



# Moral Corruption in *Salome*, *Lady Windermere's Fan* and a *Woman of No Importance*

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## Abstract:

*Oscar Wilde (1854 to 1900) was the shining star of the English literary field in the nineteenth century. He made prolific contribution to the English literature. His fame as a dramatist began with the production of Lady Windermere's Fan in (1892). Wilde depicted here the atmosphere of one of those modern drawing rooms with pink lampshade. As an outstanding play writer, his reputation chiefly relies on his major comedies, Salome (1891), Lady Windermere's Fan (1892), A Woman of no Importance (1893), The Importance of Being Earnest (Performed 1895, Published 1898). Here, research title: realistic picture of upper class in Oscar Wilde's plays: A critical study, covered his plays are as Salome (1891), Lady Windermere's Fan (1892) and A Woman of No Importance (1893).*

**Keywords:** *Moral corruption, Salome, Oscar Wilde*

## 1. Introduction

All these plays are characterized by unnatural plots and extraordinarily witty dialogues which proved that he had a natural talent for stage craft and theatrical effects. The plays glisten with his clever paradoxes and invested proverbs as "Experience is the greatest teacher", "A man who knows the price of everything."

## 2. Salome

Wilde's *Salome (1891)* is a serious drama about fanatical passion, originally written in French and was produced in Paris. It was translated into English by Lord Alfred Douglas. It was a fabulous play. The Young Syrian, the Page of Herodias, and some soldiers are gathered on a balcony at King Herod's palace, overlooking into a well. Offstage, Herod is conducting a big party with many international guests. While the Syrian and the Page discuss the moon, a figure for the princess Salome. Syrian is attracted to Salome. He was former prince and captain of Herod's guard. Soldiers discuss a group of Jews in Herod's court, who are loudly disputing their religion. They become anxious that the Tetrarch is sad because, he is looking at someone, and they try to determine who it is. They begin a conversation about religion, which is interrupted by an offstage voice shouting prophecies about the coming of the Messiah. One of the soldiers reveals that it is the voice of Iokanaan, a gentle prophet whom Herod had captured in the desert alongside his sizable following of disciples.

The prophet is now imprisoned in the palace well. One of the soldiers reveal which is the same place where Herod had imprisoned his brother for twelve years before and he had strangled him (then Herod married with his brother's wife). When one of the men asks to see the prophet, another soldier explains that Herod has forbid anyone from visiting or even looking at his prisoner. Salome enters, explaining to the group on the balcony that she grew tired of the banquet. Because her step father Herod was constantly staring at her. Upon hearing the shouting

of Iokanaan, Salome becomes curious. She asks the Young Syrian and the other soldier questions about the body behind the voice. They explain that Iokanaan is the prophet who has been shouting terrible things about Herodias, Salome's mother, and tell her that he is imprisoned in the palace cistern. After dismissing the slave who comes to bring her back to the banquet, Salome convinces the Syrian to let her see the prophet by promising him that she will look at him the next day, when she is traveling through the gateway of the idol sellers.

### 3. Love as a Crazy Symbol

Salome, finding that she is attracted to Iokanaan, begs him for a kiss, but he refused recognizing her as the daughter of Herodias, whose incestuous marriage he considers blasphemous. He refused to look at her. Upon seeing Salome's desire for Iokanaan, the Syrian becomes distraught and killed himself. Two soldiers rushed to hide his body from Herod while the Page, infatuated with the Syrian, mourns the death of his dear friend. Iokanaan, urging Salome to seek the Son of Man, returns to the depths of the cistern.

Herod and Herodias enter, accompanied by their guests. Aware that Salome is nearby, Herod, to his wife's disapproval, asks his slaves that the festivities be moved outside. Herod slips in the blood of the slain Syrian, which he recognizes as an omen. Nevertheless, Herod soon abandons the conversation he is having with his guests about religion and politics to try to persuade Salome to join him over wine and fruit. She refused, which amuses Herodias. The voice of Iokanaan, shouting insults about Herodias, interrupts the discussion and upsets the queen. She suggested to her husband that he turned Iokanaan over to the Jews who have been clamoring for him. A conversation between five Jews reveals that, while they have different thoughts about the unseen Jewish God, they are all offended by Iokanaan's claim to be such a prophet an honor conferred only on the Hebrew prophet Elias.

