

Decadence of Victorian Masculinity, or Dandyism in Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan**

Victoria Çağı Erkekliğinin Çöküşü, veya
Oscar Wilde'in *Lady Windermere'in Yelpazesi* Oyununda Züppelik
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Abstract

It is contended that, by means of the changing economic power in the nineteenth-century society, the middle classes prevailed over upper classes in Britain, and they hence established their concept of Victorian masculinity on the basis of imperialism. However, the last decade of the Victorian era witnessed the transformation of this imperial manliness that was primarily concerned with sentimental morality and later shaped by the capitalist economic interests into dandyism that was embellished with aesthetically affected codes of masculinity against the hypocrisy of the Victorian era. Therefore, this article first establishes the definition and characteristics of Victorian imperial masculinity in relation to the disciplines of gender, politics and medicine, and then delves into the concept and decade of decadence which was represented by Oscar Wilde, and his literary and critical works. Subsequently, the poetics of dandyism, as the new epitome of masculinity in this decade, is articulated with its philosophical foundations as Charles Pierre Baudelaire and Jules Amédée Barbey d' Aurevilly define. Having been affected from such philosophers, Oscar Wilde, as the artistic representation of dandiacal masculinity in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century, also presents dandy men in his plays like *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892). In this comedy, one can find various codes of a dandy's masculine preoccupations and principles with a wide range of male characters. In keeping with these attitudes, the article will underline the fall of Victorian ideals in the formation of manliness and the rise of a further individualistic and artistic mode of masculinity.

Keywords: Dandyism, Victorian Masculinity, Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892)

Öz

İngiltere'de, on dokuzuncu yüzyıl toplumunda değişen iktisadi güç yoluyla, orta sınıfların üst sınıflara baskın çıktığı ve emperyalizme bağlı Victoria çağı erkeklik kavramını oluşturdukları iddia edilmektedir. Ne var ki Victoria döneminin son on yılı, başta manevi ahlak kaygıları olup sonra da kapitalist ekonomik çıkarlarla şekillenen bu imparatorluk adamlığının Victoria dönemi ikiyüzlülüğüne karşı duruşunun yanı sıra estetik değerler de taşıyan erkeklik ilkeleriyle donanmış züppeliğe dönüşümüne şahit olmuştur. Bu makale, bu nedenle, öncelikli olarak toplumsal cinsiyet, siyaset ve tıbbi alanlarla ilişkilendirilmiş Victoria çağı erkekliğinin tanımını ve özelliklerini verip Oscar Wilde ile onun edebi ve eleştirel eserlerinin temsil ettiği çöküş kavramını ve dönemini incelemektedir. Akabinde, bu dönemin yeni erkeklik ideali olan züppeliğin estetik ilkeleri, Charles Pierre Baudelaire ve Jules Amédée Barbey d' Aurevilly'nin tanımladığı felsefi temellerle birlikte verilmektedir. Bu düşünürlerden etkilenecek

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on dokuzuncu yüzyılın sonlarında İngiltere'deki züppevari erkekliğin sanatsal temsilcisi olan Oscar Wilde, züppe erkek tiplerini *Lady Windermere'in Yelpazesi* gibi oyunlarında da sunmaktadır. Bu komedide çok çeşitli erkek karakterler aracılığıyla züppe erkekliğinin muhtelif kaygıları ve ilkeleri bulunabilmektedir. Bunlara bağlı olarak, bu makale Victoria çağı değerlerinin adamlık biçimlendirmedeki çöküşünü ve daha bireyci ve sanatsal bir erkekliğin yükselişini vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Züppelik, Victoria Çağı Erkekliği, Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere'in Yelpazesi* (1892)

Introduction

The development of masculinities in the Victorian era (1837-1901) was organically related to the major socio-economic changes Britain had experienced since the eighteenth century like the colonial problems such as the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and the Morant Bay Rebellion in 1865, the Fenian Rising of 1867 in Ireland, and the increasing global economic competition among the forces of Germany, Russia, and the United States (Beynon, 2002, pp. 38-39). However, it was not possible to observe a uniform masculinity throughout the nineteenth century because of the rising individuality, the aesthetic movements and the emergence of alternative understandings of sexuality. In this regard, the last decade of this century held a separate and marginal position in the studies of Victorian masculinities. With the aim of emphasising the rise of a new masculinity code – dandyism – which was separate from and critical of the Victorian imperial masculinity, this paper articulates its significance in the public sphere of the hegemonic masculinity with its literary analysis in *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892) by Oscar Wilde, the British dandy of the decade. Before investigating this era of marginal gender relations, one should extensively monitor the development of the “so-called” stable Victorian masculinity and the values attached to it. In the early nineteenth century, because of the protracted process of industrialisation and the concomitant increase in a consumer economy, there were socio-economic changes in Britain which influenced the pattern of the hegemonic middle-class value systems (Schneider, 2011, p. 147). Therefore, the notion of masculinity in the Victorian era was highly diverse, and it relied on quite a lot of determinants such as imperialism, religion and science along with economy.

