

THE IMAGE OF A DANDY IN OSCAR WILDE'S FICTION

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*“One should either be a work of Art, or wear a work of Art”
Oscar Wilde*

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 19th century, decadent trends began to appear in England. Most notable of that time are aesthetic and naturalistic directions (symbolists, Pre-Raphaelites, aesthetes). One of the most popular directions in the literature of that time becomes aestheticism, primarily thanks to its most famous representative – Oscar Wilde. He is one of the most controversial figures in world literature and provokes constant interest in his literary works and personal life.

In the early 19th century, a man named George Bryan Brummell started a trend which had significant consequences for the future art and literature of the world. That trend was dandyism. Many were attracted to his mode of dressing, and his manner and tried to imitate him. Thus, his influence was spreading not only in Great Britain but in Europe as a whole.

Aestheticism gave birth to dandyism, which originated in England at the end of the 18th – the beginning of the 19th century. At that time, a particular aesthetic canon of dandyism was also established, which combined the art of dressing, manners and peculiar life philosophy. In that same period, many scholarly works appear that attempt to analyze dandyism from different points of view: history, philosophy, culture and art studies, social and psychological studies and linguistics.

Despite having the same aesthetic background in different countries, dandyism was never a unified movement. Even if we put aside regional differences (dandyism existed in Germany, France, Italy and, of course, Great Britain), it diverged into at least two distinct varieties in Great Britain alone. The first was headed by Oscar Wilde himself, the other – by Max Beerbohm, and they had significant ideological differences (which we will discuss in detail later in our research).

In recent decades we have witnessed an inevitable renaissance of profound scholarly and critical interest in the ambiguous figure of a dandy in almost every sphere of research. That interest, in our opinion, is provoked, at least in part, by the dandy as an ideal for the middle and higher-class gentlemen of the 18th-19th century society (not unlike the “Renaissance man” at the end of the

14th to 15th centuries). On the other hand, it stems from a very practical interest – is it still possible for a dandy to exist in our pragmatic, modern era?

In this research, we will attempt to provide an in-depth overview of dandyism and its realization in the characters of O. Wilde's selected works.

1. The problem's prerequisites emergence and the problem's formulation

The research on the topic of dandyism and its expression in the works of O. Wilde is quite extensive in foreign literary criticism and studies. In contrast, it's barely present in Ukrainian literary research scape. Those works that exist are focused on the sum of his literary works and style as a whole, so the figure of gentleman dandy in his only novel and numerous plays stays mostly out of the scope of such critical works. Thus, there is an obvious necessity to fill that gap in Ukrainian literary research by concentrating our attention on the topic and bringing it under scrutiny, to provide an overview of related articles, and to delve deep into the nature of aestheticism and the dandy as its ultimate physical manifestation.

The relevance of this research is determined by the consideration of aspects of the philosophy of dandyism in Oscar Wilde's writings and its development from Lord Goring (comedy "An Ideal Husband") to Lord Henry and Dorian Gray ("The Picture of Dorian Gray"). This paper is devoted to the analysis of dandyism as understood by O. Wilde and the literary expression of this understanding in his major dandy characters.

The purpose of our article is to point out and describe the most prominent dandy qualities and their embodiment in the dandies of O. Wilde's selected works. To achieve this purpose we must accomplish the following:

- provide a short review of the history of aestheticism and dandyism;
- attempt to define the term "dandy" as a combination of his external appearance, character, and philosophical views;
- single out and describe dandies in the selected works by O. Wilde and highlight the dandy's characteristic qualities in their images.

2. The analysis of recent research and publications on the topic

The intertwined origins of aestheticism and dandyism were a subject of study for a very long time. Among the publications on the topics of aestheticism, dandyism and the literary legacy of O. Wilde discussed within the scope of our research are works by B. D'Aurevilly, G. Woodcock, A. Grinstein, S. Godfrey, R. Breuer, T. Schaffer, R. Meinhold, B. Guan and O. Wilde himself.

The research of aestheticism and dandyism began as early as the middle of the 19th century. One of the first fundamental works discussing both

movements is “The Anatomy of Dandyism, with some Observations on Beau Brummell” by a French writer and literary critic Barbey D’Aurevilly, which dates back to 1845. Although this book can be considered a biographical essay on the most famous British dandy George “Beau” Brummell, B. D’Aurevilly doesn’t concern himself as much with the biography of his hero as with trying to “dissect” the dandy to find out and understand “what makes him tick”. The author gives him a flattering, but entirely well-earned characteristic: “But remove the Dandy, and what remains of Brummell? He was capable of nothing more, but also nothing less than being the greatest Dandy of his time, and of all time”¹. B. D’Aurevilly was one of the first scholars who had successfully pointed out some of the major traits of an ideal dandy, such as exterior elegance of manner and dress, grace, vanity, conformity and at the same time the ability to subvert expectations².

O. Wilde in his dialogue “The Decay of Lying” summed up the principal tenets of his philosophy of aestheticism, which he had propagated. For this work he chose the form of a Platonian dialogue between Vivian and Cyril. Vivian reads his new critical article to Cyril, in which he compares Art to Life and Nature. He ends the reading with a summary of the five “doctrines” of Art:

- 1) Art never expresses anything but itself;
- 2) All bad art comes from returning to Life and Nature, and elevating them into ideals;
- 3) Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life;
- 4) Nature also imitates Art;
- 5) Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art³.

Nature is always behind the age and it and Life are not worth of being depicted in Art. Realism as an artistic method is a failure. Art is above everything else and must be used to create a new kind of beautiful reality that has nothing in common with realism.

A. Grinstein provides a solid background in summarizing O. Wilde’s biography and literary legacy in his article “Oscar Wilde”. Oscar Fingal O’Flahertie Wills Wilde was born in Dublin, Ireland on October 16, 1854. He was born into an unusual family: his father, William Robert Wills Wilde, was a prominent surgeon, but also an archeologist, an Irish folklorist, and an author; Oscar’s mother, Jane Francesca Wilde was also a writer who contributed many revolutionary articles to the Irish Nationalist Newspaper.

¹ D’Aurevilly B. *The Anatomy of Dandyism, with some Observations on Beau Brummell* / Trans. by D. B. Wyndham Lewis. London : Peter Davies. 1928. P. 6. URL: <https://archive.org/details/anatomyofdandysis0000barb>

² *Ibid.* P. 6–11.