### 4. Characteristics

After discussing the controversial figure of Christ, to whom he is indifferent, with the Jews and a Nazarene, Herod is again distracted by the sight of Salome. He asks her to dance for him. When she refused him, Herod offered her anything of her choice from his vast kingdom for a single dance. Ignoring her mother's orders that she didn't dance, Salome finally agreed after Herod has sworn on his life that he will grant her anything she desires.

Despite the ill omen of blood on the floor, and Iokanaan's shouting prophesy of doom, Herod allows Salome to perform the Dance of the Seven Veils. After she has finished, she asked him for Iokanaan's head on a silver charger. Herodias, believed that Salome is avenging her honor, is pleased with the request, but the rest of the court is scandalized. Herod pleads with Salome to ignore her mother's wishes, but Salome assures the Tetrarch that she is acting on her own desires. After many attempts to bargain with Salome but it was failed. Herod reluctantly orders the execution of Iokanaan. While the executioner hesitates to complete the task, he finally beheads the prophet inside the cistern at the urging of soldiers under Salome's command. The executioner presents Iokanaan's head to Salome on his silver shield. After initial joy, Salome regrets that Iokanaan's eyes are still closed, indicating that, even in death, he refuses to return her lustful gaze.

At that time some terrible things happened in the court. Herod ordered his slaves to put out the torches and hide the moon and then prepares to leave the terrace for the relative safety of the palace interior. As Herod's attendants extinguish the terrace torches, a cloud suddenly conceals the moon, leaving only a ray of light to illumine Salome as she finally kisses Iokanaan on the mouth. Catching sight of the kiss on his way up the palace staircase, Herod orders his soldiers to

kill that woman, so Salome is crushed to death beneath their shields.

### **5. Lady Windermere's Fan**

*Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892) the play opens in the morning room of the Windermere's residence in London. It is tea time and Lady Windermere who is preparing for her birthday ball, that evening her friend would visit her house. Lord Darlington. She shows off her new fan: a present from her husband. She explains to Lord Darlington that she is upset over the compliments he continues to pay to her, revealing that she is a Puritan and has very particular views about what is acceptable in society. The Duchess of Berwick calls and Lord Darlington leaves shortly thereafter. The Duchess informs Lady Windermere that her husband may be betraying her marriage by making repeated visit to another woman, Mrs. Erlynne, and possibly giving her large sums of money. The rumor has been gossip among London society for quite a while, though seemingly this is the first Lady Windermere has heard about.

Following the departure of the Duchess, Lady Windermere decides to check her husband's bank book. She finds the book in a desk and sees that nothing appears amiss, though on returning she discovers a second bank book: one with a lock. After prying the lock open, she finds it lists large sums of money given to Mrs. Erlynne.

### **6. Hypocrisy**

At this point, Lord Windermere enters and she confronts him. Though he cannot deny that he has had dealings with Mrs. Erlynne, he states that he is not betraying Lady Windermere. He requests that she send Mrs. Erlynne an invitation to her birthday ball that evening in order to help her back into society. When Lady Windermere refused, he writes out an invitation himself. Lady Windermere makes clear her intention to cause a scene if Mrs. Erlynne appears, to which Lord Windermere responds that it would be in her best interest not to do so. Lady Windermere leaves in disgust to prepare for the party, and Lord Windermere reveals in soliloquy that he is protecting Mrs. Erlynne's true identity to save his wife extreme humiliation. What shall I do? I dare not tell her who this woman really is? The shame would kill her. It opens in the Windermere's' drawing room during the birthday ball that evening.

