

**University of Pardubice
Faculty of Arts and Philosophy**

**The Criticism of Hypocrisy
in *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *Lady Windermere's Fan*
by Oscar Wilde**

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *Lady Windermere's Fan*, works by Oscar Wilde, and criticism of Victorian hypocrisy. The introductory part is dedicated to Victorian society, its issues, specificities, and values above all. Both plays are set into the socio-cultural context. In the following main part, the concentration is given to the mentioned dramas and elements of the Victorian society which are in these works criticised and considered hypocritical.

Key Words: *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, Oscar Wilde, Victorian hypocrisy, hypocrisy

Abstrakt

Tato práce je zaměřena na díla *Jak je důležité míti Filipa* a *Vějíř lady Windermereové* od Oscara Wildea, a na kritiku viktoriánského pokrytectví. Úvodní část práce je věnována viktoriánské společnosti: především její problematice, specifikům a hodnotám. Obě hry jsou v této části zasazeny do společensko-kulturního kontextu. V navazující hlavní části práce je pozornost soustředěna na zmiňovaná dramata a prvky viktoriánské společnosti, které jsou v těchto dílech kritizovány a považovány za pokrytecké.

Klíčová slova: *Jak je důležité míti Filipa*, *Vějíř lady Windermereové*, Oscar Wilde, viktoriánské pokrytectví, přetvářka

Table of Contents

Part I	The Victorians	2
Chapter 1	Victorian Society	2
Chapter 2	Specificities of the Victorian Society	4
Chapter 2.1	Victorian Values and Virtues	4
Chapter 2.2	Victorian Vices	7
Chapter 2.3	Victorian Marriage	9
Chapter 3	Oscar Wilde's Dramas in Socio-Cultural Context	14
Part II	Criticism of Hypocrisy in Oscar Wilde's Dramas	17
Chapter 4	Hypocrisy in <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i>	18
Chapter 4.1	John Worthing, Algernon Moncrieff and a Double Life.....	18
Chapter 4.2	Lady Bracknell and Snobbism	22
Chapter 5	Hypocrisy in <i>Lady Windermere's Fan</i>	26
Chapter 5.1	Lady Windermere, Mrs. Erlynne and Goodness.....	26
Chapter 5.2	The Duchess of Berwick and Snobbism	30
Conclusion		33
Resumé		36
Bibliography		42

Introduction

Victorian era was one of the most notable periods of English history for a number of great discoveries; starting from taking of the first photograph, over to presenting the Darwin's 'Theory of Evolution', up to launching the wireless. This era signified economic advancement and prime for the British Empire. Certainly, Victorian society had many reasons to be proud. Yet, the Victorians were also greatly censured for being hypocrites. This paper, looking further at the issue of lip service, should unveil their motives.

The purpose of this paper is criticism of Victorian hypocrisy. The focus of the study are two dramatical works by Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *Lady Windermere's Fan*, in both of which Wilde mocks at hypocrisy of the upper class. Written in the 1890s and classified as social dramas and *comedies of manners*, the plays are concerned with a theme of marriage. Courtship of two single gentlemen who fall in love is a subject in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, whereas morality of a married life is the questioned matter in *Lady Windermere's Fan*. The aim of the paper is to examine both plays, to find and analyze elements of the Victorian society which are criticized and considered hypocritical, and to compare and contrast the elements in both these dramas.

The paper is divided into two parts. The first part establishes a theoretical background to the topic. To fulfill the aim of the paper, the first chapter explores specificities, values, and social attitudes of the Victorian society in the late Victorian period from 1870 to 1901. The chapter defines general division of classes, and it further concentrates on the upper class which is the main object of the study. In the second chapter, three subdivisions deal with the Victorian values and virtues, vices, and the marriage institution. The third chapter describes the dramas in more details within the socio-cultural context. The second part provides examples of the upper-class hypocritical behaviour found in both scenarios. The first chapter of the part is devoted to *The Importance of Being Ernest* where the introduction defines the term of *hypocrisy*. Further divisions illustrate the elements of hypocrisy. The following chapter deals with an analysis of *Lady Windermere's Fan* and the elements found in this play, some of which are also compared with the elements found in the first play. The concluding chapter summarises the outcomes documented in the practical part.

Part I The Victorians

Chapter 1 Victorian Society

To talk about the Victorians, it is necessary to return in time to the nineteenth-century England. Victorian era, named after Queen Victoria, stretched from 1837 to 1901 and was divided into three periods, early-, mid-, and late Victorian, but for purposes of this paper the concentration is given to the late Victorian period from 1870 to 1901. To introduce the *Victorian society*, its class structure, and to explain the term of *Victorian Society* and its function, is the aim of this chapter.

In the late nineteenth century the Victorian society was formed by several classes based on birth and wealth of their members, distinguished by their work and income. Major classification of classes divided them into the lower (or working), middle and upper classes. The lower (working) class was represented by the skilled and semi-skilled labour workers who had only a few possessions. The middle class of factory owners and traders was divided into the lower middle and upper middle class by income, represented by working as businessmen and professionals. The upper class (aristocracy) comprised of the minor aristocracy (landed gentry (landowners and country house owners)), the major aristocracy (earls, lords, etc.), and royalty (monarchy). It was the only class freed from work receiving income from the inherited land and investments and consequently, the richest class of the country. The only duties for the members were, as Leonore Davidoff says: “[T]o be seen at the right places and given social recognition by visiting and being visited, plus mild philanthropy preferably in the local area.” (100) Born to a certain class, it meant to be doomed almost certainly to the same rank for the rest of one’s life. Chalmers and Chayne states that:

Different classes kept very much to themselves and did not know much about how others lived. It was very difficult to move up in class because the landowners considered ‘family breeding’ to be very important and looked down on people who had made money from ‘trade’, although trade made most of the Britain’s wealth. (5)

Although, the Victorian society was composed of several classes, *Victorian Society*, through which the social power was exercised, was formed only by the upper class.

The Oxford English Dictionary describes the “Society” as:

[T]he aggregate of leisured, cultured or fashionable persons regarded as forming a distinct class or body; especially those persons collectively who are recognised as taking part in fashionable life, social functions, entertainments, etc. (Perkin, 79)

The leisure and culture reflected visiting the respectable people, attending the social events, such as parties or balls. The fashion was displayed through clothes, large and expensive houses, and a city address. The upper class was responsible for customs and social views to which the Victorians turned to. As Joan Perkin, an author of a comprehensive book on Victorian marriage *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England*, explains that the titled Society of London set rules for social conduct and manners, the fashion in dress, architecture, painting, music, poetry, theatre, for both town and country society. (73) The rules applied in public and private places (at home). General points on these rules, followed by all respectability-aware Victorians, are described by Kristi Banker who summarises that:

[E]tiquette revolved largely around a sense of consideration for others (to behave with virtue was to respect the modesty of others; to dress well was to be pleasing to passersby). [...] These distinguished men and women would never lord their own positions over others and dealt generously with people of all ranks. [...] Anyone caught breaking form could be snubbed and even shunned, banished forever from society, losing the connecting link to wealth. (Society’s Survival Guide: Etiquette)

If some serious scandal spread in the high class, there was a sure prohibition for the particular person to enter the Society, and they were stigmatized for ever.

In private, most upper-class women filled their afternoons with calls; that is paying visits to or inviting various acquaintances. For the high class, these social calls functioned as a protection against the “intruders from trade”, the ‘*nouveaux riches*’, as the middle-class trade families were termed, and by whom the aristocracy felt threatened. According to John Tosh, an author interested in the Victorian society, these social visits, supporting the class seclusion and privacy, had to do with status anxieties of the high-class Victorians. Therefore, when ladies exchanged visits and left their cards, they signified which “channels should be open and which ones must be blocked.” (23) For instance, the following is a piece of advice (dated in the 1890s) given to Elinor Glyn, a novelist and a lady married into the aristocracy, by Countess of Warwick who wrote that: “Anyone engaged in the arts, the stage, trade of commerce, no matter how well connected, could not be asked to the house at all (Glyn, 1955).” (Perkin, 98) Not

only were the traders looked down upon, but also the artists and playwrights, which suggests the snobbishness of the elite.

The main time of the year for the Society was London Season, a period from May to July, when the aristocracy left the country and came to London for entertainment and socialising events. Beatrice Webb describes the London Season as “offering opportunities for adventure and assumption of power.” (Perkin, 98) The basic point of the gatherings at the balls and parties was to introduce young daughters and sons available for marriage and establish new connections.

In this chapter the terms of *Victorian society* and the class structure was presented. Also, the term of *Society*, its function, and link with the upper class was outlined. The following chapter concentrates on specificities of the Victorian society: Victorian values and virtues, vices, and the institution of marriage.

Chapter 2 Specificities of the Victorian Society

While the previous chapter dealt with a general description of the Victorian society, especially the aristocracy, this chapter looks more closely at three areas of the Victorian community. Firstly, on the Victorian values and virtues forming the base for morality. Secondly, on Victorian vices which were the source for amorality and hypocrisy. Thirdly, on marriage which was, as well as the society, the target for criticism.

Chapter 2.1 Victorian Values and Virtues

Victorian values and standards were based on historically established religion, the patriarchal system, economic and social advances of the time, and the gender differences. The core subjects of Victorianism were morals and a family life. Values stressed by Lytton Strachey were “morality and domesticity”. (Gardiner, 4-5) Morality, a set of positive as well as negative public and individual values, was the crucial point of everyday discussion. Morality in the positive way was a state in one to admire. State that opened doors and kept one in the society if one remained moral.

While the upper class formed social standards, the Church established rules for public and private morality. According to John Gardiner, moral behaviour as it was accepted by the Victorians, was based on a Methodist movement, symbolised by John Wesley, and a revival of Evangelism whose followers felt devoted to God. (6) Perkin says that this religion emphasized “sincerity, earnestness and personal responsibility”. (90) The Church set strict rules upon the people of all classes to obey them. Still, it was mainly the monarchy and the middle class who adhered to these Christian norms. Both Queen Victoria and Prince Albert were highly-principled and helped in setting the moral example to the English people. Blanka Klímová claims about Queen Victoria that:

Her essentially middle-class views and life-style, combined with the rise of the middle class themselves, led to an affirmation of values – the paternalistic integrity and discipline of the family, the sobriety and Puritanism of public life – which in later years came to be known as “Victorian values”. (43-44)

Tim Wood adds that: “These values included hard work, thrift, and respect for authority inside and outside the home.” (9) Yet, such values and industrious labour were neither attractive, nor impressive for the aristocracy. As Perkin points out, it was the upper class, who feared Methodism at first and looked down on later on, the class which passed the moral leadership to the middle class during the century. (133) The reason was that the aristocracy saw its dominance in social sphere and was keen on maintaining it which Arthur Ponsonby, M.P. admits:

In some ways social supremacy is a stronger force than the positive and ostensible powers of legislation and administration. The social standard that is set of morals, habits, and fashions forms in itself an ideal which a very vast number of people are constantly endeavouring to reach, and whatever may be the laws to which they have to conform, the influence of the social ideal is the main factor in governing their conduct and forming their ambitions (Perkin, 81)

In other words, Ponsonby says that the standard set by the Victorian elite was more powerful than legal and clerical powers and seen by many people of the lower class as the ideal which they looked up to. Overall, it implies that earnestness (or else respectability) had, however, a different meaning for the aristocracy than for other classes. F.M.L. Thompson maintains that “each Victorian class created its own version of respectability”. (G.S.Frost, 65) While the middle class understood and followed respectability through the religious views, the upper class created its own honourableness based on wealth, entertainment, fashion, and etiquette.

