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**OSCAR WILDE’S FEMALE PLAYS: ARRIVAL OF
“NEW WOMAN” INTO THE WORLD OF OLD WOMAN**

A THESIS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER

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OSCAR WILDE’İN KADIN OYUNLARI: ESKİ KADININ
DÜNYASINA “YENİ KADIN”IN VARIŞI

YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

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Yemin Metni

Yüksek Lisans tezi olarak sunduğum, “Oscar Wilde’s Female Plays: Arrival of “New Woman” Into the World of Old Woman” adlı çalışmanın, tarafımdan bilimsel ahlak ve geleneklere aykırı düşecek bir yardıma başvurmaksızın yazıldığını ve yararlandığım kaynakların kaynakçada gösterilenlerden oluştuğunu, bunlara atıf yapılarak yararlanılmış olduğunu belirtir ve bunu onurumla doğrularım.

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ABSTRACT

OSCAR WILDE'S FEMALE PLAYS: ARRIVAL OF "NEW WOMAN" INTO THE WORLD OF OLD WOMAN

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This thesis consists of an introductory part, three main chapters and a conclusion. Entitled "Oscar Wilde's Female Plays: Arrival of New Woman into the World of Old Woman", this historical and descriptive thesis is designed to examine the female characters of Oscar Wilde's plays with consideration paid to the new woman, a term which came as a shock and breakthrough into Victorian society shaped and formed by the traditions and customs privileging the men over women. The introduction is devoted to the struggle of woman throughout history to become equal with man. The first chapter gives an elaborate picture of the Victorian society, in which the new woman as the essential aspect of this study started to appear. Inspired by the concepts of equality in the society, Wilde is often credited with having contributed to the emancipation of women from male dominance. Therefore, feminism is also portrayed on the whole from the ancient times to the present. The second chapter is biographic in that it gives place to Wilde's life at home and in society. Also, Wilde's family life, marriage, education as well as homosexuality are elaborately examined, placing the emphasis on the reflections of his real-life interactions with women into his works. The third chapter offers an analysis of Wilde's leading plays, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance* and *Salome*. These three plays based and named on female characters are analyzed in terms of the female characters' attempts to undress their roles as old women imposed on them by the male-dominated society and to turn themselves into new woman. It has been concluded that Wilde, as a socialist playwright, contributed a lot to the rise

and development of woman in his age thanks to his plays, which were taken scandalously when they were first staged.

Key Words: Oscar Wilde, Victorian Period, New Woman, Feminism

ÖZET

OSCAR WILDE’İN KADIN OYUNLARI: ESKİ KADININ DÜNYASINA “YENİ KADIN”IN VARIŞI

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“Oscar Wilde’ın Kadın Oyunları: Eski Kadının Dünyasına Yeni Kadının Varışı” başlıklı tez, giriş bölümü, üç ana bölüm ve sonuç bölümü olmak üzere beş bölümden oluşmaktadır. Oscar Wilde’ın oyunlarındaki kadın karakterleri tarihsel ve betimleyici bir bakış açısıyla inceleyen çalışmada, gelenek ve göreneklerle şekillendirilmiş ve erkeğin kadına üstün olduğu Viktorya toplumunu derinden sarsan ve bir dönüm noktasına yol açan “Yeni Kadın” kavramı üzerinde durulmuştur. Giriş bölümünde tarih boyunca kadının erkekle eşit olma çabaları ve bu yolda verdiği mücadele ele alınmıştır. Birinci bölümde bu çalışmanın temel konusu olan yeni kadın kavramının ortaya çıkmaya başladığı Viktorya toplumu detaylı bir şekilde resmedilmiştir. Toplumdaki eşitlik kavramlarından esinlenen Wilde’ın kadının erkek egemenliğinden kurtulmasına sağladığı katkı yadsınamaz bir gerçektir. Bu yüzden feminizmin de eski zamanlardan günümüze kadar gelişi ele alınmıştır. İkinci bölüm Wilde’ın ailesindeki ve toplumdaki yaşantısına yer veren biyografik bir değerlendirmedir. Ayrıca, Wilde’ın aile hayatı, evliliği, eğitimi ve eşcinselliği gerçek hayatında kadınlarla olan ilişkilerinin eserlerine nasıl yansıdığına vurgu yapılarak ayrıntılı bir şekilde incelenmiştir. Üçüncü bölüm Wilde’ın önemli oyunlarından *Lady Windermere’in Yelpersesi*, *Ehemmiyetsiz Bir Kadın* ve *Salome*’un incelenmesini içermektedir. Kadın karakterlerin üzerine kurulu olan ve adını kadın karakterlerden alan bu oyunlar, kadınların erkek egemen toplum tarafından kendilerine empoze edilen eski kadın rollerinden kurtularak yeni kadına dönüşmeleri açısından analiz edilmiştir. Sonuç olarak, sosyalist bir yazar olan Oscar Wilde ilk sahnelendiğinde

skandal olarak nitelendirilen oyunları sayesinde yaşadığı dönemde kadınların özellikle de yeni kadının yükselişine ve gelişimine çok büyük katkı sağladığı ortaya konmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Oscar Wilde, Viktorya Dönemi, Yeni Kadın, Feminizm

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

ADVENTURE OF WOMAN IN WESTERN CULTURES TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Researching women's history, finding the feminine stutters or silence among the masculine voices has been a hard task for women. The culture they live in, the language they speak and even the historical records they have been studying belong to what they have determinedly protested so far; the male domination which has already penetrated the language they speak, the history they are taught, the social norms they are subjected to and the cultural codes they live under. Still, even the minority of clues helps them grasp the female and differentiate it from the male agenda. From the earliest pagan rites up to the emergence of the New Woman symbol, women have been able to observe the cultural evolution and the rise of the female voice from its long suppressed silence, though gradually and in a long effort-making process.

As regards the women's movement, there have appeared a number of female writers, critics and artists to voice the inevitability of the women's struggle against men. One of them is, among many others, Elaine Showalter (1992) who has striking views of this struggle. According to Showalter, women's and men's use of language is different and "*women can create new languages of their own; and whether speaking, reading, and writing are all gender marked*" (p. 42). Thus, she suggests that language is the medium whereby the differences and similarities and subversions of patriarchal language are created. The oppressive aspects of the men's use of language remain as an important point for the research of women's history in early times. The cultural evolution in this process is another significant point that should be investigated with the change in women's use of language. In this context, the female language and, thus, cultural evolution should be investigated together. As mentioned above, the investigation of women's history can be carried out with the investigation of women's language. In other words, the cultural codes and the use of language are not separable from each other. The female voice, which has been suppressed, and the subversions of the men's language, which is oppressive,

constitutes the women's history in western thought. Before coming to the use of language and the cultural codes shaping women, to look over the early times will be functional for a broader understanding of women's history.

Historical approach stresses the relationship of literature to the location it is set in and the time period that it was written in. Looking at the history of the time period allows more meaning of the story to come through and a specific understanding of characters and actions that fit inside that historical time period. It can also open up discussion of what was happening in a certain place during the time this story was written or if you live in the mountains how different that may be to living in the desert (Varela, 2013).

On the other hand, with the descriptive approach in literature, the aim is to teach how to read a given literary text. Certain critical terms are introduced and then it is aimed to analyze given texts in light of these critical terms. Plot structure and picking out the plot structure of a given story are also among the objectives of this approach (Diab & Bowers, 1992).

Considering the historical dimension of women's long struggle, we have chosen a descriptive and historical approach for the study. The developing process of female identity has been traced and described within the historical context. This approach is proper for such a topic and subject as Oscar Wilde's female characters evolving from old woman into new woman. The descriptive method also well suits our purpose of portraying the change in the perception of woman. Especially Wilde's three plays built on female characters are chosen for this purpose, inspired by our hypothesis that Wilde, in writing such plays on female characters, may have taken side with the female struggle against male for equality, more freedom and power. These plays are *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance* and *Salome*. Even the titles featuring the leading female characters could be taken as indicative of his concern about this process through a man. At this point, another question may strike one's mind: Did Wilde choose to write female plays because he was a feminist or because he was a socialist? This question could best answered with references to the plays listed above. And theoretically, descriptive method would be the best one for such a purpose.

There are a number of solid theories that validate an ancient matriarchal order before the patriarchy. They were entitled by some as "cult", and it was a tradition in which women were respected for their miraculous talent of giving birth. Motherhood

was a sacred duty and the matriarchal system was considered egalitarian and holistic. Mother goddess figures found in Anatolia and in other parts of the world verify this. However, it was later dethroned by the strength of the male figure when he could hunt and gather food for his clan so that he could feed his family and survive in harsh conditions. Fertility and child-birth, an ability believed to have been bestowed upon women without men's assistance, began to lose its esteem, especially when man's role in this process was discovered, and the aggressive and war-loving male appeared in the pre-historic stage. The use of muscle, cultivation of the land, and hard labour necessitated the hegemony of men in various parts of life. Thus, the place of the women shrank back to the core of the colony; they nurtured and maintained the order while men were away fighting and defending their group from the attacks of both nature and other groups. These motives resulted in the formation of the ideas of colonizing, hegemony, exploitation and they incited the desires of men for authority and power. After this phase, the history became man's recorded history, and the cultural reflections upon men and women differed greatly. From the early settlements to the age of enlightenment, women were described differently.

In the early settlements, women were viewed as property and used as the tool for the maintenance of peace and good relationships between the tribes. In Judith Butler's (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Levi Strauss' (1969) anthropological studies revealed that in the ancient times women were considered as the object of exchange between kingdoms. As Judith Butler quotes Levi Strauss, "*The bride, the gift, the object of exchange constitutes a sign or a value that opens a channel of exchange that not only serves the functional purpose of facilitating trade but performs the symbolic or the ritualistic purpose of consolidating the internal bonds*" (Butler, 1990, p. 22). The continuity of the bond between the patriarchal dominions was only possible with the bride, the greatest and the precious trophy. What is deduced from here is that women did not have identities or even selves, and it is not hard to realize that they were the slaves and servants of the male ruler.

In Ancient Greece, accepted as the cradle of the Western civilization, the cultural reflections of women took on masculine features. The early goddess images, statues, idols represented them as donning armours, helmets and wielding swords or spears, and in their expressionless face one cannot find the delicacy of the mortal woman on the earth which were abstracted from the female statues. The night was

female, Leto, her daughter was the goddess of moon, Artemis who was the counterpart of the Apollo, though he was the sun as male. Artemis signified the moon and belonged to the darker time of the day. In the cultural context, these indicated the unknown, the mystery and the perilous nature of women (Smith, 1844). The phrase “*the root of all evil*”, which points to women, resulted from the myth of Pandora’s box, since the box she opened cursed the human race with many great evils like famine, war, jealousy, and many other everlasting troubles. This mythological origin of evil attributed to a woman is indeed both the cause and effect of patriarchal view of women, as men have tended to associate anything evil or bad with women (Woodard, 2009).

Women in Greek society were, however, the indispensable elements of morality. The notions of ethics and women were two inseparable parts in that it was women who could bring up perfect male members for the community. In the early formation of the Greek polis or city where the birth of democracy could be felt, women had no right to represent or be represented, yet they worked hard to be the shadowy force behind the male figure who could speak up for them. The main source of the male Spartan warrior was the true Spartan passionless women who were manlier in their behaviours. They cherished a harsh and plain life with Spartan men. The strong-willed image of the Spartan woman became a cultural symbol and a role model for the future generations of women who could sacrifice their womanhood for the good of the order. They had the stout appearance and their determination was the impetus behind the pumping of moral values which were internalized by them. They rejected the fragile body and the delicate movements. They did their best to masquerade as men, accept male identity so as to stand firm as a nation. Apart from constituting a feminine or womanly identity, they cast aside their selves and their power was mixed up in the power of males. Also seen in the Hellenistic culture, this female identity may have been as secondary but still as an effective figure in their society.

Furthermore, the Jewish and Christian views of women were by no means good. There were striking resemblances between the pagan and the Judeo-Christian imageries concerning women and the idea of the root of evil; just like in the Greek mythology, women were accepted to give birth to the sins, and in this sense the most influential person was Eve. As stated in Holy Scriptures, she passed the burden of the original sin to her children, who, having done nothing had to atone for and suffer to

reach redemption. The woman was considered a source of temptation to be abstained, because she was believed to be in covenant with the devil and she had a feeble character who could succumb to the weaknesses in human nature. The fact that God let “man” dominate the world and all its inhabitants living on it meant that it was given to men and men only (Genesis 1). Just as men could rule the animals and tame them, cultivate the land and subdue the wilderness and turn it into a beautiful garden, so they had to subdue the women, too, all of whom were his destiny. The thought of hegemony and domination, thus, exalted the status of men to be the sovereign and master. Obtaining the right from the divine, he deemed it his right to dominate all the existing beings, including women of course.

History and the social order were in the control of males, and men were unconsciously evolving when they put an end to the threats, be it male or female. The matriarchal systems were eliminated from the records of history, while the plunders and the exploitation motivated their desire for power and their hunger for more. The scholastic and dogmatic Middle Ages was also an era in which the female voice was not heard and her role was suppressed and silenced, because she was the victim of strict religious life, and under all these circumstances she had to obey what she was commanded and told to. Although she was a visible figure at the core of the kingdoms and dynasties, she only served as the bearer of the child who could be the next king of the society. This, however, did not alter the fact that she was no more than the subject of her husband. Despite the limitation of the power of the British Monarchy in 1215 by Magna Carta, women were not active in the social life. She was still the subject, the passive element and inferior because she had neither the right of property nor any other means of security to be able to survive alone in society. She had almost no symbolic significance; she had to be chaste, even when her husband was in Jerusalem to join the forces of the Crusades, and her chastity was tested. During the time before the rise of monarchy, the powerful had killed the weak and the weak had lived in fear of death. To prevent this, people gave their full consent to the king to be protected, and the male sovereign pledged his word by sheltering them. This domination was, on the surface, an inevitable result of the state of nature, but this subjected everyone, men and women, to the obedience of the orders of the king who was supposed to act ethically with the power he was endowed.

The reforms and the liberation of western thought from the dogmatism of the Middle Ages undermined the rights of women and instead it sought the desires of the new and unexplored parts of the world, the colonization and dominion of them in every possible way. From time to time, however, there were eminent women figures who ruled the society. The tragic part was that “the women kings” embraced the role of the male and stripped off the fertile, motherly, feminine qualities within them for the sake of unquestioned power. Her move was to play the role of the masculine, the upper entity not inferior like a typical woman. Queen Elizabeth, for instance, wore extravagant attires to be different from the noble women of the time; she had her hair cut very short and wore such a make-up that caused the people to fear and respect her. Her identity and appearance signified a being superior to her true woman identity. She had to “perform” the role of the dominator to be able to achieve political ideals. Keeping the power of the man, she was no more a woman. She wore her male identity again when she managed her army by equipping the armours and swords. So her performing success was also a political success, which could only be possible by desiring like a male and thinking as the men thought. The era following that moment staged the appearance of the “middle class” between the noble and peasants, the emergence of the notion of patriotism and the citizen which triggered the shift of the role of women in society.

By putting forth the theory, with the enlightenment, the attitude towards women began to change. John Locke’s ideas are significant at this point. His concept of “tabula rasa” suggests that a new-born child is not born sinful, nor carries any sins, and that she is born as pure as an empty page to be later filled in by the good and the evil of life she leads. Locke, a major philosopher and defender of individualism, refuted the idea that individuals were sinful and originally corrupt (Dunn, 1995). This idea was contradictory to the views of the Middle Ages, because personality is not composed of the consequences of naturalistic and essential aspects. Rather, it comes from the social, emotional and intellectual aspects. This emphasis on the personality was an important point for the condition of women in this age. Contrary to the ideas of the Middle Ages, women were not the embodiment of evil any more, but they were valuable beings to be protected from the evil world. Though Locke’s inalienable rights (life, liberty, pursuit of happiness or property) were written for every human being, only men could absolutely benefit from those rights at that time. By virtue of the fact that women did not have the right to own property, they were

not and could not be considered as free individuals when it came to emphasizing their “*economic status*” as the slaves and subordinates of men. They were again the invisible factor in the symbolic social arena, without any voice to represent themselves without restrictions.

The mood of freedom, enlightenment and independence shattered the reified monarchy and it was right at that time that America declared her independence from Britain so as to break off the bonds between the tyrannical Europe and form her own egalitarian government where an ideal state could be the model for the world, “as the city upon a hill”. With such high ideals, one of the prime movers of the new country, John Adams, discussed this process with his wife, Abigail Adams who stated that the constitution of this new country should also take the position of women in the society into consideration, because the model country should have equal rights for all the citizens in it. Of the couple, Abigail worked for the good of women in the 18th century, but her advice was not taken seriously, and women went on being economically and politically inferior to white man in *The land of freedom* (Massachusetts Historical Society). Ironically, women and the blacks later gained their rights almost simultaneously.

With the rise of the middle class, the roles of the individuals within the society were reshaped and redefined, and the women were chosen to be the protector of the middle class values, but only if they stayed at home and became home-makers. This was deemed the most important role for women in the 19th century and what is amazing here is that many women embraced that role and even encouraged each other to be wives at home. Contrary to the earlier periods in history, the feminine qualities of women were celebrated and approved, for the example of a good woman was now a symbol called “*True Woman*”. The significance of woman was great, considering the unity of the nation, the preservation of morality and class values. Nevertheless, the prevailing opinion of society was that women should marry and have children while serving and self-sacrificing for the success of their husbands, namely being “*The angel in the house*” which was termed by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Victorian norms and the feminine promotion in society urged women to get education to be “woman” in the cultural sense of the period. The place where the suppression of emotions occurred was home and this either turned the woman to good natured feminine servants or to the “*Mad woman*” locked up “*in the attic*” (Gilbert & Gubar, 1984).

What was outside home, the outside world of the other, began to change and became more mobile, shifted their gears and functioned like a machine for progress; together with the mobility of the society, the norms and older traditions had to change too. In its wildest state, the capitalism facilitated faster flow of money, all the changing rates of income and outcome, and in this economic wilderness it was thought that women could not shelter themselves from the dangers of the society and for this reason it was rather conventional for the feminine and delicate woman type to survive under the wings of stronger males who could secure them at all costs. In return, women would do all the household chores, look after children and stay submissive even to the whims of men so that when men came from the outer chaotic world corruption, woman's passivity and stability could create an atmosphere of peace which was what men needed in life. In her article, *The Cult of True Womanhood*, Welter (1966) explained how essential it was for a woman to be a housewife at home. For her, woman was held captive at home and there were four characteristics that could define the "True woman": she had to be pure of all evils, whether pious, submissive or domestic.

Outside of the home was a dangerous place for women; men could return home not only with their dirty clothes but also with dirty minds influenced by the delusional and subversive effects of the society. The duty of women was, therefore, to prevent the deterioration of the good qualities in men and she was required not to be defeated by his evil influence; moreover she could make him better or "reform him" if she desired. This redeeming quality of women, as the customs expressed, strengthened her position in her group as it also transformed her into a perfect example for other families. It was claimed that it even made women stronger than men in the eyes of society. "*If, however, a woman managed to withstand man's assaults on her virtue, she demonstrated her superiority and her power over him...The purity of women is the everlasting barrier against which the tide of man's sensual nature surge*" (Welter, 1966, p.3).

The power of women was not economic, material or political but spiritual and emotional. The woman had to be definitely committed to religious affairs, or else she was relegated down to the image of fallen woman and became worse than men. There was no salvation for women although men could be saved by women at any time. She would be a badge of shame and she would be isolated if she went out of the norms tailored for her. For women, the most appropriate way of living was marriage.

People believed that marriage was indispensable for a virtuous and good life style. The only place where a woman could remain pure was the house of the man whom she married. At home she had to be submissive. She had to obey and not protest; she had to disregard all her individual rights for the sake of a smooth marriage. The woman who wished to live on her own and who wanted to stand firmly on her feet was considered as a threat to the order of things in the world, or even to the universe: “Women were warned that if they tampered [with submission], they tampered with the order of the universe” (Welter, 1966).

Women had a domestic way of life, because this provided them with a secure, conventional and respectable living. They had no voice outside homes; still, they felt equal in their own separate spheres. Thus, they had a separate but unequal life. Men, however, felt freedom outside while they thought women were not in need of freedom there. Furthermore, women were not educated as well as men due to the fear of impurity of women by books. Even if they were educated, they would use their education and learning for home. They also supplied home economy by knitting, embroidery, and other insignificant crafts, or they had cooking lessons to feed their children with healthier food. Hence, it seemed like a biological determination on women’s behalf to stay at home while men came and protected them with their reason. Briefly, the generally accepted idea that “the place of the woman in society is her home” was a shield for women in this century.

In the above-drawn picture of the society in which women were made to live as men liked them to, the major reason why women fought for their rights in social arena was the rise of their awareness of their constraint lives, and unequal treatment. So long as the women read, studied and obtained confidence, they realized their inferior status compared to men, understood how the society functioned chiefly for men, and took steps outside the house for freedom; in short, it was when they began their journey from the feminine true woman to the feminist new woman.

While the women’s world was as dark as outlined above, some new developments seemed to herald the beginning of enlightened days for them. The married woman’s property act of 1882, for example, turned out to be a successful development for women even though the unmarried women could not be legally protected. It also represented an accomplishment in the economic freedom of women. The educated women of the period questioned the Victorian generation before them; they noticed and demonstrated the common judgments against women.