Victorian/Imperial Masculinity

Sentimentalism which, with the belief of the cooperation of the politics of the state and one's personal morality, was established as a moral philosophical movement of the “Enlightenment celebration of humane feeling” (Bell, 2000, p. 2) in the early eighteenth century continued to affect the British society until the last quarter of the nineteenth century with its middle-class motive to judge, approve and mostly disapprove of social and moral conducts of the upper classes. Its long-lasting influence can be attached to its foundation of separate spheres: public sphere for men as the domain of prestige, reputation and importance and private sphere for women as the realm of affability, matrimony, and chastity. Ruskin articulates the differences between these two spheres in detail:

The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest, wherever war is just, wherever conquest necessary. But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle, – and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet orde-

ring, arrangement, and decision. She sees the qualities of things, their claims, and their places. Her great function is Praise; she enters into no contest, but infallibly adjudges the crown of contest. (1865, pp. 146-147)

For the welfare of each sex, these two spheres were believed to be kept separate. Thus, in the competitively industrialised and technological nineteenth century, it became possible to actualise the masculinity of British bourgeoisie in a successful way within the male public sphere of commerce and industry. As a result of this compulsory heterosexual patriarchy, that nineteenth-century patriarchal British society could establish its gender hierarchies by alienating women from the public affairs and defining them with perpetual inferiority.

Moreover, the employment of the concept of separate spheres to preserve the male domination led to the extreme polarisation of gender roles and identities. This polarisation created a double bind for sentimental masculinity as meditated by Ruskin:

By her office, and place, [the woman] is protected from all danger and temptation. The man, in his rough work in open world, must encounter all peril and trial; – to him, therefore, must be the failure, the offence, the inevitable error: often he must be wounded, or subdued; often misled; and ALWAYS hardened. But he guards the woman from all [these] ... (1865, pp. 147-148)

The public sphere of men was closely connected to the private sphere of women, whose tasks were mostly limited to homely atmosphere with strong ties of “motherhood” (Taşdelen and Koca, 2015, p. 209), because the protection of the feminine realm from the perils of the public realm was a constituent of a successful sentimental masculinity. This masculine achievement was defined “in relation to the domestic sphere within criteria that value the role of breadwinner for a domestic establishment and that situate affectionate as well as sexual life within marriage” (Sussman, 1995, p. 5). Therefore, the success in the private, and therefore feminine, sphere was the expected concomitant of the success in the masculine sphere, and this situation intensified the domestic and sentimental heteropatriarchal ideology strengthened by the middle classes of the nineteenth century.

This clear-cut separation between the sexes introduced a striking uniformity among men in the middle of the nineteenth century. When the Victorian visual representations of men are considered, these men looked indistinguishable from one another since almost all of them were “whiskered, wearing the same type of top hat or bowler, clad in black or grey suits or overcoats, wearing the same kind of waistcoat and tie” (Schneider, 2011, p. 148). The significance of this corporeal representation can be related to the discursive and illustrious character of the male body which directly reflected the demands and desires of society. Unlike the female body, the male body was handled to signify “society’s need for order and progress, as well as middle-class virtues such as self-control and moderation” (Mosse, 1996, p. 9). The common themes in these corporeal representations, then, stood for sobriety and solidity. A solid man carried the characteristics of “probity, integrity, conscientious application” (Mangan, 2003, p. 167). This redefinition of hegemonic masculinity by the classes of merchants and entrepreneurs also included the re-formation of the relations among culture, gender, and capitalism. By legislating restrictive laws such as marriage regulations and tax policies with regard to gender politics and supporting medicine in forging the categories of heterosexual and homosexual (Connell, 2009, p. 121), the nineteenth-century British state gave impetus to “the natural current of industry and capital” (Roper, 1825, p. 13) in order to “promote virtuous and profitable conduct” (Kuchta, 2002, p.

160). This cooperation between the state and the middle-class capital owners eventually generated imperial masculinity, “a product of time, place, power and class, along with firmly held and unquestioned conceptions of racial and national superiority” in the middle of the nineteenth century (Beynon, 2002, p. 28).