Many guests enter, and make small talk. Lord Windermere enters and asks Lady Windermere to speak with him, but she brushes him off. A friend of Lord Windermere's, Lord Augustus Lorton, pulls him aside to inquire about Mrs. Erlynne, with whom he is enamored. Lord Windermere reveals that there is nothing wrong with his relationship with Mrs. Erlynne, and that she will be attending the ball, which comes as a great relief to Lord Augustus as he was worried about her social standing.

After an unsuccessful attempt to make peace with his wife, Lord Windermere summons the courage to tell the truth to her, but at that moment Mrs. Erlynne arrives at the party, where she is greeted coldly by Lady Windermere, spoiling his plan. Alone, Lady Windermere and Lord Darlington discuss Mrs. Erlynne's attendance. Lady Windermere irritated and confused and asked Lord Darlington to be her friend. Instead of friendship, Lord Darlington takes advantage of Lady Windermere's tragic state and professes his love to her, offering her his life, and inviting her to risk short term social humiliation for a new life with him. Lord Darlington sets her an ultimatum to try to convince her to take action immediately, while still in a state of shock. Lady Windermere is shocked by the revelation, and finds she does not have the courage to take the offer. Heartbroken, Lord Darlington announces that he will leave the country the next day and that they will never meet again, and left the party.

### **7. Man Woman Relationship**

The guests begin to leave, and say goodnight to Lady Windermere and some remarking positively about Mrs. Erlynne. On the other side of the room Mrs. Erlynne is discussing her plans with Lord Windermere; she intends to marry Lord Augustus and will require some money from Lord Windermere. Later, Lady Windermere, in spite of her earlier reluctance, decides to leave the house at once for Lord Darlington, and leaves a note to that effect for Lord Windermere. Mrs. Erlynne discovers the note and Lady Windermere has gone, and is curiously worried by this. While reading the note, a brief monologue reveals that she is in fact Lady Windermere's mother and made a similar mistake herself twenty years previously. She takes the letter and exits to locate Lady Windermere. How can I save her? How can I save my child? A moment may ruin a life. Who knows that better than I? Such monologue was exclaimed by Mrs. Erlynne.

Lady Windermere is alone in Lord Darlington's rooms unsure if she has made the right decision. Eventually, she resolves to return to her husband, but then Mrs. Erlynne appears. Despite Mrs. Erlynne's honest attempts to persuade her to return home to her husband, Lady Windermere is convinced her appearance is part of some plot conceived by her and Lord Windermere. Mrs. Erlynne finally breaks Lady Windermere's resistance by imploring her to return for the sake of her young child, but as they begin to exit they hear Lord Darlington entering with friends. The two women hide. The men who include Lord Windermere and Lord Augustus have been evicted from their gentlemen's club at closing time and talk about women: mainly Mrs. Erlynne. One of them takes note of a fan lying on a table (Lady Windermere's) and presumes that Lord Darlington presently has a woman visiting. As Lord Windermere rises to leave, the fan is pointed out to him, which he instantly recognizes as his wife's. He demands to know if Lord Darlington has hidden her somewhere. Lord Darlington refused to co-operate, believing that Lady Windermere has come to him. Just then Lord Windermere has found out the hiding place of Lady Windermere. Mrs. Erlynne reveals herself instead, shocking all the men and allowing Lady Windermere to slip away unnoticed.

The next day, Lady Windermere is lying on the couch of the morning room anxious about whether to tell her husband what actually happened, or whether Mrs. Erlynne will have already betrayed her secret. Her husband enters. He is sympathetic towards her and they discuss the possibility of taking a holiday to forget the recent incident. Lady Windermere apologizes for her previous suspicion of her husband and behavior at the party. Lord Windermere makes clear his new contempt for Mrs. Erlynne warning his wife to stay away from her.