Women wore more comfortable clothes, joined the mobile world outside home and used their education and experience for social life and for work. “*The Gibson girl*” image was the evidence that women could catch up with the growing necessities of life. The main target was how women could speak for themselves against the patriarchal ideology. Gradually they studied and worked to have an equal role with men in public sphere and they completely refused submission. What is more, they sought for their economic rights as well as their independence from men. All of their attempts were useful concerning their right to work and earn a living and save their sexual identities from the clasp of men. Certainly there were protests from more conservative parts of the community and they charged women with being selfish and self-indulgent in their own affairs and sexuality. Consequently, women realized that the very means of their existence was not maternity, child birth but living and rediscovering as a woman and as a female being freed from the patriarchal set of rules. Nevertheless, the radical decisions made for women were not very radical at the end of the 19th century, and the feminist practitioners appropriated some of the concepts of true women which they thought were still not erasable from a woman’s life. Among them was the fact that being a mother was a unique experience for a woman and men were still needed for this, but it did not require women to submit to men’s hegemony. Motherhood could be redeeming but that was still a choice for a woman, not an existential obligation. The woman was freed from the house of suppressions and hysteria to become a full-fledged individual. In conclusion, the New Woman turned out to be one of the most essential symbols of the 19th century and it paved the road for women to locate their existence in the oncoming modernism.

As far as modernism is concerned, however, the triggers of this twentieth-century movement could be found in the preceding century on the whole. This is mainly attributable to the fact that the nineteenth century was a challenging century for Europe as well as England. While in the first half of the century Paris was an important centre, later in the second half London became an important centre. The time period between 1827 and 1901, which was run in the rule of Queen Victoria and which witnessed such large-scale changes in the outlook of England, is named after her, the Victorian Age. In this period, the population of London grew about three times. Moreover, this age is accepted as the beginning of the modern life (Abrams, 1993). There were serious transformations from science to social life in society

which should be dealt with in such a study on the transformation of women from their old status to the new.

For some of the historians, Victorian Age has good and bad aspects. During this period, England experienced many radical changes in economic and social areas. Because of these changes, this period was depicted as a golden period of English History. The socio-economic changes in society were leading to “new” cultural forms, after which there appeared a new England growing up socially, intellectually and spiritually.

During this period, furthermore, the industrialization proved very fast. This brought up some economic problems such as employment and population increase. Both women and men were employed as work force in industrial sectors. Class distinctions began to be very sharp. The rural life was left behind because instead of farmers, workers were needed. Moreover, this caused the population of cities to grow faster. The people were migrating to cities for new advantages and for new opportunities to become rich. These were, as Abrams (1993) listed, among the causes of the main economic problems in this.

The industrialization in Victorian Age changed the aspects of life in technological manner, as well. The steam engines, telegraphs and trains changed the communication and social interactions. The people began to travel faster. As a consequence of these changes, the city and villages kept in contact. More than that, telegraph was an important aspect that changed the whole society. It changed the business relations and also gave a chance to people to communicate all over the world, affecting the world literally, as well.

Accordingly, the intellectual space in Victorian Age was vigorous. The ideas about humanity, nature and society were under investigation. Darwin’s *The Origin of Species*, which was published in 1859, had a major influence on philosophical horizons and theological aspects of the society. This book was effective on people’s religious ideas. The theological implications of religion were called into question. Besides, in every space of social life the idea of equality began to emerge. Thus, this affected the male and female rights in the society. As a result of his challenging views and the growing reliance on the science and scientific view, based on the reason and mind, the humanity concept in Victorian Age began to be built on scientific and rational ideas. Christian views of women were undermined. The rights of men and women were not due to dogmatic believes. Within these social and

economic environments, the women's situation in Victorian Age should be closely investigated.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the women were considered as "*perfect wives*". At least, they were educated in that way. The qualifications of the "*perfect wife*" could give a way to understanding the Victorian women. Perfect wives of the nineteenth century were an active participant in the family with the main responsibility of taking care of children. Their lives were within the boundaries of home, so that their social life was under the control of their husbands. In addition to the childbearing, in the lower classes the wives were responsible for working and bringing an extra income to the family. In the upper middle classes, however, the ideal woman of Victorian Age was named as "*perfect lady*". The perfect lady was similar to "*perfect wife*". The young girl of Victorian Age was brought up in her father's home and she was under the control of her mother. She was accepted as perfectly innocent and asexual. In Victorian age, the motherhood rather than the sexual feelings was in the foreground. Besides, the perfect lady was also a perfect assistant for the Victorian man. Social and intellectual life of the women was limited to home and very close friends. Her economic situation was completely dependent upon her husband or her father. Thus the emergence of the "*new women*" who had a wider social role in public sphere succeeded "*perfect lady*" (Vicinus, 1972).

In Victorian Age, one of the most important points for women was marriage. Women's life was all built on the marriage. Victorian women were dependent upon their father and, after marriage, on their husband. According to Kent (1990), "*woman had only one means of livelihood, that of marriage. p. 86*" In other words, the desire of Victorian women was neglected and their lives were limited to domestic sphere. Since marriage was so notable, before marriage the young women were seen as virgins and having no sexual instincts. Their sexuality was under control and regulation and unquestionable. Moreover, the education life of young girls before marriage was also focused on marriage. Young girls could attend schools to study basic skills such as reading and writing. At first sight, this seems to be rational and equal. However, the purpose of this education was to make young girls ready for marriage. Thus, Victorian women's education was a tool "*to sympathize in her husband's pleasures*" (Vicinus, 1972).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was one of the most significant thinkers during the Enlightenment in the 18th century Europe. Rousseau's understanding of equality does

not include gender equality. He wrote on the subject of education in a book describing the fictitious education of a boy called Emile. Rousseau, while telling about Sophy, Emile's imaginary wife, argues that women should not receive the same type of education with men. For Rousseau the place of woman is her home, and her duty is to give birth and grow up children in addition to making her husband happy and comfortable at home. He advocates that the place of man is outside of his home (Rousseau, 1762). He also believes that boys need education in order to develop natural instincts which is necessary for their independence, autonomy, and citizenship. On the other hand, education for women should be only for domestic purposes such as motherhood, houseworks and to be an ideal wife for her husband.

After the marriage, a woman came under the supervision of her husband. The Victorian woman did not have ideas of her own because the wife and husband were seen as one person so that the ideas of husband were the only acceptable ones for women (Perkin, 1995). The marriage of Victorian women was like slavery, because woman's body was also under the control of her husband, since in front of law, rape and beating were legal. Ironically, Victorian women's best life was accepted as it was in marriage. This was because the women's duty in life was to serve her husband and look after "*his*" children. Here, the adjective "*his*" seems more proper because even the children did not belong to women, as the only owner of all within the family was the man, the husband (Kent, 1990).

Marriage was seen as a statue for Victorian women. Also, the motherhood was a significant point in Victorian woman's life. In that era, motherhood was an angelic and appreciated position for a woman. Woman with children was viewed as mother and "*angel in the house*". This religious perspective gave her an asexual position. The sexual relations within the family were just to have children and motherhood image was sexless. The religious approach towards the mothers was based on holiness and innocence. The motherhood was appreciated because of non-existing sexual passion. This was seen as a pre-requisite for bringing up children well and perfectly. To sum up, motherhood was connected to being pure and religious, and the Victorian women's roles as mothers were built on these two concepts of moral standards (Kent, 1990).

Up to this point, the situation of women was portrayed until and in the Victorian Age. Briefly, Victorian women's lives were in their private sphere, which includes the home and all domestic works. Besides, in this era the women's

movements were momentous. Women's domestic lives, education and property rights were debated. In this regard, Mary Wollstonecraft's (1792) book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* published in 1792, which could be accepted as the product of the epoch-making French Revolution intended to bring equality, solidarity and liberty to all who formed the country, was also stating the situation of women (Lynch, 2009). Then women did not have the right to vote and the married women did not exist in legal terms. According to Wollstonecraft, it was important to advocate the equality of sexes. In her book, the images of women as sentimental and slavish were criticized. Education was very important for her and it was the key to take a position against women subjugation. Also it was mentioned that self-respect of women could be gained by education.

On the other hand, William Thompson's (1825) book, *An Appeal of One Half of the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretences of the Other Half Men to Retain them in Political and Thence in Civil and Domestic Slavery* published in 1825, was one of the important books that focused on the dependence of women on their fathers and husbands. In it, the situation of woman in her father's and husband's house was clearly described. Another significant point of this book was the advocacy of marriage reform. Shortly, in this era woman's situation started to be clearer. Women's movements tend to increase for the legal rights and political equality.

In the Victorian age, for all the above works and alike, the activism of women rights was still in its infancy. Marian Reid's (1843) book, *A Plea for Women*, published in 1843 was one of the books for advocacy of women's rights. Additionally, John Stuart Mill's (1869) book *Subjection of Women* had an important impact on these issues. This book was submitted to the British parliament. Female Political Union and Women's Property Act were to change the situation of women with laws. These acts focused mainly on the rights of women in marriage and in political arena. The movements towards gaining the suffrage of women started in 1867 with the creation of National Society of Women Suffrage. The first victory of this institution was in 1869 with Municipal Franchise Act. With this victory, unmarried and widowed women gained the right to vote. In 1880, about one million women in England and Wales had a local suffrage act. In 1889, Emmeline Pankhurst founded Women's Franchise League. The suffrage right to married women was gained in 1894. By this victory, married women gained the equal rights both to vote and seat on municipal councils (Kraditor, 1965). Women gained equal rights in

family and in marriage, too. In 1839, a law was passed stating that if a marriage broke down and parents separated, the children under seven would stay with their mothers. In 1857, women gained the right to divorce. In 1870, women were able to keep their own money without giving them to their husband.

All these positive and bright, though leaking not pouring, developments in field of women's movement can be granted with having paved the way for the new woman, the focal point of the present study. Accordingly, this brief but outlined introduction to the adventure of women from nothingness in the ancient Greece to being something in the mid-Victorian Age is to be supplemented by a more comprehensive insight into the whole Victorian Age and the birth of the new woman in it.

CHAPTER II

VICTORIAN PERIOD; THE AGE OF CHANGES

Queen Victoria, whose name is derived from the word ‘victory’ that signifies supremacy or superiority, is credited with having given England under her rule from 1837 to 1901 the greatest victories in industrial, political, economic and expansive terms. Under her rule, however glorious it proved to be, there emerged, on the other hand, a number of chaotic, conflicting and controversial issues at home and abroad, ranging from unemployment, poverty and working-class through the woman question to the problems in the colonized lands. Even though the Victorian Period is today called the Age of British imperialism under the impetus of its expansion into the Asian and African lands, a process also known as colonialism, it also has a reputation for the tremendous changes in the social, religious and demographic structure within the country due to its focus on economic advance and consolidation. For example, as mentioned by Jane Thomas in her writing on Victorianism, England under Victoria’s reign was associated with “*change and instability, the threat of revolution, the discrediting of old traditions and even the usurpation of God*” in the face of the established views and beliefs of the preceding ages. For example Thomas Carlyle, a prominent writer and thinker of the mid-19th century, summarizes the period as a ‘*boundless grinding collision of the New with the Old*’ (Thomas, 1994). These changes proved to be so big and challenging that the early Victorian Period could be said to be quiet unlike the late Victorian Period in almost all terms regulating the social, economic and political lives of the whole nation. It is largely for this very reason that any study that is intended to deal with the image of new woman, transformed from the old woman shaped by the traditions, on the English stages at the turn of the 19th century cannot do without mentioning the process of such a large-scale process of transformation in almost every field.

Given that literature, especially theatre, is an art closely associated with whatever happens in the society, this inevitability seems to be more than a necessity. In the presence of huge changes that will be clarified below, the Victorian Age is also often termed as a transition period in which, as John Stuart Mill declared in his famous article *The Spirit of the Age*, it was considered necessary and urgent to stop the worldly power “*being monopolized by the landed gentry and the monied class*”

(Turner, 1989, p. 87). Such a transition seemed to be from the rural country to the urban, from the aristocracy to the middle classes, from the agricultural society to the industrial, from the one-class society at power to three classes, or in short from England to the British Empire. As Judith Newton also reported, the decade from the 1830s to the 1840s is often characterized as “*a time of transition, deeply informed by a sense of ‘history’, a heightened consciousness that the past was distinctly different from the present and the future was liable to be marked by greater difference yet.*” (Newton, 1994, p. 97).

Newton was right in her characterization of the first half of the 19th century in that the second half came to be rather different from the first half. In other words, this century witnessed such profound changes that can be taken as preliminary or preparatory to the establishment of the British Empire and that are largely attributed to the Industrial Revolution and French Revolution. The former of these two revolutions is often held responsible for almost all the changes in the Victorian England, for it is known to have altered the way of life, the class system, the working conditions, the distribution of wealth, the individual rights, the understanding of religion and so on in the country. This is much evident in the fact that industrialism and its concomitant results frequently found a place for themselves in the literature after 1840, whereas there was hardly any serious interest in the industrial society in the literary works of the period before 1830:

Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green airs and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights (Dickens, 1853, p. 5).

On the other hand, the need for widespread changes had already been recognized by social commentators, politicians and intellectuals as can be seen in the government reports of the 1830s and 1840s and in the Chartist movement of 1837-48. Thomas Carlyle (1839), the authoritative figure of literature and sociology in England of the time, seemed to be writing forebodingly in *Signs of the Times* in 1839 about the visible change from human labour to the machines’ world in industry which is today called the root of industrialism:

Were we required to characterize this age of ours by any single epithet, we should be tempted to call it, not an Heroical, Devotional, Philosophical, or Moral Age, but, above all others, the Mechanical Age. It is the age of Machinery, in every outward and inward sense of the word; the age which, with its whole undivided might, forwards, teaches and practices the art of adapting means to ends. Nothing is now done directly, or by hand; all is by rule and calculated contrivance. On every hand, the living artisan is driven from his workshop to make room for a speedier, inanimate one (Carlyle, 1839, p. 406).

Carlyle's prophecy was not slow to come true and around the middle of the 19th century there emerged second Industrial Revolution with what he had foreseen as the future of the country. At this point, it sounds reasonable to make a brief account of the Industrial Revolution for a better understanding of its impact on or contribution to the process of change in the Victorian England. Beginning with the mechanization of the textile industry, the Revolution gained impetus with the iron-making techniques and the increased use of the refined coal, later followed by the introduction of the railways in particular. The production capacity of the factories was highly increased by the use of steam power fuelled by coal and of all-metal tools in manufacturing by the early 19th century. What we today call the first Industrial Revolution had begun in the late 18th century and merged into the second one around 1850, the period when technological and economic progress was accelerated with the development of steam-powered ships, railways and later with the internal combustion engine and electrical power.

Under the influence of the Industrial Revolution, materialism came to dominate all classes of the society, penetrating into the established moral values to the extent of undermining them. Emulating to the life standards of the upper class people, the lower class citizens became the slaves of working and ambition. Besides, the spirit of commerce dominated the daily life of the middle-class and accelerated the migration from rural areas where they were engaged in farming or animal breeding for lower earnings to urban areas where they hoped to find jobs at factories or mines or somewhere else to earn more. This example is indeed universal in that it could be seen in almost all the developing and enriching countries, such as Turkey where Istanbul has attracted millions of rural people from their lands in the hope of finding better-paid jobs and higher standards of life. London in England, prompted by this big wave of immigrants, soon became the centre of Capitalism in the 1850s. The most striking proof of this fact was the Great exhibition in 1851, which appeared

to be the symbol of Victorian technology and industrialization in the middle of the century. It was a platform where the achievements of the world countries could be exhibited, but Great Britain was after proving its own superiority there. The English exhibits at the Great Exhibition “*held the lead in almost every field where strength, durability, utility and quality were concerned, whether in iron and steel, machinery or textiles.*” (Auerbach, 1999, p. 74). Great Britain also attempted to give the world the hope of a future built on better standings, hoping to show that technology, particularly its own, was the key to a better future. Peck and Coyle, in their survey of English literature, regard the Great Exhibition as “*a triumphalist statement, an invitation to the whole world to reproduce itself in the image of middle-class Englishman*” (Peck & Coyle, 2002, p. 218).

It may be said that Great Britain owed its greatness largely to the technology available in its factories, but the contribution of the workers to this process cannot be neglected. There was always a need for human labour then in such metropolises as Manchester and London, where industrial activities were at their top then. How these cities turned into a metropolis was largely through the abovementioned migration from rural lands to the urban centres. The inevitable consequence of this wave of migration, coupled with the immigration from Ireland following the potato famine of 1845, was that by 1851 more than half of the people in England were living in urban areas. This growing crowdedness of the urban centres, however, brought with it the worsening of the working and living conditions for those who worked at factories. On the other hand, the factory owners, or industrialists, found themselves in a big competition to exploit the recent technologies for the sake of making profit instantly. New technologies brought about overproduction, only to lead to periodic slumps and mass unemployment due to the reduced need for human labour at factories upon the introduction of the mechanized tools. All these emergent conditions gave, unavoidably, way to unemployment, poverty and misery among the lower classes of people. To illustrate the gap between those who were ruled and those who ruled, Benjamin Disraeli, one of the authoritative figures in English life then, regarded England as essentially two nations, ‘Rich’ and ‘Poor’.

In terms of social structure, the Industrial Revolution, above all, witnessed the triumph of a middle class of industrialists and businessmen over a landed class of nobility and gentry, which could also be taken as another big change. This was mainly because the Industrial Revolution had brought about a new source of wealth

besides the pre-Industrialization source of land for wealth; it was the ownership of factories and machinery. Inspired by the daring to get the chance to invest in new ventures, those who did not belong to any single class of people – i.e. landed aristocracy, industrialists or merchants – invested in factories and machinery. It could as well be said that it was these capitalists who gave the necessary impetus to the speedy growth of the Industrial Revolution.

Factory owners, merchants and others who controlled the means of production rapidly became very rich. Capitalism began to exploit workers for the benefits of the rich. Men, women and children were employed at survival wages in unhealthy and dangerous environments. Also women and children were working in textile factories and mines under brutal conditions. The factory and mine owners considered themselves as innocent of guilt for such conditions, since they devoted themselves to an economic theory of *laissez-faire*¹, which assumed that turbulent working conditions would ultimately utilize everyone (Abrams, 1993).

The genius and capital of these capitalists was not, of course, enough to carry out the Industrial Revolution. It was largely made possible, as explained above, by the new working class as well as by the scientific and technologic developments. Managing to find increased opportunities for employment in the new mills and factories, the product of industrialization itself, ordinary working people often had to work under strict working conditions with long hours of labour dominated by a pace set by machines. That was a machinery age, and this man-made world gained power over the men and women within it, like a machine that had developed beyond the control of its inventors. The system of working at factories led to a change in the way people worked. Having to work in large, impersonal settings away from home, workers were viewed by their employers merely as “hands”. Being one of the characters in the novels by Mrs Gaskell, a noteworthy female novelist of the Victorian Age, Mary Barton speaks as follows to speak indeed plainly of the way workers had to work then for their patrons:

“Don’t think to come over me with the old tale, that the rich know nothing of the trials of the poor. I say, if they don’t know, they

*An economic term of French origin that means “let do” or broadly “let it be” and that describes an environment in which transactions between private parties are free from state intervention, including restrictive regulations, taxes, tariffs and enforced monopolies.

ought to know. We are their slaves as long as we can work; we pile up their fortunes with the sweat of our brows; and yet we are to live as separate as if we were in two worlds; ay, as separate as Dives and Lazarus.” (Jockers, 2013, p. 7).

However, overburdened with workload for negligible pays, workers began to see that they could possess a great deal of strength and power against their employers if they were a unified force. It was a long, uphill battle for them to be able to have the right to organize into officially-recognized unions. In the end, workers were on the way to being freed from the injustices of the factory system after political leaders called for reform legislation, which would address these injustices. Dickens, strictly aware of the harsh working conditions of and injustices on the workers then, reflected their situation in his novels and lamented in the *Quarterly Review* for June 1839: “*The one half of mankind lives without knowledge of how the other half dies.*”

The process, known as the Reform Bill, came out, in fact, with the pressure on the Parliament of the riots that took place on the streets in the first quarter of the 19th century due to the poverty and hindrances imposed on the workers or unemployed people. Fearing that a revolution like the one in the late 18th century France would strike England, the Tories who believed that Parliament should represent property and property owners got into conflict with the Whigs of the same fear, or Liberals, who were insistent on the need to reform the law to improve the social conditions. After long hours of debate at Parliament, the Reform Bill was accepted in 1832, which seemed initially to be almost a political reform. As in almost all new practices, there were opponents of this bill as well as supporters. It was the first attempt at the social conditions of the workers, which could be taken as meaning that they had been taken seriously for the first time; as it was the earliest incentive, it naturally had some shortcomings. However, it was, after all, a political recognition that Britain had become an urban society. Writing for the *Westminster Abbey* in 1840, eight years after the Bill, the eminent politician, poet, playwright and critic of the time Edward Bulwer-Lytton spoke positively of the Reform Bill:

Young, fair, trusted, beloved, new to business and to life, the sovereign of England commences a reign, that in the course of nature will last beyond the generations who hailed in the Reform Bill – the charter of new liberties – the transition to a new stage of British culture (Thomas, 1994, p. 19).