In order to foster the Empire and the British race, the education of young men became especially important after the 1830s. Manly group activities in sports and trainings were encouraged to establish “athleticism, stoicism, sexual purity and moral courage” because imperial masculinity was equated with “intellectual energy, moral purpose and sexual purity” (Beynon, 2002, p. 27). Sussman affirms that

the early Victorians defined maleness as the possession of an innate, distinctively male energy that ... they did not represent as necessarily sexualized, but as an inchoate force that could be expressed in a variety of ways, only one of which is sexual. This interior energy was consistently imagined or fantasized in a metaphoric of fluid, suggestively seminal, and in an imagery of flame. (1995, p. 10)

The pressure on the masculine identity until the end of the nineteenth century continued to direct and settle the flow of the male energy efficiently. Thus, the failure to balance the flow of the male energy would be eliminated as well as any probable danger of “either repression or an unfocused, and so unproductive, externalization” (Booth, 2000, p. 120). This strict balance was crucial since any deficiency in controlling the male energy would not only result in disasters in the public sphere like business, but also spread over all the spheres of life including the private one. By disciplining and toughening boys, a hard imperial masculinity was, thus, maintained in all-male organisations together with an emphasis on “Muscular Christianity” as a complementary branch of the imperial masculinity – “an aggressive, robust, and activist masculinity” – to create brave, true, and Christian men (Mosse, 1996, p. 49).

In addition to these characteristics, Victorian or imperial masculinity was also debated and defined in medical terms. Risks to individual health such as syphilis, tuberculosis and hysteria became a common obsession, started the questioning of the sexual restraint, the psychological stamina of Victorian men (Foucault, 1978, pp. 8-10), and led to some ideas about the emotional and psychological immaturity of men (Hogan, 2000, pp. 64-65). Because a man’s physical health was directly related to his manners, virtues, and morals, practices of vice and immorality were comprehended in the terms of medical science. Loose morals were thought to blight the establishment of the heteronormative standards which were believed to sustain the state. For that reason, physicians authorised “the equation between morality, health, and sickness, partly because this was expected of them and partly because they themselves gained status as the arbiters of established norms” (Mosse, 1996, p. 80). In a society in which gender identities were discernibly polarised by defining masculinity in relation to its artificially constructed others and ideologically formulated ideals, the concept of decadence emerged and was associated with the avant-garde men like Oscar Wilde who caused a rupture to middle-class value system.

Decadence and Oscar Wilde

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, the concept of decadence, as used by Charles Pierre Baudelaire (1821-1867) and J. K. (Charles-Marie-Georges) Huysmans (1848-1907), referred to “a new sensibility, a refinement of the nerves and the senses that was not always seen in a negative light” or

confused with degeneration (Mosse, 1996, p. 81). Those who were influential in the construction of imperial ideals lined the decadence of the Victorian age with the so-called golden age and the subsequent fall of the Roman Empire in which “alcoholism ..., bad personal habits, and social conditions” were believed to lead the Romans to a widespread degeneration (Mosse, 1996, p. 81). In the context of the correlation of physical health with mental stability, the established and newly gentrified middle classes living up to Victorian manly ideals opposed and tried to ostracise all outsiders like profeminist women, homosexual men and lesbians in this time of decadence. Effeminacy for men and female masculinity were stigmatised as a sickness by the physicians (Brady, 2009, pp. 179-182). Despite all the pejorative labelling, “unmanly man and unwomanly women” (Mosse, 1996, p. 86) increasingly stood against the normative ideals of Victorian masculinity, and they exhibited their sexual differences and unorthodox gender identities in that period. Decadence was, therefore, considered to be degeneration by the defenders of the normative gender structure in British society. In Britain, one of the most marginal masculinities among these unconventional circles belonged to dandyism which became identical with Oscar Wilde with all its characteristics.

Oscar Fingal O’Flahertie Wills Wilde (1854-1900) was of Irish descent and the upper-class community. As a young member of the upper class, Oscar Wilde’s formal education included prestigious schools like Trinity College, Dublin, and Magdalen College, Oxford. Studying under Ruskin, Wilde improved his philosophy of love for beauty and the cult of self, which are known as the characteristics of the “art for art’s sake” school of thought. He drew attention in the literary world with his extravagant outfits, witty epigrams, and unconventional manners (Pearson, 1930, p. viii). As a novelist first, he produced *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in 1891, which startled the moral sensibilities and the ideal of masculinity held by the Victorian society. One year later, he started to write plays, first serious ones such as *Vera; or, the Nihilist* (1883), *The Duchess of Padua* (1883, performed in 1891) and *Salome* (1891), and then comedies. In 1892, he wrote his first comedy of manners *Lady Windermere’s Fan, a Play about a Good Woman* for St James Theatre under the administration of Sir George Alexander, an actor-manager (Ganz, 1957, p. 124). Without overtly violating the norms of the late Victorian society, he wrote for the theatre by extensively borrowing from melodramatic sources. He defended himself by criticising the very society he wrote for: “Why not? Nobody reads nowadays” (Pearson, 1946, p. 246). So, it can be articulated that Wilde combined what society demanded with what he himself was pleased with so that both sides were left content. This combination actually suited the new masculinity figure of the decadence: the dandy. To grasp the dandy in its full content and context, one must look at French philosopher Jules Amédée Barbey d’Aureville (1808-1889) and French poet Charles Baudelaire.¹