Religion appealed to many people in providing charity at home and to be missionaries abroad. Asa Briggs proclaims that “high-mindedness” should be stressed

as the first important feature of Victorianism and that “charity and service to one’s fellow men were the standards of public activity.” (285) For the upper class, the attendance of the Anglican Church was “regularly a matter of convention, if not belief”, Davidoff points out. (100) It suggests that the middle- and upper-class ladies were engaged in giving charity to less fortunate neighbours at Christmas time, but the richer were often beneficial rather due to conventional standards than from mercy.

Moral virtues of the Victorians were formed not only by religious views, but also by gender differences of the men being the superiors and the women being the inferiors. Ginger S. Frost states that women were “inferiors” to men, and her book *Promises broken: Courtship, Class and Gender in Victorian England* lists the qualities of individuals, of both men and women, with reputation of a respectable person. Firstly, a moral male character expressed several capabilities. An honourable man was supposed to keep his word, uphold his promise (or else to demonstrate firmness), be brave and face the consequences of his actions without flinching, be generous (e.g. to put his wife’s needs first; not those of his parents), face up to his debts, control his temper, be chaste, be sexually responsible, courageous, protecting, chivalrous, romantic, honest, sincere, truthful, upright, and independent of his family. As a husband he was expected to provide, be dutiful, an attentive father and devotee of hearth and family. (10, 42-45, 51, 56, 142, 158) Secondly, the most appreciated female qualities were quite different from the male ones and reflected more or less delicacy of the female gender. According to Frost, a virtuous woman meant one thing, that she was sexually pure, therefore, her qualities would comprise of chastity, innocence, purity, modesty, timidity, decency, and passivity. Apart from these, there were others such as accomplishments, delicacy, strong emotions, forgivingness and willingness to accept her errant man, truthfulness, good manners and thoughts, sensibility, consideration, and overall moral superiority over men. (44-47, 51, 61, 142) Gardiner’s opinion is that women “were supposed to be meek, dutiful, and supportive.” (15)

Domesticity was the focus of moral stability and the core of Christian religion. Briggs stresses “domesticity” as the second feature typical for the Victorians based on the fact that: “Victorian upper and middle class education took place largely in the family and any public figure whose behaviour ‘violated the domestic tie’ courted disaster” (285) That family life was in the centre of the Victorian’s moral world, it was a view stressed by both Frost and Tosh. Tosh claims that the everyday private prayer, meditation, diary-keeping, and a Bible study were associated with religious practices of

home. While Frost notes that domesticity was an ideal for the middle class, Tosh argues that it was not so for the aristocracy for whom “large-scale hospitality was an extension of political and dynastic activity by other means.” (Frost, 63; Tosh, 27) He apparently means socialising with friends, relatives, and the respectables. Still, for all classes the family life was important due to the marriage ties which for its complexity are discussed further in a separate chapter.

This chapter mentioned the main Victorian values, i.e. respectability and domesticity, and Victorian virtues which formed the basis for respectability. Differences in accepting honourability were noticed between the middle and upper classes. The middle-class earnest people were deeply religious and devoted to the family life, while their upper-class counterparts reduced respectability to fashion, wealth, entertainment, and etiquette. Concerning moral virtues, there seem to be no differences in perceiving them. Further, the Victorians’ negative moral side is defined in the next chapter.

Chapter 2.2 Victorian Vices

If the positive values were stressed by the Victorians themselves, the negative aspects were commented by their successors. Many scholars accuse the Victorians of hypocrisy. In Gardiner’s view, the reason for cant may be that “the whole age [Victorian] was struggling to come to terms with modernity”, and that it might also be seen as an example of “psychological over-compensation amongst people deeply uncertain of their surroundings.” (16) More understandable explanation on lip service seems to be Perkin’s opinion that: “The English aristocracy was the focal point of envy, admiration, and gossip, representing for many people the lifestyle they most wished to imitate.” (312) For that reason, the class which should be claimed to set the hypocritical atmosphere among the Victorians is the upper class which, as Perkin lists, “indulged in hard drinking, gambling, blood sports, and the keeping of mistresses.” (251) It can be assumed that the aristocracy was the source for cant, whereas the middle class tended to come closer to the lifestyle of the elite, although, the style did not follow the rules established by religion.

Although, hypocritical behaviour is said to be associated with one particular class, it cannot be said about *vice*, immoral conduct which is for the act of hypocrisy the basic element. Frost lists among the negative male characteristics dishonesty,

cowardice, ungenerosity (e.g. waywardness), meanness, brutality (comprising bullying, violence, drunkenness, and sexual overtures), heartlessness, weakness, foolishness, and emotionalism. (1, 40-55, 142) Practically, the opposites of the earlier mentioned positive qualities can be also added to the list of vices, such as selfishness, insincerity and secrecy, falseness, flirting, infidelity. In case of females, Frost assigns a disreputable woman to be unchaste, indecent, shameless, perverse, clever and cunning, designing, unscrupulous, and the scolds. Women had to live fairly quietly [...], though hysteria and emotional display were tolerated as well as vacillating and indecisiveness. (1, 44-55, 142) Similarly, the opposites of the mentioned moral virtues could be profligacy, immodesty, unwillingness to forgive and to support, untruthfulness, mores, insensibility, inconsideration, aggressivity, boldness, or disobedience. Theoretically, a hypocrite could have been anyone who possessed some of these vices and at the same time s/he pretended to be respectable.

Scientific explanation of some of the vices can be traced in George Yule's book *The Study of Language*. George Yule, a linguist specialist, describes one of the many characteristics of a human language, *prevarication*, as the ability of a human to tell lies and nonsense with the purpose of misleading the receiver of the information. (22) Taken into account such a scientific statement, it can be said that vices such as lies, deception or talking nonsense are the basis for other vices, such as dishonesty, cowardice, weakness, selfishness, insincerity, secrecy, infidelity, cunning, and so on. Consequently, this fact may lead to a conclusion that hypocrisy is based on natural human behaviour.

This chapter explained the reasons for cant and the Victorians' vices, as the base for the act of hypocrisy. It is assumed that the aristocracy was the source of cant. It is also suggested that hypocrisy is formed through natural quality of a human language, *prevarication*. The following chapter focuses in more detail on Victorian domesticity, life in marriage, and hypocrisy in marriage.

Chapter 2.3 Victorian Marriage

Domesticity, as it was discussed earlier, was the basic Victorian value, and marriage was regarded as the institution through which this value can be realized. Marriage held the reputation of the only proper social state for both men and women no matter the class. Two viewpoints on the account of matrimony were held by the Victorians. Marriage was accepted either as a *contract*, or a *sacrament*. Perkin explains that a *contract* between a man and a woman was based on *profane love* (physical love), a free choice of a partner, voluntary consent, mutual duties and commitments, discipline, and restraint of oneself. Both individuals did not merge into one sole person. If one or both partners broke the terms of the contract, the bond was no longer valid. A *sacrament* was a contract between a man, a woman and God which was established on the grounds of the religious ties and sacred love, i.e. the kind of love one felt for God. The union required the woman's identity to be absorbed into the man's one, and the marriage was inseparable. (237)

Marriage was a highly preferred state by women, although by marrying a woman ceased to exist. According to Barbara Leigh Smith's *Brief Summary, in Plain Language, of the Most Important Laws of England concerning Women*, published in 1854 and based on the *Common Law of England*, a married woman did not legally exist, for she lived by the act of marriage under husband's protection called *coverture*. She could not bring a legal action against his married partner unless his name was mentioned with hers. (Perkin, 13-15) From the husband's point of view, Perkin further claims: "A man was answerable for his wife's actions: since she was presumed to act under the command and control of her husband" (97, 19)

The Victorian notion of matrimony saw the ideal in a *companionate marriage*. Tosh explains that: "Marriage was assumed to be voluntary, not arranged or imposed, and to be for love, whatever secondary motives might be involved." (27) "Love appropriate for marriage was a deep companionship or affinity, not sexual attraction or fancy. Affinity grew from similar outlooks, beliefs, and ways of life", Frost adds. (81) It can be suggested that it was common within the middle class to put greater emphasis on love as the religious basis for marital happiness, while the upper class, anxious about the status and property, did not pay much attention to affections.

There were several reasons for matrimony. From the public perspective of religion and government, the reasons for marriage were similar. The Christian view, set out in *The Book of Common Prayer*, stipulated matrimony for purposes intended by God: the procreation of children and their nurture in and love of God, for mutual joy of partners, their help, and comfort both in prosperity and adversity. A wife promised to obey her husband, while a husband declared to worship and endowed his wife with all his worldly goods. The contract was terminated by death of either partner, love and faithfulness were expected; sex outside marriage was considered a moral offence. (Pastoral Offices, 423) Still, Perkin states that the upper-class women had often low expectations of love or sexual fidelity in marriage (55) which implies that they preferred those marriages where wealth was more important than love.

From the individual perspective, the reasons for marriage depended on individuals as well as the class they belonged to. Firstly, the reason for marriage was affection and the family life. Perkin believes that:

They [women] wanted affection and companionship [...] they wanted a home of their own, children, a husband with a legal obligation to maintain his family, an acknowledged status in the community as a wife and mother. (29)

Secondly, the reason for marriage was expansion of property and, thus, enhancing the social status of a girl and her family. Strengthening the social status was primarily important for the upper class. Perkin maintains that:

Once the oldest son was married, thus ensuring the continuity of the estate, the marriage of the daughters formed the main connecting links [because their] alliance with other influential families could bring political and social influence as well as opportunities for patronage and material bargains (5-6)

That was the reason why so much importance was given to organizing of the parties and balls. Thirdly, the reason for marriage was also freedom. It was greatly appreciated by women, for men were freed from their parents' ties early before their marriage. Perkin explains that by marrying women reached independence from their parents, could maintain their own domestic life, and make separate friends. (3) Most freedom was again granted to the upper-class ladies, since the financial provisions obtained through marriage secured a fairly trouble-free life for them. Perkin informs that the private system of law (so-called *Equity*) safeguarded a legal protection and access to their own income and property, designed in the marriage settlement at the time of their marriage. Therefore, they could travel and visit relatives and friends as they liked, at the times of

conflict with their husbands they could leave them or even pay for divorce. (76) As mothers, they were spared of rearing their children, since it was the servants' duty. Therefore, as Perkin states:

Upper-class Englishwomen in the nineteenth century rarely expressed any guilt or sense of personal deprivation about leaving their children in the care of nurses, nannies and governesses; nor were they criticised for finding mother-substitutes and sharing childcare. (97)

Evidently, the aristocratic women enjoyed more independence in marriage than their middle-class counterparts. For all these reasons the elite women must have been secretly censured by the rest of the Victorian women.