The Reform Bill was not enough in itself to make the ruled feel that they were absolutely taken seriously, as the right to vote was limited and so was the right for property. Thereupon, in 1837, six Members of Parliament and six working men formed a committee, which then published the *People's Charter* in 1838, stipulating the six main objectives of the movement: the right of voting for everyone at and above the age of twenty-one; the secret ballot, which would make it possible for everyone to vote for anyone they liked to; the right for a man with no property to be a Member of Parliament; payment for members; equal Constituencies; and annual parliaments. Though these demands were all refused by the House of Commons, it is certain that they aroused the fear of revolution among the Members of Parliament. Later taking the name of Chartism largely as a working-class movement that turned to campaigning for political rights by holding massive demonstrations, the movement also encouraged the belief that the higher classes had more reason to fear the poor when they were uneducated than when they were educated.

Chartism, thus beginning, increased the workers' and poor people's awareness of the status quo and the life outside of their small boundaries. They asked for more privileges and better conditions and high wages and etc. In fact, their insistence on their demands for better rights could be said to have been accelerated by the publication of Karl Marx's epoch-making book in 1867 of *The Capital* as a political theory of political economy and a negative critique of the capitalist system. Marx was affected by Friedrich Engels with whom he made a close study of Britain's industrial system and its effects. Engel's *The condition of the Working Class in England* (1844) praised Carlyle's awareness of the workers' conditions. According to Marx and Engels, conditions determine consciousness and ending the role of the capitalist class leads eventually to a classless society in which the state would wither away. Marx stated that it is not the consciousness of people that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. He believed that all aspects of an individual's life were determined by that individual's relationship to the means of production. Classes were established by the various degrees of connection to the means of production, whether direct ownership or factory work. Governing classes always owned the means of production while the least powerful working class did not.

With all such provoking thoughts and inspiring views for workers, Marx had a major influence on a lot of people. Many workers were convinced that they were

being exploited by the free-market capitalism in Britain. Marx considered that the only changes in this power structure would occur through revolution. The result of this revolution was Socialism. According to the law of Marx, the capitalist could only pay his workers just enough to keep them alive. His theories appealed for human freedom and justice. The way from Marx's views of the workers' state in England to his call for Socialism for the sake of ending the class distinction that he saw as the primary cause of all that disturbed and damaged the workers was what brought most Englishmen under the roof of Socialism, or socialist thoughts. There emerged several writers and thinkers or politicians and economist who favoured Socialism in England, but the most important of the socialist groups of the century was the Fabian Society, founded in 1884.

Fabians were not a political party, and they were not bound by the pressures of political expedience. They discussed such topics as radical politics, economic solutions to the problems of an unjust society, and psychic phenomena. The society included such intellectuals as Ramsay MacDonald, Annie Besant, Sidney Webb, Beatrice Potter, George Bernard Shaw, Henry George and H.G. Wells. The Fabian Society favoured gradual change rather than revolutionary change. They considered that capitalism had created an unjust and inefficient society. They agreed that the ultimate aim of the group should be to reconstruct "society in accordance with the highest moral possibilities". The Fabians rejected the revolutionary socialism and were concerned with helping society to move to a socialist society "as painless and effective as possible". They organized schemes for municipal socialism, and for the improvement of working conditions. The society won acclaim in 1889 with the publication of Fabian essays. George Bernard Shaw, the Fabian founder, said:

"Under Socialism, you would not be allowed to be poor. You would be forcibly fed, clothed, lodged, taught, and employed whether you liked it or not. If it were discovered that you had not the character and industry enough to be worth all this trouble, you might possibly be executed in a kindly manner; but whilst you were permitted to live, you would have to live well." (James, 2006, p. 25).

Sidney Webb wrote to the Fabian Edward Pease, "*Nothing is done in England without the consent of a small intellectual yet political class in London, not 2000 in number (cited in: Independent Working Class Association, 2009). We alone could get*

at that class.” The Fabians were especially active in London local government. They also aimed for democratic socialism. The word socialism was not to be used. Instead they would speak of benefits for the people such as welfare, medical care, higher wages, and better working conditions. In this way they planned to accomplish their aim without bloodshed and even without serious opposition. They scorned the Communists, not because they disliked their goals, but because they disagreed with their methods. To emphasize the importance of gradualism, they adopted the turtle as the symbol of their movement. In 1900 the Fabians helped organize the Labour Representative Committee, which became the Labour party in 1906.

The panorama of the Victorian Period drawn so far seems to testify that it really underwent a process of radical changes. It was the Victorian age, which provided conflicting explanations and theories, scientific and economic confidence, and social and spiritual pessimism, and intense anxiety as to the nature of the present. It was an inevitable fact that science should have a great contribution to these changes. Science mainly developed in contexts shaped by the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and the sweeping cultural and social changes of the century. According to James Ward, for example, social, economic and secularizing conditions led to nineteenth-century science and rising of the city (Davis, 2002).

The Victorians followed the improvements in science optimistically at first. Thanks to the science, many inventions were made so that people could sustain a more comfortable life. In a sense, the Industrial Revolution could as well be attributed to the immense developments in science. Steam power, fast railways, iron ships, looms, printing press and telegraph were some of these inventions performed in the Victorian Era. Scientists also improved laboratory techniques and precision laboratory tools as a gift of industrialization. They also improved medical knowledge and hygiene, so more people survived infancy and people started to have a longer lifespan. At the time of the first census in 1801 the population of England was about ten and a half million, but by the time of the 1901 census, population reached thirty-seven millions. Also, one of the most important inventions of the time was light. For the first time in history, streets were relatively well-lit at nights, allowing a lot more of nightlife than in the centuries past. The appearance of the landscape was changed by these developments, a physical conversion that also affected how people saw and related to each other. These technological and demographic changes changed the common rhythms of life, and improved the livings of countless people.

The fast-changing face of the Victorian Age to the accompaniment of science in particular brought about some of the major transformations across the Victorian Period, such as the change from “natural philosophy” and “natural history” to “science”. The idea of science helped to shape the general view of nature of “reality”. In the year 1859 Darwin, an English naturalist, published his ground-shaking book *The Origin of Species*. Darwin’s book first struck the scientific and social scene in the Victorian Period. It shattered the accepted beliefs about mankind and its place in the order of creation. It also subverted the long-centuries view that man stands at the centre of the universe as the lord of creation. Darwinism denied the biological uniqueness of humankind and asserted that human beings were one of many species of animals. As a result, people began to question their place in the universe and to wonder whether they were an animal or human. Thus, Victorian Age witnessed some of the most fundamental transformations of belief about nature and the place of humans in the universe. Tennyson, for example, stated that “*scientific knowledge brings not wisdom but despair as the individual self is threatened with extermination in the cause of the progress of the species*” (Thomas, 1994, p. 101).

Besides, the theory of natural selection² dislocated the religious faith of the people. People began to look to the world and future from a materialist view, whereupon Materialism became dominant and prepared the ground for the emergence of Realism. However, many people strongly rejected the idea of evolution, because it contradicted with religious beliefs of Christianity. In the presence of such a gradually deepening clash of ideas among the members of the same society, Christian institutions came to be questioned and viewed with suspicion and scepticism. The England Church began to lose its authority. A deep scepticism rose to a high level among the people. The Victorian world changed almost totally to the other side of belief; its history was no longer governed by religion but by the natural sciences. The post-Darwinian world grew more pessimistic in the light of the science. In a way, the science, which had made the Victorians’ world light, made it dark in the later decades of the century. This could be seen in the lines of Tennyson

* Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection as an explanation for adaptation and speciation. In 1859, he defined natural selection as the “principle by which each slight variation [of a trait], if useful, is preserved”. The concept was simple but powerful: individuals best adapted to their environments are more likely to survive and reproduce. As long as there is some variation between them, there will be an inevitable selection of individuals with the most advantageous variations. If the variations are inherited, then differential reproductive success will lead to a progressive evolution of particular populations of a species, and populations that evolve to be sufficiently different eventually become different species.

in his famous poem *In Memoriam*, one of the most powerful poems of doubt and despair to be written during the period of Victoria's reign:

*I falter where I firmly trod,
And falling with my weight of cares
Upon the great world's altar-stairs
That slope thro' darkness up to God,
I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope.*
(Tennyson, 1849, p. 13-16)

On the other hand, developments in the science saved the people from the heavy burden of the past. Besides Darwin's theory of evolution, the scientific world was affected by some others, as well: the book *Principles of Geology* (1830) by Charles Lyell, a close friend of Darwin and the major advocate of James Hutton's idea of uniformitarianism, that the earth was shaped entirely by slow-moving forces still in operation today, acting over a very long period of time; the work "*Vestiges of Creation*" (1844) by Robert Chambers, whose unorthodox themes contradicted the natural theology popular then and were reviled by clergymen but caused a shift in popular opinion which Darwin believed prepared the public mind for the scientific theories of evolution by natural selection; and the writing "On the Physical Basis of Life" (1869) by Thomas Huxley, who tended to deny that there exist any sort of "iron laws" that necessitate human conduct and believed in such abstractions as "spirit" and insisted that we possess enough "*freedom*" to "*do our duty*" and "*do as we like*," obvious exceptions to a thoroughgoing determinist view of human motivation. These all changed the stereotyped beliefs of people, or at least created some question marks in their minds about these and similar issues. As a result, many of the Victorians got freed from the constraints of religion and especially Puritanism. But all of these fluctuations in the society gave way to Agnosticism or Atheism. Thomas Chalmers wrote in *Prelections on Butler's Analogy* that the most distinguishing feature of Victorian agnosticism was not that of sceptical 'disbelief', affirming the falsehood of any given doctrine, but 'unbelief', the wish of a positive reason for affirming its truth (Davis, 2002). Rising of doubt and questioning old thoughts and beliefs dragged human mind into a dilemma. All in all, the beliefs of Victorian people had been shaken and they had grown more sceptic.

The abovementioned social changes and awakenings in the society, when combined with the scientific developments in technology concomitant with a deep trust in the science, inevitably gave way to the significant changes in the belief systems of the Victorians and to the rise of new belief systems to match their new understanding and interpretation of life and themselves. It goes without saying that Victorian England was a deeply religious country. Most of the people were habitual church goers, at least once and probably twice, every Sunday. The Bible was seen as the literal truth and was the basis of moral behaviour, which came to be known as “Victorianism”. In this period textbooks and games were largely based on religion. It was believed that if religion should be accepted by all, morality would bring a definite end to crime and poverty prevailing in the society then. So conservative were the people that they were clothing fabrics to the piano legs because of their thought that they evoked woman leg. But towards the end of Victoria’s reign, religion began to slacken for several reasons. Advancements in science and technology dragged the religion to descent. People gradually became more pessimistic. They began to lose their faith. In this sense the year 1859, when Charles Darwin published his ground-breaking book *The Origin of Species* in which he purposed the theory of evolution, marked a turning point in people’s views of the religion and even God.

According to Darwin, man was an animal and God was an unnecessary hypothesis; science became a threat to religion. Many people of the time saw Darwin’s arguments as contrary to the teachings of the Bible. However, his views were furthered by some other philosophers, writers and scientists, including Charles Lyell who wrote in his *Principles of Geology* that there was no God. To Tennyson, it was like a corrosion of which he read in Lyell’s *Principles of Geology* (Turner, 1989).

*If e’er when faith had fallen asleep,
I heard a voice ‘believe no more’
And heard an ever-breaking shore
That tumbled in the Godless deep.
(Tennyson, 1849, p. 13-16)*

Also Matthew Arnold’s (1867) works had the same flavour. He wrote in his famous poem “Dover Beach”:

*The Sea of faith
Was once, too, at the full and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.
(Arnold, 1867).*

In this period, for the first time Thomas Henry Huxley used the term of “Agnosticism” and asked; “*Does God exist? How can we know him? Does He intervene miraculously in the world?*” (Everett & Landow, 1987, p. 61).

While all such challenging and disturbing questions came out in this age, there appeared some other developments repairing the ground for them. Industrial Revolution was another reason of the upset in religious beliefs. Because of the industrial development in the country, the number of people who sought education had increased. Before the industrialization the Victorians did not even know that any life existed beyond their farming occupation or outside their small hamlets. In addition, with the development of technology, communication and travelling became easier and these developments provided material comfort to the people who gradually drifted apart from the religion. Owing to the new industrial and scientific developments, the Church lost its authority and power in this period. In England scientific growth was the main reason why many questions were raised against the religious ideologies. Despite all, there were some faithful ministers, missionaries, theologians and authors who tried to keep the Christian truth alive.

The Victorian period from the mid to the late 1800s was a time of religious turbulence for England. In the Anglican Church there were many different groups competing to define the doctrine and practice of the religion. The church was divided into three general categories following; the High Church, which was the most conservative; the Middle, or Broad Church, which was more liberal; and the Low Church, which was the Evangelical wing of the Anglican Church. High Church includes many different opinions on the true nature of the church as a whole. It was from this conservative branch of the Anglican Church that the men of the Oxford Movement came. The aim of Oxford Movement was to reform the Church of England in 1833. The name was taken from the Oxford University. John Keble, Edward Pusey and John Henry Newman were involved in this movement. The

movement was also known as “*Tractarianism*” because Newman and his followers developed their arguments by using pamphlets and tracts. They wanted to revive the rituals and mysticism of the early church.

The Evangelical Movement, known as the Low Church faction, was established during the 18th century. It emphasized the individual’s personal relationship with God, stressed the importance of believing in the sole authority of the Bible and highlighted the significance of faith over good works in achieving salvation. This movement matured along Methodism. The main purpose of Evangelical Movement was to revive the churches spiritually. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Evangelicals in the Church of England, especially William Wilberforce and other members of the group known as Clapham sect, played a leading role in the movement to abolish slavery in the British Colonies. They believed that each individual has a need for spiritual rebirth and personal commitment to Jesus Christ as saviour.

The Broad Church Movement was unlike the Evangelical or Oxford Movements, a group with which its members were only loosely associated. Those belonging to the Broad Church were liberals who questioned the doctrine that the entire Bible was inspired by God. The Broad Church publication “*Essay and Reviews*” in 1860 outlined some of its members’ liberal views. It was very strongly criticised by Tractarians and Evangelicals.

The improvement of technology was the only one element of the mid-Victorian period. Equally significant was the conflict between science and religion. Like much mid-Victorian literature, Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* (1850) reflects the religious debates of the earlier decades. These debates were between the Utilitarians, the followers of Jeremy Bentham, and the conservatives, followers of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The aim of Bentham and his followers was to test all institutions in consideration of human reason and to decide whether such institutions were useful or not. This test was an effective way of correcting the inefficiencies of government. Of course, one of the questions of the Utilitarians was about religion. According to them, religious belief was an unnecessary superstition. We can see that in a letter of Harriet Martineau (1802-1876) “*There is no God, of an author of Nature, of an origin of the universe, which is not utterly repugnant to my faculties; which is not (to my feelings) so irreverent as to make me blush, so misleading as to make me mourn.*” (Abrams, 1993, p. 84).

In the presence of such broad changes in the social and political life, accompanied by the changed economic and religious face of the country, it was inevitable that literature, a branch of science closely associated with the events in the social environment in terms of form and content in particular, should undergo the same process of change as did the society. It is, therefore, no surprise that the century witnessed the supremacy of the novel above the established forms of theatre and poetry.

2.1. Birth of the “New Woman” From the “Old Woman” of the Traditions

In August of 1893, *The Woman’s Herald* magazine declared the women’s rights as equal to men’s. Moreover, a new image of women came out. She named the “*New Woman*” who was the ideal woman of the new coming century and had a new female identity. This identity, when compared to Victorian women, was very different in many ways. Mainly, this “*New Woman*” was critically destructive to the traditional social structure. According to literary critics and historians, “*New Woman*” was a literary invention who was represented as a rebellious social radical. However, this fictional characterization of “*New Woman*” was playing an important role in women’s movements and in gaining respectability in the public space of periodicals. Also, the representation of women in that way was useful in combining the political agendas and in acting against the social and cultural boundaries of women (Tusan, 1998).

The images of New Woman were completely different from the images of the old woman. The earliest image of New Women was printed in press in the 1890s. This image was known as the “*Gibson girl*”. This name was taken from the artist Charles Dana Gibson. This earliest image showed the changing appearance of the woman. Instead of heavy corsets, petticoats and frills, New Woman or “*Gibson girl*” had sportswear. She was wearing a blouse and a long skirt. These clothes gave her a possibility for sports like tennis or riding a bicycle. In the press, new-fashioned “*Gibson Girl*” was shown as riding bike. This image of New Woman was self-confident, accomplished, athletic and flirty. Later on, “*Gibson girl*” image of New Woman changed and from 1913, “thin”, “flat-chested” and “boyish-looking” became the new features of the New Woman (Marks, 1990).

From an economic and social perspective, emergence of New Woman in Britain was a necessity because of the industrialization. Thus, the traditional Victorian ideology towards women was replaced by the ideology of New Woman.

The old gender roles changed and the women's economic independence and sexual liberation were brought to the forefront as women's rights. However, the images and ideology of New Woman were not accepted at that very moment. There were debates about these changes. In different magazines the opponents defended the idea that the emergence of New Woman was unhealthy for the entire nation. These debates showed that New Woman was not internalized by the society at that moment (Jusova, 2005).

As it is mentioned earlier, women's movements were influential for their emancipation. By these movements, women in Victorian Age began to participate in public sphere and were questioning the Victorian ideal of the domestically confined woman. The ideology of New Woman can be compared to old traditional woman. New Woman was independent over marriage and childrearing and rejecting the old conventions. Additionally, New Woman had more roles in public sphere and rejecting the idea of domestic sphere. The rupture of New Woman from the traditional Victorian woman can be analyzed more closely from the standpoint of economic dependence, marriage and education.

In the 1880s, emancipation of women was seen as directly connected to the economic independence. The image of New Woman was built on earning money. Instead of staying at home, they were working outside, thus gaining their economic independence. In other words, New Woman had a role in domestic financial responsibility and by this way New Woman gained self-confidence. According to the statistics in 1881, there were 6000 working women and this number increased to 17859 in 1891. There were women nurses and women teachers. Thus, economic independence played a significant role in the emancipation of women and emergence of New Woman (Cunningham, 1973).

The criticism of marriage was another point for New Woman. For Victorian woman, becoming a wife or a mother was a duty. However, for New Woman these ideals imposed by men for social purposes ceased to be necessary. Rejecting marriage was conceivable. New Woman began to criticize male sexual violence and other forms of oppression within the family. The double standards of sexual morality by which men were able to enjoy sexual freedom, while keeping women's sexuality confined to the institution of monogamous marriage was rejected. The traditional view of sexuality was dependent on marriage, but for New Women there was not a barrier of marriage for sexuality. The image of New Woman at that point was shaped as an independent, working woman. With The Married Women's Property Act of 1882, married woman gained rights about divorce. This also led to the

emancipation of women in front of laws. New Woman's perspective of marriage was very different from the look of traditional values (Cunningham, 1973).

Education was another significant point for New Woman. The new schools were bringing up women teachers and this was giving way to the education of New Woman. The Foundation of Queens's and Bedford Colleges in London in 1848 and 1849 were the first educational movements. Besides, The North London Collegiate founded in 1850 and Cheltenham Ladies' College founded in 1854 were giving secondary education. Thus, these schools were progressive in the education of women (Cunningham, 1973). In short, the qualifications of New Woman can be summarized as follows: she would be educated, economically independent and politically active, but she would also have her own decision of marriage, wearing comfortable clothes and rejecting old social norms.

The part of the study up to this position is assigned to the social and historical background of Victorian Age and a comparison between the traditional Victorian Woman and New Woman. As mentioned earlier, New Woman was also seen as a literary construction, in other words a literary fiction. Following this idea, an illustration could be given to expand the understanding of New Woman in Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* (1879) for a better understanding.

Henrik Ibsen's play, *A Doll's House* was published in December 1879 and since then it has been accepted as a major work in dramatic literature. The play was first presented in Stockholm by the Royal theatre on 8th of January 1880 (Siddall, 2008). This play was sharply critical of the nineteenth-century marriage norms and showed the increasing consciousness of a housewife, Nora. The play's closure had an impact because the final act breaks conventions. In the final act, Nora closes behind the door of her doll's house. It has a discussion on the final act, not an unravelling. Nora's departure made an impact on the society, because as Nora leaves the house, she opens the possibilities of a new life for herself. Thus, the play manifests Ibsen's concern for women's rights (Shafer, 1985).

In this play, Nora is the embodiment of "New Woman". She is the protagonist of the play and Torwald Helmer's wife. At the beginning of the play, Nora seems to be completely happy in her home and does not know anything about the life outside. In the second act, she realizes that she has ability and intellectual capacity for understanding the world outside and she begins to question her own position as a wife and mother. She takes out a loan to save her husband's health. These actions are also new for women in that era. Nora's behaviours signify her assurance and courage. After that, she becomes aware of her social roles and thinks about fulfilling

her ideas which were before determined as a daughter, wife and mother. In the play Nora's behaviours, like eating macaroons and swearing just for pleasure, also symbolize and criticize the traditional gender roles of women in Victorian age. In the final act, as Nora walks out of the house, she leaves behind the old women, the traditional marriage norms and walks for her freedom to find herself.