The Poetics of Dandyism

In 1845, Barbey d’Aureville wrote his work *Of Dandyism and of George Brummell*. It was a disquisition on dandyism through the explanation of George “Beau” Brummell, a close friend of George IV, in Regency England. A man described as a dandy is mostly recognised with the neatness of his apparels. His clothes reflect the day’s fashion with their plain colours, perfect cut, and delicate combinations.

¹ Jules Amédée Barbey d’Aureville and Charles Baudelaire are the early critical thinkers on the philosophy of dandyism. For readings on dandyism, one can also refer to Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) and his long essay *Treatise on Elegant Living* (1830/2010), Albert Camus (1913-1960) and his *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt* (1951/1991), and Roland Barthes (1915-1980) and his essay “Dandyism and Fashion” (1962/2006).

The neckwear is an indispensable element of his outfit. It is “either in the form of a cravat or a stock” worn on an upright collar (Laver, 2002, pp. 158, 160). With that aspect of a man’s outlook, a dandy seems to conform to the codes of Victorian masculinity. However, he is not described only with what he wears as suggested by Barbey d’Aureville:

Those who see things only from a narrow point of view have imagined it to be especially the art of dress, a bold and felicitous dictatorship in the manner of clothes and exterior elegance. That is most certainly is, but much more besides. Dandyism is a complete theory of life and its material is not its only side. It is a way of existing, made up entirely of shades, as is always the case in very old and very civilised societies. (1897, pp. 17-19)

The dandy has his own motives to stand against the hypocrisy of the very society he lives in. Barbey d’Aureville found this explanation necessary as a response to Thomas Carlyle, an admirer of the ancient heroic values, as Carlyle defined dandy as “a clothes-wearing Man, a Man whose trade, office, and existence consists in the wearing of Clothes. Every faculty of his soul, spirit, purse, and person is heroically consecrated to this one object, the wearing of Clothes wisely and well: so that the others dress to live, he lives to dress” (1836/1984, p. 313). Barbey d’Aureville harshly criticises Carlyle because a dandy is a “social, human and intellectual” man, not “a caricature” or “a suit clothes walking about by itself” (1897, p. 18). Thus, the dandy is advocated to be a member or insider of Victorian society though he does not appreciate the hypocritical deeds of the society he lives in. However, he both practises and ridicules them.

What is also essential in a dandy is his superiority regarding his wit and firm individuality. His expression of self-morality provides a revolt against the nineteenth-century middle-class conventions, industriousness, materialism and utilitarianism. By opposing the uniformity of people, the dandy values individuality above social descriptions (Glick, 2001, pp. 131, 145). His individuality carries his honesty in the face of the hypocrisy of society. He observes the flaws of the Victorian middle classes and avoids to practice their ideals. Moreover, he is unable to desist from ridiculing with situations sprung after these flaws. The dandy always emphasises the insincere, deceitful teachings, the practises in contrast with the moral ideals, and the judgemental and exclusionary attitudes of the society he lives in.

There were other significant literary and political characters who were influential in Wilde’s dandyism. Next to Barbey d’Aureville, Oscar Wilde also admired Charles Baudelaire who provided another example of a dandy with both his life and his works. Baudelaire defines the dandy as follows:

The wealthy man, who, blasé though he may be, has no occupation in life but to chase along the highway of happiness, the man nurtured in luxury, and habituated from early youth to being obeyed by others, the man, finally, who has no profession other than elegance ... These beings have no other status but that of cultivating the idea of beauty in their own persons, of satisfying their passions, of feeling and thinking. Thus they possess, to their hearts’ content, and to a vast degree, both time and money, without which fantasy, reduced to the state of ephemeral reverie, can scarcely be translated into action. (1863/1981, p. 419)

For him, dandyism is equal to individualism which requires an enthusiastic commitment to producing original things, making a cult of one’s own self, and astonishing others in a dignified unsurprised man-

ner (Baudelaire, 1863/1981, pp. 422-423). The dandy pursues his own desires to obtain the pleasures of the world. His wealth and leisure time enables him to put his ideals into practice.