Mrs. Erlynne's arrival is announced along with the return of the fan, and despite her husband's protestations, Lady Windermere insists on seeing her. Mrs. Erlynne enters and states that she shall be going abroad, but asks that Lady Windermere gives her a photograph of herself and her son. While Lady Windermere leaves the room to find one, the story is revealed: Mrs. Erlynne left her husband for a lover shortly after Lady Windermere's birth. When her new lover abandoned her, Mrs. Erlynne was left alone and in disrepute. More recently, using the assumed name of Mrs. Erlynne, she has begun blackmailing Lord Windermere in order to regain her lifestyle and status, by threatening to reveal her true identity as Lady Windermere's shameful mother not dead, as Lady Windermere believes. Lord Windermere laments not having told his wife the whole story at once and resolves to tell her the truth now. Mrs. Erlynne forbids him to do so, threatening to spread shame far and wide if he does.

Lady Windermere returns with the photograph which she presents to Mrs. Erlynne, and requests that Lord Windermere checks for the return of Mrs. Erlynne's coach. Now that they are alone, and being owed a favor, Mrs. Erlynne demands that she does not reveal the truth that revealed the night before to her husband. Lady Windermere promises to keep the secret. After Lord Windermere's return, Lord Augustus enters. He is shocked to see Mrs. Erlynne after the events of

the night before, but she requests his company as she heads to her carriage, and he soon returns to the Windermere with news that she has satisfactorily explained the events of the evening, and that they are to marry and live out of England.

### **8. A Woman of no Importance**

*A Woman of no Importance (1893)* the story begins with Mrs. Arbuthnot and George Harford, the later Lord Illingworth. George Harford has not a penny of money, except what his mother used to give him refused to give their child a name by leaving young Mrs. Arbuthnot. His father, Sir Thomas Harford, wanted and to force him into marrying with Mrs. Arbuthnot, and his mother, Lady Cecilia (daughter of the Duchess of Jerningham), would refuse and rather offer her £ 600 a year to get out of sight. Lord Illingworth's elder brother Arthur had died in some accident. Nameless Mrs. Arbuthnot becomes a woman of no importance. (The title of the play refers to a letter lying on some desk that is written by Mrs. Arbuthnot. Before meeting her Lord Illingworth recognizes her hand writing. Asked what kind of a letter that was and who had written it, he answers:"A woman of no importance".

The play begins with a typical upper class party hosted by Lady Hunstanton at her house in the country. After a very long period of time (up to 20 years) the first meeting between Lord Illingworth and Mrs. Arbuthnot takes place. The reason for this meeting is based on account of Lord Illingworth offering Gerald the job as a secretary, which would be the beginning of a wonderful career and a chance that not many youngsters stand. He doesn't know that this young man is his son. Mrs. Arbuthnot told her son his father had died many years before.

### **9. Woman Exploitation by man**

Gerald falls in love with Hester Worsley, a puritan American. Lord Illingworth, as sort of a party joke, has a bet on telling all the ladies present he would try to kiss Hester the very same evening. The moment he tries to do so Hester Worsley escapes in fury and hatred. Gerald, who at the same time was trying to convince his mother that she had married Lord Illingworth gets to know what had happened. Gerald now changes his mind and even wants to kill his "father" for that. His mother prevents him from doing so and now tells her son the very truth about his father and the whole story from A to Z. Mrs. Arbuthnot refused to marry Lord Illingworth although the latter had offered it to her, including a few premises Gerald could have. But the play ends by the idea of Hester, Mrs. Arbuthnot, and Gerald leaving to the USA to celebrate a happy wedding, whereas Lord Illingworth changes into a "man of no importance", which is the very last sentence of the play.

### **10. Conclusion**

I have come to a conclusion: Oscar Wilde was the man who had greatest skill of composition. And these plays are proved it. Full of zingers, witty banter, the well-crafted insult, and all things he included in a grand way. That makes Wilde as an absolutely perfect. The play had laughing me out loud at lines like "The only way to behave to a woman is to make love to her, if she is pretty, and to someone else if she is plain" or, as a resigned Jack realizes none of them may be married, "Then a passionate celibacy is all that any of us can look forward to." Also characteristic of Wilde is that there is a lot more going on here than comedy. With a sharp eye, Wilde cleverly satirizes all aspects of aristocratic life. For all their cleverness, these are despicable people. They are petty, vain and arrogant.

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