According to Emma Goldman, Nora is "*in the sacred institution of the home and in the position of woman in her gilded cage*" (Goldman, 1914). However, in this house, Nora feels so happy and after taking money to save her husband, she thinks of earning money. In the 1890s, earning money was something quite unusual and new for women. Surprisingly in this play, however, Nora is represented as a woman who tries to earn and save money irrespective of her husband's inevitable objection and reaction to her doing so, which makes her appear on the way to being a new woman. As Nora says:

"When Torvald gave me money for clothes and so on, I never used more than half of it; I always bought the simplest things. . . . Torvald never noticed anything. But it was often very hard, Christina dear. For it's nice to be beautifully dressed. Now, isn't it? . . . Well, and besides that, I made money in other ways. Last winter I was so lucky--I got a heap of copying to do. I shut myself up every evening and wrote far into the night. Oh, sometimes I was so tired, so tired. And yet it was splendid to work in that way and earn money. I almost felt as if I was a man." (Ibsen, 1874, p. 17)

By these words, the image of New Woman, earning and saving money, was glorified. Even though Nora finds working stimulating and gratifying, she does not allow anyone to know about it except Mrs. Linde. Nora finds working scandalous because her husband and father thought that it is not an honourable behaviour. However, working gives her the feeling of accomplishment and she liked it. By this way, Nora is the representation of New Woman who likes working, earning and saving money.

Furthermore, taking a loan to save her husband is not accepted as a moral behaviour. Because as her husband Helmer mentions, her duty is towards him and children. Nora should not be interested in the economic situations:

Helmer: It's exasperating! Can you forsake your holiest duties in this way?
Nora: What do you call my holiest duties?
Helmer: Do you ask me that? Your duties to your husband and children.

Nora: I have other duties equally sacred.
Helmer: Impossible! What duties do you mean?
Nora: My duties toward myself.
Helmer: Before all else you are a wife and a mother.
Nora: That I no longer believe. I think that before all else I am a human being, just as much as you are--or, at least, I will try to become one. I know that most people agree with you, Torvald, and that they say so in books. But henceforth I can't be satisfied with what most people say, and what is in books. I must think things out for myself and try to get clear about them. . . . I had been living here these eight years with a strange man, and had borne him three children--Oh! I can't bear to think of it--I could tear myself to pieces!. I can't spend the night in a strange man's house.
 (Ibsen, 1874, p. 28)

This conversation between Nora and her husband Helmer forms the peak point of conflict. As Helmer states, Nora's duties are being a wife and mother. However, Nora as the representation of New Woman rejects these norms. Nora, before being a wife and mother, sees herself as a "*human being*". Thus, marriage institution is criticized here and Nora rejects the idea of marriage that settles married woman "*nothing else than a plaything, a doll, a nonentity*" (Goldman, 1914).

In the play, when Nora accuses her father and husband of having committed a great sin against her by treating her as if she were a playmate, she also rejects the idea of womanhood, which is limited to domestic sphere and based on pleasing husband or father by accepting the traditional social norms. In other words, it is a doll wife. Later on in the play, the education demand of New Woman is voiced by Nora: "*I have to try to educate myself.*" From a different perspective, this demand is the way for women's emancipation and it is discrediting the idea of women as playthings or servants. With Nora's enlightenment, she discovers that she has duties higher than those of a "wife and mother," obligations she names as "*duties to myself*" Nora as a New Woman voices the emancipation of woman by education, and voices the man and woman intellectual equality (Templeton, 1989).

In Henrik Ibsen's play, Nora is awakening into a new understanding of herself and criticizing the traditional gender roles of women in Victorian society. At the end of the play, she is transformed into a New Woman. As the closure of the play suggests, the enlightenment for Nora is outside the family, in other words, outside the traditional view of womanhood. Parallel to this traditional viewpoint, Ibsen wrote the following notes about his own play: "*A woman cannot be herself in contemporary society; it is an exclusively male society with laws drafted by men, and with counsel and judges who judge feminine conduct from the male point of view*" (McFarlane, 1994). Following this idea, the characterization of Nora is fitted on the

positive image of New Woman. To put it in short terms, it can be seen that in this play Nora is voicing the rejection of degrading modes imposed by conventional social norms and assenting the possibility of New Womanhood.

To sum up, in this section of the thesis focusing on the image of woman in Victorian Age, the oppression of women is cleared up. Afterwards, the social and economic conditions that gave the way to the emergence of New Woman are discussed. Lastly, characteristics of New Woman are specified. The characterization of Nora in *A Doll's House* was interpreted and discussed as the representation of New Woman. The process beginning with this play and the social developments inherent in the Victorian Age, is today considered to be the visible germ of what is today known as feminism, the struggle of women to rid themselves of the male impositions and restrictions. This is because the cause of equality between different classes of society in Marxist terms has extended to the necessity of equality between different genders.

2.2. From the New Woman to Feminism

There are tools that may be effective when we interpret literary works and find the symbols and codes used for women in text. How are women depicted in the literary text? The use of stereotypes for women included sex maniacs, goddesses of beauty, old spinsters, threatening widows etc. Apart from the character analysis, one should also look inside text for the form, style, voice and theme. It is better to classify the woman characters according to their role. They may be mad or angels, typified characters, educated feminist, centre of attraction or amnesiac conformist, bearer of the social norms. Thus, feminist literary criticism can be used as a tool to analyse literary works. This section is devoted to a brief explanation of the points targeted by feminist criticism.

The main focus of the feminist literary criticism is the struggle of women in patriarchal society. However, the patriarchal codes should be handled deeper in this definition. Thus, the cultural roles of women and women's social and political rights play an important role in feminist literary criticism. The traditions representative of patriarchal society constitute the research areas of this criticism. From these analyses the women's oppression is to be revealed. Feminist literary criticism is concerned with the social, economic and psychological oppression of women, by interpreting the male and female writers' works. Furthermore, by discovering and evaluating the gender roles of the characters in literary works, and by analyzing the images and

stereotypes in literary works, the patriarchy is criticized. The origins of patriarchy and its representations in literary works are questioned because every patriarchal cultural code is a conspiracy to oppress women (Armstrong, 2006). Besides, feminist literary criticism is also connected to the phases of feminism, which give a wider understanding of this kind of criticism and provide a feminist look to the literary works.

The first phase of feminism includes the years between 1700 and early years of the 20th century. The socio-historical context of the first-wave feminism arose in industrial society and liberal politics which includes women's rights movements and early socialist feminism in the late 19th and early 20th century. In this phase, the focus is on the inequalities between sexes. In this sense, education was an important point because equality of chances for education was the key for women to exist in the social area. Wollstonecraft's ideas were important for women. Her ideas were based on women education, and thus it would enable women to interact with the outer world and have self confidence and autonomy. In her work *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, published in 1792, Wollstonecraft points out that she "sees no fundamental difference between the sexes in terms of their capacity for reason and their potential for self development, adding that education must foster independence of thought" (Wollstonecraft, 1988).

Virginia Woolf's novel, *A Room of One's Own* published in 1929, can be considered in the first wave feminism. In her book, Woolf mainly focuses on the social inequalities of women and men. According to Woolf (1929):

In the first place, it is necessary to have a room of her own, let alone a quiet room or a sound-proof room was out of the question...since her pin money depended on the good will of her father, was only enough to keep her clothed ... such material difficulties were formidable; but much worse were the immaterial...Write if you choose ... (p. 86)

In this quotation, Woolf emphasizes the dependence of woman on her father or, in general, views of men. Moreover, women do not have a room of their own, and they are fully dependent and under the oppression of patriarchal cultural codes.

The second wave feminism is associated with the years between 1960 and 1980s. In these years the women were active in working life. Thus, this wave of feminism was intended to gain civil rights, sexual liberation, childcare, health, welfare, education, work and reproductive rights including the right for abortion. The women in patriarchal society were seen as mothers and housewives. In this wave of

feminism, this cultural stereotyping was criticized and the campaigns were against these cultural codes. In the first wave feminism, women were to gain equality in laws. However, in this wave the struggle was for the rights of women in working life.

For the second wave feminism, Simone de Beauvoir's book *Second Sex* has a crucial role. In this work, it is emphasized that the women should react to the image of housewives and they should react to the oppression of male dominance. In Beauvoir's words "*one is not born, rather becomes a woman*" (Beauvoir, 1986). It can be seen that being a woman does not have essential aspects but rather it is a sociological and cultural construction. Thus, Beauvoir's ideas were influential in those years. According to her, women should fight for their rights and reject the given patriarchal roles and they should be aware of male dominant cultural codes in every aspect of working and private life.

Lastly, the third wave of feminism focuses on the missing point of the second wave. Second wave feminism is based on the middle class white women. With the third wave feminism, women from different races and classes were integrated into the feminism definition. This wave started in the 1980s.

The three waves of feminism give us the chance to see the whole picture of women's struggle for emancipation. Directly connected to the waves of feminism, feminist literary criticism is after the questioning of the aspects of literary works from a feminist perspective. In other words, feminist literary criticism asks questions about the representations of women in patriarchal society. In this manner, in literary works the roles and situations of the female characters to other female or male characters are analyzed. Furthermore, the cultural codes that shape the characters in literary works are determined and examined whether these codes are dominant aspects of patriarchal society that suppress women. The images and the words used to describe the female characters are also interpreted. By these interpretations, the feminist critic of the literary work is presented.

In this thesis, Oscar Wilde's plays will be interpreted from a feminist point of view. However, before starting this interpretation the historical and sociological background of Victorian Age will supply meaningful interpretation facilities for the interpretation of his plays. Thus, in the next section the perception of women in Victorian Age will be grasped in its outline.

CHAPTER III

OSCAR WILDE; DIFFERENT LIVES OF ONE MAN IN DIVERSE FIELDS

3.1. Wilde on the Stage of Real Life

Oscar Wilde was born as the second son of Jane Francesca Wilde and her husband William on 16 October 1854 in Dublin. His mother, who was widely known as Speranza then, was a popular figure in Dublin society. She was also well-known for her poems and patriotic manner. Strongly inspired by Thomas Davis, who was also famous for his nationalist poetry, Speranza wrote verses that could be interpreted as her screams emphasizing the deeper sense of patriotism aiming to set Ireland free from the English rule. She was very talented, a fact which was proven by the fact that she was able to learn two European languages before she was eighteen. She published thirteen books, including collections of her poetry. Speranza married William Wilde on 14 November 1851 at St Peter's Protestant Church in Dublin. Oscar's father, William Wilde, was, however, an aural surgeon and oculist, whose name had a place in the medical circles. He published some textbooks in the field of ear and eye surgery and travelled around Europe for his studies. Just as his mother was renowned and respected in Dublin society, so his father was of high reputation and respect in medical circles.

Of his parents, Speranza had greater impact on Oscar, an effect which would continue throughout his life and which would be visible in his treatment and portrayal of female characters in his works, especially plays. As Oscar admired his mother all his life, she was a great model for him in that she had endless support for him and his genius. Moreover, he was very fond of his mother and later in his play *The Importance of Being Earnest* he was to lament saying, "All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's his" (Gardiner, 1995). His regret was seemingly that he had no resemblance to his mother as a man. This quotation from him signifies that he finds all women unfortunate in that they resemble or become mothers, probably following the process of marrying and giving birth. Here one can sense that Oscar, maybe, puts the emphasis on the physical appearance of women, which is distorted after the birth or sometimes marriage. Another saying of Wilde on his attitude to his wife Constance is a clear sign of his

growing disgust with her after their marriage, which seems to have been caused by her distorted body image. In a conversation with his friend Frank Harris, Wilde remarks:

When I married my wife was a beautiful girl, white and slim as a lily, with dancing eyes and gay rippling laughter like music. Within a year or flower-like grace had all vanished; she became heavy, shapeless, deformed. She dragged herself about the house in uncouth misery with drawn blotched face and hideous body sick at heart because of our love. It was dreadful. I tried to be kind to her, forced myself to touch and kiss her; but she was sick always – oh! I cannot recall it, it is all loathsome. I used to wash my mouth and open the window to cleanse my lips in the pure air (McKenna, 2003).

Reflecting his aversion to his wife, which grew after their marriage, Wilde had a mother, Speranza, as a mother, devoted to her two sons, which is indicated by the fact that she did her best to train them at home till their teens. After being tutored at home until Oscar was ten and Willie, his elder brother, was twelve, they became part of Portora Royal School at Enniskillen in the country of Fermanagh. From the beginning it was obvious that Wilde was gifted, and naturally Speranza was proud of Oscar's ability. At his new school Portora, Oscar was eager to read Greek and Latin texts, whereupon he was able to translate them orally. His brilliant talent was crowned by the Carpenter Prize for Greek Testament in 1870 and he was awarded a scholarship to study at Trinity College, which still had a high reputation for its scholarship in Dublin. There, Reverend John Mahaffy, the Professor of Ancient History at Trinity influenced Wilde with his language skills and confidence.

Wilde, remarkable for his achievements in his school life, was not so lucky in his private life in the 1860s. His younger sister Isola, aged nine, died of fever in the spring of 1867, and anguish about her death. His perished state of mind is proven by the fact that he kept a lock of her hair in an envelope with the words 'My Isola's Hair'. Later, when Oscar was travelling in France, he wrote a poem, 'Requiescat', expressing his own sense of melancholy at his early loss, beginning with the lines "Tread lightly, she is near / Under the snow, / Speak gently, she can hear / The daisies grow." and ending with the lines "All my life's buried here, / Heap earth upon it" (Methuen, 1921). This was the first loss of a woman in Wilde's life, which obviously shook him in spiritual and mental terms.

Seven years after her death, Wilde was again distinguished for his achievements. On 23 June 1874, Wilde presented himself at Magdalen College, Oxford, and attended the examinations for Demys (scholarships) in classics that the college was offering. Again, he came to take place on top of his schoolmates. At Oxford, where Wilde went on his education and career, he lived his happiest and most prolific days. He gradually grew addicted to the city of Oxford as well as the university because he found the ancient city of Oxford appealing entirely to his taste, declaring publicly that it was the most beautiful thing in England. “*Two turning points in my life were when my father sent me to Oxford and when society sent me to prison*”, wrote Wilde in recollection (Gide, 2007). In a sense, his arrival at Oxford meant the beginning of the rise in Wilde’s intellectual and artistic career, while his imprisonment came to mean the ending of his mental as well as his spiritual brightness. Though fresh to Oxford and the intellectual world of the city, Wilde was able to catch up with John Ruskin and Walter Pater, two radical and iconic young figures famous for their skills at Oxford. Besides his intellectual awakening, he got acquainted with the Catholic rituals there, as well. During his years at Oxford, he felt under the spell of Catholic Church and attracted to its rituals. However, he did not convert so that he would not be deprived of his father’s heritage. His anxiety about this attitude ended with the death of his father in 1876.

The troubled years in Oscar Wilde’s life were also accompanied by the enormous changes in English social and political life: Already tormented by what was happening around him, Wilde also underwent some changes in his view of life and society. His newly-developing identity and tastes were inevitably influenced by the emerging scenes of Great Britain, known as the empire on which the sun never set. However, the country was passing through an industrial era. The Victorians attributed much importance to the science and industrial revolution, but people were under heavy labour conditions, which, on the other hand, led to the rising of Marxism and Darwinism though indirectly. It should be considered as indirect because the 19th century was an era in which capitalism was the form of government. The spread of industrialization led to the exploitation of the poor. This sort of exploitation was common in almost every segment of the society. Men were superior to women, white people were superior to black people, and of course the rich were superior to the poor. It is today considered to be for this very reason that Britain grew to be the biggest colonial country in the 19th century. Britain was making a promise of

civilisation to its colonies, but these colonial countries were only the tools of Britain, which made it more powerful.

Just as Colonialism contributed to the enrichment and enlargement of Britain as a country in economic and political as well as geographic terms, so Capitalism shaped the social life and economic conditions in and out of the country. Capitalism was an unjust system, which restricted the wages of the workers, but increased the intensity of working hours of the workers on the other hand Bourgeoisie who made profit from this system. In contrast to those of the poor, their living standards were increasing. Even the children were working in the factories. People were migrating from south to the north in order to gain money and lead a better life, but generally the results were disappointing, and eventually hopes were shattered. The workers could not get much money during the Industrial Revolution, so they had to work under heavy and bad conditions not only to gain money but also earn their lives. In consideration of these circumstances, Marx published his *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848 in Manchester, the English city populated mostly by workers undergoing such heavy conditions. Hereby he invited the workers to this movement named Marxism. Also in *Das Capital* (1867), Marx stated that workers produced more goods, but they could never use. On the other side, upper-class and the owners of the factories had more goods than they could produce, so there was a conflict within the system. Those were either owners or workers. Capitalism only improved the living standards of some people, or the minority, but increased the unemployment, poverty and suffering of others, or the majority. Besides, Marx advocated the inequality of people. The words of domination, exploitation and alienation were enough for him to define the capitalism of the 19th century. Within the statement that the worker is as much related to the product of labour as to an alien object, these consequences are emphasized. From this point of view it can be stated that the more effort the worker makes, the stronger the world of objects becomes and it is the same in religion, as well. The more man puts into God, the less he retains in himself. The worker puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object (Tucker, 1978). Also Marx stated that his theory is based on materialism. Marxism turned people away from religion and morality. Marx claimed that the source of everything is substance, world and nature because the creator of man and the world is not God, but the nature itself.

Communism can be taken as the adaptation of Marx's views and thoughts to sociology, politics and history. It is also a theory of evaluation. During this period it was not only Marx who challenged the age of traditions with his ground-shaking allegations and suggestions, but Charles Darwin also contributed a lot to his age with his scandalously alarming when considered within the context of the 19th century dominated and shaped by the centuries-old traditions and customs in almost every field of life and society. Darwin proposed his theory of evaluation in his famous book *The Origin of Species*. He objected to the religious beliefs by contradicting the creation. For him, all existing things consist of "matter in motion" and life arose by chance. Human beings are evolved species of animals. In Darwin's theory material terms are the key factors to explain the whole human history. He contributed to materialism as much as Marx and his theory also included that of Marx. In his book Anton Pannekoek (1909) explained the situation as follows.

The scientific importance of Marxism as well as of Darwinism consists in their following out the theory of evolution, the one upon the domain of the organic world, of things animate; the other, upon the domain of society... Thus, both teachings, the teachings of Darwin and of Marx, the one in the domain of the organic world and the other upon the field of human society, raised the theory of evolution to a positive science. In doing this they made the theory of evolution acceptable to the masses as the basic conception of social and biological development.(p. 97)

As a consequence, there occurred a disorder in the Victorian society. They were shocked by the idea that humans are basically animals. Their continual order was corrupted.

Despite the developing economic and political state of Britain, there was a downfall regarding the moral values of Victorians. Consequently, it was a time of contradictions with its social and economic dilemmas. One of such contradictions was Utilitarianism, searching for ultimate happiness for people, adopted by individuals, particularly by the upper class. It might be said that there was a great expectation of happiness among the people in parallel with the increased levels of development and advancement. However, utilitarianism set barriers to human awareness and sense of freedom in addition averting aestheticism. It also constituted a community obsessed with materialistic thought. The aesthetes regarded utilitarianism as a threat to freedom as it limits the art and they were aware of the fact

that the nature of art would wither if utilitarianism were practiced in the field of art. Advocating the motto “*art for art’s sake*”, they launched aestheticism.

As can be seen above, the nineteenth-century England witnessed many social changes also reflected onto the literary realm. Following the religious trend of Oxford movement, for example, the university passed through an aesthetic movement after the 1870s. It may be said that aestheticism was born as a reaction to utilitarianism; however, this movement did not last long. During his education at Oxford, which was passing through these changes, two important figures influenced Wilde with their aesthetic theories: John Ruskin and Walter Pater. Pater was regarded as the high priest of aesthetic movement. He was impressed by Theophile Gautier, who was a French writer. Gautier firstly supported the Romantic Movement and Pater (1873) tried to adapt it into aestheticism. For him the main point of the art is “*art for art’s sake*”, so he refused the morality of the art and advocated the supremacy of beauty. According to Walter, the quest of aestheticism is the most important pursuit in human life. Also for Pater, the artist should worry about the form as well as the method and reflect his ideas freely. He should not be dependent on conventional, ethical and moral ideas. Accordingly, for Pater, the function of the aesthetic critic;

... is to distinguish, to analyze, and separate from its adjuncts, the virtue by which a picture, a landscape, a fair personality in life or in a book, produces this special impression of beauty or pleasure, to indicate what the source of that impression is, and under what conditions it is experienced. His end is reached when he has disengaged that virtue, and noted it, as a chemist notes some natural element, for himself and others (Levey, 1978, p. 238).

Also he mentions, “*Of such wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for its own sake, has most. For art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality of your moments as they pass, and simply for these moments sake*” (Levey, 1978, p. 70).

Besides Pater, John Ruskin was also a defender of aesthetic movement. According to Ruskin, art contains the whole humanity. Feelings, morals and knowledge are the mains aspects needed in art. For Ruskin, art is inspired by nature and even the greatest artists emphasized life and religion as much as addressing the significant truths. He also stands as one of the main figures of aestheticism, believing

that the Victorian society can reach moral and spiritual perfection in terms of life through the improvement of aesthetic sense. In his lectures at Oxford, he argued:

All the great arts have for their object either the support or exaltation of human life, usually both; and their dignity, and ultimately their very existence, depend on their being, that is to say, apprehending, with right reason, the nature of the materials they work with, of the things they relate or represent and of the faculties to which they addressed (Ruskin, 2007 p. 35).