The common practice in the Victorian society was that marriages were arranged. Prior a marriage act the choice of a partner was on shoulders of the parents and their control was split by gender. Frost and Perkin agree that mothers were in charge of evaluating the prospective suitors, encouraging the proper ones, and discouraging the unsuitable ones, as well as planning the social occasions and weddings. (Frost, 78; Perkin, 64) Fathers had different responsibilities. Frost explains that they were responsible for their girl's fortune, giving their approval or disapproval for engagement, and stepping in when troubles occurred. Opinions of relatives (cousins, aunts, uncles, guardians, and in-laws) were also expected. (77-78)

If a marriage was discussed, class, wealth, and social status were taken into considerations, as well as a moral profile. Women usually married within their class. Cross-class marriages were not common, because women wanted to keep the standard they were used to, or even better one, for obvious reasons of comfort and social freedom. Perkin is sure that such cross-class rigidness was exclusive to the aristocracy, though, she also admits that with the need of wealth the aristocracy also formed alliances with "wealthy new families", suggesting that their daughters married into the upper middle class. (62-63) Wealth and social status of suitors were enormously important for aristocratic parents, as mentioned above. "Portions of £10,000 to £30,000" were normal in the high circles. (Perkin, 67)

Moral profile and age were also the issues for a discussion, if matrimony was considered. Respectability, moral qualities or age of the future partners may have been crucial for the middle-class families, but they were not so forceful to persuade the upper-class parents to consider the applicant, as in case of wealth and status. Yet, Frost stresses that: "Both parties, but especially women, had to pass character tests to be considered marriageable." They had to be chaste; whereas a man, to pass the test, had to

be a “good provider”. (82) Once a man suited the parents’ requirements, the engagement could be announced in the local newspapers and the marriage act could take place soon after that.

Hypocrisy in Marriage

Strong sense of morality and domesticity was weakened by immoral behaviour of marriage partners. One source for hypocrisy in marriage can be found in the social norm of dissimulation and deceit imposed on Victorian women. From the very young age, women were encouraged to hide their feelings, bodily functions (for instance, pregnancy), and to cover their bodies. Perkin explains that women were educated in dissimulation from the youth when their parents’ repressive discipline aimed at keeping girls from seduction. The parental control over their behaviour and correspondence led to development of private codes of communication among the girls. They “had to get their own way by stealth” or otherwise, if married, by “nagging”, as Perkin observes. (261-264) Deceit, which is very closely connected with hiding, was practised by a married woman within her home, whether she needed to be informed about her husband’s financial situation or avoid unwanted sex, or in social sphere, whether she wanted to pay a compliment to another lady or find the right partner for her daughter. As Perkin adds, a few men were also deceitful, however, mainly women were recommended by advice manuals to exercise duplicity. (264) If deceitfulness was taught and advised in female education, it can be assumed that deceit, which gave rise to hypocrisy, did not have effect only on women, but also on men and consequently, affected the whole Victorian society.

Another source for cant appeared during marriage. Although, the English royal couple set a good example of respectability and fidelity in marriage, still, the morals of many upper-class Victorians were loose. Perkin presents Queen Victoria’s complaint on conduct of the upper class:

The higher classes - especially the aristocracy [...] are so frivolous, pleasure-seeking, heartless, selfish, immoral and gambling that it makes one think [...] of the days before the French Revolution. The young men are so ignorant, luxurious and self-indulgent - and the young women so fast, frivolous and imprudent that the danger is really very great (92)

Unfortunately, it was the Queen’s oldest son, Prince of Wales, whose moral conduct was a source for many scandals. As Perkin maintains, Prince’s infidelity in marriage casted shade on morality of the royal family, and as a consequence, the *code of conduct*,

established in the period from 1870 to 1910, was to govern the extra-marital relationships for both married men and women. The main purpose was to “maintain the dignity of family life, and not to embroil one’s spouse in scandals” (31, 90-93) The fact that such a scheme was necessary is explained by a great number of husbands who spared little time or thought for his family for the reason mentioned by Perkin that:

[W]hen the nursery was well-stocked, a husband was likely to turn a blind eye to his wife’s amours, so that he could look at the other men’s wives. [...] Many upper-class men were interested in women of their own class with whom they could have friendship and conversation as well as sex (Perkin, 93)

Perkin adds that in case of women, the extra-marital relationships were also evident; for example many upper-class ladies were the royal mistresses, though the reason for infidelity was due to lack of emotions they received from their husbands. (31, 90-93)

Marriage à la mode, the fashionable, tolerant, free and easy form of almost open marriage which allowed the partners to have their own friends and go their own way, was at the heart of lifestyle. (Perkin, 312)

Perhaps, this open form of morality in marriage set an example of cant to the rest of the Victorian society.

Victorian marriage, as a state through which the second Victorian value of domesticity was fulfilled, was discussed in this chapter. Together with its notion, reasons for marriage and courtship, the sources of hypocrisy in matrimony were also unveiled.

The second chapter closely looked at Victorian values of respectability and domesticity which revealed differences in perception among the middle and upper classes. Then, vices and hypocrisy above all were discussed. It seems that the initiator of the cant was the upper class. Finally, the marriage institution was described and motifs for cant were marked stressing the intentional education of women in dissimulation and loose morals of married partners. The last chapter of this part aims at an introduction of the two earlier mentioned dramas by Oscar Wilde within the socio-cultural context.

Chapter 3 Oscar Wilde's Dramas in Socio-Cultural Context

Dramas by Oscar Wilde are the main point of the paper and this chapter pays attention to evaluation and the genre of these plays. Also, the theatre audience and their expectations as well as comparison of drama by Wilde and G.B.Shaw are pointed. Finally, some criticisms and the reasons for selecting the works are disclosed.

The Importance of Being Earnest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People (further mentioned as "*The Importance of Being Earnest*") was written by Oscar Wilde in 1894, and staged in 1895. The drama is regarded by many critics and scholars as the wittiest play in the English language and Wilde's masterpiece. In the play, which is set in the 1890s in England, Wilde criticises low manners of the Victorian high class, in Society and marriage. *Lady Windermere's Fan: A Play About a Good Woman* (further mentioned as "*Lady Windermere's Fan*") was both written and staged in 1892; the setting time and place resemble those in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. The major issue Wilde focused on is criticism of the Victorian upper class's morality in marriage. Colin Swatridge claims that the introduction of this play was "the most significant event in the English theatre since Sheridan's *The Critic* was produced in 1779." (109) *Lady Windermere's Fan* was the "first successful social drama". (110)

In the basic sense, these social plays belong in the category of modern English drama to the genre of comedy in which humour is used to amuse the listener. They are classified by drama scholars partly as a *comedy of manners*, *satire*, and *farce* sub-genres. *Comedy of manners* makes fun of the mores and affectations of a social class. Scandal is a part of the plot, and wit is widely used. *Satire*, using also irony and sarcasm apart from wit, ridicules vices, follies, and abuses of individuals aiming at their improvement. *Farce* entertains by means of unlikely situations, disguise and mistaken identity, verbal humour including word play (puns), and absurd proclamations. In the narrow sense, the comedies are written in a form of *Victorian melodrama*, or "*sentimental comedy*". *Victorian melodrama* was full of coincidences and recognition scenes, in which true identities were revealed and the long-lost family members were reunited. In these plays, the revelation of identity was often predicated on a long-kept secret that involved a woman who had committed a transgression in the past. A new character, introduced for the first time to the melodrama genre by Wilde, was a "*dandy*" - "a witty, overdressed, self-styled philosopher who speaks in epigrams and paradoxes,

ridicules the cant, and hypocrisy of society's moral arbiters" (SparkNotes Editors) The dandiacal characters in the plays were Algernon Moncrieff (*The Importance of Being Earnest*) and Lord Darlington (*Lady Windermere's Fan*).

Comedies of manners were obviously intended for being staged in theatres. The theatre audience of the late Victorian time comprised all classes, but the aristocracy. As George Rowel describes:

Among those who rejected the theatre were the aristocracy, who transferred their patronage of the performing arts to opera and ballet; the educated and religious, who shunned the theatre and took to reading; and the government, which recognised merit in writers, painters and musicians, but ignored it in playwrights and players. (145)

The fact that both dramas were intended mostly for the middle-class public is cued by the drama titles. Subtitles "*A Trivial Comedy for Serious People*" and "*A Play About a Good Woman*" suggest that the plays were intended for the morally-conscious spectators. This suggestion is supported by Gavin Witt's view that audience "expected surprising complications and crises to build to a climactic resolution that reaffirmed social and moral values [...]". (Wilde & Victorian Theater) Consequently, such dramas were suitable for the Victorian middle-class people, for whom "being serious" was the synonymy for "being earnest", and "goodness" had a high importance.

The comedy of manners was attempted by another author who had so much in common with Wilde – George Bernard Shaw (1856 – 1950). He was born in Ireland and became one of the leading Anglo-Irish dramatists preoccupied with social constraints of his time. In one case, his witty and paradoxical performances and an attempt to shock are things which put him on the same level with Wilde. For example, when he writes about *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1898), he attempts the moral side of a controversial profession of prostitution, a theme not publicly welcomed by the puritan Victorians. That is why this drama, as Sanders mentions, was censored and did not appear on stage until 1920 and on which grounds Shaw eventually turned to more 'pleasant' plays. (479) In this way, Wilde was not forced to change his approach in selecting his themes, although he did not spare his audience his open criticism. Possibly, it was due to his arrest and impossibility to carry on with writing. In another case, Sanders points out that Shaw drew his interest from traditions of the nation and, at the same time, responded against them, in which case he demonstrated rejection of the popular style of acting and production, but also diverted himself from a new style of Wilde's comedies. (478)

The new style of Wilde's comedies received contradictory criticisms in terms of how well the real social life is reflected in these social dramas. Swatridge comments on Wilde's work that: "The earliest plays were melodramatic treatments of 'real moral problems'. *The Importance...* is 'utterly removed' from concern with such problems." (111). Similarly, Rowell, proclaims that a drama established between 1892 and 1895 by Wilde and Pinero "did not amount to a drama which illustrates faithfully modern social life" and, therefore, it may not be taken as reflection of social life of those days. (150) In contrast, in Witt's view, both plays "lampoon conventional moral dilemmas" (Wilde & Victorian Theater) Nevertheless, the reasons why the dramas were selected for the analysis are well presented in a summary by Witt who writes about the nineteenth-century plays these facts:

These plays used a set of stock characters and situations to present conventional themes emphasizing bourgeois morality. Sentimental heroines, ingenuous young bachelors, scheming servants, harsh parents, foolish aristocrats, and women with a past were the familiar characters. These archetypal figures would struggle in endless variations against such common obstacles as jealous misunderstandings, mistaken identities, compromising letters, hopeless love, and betrayal of affections. (Wilde & Victorian Theater)

Both dramas introduce most of the mentioned characters: free-spoken bachelors, foolish aristocrats, and infamous or sentimental women; thus the works can be regarded as the suitable examples which will be analysed in detail in the next analytical part.

This chapter placed the social dramas within the socio-cultural context by describing the genre to which these plays belong to and subjective comments by their critics, classifying the pieces among one of the most recognized works in the English drama. Views of the theatre audience and comparison of Wilde's approach in his writing career with that of G.B.Shaw were also discussed. Finally, criticisms on true depiction of Victorian social life and reasons for selecting the dramas were established.

