscariot by Guirgis is essentially fanciful where the different characters (actors and actresses) perform the roles assigned to them following the playwright's imagination and history. These characters can be split into four sub-categories: Courtroom Personnel, Saints and Super naturals, characters drawn from history, and Guirgis's invented personalities. The first two groupings are partly based on each of the three everlasting dimensions: Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory. This article investigates on the issue of whether judges, lawyers, and witnesses are treated equally as men and women in Judas Iscariot's trial. The answer (s) to this question will help find a better stand and serve as an accurate mirror to-

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wards women's emancipation in Guirgis's play.

What Feminism Is

To begin with, feminism, or better feminisms, is rather a difficult and complex notion to define because of the many different kinds of feminism which exist today" (Mills, 1995: 3) cited in Tshimanga (2017). Yet, the term feminism had existed since as early as the nineteenth century, but now comes into its own (Sunderland, 2006). It has been used alternatively for the Women's Movement which aimed at promoting women's rights and interests in all aspects of life. As such, it was a counterclaim to multifarious forms of bias against women. However, as an emancipatory movement, feminism has been controversially considered; that is, positively by some and negatively by others.

The movement was accompanied by progressive reforms and furthered by different initiatives intended to create equality between the genders. This view is held by Sunderland (2006: 10) cited in Tshimanga (2017) when she writes: Nevertheless, progressive reforms are ongoing worldwide. Symbolized by initiatives such as International Women's Year (1975); and "gender equality" has been substantially taken on board by aid agencies and organizations such as the World Bank and British Counsel. As earlier as 1975, The Pacific Women's Conference, held in Suva, Fiji, passed resolutions on women and the family, health, religion, education, work, the law and politics. More recently, the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women (the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women), had as its slogan "Action for Equality, Development and Peace". Although "equality" is open to interpretation, its inclusion was crucial. Though its impact may have been marginal in the "West", women in many African countries acclaim "Beijing" as an important landmark and attest to its influence on the way people now think and talk about gender issues.

It is worth noting that the feminism movement is neither monolithic nor static. Instead, it is so multifaceted and so dynamic; that it has yielded different feminisms. However different they may be, all of them have in common women and men, girls and boys as well as a critical interest. (Cameron cited in Tshimanga, 2017).

What Gender Is

Hornby (2010: 622) defines gender as "the fact of being male or female, especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences, not differences in biology. In this regard, either males or females may perform a given role, but society intervenes to categorize such a role as male-or female-specific or exclusive and attach ideological value to each of these roles. Yet, the notion of ideologies is differently defined. From a critical point of view, ideologies are defined as "representations of practices formed from particular perspectives in the interest of maintaining unequal power relations and dominance" (Lazar, 2005: 6-7). Moreover, the term gender can be understood in two ways: (1) A label for certain ways languages may subcategorize their lexicon, and (2) social distinctions drawn between men and women.

1. The problem

Beauvoir's emphasis on women's need to access to the same kinds of activities and projects as men places her to some extend in the tradition of liberal or secondwave feminism. She demands that women be treated as equal to men and that laws, customs and education should be altered to encourage this. And she goes on asserting that women are as capable of choice as men, and thus, can choose to elevate themselves moving beyond the "immanence" to which they were previously resigned and reaching "transcendence", a stand in which one takes responsibility for oneself and the world, where one chooses their freedom. The International women's year (1975), The Pacific Women's Conference, the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women and some other initiatives on the sexes only acclaim gender equality in laws, politics, economics, and education. The most developed countries in the world to mention only the United Stated, are of no excuse to have promoted gender equality even at the level of presidential votes. Of all the positions above, none has placed due consideration to the role of theatre in the growth of gender equality. For drama plays a greater role in the society, be it tragedy or comedy. The Ancient Greek critic Aristotle argues that, drama arises from the instinct of imitation and order. The basis of drama is the conception of an ordered universe which is permitted by law. For him, the need to be ordered, to have an orderly universe is at the origin of tragedy. A noteworthy belief or opinion is that theater and/or drama as literature is a platform of various fields such as linguistics, sociology, anthropology, history, philosophy, sociolinguistics, etc. A text gains a high status not because it is valuable, but because… someone has the political-cultural power to grant the text the status they believe it deserves (Mills, 2000). Therefore, three main questions are raised: (1) Does contemporary American drama increase the awareness on gender equality? (2) Do playwrights really cope with the newly thorny trend of sex – based capacity? (3) How do people today get the necessity to reinforce the laws and democracy in order to refrain human folly, if not theater or drama?

2. Methodology

As far as this survey is concerned, it is crucial to note that qualitative research fits into connection in that literary criticism which is basically content analysis, and its data come from the different texts, and text-based recording produced by literary writers, producers, and consumers (Buhendwa, 2015: 11). However, qualitative data consist of words and observations, not mumbers. As with all data, analysis and interpretation are required to bring order and understanding (TaylorPowell, E & Renner, M., 2003). Again, this survey is based typically on observation and research questions. These two approaches are supported by the analysis of the movie and the play The Last Days of Judas Iscariot. The population of this study consists of the twenty-seven actors and actresses that make the sample size including in Guirgis's play The Last Days of Judas Iscariot. That is, the population equals the sample.

3. Data processing and Analysis

As for data processing and analysis, Microsoft Excel and SPSS software stood for our choice software programs for the sake of statistics and Chart (Rose, at al., 2015).