Influenced by these two figures and his stay at Oxford, Wilde became an important defender of aestheticism. He won the Newdigate Prize for his poems *Ravenna* and *First in Greats* and this prize contributed much to his fame. According to Wilde, “*Aestheticism is a search after the signs of the beautiful. It is the science of the beautiful through which men seek the correlation of the arts. It is to speak more exactly, the search after the secret of life.*” (Gardiner, 1995). Parallel to Aestheticism, which favours the search and attainment of beauty and whatever is aesthetic, Wilde insists on what is beautiful, which means to him the secret of life. He argues that arts should aim to focus on the concept of beauty, whether it may be in physical or abstract terms. To him, man deserves the beautiful around him as a divine being in the world, which is the creation of God. Moreover, he believes that arts should not be in search of material gains or earnings, which would diminish the artistic value and beauty of works. Similarly, the theory of aesthetic movement was that art should not be utilitarian, but an independent part of human life, and should exist only for its own sake. The saying “art for art’s sake” was the threshold of aesthetic movement, which emerged from artistic and cultural necessities. Moreover, according to the aesthetic writers, art should not have didactic or any other purpose, either. Instead, it should just deal with pleasure of people rather than sentimental or moral messages.

In contrast to his decided devotion to Aestheticism, he remained often undecided as to his religious feelings. Grown up in a Protestant family though he was Irish, he first became familiar with Catholicism in the southern coast of Ireland at the age of five. Under the delusion of his childhood, he tended toward Catholicism during his studenthood at Oxford. His statement “*I am not a catholic, I am simply a violent Papist*”, like many of his paradoxes, is another reflection of his blithe wit. For him, Catholicism was the only religion worth dying in (McCracken, 2003). He had a group of Jesuit friends, upon whose influence he intended to be Catholic. However,

he realized that his was just an aesthetic interest in the Catholic masses due to the aesthetics involved in them, not a wholehearted devotion to it. His confusion in political matters is equalled by his confused mind over any sense of the world. As he stated in *De Profundis*, he had no belief in the capacity of religion to help him. He expressed his feelings with a letter to his friend, William Ward: “*I feel an imposter and traitor to myself on these occasions and must do something decided.*” (Hart-Davis, 1962). To Pearson (1946) on the other hand, Wilde was an idolatrous person. However, he often admired Catholicism as an outsider rather than an insider. The day before his death, Wilde was baptized in the Catholic Church, so his desire to become Catholic was attained which brought him peace in his final moments.

As a man with such confusion about religion and politics, Wilde was not at ease with his marriage, either. Meeting Constance Lloyd at a family friend’s house in London in May 1881, Wilde took a liking to her. He developed an affair with her and only three years later did they marry. On 29 May 1884, when they got married, Wilde was four years older than his wife Constance. She was the daughter of a prestigious barrister named Horace Lloyd and her mother’s name was Adelaide Atkinson. The newlywed couple lived in the Tite Street and had two sons. He admired her outspoken, independent mind as well as the fact that she was well-read and spoke several European languages like him. According to him, the institution of marriage was unnecessary and nonsensical. It was only beneficial for social status because at that time in the eyes of people marriage was an important factor to earn some level of esteem in the society. Wilde was aware of this fact, but later his sexual preferences changed and there was nothing for Oscar that domesticated him. Constance had to take care of their kids, so she was not able to have enough time with Oscar. She did not want to go out at nights and organize parties to meet her friends. Also, she did not have enough delicacy for art to share her husband’s works. However, she wrote two books for children in order to win her husband’s favour and prepared an anthology from Wilde’s mottos. Yet Wilde found the anthology unfavourable and stopped the printing. In *An Ideal Husband* Wilde says, “*Modern women understand everything except their husbands. That is the one thing the modern woman never understands*” (Tydeman, 1982). Gradually Wilde got bored with marriage and was fed up with hiding his suppressed emotions. As he always said, he wanted to set his soul free and pursue his passion. He thought that, the only way of getting rid of the sin is to obey it. He no longer went home and he always

stayed with Lord Alfred Douglas. Henceforward marriage was a heavy burden on his shoulders. “*How marriage ruins a man! It is as demoralizing as cigarettes and far more expensive*” (Tydeman, 1982). It later turned out that he was opposed to the institution of marriage. Wilde believed that there could not be a faithful relationship between men and women. So marriage could not have been a well-grounded institution. That was one of the reasons why Wilde repudiated institution of marriage. In one way marriage is a scene where man and woman are forced to the act of lying.

3.2. His Political Vision

Wilde was concerned with politics and society. He called himself a socialist. In his great essay *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, which is a commentary on politics, Wilde supposes that socialism will establish a society in which people are more independent and express themselves freely while problems of production are also solved. It might be said that the aim of Wilde’s socialist view is to create a world where “individualism” and “self” expressions are possible. Besides, Wilde believes that private property has an adverse effect on man’s soul. He expresses, “*It (private property) has made neither gain nor growth its aim*” and adds “*So that man thought that the important thing was to have, and did not know that the important thing was to be*” (Dowling, 2001).

Negating John Locke’s view of property as the basis of social system based on individuals each in an attempt to have more than others, Wilde places the emphasis on the process whereby man comes to be or exist. To him, man should try to realize the essence of his being rather than earn and have more. For this ambitious process of having is sure to do away with the mysterious process of realizing the essence of being. The more one tends to have in the physical or material world, the more he or she will get away from the essence of life, namely the soul and being. While Wilde suggests such contradictory views on one hand, he also rejects the state control over man and says:

What is needed is Individualism. If the Socialism is Authoritarian; if there are Governments armed with economic power as they are now with political power; if, in a word, we are to have Industrial

Tyrannies, then the last state of man will be worse than the first.... I confess that many of the socialistic views that I have come across seem to me to be tainted with ideas of authority, if not of actual compulsion. Of course, authority and compulsion are out of the question. All association must be quite voluntary. It is only in voluntary associations that man is fine (Dowling, 2001).

Wilde was certain of what kind of future he wanted for humanity. As the quote above indicates he did not wish to see an industrial tyranny rise in the name of Socialism. “*All modes of Government are failures*”, he maintained, while social democracy is “the bludgeoning of people by the people for the people. His main obsession was with what he termed “*individualism*”. It’s fair to interpret this as a will for freedom. Socialism itself will be of value because it will lead to individualism.

In its final form, Wilde’s socialism closely resembles Tucker’s libertarian anarchism. To define and describe it, Wilde writes:

Individualism, then, is what through Socialism we are to attain to. As a natural result the State must give up all idea of government. It must give it up because, as a wise man once said many centuries before Christ, there is such a thing as leaving mankind alone; there is no such thing as governing mankind. All modes of government are failures. Despotism is unjust to everybody, including the despot, who was probably made for better things. Oligarchies are unjust to the many, and ochlocracies are unjust to the few. High hopes were once formed of democracy; but democracy means simply the bludgeoning of the people by the people for the people... The form of government that is most suitable to the artist is no government at all. (Dowling, 2001).

What Wilde advocates, individualism is a system that puts human to a place superior to society and state. For Wilde human should be in the center of all values and social institutions. He emphasizes that if socialism works well and the society lives in welfare, individuals will also be happy as a part of this welfare. According to Pearson (1946), another reason that led Wilde to be imprisoned besides being homosexual was his articles praising socialism.

3.3. Wilde on the Stage of Literary Life

For a while Wilde dealt with journalism and published the volume of essays, "Intentions". Also *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was his important work which treated the two-sided life of a young man. Since Wilde had a two-sided life too, this work served as a mirror reflecting his life. He developed a tendency towards homosexuality, and it was when he met Lord Alfred Douglas in 1891 that Wilde's tendency came to light.

In the four years after his acquaintance with and attraction to Douglas, Wilde focused on writing plays for the stages. He attained great popularity with his plays as well as poems which he went on writing. He had a great reputation in London society, but he started to fall into a decline because of his extreme and unusual relationship with Douglas and also other relationships in the London underworld of male homosexuality. Not only the society but also Lord Alfred Douglas's father, who was the Marquess of Queensberry, developed a grudge against Wilde. On the grounds that homosexuality was illegal in the society then, he found himself on trial. In 1895, he was sent to prison for two years. In prison he wrote a long letter telling his strong emotions for Douglas, and after prison life he published this letter as *De Profundis*. In 1897, he was released, but he had already been offended by the London society. For this reason, he went to France and on 30 November 1900 he died with deep anguish and thoughts as well as sorrow. The critic worth comments on this tragic death as follows: "*In life, Wilde lost the battle with 'earnestness', which in the theatre it was his mission to explode with the bombs of paradox and epigram*" (Worth, 1992).

3.3.1. Wilde as a Poet

Wilde was never engaged in a single form of writing or genre. That is, he wrote poems, novels, stories, plays and other sorts of writings. It could be said that he was not content with writing in the same line. However, from the very beginning of his career he wrote poems. As a conventional Victorian, he expressed political, moral, religious and social manners of the period. Generally in his works he reflected the cultural and social crises of the time he lived. Soon, however, he turned his

attention to the Aesthetic Movement, always rejecting the Victorian sense of art, but he could not perpetuate his aestheticism. Though he was a strong defender of Aesthetic Movement, there was a tension between his sensitivity to Victorianism and Aestheticism, which resulted in contradictions throughout his work, as summed up in the oxymoronic title of Norbert Kohl's study: *Oscar Wilde: The Works of a Conformist Rebel* (1989).

As the above title shows, Wilde put his pen and art into the art of poetry, touching a wide range of subjects and topic. For example, he called attention to Roman Catholicism and wrote several religious poems, such as *San Miniato* in which he mentions his physical and emotional rising to the twelfth-century church on one of the hills of Florence comparing his own with the pure Virgin and indicating a similarity between the crucified Christ and Romantic image of the martyred artist, he states: "*O crowned by God with thorns and pain! / Mother of Christ! O mystic wife! / My heart is weary of this life*". After this address to the virgin, the poem ends with the cry directed to her for help (the 'sun' is perhaps an allusion to her son): *O listen ere the searching sun/Show to the world my sin and shame.* (Wilde, 1950). Besides his preoccupation with Catholic figures and themes, in his earlier poems, Wilde kept loyal to the literary tone of the traditional Victorian in Period and frequently referred to the crucified Christ. His poem *Humanitad*, written on the integration of human and Christ with their sorrows, is also considered as his most lyrical and beautiful poem by some critics.

Throughout his life, however, Wilde had a dilemma of Christianity regarding his emotions. There were times when he objected to the religious beliefs and ironized the Church, besides his sheltering under Christianity. He adopted the philosophy of crucified Christ and mentioned Christ's superiority as a poet. However, depending on his belief that there is no universal reality in art, what conflicts with reality is also a reality, he says. In his work *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, he distinguishes Christ from the understanding of Christianity of the Victorian Period. "*The Chaplain would not kneel to pray/By his dishonored grave:/Nor mark it with that blessed Cross/That Christ for sinners gave,/Because the man was one of those/Whom Christ came down to save.*" (Wilde, 1950).

In his poems after the 1870s, Wilde was highly influenced from the painter Whistler, impressionist artists, and Theophile Gautier, the master of colour and music in poem. His most popular French-named poems of that time *Les Silhouettes*,

Impressions du Matin, and *Fantaisies Decoratives* have lots of impressionist images. Below is the first stanza of *Silhouettes* portraying the impressionist images of the nature:

*The sea is flecked with bars of grey,
The dull dead wind is out of tune,
And like a withered leaf the moon
Is blown across the stormy bay.* (Wilde, 1881, p. 6)

In another poem of Wilde, *Rome Unvisited*, he considers his journey to Italy as sacred, but his trip lasts a short time due to lack of funds. In his poem, *Sonnet on Approaching Italy*, has a religious tone attributing to Pope's perceived imprisonment. As Wilde's experience and naturally view of life change, his poetry also makes a change from religious tones to Hellenistic tones.

Besides being a pastoral poet, Wilde wrote many poems with Greek mythological and pastoral themes. His poem *Sonnet Written in Holy Week at Genoa*, which is about the crucifixion of Christ during Holy Week, clearly indicates this transition and the reference to "those dear Hellenic hours" demonstrates the sadness of Christ's death (Wilde, 1950).

In his poem *Theocritus: A Villanelle*, the villanelle is a word derived from the pastoral. In *Theocritus* (Wilde, 1950), Wilde uses many Greek mythological elements.

*O singer of Persephone!
In the dim meadows desolate
Dost thou remember Sicily?* (Wilde, 1881)

In the poem, whoever he calls out as Persephone is the daughter of Zeus and the wife of Hades. Theocritus calls for him from the Underworld to remember Sicily. This poem also refers to the myth of Odysseus and Polyphemus, a human-like monster living in Sicily and herding sheep and goats. The myth ends with Odysseus' killing Polyphemus by using his mind and intelligence. In a way he invites here the singer of Persephone to recall and revisit Sicily, thus bringing life and art, joy and pleasure to the city which seems to him to be desolate and deserted and deprived of all its old colours. In a sense, Wilde here portrays his desire for the aesthetic life style.

With his popular poem *Ravenna* Wilde is awarded the Newdigate Prize in Oxford. He completes this poem after a trip to Italy with his Trinity tutor, the Reverend John Mahaffy. It is a poetic description of an ancient city, which also hosts Dante's tomb:

*And Naples hath outlived her dream of pain,
And mocks her tyrant! Venice lives again,
New risen from the waters! and the cry
Of Light and Truth, of Love and Liberty,
Is heard in lordly Genoa, and where
The marble spires of Milan wound the air,
Rings from the Alps to the Sicilian shore,
And Dante's dream is now a dream no more.
(Wilde, 1878)*

Wilde is also influenced by Pre-Raphaelite groups, and reflects that into his poems. His first poem having their influence is *La Bella Donna Della Mia Mente*. His another poem under the influence of Pre-Raphaelite is *The Dole of the King's Daughter* (Wilde, 1950) There is a diversification in Wilde's poetic themes. He also writes poems with political messages. In *Sonnet on the Massacre of the Christians in Bulgaria* (Wilde, 1950), for example, he is moved by the atrocities against Christians in the Balkans (Raby, 1997). However, his most popular poem is inspired by his imprisonment which lasts two years. Also it is an important work that it includes various styles as Wilde said; "*The poem suffers under the difficulty of a divided aim in style. Some is realistic, some is romantic: some poetry, some propaganda*", he wrote in 1897 before its completion (Hart-Davis, 1962):

*Yet each man kills the thing he loves
By each let this be heard, Some
do it with a bitter look, Some
with a flattering word, The
coward does it with a kiss, The
brave man with a sword!
Some kill their love when they are young,
And some when they are old;
Some strangle with the hands of Lust,
Some with the hands of Gold:
The kindest use a knife, because
The dead so soon grow cold. (Wilde, 1878)*

In terms of structure Oscar Wilde's *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* is labelled as a ballad since Wilde did not adhere to the traditional four line ballad stanza, but used

a six line stanza instead. The poem is dedicated to the memory of the Royal Horse Guards trooper, Charles Thomas Wooldridge, and to the incident is Wooldridge's execution for the murder of his wife. Around this narrative core, whose genre might be described as gothic realism, Wilde builds a meditation on the paradoxes of morality. The Ballad is an indictment of the death penalty and the whole penal system, but it is much more than a protest poem. It is a revelation, and its structure is part of that revelation (Rumen, 2009).

Everyone can quote the refrain: "*Yet each man kills the thing he loves*". Poetically, it's unquestionably powerful, and, intellectually, it's powerfully questionable. What does Wilde mean? Perhaps he is saying that love itself corrupts or alters its object. That would certainly seem to have been true of his relationship with "Bosie", Lord Alfred Douglas, seemingly a spoiled brat further spoiled by Wilde's adulation. Judas, of course, is on his mind: the poem refers to the kiss of Caiaphas, the latter being the priest who participated in Christ's betrayal. What brought the end of Oscar Wilde is the great love he had for Douglas. While Douglas continued his life outside, Wilde suffered in prison and he had a downfall in the eyes of society. Following this tragic downfall, he died alone in a hotel room.

His other famous poem *De Profundis*, written in prison, has a tragic theme. Its publication created a sensation in England. Once again Wilde's name appeared and he was reevaluated by the Victorian society. After a few months he was sent to prison, and his mother died. "*Her death was terrible to me*", he wrote; "*but I, once a lord of language, have no words with which to express my anguish and my shame*" (Wilde, 1997) This shattering poem was addressed by Wilde to Lord Alfred Douglas. It complains of Douglas's egoism, negligence of Wilde, rapacity and slavishness. It is the expression of Wilde's sorrow. In the letter to Douglas from prison known as *De Profundis*, Wilde would comment:

*Blindly I staggered as an ox into the shambles.'19 He lamented an outcome that had come to seem inevitable:
At the end, I was of course arrested and your father became the hero of the hour; more indeed than the hero of the hour merely: you family now ranks, strangely enough, with the Immortals, for . . . your father will always live among the kind pure-minded parents of Sunday-school literature, your place is with the Infant Samuel, and in the lowest mire of Malebolge I sit between Giles de Retz and the Marquis de Sade (Hart-Davis, 1962).*

3.3.2. Wilde as a Writer

After serving as an editor, poet or playwright, Wilde contributed to the development of the genre of short story. Thanks to his strong creativity, he produced many great works.

In 1888, he published *The Happy Prince* based on his field work in Ireland. It contains five stories: *The Happy Prince*, *The Nightingale and the Rose*, *The Selfish Giant*, *The Devoted Friend* and *The Remarkable Rocket*. Wilde wrote to a friend that “the tales were meant partly for children and partly for those who have kept the childlike faculties of wonder and joy, and who find in simplicity a subtle strangeness” (Hart-Davis, 1962). To Wilde, these tales with their aesthetic sensibility make people question their attitudes towards the poor and develop children’s affection and sympathy for unfortunate people. *The Happy Prince*, as a good example of allegory, emphasizes the importance of charity, love and sacrifice to endear us to God.

Like *The Happy Prince*, Wilde’s another story *The Nightingale and the Rose* is an allegoric story. In the stories of *The Happy Prince* and *The Nightingale and the Rose* the heroes are birds. In these stories, the birds sacrifice themselves for the others. The story is about a boy who feels strong and true love towards a girl, but he is not loved in return because the girl appreciates material things rather than the love. So her obsession with materialism leads love to end tragically. It might be said that Wilde’s choice of a bird as a hero in his story shows his despair about mankind. This is because he believes that man has lost his humanitarian values and dehumanized in the materialistic age. He exhibited these thoughts in his plays. Moreover, in the story while man does not value the true love and does nothing for that, the nightingale sacrifices itself to make the love superior.

The Portrait of Mr. W. H. is another story written by Wilde and first published in Blackwood's Magazine in 1889. It was later added to the collection of *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories*. Wilde's story is narrated by a friend of a man called Erskine, who is preoccupied by the Hughes theory. It is not known whether or not Wilde himself subscribed to the theory presented in the story. His lover Lord Alfred Douglas states that he did believe it. Samuel Butler accepted some aspects of it, regarding the name 'Will Hughes' as a "*plausible conjecture*" (Knight, 1955). Wilde's story may have been an influence on John Masefield, whose book

Shakespeare and Spiritual Life (1924) suggests that the Fair Youth was an actor who was delicate and small enough to play parts such as the boy-servant Moth in *Love's Labours Lost* and the sprite Ariel in *The Tempest*. He believed that he may even have been a kind of symbol to Shakespeare for his own creative genius (Knight, 1955).

Wilde's another story written for children is the *Devoted Friend*, which also deals with social and moral issues about friendship. This fable, touching upon many aspects of life, is written in 1888. The message intended to be given in this fable by Wilde is mutual friendship. One-sided friendship of Hans, deceived by Miller, emphasizes the difference between what is said and what is done. Wilde also uses this fable as a means of criticising the age he lived by using the animal tongues.

The *Selfish Giant*, as it can be understood from its title, tells about a giant who is very selfish. This selfish man forbids the poor children to play in his beautiful garden. While reading the story *The Selfish Giant* we can easily find out that the theme of the story is the selfishness of the person. At first, the giant gets angry with the children playing in his garden. After realizing that his garden cannot be green without children, he feels happy with children. Besides its moral messages, the story implies some religious aspects in the end. When the giant comes to his garden, a child gets afraid and escapes. Years after, this child comes back with some marks of crucified Christ in his hands. The giant who understands that this child is Jesus Christ kneels down in front of him and the child promises to bring the giant to the heaven as he let the child play in his garden.

In addition to these tales, Wilde wrote *Lord Arthur Saville's Crime*, *The Canterville Ghost*, *The Sphinx without a Secret* and *The Model Millionaire*. The first two are much longer than the last two of these tales.

On the other hand, the first and only novel of Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, was first published in 1890 in England. At that time the novel was criticized for being scandalous and immoral. In the novel, the well-known artist Basil Hallward meets Dorian Gray, who is a rich, intellectual and handsome young man, at his aunt's home in London. In the opening of the novel, the artist is about to complete his work picturing Dorian. However, he feels disappointed because the portrait reveals his feelings. His friend Lord Henry Wotton, who is fond of scandalizing his friends, insists that the portrait is the masterpiece of Basil. He hopes that the picture will remind of him his beauty which he will lose one day, yet as the picture grows older and changes surprisingly; the beauty of Dorian in real life

remains the same. The novel is used as evidence to prove Wilde's homosexuality since it has a theme considered as immoral and shame at that time.

Upon the low demand for his novel, Wilde revised the book and added six more chapters to this novel. He wrote a new preface setting forth the principals of his philosophy of art and notified the reader against finding meanings such as "*beneath the surface*" of art. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a gothic novel with its comedy of manners examines the relation between art and morality and pokes the audience to find out the parts of a puzzle. Moreover, it is not only the first novel written in aesthetic style but also one of the leading novels dealing with homosexuality.