³ Wilde O. *The Decay of Lying*. P. 16–17. URL: <http://virgil.org/dswo/courses/novel/wilde-lying.pdf>

After she married William Wilde, her political writings came to an end but she still wrote fiction and poetry and it was she who engendered Oscar's infatuation with folklore, fiction, and beauty, which later developed into his brand of aestheticism. During his student years at Oxford, he was noted for his "flamboyant and somewhat studied aestheticism"⁴. Later after graduation, he sought to gain fame as a poet and playwright, he styled himself as an "Apostle of Aestheticism". According to A. Grinstein, for Wilde aestheticism became a rebellion against Victorian morality. The position of the aesthete is to oppose generally accepted tastes and conventions. That is exactly why he expressed a protest against the dominance of practicality and common sense: "This ["The Picture of Dorian Gray"] was Wilde's only novel and brought him considerable notoriety as the British public was incensed by the implied immorality in the work"⁵.

B. Guan⁶ in his research analyses various aspects of dandyism. He discusses Wilde's formalism, the opposition between morality and evil, and the Wildean paradox. The researcher also notes several major characteristics of an ideal dandy: perfection of physical appearance and dressing, refined language, paradox, and cynicism based on contradictions between spiritual and material, elegance and vulgarity, art and nature, conformity and provocation.

R. Breuer⁷ delves into the depths of paradox in the literary works of O. Wilde, which, although in itself is nothing new, gives us a better understanding of the fundamental ideological background of dandyism, because the paradox, in all its forms and expressions, was inherent to the character and philosophy of dandyism. It was their "raison d'être", they had built their identity and behavior around paradox as a core. As the dandy phenomenon was a reaction to the strict and rigid Victorian morality which was only a facade, his duty was to expose it by any means necessary, including, but not limited to, a conversation. So, the paradox was a weapon in dandy's arsenal to fight the conformity and falsehoods of his contemporary society.

The most interesting and valuable to our research is, in our opinion, the article by T. Schaffer "Fashioning Aestheticism by Aestheticizing Fashion:

⁴ Grinstein A. Oscar Wilde. *American Imago*. Vol. 37. № 2. 1980. P. 126. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26303564>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Guan B. Oscar Wilde's Aestheticism. *Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol. 7. Iss. 2. 2018. P. 24–32. URL: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324812726_Oscar_Wilde's_Aestheticism

⁷ Breuer R. Paradox in Oscar Wilde. *Irish University Review*. Vol. 23. № 2. 1993. P. 224–235. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25484563>

Wilde, Beerbohm, and the Male Aesthetes' Sartorial Codes"⁸. In it, the researcher provides a comprehensive overview of the whole aesthetic (and, by extension, the dandy movement) from its early roots in the Arts and Crafts movement of the 1860ies and Wilde's own efforts to make "The Woman's World" (of which he was an editor) a more serious, useful and respectable publication. The result of both the Arts and Crafts movement and Wilde's work was the establishment of a male aesthete (a role which was before only reserved for females) and the rise of a new trade – the art expert. As for dandyism, there appeared two major and opposite interpretations, which were devised by their major apologists, namely O. Wilde and M. Beerbohm. Wildeans were more free and flamboyant in their expression of aesthetic values both in their dress and manners, while disciples of M. Beerbohm ridiculed O. Wilde and advocated for an opposite approach, praising masculinity, reliability, and conformity above everything else.

R. Meinhold attempts a comprehensive study of a dandy in his relation to aestheticism. The scholar starts by trying to find the etymological roots of the term "dandy", then goes on to define dandyism from different points of view of the observer as "an aesthetic (Baueilaire's concept of the dandy), aestheticizing (Wilde's Dorian Gray) or psycho-pathological (Barbey d'Aurevilly's Des Esseintes) lifestyle"⁹. A significant part of R. Meinhold's research is devoted to the analysis of the two major O. Wilde's dandy characters – Dorian Gray and Lord Henry Wotton ("The Picture of Dorian Gray"). He then proceeds to point out the major dandy traits in those characters' appearance, actions and philosophy. He looks at a dandy from different angles: as a staging artist (his artistism and artificiality), an aesthete (his philosophical views), and an enemy of old age (attitude towards age and death).

3. A short review of the history of aestheticism and an attempt at defining the phenomenon of the dandy

Aestheticism and dandyism are inseparable, because dandyism is a practical implementation of aesthetic principles in one's own self: "Because the dandy regarded himself as artwork, aestheticism is essential to understanding the phenomenon of the dandy. Irrespective of the cultural

⁸ Schaffer T. Fashioning Aestheticism by Aestheticizing Fashion: Wilde, Beerbohm, and the Male Aesthetes' Sartorial Codes. *Victorian Literature and Culture*. Vol. 28. № 1. 2000. P. 39–54. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25058490>

⁹ Meinhold R. The Ideal-typical Incarnation of Fashion: Thee Dandy as... / *Fashion Myths: A Cultural Critique (Translated by John Irons)*. Transcript Verlag. 2013. P. 112–113. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1xxspz.5>

location of dandyism... aestheticism was always central to dandyism”¹⁰. As we have mentioned earlier concerning T. Schaffer’s research, aestheticism takes its roots from the Arts and Crafts movement of the 1860ies, popularised by William Morris and Walter Crane. This movement was antiquarian in nature, meaning that the members of it valued craft objects which had exotic, antiquarian provenance (predominantly of Medieval or Asian origin) while scornfully rejecting the value of other craft objects (mostly created by females), which were common in Victorian-era English homes: “In the Aesthetes’ desire to beautify everyday life, they moved into areas that had historically been associated with women: the decoration of homes and bodies. Male Aesthetes faced the challenge of asserting their authority while simultaneously distinguishing themselves from the women whose advice manuals already dominated the field of domestic arts”¹¹. At that point and for that very purpose advice manuals on domestic arts and decor appeared, which were written by male aesthetes, such as, for example, “Hints on the Household Taste” by Ch. Eastlake. And he and other male authors distinguish themselves from female authors by making remarks, similar to this one: “we may condemn a lady’s opinion on politics – criticise her handwriting – correct her pronunciation of Latin, and disparage her favourite author with a chance of escaping displeasure. But if we venture to question her taste – in the most ordinary sense of the word, we are sure to offend”¹². This male turn to aestheticism caused a new male profession to emerge – an art expert. Men now could derive their economic and social success from their ability to recognize beauty.