In Britain, the “dandy [man] was flamboyant, sometimes to the point of vulgarity;” Ribeiro writes in “On Englishness in Dress” and continues to elicit the representative dandyism of a British gentleman:

On the whole, nineteenth-century dandyism, as befitted the tenor of the times and the muted palette of the male wardrobe generally, was restrained and understated, showing itself in a kind of world-weariness and affected nonchalance, with attention to the subtle details of dress and accessories (an increasingly select and private dialogue between the tailor and the client): the quality of the fine woollen cloth, the slope of a pocket flap or coat revers, exactly the right colour for the gloves, the correct amount of shine on boots and shoes, and so on. It was an image of a well-dressed man who, while taking infinite pains about his appearance, affected indifference to it. This refined dandyism continued to be regarded as an essential strand of male Englishness. (2002, p. 21)

The dandy is a self-educated and self-designed man of both elaborate physical appearance and intellectual accumulation. He has radically broken with the past traditions, and he has an idle, decadent lifestyle. Wilde embodied all the characteristic features of the masculinity of a dandy in his character and lifestyle by becoming the centre of one of the most notorious scandals of the time due to his homosexuality. In his plays, Wilde mostly emphasised the scandals created by society, which is not absent from *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, either.

Wildean Dandies in *Lady Windermere’s Fan*

As the first example of comedy of manners at the end of the nineteenth century, *Lady Windermere’s Fan* is a nonclassical four-act play illustrating a verisimilar portrait of the late Victorian society on the stage. It opens in Lord Windermere’s house in Carlton House Terrace, London where young Lady Windermere is busy arranging roses in a blue bowl. She is soon interrupted with the arrival of Lord Darlington, and then the Duchess of Berwick and her daughter Lady Agatha Carlisle. The drive of the play is revealed by Lord Darlington’s proposal of secret affair to Lady Windermere and by two ladies’ informing the title character about a possible secret relation of Lord Windermere with an old woman, Mrs Erlynne. In the ball in honour of Lady Windermere’s birthday, Mrs Erlynne is introduced to the elite society with whom she quickly socialises. Furious with her husband’s inviting that old woman, Lady Windermere decides to elope with Lord Darlington, and leaves her house. Mrs Erlynne, having desired to see the lady of the ball and failed to find her, realises something is wrong and finds a letter left by Lady Windermere. At this moment, she is understood to be Lady Windermere’s mother who did the same mistake years ago, recently returned to London, and took money from Lord Darlington to be away from her daughter. In order to save her daughter from the shame of her deed in such an elite and normative society, Mrs Erlynne hurries to the lodging of Lord Darlington and urges Lord Augustus, her courtier, to keep Lord Darlington out of the house as long as possible. Lady Windermere is saved with Mrs Erlynne’s sacrificing her reputation due to being discovered in a single man’s house with Lady Windermere’s fan which has actually been forgotten there by the owner. In the last

act, Lady Windermere is in her own house, and sad to learn that Mrs Erlynne has defiled her name and honour for her sake. In the end, Mrs Erlynne takes the photo of her daughter with her grand-son and the fan of Lady Windermere with permission, and leaves without revealing any secret to her. The play ends with the securing of the Windermeres' marriage, and the possibility of a marriage between Mrs Erlynne and Lord Augustus who seems to be convinced to leave the country with her.

Throughout the play, Oscar Wilde presents the audience with several dandy characters who articulate their worldviews one after the other and, in a way, demonstrate what it is to be a dandy. In the first act of *Lady Windermere's Fan*, Lord Darlington appears to be the first dandy of the play, as the admirer of Lady Windermere. If a dandy wants to dominate his society, he ought to be superior to it and Lord Darlington, here, belongs to the aristocracy to which eloquence and aesthetics are attached by the dandy. He directly shows his interest in the lady's roses and fan by stating that the flowers are "quite perfect" and the fan is "wonderful" (I.13). He also tells her that he "would have covered the whole street in front of your [her] house with flowers for you [her] to walk on" if he had known that that day was her birthday (I.14). He primarily shows his dandiacal side with his master of courteous speech while wooing the married, young lady. When she is annoyed by his perpetual "elaborate compliments," his elegance and artistic delight are presented as the mischievous characteristics of a dandy in the late Victorian society:

LADY WINDERMERE [*gravely*]: ... I should be sorry to have to quarrel with you, Lord Darlington ... But I shouldn't like you at all if I thought you were what most other men are. Believe me, you are better than most other men, and I sometimes think you pretend to be worse.

LORD DARLINGTON: We all have our little vanities, Lady Windermere.