Part II Criticism of Hypocrisy in Oscar Wilde's Dramas

This part concentrates on the analysis of both Wilde's dramas and answers the question which elements of the Victorian society were criticized and considered hypocritical. Each drama is given a focus in a separate chapter, where examples of hypocritical behaviour of the aristocracy are presented. To start with the analysis, the meaning of *hypocrisy* must be defined and explained.

Based on a dictionary description the *act of hypocrisy* is "a pretense of having a virtuous character, moral or religious beliefs or principles, or some desirable or publicly approved attitude, that one does not really possess." A *hypocrite* is a person:

[W]hose actions belie stated beliefs, i.e. one pretends to be better than one really is or to have feelings or beliefs which one does not actually have, or whose private life, opinions, or statements belie his or her public statements." (Dictionary.com)

The crucial thing to know is that the act of hypocrisy is not related to things and values but human beings. In fact, hypocrisy originates in human behaviour. Therefore, the analysis is aimed at behaviour of the characters.

That cant is at least as old as the Bible, can be seen through many found examples, for this religious book contains several citations by Matthew relating to calculating and disguise. "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogue and in the streets, that they may be praised by others." (Matthew 6:2) Matthew appeals to those who seem interested in charity, but do take the part in beneficial actions only to be seen in public. Examples of such people will be depicted later.

The basic sign of hypocrisy can be found in *moralism*. The common knowledge usually finds a negative connotation and sees a *moralist* as someone who tends to say to the others what is right and what is wrong in terms of morality. The dictionary meaning distinguishes a positive meaning, i.e. a person who practices morality, and the negative meaning, i.e. someone who is concerned with morals of the others and imposes censorship on their ethical conduct. (Dictionary. com) The ongoing discussion will disclose what faces of hypocrisy were found in the Victorian upper-class society.

Chapter 4 Hypocrisy in *The Importance of Being Earnest*

As it was mentioned earlier, *The Importance of Being Earnest* is aimed at criticism of morality of the Victorian upper-class society and the institution of marriage. In fact, the title itself satirizes the Victorian morality. It is formed by a pun based on a pair of homophones¹ where “earnest” is a synonymy for “serious”, i.e. being honest and truthful, while the real *importance* for the main characters is bearing the stylish name of Ernest. In this part, several characters are analysed and their hypocrisy through criticised elements of a double life and snobbism is shown.

Chapter 4.1 John Worthing, Algernon Moncrieff and a Double Life

John Worthing, alias Ernest Worthing or Uncle Jack (further referred to as *Jack*), is a single English gentleman residing in the country where he lives a respectable life. There, he is a guardian to Cecily Cardew, an eighteen-year-old young lady who calls him familiarly “Uncle Jack”. While Cecily sees Uncle Jack as a serious and boring person, Miss Prism, her governess, and Rev. Canon Chasuble are certain that Jack is an earnest and dignified member of their society. Algernon Moncrieff, Jack’s friend, who finds Jack flirting with a young lady Gwendolen, has an opposite view. Since it was not publicly tolerated for a man to flirt with a lady unless he intended to marry her, Jack’s behaviour seems to be in conflict with good manners.

Algernon Moncrieff, alias Ernest, is an English gentleman and also a bachelor residing in London. He is a cousin of Lady Bracknell and a close relative to Gwendolen, Lady Bracknell’s daughter. He has many debts which in the upper class did not damage one’s positive reputation. His vanity does not seem to accept the fact and he enjoys a life full of evening parties. Gwendolen and Jack are not in favour of Algernon’s moral code. While Gwendolen is sure that Algernon is generally immoral, Jack is more precise and titles him dishonest and untruthful. Both Jack and Algernon are considered by the public as respectable persons, though their respect is held on different grounds. Jack is claimed to be earnest by his acquaintances in the country, while Algernon is found respectable purely on the basis of his relation with the upper-class Lady Bracknell. Still, friends of both of these men have the opposite view and describe them as immoral.

¹ Homophones are words written with different spelling (Ernest – earnest) but when they are pronounced they sound alike ([e:nɪst]) and therefore, in speech the context is necessary to distinguish their meaning.

Though, Jack behaves contrary to what many people around think of him. When asked by Algernon who found Jack's cigarette case with inscriptions from a Cecily if he knew someone called Cecily, Jack unfolds the whole series of falsities. First of all, he answers that he does not know any Cecily, but because Algernon has seen Jack with the cigarette case, he questions Jack again. Jack only moralizes about whether it is gentlemanly to read a private cigarette case or not (even though it was found). Then, he invents a lie that Cecily is his aunt which is still not satisfying for Algernon because his aunt would not call him "Uncle Jack" if his name is Ernest. Finally, Jack discloses that his name is not only Ernest, but also Jack when he says: "Well, my name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country, and the cigarette case was given to me in the country." (Wilde, 1910, 32) It is a surprise to Algernon, for Jack presented himself always as Ernest. Therefore, Jack must reveal the truth to Algernon when he requires to know why he is Ernest in town and Jack in the country?

My dear Algy, I don't know whether you will be able to understand my real motives. You are hardly serious enough. When one is placed in the position of guardian, one has to adopt a very high moral tone on all subjects. It's one's duty to do so. And as a high moral tone can hardly be said to conduce very much to either one's health or one's happiness, in order to get up to town I have always pretended to have a younger brother of the name of Ernest, who lives in the Albany, and gets into the most dreadful scrapes. (Wilde, 1910, 35)

Jack admits that he has been leading a double life all the time. The reason behind his deceit was to escape boredom of duty enforced on him as a guardian in the country and to experience some pleasure in the city of London. Surprisingly, Jack seems to feel no shame about his lies. In fact, he accuses Algernon of being not serious enough to comprehend his actions. Nonetheless, Jack is not the only one who is false in this company. Algernon is untruthful too when he talks about his invalid friend Bunbury who is Algernon's version of Jack's Ernest:

You have invented a very useful younger brother called Ernest, in order that you may be able to come up to town as often as you like. I have invented an invaluable permanent invalid called Bunbury, in order that I may be able to go down into the country whenever I choose. Bunbury is perfectly invaluable. If it wasn't for Bunbury's extraordinary bad health, for instance, I wouldn't be able to dine with you at Willis's to-night, for I have been really engaged to Aunt Augusta for more than a week. (Wilde, 1910, 37)

Like Jack, Algernon is also insincere in his motives for helping the invalid and invents excuses about Mr. Bunbury to get out of familial responsibilities (for example dining with his Aunt Augusta). Like Jack, he is selfish. He practices deception to avoid unpleasant situations and to create more pleasant ones for himself.

Jack is convinced, as well as Algernon, to bring his double life to the end. Both, however, do not find their moral profile clear enough than to finish their secrecy again by the way of deception. Jack is aware that he cannot publicly reveal the whole truth, for there would be a sure scandal about him being so deceitful among the moral Victorians. He would run into a risk of being publicly discredited. Therefore, he stands to his plan and an amoral character and appears in his country house wearing a mourning suit announcing a death of his brother. According to Richard A. Cave:

Mourning [...] had become ranked amongst the highest of Victorian pieties, with its required dress codes and sanctioned behavioural conventions; and here Wilde was setting it up as an object for fulsome derision. It's the measure of Jack's total want of responsible decorum that he is prepared to abuse such piety in his efforts to protect his social image. (219)

Jack cannot be more heartless as to construct such a pious scene, to lie about the death of his relative, and deceive all the close participants. Algernon, on the contrary, uses a more standard way of releasing himself of the fictitious individual which is announcing his friend's death in a conversation with Lady Bracknell, without any theatrical action.

Although, all are being let believe that Jack's brother is dead, Cecily, unconscious of Jack's arrival, is talking with his "brother Ernest", impersonated by the deceitful Algernon who took the advantage of Jack's plan to come and see Cecily. Assuming that Algernon is Jack's unfortunate brother Ernest, Cecily forces him to explain his wicked nature. To please Cecily and deny hypocrisy, Algernon admits that his behaviour was reckless. Jack is pleased that he finally finished with the illusion of his nonexistent brother and a possible threat when Ernest (Algernon) suddenly appears in front of everyone and makes sincere apologies. Of course, Jack denies he has a brother and refuses to shake hands with Algernon as a sign of reconciliation. He acts as if his moral profile was pure. On the contrary, he is two-faced. In public, he appears far more moral and responsible while in private he indulges in similar sort of amorality he disapproves of in his brother. In real life he is a hypocrite pretending he is something he is not (a moral person), and at the same time that he is someone he is not (Ernest). Algernon is also morally wicked in the way that he uses tricks to cheat on the others and misuse their trustworthiness.

Finally, the coincidence caused that the truth is revealed to both young ladies. Questioned by Cecily, Jack admits that his name is John and his brother was a fantasy. Even at the time of testimonial Jack presents himself as a proud, selfish man. Cecily and Gwendolen are curious to know the reasons for pretence since they assumed they are in

love with a man called Ernest and thus, both Jack and Algernon must reveal grounds for their moral vices:

Cecily: Mr. Moncrieff, kindly answer me the following question. Why did you pretend to be my guardian's brother?

Algernon: In order that I might have an opportunity of meeting you.

[...]

Gwendolen: Mr. Worthing, what explanation can you offer to me for pretending to have a brother? Was it in order that you might have an opportunity of coming up to town to see me as often as possible?

Jack: Can you doubt it, Miss Fairfax? (Wilde, 1910, 198-199)

Algernon's explanation seems believable until one recalls that he did not know Cecily prior appearing in Jack's house and that his trip was a "Bunbury-one" as some other trip to the country before. As for Jack, it is not clear from the play whether he created his fictitious brother in order to see Gwendolen at all, or to see her more often. One can doubt Jack's declaration trustworthy because to Algernon's question what brings him to town Jack answers: "Oh, pleasure, pleasure! What else should bring one anywhere?" (Wilde, 1910, 19) When Gwendolen asks if he pretended to have a brother in order to see her as often as possible, Jack replies with a question if she could doubt it, and at that moment Jack is spared further explanation, for Gwendolen believes him and announces that she would "crush" the doubts she has. Hence, none of the men speak the whole truth. Although, both men confess that they were deceitful to be engaged with the woman they love, their real motives were originally different. For Jack, the motive was to escape boredom and duty of the country life, while Algernon used it as a gateway from social conventions.

To sum up, both Jack's and Algernon's characters bear signs of hypocrisy. They pretend to be honourable, while they falsely demonstrate philanthropy and interest in the poor and the invalid, in order to avoid restrictions of the Victorian moral society. They lead a double life. Jack pretends to have a young troublesome brother Ernest whom he is obliged to support whenever he tries to avoid boredom of the country. Algernon feigns an imaginary ill friend Bunbury to whom he is prepared to help whenever he needs to escape social meetings with his relatives. In comparison to Jack, the act of hypocrisy is of lower degree because Algernon "only" pretends to be something that he is not whereas Jack invents the second "I". Apart from that, Algernon is not secretive about being a "Bunburyist" and tells the truth about his deception, while Jack strictly disapproves of being one even though he admits inventing his brother Ernest earlier.