The main principles of aestheticism can be summarized as follows: beauty is above morality, art is above reality, and pleasure is above all else. Aestheticism gave an impetus to the flourishing of dandyism, which arose in England in the 18th – at the beginning of the 19th century as a reaction and a countermeasure of sorts to the growing role in the social and cultural life of the rich bourgeois. As stated by B. Guan, “the dandy, who despised the vulgarity and false morality of the newly emergent bourgeoisie, placed particular importance on nonchalant appearance, refined language, banter and cynicism, which manifested the contradiction between spirit and material,

¹⁰ Guan B. Oscar Wilde’s Aestheticism. *Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol. 7. Iss. 2. 2018. P. 24. URL: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324812726_Oscar_Wilde's_Aestheticism

¹¹ Schaffer T. Fashioning Aestheticism by Aestheticizing Fashion: Wilde, Beerbohm, and the Male Aesthetes’ Sartorial Codes. *Victorian Literature and Culture*. Vol. 28. № 1. 2000. P. 40. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25058490>

¹² Eastlake Ch. Hints on the Household Taste / 2nd Edition (revised). London : Longman, Green, and Co.. 1869. P. 8. URL: https://dahp.wa.gov/sites/default/files/HintsOnHouseholdTaste_Eastlake.pdf

aristocracy and vulgarity, art and nature”¹³. Aestheticism became an ideological and aesthetic foundation for dandyism, for an ideal dandy must be a connoisseur of art and beauty.

As one of the principal ideologists of the aesthetic movement, O. Wilde did a lot to establish its main tenets and conceptions. In his formative dialogue “The Decay of Lying” he summarises the principles of this art movement: “Art never expresses anything but itself. It has an independent life, just as Thought has, and develops purely on its own lines. It is not necessarily realistic in an age of realism, nor spiritual in an age of faith. So far from being the creation of its time, it is usually in direct opposition to it, and the only history that it preserves for us is the history of its own progress. Sometimes it returns upon its footsteps, and revives some antique form... At other times it entirely anticipates its age, and produces in one century work that it takes another century to understand, to appreciate, and to enjoy. In no case does it reproduce its age”¹⁴. Art is free from any imposed significance beyond its own expression. It doesn’t reflect the zeitgeist of the era, on the contrary – it almost always goes against the grain into the future or into the past. Thus, the art of the era can only be fully understood in the next age.

There are three main periods of development of European dandyism. Initially, dandyism was considered a phenomenon of fashionable society. Its first classic representative and prototype for all dandies of the 19th century were one George Bryan “Beau” Brummell, a fop and a trendsetter of fashion and cultural preferences for the whole of Europe. His figure is both historically and culturally significant, the first ever attempt at an academic examination of dandyism was, in essence, an aesthetic biography – “The Anatomy of Dandyism, with some Observations on Beau Brummell” (or “Of Dandyism and of George Brummell” in different translations) by a French writer and literary critic Barbey D’Aurevilly (1845). Since then, scholars have been trying to pin down the exact definition of a dandy and produced a multitude of more or less vague characterizations. The difficulty in defining such an elusive phenomenon as dandyism lies in the very nature of a dandy himself: “Dandyism is a whole state of being, and one exists only in a material and visible aspect. It is a state of being entirely composed of fine shades... Double and mutable character!»¹⁵. A dandy is a subtle and elegant provocateur, whose rebellion is more or less covert and often amounts to an exotic, colorful

¹³ Guan B. Oscar Wilde’s Aestheticism. *Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol. 7. Iss. 2. 2018. P. 24. URL: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324812726_Oscar_Wilde's_Aestheticism

¹⁴ Wilde O. The Decay of Lying. P. 16. URL: <http://virgil.org/dswo/courses/novel/wilde-lying.pdf>

¹⁵ D’Aurevilly B. The Anatomy of Dandyism, with some Observations on Beau Brummell / Trans. by D. B. Wyndham Lewis. London : Peter Davies. 1928. P. 7–10. URL: <https://archive.org/details/anatomyofdandysis0000barb>

buttonhole, a demonstratively carelessly tied ascot, or an ironic or paradoxical remark: “the Dandy is a man who, by virtue of his own sense of superior taste, stands outside and slightly above the rest of his society... It is his elected distance from a world of more common concerns that gives the Dandy a perspective of superiority and irony on that world and conversely allows others excluded from his private realm, but members of a larger bourgeoisie to judge him as eccentric and extravagant”¹⁶.

During the second period, the literary canon of dandyism began to take shape when a series of “fashionable novels” was published where the main characters were dandies. These novels were perceived as textbooks of social manners and were a great success. Under the influence of translations of “fashionable novels” and general Anglomania, European dandyism began to develop in France. Its characteristic features are becoming intellectuality, modernism, and rationality. The dandy develops traits of a bohemian artist and the model of gentlemanly behavior as a result becomes more democratic.

The third period of the development of dandyism is associated with the development of European decadence. At this time the literary canon of dandyism is continued by the novels “Against Nature” by J.-K. Huysmans, “The Picture of Dorian Gray” by O. Wilde, and “Zuleika Dobson” by M. Beerbohm. In these novels, the dandy turns into a sophisticated aesthete who is characterized by his own ideology, and rejection of the vulgar, his personality is carefully hidden behind a mask. Oscar Wilde portrays a dandy as a cultural-aristocratic individual who is opposed to society due to his aesthetic sophistication and exclusivity. Principles and ideas of the “philosophy of unreal” are set forth by the writer in his treatises, letters, and essays, but they are most obvious in the images of his fictional dandy characters.

The etymology of the very word “dandy” is uncertain. R. Meinhold presents several possible roots for the term’s origin such as:

A) The Indian word “dandi” is the term used for “someone who carries a stick”, i. e. a higher official in the Indian Civil Service;

B) Dandy is possibly a modified (perhaps coquettish) form of Andy: a shorten or diminutive form of Andrew from the Greek “andrea” (manfulness, bravery, courage) – if one speculates further, the concept could be a caricature of manfulness.

C) The word could also be derived from the English word “dandle” (Scottish “dandill”, German “tändeln”, Middle High German “tant”), a word that in the early 19th century in English roughly meant “refinement” or “gentility”.