LADY WINDERMERE: Why do you make that your special one? [*Still seated at table L.*]

LORD DARLINGTON [*still seated L.C.*]: Oh, nowadays so many conceited people go about Society pretending to be good, that I think it shows a rather sweet and modest disposition to pretend to be bad ... If you pretend to be good, the world takes you very seriously. If you pretend to be bad, it doesn't. Such is the astounding stupidity of optimism. (I.14-15)

Here, Lady Windermere is seen as a philistine woman who avoids using flamboyant words – adjectives – while she describes people because she is an adherent of the sentimental norms of the Victorian middle classes. Contrarily, Lord Darlington seems to have a passion for "perceived" wickedness stemming from his reaction against social conventions surrounding him although he is content with this. In that way, he reveals that he rejects the morality of Victorian manliness built around "materialistic and imperialist values" and holds "the distorting mirror of its hidden vices" to society (Florence Tamagne as cited in Defeyt, 2014, p. 179). As a self-centred dandy, his masculinity hinders Lord Darlington focusing on anything but himself in this dialogue. Therefore, he gets oblivious to what the lady he is with says and leaves her questions unanswered. Next to her, Lord Darlington further expresses his views on morality with his remark that "It is absurd to divide people into good and bad. People are either charming or tedious. I take the side of the charming," and that "I couldn't help it. I can resist everything except temptation" (I.17). He does not believe in sentimental concepts like sac-

rifice. He remarks that “anything is better than being sacrificed” when the lady says that life “is not a speculation. It is a sacrament. Its ideal is Love. Its purification is sacrifice” (I.16).

In the salutation dialogue, the Duchess of Berwick calls Lord Darlington a “wicked” man and tries to protect her daughter from him (I.18). In response, he emphasises that this badness is only an appearance, and not his innate character: “Don’t say that, Duchess. As a wicked man I am a complete failure. Why, there are lots of people who say I have never really done anything wrong in the whole course of my life. Of course they only say it behind my back” (I.18). On the dandy’s philosophy of life and relations with other people, Albert Camus states that “Profligate, like all people without a rule of life, he is only coherent as an actor. But an actor implies a public; the dandy can only play a part by setting himself up in opposition” (Camus, 1951/1991, p. 51). With that view, a dandy like Lord Darlington surprises society with his conflictual manners. Although his so-called corrupt side is made up of only suppositions and other people’s descriptions, it constitutes no impediment in his social relationships. The dandy still continues to be charming in the eyes of those who do not approve of his manners. The Duchess cannot help calling him “Dear Lord Darlington” while she is telling him “how thoroughly depraved” he is (I.19). Upon his leaving, she states her opinions on him: “What a charming wicked creature! I like him so much” (I.19). It is seen that the young gentleman successfully transferred his conflictual identity to the Duchess, and she does not eventually despise him, relying on the rumours of the town or his being a self-centred, pleasure-fond dandy.

A dandy like Lord Darlington is indifferent to moral values as is seen above; however, he does not interfere with other people’s relations. He says “A man can’t tell these things about another man!” to confirm this view (II.37). However, there is one danger for a dandy: to lose his dandyism, to surrender his character to middle-class sentimental values. For Lord Darlington, the moment he confesses his love for Lady Windermere, he degenerates from a dandy to a sentimental lover:

LORD DARLINGTON: Yes, I love you! You are more to me than anything in the whole world. What does your husband give you? Nothing. Whatever is in him he gives to this wretched woman, whom he has thrust into your society, into your home, to shame you before every one. I offer you my life –

LADY WINDERMERE: Lord Darlington!

LORD DARLINGTON: My life – my whole life. Take it, and do with it what you will. ... I love you – love you as I have never loved any living thing. From the moment I met you I loved you, loved you blindly, adoringly, madly! You did not know it then – you know it now! (II.37-38)

At that moment, he gets attached to whatever he has ridiculed previously. Unlike a true dandy, he judges Mrs Erlynne’s modesty by calling her a “wretched” woman and offers his “whole” life to the lady’s service (II.37). In the previous act, he is seen to have rejected the conventional definitions of society. He has not cared about them. Nonetheless, it is understood that he listens to and minds what the elite society thinks of him. He tells that “I won’t tell you that the world matters nothing, or the world’s voice, or the voice of society. They matter a great deal. They matter far too much” (II.38). To put it differently, he ceases to be truly dandiacal by paying attention to the content, not the form.

Other than Lord Darlington, the minor male characters are shown to possess one of a dandy’s masculinity aspects. Dumby, not a man lacking intelligence as his name suggests, is another dandy in

the play. In his comical conversation with ladies at the ball, he is seen to play with words and not to pay attention to what is said, or the content, but the flow of the conversation, i.e. the form:

DUMBY: Good evening, Lady Stutfield. I suppose this will be the last ball of the season?

LADY STUTFIELD: I suppose so, Mr Dumby. It's been a delightful season, hasn't it?