To sum up, Wilde's tales and his only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* give hidden messages criticizing the moral values of the society and social rules to be obeyed. While some of his tales include religious motives, he usually gives moral tenets to the readers.

3.3.3. Wilde as a Dramatist

Although Wilde gained popularity with his poems, tales and his great novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, he reached the peak of his career with his plays. To him, life itself is a thrilling and emotional drama world in which everyone has a different role. Wilde, himself, also lived with ups and downs as if he is playing in a theatre stage. Wilde's dramatic works took their place on the stage in the early eighties. His tragedies *Vera; or the Nihilists* (1880) and *The Duchess of Padua* (1883) were not widely accepted because of being imitative and artistically weak, but he achieved his success with his other plays. He is appreciated by some other dramatists of his period. One of them is Bernard Shaw who puts into his words his admiration of Wilde; "*Wilde is the only through playwright because he plays with everything: with wit, with philosophy, with drama, with actors and audience and with the whole theatre*" (Worth, 1983). Shaw is right because by playing with wit, drama and other factors Wilde expresses his vision of life and criticizes the matters that can be regarded as problem for him. He makes his characters speak as if he talks. In other words, by means of them he reflects his thoughts as a self expression. Generally, the characters chosen by Wilde are the members of upper class in the society. By means of his paradoxes and epigrams, Wilde shows his characters to the reader with their way of life, manners and thoughts. It might be said that epigrams and paradoxes have

an important role in Wilde's plays. Besides, he uses symbolist and aesthetic movements in his plays. His plays not only amuse the audience, but also make them think because there is always a message behind the comic issues. With the help of these stylistic devices, Wilde reflects his own points of view on the society of his time, his opinions about life, love and friendship, men and women.

As an example of his symbolist play, *Salome* is written in 1891 in France as a musical play. It was first published in France in the year of 1893 and after one year it was translated into English. Its story is taken from the Bible, Wilde's choosing the story of Salome is much discussed at that time as it includes many aspects from the Genesis. In this play, Wilde uses symbolic factors like the moon and omens. At the same time it is also a musical play because Salome, the main character of the play, dances for the head of John the Baptist. It has also a poetical language for expressing strong emotions of Salome for Jokanaan. On the other hand, Wilde's play shows the power of love and how it can be dangerous when a lover is not loved in return.

Lady Windermere's Fan, the other play of Wilde, deals with the man's position in a hypocritical Victorian society. It is a play of flawless epigrams and paradoxes and includes many satirical features. It might be said that his characters serve as the mouth to verbalize the thoughts of Wilde about Victorian England. He does that by using funny elements. *Lady Windermere's Fan* is a play about a woman who is the symbol of goodness. It is a successful play of wit. It was first presented in London in the year of 1892. It tells the story of a woman who thinks that she is deceived by her husband. The sequences of events pass through the birthday party of her. In this play Wilde uses characters from upper class and shows how they are hypocrite and varnish in their acts. In the play the woman, Mrs. Erlynne, whom Lady Windermere thinks that she is the mistress of her husband Lord Windermere is in fact her mother, but she does not know that. Wilde also gives a message in this play by showing some events in fact which are not as they appear to be. Because of the gossips Lady Windermere thinks that Mrs. Erlynne is a bad mother until she helps her to correct her mistake. It shows us to be prejudiced is not a good thing because there can be a difference between the apparent truth and the main truth. While there is a woman who does not know her mother in *Lady Windermere's Fan*, there is a young man who does not know his father in *A Woman of No Importance* written in 1893. This is a play about an ordinary woman who does not seem to have enough significance from her son's father Lord Illingworth and her struggle for surviving

and bringing up her son Gerald Arbuthnot in a conservative Victorian society. Her illegitimate son's father Lord Illingworth learns that Gerald is his son and he tries to win back him, but Mrs. Arbuthnot is so strong individual that she succeeds to change the title into "a man of no importance". Also in this play, Wilde uses epigrams, paradoxes and plays with the words. By doing that he conveys his thoughts to the audience and criticizes the Victorian values and morality.

His other play *The Importance of Being Earnest* is Wilde's most popular and funny play written in 1894 as a four-act play and staged in 1895. It is considered as one of the classics of English comedy. In this play Wilde criticizes the low manners of high class society as well as their marriage in the 1890s England. The play *The Importance of Being Earnest* tells about the characters of John Worthing, Algernon Moncrieff, and Lady Bracknell who are the representatives of shammer personalities of Victorian England. John Worthing on the other hand leads a double life, pretending to be a respected magistrate as he represents the confliction of Victorian morals. On the contrary of the title nobody is earnest in the play. The idleness and hypocrites of upper class is ridiculed by Wilde. The social hypocrisy of Victorian England, the masks worn in the conventional society, the moral understanding of aristocrat class, false identities, secret relations and an unnatural kindness are all criticized by Wilde by means of funny chain of events.

Wilde, being distracted by his lover Lord Alfred Douglas, started to write *An Ideal Husband* in 1893. It is a subject of debate whether Wilde related the complexity of his own relations or to himself and his lover Lord Alfred. In *An Ideal Husband*, Sir Robert Chiltern, exposed to public ruin and being left by his wife, Lady Chiltern, represents the political corruption. Wilde argues the mercy emotion in relationships and tolerance to other's faults. For instance, Lord Goring, the friend of Lady Chiltern, thinks that real life demands flexibility and objects to the Victorian rules. Thus, Lord Goring suggests Lady Chiltern to forgive her husband and ignore his mistakes.

An Ideal Husband is no doubt a comedy since it has funny and silly aspects and everyone is overdressed. If we remove the ruffles and bows, the play gets quite serious. It teaches the audience how to live with others and question to what extent we respect different personalities, expectations and understand each other without judging. These questions take place in our own lives regarding how we behave our friends, our family and how we vote and decide in political issues.

CHAPTER IV

TO BE A WOMAN IN WILDE'S PLAYS

As seen up till this point, Wilde tried his hand in a variety of genres, but he was particularly reputed for his poems as well as plays. He seemed to have turned, in his plays, to the trend of his time, which was to represent women at home, which was traditionally the natural setting for them, and outside, which the society did not find appropriate for them. Even the titles of his plays are indicative of the extent to which he focused on women. *A Woman of No Importance* is ironical in that it obviously portrays the Victorians' understanding of woman who was not perceived as important in that age. *Lady Windermere's Fan* also represents a lady with an accessory as if women were only to be adorned with something. Another play, *Salome*, bears the name of the leading character in the play, a case which in itself evokes an open reaction to the age in which women were only considered secondary to men. The reason why Wilde placed so much emphasis on female characters in his plays though he was male should be sought for in the way he was brought up in his family environment and in his relationships with other women. In this context, his first interaction with a woman, namely with his mother, should be reflected in terms of her contribution and effect on his life as well as his arts. The first teacher to Wilde, his mother Speranza once said that "*The drama is meant to represent, not a visionary world, but intense phases of actual life*". In Wilde's works it is possible to see the traces of this philosophy which represents his real life experiences, especially his portrayal of mothers. Of course "motherhood" is not the main theme of Wilde's plays, but mother characters in his drama reflect Lady Wilde's sophisticated personality. For instance, his mother Lady Wilde's influence is so apparent in Wilde's comedies like *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance*, and *The Importance of Being Earnest* that the mother characters in these plays are "women with a past" who demonstrate both conventional and non-conventional life styles like his mother Speranza. Wilde also mentions his admiration for his mother in his plays. In *A Woman of No Importance* Lord Illingworth says, "*Of course, I was influenced by mother. Every man is when he is young*" (Wilde, 2012). Commenting in a supportive way on this point, Alan Bird says that the mother characters in Wilde's plays are merciless, powerful, and authoritative (Elmann, 1987. On the other

hand Wilde does not exhibit good father models in his plays because he had an irresponsible father addicted to women and led his family to a social scandal. Sir William Wilde was not dominant in the family, like his mother Speranza. For that reason, Wilde's plays do not exhibit an apparent father model. For instance, he states in *An Ideal Husband*: "*Fathers should be neither seen nor heard. That is the only proper basis for my family life*", but he adds, "*Mothers are different. Mothers are darlings*" (Horan, 1997). Mother characters in Wilde's plays love their children and remain devoted to them like his mother, Speranza. For instance; in Wilde's first play, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, the mother character Mrs. Erlynne does all she can do to make her daughter happy. First of all, Lady Windermere does not think well of Mrs. Erlynne nor does she respect her because of her past. We see that Wilde uses the dramatic convention of "*the women with a past*". But after some sequence of events she recognizes her fault and says that "good women may have terrible things in them.... Bad women, as they are termed, may have in them sorrow, reputance, pity, sacrifice" (Wilde, 1997).

In *A Women of No Importance*, moreover, we see the discrimination between father and mother figures. Mrs. Arbuthnot tells her son that "*Men don't understand what mothers are*" (Wilde, 1950). It can also be seen that Mrs. Arbuthnot is a mother who loves her child more than Mrs. Erlynne in another play. Wilde likens Mrs. Arbuthnot to his mother Speranza. By far, Mrs. Arbuthnot does not want to stay with her son's father even for the sake of his son Gerald, but Speranza stays with her husband despite his infidelity. On the other side, Wilde exhibits a different manner in his other play *Salome*, but the family life in this play has a conventional characteristic. In the play Wilde retells the known Biblical story of Salome who dances in front of the king Herod in order to obtain the head of John the Baptist. Salome's mother Herodias is not in touch with her husband Herod like his other mother characters. Yet, like many of Wilde's father characters, Herod does not show a sense of responsibility to his family. Herodias wants to keep her family together and for this reason she ignores Herod's infidelity and irresponsibility. In this respect, we can draw a parallel between Herodias and Wilde's mother Speranza. Herodias is not as self-sacrificing a mother as Mrs. Arbuthnot or Mrs. Erlynne; indeed, when compared to them, she is more avenger and selfish. Nevertheless, she is as proud of her child as they are of Lady Windermere and Gerald (Horan, 1997). On the other hand, both Wilde's mother Speranza and Herodias got pleasure in social recognition.

On the other hand, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Wilde's most famous theatrical work, includes two different mother characters while there is no father figure. This absurd comedy is concerned with a young man's quest to find his family and to affirm the importance of having a mother as well as being earnest (Horan, 1997). Like *Lady Windermere's Fan*, the plot of *The Importance of Being Earnest* is complex and complicated by mistaken identities and characters with past secrets. Jack Worthing, the protagonist, has two goals: to find his family and to marry the charming Gwendolyn Fairfax. At the beginning of the play, we learn that Jack has invented a wicked brother named Ernest who resides in the city. Under the guise of visiting his wayward brother Ernest, Jack may absent himself from his country home and enjoy life in the city. Algernon Moncrief, Jack's cohort and city friend, has similarly invented an invalid friend Bunbury, who resides in the country, so that he may escape from the city whenever he likes. Both men fall in love; Jack wants to marry Gwendolyn, while Algernon eventually romances Cecily Cardew. Both women, however, will only marry men named Ernest. Moreover Lady Augusta Bracknell, Gwendolyn's mother, will allow her daughter to marry Jack only if he acquires "*some relations as soon as possible*" (Wilde, 1997) Underscoring this plot, therefore, is Wilde's premise that Jack cannot find happiness until he finds a family. At the end of the play Jack finds his mother and understands that having a family is as important as being earnest. Two mother figures in the play, however, Lady Bracknell and Miss Prism, illustrate the dual aspects of Speranza's personality. Also Lady Bracknell gives voice to Speranza's belief that one should act in accordance with the rules of society (Horan, 1997).

As we see, Wilde's mother Speranza is an important figure for many of the female characters in his plays. After a brief consideration paid to the female characters, especially mothers, in his plays, it should be mentioned that Wilde was always a defender of equality between men and women. He was the editor of "The Woman's World" and wrote many things to criticize the prejudices of Victorian England. He constantly encouraged women like his mother Speranza. His being homosexual in a very conservative English society shows his unordinary character. He lighted a torch to against the social prejudices against women. He generally used courageous female characters in his plays. These characters were very extraordinary when we consider the expectations of that time's society. For example; in *A Women of No Importance*, Mrs. Arbuthnot does not want to marry her son's father as a

reaction to the social norms and also does not accept the offer of financial security which was an important fact for the Victorian women. Wilde also mentions the general situation of the women in this play: “*And the ending is ordinary ending. The woman suffers. The man goes free*” (Wilde, 2012). Moreover, Salome, a female model of Wilde’s plays, is very courageous and independent since she rebels against the patriarchal society. Lady Windermere, a similar character to Salome is not a conventional woman. After leaving her house she tries to escape with another man. That is, the female characters of Wilde are not ordinary women. They stand out of the time they live. Besides the theatrical plays, his editorials in *The Woman’s World* shed light on his feminist views. For him, a publication should deal with what women think as well as what they wear and they do. Why he made such a statement seems to have been because sexual equality was an important issue for him. In the year of 1888 he wrote out essays, including such topics as *The Oxford Ladies’ Colleges*, *The Poetry of Christina Rossetti*, and *Medicine: Professions for Women*. In the year of 1889 he wrote out articles entered upon these important topics as *Women’s Suffrage*, *On Woman’s Work*, and *Women Wearers of Men’s Clothes* (Wilde, 1997). Also he promoted his wife Constance to contribute to this edition and in the journal’s 1888 issue; he underscored his mother Speranza’s very long poem “*Historic women*”, which begins with these lines:

*Yes, they have lived! These women whose great names
 Are graven deep on the world’s history!
 Strong, splendid souls that chafed at human wrong,
 And tyranny and servile servitude...*

So flung their lives down with a passionate waste. (Horan, 1997)

Just as he indirectly contributed to the women’s movements with his plays on the stage, so he devoted himself to *The Woman’s World* in public because he wanted women to have an important place outside the home as well as their domestic sphere. Also he mentioned in *A woman of No Importance* that there should not be one law for men and another law for women, which could be taken as pointing to his egalitarian view. All the members of a society, whether men or women should be treated in the same way by the laws, he thought. In this play, Wilde produced not only his feminist themes but also his sexist thoughts through characters such as Lord

Illingworth, who propounds that women represent the triumph of matter over mind-just as men represent the triumph of mind over morals (Wilde, 1893).

To Wilde, in contrast to American women, Victorian women did not tend to defend their rights and did not prove brave enough to question their status, and instead they remained passive and introverted. Yet, on the other side, American women had a place in the social life and were more independent. In *The Woman's World* he touched on this subject and stated that “*intellectual progress of America is largely due to American women, who edit many of the most powerful magazines and newspapers... and exercise an important influence upon the growth and tendencies of literature and art*” (Horan, 1997). Wilde expresses his thoughts in *The Woman's World*, and his famous character Hester Worsley repeats these thoughts in ‘A Woman of No Importance as well:

You rich people in England, you don't know how you are living. How could you know? You shut out from your society the gentle and the good... You love the beauty and you can see and touch and handle, the beauty that you can destroy, but of the unseen beauty of life, of the unseen beauty of a higher life, you know nothing (Wilde, 1893).

As can be seen in this quotation from that play, Wilde's thoughts were very close to his mother's in that they both believed the self-sacrificing of women in love. Speranza was also an example of self-sacrificing as she was strongly loyal to her husband though deceived several times.

Not only to women, but Wilde attributed great importance to all humanity regardless of their sex, as well. For him, happiness in a marriage was only possible with the independence of individuals. He imagined a new society in which there is no discrimination between the sexes. Being a model for a socialist utopia, this society can only be built with the active participation of women in social and productive life, Wilde seemed to have argued. When considered collectively, all his works give this message, sometimes with his essays.

4.1. Lady Windermere's Fan

Not only did Wilde contribute to *The Woman's World* with his writings, but he also engaged in the evolution of the New Woman in his plays. To be a woman of Wilde is radical and privileged because women are always in a process in evolvment, in his works; they try to put an end to the boundaries or restrictions of conventional gender roles which have already been explained and portrayed in the previous chapters. Unlike the typical Victorian women who were taught to be obedient to their fathers and husbands and to be good mothers to their children only, the leading female characters in Wilde's plays appear to be self-confident, enlightened and also independent women who rebel against the social norms of the society. They do not acknowledge the imposed role of pure, domestic angel of the house. One of these characters is Lady Windermere who is the protagonist of the play *Lady Windermere's Fan*.

Written by Wilde in 1892, *Lady Windermere's Fan* is the first of his series of social comedies which attracted a good deal of attention and admiration when first staged. The play is built on a woman escaping from her domestic life, and touches on the showy world of the upper-class of English society. The play takes place in a domestic setting involving Lord Windermere, Lady Windermere and her mother Mrs. Erlynne, whom she believed to have died years ago. It is based on the blackmail, deception and revenge stories among these characters and others. However, it unexpectedly turns into a sentimental story in which Mrs. Erlynne recognizes the feelings that a mother can have. What makes the story sentimental here is that she feels like a mother for the first time in her life though a mother indeed for long years. Through such a story Wilde questions the understanding of virtue, goodness and morality as perceived and experienced in the Victorian Age, covertly portrays the hidden way people worked and lived in their corrupt society. Wilde here seems to be in an attempt to provide the readers or audiences an insight into the real virtue, which is proven to be sublimity in the character of Mrs. Erlynne who is made to suffer from the faults and wrong choices in her past.

It seems that Lady Windermere has a domestic environment in her house and abstains from the reaction of the society. According to the Victorian values the most suitable place for a woman is her house and having a husband and children is the best thing that a woman can free, and the exact opposite situation is a threat for the

society. Not surprisingly, Lady Windermere is very faithful to her husband Lord Windermere. She is an ideal woman according to the social norms of the Victorian society. She does not accept the informal and flirtatious behaviours of Lord Darlington, who is in love with her, and warns him not to behave in this way. Also she is quite a self-sacrificing woman both for her husband and for the society because self-sacrifice is a great virtue for her.

Lady Windermere: Yes, Nowadays people seem to look on life as a speculation. It is not a speculation. It is a sacrament. Its ideal is love. Its purification is sacrifice (Wilde, 1892).

Besides, she is a moral woman who attaches importance to the social values. In this respect it might be said that she is a conventional Victorian woman who does not harbour the evil or bad inside her.

*Lady Windermere: Because the husband is vile-should the wife be vile also?
Lord Darlington: Vileness is a terrible word, Lady Windermere.
Lady Windermere: It is a terrible thing, Lord Darlington. (Wilde, 1892)*

Even Lady Windermere does not tolerate the immorality of other women. She is educated according to the social rules of the Victorian society. She conforms to society, because that is an era in which, despite the rapid changes, Victorians protected their conventional values and morals. She, on the other hand, does not accept the new ideas and values. To her, there are two types of women, either good or bad. If you are a good woman, you bow to Victorian traditions. In contrast if you are a bad woman you are immoral and outrageous, and you have to be externalized from society. Under such circumstances Lady Windermere is proud of being a Puritan. She thinks that people are not aware of the fact that there is a thin line between the right and the wrong. There is nothing else except this fact, which matters.

*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 there should be the same laws for men as there are for women?
Lady Windermere: Certainly! (Wilde, 1892).*

As can be seen, she has strict rules about life. There is no place for the exceptions in her life. Everything is bound to work and run in its rule and routine.

Lady Windermere: If we had 'these hard and fast rules', we should find life much more simple.

Lord Darlington: You allow no exceptions?

Lady Windermere: None! (Wilde, 1892)

Also she does not care about the modern life. It might be said that she feels like an individual in her family and as part of the strict Victorian society because she is committed to the happiness of her family. Within this framework, she does not find it necessary for a woman to be an individual by herself. She thinks that Lord Darlington “*has the modern affectation of weakness*” (Wilde, 1950). She does not go beyond her ordinary life and traditional roles. She is a good and ideal woman. Like all traditional women, Lady Windermere feels herself important in her conservative environment. She is taught only about domestic duties because, starting at a young age, Victorian women are taught that a good and ideal woman should have traits such as “*tenderness of understanding, unworldliness and innocence, domestic affectation and in various degrees, submissiveness*” (Abrams, 1993).

In this play, Wilde also criticizes the hypocrisy of the Victorian society. Lady Windermere belongs to upper-class. She organizes parties in her house because it is important to be with pre-eminent people. For those people outward appearance is more important than inward or inner reality. This contrast between what others see in you and what you hide from them indeed is quite the reflection of the contradiction between appearance and reality.

Duchess of Berwick: Of course, it is going to be select. But we know that, dear Margaret, about your house. It is really one of the few houses in London where I can take Agatha, and where I feel perfectly secure about dear Berwick. I don't know what society is coming to. The most dreadful people seem to go everywhere. They certainly come to my parties-the men get quite furious if one doesn't ask them. Really, someone should make a stand against it.

Lady Windermere: I will Duchess. I will have no one in my house about whom there is any scandal (Wilde, 1892).

In fact, the truth is not what they show each other. Secrets are hidden behind appearance. Lady Windermere seems too strong, but she is influenced by the hypocrisy of Victorian society and attaches so much importance to the gossip of

upper-class. She prefers to believe erroneous words of them rather than those of her husband.

Lady Windermere: My husband-what has he got to do with any woman of that kind?