¹⁶ Godfrey S. The Dandy as Ironic Figure. *SubStance*. Vol. 11. № 3. Iss. 36. 1982. P. 24. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3684311>

D) It is also conceivable that the origins can be dated back to the English popular rhyme “Jack-a-Dandy” from 1659, which derives from “to dandle” (to dally, fondle).

E) Dandy could further be the name of a historical and now unknown person¹⁷.

The one indisputable fact about the phenomenon of a Dandy is that it originated in England, which was emphasized in most of even the earliest scholarly works on the subject, take, for example, the words of B. D’Aurevilly: “a very particular kind of vanity: English vanity. And since everything which is universal and human has its name in the tongue of Voltaire, that which is not has of necessity to be introduced; and that is why the word Dandyism is not French. It will remain foreign, like the quality it expresses... It is the force of English originality impressing itself on human vanity... which produces what is called Dandyism. There is no means of our sharing this with the English. It is as profound as their own genius”¹⁸. However, he also adds that although dandyism is a distinctly English phenomenon, it was originally influenced by the French culture, which was exported to England’s soil and taken up by the courtiers of King Charles II. The courtiers tried to escape Puritan morality which was exercising its stranglehold on the high society and French influences provided that escape. So was born the culture of “beaux” (pl. from French “beau” – “lovely”, “beautiful”). Thus, Brummell, as the first dandy, is one among many, merely a last chain in the golden link of beaux, but now with an addition of aestheticism and dandyism.

It is hardly possible to sum up every aspect of dandyism, providing a comprehensive but brief definition of a dandy. Thus, we will only attempt to enumerate and analyze the definitive qualities a gentleman must possess to be considered a dandy.

The dandy’s search for the perfection of appearance manifests itself at a glance in his elegant mode of dressing – this, probably, is the most recognizable characteristic of a dandy that everyone is aware of. The image conjured by our imagination at hearing the term “dandy” is usually a gentleman resembling the famous Beau Brummell – an austere figure, dressed in muted colors and a classically-cut suit. But the reality of the matter was somewhat different, for there were two trends among the dandies of the age. The first group, the so-called Wildeans, followed O. Wilde’s

¹⁷ Meinhold R. The Ideal-typical Incarnation of Fashion: Thee Dandy as... *Fashion Myths: A Cultural Critique* (Translated by John Irons). Transcript Verlag. 2013. P. 112. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1xxspz.5>

¹⁸ D’Aurevilly B. The Anatomy of Dandyism, with some Observations on Beau Brummell / Trans. by D. B. Wyndham Lewis. London : Peter Davies. 1928. Pp. 3–4. URL: <https://archive.org/details/anatomyofdandyis0000barb>

interpretation of dandyism in its more vivid, provocative, feminine, and artful form. The second group – the disciples of M. Beerbohm, who wanted to retain the masculine earnestness, respectability, self-discipline, and seriousness of art. This second type is largely considered to be a “classical” dandy. Genuinely believing in the seriousness of their ideas or simply trying to avoid being branded as vane by Victorian society, they created aestheticism as the theory of beauty, based on immutable laws, unlike the “lowly” sense of taste and fashion. Though having their differences, the followers of both O. Wilde and M. Beerbohm considered Art to be timeless, transcendent, symbolic, and meaningful, while the Dame Fashion – an unforgiving and fleeting tyrant. Closely following O. Wilde’s maxim – “One should either be a work of Art, or wear a work of Art”¹⁹, they sought to convey Art into the clothing, thereby starting the Aesthetic Dress Reform movement. The Green Carnation was a symbol, invented by O. Wilde. Wildeans also used sunflowers, lilies and peacock feathers as decorative elements in their dress. They wore breeches, doublets, wide-brimmed hats, cloaks and capes in blue, lavender, green and yellow, made from satin, silk and velvet, decorated with lace. They wore their hair long. They infused fashion with serious and historical references. On the other hand, M. Beerbohm followed a different path: he did away with all the 18th-century influences in man’s fashion – the multicolored suits, satin and velvet, wide-brimmed hats, and embroidery. He followed Beau Brummell who had reduced the acceptable suit colors to white and black. Beerbohm, however, did not leave various shades of black and white outside the acceptable variation: he could be seen wearing a coat of a color that left the spectator uncertain – was it purple or dark chocolate? Much like an ideal dandy, he tested the limits of acceptability not in huge breaks as did O. Wilde and his followers, but in slight, almost imperceptible, shifts²⁰.

A logical, but less noted, continuation of the dandy’s quest for the perfection of appearance is his fascination with his own body or male narcissism: “Wilde was fascinated by the pleasure derived from the contemplation and admiration of his own body and self as well”²¹. The dandy’s relationship with aging and death is a complex one. On the one hand, a dandy is aware that his life, as well as any other performance, must someday end, and he is looking to stage his death in dramatic panoply befitting his life

¹⁹ Wilde O. Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young. *The Writings of Oscar Wilde*. London, N. Y.: A. R. Keller & Co. 1909. P. 143. URL: <https://archive.org/details/epigramsphrasesp00wild/mode/2up>

²⁰ Schaffer T. Fashioning Aestheticism by Aestheticizing Fashion: Wilde, Beerbohm, and the Male Aesthetes’ Sartorial Codes. *Victorian Literature and Culture*. Vol. 28. № 1. 2000. P. 44–47. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25058490>

²¹ Guan B. Oscar Wilde’s Aestheticism. *Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol. 7. Iss. 2. 2018. P. 25. URL: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324812726_Oscar_Wilde's_Aestheticism

as a work of Art. He regards death and funeral as his ultimate performance, the crowning glory of his brilliant life. Hidden behind this notion of “the more dead, the more beautiful” is his longing for eternal existence in beauty. That is why the dandy also fears and hates aging and death because he knows that age disfigures, makes one’s once beautiful features haggard, it’s disgusting. There is nothing for him after death as well, no eternal life, just the ugliness of decay and what’s even worse – oblivion. Thus, there is a certain age bracket that one must fit to be considered a dandy – from seventeen to fifty, ideally from seventeen to thirty-five²².

From the following quotation we can derive the second quality of a dandy, which is vanity – a true dandy has no occupation or job, he simply lives, spending his time in visits to tailors, theaters, operas, gambling, or spectating horse races (in short – all those activities which are considered an antithesis of occupation in a sense of “doing something useful”): “his [dandy’s] sole preoccupation is the cultivation of beauty in his own person and when he dies, all he leaves is a reputation”²³.