Chapter 4.2 Lady Bracknell and Snobbism

Lady Bracknell is a well-off upper-class woman who lives with her husband Lord Bracknell and their young daughter Gwendolen in London. She is the one who plays solo and controls everyone. The close “victim” of her attention is her husband. Firstly, on the occasion of following her run-off daughter, she reveals she is deceitful towards Lord Bracknell:

Lady Bracknell: [Turns to Jack.] Her unhappy father is, I am glad to say, under the impression that she [Gwendolen] is attending a more than usually lengthy lecture [...] I do not propose to undeceive him. Indeed I have never undeceived him on any question. I would consider it wrong. (Wilde, 1910, 205)

Secondly, Lord Bracknell is degraded by her in front of other guests at dinners. As one of the ‘*grandes dames*’ of high society, her social duty in family is to please her guests during parties which she undertakes with an utmost care and invites her smart nephew Algernon who is a guarantee of a pleasant conversation. However, when her nephew refuses to keep a company, she is appalled that no one of her visitors would dine at her table and her husband would have to dine upstairs. It implies that she is insensible and inconsiderate and does not respect her husband. In the first case, she dares deceiving her husband and openly declares she would not tell him the truth. In the second case, she would rather let him eat on his own than to stand his company.

Lady Bracknell asserts her control in the family also over her daughter. Gwendolen is old enough to be engaged and become a wife. When she informs her mother about being engaged to Jack Worthing, Lady Bracknell’s authority sets her daughter right:

Pardon me, you are not engaged to any one. When you do become engaged to some one, I, or your father, should his health permit him, will inform you of the fact. An engagement should come on a young girl as a surprise, pleasant or unpleasant, as the case may be. It is hardly a matter that she could be allowed to arrange for herself. (Wilde, 1910, 59)

Lady Bracknell’s severe comments are clear. Whether Gwendolen is engaged and to whom she would learn from parents. Her mother’s concept of marriage is based on rules led by the high class and, therefore, she cannot allow her daughter to choose as she wishes. No matter that Gwendolen is in love with Jack which she openly proves by her consent to their engagement, her mother is certain that a girl should not even meet her partner before marrying him let alone to decide herself. Authority of Lady Bracknell, as

an upper-class mother, concentrates on conventional values of her class, e.i. status (class), wealth (income), character (morals) and age, to interview each “applicant”, and reason out her decision. Although, Mr. Worthing is not on her list of the potential suitors, Lady Bracknell is willing to interview him. For Jack, the whole dialog is unpleasant. He is warned from the beginning that his engagement with Gwendolen depends on the answers he would produce to her mother. Then, he is exposed to questions on his income and whether he has a town house. All seems to go well, until the Lady learns that Jack was found in a handbag when he was a little child:

Mr. Worthing, I confess I feel somewhat bewildered by what you have just told me. To be born, or at any rate bred, in a hand-bag, whether it had handles or not, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life [...] As for the particular locality in which the hand-bag was found, a cloak-room at a railway station might serve to conceal a social indiscretion—has probably, indeed, been used for that purpose before now—but it could hardly be regarded as an assured basis for a recognised position in good society. (Wilde, 1910, 69)

For the upper class the recognized position in society was the most important criterion to maintain respectability. In this case, once the Lady is informed that Jack’s origin is unknown, she arrogantly refuses him as a potential husband for Gwendolen and he is promptly dismissed. Clearly, Jack’s intention is to marry Gwendolen for love and he does not see any obstacles in being her husband, particularly if Gwendolen loves him as well. Despite this, Lady Bracknell disagrees, for she values social status and wealth more than affection for a partner or a person’s character. Her foolishness and pride is more evident. As stated earlier, it is certainly for the reason that marriage for the well-off families meant accumulating property and strengthening their social standing.

Lady Bracknell shows her pretentious nature through her arrogance. She ignores anything and anyone which/who does not fit to her posh taste and she does not go far to scold. When noticing her nephew Algernon holding Cecily’s hand, she turns to Jack and requests to know who Cecily is. Lady Bracknell is appalled by their conduct and she makes it clear that such mores are improper. Those two are not even engaged and holding hands between two unmarried individuals was highly inappropriate and seen as a scandalous public flirtation. On the one hand, she moralises about proper manners, on the other hand, she deliberately stirs the troubles. Again, when she recalls Jack’s story of his hidden social origin, she bluntly pronounces her biting remarks about Cecily’s ancestry:

Mr. Worthing, is Miss Cardew at all connected with any of the larger railway stations in London? [...] Until yesterday I had no idea that there were any families or persons whose origin was a Terminus. [Jack looks perfectly furious, but restrains himself.] (Wilde, 1910, 210)

Her comment is aimed at mocking at Jack's unknown birth which demonstrates her arrogance and conceit. Yet, when she hears Jack's answer, she is more inquisitive for information about Cecily and, in a similar way to Jack's interview, Lady Bracknell is interested about her position in society; whether her family solicitors are seen in dinner parties or what dowry would she bring by marriage. When Jack mentions the sum, the Lady is astonished:

A hundred and thirty thousand pounds! And in the Funds! Miss Cardew seems to me a most attractive young lady, now that I look at her. Few girls of the present day have any really solid qualities, any of the qualities that last, and improve with time. We live, I regret to say, in an age of surfaces. (Wilde, 1910, 213)

It cannot be said if one asset is preferred by Lady Bracknell to another, for the fact that Jack, for example, could provide sufficient income but was rejected for being unable to document his origin. In particular, the tradesmen were not enormously sought-after by the upper class, but Cecily's dowry would catapult her among the aristocracy. Lady Bracknell's last remark on "living in an age of surfaces" suggests hypocrisy of the class to which she belongs herself. Otherwise, she would not pretend her deepest interest in Cecily's profile in which she feigns searching for her accomplished personal qualities. After all, when she pronounces to see some marks of the distinguished society in Cecily's face, it is obvious that Lady Bracknell is cunning and careful not to disclose her real interest. Obviously, Lady Bracknell's sudden approval for the engagement is not based on Cecily's pretty face, but the money she would receive through marriage. No other reason is possible. Her nephew Algernon is in debts and by marrying a woman with substantial wealth he would not only be spared from bankruptcy and certain scandalous reputation, but also it would secure a trouble-free life for him in future. "I do not approve of mercenary marriages", (Wilde, 1910, 216) Lady Bracknell assures the audience, but at the same time, her approval for marriage of Cecily and Algernon is based only on her mercenariness.

Lady Bracknell's authoritarian view on customs abuses all people in and out of her family, and she does not go far for a biting remark. She is snobbish: arrogant, proud, and conceited. In her marriage, she is insensible and disrespectful of her husband. If marriage of her daughter is the point, the family ancestry and inheritance is more important to her than love of young people. She does not hesitate to profit from lying and deceit both inside her marriage and in public circles. In spite of moralizing and pretence for being faultless, her snobbish conduct uncovers a perfect hypocrisy.

Lady Bracknell is the symbol representing the English aristocracy which submitted social norms to the rest of the English society and rigidly kept to respectability and conventions of her class. None the less, the concept of its honourability is far from the standard notion of religious respectability: morality, hard work, or thrift. For the aristocracy, respectability is seen through material values, income, or social status. The ideal person dines at dinners and parties with other “respectable” people talking about stylishness. The ideal way of life is idleness filled with gossips about the “disrespectable”. Ironically, as the “elite” of the country, the upper class tends to be snobbish and does not follow the standard notion of respectability which indicates a profound hypocrisy.

To summarize, *The Importance of Being Earnest* presents the characters of John Worthing, Algernon Moncrieff, and Lady Bracknell who act hypocritically. John Worthing pretends to be a respectable magistrate in the country, while he keeps travelling to London for pleasures covering his visits for help to his unfortunate brother. He leads a double life which was in conflict with the proper Victorian morals. Algernon Moncrieff’s life is double likewise, though, in his case he invents a poor friend Bunbury to whom he refers anytime he wishes to escape social occasions with his relatives. Lady Bracknell is, on the contrary, an example of a woman whose hypocritical conduct stands for snobbism of the British elite. Andrew Sander judges the author’s intention of mocking at morality by his comment that: “Wilde triumphed in capturing a fluid, intensely funny, mood of ‘irresponsibility’” in the play. (477) Similar elements of cant are found in the second drama which is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 Hypocrisy in *Lady Windermere's Fan*

This drama can be classed as a social play of the Victorian days for at least two reasons. The first one is pointed by Wilde himself when he calls *Lady Windermere's Fan*: “New and original play of modern life” (Rowell, 146-147) The second reason refers to the age by the adverb “*nowadays*” which is widely used throughout the play. For instance, according to Mrs. Erlynne “what consoles one *nowadays* is not repentance, but pleasure.” (Wilde, 1911, 8)

As mentioned earlier, *Lady Windermere's Fan* focuses on criticism of morality of the Victorian upper-class society and the institution of marriage. In comparison with *The Importance of Being Earnest*, it deals with hypocrisy of married upper-class women. The next chapters, therefore, closely look on their morality and the criticized elements of goodness and snobbism.

Chapter 5.1 Lady Windermere, Mrs. Erlynne and Goodness

Lady Margaret Windermere is a young upper-class lady who has been married to Lord Arthur Windermere for two years. They have a six-month-old baby-boy. When Margaret was a little child, her mother abandoned her and Margaret's nurture was entrusted to her father's sister who brought her up by Puritan rules of strong moral consciousness. Margaret claims to be a Puritan herself and she is sure the world does not know what is “right and what is wrong”, suggesting that the morals of the Victorian age are led astray. She considers *love* as the ideal in life. When Lord Darlington, a friend of hers, tests her morality, Lady Windermere acts like a moralist:

Lord Darlington: [...] do you think seriously that women who have committed what the world calls a fault should never be forgiven.

Lady Windermere: I think they should never be forgiven.

Lord Darlington: And men? Do you think that there should be the same laws for men as there are for women?

Lady Windermere: Certainly! (Wilde, 1911, 11-12)

Margaret asserts that if any woman or man trespasses against moral rules, their conduct should never be apologized or perhaps they should be punished for it. This young lady seems to be, as Lord Darlington called her, “a good woman” who has “purity and innocence” (Wilde, 1911, 111). The fact is that Margaret is known in the high circles as a well-reputed lady.

Mrs. Erlynne, a mother of Lady Margaret Windermere, stands in the opposition to Margaret's reputation. She divorced her husband, leaving him to take care for the little Margaret. Frederick Wedmore, an art critic, uses the term of *demimondaine* when he talks about Mrs. Erlynne (nowadays such a naming would be used for a prostitute). (Lady Windermere's Fan, 129) A divorced woman and a social outcast who was once banished from the Society she wishes now to return and a good reputation of her mature daughter should help her. Identity of Mrs. Erlynne is never revealed to Margaret.

Soon, Margaret is forced to deal with amorality of her husband who is rumoured for infidelity and financial support for a disrespectful woman. Since unfaithfulness was a moral offence casting a shade on the married couple, Margaret is keen on finding some proof in her husband's bank book. She does hesitate for a moment to look inside but excuses her doing on the grounds that she is Arthur's wife and has the right to do so. Inside the bank book she sees that her husband pays money to Mrs. Erlynne, a stranger to Margaret. At the same moment, however, Arthur finds her reading his private bank book and accuses her of spying which she refuses to admit. Instead, she counterattacks which may be regarded as a rejection to confess her guilt. Apart from that, to claim that as a wife she has the right to look into husband's bank book was also false. Such an excuse was impossible even for the upper-class ladies, for the fact that legally, wives did have almost no rights at all in the Victorian times.