Duchess of Berwick: Ah, What indeed, dear? That is the point. He goes to see her continually, and stops for hours at a time, and while he is there she is not at home to any one... (Wilde, 1892)

Once again Wilde emphasizes the conventional family structure of Victorian Period, and reveals the discrimination between men and women. In this conventional structure, women are required to commit themselves to their husbands at all costs, irrespective of the probability that they may have been involved in immoral acts outside of the home. While she considers it inappropriate for a woman to be out, she also does not agree with the fact that she should have some doubts about her husband, which is one of the remarks that make her deserve the title of ‘unconventional woman’ in a sense.

Lady Windermere: You think it wrong that you are found out, don't you?

Lord Windermere: I think it wrong that a wife should spy on her husband (Wilde, 1892).

Viewed from another perspective, this conversation may be emphasizing Lady Windermere as a conventional woman. She believes she does not have the right to question her husband, but as a husband, Lord Windermere is responsible for everything at every step of her life, even decision-making and independence. This is clearly portrayed in one poem of Tennyson stated in his famous poem *The Princess*;

*Man for the field and woman for the hearth;
Man for the sword, and for the needle she;
Man with the head, and woman with the heart;
Man to command, and woman to obey;
All else confusion. (Tennyson, 1847)*

Nevertheless, in the forthcoming dialogues of the play a transition is seen from the traditional woman to the new woman, which seems to have been heralded by the contrariwise interpretation of this speech. Lady Windermere threatens to leave her husband and also hit Mrs. Erlynne on her face with the fan he gave her if he

invites Mrs. Erlynne to the party. It is an unexpected situation for a traditional Victorian woman. She thinks that she was deluded and does not care about the reaction of the society. All her thoughts and dreams about her husband begin to dismantle in a while. They have an ideal family life in the eyes of people, but this marriage begins to shatter on the part of Lady Windermere.

Lady Windermere:Arthur, if that woman comes here-I warn you.

Lord Windermere: Margaret, you'll ruin us!

Lady Windermere: Us! From this moment my life is separate from yours. But if you wish to avoid a public scandal, write at once to this woman, and tell her that I forbid her to come here!

Lord Windermere: I will not-I cannot-she must come!

Lady Windermere: Then I shall do exactly as I have said. You leave me no choice (Wilde, 1892).

It might be understood that she believes in equality between men and women. She rejects the strict norms of the Victorian society and does not accept the role of traditional and ideal woman. She is so strong as to behave like an individual. She exhibits a transition from femininity to feminism, and thinks that she has the right to say her thoughts. This is reflected in one of the comprehensive definitions of new woman.

“The New Woman typically values self-fulfilment and independence rather than the stereotypically feminine ideal of self-sacrifice; believes in legal and sexual equality; often remains single because of the difficulty of combining such equality with marriage; is more open about her sexuality than the ‘Old Woman’; is well-educated and reads a great deal; has a job; is athletic or otherwise physically vigorous and, accordingly, prefers comfortable clothes (sometimes male attire) to traditional female garb” (Beckson, 1992).

This definition partly agrees with the case of Lady Windermere, who attempts to have her say in some familial matters, thus acquiring her independence and self-authority.

Lady Windermere: London is full of women who trust their husbands. One can always recognise them. They look so thoroughly unhappy. I'm not going to be one of them. Lord Darlington, will you give me back my fan, please? Thanks... A

*useful thing a fan, isn't it? I want a friend tonight, Lord Darlington: I didn't know I would want one so soon.
Lord Darlington: Lady Windermere I knew the time would come some day; but why to-night? (Wilde, 1892).*

It is really a quick transition for such a conventional woman as Lady Windermere, and therefore she is drifted into the contrary identity of conventional woman. She flirts with Lord Darlington to make her husband angry. It might be seen that Lady Windermere expands her morality. On the other hand, Lord Darlington loves her though she is a married woman and she tends to find his attempts agreeable and goes to his home for a revenge on her husband. By doing so, she violates her purity and innocence. She does not think that there are social norms or boundaries for her. The New Woman 'seemed to dissolve the boundaries of traditional gender roles...The New woman was self-confident and enlightened, and was violating Victorian conventions of femininity'. (Beckson, 1892) The New Woman, in its definition, seems to have dissolved the boundaries or traditional gender roles, as can be seen in Lady Windermere's decisions and actions. She also appears self-confident and enlightened about what she herself wants. She, in a way, undresses the feminine role tailored by the Victorian society and prefers to wear her own dress, which is the self-determined and self-efficient woman.

In contrast to Lady Windermere, Lord Windermere is more faithful to his wife. He does not think of himself primarily, but his wife. On the other side, Lady Windermere primarily thinks of herself. So she is more selfish than her husband. We do not see a traditional Victorian woman when we look at her.

*Lady Windermere: I'm afraid of being myself. Let me think! Let me wait! My husband may return to me.
Lord Darlington: And you would take him back! You are not what I thought you were. You are just the same as every other woman. You would stand anything rather than face to censure of a world, whose praise you would despise. In a week you will be driving with this woman in the Park. She will be your constant guest—your dearest friend. You would endure anything rather than break with one blow this monstrous tie. You are right. You have no courage; none! (Wilde, 1892).*

Lord Darlington realizes her getting different and unlike her usual. She does not resemble other women any longer. He is right because she proves that by leaving her home to escape with another man. On the other hand, Mrs Erlynne can also be

accepted a new woman who left her home and child to marry another man. Now, Lady Windermere does the same thing and leaves her child and husband for another man. Of course she is hurt, but she does not think anything except herself. She does not behave in a sensible way and does not think of the consequences of her behavior. She is as selfish as her mother. Mrs. Erlynne left her many years ago and still just thinks of leading a life of luxury. In order to do that, she wants money and help from Lord Windermere. She wants to be an upper-class woman again. Though she meets her daughter after so many years, she still tries to find a rich husband and become a privileged woman among these people. She relies on her physical appearance, by which she impresses and fascinates the men of her age. She plays a game by her rules, doing exactly as she pleases. She is the victor of her play. Her failure as a mother and a wife shows parallelism with the motherhood of her daughter, Lady Windermere.

Lady Windermere: To stay in this house any longer is impossible. To-night a man who loves me offered me his whole life. I refused it. It was foolish of me. I will offer him mine now. I will give him mine. I will go to him! [Puts on cloak and goes to the door, then turns back. Sits down at table and writes a letter, puts it into an envelope, and leaves it on table.] Arthur has never understood me. When he reads this, he will. He may do as he chooses now with his life. I have done with mine as I think best, as I think right. It is he who has broken the bond of marriage—not I. I only break its bondage (Wilde, 1892).

She breaks the bonds of marriage by leaving her house. She does not have maternal feelings. She puts everything onto one side and only thinks of her welfare. It is fair to say that Mrs. Erlynne and Lady Windermere do not differ from each other. Both of them do the same mistake by leaving their family. As Nicole Shindler and Julia Oesterreich (2005) stated, new woman was sometimes reflected as “*wild woman*” by the media. Especially in articles it was implied that they opposed marriage and advocated personal independence and political rights through power and men. In many portraits, this type of woman was pictured as morally decadent, mannish, asexual but also sexually lecherous.

Mrs. Erlynne:You don't know what it is to fall into the pit, to be despised, mocked, abandoned, sneered at—to be an outcast! to find the door shut against one, to have to creep in by hideous by ways, afraid every moment lest the mask should be stripped from

one's face, and all the while to hear the laughter, the horrible laughter of the world, a thing more tragic than all the tears the world has ever shed. You don't know what it is. One pays for one's sin, and then one pays again, and all one's life one pays. You must never know that... (Wilde, 1892).

By letting Mrs. Erlynne say these words, Wilde exhibits the traditional Victorian society, its norms and the situation of a fallen woman. At the beginning of the play *Lady Windermere* is so innocent and pure, but throughout the play she loses these morals. Although Mrs. Erlynne tries to convince her to return back to her family, she insists on staying at Lord Darlington's house. In accordance with the Victorian society, leaving her family is an unforgivable act. Both Mrs. Erlynne and Lady Windermere are, viewed from this angle, New Women who react against the society and domestic life. However Mrs. Erlynne convinces her to turn back home, but this does not show that Lady Windermere accepts her role as a wife and mother. Wilde ends this play in this way not because of he supports Victorian society, but he knows that in the eyes of Victorian audience it must be in this way (Alharbi, 2011). From a different viewpoint, Mrs. Erlynne self-sacrifices herself in order to save her daughter from making mistake.

Mrs. Erlynne: I have no ambition to play the part of a mother. Only once in my life like I known a mother's feelings. That was last night. They were terrible—they made me suffer—they made me suffer too much. For twenty years, as you say, I have lived childless,—I want to live childless still (Wilde, 1892).

Yet her words show that she rejects the feelings of motherhood. According to her, it is nothing short of weakness. Motherhood limits the freedom of an individual. She mocks at this feeling. So she abandons her daughter, Lady Windermere, once again. She thinks that motherhood is an outmoded emotion in modern life. All these show that Mrs. Erlynne is a woman who does not belong to the age when she lives. She is not a traditional Victorian woman, but a new woman. She and her daughter Lady Windermere do not live according to the social norms of the society, but according to their own choices at the risk of being excluded from society. Despite being a traditional character, Lady Windermere's understanding of morality changes at the end of the play and she chooses to maintain a domestic life.

At the first glance, the audience think that Lady Windermere and her mother obey the rules of the society, however they represent the New Woman as they never

retreat the rules of their society. Also, Mrs. Erlynne objects to the social rules of that time as she does not accept her maternity and marries Lord Augustus. The reason why Lady Windermere chooses to return her home is that she believes her husband's innocence, however it may be thought that she behaves so because of the traditional rules of society.

It is, however, well known that Victorians often associated the new woman with the bad woman since the new woman rejects their traditional women roles (Powell, 2007); therefore, every new woman to them was a bad woman. In this sense, every new woman is a threat to the Victorian society since they act as an independent individual in the society unlike traditional Victorian women.

In a letter to a correspondent, Wilde explains what he saw as the main action of his play:

The psychological idea that suggested to me the play is this. A woman who has had a child, but never known the passion of maternity, and suddenly sees the child she has abandoned falling over a precipice. There wakes in her the maternal feeling - the most terrible of all emotions - a thing that weak animals and little birds possess. She rushes to rescue, sacrifices herself, does follies - and the next day she feels "This passion is too terrible. It wrecks my life. . . . I don't want to be a mother anymore" (McCormack, 1998, p. 108).

4.2. A Woman of No Importance

A Woman of No Importance is Wilde's classic social comedy. It was first performed at the Haymarket Theatre in London in 1893. The woman of no importance in the play is Mrs. Arbuthnot, a woman scorned by the society for having an illicit affair and conceiving a child out of wedlock. While Lord Illingworth entertains the guests one of whom is the young American heiress Hester Worsley with her fiancé Gerald Arbuthnot; Gerald hopes to become Illingworth's secretary, but her mother tries to deter him from his thoughts. She reveals to Illingworth that Gerald is his son, born as a result of an illegal relation that is broken off by Illingworth. The reason why she revealed this relation is that she is considered as "a woman of no importance". When Illingworth abuses Hester, Gerald gets so angry with him that she is prepared to kill him. Upon this, Mrs. Arbuthnot decides not to

reveal his parentage's secret. *A Woman of No Importance* is both a criticism of the shameful double standard applied to men and women in such matters and a biting satire of the hypocrisy of the upper classes in Victorian society. As if to emphasize that *A Woman of No Importance* was not a play of 'action', a traditionally male perverse, Wilde stated that this was a woman's play' (Hart-Davis, 1962). Also the two plays, *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *A Woman of No Importance* find a middle ground. Both plays address the issue of woman with a past and the well-worn situation of traditional Victorian woman.

In terms of the living standards, Victorian period may be said to have been designed for men, not for women. Almost all the laws and practices hold men above women and entitle men to treat the women as they like to. This picture is most visible in the words of Lady Stutfield in the play:

Lady Stutfield: Ah! The world was made for men and not for women.

Mrs Allonby: Oh, don't say that, Lady Stutfield. We have a much better time than they have. There are far more things forbidden to us than are forbidden to them (Wilde, 1893).

As Mrs. Allonby says, there are too many restrictions for women in contrast to men. They are the symbol of purity, goodness and innocence and also women who cannot free themselves from the rules of the society.

The following lines from *The Wife's Tragedy*, a poem by Coventry Patmore, perfectly illustrate the conditions under which women are left obliged to live. Even the title is meaningful as it reflects the tragedy faced by a wife:

*MAN must be pleased; but him to please
Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf
Of his condoled necessities
She cast her best, she flings herself-
How often flings for nought, and yokes
Her heart to an icicle whim,
Whose each impatient word provokes
Another, not from her, but him;
While she, too gentle even to force
His penitence by kind replies,
Waits by, expecting his remorse,
With pardon in her pitying eyes;
And if he once, by shame oppress'd,
A comfortable word confers,
She leans and weeps against his breast,*

*And seems to think the sin was hers;
And whilst his love has any life,
Or any eye to see her charms,
At any time, she's still his wife,
Dearly devoted to his arms;
She loves with love that cannot tire;
And when, ah woe, she loves alone,
Through passionate duty love springs higher,
As grass grows taller round a stone.
(Patmore, 1854)*

On the other hand, in this play Wilde uses an American woman character in order to compare the situation of women in America and England. Lady Wilde describes the differences between English woman and American woman in this way:

The English girl never stares, nor asks questions with obtrusive curiosity. She is trained to seem and be a negation – a dormant soul without volition or an opinion on any subject, felt or expressed. Her American cousin, however, has an aggressive frankness, based chiefly upon interrogatories and blood personalities. Her gaze is clear and direct; not the 'stony British stare,' but the large, truthful eyes of childhood – the eager, inquiring glance of a candid nature. Truth is in all her words. This Puritan virtue has indeed remained an heirloom in the American family. They have none of the subtle evasions and graceful mendacities of high life in Europe – the delicate flatteries, so charming and so false. These are stamped out at once by the frank, fearless candour of the American girl. Yet one trembles a little before a candour so uncompromising; for we all shrink from the downright expression of the actual, and the glare of the unshadowed truth makes one nervous. But the Americans have no mercy. Nature meant them for a nation of interviewers (Varty, 1998, p. 71).

As mentioned before, marriage was an essential function for a woman in Victorian age. If you have a family life that sets a good example, then you are an esteemed person in the eyes of society. This is because the family, rather than the individual, was considered the basic unit of the society, and the respectability and stability of family life was entered through marriage (Weeks, 1989). This is easily observed in Lady Stutfield's remark:

*Lady Stutfield: There is nothing, nothing like the beauty of home-life, is there?
Kelvil: It is the mainstay of our moral system in England, Lady Stutfield. Without it we would become like our neighbours (Wilde, 1893).*

Lord Illingworth says that “*there is no woman in the world who would object to being kissed*” (Wilde, 1997). And Mrs Allonby encourages him to kiss Miss Hester Worsley. Hester holds a quite strict moral principle that lauds her innocence and self-sacrifice, which is why Mrs. Allonby thinks that if kissed by Lord Illingworth, Hester will either marry him or strike him with a glove. In the eyes of Victorian women there are two valid options for a woman; one is to marry a man with whom she is in an intimate relationship, and the other is not to permit the violation of her purity and morality because it is the role of women in society.

Lord Illingworth, who is known as a dangler among women does not mind his son’s mother Mrs. Arbuthnot. She is just an important woman for him. By abandoning her although he knows that she is pregnant, she is forced to live as an isolated woman in society, because there is no equality between men and women. It was thought that women are inferior to men. Even though there was a common sin committed together, only the woman was held responsible and supposed to pay a heavy price for it. Hester Worsley, who is an American woman, reveals this fact with her words:

Hester: It is right that they should be punished, but don't let them be the only ones to suffer. If a man and a woman have sinned, let them both go forth into the desert to love or loathe each other there. Let them both be branded. Set a mark, if you wish, on each, but don't punish the one and let the other go free. Don't have one law for men and another for women. You are unjust to women in England. And till you count what is a shame in a woman to be an infamy in a woman, you will always be unjust, and Right, that pillar of fire, and Wrong, that pillar of cloud, will be mad edim to your eyes, or be not seen at all, or if seen, not regarded (Wilde, 1893).

These words also show us that the injustice between men and women is a truth that has never received sunlight. Mrs. Arbuthnot who comes there hears the words which exactly tell her situation. As a result of her informal relationship with Lord Illingworth, Mrs. Arbuthnot suffers all the consequences and brings up her son by herself. Though she has an illegitimate child, she does not care about the reaction of the society. She gives her son the surname of her family and the name of her father. In this respect it might be said that she is not a traditional Victorian woman. She is proud of living in this way. Although in Victorian period economic independence is so important for a woman, she does not accept the money proposal

of Lord Illingworth's mother. In contrast to traditional Victorian woman, she can manage on her life without being in need of anyone. As Sarah Grand (1894) states; *"The new woman [...] had been sitting apart in silent contemplation all these years, thinking and thinking, until at last she solved the problem and proclaimed for herself what was wrong with Home-is-the-Woman's-Sphere, and prescribed the remedy"* (Grand, 1894, p. 14).

Since Lord Illingworth does not fulfill his duty by marrying her, she frees herself from the bounds of society and makes her own way and determines her and her son's own future. In contrast to traditional Victorian woman, she does not show any sign of weakness. She is strong and self-determined. She thinks not emotionally but rationally. There is no woman like her who brings up her child by herself in Victorian drama. Probably she is not a symbol of purity, innocence and truth, but of pridefulness, virtue, determination, and free will. Her son Gerald does not know his father is Lord Illingworth and the secrets hidden from him. In fact, he knows that his father died when he was a child. He wants to work as a secretary of Lord Illingworth. He does not know any information about her mother's past, but he has a great respect for his mother. On the other hand, Mrs. Arbuthnot does not want Lord Illingworth to interfere in their pure and small world that is full of peace. As a traditional Victorian woman, one thing is certain that she should accept the offer of Lord Illingworth. All in all (in the course of events) he offers a good future to his son Gerald, but Mrs. Arbuthnot is not eager to accept anything from him.

Mrs. Arbuthnot: My son to go away with the man who spoiled my youth, who ruined my life, who has tainted every moment of my days? You don't realise what my has been suffering in shame.

Lord Illingworth: My dear Rachel, I must candidly say that I think Gerald's future considerably more important than your past.

Mrs. Arbuthnot: Gerald cannot separate his future from my past (Wilde, 1893).

On the one hand she feels shame for her past and on the other past is the mirror of her future, and the thing that makes her stronger. She is a woman who lives in accordance with her thoughts without caring the ideas of others. Traditional Victorian woman is obedient, but Mrs. Arbuthnot has some principles in her life. She thinks that if a woman is right she must not forgive the man who has agonized her.

Lady Hunstanton: Ah, we women should forgive everything, shouldn't we, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot?

Mrs. Arbuthnot: I do not, Lady Hunstanton. I think there are many things women should never forgive (Wilde, 1893).

Although she is a fallen woman, she does not deprive herself. She does not want to join such parties. Everyone thinks of her as a respectable woman, but in fact she is a fallen woman who is always oppressed under this weight, and lives with this sin. Submitting some reasons, she refuses to come to the invitation of Lady Hunstanton because she does not want to be in crowded places. Although people think that she is a respectable woman because of her dressing style, her dresses in fact are a sign of her secludedness from society and perhaps delinquency. Since she knows she is a sinful woman in the eyes of people, she tries to move away from society either with her behaviors or dresses. She tells what it is to be a fallen woman:

Mrs. Arbuthnot: ... She will always suffer. For her there is no joy, no peace, no atonement. She is a woman who drags a chain like a guilty thing. She is a woman who wears a mask, like a thing that is leper. The fire cannot purify her. The waters cannot quench her anguish. Nothing can heal her! no anodyne can give her sleep! no poppies forgetfulness! She is lost! She is a lost soul! (Wilde, 1893).

It is true that she wears a mask that hides her sorrow. Despite everything she seems very strong and symbolizes purity and goodness in the eyes of people. The American Hester Worsley says to Mrs. Arbuthnot, “*You are so different from the other women here. When you came into the drawing-room somehow you brought with you a sense of what is good and pure in life*” (Wilde, 1997). She is different from other women and also the most enlightened one. Hoping to marry to have a child from the man she loves, she believes it does not make her a guilty woman. She is only the victim of Lord Illingworth. She does not appreciate the values of upper-class because she finds them varnished, artificial and hypocritical. Mrs. Arbuthnot, like Hester Worsley, is against the double standard between men and women. So she opposes Gerald's words:

Gerald: My dear mother, it all sounds very tragic, of course. But I dare say the girl was just as much to blame as Lord Illingworth was.- After all, would a really nice girl, a girl with any nice feelings at all, go away from her home with a man to whom she was not married, and live with him as his wife? No nice girl would.

Mrs. Arbuthnot: Gerald, I withdraw all my objections. You are at liberty to go away with Lord Illingworth, when and where you choose (Wilde, 1893).

Also by saying these to his mother, Gerald exhibits the patriarchal nature of the society. However, Mrs. Arbuthnot does not agree with him, it is the reality of Victorian society. Barely, not submitting to a man and accepting the belief that women and men have the same rights is the truth of Mrs. Arbuthnot. Her son Gerald wants Lord Illingworth to marry his mother. According to Gerald, that is the duty of his father Lord Illingworth. By refusing to marry Lord Illingworth, she takes a radical decision in comparison to traditional Victorian woman. Her refusal of her son's wish indicates that she is independent. In contrast to the heroines of the play, she does not try to gain a husband's love or attract a man's attention. As she is able to live and raise a child on her own without a man's financial support, she is the first woman character who managed to do these. She does not care what society thinks about her or her son. First of all she already did the same thing. Although she begs him too much to marry her, Lord Illingworth does not accept and leaves them, but she does not give up and she gives birth without hesitating. Also she gives him her name.