The third trait of an ideal dandy is what can be called a provocative genius. B. D’Aurevilly wrote about it as the “ability always to produce the unexpected, something for which a mind accustomed to the yoke of routine cannot in sound logic be prepared... Dandyism... plays with the regulations, but at the same time pays them due respect. It suffers from them, and avenges itself by submitting... it dominates and is dominated by turns... To play this game it is necessary to have at one’s command all the graces which make up Grace, as all the delicate tints of the prism unite to form the opal... He [Beau Brummell] possessed grace as Providence dowers it, and as the strait-jacketing of society deforms it... and by its means he responded to the capricious needs of a bored society too rigidly stooping under the rigours of a code. He was a proof of that truth which should be repeated incessantly to men subject to routine: namely, if the wings of Fancy are clipped, they sprout again longer by half”²⁴. This particular trait is noted by S. Godfrey as well: “The Dandy is not an anarchist who overthrows rules of behaviour and discourse; rather, he exploits their logic in order to produce the unexpected (an unexpected that conforms, however, to the rules of unexpectedness within that system) and

²² Meinhold R. The Ideal-typical Incarnation of Fashion: Thee Dandy as... *Fashion Myths: A Cultural Critique* (Translated by John Irons). *Transcript Verlag*. 2013. P. 126–131. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1xxspz.5>

²³ Godfrey S. The Dandy as Ironic Figure. *SubStance*. Vol. 11. № 3. Iss. 36. 1982. P. 23. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3684311>

²⁴ D’Aurevilly B. The Anatomy of Dandyism, with some Observations on Beau Brummell / Trans. by D. B. Wyndham Lewis. London : Peter Davies. 1928. P. 10. URL: <https://archive.org/details/anatomyofdandysis0000barb>

challenges their system from within”²⁵. An ideal dandy is always forced to maintain a delicate balance between the unexpected and conformity, to shake up the “polite society” but just a little, so as not to topple it completely, because if the society is ruined, so is the dandy as its brilliant “son”.

The fourth trait stems from his ability to produce the unexpected and can in many cases be similar to it because this ability is most vividly expressed in a dandy’s speech. It is a quality of an ideal dandy’s discourse, namely – his active and skillful use of paradox, epigram and irony. The dandy is distinguished by his discourse. The paradox of a dandy is “what struck the first reviewers and commentators in Wilde and what has remained his trademark as a dandy, aesthete, decadent and writer is paradox in the sense of its etymology: *part doxan* means “contrary to what everybody expects” or “contrary to received wisdom”. A statement, therefore, is said to be paradoxical if it seems to be absurd at first sight but gains in plausibility the closer one looks at the matter”²⁶. The concept of paradox is at the very core of the dandy: on the one hand, he mocks the established society with his words and actions, but on the other hand, he is dependent on this very society for his existence. This dual nature forces him to constantly live on the edge, he uses paradox, epigram and irony to mock, wound and laugh at the norms of Victorian society with its higher classes seemingly occupying the moral high ground but, in fact, rotten to the core. Doing all this he was able to stay charming: “In conversation his good qualities are reflected – geniality, generosity, tolerance, lack of malice or resentment, open-mindedness and lack of prejudice, desire to please and to be pleased... More than this, however, his conversation reflects the merits of his thought and work – his quick intellectual penetration, his breadth of learning and rapidity of intuitive insight, his love of phrases and verbal embroidery, his delight at shocking in and out of season by epigram and exaggeration. And, behind all this, Wilde, as he talked, revealed continually that duality which exists in all his actions and thought, and which is expressed at its extreme in his favourite conversational device, the paradox”²⁷. O. Wilde’s own dandy characters echoed this sentiment in the most ingenious forms: Lord Henry fears the most dreadful thing in life – “there is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about”²⁸. Lord Henry just shows how

²⁵ Godfrey S. The Dandy as Ironic Figure. *SubStance*. Vol. 11. № 3. Iss. 36. 1982. P. 28. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3684311>

²⁶ Breuer R. Paradox in Oscar Wilde. *Irish University Review*. Vol. 23. № 2. 1993. P. 226. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25484563>

²⁷ Woodcock G. The Paradox of Oscar Wilde. London-N. Y. : Boardman & Co. 1940. P. 187. URL: <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.183254>

²⁸ Wilde O. The Picture of Dorian Gray. Ch. 1. URL: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/174/174-h/174-h.htm>

vain he is by stating that although to be the subject of talk and gossip of society is bad, not being talked about, to be forgotten or unappreciated is even worse than that. In “An Ideal Husband” Lord Goring says, concerning Robert Chiltern’s machination, that “in England a man who can’t talk morality twice a week to a large, popular, immoral audience is quite over as a serious politician. There would be nothing left for him as a profession except Botany or the Church”²⁹. One may not possess moral superiority but even the appearance of having it is important (especially for a politician), for otherwise a man is doomed to insignificance in Victorian society. As for the dandy’s irony, it’s in a class of its own: “If the common ironic inversion is to say the opposite of what *you* think, the Dandy’s ironic inversion consists in saying (or doing) the opposite of what *others* think”³⁰.

The fifth quality of an ideal dandy is dandyism as a combination of his philosophical views. Though in essence an ideal dandy is guided first and foremost by aestheticism (as we have noted before), to some extent the dandy’s philosophy has certain elements of stoicism in a sense of self-discipline in order to hide and overcome negative emotions: “These Stoics of the boudoir absorb under their mask the blood of their wounds, and remain masked. To appear is to be, for Dandies as for women”³¹. This is further noted by R. Meinhold: “To claim that dandyism is stoicism is too broad, although the former does admittedly seek to combine virtues of the latter in itself, such as calmness of soul, imperturbability, self-discipline and self-perfection. But dandyism does not share the Stoic’s ethical ideal of community participation... In a noble form, it unites the virtues of self-discipline, self-assurance and self-awareness at all levels with coolness, composure, imperturbability and audacity. Over-fine elegance does not seek to attract attention via extreme elegance”³². That particular wish of a dandy to seem to be what he likes his audience to see is further embodied both in his manner of dressing and his actions and behavior: for Wilde, there was no difference between clothing and a costume – he always dressed for the audience. He didn’t want to reveal his emotions in his clothes, on the contrary, he presented a completely artificial image and derived satisfaction from the process. Wilde