Arthur assures Margaret that he loves her, but at the same time, he seems to be obsessed with Mrs. Erlynne and asks his wife to invite Mrs. Erlynne for her birthday party. The reason is that the lady wishes to be received back into the Society and Margaret's good reputation could speed up the action. Margaret strictly refuses to do so saying: "No! If a woman really repents, she never wishes to return to the society that has made or seen her ruin." (Wilde, 1911, 34) Margaret talks foolishly and recklessly. She is jealous of Mrs. Erlynne for Arthur pays attention to her and pays her bills. As a consequence, Margaret warns Arthur that if Mrs. Erlynne comes to her party she would insult her in front of the most prominent people of the Society. She is so foolish as to expose the couple to a public scandal. Arthur Bingham Walkley, a drama critic, describes the character of Lady Windermere as someone who trusts in equality of fidelity for both married partners. Still, once her confidence in her husband is ruined, she acts on the base of vengeance. (Lady Windermere's Fan, 120) To be a "good woman", as she is presented by Arthur, the public and herself, she would be considerate

and sensible. Unfortunately, she does not stand to her reputation. She is inconsiderate, insensible and unforgiving.

As for the morals, Margaret's conduct almost levels with that of Mrs. Erlynne's. Mrs. Erlynne appears from the beginning of the play as the "woman with the past"; degraded by a divorce and abandonment of her child. Moreover, further negatives are to be added to her characteristics. Firstly, her divorce suggests that she was not the virtuous Victorian lady, a meek and passive woman, but decisive and perhaps reluctant to support her family. Female support to a husband or children was the main duty required by the society and unwillingness of Mrs. Erlynne also suggests disrespect for her husband, lack of mother's love, and responsibility towards her little baby. Secondly, Mrs. Erlynne uses lies and deceit on many occasions: she pretends to be married to be easily received into the Society, or pays false compliments to please the aristocratic ladies. Thirdly, she deliberately attempts to make her wooer jealous and Margaret's husband guilty of inattentiveness. Mrs. Erlynne, in comparison to Lady Windermere, is portrayed as a vile woman and her behaviour truly reflects the description.

Eventually, Mrs. Erlynne appears at Margaret's party, looking dignified which seems to prevent Margaret from insulting her. Appalled, she retreats from the public eyes outside the house, accompanied by Lord Darlington, a man who is in love with Margaret. Lord Darlington discredits Lord Windermere, in order to persuade Margaret to leave her husband and marry him instead. Although, Mrs. Erlynne behaves most distinctly, several ladies are enthralled by her manners and pay their compliments to the hostess, Margaret feels ashamed. Persuaded by Lord Darlington, she writes a letter to Arthur and leaves their house to retreat to the Darlington's residence. She thinks she is foolish not to accept Darlington's hand, but on the contrary, to stay with her husband and forgive him was, for a wife regarded as a socially-acceptable moral conduct.

In the meantime, Margaret is waiting in Lord Darlington's house. Suddenly, Mrs. Erlynne enters his room and urges Margaret to return to her loving husband who does know neither about the letter, nor about his wife's elopement. At first, Margaret does not stop accusing her and Arthur of treachery and stresses that she would take vengeance on Arthur, and to give him a reason for a scandal. She is as imprudent and simple as to openly run into a public disgrace. Then, discovering that Mrs. Erlynne read the letter addressed to Arthur, but burnt it, she carries on despising her presumptuous conduct:

You took good care to burn it [the letter] before I had examined it. [...] I cannot trust you. You, whose whole life is a lie, could you speak the truth about anything? [...] He [Lord Windermere] does not understand what love is. He understands it as little as you do - [...] a woman whom it is an infamy to meet, a degradation to know, a vile woman, a woman who comes between husband and wife! (Wilde, 1911, 93-94)

All such accusations confirm that Margaret is a foolish upper-class lady who places greater importance on the unconfirmed news rather than trusting her affectionate husband. The cited text suggests that she is influenced by hypocrisy of the Victorian upper-class Society. The striking point in the cited text is when Margaret says to Mrs. Erlynne “*I cannot trust you. You, whose whole life is a lie, could you speak the truth about anything?*” It was mentioned earlier that Lady Windermere believes in love (she married Arthur for love). Now, it is clear that she blames both Mrs. Erlynne and Arthur for not comprehending what love is, but at the same time, the escape from her husband and their child to arms of Lord Darlington means exactly what she despises at them, lack of love-understanding, and thus her proclaimed love is false and her attitude can be regarded as hypocritical.

Mrs. Erlynne, though she is disadvantaged by the disreputability and accused by her own daughter, does not stop persuading Margaret to return to Arthur. She even begs her not to spoil their admirable marriage and let her child suffer, as was the case of hers. It was the unexpected appearance of several gentlemen coming to Lord Darlington’s rooms (Lord Windermere included) that almost led to a public disgrace of Margaret, but which was prevented by Mrs. Erlynne from happening. It is in the moment when she appears in front of the men, while Margaret escapes from the Darlington’s room unnoticed. At the first time, Mrs. Erlynne expresses her mother’s love through devotion, unselfishness, and sacrifice which Margaret eventually deeply appreciates and calls Mrs. Erlynne “a good woman”.

To sum up this *Play About a Good Woman*, a question can be asked who of the characters the *good woman* really is? Lady Margaret Windermere holds a reputation of a Puritan and “a good woman”, not only by her husband but also within the aristocratic circles. In fact, Andrew Sander’s view is that the play has a feminist bias in that it stresses the natural strength of the central female character(s); a strength which encourages and finally masters a certain puritanism. (477) Margaret may have all the qualities of a virtuous woman, but once she is exposed to gossips of the upper-class society which have an impact on her life, her character reveals many vices, and she also becomes one of the hypocrites of her class. Her seemingly good-natured character is

violated by foolishness, jealousy, inconsideration or insensibility. In many ways her character is similar to Lady Bracknell's character from the first play. On the one hand, she moralizes about observing strict rules for what is right and what is wrong, but on the other hand she is unscrupulous in adhering to them herself. What is more, she is reckless to offend those who tell her the truth, such as her husband, or dares insult people who try to help her, such as her mother Mrs. Erlynne. While Margaret is presented as a good woman from the beginning, Mrs. Erlynne is characterized as a disreputable woman whose reputation suffered due to her divorce and abandoning her daughter after the birth. Although, she purposely misuses Margaret's good reputation in order to be accepted back into the Society, she saves her from the same fault she had done herself in her youth and spares her and Arthur from the same misery she underwent herself. By this action she proved her motherly instincts and care which demonstrates that, in Margaret's words, she is "a good woman". Eventually, Margaret, the good woman, becomes the bad one and Mrs. Erlynne, the vile woman, happens to be the good one.

Chapter 5.2 The Duchess of Berwick and Snobbism

The Duchess of Berwick is a well-off upper-class lady who lives with her husband Duke of Berwick and their young daughter Agatha in London. The Duchess is one of the typically aristocratic women who are in favour of gossips and preying on scandals, therefore, she meets Lady Windermere on the occasion of informing her about rumours being heard in the high circles of her untrue husband. In conversation about their husbands the Duchess tries to support Margaret in handling the matter wisely and confesses that she had to pretend to be ill on several occasions, in order to keep her husband out of town and save him from infidelity. Lady Windermere believes that not deceit but love prevents a man from being unfaithful:

Lady Windermere: Windermere and I married for love.

Duchess of Berwick: Yes, we begin like that. It was only Berwick's brutal and incessant threats of suicide that made me accept him at all, [...] In fact, before the honeymoon was over, I caught him winking at my maid, a most pretty, respectable girl. (Wilde, 1911, 24)

The Duchess, as many other aristocratic women, is fond of gossiping and uncsciously initiates an action which almost led to a ruined marriage. Her own marriage is not successful, for the fact that because she considers her husband weak, emotional to

commit a suicide and too coward to be lured by a woman. Therefore, as well as Lady Bracknell, not only she deceives him, but she also does not respect him.

Agatha, another submissive person who is under the Duchess's authority, she is a mature lady old enough to be married. Her mother is placed in the same position of finding a husband for her as Lady Bracknell was. The following passage reveals common practices of the upper-class mothers to find a valuable partner for Agatha. The Duchess is glad to hear that a wealthy and well-known gentleman is invited for a ball given by Lady Windermere both of which they would attend. The Duchess meets the lady to thank her that she invited Mr. Hopper, a rich young Australian, who is in the centre of attention in the social circles at present. She particularly stresses information about the great profits from his father's business in selling food which the servants refuse to eat. The words pronounced by the Duchess about Mr. Hopper express that she does not take interest in his personal qualities; she finds him only an interesting man. The comment about Mr. Hopper's father's business that is successful but morally rotten indicates that the Duchess does not seem to pay much attention to it. It implies that she gives preference to both profit and popularity before love and one's character. What is more, counter to morality she is able to use subtle tricks to match Mr. Hopper with her daughter so that the courting is successful:

Just let me see your card. [...] (Scratches out two names) No nice girl should ever waltz with such particularly younger sons! It looks so fast! The last two dances you might pass on the terrace with Mr. Hopper. (Wilde, 1911, 43-44)

Duchess of Berwick senses that Mr. Hopper, a son of a successful businessman, is the perfect match for her daughter Agatha. At the party, she quickly refuses to allow her daughter to dance with two young gentlemen, suggesting that her daughter's reputation might suffer, but then, she allows her to dance with him the last two dances on a terrace, as if this conduct did not look "so fast". Later, she is so daring as to scold Mr. Hopper for dancing with her daughter on the terrace, although she agreed on doing so with her child some minutes ago. As a marriage broker, Duchess of Berwick acts in the same way as Lady Bracknell; she is too proud to allow her daughter dancing with someone who is below her class or who lacks wealth or positive attention.

When the signs of an upcoming engagement are clear from Mr. Hopper's proposal, the Duchess proudly announces to Lady Windermere: "I'm afraid it's the old, old story, dear. Love — well, not love at first sight, but love at the end of the season, which is so much more satisfactory." (Wilde, 1911, 70-72) In other words, the Duchess

is glad that her cunning strategies repaid and her daughter's marriage would be financially secured which the Victorian hypocritical upper-class society found more attractive than love.

The Duchess of Berwick can be compared to Lady Bracknell. She also disrespects her husband, moralises about improper behaviour and demonstrates authority over her daughter. In search for her daughter's marriage partner she prefers his family's wealth and his reputation to affection towards Agatha or his character. She does practice deception both inside her marriage and in the upper-class circles, as Lady Bracknell does. With respect to the snobbish way of the elite, her pretence for living faultless, but being foolish and amoral at the same time, she acts like a hypocrite.

To summarize, *Lady Windermere's Fan* introduces characters of Lady Windermere and the Duchess of Berwick and illustrates their hypocritical attitude. At the beginning, Lady Windermere is presented as a good woman, a virtuous lady, and a moralist who acknowledges morals above all. Later on, influenced by gossips, she eventually becomes foolish and unprincipled. As for the Duchess of Berwick, there is evidence throughout the play that she strongly believes in conventional principles of aristocracy and adheres to them. Also, she is foolish in the way to spread gossips, or else snobbish for being proud and insolent.