DUMBY: Quite delightful! Good evening, Duchess. I suppose this will be the last ball of the season?

DUCHESS OF BERWICK: I suppose so, Mr Dumby. It has been a very dull season, hasn't it?

DUMBY: Dreadfully dull! Dreadfully dull!

MRS COWPER-COWPER: Good evening, Mr Dumby. I suppose this will be the last ball of the season?

DUMBY: Oh, I think not. There'll probably be two more. [*Wanders back to* LADY PLYMDALE.] (II.29-30)

As a wit, he comfortably adjusts himself to whatever is being said. Moreover, Dumby's dandyism, here, makes him tend to neglect the content of his remarks as long as they are formulated and phrased well. Just like a true dandy's obsession with form, or the appearance of someone or something, he "can only be sure of his own existence by finding it in the expression of others' faces. Other people are his mirror. A mirror that quickly becomes clouded, it's true, since human capacity for attention is limited" (Camus, 1951/1991, pp. 51-52). Dumby, as a representation of the artistic dandy, delights in his own capability of eloquence and pays attention to the formation of the expressions he utters, but not their meanings.

Dandyism, as a philosophy in the nineteenth century, works as a justification for the actions and manners of Wilde's characters. Since dandyism does not, in reality, have a political purpose, it does not aim to influence or to urge other men or women to absorb its ideals. Roland Barthes affirms this philosophy by stating that "[t]he dandy in no way sets the upper classes against the lower classes, but rather, exclusively and absolutely, sets the individual against the common herd" (as cited in Nelson, 2007, p. 136). Therefore, dandyism can be said to have no ideological aim, but is just a philosophical stance against the bourgeois normativity and masculinity values in the nineteenth century. Dandyism, thus, constitutes the ground for Wilde's and his characters' ideas and behaviours. Additionally, dandyism is not limited to only males. It is possible to see dandiacal traits also in the central female character of the play, Mrs Erlynne. She has been alienated from society due to a secret in her past. That secret is revealed at the end of the second act when she learns that Lady Windermere has left her husband for another man. Mrs Erlynne utters the reality at that moment: "The daughter must not be like the mother – that would be terrible ... Who knows that better than I?" (II.44). It is understood that she once paid attention to appearances, but not the realities, just like a dandy would do. Her motive is also given as to re-enter the elite society, of which she was a member in the past, and to be accepted by it. All the dandies, at some point, are seen to have rejected the morals and conventions of the Victorian middle classes. One can interpret these dandies' eccentricities as the signs of a desire to be accepted and applauded by the very society they, the dandies, themselves ridicule (Ganz, 1957, p. 147).

For the dandy, superiority does not come from the composition of one's personality, but from the structure of form, or a person's appearance. Wilde illustrates why:

For the real artist is he who proceeds, not from feeling to form, but from form to thought and passion ... [R]ealizing the beauty of the sonnet-scheme, he [first] conceives certain modes of music and methods of rhyme, and the mere form suggests what is to fill it and make it intellectually and emotionally complete ... He gains his inspiration from form, and from form purely, as an artist should ... All bad poetry springs from genuine feeling. To be natural is to be obvious, and to be obvious is to be inartistic ... In every sphere of life Form is the beginning of things ... Yes: Form is everything. It is the secret of life. (1891/1989, p. 289)

The principle of superiority of form to content is seen in Mrs Erlynne's description of Lord Augustus Lorton: "And there is a great deal of good in Lord Augustus. Fortunately it is all on the surface. Just where good qualities should be" (II.41). In the last act, Lord Windermere chastises her because of her misbehaviour in Lord Darlington's house with harsh words. At that moment, Mrs Erlynne warningly reminds him of the importance of "manners before morals" (IV.62). In one of her most sentimental speeches, she contrastively underlines the importance of appearance rather than feelings like contrition in a person, even in a woman: "what consoles one nowadays is not repentance, but pleasure. Repentance is quite out of date. And besides, if a woman really repents, she has to go to a bad dressmaker, otherwise no one believes in her" (IV.65). Mrs Erlynne, as a female dandy, cleverly uses language and demonstrates the superiority of mind over morals because her subversiveness relies on her use of irony and command of the game of appearance, or forms.