²⁹ Wilde O. An Ideal Husband. Act 2. URL: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/885/885-h/885-h.htm>

³⁰ Godfrey S. The Dandy as Ironic Figure. *SubStance*. Vol. 11. № 3. Iss. 36. 1982. P. 28. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3684311>

³¹ D’Aurevilly B. The Anatomy of Dandyism, with some Observations on Beau Brummell / *Trans. by D. B. Wyndham Lewis*. London: Peter Davies. 1928. P. 46. URL: <https://archive.org/details/anatomyofdandyis0000barb>

³² Meinhold R. The Ideal-typical Incarnation of Fashion: Thee Dandy as... / *Fashion Myths: A Cultural Critique (Translated by John Irons)*. Transcript Verlag. 2013. Pp. 113, 118. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1xxspz.5>

didn't even care who formed his audience, as long as there was one. Thus, in his own view, he became a work of Art, a thing as farthest from the tyranny of Dame Fashion as can be³³. Furthermore, dandyism has certain traits of platonism, manifesting in the dandy's attitude towards aging and death. Here death is more interesting, as his attitude is double-sided. On the one hand, a dandy is regarding death as a natural conclusion to his life as a play and a work of Art, and he tries to make it as artificial (i. e. beautiful) as possible, staging it in as grand setting as he can manage. He seeks to immortalize himself in death and from a certain perspective is regarding it as the aesthetic apogee of his life. This likens his philosophy to that of Plato, for he thought that a true philosopher is granted absolute knowledge in death³⁴.

4. Dandies in Oscar Wilde's selected fiction

In this section of our research we will describe and analyze how all five major qualities of an ideal dandy are represented in selected O. Wilde's dandy characters such as Lord Goring ("An Ideal Husband"), Lord Henry Wotton and Dorian Gray ("The Picture of Dorian Gray").

It is hardly surprising that dandies are present in almost every work of fiction by O. Wilde. The author empowers his characters with clear traits, highlighting one or another facet of dandyism, and this makes it possible to assess his attitude towards a certain character. In this sense, the play "An Ideal Husband" is especially relevant, because it contains one of the best dandy characters in all Wilde's works. A philosopher, a close friend of the Chilterns, who hides behind the mask of a dandy – that is how Lord Goring is presented to us. One can see clearly that he is a perfect dandy from the tips of his shoes up to the boutonniere: "enter Lord Goring. Thirty-four, but always says he is younger. A well-bred, expressionless face. He is clever, but would not like to be thought so. A flawless dandy, he would be annoyed if he were considered romantic"³⁵. That little detail about his age is particularly interesting because it confirms R. Meinhold's suggestion that age is of significant importance for a dandy.

Lord Goring, an aristocrat, is a big spender, a slacker and a destiny's darling, a philosopher and an intellectual who enjoys a luxurious lifestyle but hides behind a mask of airheaded passivity: "I love talking about nothing... It

³³ Schaffer T. Fashioning Aestheticism by Aestheticizing Fashion: Wilde, Beerbohm, and the Male Aesthetes' Sartorial Codes. *Victorian Literature and Culture*. Vol. 28. № 1. 2000. Pp. 46. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25058490>

³⁴ Meinhold R. The Ideal-typical Incarnation of Fashion: Thee Dandy as... / *Fashion Myths: A Cultural Critique (Translated by John Irons)*. Transcript Verlag. 2013. P. 126. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1xxspz.5>

³⁵ Wilde O. An Ideal Husband. Act 1. URL: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/885/885-h/885-h.htm>

is the only thing I know anything about”³⁶. He has never had to work a day in his life.

Furthermore, the author lets us know that “He [Lord Goring] plays with life, and is on perfectly good terms with the world. He is fond of being misunderstood. It gives him a post of vantage”³⁷. He masterfully conceals his true feelings, intellect and philosophical depth from his audience – even his own father falls under this ruse: Lord Caversham calls him “my good-for-nothing young son”. As in the examples above, Lord Goring often indulges himself in paradox, epigram and subtle irony. The writer puts a number of his own aphorisms, with which he more than once shocked society, in Lord Goring’s mouth. That is why in the dialogue between the dandy and his butler, all of Goring’s answers sound like memorized aphorisms, and parodies, and this feeling increases with each consecutive line: “Fashion is what one wears oneself”, “vulgarity is simply the conduct of other people”, “falsehoods the truths of other people”, “the only possible society is oneself”, and finally “to love oneself is the beginning of a lifelong romance”³⁸. This “manifesto” of dandyism in front of the butler is delivered in the best traditions of the author’s self-irony. O. Wilde himself brings a number of his own ideas to the level of paradox, but at the same time maintains a certain distance from his character. He, as a researcher, is experimenting with his pet dandy, testing him for strength and, as an outside observer, is eager to see whether Goring will be able to retain his superiority like a real dandy should. And isn’t it Lord Goring who answers his creator – what should you do when you and your friends are in a difficult situation? Maybe it’s time to throw away the mask and become a true gentleman.

In the play, thanks to Lord Goring, his ingenuity and extraordinary intellect, complicated situations unravel. At a decisive moment, he is “pulling himself together for a great effort, and showing the philosopher that underlies the dandy”³⁹. But, if you look more closely, it seems that the author treats his hero with a slight irony (as does Lord Goring himself): “enter Lord Goring in evening dress with a buttonhole. He is wearing a silk hat and Inverness cape. White-gloved, he carries a Louis Seize cane. His are all the delicate fopperies of Fashion. One sees that he stands in immediate relation to modern life, makes it indeed, and so masters it. He is the first well-dressed philosopher in the history of thought”⁴⁰. Although the description of Lord Goring as “a first

³⁶ Wilde O. An Ideal Husband. Act 1. URL: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/885/885-h/885-h.htm>

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

well-dressed philosopher” is certainly ironic, it doesn’t diminish the character. On the contrary, he is obviously favored by the author.

We can conclude that Lord Goring is an example of an ideal dandy, or a dandy as he should be. He is elegant, well-mannered, does not work for a living, intelligent, witty, he follows the code of aestheticism, and possesses a strong will and iron self-discipline, which doesn’t allow him to slide into excess.