Conclusion

The study was focused on two literary works *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *Lady Windermere's Fan*, comedies of manners written by Oscar Wilde in the 1890s. The aim of the paper was to examine both plays, find and analyze elements of the Victorian society which were criticized and considered hypocritical, compare and contrast the elements in these dramas. Overall, the difference between the plays is in the theme variation, characters, and the elements which are criticized. *The Importance of Being Earnest* is written about a courtship of two bachelors who fall in love, while *Lady Windermere's Fan* presents married or divorced characters who question the moral side of marriage.

Several elements of the Victorian upper-class society criticised from the point of view of hypocrisy arose during the analysis. The first play criticizes the *double life* of the bachelors, whereas the second play is concerned with a moral virtue of *goodness* of two ladies. Apart from that, both plays mock at *snobbery* of the aristocracy. The elite of the country - the upper class (aristocracy) - which should have been the representative of Victorian moral values, reduced the standard concept of respectability (based on morality, virtue of one's character, hard work or help to the ill and poor) to the concept of their own honourability achieved by social status and grandeur of wealth, fashion, property, or social events. Snobbism and foolishness were the greatly censured aristocratic 'deeds'.

The findings are based on the earlier mentioned fact that hypocritical behaviour is a pretense of having a virtuous character, moral or religious beliefs, or principles that one does not really possess. Therefore, the drama characters mentioned in the analysed text always performed pretence of some kind; either pretence of sympathy for the poor and the needy, pretence of respect for their married partner, pretence for principles, or for moral beliefs.

In the *The Importance of Being Earnest* the criticised elements found are the *double life* and *snobbism* of the aristocracy. John Worthing (alias Jack), a respectable gentleman who lives in the country, invents a younger brother Ernest, residing in London who is in troubles. Jack pretends to be a sympathetic man helping his unfortunate brother in saving him from difficulties, but in reality, his brother is a camouflage. He uses this imaginative person to escape his boring home-place in the country, in order to leave behind the strict moral code set by the Victorian standard and

to head for pleasures waiting for him in London. The act of hypocrisy can be seen through leading the double life and pretending to be someone else in the town and someone else in the country.

While Jack contrives Ernest, Algernon Moncrieff, a gentleman who lives in London, devises an invalid friend Bunbury residing in the country. Publicly, he talks about his friend as an invalid to whom he helps whenever necessary. The truth is that his supposed care is a camouflage to avoid social occasions with his relatives, leave one place for another and enjoy himself in a better company. In his life, he practices so called Bunburying which is another term for the double life. He keeps it a secret, until he reveals it to Jack, once he learned about his double life.

Lady Bracknell, a wife of Lord Bracknell and a mother of their daughter Gwendolen, is an upper-class authoritarian woman. In her family, she disrespects her husband and asserts social rules towards her daughter. In public, she proclaims the conventions and traditions of Society and she judges how the others obey them. What she respects are values set by her class; values which extend her property and strengthen social status of her family. Therefore, when she interviews Jack, a possible husband for Gwendolen, all she cares about is his money, property, style, and a family (aristocratic) ancestry. If Jack cannot prove his origin, she arrogantly dismisses him. She cares little for his character and his affection. Lady Bracknell who usurps authority to regulate everyone but herself and who is, at the same time, foolish, proud, arrogant, and illustrating snobbery, she acts like a hypocrite.

Similar tendency of hypocrisy was found in the *Lady Windermere's Fan* where the criticism is aimed at the elements of *goodness* and *snobbism* of the upper class. The drama discusses the virtue of goodness and introduces two ladies who are connected with this term: Lady Windermere and Mrs. Erlynne. Lady Margaret Windermere is a young aristocratic lady and a wife of Lord Arthur Windermere with whom she has a little baby. From the beginning, her reputation of a "good woman" is presented by her husband, the upper-class society, and herself, for she moralizes about what is right and what is wrong. However, it is so until she is exposed to rumours about Arthur's infidelity. She believes the gossips and becomes jealous, inconsiderate, and insensible. She is so prejudiced against Arthur's supposed lover Mrs. Erlynne as to almost run into a scandal and ruin the marriage for her, her husband, and to cast a shame on their child. Overall, Margaret is not as good as she and everyone around her profess which confirms that she is a hypocrite.

Margaret's reputation is rescued by Mrs. Erlynne who is pictured as a vile, disreputable woman, for she divorced her husband, abandoned her child, and was outcasted from the Society. She cannot be described as a virtuous woman because she uses lies and deceit to be received back into the high circles, or attempts to make people jealous and inattentive. Still, Mrs. Erlynne appears as a woman who is devoted, unselfish, and loving. She is able to sacrifice her life and reputation once again to spare her daughter Margaret the misery of being outcasted from the Society and ruining her marriage. For these deeds, as Margaret insists, she can be called a "good woman".

The Duchess of Berwick is an upper-class lady who lives with Lord Berwick and their daughter Agatha in London. She finds her husband weak and emotional and for this reason, as Lady Bracknell does, she does not respect him. She openly admits to deceive him. Agatha is similarly submissive which is due to the authoritative conduct of her mother. Being a member of the high class, the Duchess maintains her strong social awareness in the same way as Lady Bracknell does. For Agatha, she agrees to accept only a well-reputed husband who comes from a wealthy family. Her tricky cunning techniques are revealed during the marriage settlement and her pride is evident when she finds such a partner. She surely belongs among the upper-class ladies who assert to be faultless but at the same time act ammorally and snobbishly, and therefore, hypocritically.

To conclude, both dramas by Oscar Wilde reflect the morality of the Victorian upper-class society in the late nineteenth-century England. From the presented discussion it is clear that both scenarios document several elements of the Victorian society which were criticised for their hypocritical nature. Snobbishness is the issue identically commented in *The Importance of Being Ernest* and *Lady Windermere's Fan*. In addition, the former mocked at the double life, whereas the latter disapproved of pretence for goodness.

Resumé

Tato práce je zaměřena na kritiku viktoriánského pokrytectví a objektem analýzy jsou dvě divadelní hry *Jak je důležité míti Filipa* (*The Importance of Being Ernest*) a *Vějíř lady Windermerové* (*Lady Windermere's Fan*) od Oscara Wildea. Cílem práce je analýza těchto dvou dramát a vystopování prvků viktoriánské společnosti, které jsou v těchto scénických dílech kritizovány a považovány za pokrytecké, a dále porovnání zjištěných prvků v obou dílech. Pozornost je tedy nejprve soustředěna na specifika, hodnoty a normy viktoriánské společnosti.

Viktoriánská éra, jejíž název se pojí s vládou anglické královny Viktorie panující v letech 1837-1901, byla pro své dlouhé období rozčleněna do tří etap, z nichž poslední třetině, tedy období od roku 1870 do roku 1901, je v této práci věnována pozornost. Viktoriánská společnost byla tehdy rozdělena do několika tříd (nižší, střední, vyšší), které byly už historicky dříve vytvořeny na základě původu, majetku, a dále podle druhu zaměstnání a příjmu. Výjimkou byla nejvyšší třída, kterou tvořili obchodníci, nižší a vyšší šlechta a monarcha. Pro tuto třídu nebylo zaměstnání důležité, protože získávala majetek z pronájmu půdy, prodeje pozemků a akcií. Její jedinou „povinností“ byly návštěvy svých příbuzných a společensky vážených osob, organizování společenských událostí, jako například večírků a bálů, a drobná pomoc chudým a nemocným lidem. Vyšší třídě se také familiárně říkalo „Společnost“ a předpokladem k tomu, aby člověk mohl být členem této společnosti byl vznešený původ, materiální bohatství, luxusní garderoba či okruh vážených osob. Každý člen musel dodržovat určitá pravidla. Projevování zásad etikety, módy a stylovosti, to vše bylo chápáno jako součást úctyhodnosti dané osoby. Tato pravidla byla nastavena i pro ostatní obyvatele země, na veřejnosti či v domácnostech, ve městech i na venkově.

Ve viktoriánské době byla nejvíce diskutovanými tématy morálka a rodinný život. V pozitivním smyslu obě tato témata tvořila hodnoty, které Viktoriáni uctívali. Jestliže pravidla společenského chování diktovala vyšší třída, pak morální zásady byly utvářeny pravidly církve. Metodistická církev kromě ctností jako upřímnost, serióznost, osobní odpovědnost a respekt k autoritám doma i na veřejnosti, nařizovala tvrdou práci, disciplínu a spořivost. Fakticky, tyto zásady byly dodržovány pouze střední třídou a anglickým monarchou, královnou Viktorií a Princem Albertem. Vyšší třída, aristokracie, byla nad tato pravidla „povznesena“. Přestože ještě na začátku

devatenáctého století byla morálním vůdcem společnosti, v průběhu století toto vedení předala střední třídě, sama si vytvořila vlastní společenská pravidla a svou sílu vnímala skrz bohatství, díky kterému udávala směr téměř ve všech oblastech společensko-kulturního života: módě, architektuře, malířství, poezii, divadle. Vyšší třída měla natolik dominantní postavení, že zastiňovala sílu církve i parlamentu a zejména střední třída se chtěla z tohoto důvodu možnostem vyšší třídy nejvíce přiblížit. Každá z těchto tříd však měla jinou představu o úctyhodnosti jednotlivce. Zatímco střední třída považovala za váženého člověka pracovitou, odpovědnou, pravdomluvnou osobu, která dodržuje zásady náboženství a pomáhá potřebným, pro vyšší třídu byl znakem váženosti naopak šlechtický původ, dostatek majetku, módní oblek a dodržování společenské etikety. Pomoc potřebným byla sice praktikována, ale v mnoha případech se jednalo pouze o vyvolání dojmu odpovědnosti. Z tohoto důvodu byla vyšší třída kritizována a obviňována z pokrytectví. Morálka jednotlivce, kterou tvořila řada morálních ctností jako čestnost, pravdomluvnost, zdrženlivost, pasivita, byla chápána všemi třídami stejným způsobem. Rozdílly byly patrné pouze v rámci pohlaví mezi ženskými a mužskými negativními vlastnostmi, které také vedly k označení pokrytectví u dané osoby.

Kromě morálky byl důležitou hodnotou Viktoriánů i rodinný život. Rodinný kruh byl základem pro výchovu a výuku dětí, modlitby, pracovním prostředím ženy a útočištěm muže. Podstatu rodinného života bylo možné naplnit skrz pouto manželství, které bylo chápáno jako jediná platná společenská role pro muže a ženy, bez ohledu na společenskou třídu. Manželský svazek byl založen buď na základě smlouvy (v angl. překladu *contract*), kterou oba partneři založili, nebo ukončili svobodně, nebo na něj pohlíželi jako na svátost (v angl. překladu *sacrament*); smlouvu mezi mužem, ženou a Bohem, která mohla být ukončena pouze smrtí jednoho z manželů. Ideálem bylo tzv. „kamarádké manželství“ (v angl. překladu *companionate love*), založené na lásce a dobrovolnosti, což bylo patrně preferované u střední třídy, protože vyšší třída naopak dávala přednost zprostředkovanému sňatku kvůli zajištění majetku. Důvodů pro sňatek bylo několik. Z pohledu náboženství šlo o vůli stanovenou Bohem, mimo jiné z důvodu plození a výchovy dětí a vzájemné podpory v dobrém i zlém mezi manželi, z pohledu jednotlivce se jednalo o lásku a touhu být s milovaným partnerem, rozšíření majetku (což byl důvod zejména pro vyšší třídu), a také pro svobodu dívek, které díky manželství nebyly pod dohledem rodičů. Dívky z vyšší třídy měly určité výhody díky zvláštnímu zákonu umožňujícímu spravovat jejich majetek a byly tedy důvodně terčem

pomluv. V každém případě však identita žen kvůli poutu manželství přestala existovat a to proto, že žena byla přijata pod ochranu muže a musela být vůči němu poslušná.