4. The Findings

The present article's findings revolve around the four main research questions raised earlier. Remember? That means, the research has endeavored to answer those questions so as to solve the material – related problem in gender equality towards the role on stage. As a matter of fact, the evidence is that the findings gender equality are less effective since we only have 9 positions of women out of 27 handled positions in the whole trial.

Checklist of gender grouping position

Male positions Female positions N° Males Role Total Total Percent Total Percent 1 Littlefield Judge 3/5 18 66.6 9 33.3 2 El-Fayoumy Prosecution attorney Courtroom 3 Judas Iscariot The suspect personnel

N° Females Role Total 1 Cunningham Defense attorney 2/5

Male positions Female positions 2 Bailiff Bailiff
N° Males Role Total 1 Jesus of Nazareth The betrayed witness 5/7 2 Satan Witness 3 Saint Peter Witness Saint & 4 Saint Matthew Witness supernatural 5 Saint Thomas Witnesscharacters
N° Females Role Total 1 Saint Monica Witness 2/7 2 Mary Magdalene Witness
N° Males Role Total 1 Sigmund Freud Witness 5/7 2 Pontius Pilate Witness
3 Caiaphas the Elder Witness 4 Matthias of Galilee Witness-Characters drawn from 5 Simon the Zealot Witness history
N° Females Role Total 1 Mother Teresa Witness 2/7 2 Sister Glenna Witness
N° Males Role Total 1 Butch Honeywell Foreman of the jury 5/8 2 Uncle Pino Witness 3 3 Soldiers WitnessesThe writer's invented characters N° Females Role Total 1 Henrietta Iscariot Judas's mother 3/8 2 Gloria Witness 3 Loretta Witness
As far as the above checklist of gender grouping position is concerned, it is worth noting that not only both quantitative and qualitative findings show that gender equality positions in Judas Iscariot's trial are less effective and less consistent at the same time, but also challenging.
The use of the language by the playwright
With regard to the objective orientation, it is assured that the gender issue is tacked especially among the Courtroom personnel such as, judge Littlefield, the prosecution attorney El-Fayoumy, the defence attorney Fabiana Aziza Cunningham, and Bailiff. The use of language is controlled to help convey meaning as intended by the playwright. Three key literary devices have been used: Understatement, simile, and hyperbole. Understatement consists of saying less than it really is. It is paradoxical that one can emphasize a truth by overstating it or by understating it (Perrine, 1956: 86 – 87 cited in Ngwaba, 2012). Understatement is essential in this play when judge Littlefield invites the defence attorney Cunningham to the stand by belittling her position which is associated with gender:
Judge Littlefield: next fuckin' case!!! (Guirgis, p.18).
Simile is the comparison of one thing with another to give a color to a statement. It is remarkable for the use of either like or as to make its comparison. It is apparent in the play when the defence attorney Cunningham is not, despite her position, valued by her pair the prosecution attorney El-Fayoumy especially when she is compared to a crocodile:
El-Fayoumy: Fear not, your Grace, I shall slay this fallen woman as the crocodile slays the one-legged newl (Guirgis, p.18).
Hyperbole or overstatement is simply exaggeration (Perrine, 1956: 86 cited in Ngwaba, 2012). Hyperbole is "an obvious and deliberate exaggeration, an extravagant statement. It is used for the sake of emphasis. It is also at work in the play when El-Fayoumy in an aside addresses Cunningham as if she were a prostitude.
El-Fayoumy: (an aside) you have great legs, Fabiana. Free for dinner, perhaps?
In addition, it is worth noting that both judge Littlefield and the prosecution attorney El-Fayoumy hardly used flexible expressions towards the Defence attorney Cunningham with the purpose to demoralize her at the stand. This proves that gender-equality would remain a slogan unless women's positions or roles in the society are treated with much due respect.
Cunningham: your Honor, the only person who needs forgiveness is the one who doesn't deserve it.
Judge Littlefield: Then let him ask! Cunningham: I'm asking for him! Judge Littlefield: Out of my courtroom, sister… Cunningham: your Honor, are you a citizen of heaven?
Judge Littlefield: Bailiff! Remove this woman (Guirgis, p.17).
Actually, my own observation and research questions have led me to these answers. 1) Contemporary American drama hardly increases the awareness on gender equality. 2) Playwrights of today have difficulties coping with the newly thorny trend on sex-based capacity. 3) The problem is up to the playwrights. That is, sometimes, they ignore that they are the best teachers in helping increase rulers' awareness on leadership accountability vis-à-vis the people they govern.

Conclusion

This paper is first of all a significant tool for the playwright's rise of leadership consciousness towards gender issue productions. It has been proven that gender discrimination is a persistent problem in theater today. What is crucial is a real need to figure out how to fix the point. The use of the language is controlled to help convey the meaning intended by the playwright in potraying the attitude of today's leaders towards a small number of hired women in the society. Three recommendations and suggestions are made below: 1) Playwrights should contextualize gender policies in encouraging parity of participation through applied theater. This will help reach a tipping point where the barriers for women theater artists finally come crashing down.
2) Women theater artists should be motivated to have a further training to act in front of the camera, and they should be committed to address gender issue and try to maximize the impact of their efforts to change lives through theater. 3) As we live in a more competitive world, women students should struggle to have their voices heard in Leadership Theater like their pairs in human and applied sciences. Thus, education is and remains the key to gender equality in theater, laws, politics, education, business administration, etc.

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