The theme of a young dandy, influenced by an older gentleman who is preaching the ideas of “new Hedonism”, is revealed in the novel “The Picture of Dorian Gray”. O. Wilde created three characters, whose worldviews cannot be more different from each other and thus irreconcilable, though he had seemingly united all three in his own person as the author described it in his letter to Ralph Payne: “Basil Hallward is what I think I am: Lord Henry what the world thinks me: Dorian what I would like to be – in other ages, perhaps”⁴¹. Although Basil Hallward is not the subject of our current research, the other two characters are. Their relationship makes them more special than the previously mentioned Lord Goring. Lord Henry Wotton and Dorian Gray are quite inseparable because they have a kind of mentor-student relationship throughout most of the novel’s plot. Lord Henry is a major influence in Dorian’s life, and not for the best.

O. Wilde has taken up that idea of a dandy fashioning himself into a work of art without being distracted by artistic pursuits. Developing the storyline for the novel, the author introduces a dandy character of a very different sort – an experienced rake, cynic and hedonist Lord Henry Wotton. We do not have a clear description of Lord Henry’s dress, appearance, or even age, but we can infer that he is as elegant and well-mannered as a dandy should be (though later he is revealed to be quite shallow) and his apparent experience in worldly pleasures hints at a greater age than that of Dorian (though he is still sometimes referred to as a “young lord” in the novel) – we can assume that he is around thirty-five at the beginning of the novel.

Lord Henry is a nobleman who has a rank without any apparent responsibilities and who mostly spends his life inside the “polite society”. He is quite intelligent, and has an eye for beauty and detail, but at the same time, he doesn’t concern himself much with anything outside of what attracts his (mostly fleeting) attention. His intellectual, almost scientific air is there only to impress people who do not know him very well. If one is to look deeper into his personality, he might be disappointed to find nothing of real substance inside that studied shell (unlike, for example, Lord Goring, who is in this

⁴¹ Wilde O. To Ralph Payne. *Selected letters* / Ed. Rupert Hart-Davis. Oxford University Press. 1979. P. 116. URL: <https://archive.org/details/selectedletterso000wild/page/116/mode/2up?view=theater>

a total opposite of Lord Henry – the former, unlike the latter, has profound knowledge and intellect, though he tries to conceal it).

Sir Henry Wotton is a master of sophisticated speech. At one point in the novel he is even called Prince Paradox by Dorian. He is often commenting about things in a very amusing and refreshingly surprising manner. For example, talking about friendship, he says: “I choose my friends for their good looks, my acquaintances for their good characters, and my enemies for their good intellects. A man cannot be too careful in the choice of his enemies”⁴². This quote can be seen as an example of a paradox realized through anaphora. Another realization of a paradox through antithesis in Lord Henry’s comment on friendship may evoke different feelings and motivations in people with different social, national, and educational backgrounds: “Laughter is not at all a bad beginning for a friendship, and it is far the best ending for one”⁴³.

As for Lord Henry’s philosophical ideas, he is a follower of what he calls “New Hedonism”. That philosophy can be best explained by quoting his own words: “I believe that if one man were to live out his life fully and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream... We are punished for our refusals. Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind and poisons us. The body sins once, and has done with its sin, for action is a mode of purification... The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself, with desire for what its monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful”⁴⁴. Being under the influence of a “poisonous” Yellow Book (which is an allusion to no other than “Against Nature” by J.-K. Huysmans), given to him by Lord Henry, Dorian develops a curiosity for life. The thirst for pleasure became more acute the more diligently Dorian satisfied it, which eventually leads to his downfall.

In the novel “The Picture of Dorian Gray” the philosophical views of O. Wilde on aestheticism, dandyism and art were laid bare. Lord Henry Wotton, who is a mold of tastes, manners and beliefs of O. Wilde himself, is a spiritual leader in the novel. He belongs to critics-aesthetes, adepts of art. This sophisticated aesthete proclaims a manifesto of new hedonism that glorifies the joy of physical pleasure as one’s loftiest goal and a necessary condition of happiness. Lord Henry embodies O. Wilde’s aesthetic and philosophical ideas in Dorian Gray, but without the crucial element of balance and moderation, thereby corrupting him. And under the influence of the “poisonous book” that Wotton gives Gray, the protagonist begins to believe

⁴² Wilde O. The Picture of Dorian Gray. Ch. 1. URL: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/174/174-h/174-h.htm>

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

that “art is above life”. The ability to satisfy his desires with impunity (because, as Dorian thinks, only the portrait suffers for his sins) absorbs him so much that he is even capable of the crime of killing his friend and benefactor Basil Hallward. Dorian’s penchant for art for the art’s sake combined with the fact that he has no moral conviction and thus cannot distinguish good from evil led to corruption, downfall and destruction of his soul. Lord Henry is a type of dandy-hedonist who preaches surrender to one’s desires, but he doesn’t practice what he preaches, preferring instead to test his philosophy on other people whom he seduces with his malign powers of persuasion and charm.

This book is certainly a brilliant example of a “fashionable novel” in which the main character – Dorian Gray, a dandy: his appearance, behavior, and clothes challenge society, but inspire others to follow his lead: “to him life itself was the first, the greatest, of the arts, and for it all the other arts seemed to be but a preparation. Fashion, by which what is really fantastic becomes for a moment universal, and dandyism, which, in its own way, is an attempt to assert the absolute modernity of beauty, had, of course, their fascination for him. His mode of dressing, and the particular styles that from time to time he affected, had their marked influence on the young exquisites of the Mayfair balls and Pall Mall club windows, who copied him in everything that he did, and tried to reproduce the accidental charm of his graceful, though to him only half-serious, fopperies”⁴⁵. The beauty of Dorian Gray, his fascination with exoticism and precious things, his desire to be surrounded by them and feel a great passion for them – all this corresponded with the image of a dandy – a “golden boy”: “Yes, he was certainly wonderfully handsome, with his finely-curved scarlet lips, his frank blue eyes, his crisp gold hair. There was something in his face that made one trust him at once. All the candor of youth was there, as well as all youth’s passionate purity. One felt that he had kept himself unspotted from the world”⁴⁶. At the beginning of the novel Dorian is young, a little over twenty, as Basil Hallward explains to Lord Henry. At the end of the novel Dorian is thirty-eight.