Samotnému aktu manželství předcházely námluvy a jelikož bylo běžné, že manželství bylo předem domlouváno, bylo také samozřejmostí, že budoucí partner byl vybrán podle společensky uznávaných měřítek. Výběr partnera byl vždy doménou matek, z nichž především ty z vyšších kruhů striktně lpěly na kritériích jako původ, společenské postavení či velikost majetku. Naopak pozitivní morální profil byl oceněn především střední třídou. Vždy bylo nakonec nutné, aby byly dívky neposkvrněné a muži byli schopni svoji manželku finančně zajistit.

Dříve popisovaná morálka měla ve viktoriánské době dvě tváře. Pokrytectví patřilo mezi často kritizované amorální chování. Podle Johna Gardinera bylo pokrytectví spojováno s obtížemi Viktoriánů přizpůsobit se moderní době a fungovalo jako psychologická náhrada pro ty, kteří si nebyli jisti svými životními podmínkami. Naopak podle Joan Perkinové byla důvodem k přetvářce snaha nižších společenských tříd o napodobení životního stylu nejvyšší třídy, která byla pro svoji marnotratnost terčem pomluv a záští. Tuto potřebu napodobování měla zejména střední třída. Díky množství negativních charakterových vlastností, které byly některými kritiky popsány, mohla být pokrytcem téměř každá osoba, která předstírala, že je ctnostnou a váženou osobností, ale její chování, protknuté mnoha negativními vlastnostmi, tomu zároveň odporovalo. Nicméně, na základě vědeckého podkladu o jedné z charakteristických rysů lidské řeči, *vykrucování se* (v angl. překladu *prevarication*), při které jedinec záměrně lže a vymýšlí si nesmysly s úmyslem oklamat posluchače, lze vyvozovat, že pokrytectví je založeno právě na přirozené schopnosti lidské řeči. Kromě toho, jak už bylo uvedeno, byli za pokrytce považováni i ti, kteří patřili do vyšší vrstvy a vyznávali úctyhodnost ve smyslu nadřazenosti, ať už vlivem materiálního bohatství, vznešeného původu či společenské důležitosti.

Přetvářka byla součástí běžného života jak na veřejnosti, tak v rámci rodiny a manželství. Důvody, které je nutné zmínit jsou hned dva. Zaprvé se jednalo o výchovu dívek a mladých žen k tomu, aby záměrně nedávaly průchod svým pocitům, zahalovaly svá těla a skrývaly projevy ženskosti (např. těhotenství). Důvodem striktní disciplíny rodičů bylo zajištění počestnosti dívky a zabránění tomu, aby nechtěně neotěhotněla, pokud byla dívka svobodná. Dívky se naučily oklamávání, lhaní a lsti a tuto výchovu samozřejmě dále praktikovaly v manželství nebo na veřejnosti. Tímto způsobem například získaly pozornost budoucího manžela, informace o finanční situaci svého

stávajícího manžela, nebo jej použily v případě, pokud se chtěly vyhnout nechtěnému sexu. Zadruhé se jednalo o společenskou přetvářku mužů, které manželství a rodinný život nenaplňoval, a žen, které trpěly nedostatkem projevení citu ze strany svých manželů. Obě pohlaví si pak své nedostatky kompenzovala manželskou nevěrou, kterou v té době moderní „otevřená“ manželství umožňovala.

K analyzovaným divadelním hrám *Jak je důležité míti Filipa* a *Vějíř lady Windermorové*, jejichž autorem je Oscar Wilde, lze uvést, že patří mezi díla s tematikou viktoriánské společnosti a kritikou právě diskutované morálky. Byla napsána a uvedena v devadesátých letech devatenáctého století, a jsou považována za jeho významnější díla. *Jak je důležité míti Filipa*, komedie napsaná na vrcholu autorovi umělecké kariéry, je považována za nejhumornější anglickou divadelní hru, která je na repertoáru světových divadel dodnes. Obě hry patří do kategorie moderního anglického dramatu, žánru komedie, ve které se spojují prvky komedie mravů, satiry a frašky. Cílem Oscara Wildea bylo kritizovat pokrytectví jak vyšší třídy viktoriánské společnosti, tak pokrytectví v manželství. Wilde dokonce jako první vytvořil postavu tzv. „světáka“ (v angl. překladu „dandy“), individualitu charakterizovanou vtipným, přehnaně módně vypadajícím filosofem, který zesměšňuje společenskou morálku aristokracie. Ve hře *Jak je důležité míti Filipa* tuto postavu ztvárnil Algernon Moncrieff, zatímco ve druhé hře *Vějíř lady Windermorové* byl touto postavou lord Darlington.

Dramata se v obou případech zabývají tématem manželství, nicméně každá z her je zaměřena na jinou etapu. *Jak je důležité míti Filipa* se věnuje převážně zamilovanosti dvou staromládenců, kteří se dvoří mladým slečnám a chtějí je pojmout za manželky. Naproti tomu *Vějíř lady Windermorové* je hra zaměřená na partnery v manželství či rozvedené, kteří řeší amorální stránku manželství. Z analyzovaných děl je zřejmé, že některé prvky, které jsou kritizovány a považovány za pokrytecké, se liší a některé se naopak shodují. První uvedená hra kritizuje *dvojitý život* výše zmiňovaných mužů, kteří žijí staromládeneckým životem, zatímco ve druhé hře se stala morálně napadnutelnou pozitivní vlastnost *dobrota*. Obě hry současně pak zesměšňují *snobství*.

Ve hře *Jak je důležité míti Filipa* jsou tedy kritizovanými prvky viktoriánské společnosti *dvojitý život* a *snobství*. Postavami, které se dopouštějí přetvářky jsou John Worthing (alias Jack), Algernon Moncrieff a lady Bracknellová. Oba muži, Jack a Algernon, kteří vedou staromládenecký život, si vymysleli fiktivní osobu, jež jim vždy ve vhodnou chvíli umožní únik před povinnostmi stanovenými viktoriánskou společností. Vymyšlenou postavou Johna Worthinga, jenž vede spořádaný život na

venkovském sídle a je tam váženou osobností, je mladší nezodpovědný bratr Ernest žijící v Londýně, kterého Jack vždy odjíždí „vysvobodit“ z nečekaných problémů. Jediným pravým důvodem návštěvy města je však jeho potřeba zábavy a uvolnění mysli od povinností, které Jacka na venkově svazují.

Podobně jako Jack, i Algernon, který naopak žije v Londýně, předstírá, že na venkově navštěvuje svého nemocného přítele Bunburyho. Důvodem k přetvářce a oklamávání svého okolí jsou návštěvy, ať už rodiny, známých nebo společensky významných osob, na které je Algernon zván, ale které jsou pro něj nudnou zábavou. Tudíž, záměrem pro myšlenku na Bunburyho je vidina jeho volnosti kdykoliv zatouží se vzdálit z města a užívat si svobody podle svých představ.

Lady Bracknellová, manželka lorda Bracknella a matka jejich dospívající dcery Gwendolen, je autoritativní ženou vyšší třídy a své názory prosazuje vůči své rodině i okolí. Ke svému manželovi se chová s despektem, své dceři dává arogantně najevo, že ji musí poslouchat. S domýšlivostí upozorňuje na porušování pravidel morálního chování a striktně soudí každého kromě sebe. Hodnoty stanovené její společenskou třídou jsou pro ni velmi důležité. V případě volby budoucího manžela pro Gwendolen je pro ni tedy zásadní, jestli má muž vznešený původ a zdali se sňatkem rozšíří majetek; láska vůči Gwendolen ani jeho vlastnosti ji vůbec nezajímají. Lady Bracknellová, která si uzurpuje autoritu na usměrňování chování každého kromě sebe samé, a přitom je hloupá, pyšná, arogantní a chová se snobsky, je jen pokryteckou dámou.

Ve hře *Vějíř lady Windermere* je kritizovaným prvkem viktoriánské společnosti nejen *snobství* ale také *dobrota*. Postavami, které jsou zde považovány za pokrytecké je *lady Margaret Windermere* a *vévodkyně z Berwicku*. Dvě postavy, které upoutají pozornost s ohledem na pozitivní vlastnost *dobroty* jsou lady Margaret Windermere a paní Erlynneová. Nicméně, pouze Margaret je postavou, která se chová pokrytecky. Od počátku hry je totiž Margaret považována za dámu, která je vzorem osobnosti s dobrým chováním. „Dobrá žena“ – to o ní říká nejen její manžel, okolí, ale i ona sama se staví do role moralistky, která by neodpustila žádný mravní přestupek. V momentu, kdy je však jedinou ženou přesvědčena, že její manžel je jí nevěrný, stává se z ní závistivá, bezohledná a bezmyšlenkovitě jednající bytost, která má s laskavostí dobrosrdečného člověka jen pramálo společného, a právě tímto chováním se stává pokryteckou.

Paní Erlynneová je společností považována za nemravnou, zavrženíhodnou ženu, protože se rozvedla se svým manželem a opustila svou malou dceru (kterou je

právě Margaret), a proto je ve společensky vyšších kruzích odmítána. Faktem je, že i ona má mnoho negativních vlastností, například předstírá, že je vdanou ženou, jelikož se snaží dostat zpět mezi šlechtu, nebo si vymýšlí lži, aby se zalíbila dámám z vyšší vrstvy. Nicméně není tou, která moralizuje a přitom se chová amorálně, jako je tomu v případě Margaret. Právě naopak, paní Erlynneová je ženou, která dokáže být obětavou, nesobeckou a milující matkou. Dokázala totiž dát v sázku svůj život a znovu pošpinit svoji pověst, jen aby zachránila Margaretino manželství a ušetřila ji skandálu a špatné pověsti, která ji mohla potkat v případě domnělé nevěry s jejím přítelem lordem Darlingtonem. Margaret si je vědoma této oběti, kterou vůči ní paní Erlynneová učinila a s vděčností ji nazývá „dobrou ženou“. To, že je paní Erlynneová její matkou, se Margaret nikdy nedozví.

Postava vévodkyně z Berwicku svým chováním velmi připomíná Lady Bracknellovou. Vévodkyně, která je manželkou vévody z Berwicku a spolu mají již dospělou dceru Agathu, považuje svého manžela za slabošského a přecitlivého muže, kterého nerespektuje a otevřeně ho oklamává. Agatha je podobně submisivní mladou slečnou, kterou její matka autoritativně ovládá. Vévodkyně, jako žena elitní třídy, vyznává nastavené společenské konvence „serióznosti“ a ve výběru budoucího manžela své dcery upřednostňuje dostatek majetku a dobrou pověst. Nejenže je však při výběru partnera vychytralá, ale dokonce je na svůj úspěch díky podvodům patřičně hrdá. Stejně jako Lady Bracknellová, i ona je pokrytcem, který se svým chováním nadřazuje nad ostatní, a přitom se sama chová nemorálně a snobsky.

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