Mrs. Arbuthnot: What son has ever asked of his mother to make so hideous a sacrifice? None.

Gerald: What mother has ever refused to marry the father of her own child?

Mrs. Arbuthnot: Let me the first, then. I will not do that (Wilde, 1893).

When Lord Illingworth says that he will marry her for the second time, she declines pertinaciously because she thinks that marriage is a sacred thing for those who love each other, and it should not be for economic freedom, social status or power. She stands behind her decision. As Anne Varty (1998) mentioned; "The character of Mrs. Arbuthnot displays the features of an old world dying and a new one struggling to be born. The nature of the relationship she once entered into with her lover, and the subsequent independence with which she chose to raise the illegitimate offspring of that alliance, suggest the life-style of 'new woman' determined to make her way alone and against all odds. This is confirmed by the

self-possession with which she addresses Illingworth at the end of Act II and by her confession to Gerald that she refuses to repent her 'sin' (Varty, 1998).

*Mrs. Arbuthnot: ... For though day after day, at morn or evensong.
I have knelt in God's house. I have never repented of my Sin. How
could I repent of my sin when you, my love were its fruit! Even now
that you are more to me than innocence (Wilde, 1893).*

To the rules and traditions of Victorian era, Gerald is a child of sin, but instead of being a fallen woman because of that, Mrs. Arbuthnot is proud of her sin. She loves her son too much, so she never regrets her decision.

On the whole she has raised her son. When Lord Illingworth comes to her house in order to talk about their son, he offers monetary aid to Gerald. Yet Mrs. Arbuthnot does not accept this offer. Whereas economic freedom is so important for a woman in that age, she does not accept anything from him though she is a poor woman. This is also quite unusual in Wilde's age because then men govern the women because the property woman has belongs to her husband. In this sense, Gleadle (2001) points out that; "*the perpetuation of male authority within marriage is not surprising, given that most women remained economically dependent upon their husbands; educationally disadvantaged in comparison to them and without political rights*" (Gleadle, 2001, p. 23). In such an age she exhibits an opposite behavior. She shows that she has changed and she is not like other women. The biggest richness she has is her honour. Also she is a strong woman who suffers for her sin and matures due to that sin. It might be said that she is one move ahead of the age she lives.

*Lord Illingworth: You have grown hard, Rachel.
Mrs. Arbuthnot: I was too weak once. It is well for me that I have
changed (Wilde, 1893).*

After a while Lord Illingworth reads the letter written by Gerald in order to tell him to marry his mother Mrs. Arbuthnot. He agrees to marry her just because his son Gerald wants that.

*Mrs. Arbuthnot: I decline to marry you, Lord Illingworth.
Lord Illingworth: Are you serious? (Wilde, 1893)*

It is a wonder that a woman does not want to marry her son's father because it is not a situation that should be done voluntarily, but it is the main duty of a Victorian woman. The play ends with the victory of Mrs. Arbuthnot. It is Lord Illingworth who becomes the person "*of no importance*". Also it might be said that it is the rise of fallen woman.

4.3. Salome

Salome was written as a French musical by Oscar Wilde towards the end of 1891 in Paris. The play was published in France in 1893. Though it was translated into English in a year, Wilde died without seeing his play when it was first performed in England in 1905. Even when it was first performed in France in 1896, he could not see it as he was in prison in his homeland. Wilde wrote this play with inspiration from the tale of princess of Judea in Bible. While *Salome* takes place as a parable in Bible, it turned into a passionate and obsessive love story in Wilde's hands. Being regarded as a radical play considering the period it was written, *Salome* was criticized to a great extent. The reactions of Victorian period audience led to the censoring and forbiddance of the play. The reason why this play caused so much reaction at the end of the 19th century was the character of *Salome*, from whom the play mainly took its name. Moreover, one of the reasons of debates on this play was that the play had taken its theme from the Bible and at that time it was forbidden to perform the characters of the Bible on the stage.

According to the tale in the Bible, Herod has Jokanaan arrested and put him into a dungeon as a result of provocation of her brother Filipus's wife. This is because Jokanaan tells him that his marriage to his brother's wife is against the holy law and disallows this marriage when Herod marries this woman. So Herodias bears a grudge against Jokanaan and wants to get him killed; however she fails. Herodias, who knows that Jokanaan is an honest and holy man, is afraid of him and despite imprisoning Jokanaan, he pretends to protect him as he abstains from the reaction of people. Yet an opportunity arises for Herodias during his own birthday feast given for the aristocracy and nobility of the palace. The daughter of Herodias, Salome, comes to the court and dances upon the request of the king. Herod and his guests admire her dance and the king tells her, "*Make your wish and I will give it for you*". He repeats his offer and swears to give what she wishes, even the half of his

kingdom. The girl goes out and asks her mother what to wish and her mother replies “*The head of Jokanaan the Baptist*”. The girl returns and declares her wish: “*I wish the head of Jokanaan the Baptist on a tray*”. The king feels deep sorrow; however he cannot refuse her as he swore in front of his guests. Rather than feeling ashamed and humiliated in front of people’s eyes, he sends a hangman and orders Jokanaan’s head. The hangman goes to the dungeon and gets Jokanaan’s head. He brings the head on a tray and gives it to the girl, and the girl gives it to her mother. Jokanaan’s students, upon hearing this incident, come and get his corpse to bury.

It is this Biblical story that Wilde dramatized in this play; however he made some small but significant changes. Wilde customized the character of Salome and presented her as a girl who behaves independently and runs after her desires to the audience. In Wilde’s play, Salome does not ask for her mother’s wish. Moreover, though her mother opposes, she dances for the king because she wants Jokanaan from the very beginning and she knows what to wish. She does not hesitate to use her seduction to reach her goal. Thus, many theatre critics emphasize the “*femme-fatale*” (seductive woman having fatal beauty) characteristics of Salome (Hedgecock, 2008). As a matter of fact, Salome is known and described as the icon of seductive woman in Christian customs.

From the very early lines of the play, we see Salome’s seductive features. As the plays proceeds, the question for the audience is whether Salome advocates women’s matter with a feminist identity, or she behaves with the label of feminine using her sexual identity to achieve her goal. Wilde tries to highlight this phase with various actions, words and images during the play. For example, objects in the nature frequently identify with Salome. The foremost object of these is the “*moon*” image. Moon can be considered as the major image in the play and it represents not only the “*death*” but also the “*life*”. From the earliest lines of the play, a match between Salome and the moon can be seen. To the lover of Salome, young Syrian, she is like a little princess who wears a yellow veil, and whose feet are of silver while the servant of Herod who bears deep emotion to Syrian likens the moon to a dead woman. Both of the characters seem to be lost in their feelings and they simultaneously see different objects in the moon. Thus, these two characters sooner or later will be the victim of their own tragedy due to their narrow point of view. At that time Salome’s entrance to the scene leads to a different point of view to the play. Her words to the king, who wants her to stay there, are very remarkable “I will not

stay, I cannot stay” (Wilde, 1891). With these words, Salome rejects Herod’s, in other words the king’s, authority and she leaves the palace and goes to the terrace in order to get around the king’s gazing. This behaviour of Salome indicates her independence. Salome describes this situation with her words “*What a nice weather, I can breathe here*” (Wilde, 1891).

By walking away from the place where the king is, she first implies her getting further away from the king’s authority and pressure. She refuses to stay with the king in spite of his power and richness, whereas almost all women of Victorian age would accept such power. Getting out of the society’s rules by using her identity, Salome uses these words for the moon and describes herself while staring at the moon:

How good to see the moon! She is like a little piece of money, a little silver flower. She is cold and chaste. I am sure she is a virgin. She has the beauty of a virgin. Yes, she is a virgin. She has never defiled herself. She has never abandoned herself to men, like the other goddesses (Price, 1996).

By praising the moon, Salome describes herself as a matter of fact. These praises are not timid thoughts of a small girl, but praises of a girl who is not afraid of the first sexual experience. Salome regards herself superior to everything around her and these words are the indicators of the power of her virginity. Revolting against the authority of man, Salome is aware of her power thanks to her virginity and its impact on man. Salome realises the power and advantages of her attraction and femininity. At that point, Salome can be identified with the Pagan moon goddess Cybele as they both try to preserve their virginity. Being aware of this power, Salome turns to her feminine identity, in other words her sexual feminine identity. For such a powerful woman, the patriarchal regime of her time is not important.

Salome hears the voice of Prophet Jokanaan from the cistern and wants to see him, but the soldiers reject her. Herod strictly forbids her to see Jokanaan, but Salome is not a woman who easily gives up. In this play Wilde draws the character Salome as superior to men at almost all points. Contrary to the period of the play, in this play man gets weaker than Salome. Salome shows a transition from the power of innocence to the power of sexuality of which she is totally aware. As she is a rebellious woman she is very determined to see the prophet Jokanaan. Seducing the guards, she makes Jokanaan get out of prison.

While the women of Victorian period give birth, Salome is a woman who takes people's lives. On the other hand Victorian women have to be chaste, at least seem to be chaste. However, Salome feels sexual emotions for Jokanaan as well as seeing herself superior to him. Salome expresses her thoughts explicitly:

I am amorous of thy body, Jokanaan! Thy body is white, like the lilies of a field that the mower hath never mowed. Thy body is white like the snows that lie on the mountains of Judaea, and come down into the valleys. The roses in the garden of the Queen of Arabia are not so white as thy body. Neither the roses of the garden of the Queen of Arabia, the garden of spices of the Queen of Arabia, nor the feet of the dawn when they light on the leaves, nor the breast of the moon when she lies on the breast of the sea.... There is nothing in the world so white as thy body. Suffer me to touch thy body (Wilde, 1891, p. 7).

The words Salome chooses symbolize the spiritual power she has (Bird, 1977). Each time, however, Jokanaan rejects Salome. That Jokanaan rejects Salome also means the despising of Salome's power and her confidence in her sexual identity. Jokanaan is the prophet of the God and he also feels superior to Salome. For such a man, the seduction of Salome has no importance. For him, Salome is corrupted because of her race and he says "*Back, daughter of Sodom! Touch me not. Profane not the temple of the Lord God*".

For Jokanaan, sin came to the world with woman. As Eve seduced Adam, Salome's mother seduces her husband's brother and marries him. Thus, Jokanaan tells Salome that he does not want to listen to Salome and he only obeys God's orders. However, this refusal triggers Salome's desire and passion instead of breaking up her desire. As an expression of her determination, Salome repeats the same sentence nine times: "*I will kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan. I will kiss thy mouth*". The young Syrian, upon hearing what Salome says, cannot stand more and kills himself. The young Syrian, loves Salome, but he cannot bear the rejection and humiliation of his patriarchal feelings by a woman. And he becomes the first male victim of Salome.

"Princess, Princess, thou who are like a garden of myrth, thou who art the dove of all doves, look not at this man, look not at him! Do not speak such words to him. I cannot endure it.... Princess, do not speak these things." (Wilde, 1891, p. 8).

These are the last words of the Syrian. The dead body of the Syrian falls between Salome and the prophet Jokanaan and this situation symbolizes the wall between man and exploited woman in the society (Price, 1996).

After all these, King Herod, Herodias, and their subordinates come to the terrace. Herod depicts Salome and the state of the play in line with the moon.

Herod: The moon has a strange look to-night. Has she not a strange look? She is like a mad woman, a mad woman who is seeking everywhere for lovers. She is naked too. She is quite naked. The clouds are seeking to clothe her nakedness, but she will not let them. She shows herself naked in the sky. She reels through the clouds like a drunken woman.... I am sure she is looking for lovers. Does she not reel like a drunken woman? She is like a mad woman, is she not?

Herodias: No; the moon is like the moon, that is all. Let us go within.... We have nothing to do here. (Wilde, 1891, p. 11)

While Salome was a white princess, she attained a masculine power. Herod, who has unlimited ruling authority, is fascinated by her femininity and gets controlled by her power. Salome's femininity wins the victory against King Herod, the most powerful representative of male dominant society. Thus, Herod and Salome change roles, and Salome becomes as strong as a man while Herod gets weaker as a woman. Herod starts to behave as a feminine character and he offers half of his kingdom to Salome:

Salome, Salome, dance for me. I pray thee dance for me. I am sad to-night. Yes, I am passing sad to-night. When I came hither I slipped in blood, which is an ill omen; also I heard in the air a beating of wings, a beating of giant wings. I cannot tell what that they mean.... I am sad to-night. Therefore dance for me. Dance for me, Salome, I beseech thee. If thou dancest for me thou mayest ask of me what thou wilt, and I will give it thee. Yes, dance for me, Salome, and whatsoever thou shalt ask of me I will give it thee, even unto the half of my kingdom (Wilde, 1891, p. 12).

Herod then realizes that Salome will dance on blood, and he resembles the moon to blood. The change of moon like that can be commented as a sign showing the determinacy of Salome. The death of Jokanaan is actually the birth of Salome as a stronger character. Salome's dance with seven veils is the peak of eroticism in the play. After this dance Herod asks the wish of Salome and she replies that she wants the head of Jokanaan in a silver tray. Salome is a femme-fatale woman and upon this wish Herod offers various other things such as emerald to Salome, but she rejects all.

She follows her own desire; the world's richness does not appeal to her. Herod becomes the slave of his promise and this is his weakest moment. A hangman goes and comes back with the head of Jokanaan and Salome is now satisfied.

Ah! thou wouldst not suffer me to kiss thy mouth, Iokanaan. Well! I will kiss it now. I will bite it with my teeth as one bites a ripe fruit. Yes, I will kiss thy mouth, Iokanaan. I said it; did I not say it? I said it. Ah! I will kiss it now.... But wherefore dost thou not look at me, Iokanaan? Thine eyes that were so terrible, so full of rage and scorn, are shut now. Wherefore are they shut? Open thine eyes! Lift up thine eyelids, Iokanaan! Wherefore dost thou not look at me? Art thou afraid of me, Iokanaan, that thou wilt not look at me?... (Wilde, 1891, p. 13).

These words are the most powerful evidence showing that Salome reaches her goal. Though Jokanaan is a prophet, the representative of God, he is now the victim of Salome. Salome kisses Jokanaan's mouth and shows that no man can rise against her.

Ah! I have kissed thy mouth, Iokanaan, I have kissed thy mouth. There was a bitter taste on thy lips. Was it the taste of blood?... Nay; but perchance it was the taste of love.... They say that love hath a bitter taste.... But what matter? what matter? I have kissed thy mouth, Iokanaan, I have kissed thy mouth. (Wilde, 1891, p. 15).

Then the moon enlightens Salome. While leaving the place of incidence, on the stairs Herod orders to the soldiers to kill Salome. Although Salome is killed in the end of the play, she is undoubtedly the winner as she reached her goal though she knew that she would be killed.

CONCLUSION

To be a woman has almost always been a challenging and demanding business, especially in societies shaped and ruled in accordance with the decisions and practises of men. Beginning with the original sin committed by Eve as the arche type of sinful woman followed by Adam as that of victimized man, a common Christian belief that has dominated the whole social life from the earliest days to the extent of giving men the right to control and rule women to prevent them from such a big mistake again, woman has been subjected to male dominance, authority and power. Under the pretext of original sin, woman has often been confined to home and charged with looking after the whole house, including children and husband. In patriarchal societies led by the male authority, man is believed to have been endowed with the right to be above woman in hierarchical order at home or in the society. Being such a male-dominated society from its earliest days, the Western world, not excluding England, has also chosen to see woman as a secondary subject.

England, which rose to be a world power under a female monarch, Queen Elizabeth, in the late 16th century, went on viewing women from a similar perspective, however. Women were supposed to be obedient daughters who were ready to accept whatever they were dictated by their fathers; chaste lovers who were willing to keep loyal to their darlings under of all circumstances; angelic wives who were voluntary to admit their husbands as their sole masters; and self-sacrificing mothers who were never tired of doing their best for their children. Such a submissive identity was also portrayed and reflected in the plays, poems and novels until the late 19th century, and almost always from a male perspective. In Shakespeare's plays, for example, women are quite embodiment of loyalty, virtue, beauty, chastity, obedience and readiness to please men. "*Taming of the Shrew*" can be taken as a typical play in this sense. On the other hand, John Donne's metaphysical poems of love are also centred around his lovers whom he describes as the partners ready to please him in all ways and to wait him under all conditions. Even in the novels of a female writer, Jane Austen, women are described as the girls trying to find a good husband and to seem as feminine and womanly as possible in pursuit of their target. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in a similar manner, tends to depict women as beings that should be brought up, trained and educated to be good housewives, decent wives and devoted mothers at home and that should be kept away from the society and business life.

In the presence of such prejudiced and imposed attitudes to women, the Christian World, however, entered a process of questioning almost everything, including the freedom, justice and equality among people with the onset of the French Revolution in 1789. It especially triggered serious debates about equality, first between the members of a society, then between the workers and others, and finally between women and men. Romantic Movement also contributed to this process in the first quarter of the 19th century. It was, however, followed by grim and grey days and nights for married couples under the middle class because both the man and woman were obliged to work under hard conditions, and even the children. In the middle classes, however, traditional Victorian society had adopted a patriarchal attitude to women as in the preceding centuries as if French Revolution had never broken out. Victorian women were again silent daughters, obedient wives and devoted mothers. The whole history of mankind had changed almost nothing for women and put them under the hegemonic control and rule of men. And it was into such a society that Oscar Wilde was born and grew up, only to witness the men's exploitative oppressive and repressive treatment of women. Influenced by his mother as his first contact and encounter with women throughout his childhood and later by his sister and finally by his wife, Wilde passed through a radical transformation in his views of women and femininity. Also influenced by the socialist values and views that aim to spread equality through the whole society, Wilde chose three women as the leading characters for his three influential plays.

Viewed as a whole, two of these three plays, excluding *Salome* represent the women in the grip of man-made traditions and beliefs, who make conscious, and sometimes unconscious, attempts to get rid of the male dominance over them. Lady Windermere, for example, attempts to follow, or pursue, her own choice and leaves her home, including her husband and children. This is, in a sense, an attempt to destroy the traditionalized identity of woman required to spend her life waiting and serving at home under all circumstances. Her mother is also representative of the old woman transformed into the new woman through her own decision. Besides Lady Windermere and her mother Mrs. Erlynne in *Lady Windermere's Fan*, Mrs. Arbuthnot prefers to have an illegitimate child and, above all, she conceals this fact from her son's father until he grows up to be an adult. She even refuses that man's proposal at the expense of falling in poor living conditions. Masculine financial authority is denied at this stage, and the woman proves independent of others' assistance and contribution. She, in a sense, declares herself as a fully-developed and self-efficient individual in the male-dominated society. In these two plays, the two

female protagonists reflect the changing face of the society in which women, to Wilde, were in the infancy of their struggle in the late 19th century to be on equal terms with men, ending their inferior or secondary status within the society that they share with men. However, this should not be taken as tantamount to admitting that Wilde is a feminist writer, a misconception which he himself warns his readers or the public to avoid. He bases his egalitarian attitude to women in his plays not on his feminist identity, but on his socialist view of life. To him, there should be no discrimination first between the upper class and lower classes, then between the bosses and rulers and workers or the ruled, and finally between men and women. His insistence on pure equality finds its expression in these two plays though he seems to be cautious of the social reaction and condemnation of his plays on grounds of his female characters' free and independent choices. It may be for this reason that he ends up his play *Lady Windermere's Fan* with the scene in which Lady Windermere returns home in regret and desperation in such a way as to satisfy the social expectations and man-made laws or traditions. However the other play *A Woman of No Importance* ends with the refusal scene in which Mrs. Arbuthnot declines the proposal made by the biological father of her son though it could be the way of her recovery from her difficult and troubled life. Her reference to him as a man of no importance should be taken as her refusal of the society considering women to be of no importance.

These two plays are followed by *Salome*, a play in which Wilde turns all the established values and judgements through the leading female character's ambitious and self-centred preference to kiss a man's mouth at the expense of having him killed at first and having herself murdered in the end. The fulfilment of personal desires was not an acceptable issue for women in Wilde's society, which makes Salome an extraordinary character in her time. She violates the rules set by men; she disregards her mother's warnings and instructions; she defeats the king as the highest male authority by means of her physical appearance and lure. Instead of letting a man exploit her body to his pleasure, she herself uses her body to her end, which is to kiss the mouth of a man of dignity and respect in her society despite his repeated rejection of this offer.

In all these plays, Wilde draws the pictures of old woman and new woman side by side so that he clearly demonstrates the distinction between the two. However, as far as humanly values are concerned, new woman outweigh old woman through their choices and actions. In a sense, he intends to make it seem desirable to women of his time to become new woman. This may be because he believes that to

be a woman suppressed and belittled by the men's choices and practises is quite a wrong and hard business. His is a dream of society in which women enjoy the chances and facilities granted to men in legal, ethical or customary ways. Therefore, being a woman in the late 19th century, when Wilde produced his plays, is quite unlike being a woman in his plays in that women in the latter seem to be aware and conscious of their power and rights, and they can do anything possible to find, realize and upgrade themselves in the face of men. Therefore, his plays can be taken as a bridge from the old woman to the new woman, reflective of his socialist view of egalitarianism rather than feminist view of equality between different sexes.

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