Dorian’s parents died when he was still a child and at the beginning of the novel the youth lived with his grandfather Lord Kelso, who hated him and tried to keep him at a distance. As a representative of the British aristocracy Dorian is rich enough to have no real occupation, except that he is a model for Basil Hallward. But this was a passive, vane role. In the novel we never see him doing any work whatsoever, which is, as we have already established, one of the hallmarks of a dandy. He lived in a sheltered environment, not knowing

⁴⁵ Wilde O. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Ch. 11. URL: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/174/174-h/174-h.htm>

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

much about real life and real people outside the selected aristocratic society before he met Basil Hallward and Lord Henry. The latter says, when he is talking to Dorian: “At present you are a perfect type. Don’t make yourself incomplete. You are quite flawless now... I am so glad that you have never done anything, never carved a statue, or painted a picture, or produced anything outside of yourself! Life has been your art. You have set yourself to music. Your days are your sonnets”⁴⁷.

Dorian Gray is certainly capable of elegant and charming speech, under the tutelage of Lord Henry he has also mastered the use of paradox, as can be seen from the following examples: “Stop!» faltered Dorian Gray, “stop! you bewilder me. I don’t know what to say. There is some answer to you, but I cannot find it. Don’t speak. Let me think. Or, rather, let me try not to think”⁴⁸ and later in the novel “I don’t think I am likely to marry, Harry. I am too much in love”⁴⁹.

Dorian tries to lead a life based on the principles of aestheticism, but because of Lord Henry’s influence he falls into a trap of Henry’s “New Hedonism”. Because Dorian is still young and was relatively sheltered from real life before meeting Lord Henry, his hedonistic philosophy seems very fresh and novel to Dorian, but he lacks the skill to maintain the balance between his desires and their realization, which eventually leads to his death and infamy. There is certainly nothing stoic or platonic about Dorian, his life is an embodiment of aestheticism, which without self-discipline and control turns into pure hedonism, leading to the corruption of body and soul. Thus, Dorian Gray is a dandy without one of a dandy’s most important qualities – the art of balance.

Among three dandy characters from the selected fiction of O. Wilde that we have analyzed, we concluded that only Lord Goring from the play “An Ideal Husband” can be considered an ideal of a dandy. Although Dorian Gray in “The Picture of Dorian Gray” starts as an ideal young dandy, he soon descends into sin under the influence of Lord Henry, the third character under our consideration, who is a hedonist. He is well-mannered, and relatively intelligent (or seems to be), but he perverts aestheticism, interpreting it simply as a pursuit of pleasure in all forms and at any cost. He infects Dorian, who is young and inexperienced in worldly matters, with his destructive ideas. Because Dorian is eager to please Lord Henry, he tries to follow his teachings to the letter. Lord Henry seems almost happy to watch Dorian’s gradual descent into infamy. He shows no sadness or remorse as well when he learns about Dorian’s suicide. Thus, we can call Dorian Gray a failed, “fallen” dandy.

⁴⁷ Wilde O. The Picture of Dorian Gray. Ch. 19. URL: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/174/174-h/174-h.htm>

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

CONCLUSIONS

One might say that the reputation of a dandy has survived through the ages, despite being ridiculed by the wider community and the dandy indeed became a work of art to which status he so aspired.

In his writings, Oscar Wilde developed the philosophy of dandyism; he shows the regression from the classic dandy in the persona of Lord Goring to the “fallen” dandy in *Dorian Gray*. In his mindless pursuit of pleasure and satisfaction, getting everything from life, moral or immoral, Dorian loses something most precious – his soul, his humanity. At the same time, we see Sir Henry Wotton, who, in his desire to experiment with human souls, is only interested in seeing how the corruption of his ideas subverts Dorian, he is indifferent and unmoved by Gray’s ultimate fate. Thus, we now understand that the pursuit of beauty can turn into a destructive force.

Our research consists of four paragraphs. In the first paragraph we the problem of our research, and establish its goals and topicality. The second paragraph is devoted to an overview of major scholarly works on the subjects of aestheticism, dandyism, and the works of O. Wilde. The third paragraph deals with the history of aestheticism, dandyism, and its forms and qualities. The last paragraph contains the description and character analysis of several dandy characters from selected works of O. Wilde.

In our research we have accomplished all our goals, providing a short overview and analysis of the history of aestheticism and dandyism, describing the most notable qualities of a dandy, which are: the dandy’s quest for perfect appearance (manifesting in dressing, manners, age, and narcissism), vanity (lack of occupation), provocative genius (the ability to produce the unexpected), dandy’s discourse (his usage of paradox, epigram, and irony) and dandyism (as a combination of aestheticism, stoicism, and platonism). We have established that there are at least three different kinds of dandies in the literary works of O. Wilde we have analyzed: an ideal dandy, a dandy-hedonist, and a fallen dandy.

In conclusion, we suggest that further research of O. Wilde’s dandy characters on a larger selection of his literary works is needed. Nearly every play by O. Wilde has one or more dandy characters in it and they are all different and unique (for example Lord Illingworth in “*A Woman of No Importance*” or Algernon and Jack in “*The Importance of Being Earnest*”).

SUMMARY

In recent decades we have witnessed an inevitable renaissance of profound scholarly and critical interest in the ambiguous figure of a dandy in almost every sphere of research. That interest, in our opinion, is provoked, at least in part, by the dandy as an ideal for the middle and higher-class gentlemen of the

18th-19th century society (not unlike the “Renaissance man” at the end of the 14th to 15th centuries). On the other hand, it stems from a very practical interest – is it still possible for a dandy to exist in our pragmatic, modern era or not?

In our research, we attempted to analyze the qualities of a dandy and the philosophy of dandyism as it is realized in selected Oscar Wilde’s fiction. We have provided a short overview of the history of aestheticism and dandyism, and we singled out notable qualities of a dandy, which are: the dandy’s quest for perfect appearance (manifesting in dressing, manners, age and narcissism), vanity (lack of occupation), provocative genius (the ability to produce the unexpected), dandy’s discourse (his usage of paradox, epigram and irony) and dandyism (as a combination of aestheticism, stoicism and platonism). After that, we analyzed the realization of those traits in dandy characters in the play “An Ideal Husband” and the novel “The Picture of Dorian Gray” by O. Wilde. We found out that there are at least three different kinds of dandies depicted in those literary works: an ideal dandy, a dandy-hedonist, and a fallen dandy.

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