In dandyism, any artificial thing is held in great esteem since the dandy recognises that art is an artificial reality in its own paradox, but not a natural one. Wilde illustrates the main idea behind the dandy's manners thus:

[J]oy in art – that incommunicable element of artistic delight which, in poetry, for instance, comes from what Keats called the "sensuous life of verse," the element of song in the singing, made so pleasurable to us by that wonder of motion which often has its origin in mere musical impulse, and in painting is to be sought for, from the subject never, but from the pictorial charm only – the scheme and symphony of the colour, the satisfying beauty of the design: ... for music is the art in which form and matter are always one, ... the art which most completely realizes for us the artistic ideal, and is the condition to which all the other arts are constantly aspiring. (1904, pp. 8-9)

The dandy devotes himself "to transform life into art, self into *chef-d'oeuvre* [a masterpiece]" by playing on his eccentricity and distinctness (Nelson, 2007, p. 136, emphasis in the original). In the play, the young dandiacal gentlemen regard the old man, Lord Augustus, as one of them with his delight in unnatural, artificial things:

LORD AUGUSTUS: My dear boy, if I wasn't the most good-natured man in London –

CECIL GRAHAM: We'd treat you with more respect, wouldn't we, Tuppy?
[*Strolls away.*]

DUMBY: The youth of the present day are quite monstrous. They have absolutely no respect for dyed hair. [LORD AUGUSTUS *looks round angrily*.] (III.52)

Lord Augustus provides a rather different example of an old man with his “dyed hair” that mirrors the artificiality of a dandy. He conforms to the dandyism adopted by the youth because he is aware that anything natural and moral is belittled by them.

In the all-men scene of the third act, another characteristic of a dandy is demonstrated again: despising middle-class values. In the first act, Lord Darlington was ridiculing Lady Windermere’s old puritanical beliefs; now other dandies begin to ridicule his sentimental condition. Lord Darlington phases in the moralistic, conventional values of the middle classes after his love for Lady Windermere.

LORD DARLINGTON: Oh! she doesn’t love me. She is a good woman. She is the only good woman I have ever met in my life.

CECIL GRAHAM: The only good woman you have ever met in your life?

LORD DARLINGTON: Yes!

CECIL GRAHAM [*lighting a cigarette*]: Well, you are a lucky fellow! Why, I have met hundreds of good women. I never seem to meet any but good women. The world is perfectly packed with good women. To know them is a middle-class education.

LORD DARLINGTON: This woman has purity and innocence. She has everything we men have lost.

CECIL GRAHAM: My dear fellow, what on earth should we men do going about with purity and innocence? A carefully thought-out buttonhole is much more effective. (III.54)

The conversation starts with the good manners of a woman and then continues with a metaphor of clothes. A carefully designed and stitched buttonhole is mentioned as an object of artistic creation which is of greater significance than a woman’s purity and innocence, according to the dandies. In this short third act which is preceded and succeeded by sentimental melodramatic occurrences, Wilde achieves to demonstrate his dandies’ aesthetic concerns by means of witty dialogues. He shows the two worlds, aristocratic dandy’s aesthetic world and middle-class man’s sensible world, as running counter to each other.

Conclusion: Affected Masculinity of the Dandy

In *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, Oscar Wilde displays several dandy characters like Lord Darlington, Mr Graham Cecil, Dumby, Lord Augustus Lorton, and Mrs Erylne without limiting the philosophy of dandyism to a specific sex. Dandyism, which visibly emerged with its all characteristics in the last decade of the nineteenth century, appears as an affected pose against the Victorian middle-class gender relations which elevated imperial masculinity so that men could serve the capitalist and colonial purposes of the British Empire. As it is seen in the play, dandies such as Lord Darlington and Mr Graham Cecil are not interested in the politics of their time, but they are highly concerned with the representations of their selves. The dandy is rakish as it can be observed in the conversation between

Lord Darlington and Lady Windermere in the first act; however, he is not involved in the Victorian politics dominated by the middle classes. With the idea that perfect form can only be found in art, but not in nature, a dandy seeks perfection in art and artificiality all the time. For that reason, he pays attention to his appearance more than the conventional values which he lacks. When his or her focus shifts from form to content, or from artificial manners to true feelings, the dandy carries the potential to slip into the normative Victorian masculinity, just like Lord Darlington does in the play. In the case of Dumby and Mr Cecil Graham, to be acknowledged as having accomplished perfection in anything is most praiseworthy. For that reason, they are confident in their conduct of manliness, in their ever-charming relations with women and male friends although they remain as keen observers standing apart from society throughout the play. In this regard, the dandy is reluctant to let any exterior force affect his personality due to the Baudelairean cult of the self. He is self-sufficient, self-centric, and he regards himself as uncorrupted by this hypocritical society. The dandies in *Lady Windermere's Fan* collectively represent the ideals of the masculinity of the dandy; these ideals are not given with the specific aspects of only one character. Dandiacal masculinity is, thus, presented in opposition to the sentimental and puritanical middle-class values which are supposed to shelter Lady Windermere from the harsh conditions of the outer world she lives in, but fail to function when there is the slightest gossip.x

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