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Male after a Fashion: Post-Genital Masculinity in Question

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My intent is to revisit non-canonical texts composed in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, exploring anonymous satirical songs and poems usually circulated as broadsheets and salvaged in collections for recreational markets. Never meant to hit the timeless glory attached to major artistic achievement, they echo public opinion and record both the spirit of the age and the collective unconscious of the time. As a matter of fact, the texts under scrutiny mainly depict grotesque figures of dapper young men-about-town, who may really be dashing young men-about-town viewed in a caricatural way for ideological reasons. Indeed, the concept of masculinity problematically reads either as what is proper to men at a given place and time, or what society expects from them, in a specific situation usually passing as universally and eternally valid. The fairly homogeneous corpus proceeds under the influence of these social expectations, in particular with the unquestioned paradigm of masculinity partly resting on the preconceived superiority of abstract thought, self-control and inconspicuous exercise of domination as defined in Monica Wittig's "The Straight Mind". In consequence, the youth's behavioural regimes unsurprisingly meet with condemnation.

More precisely, the object of description and criticism is covered by the timeless umbrella term of dandyism under its late-eighteenth-early-nineteenth-century incarnated guises—fops, *Incroyables*, coxcombs, Beaux (butterfly or not), Exquisites or fashionables¹. Obviously, the *persona* exposes their supposedly

obnoxious fast-spreading narcissistic parade. The description dwells on their self-indulgent adornment of their idle bodies in the latest fashion, and indicates that they might be great performing socialites but prove to be very poor social achievers. More importantly, these highly embodied, sensuous aesthetes lend visibility to what in biological men should not attract public notice when they display the un-masculine in men, not unlike anti-models—a problematic contorted phrasing which it is the aim of this study to elucidate.

Thus, the corpus presents a paradoxical, antiphrastic form of masculinity peeping through; and yet, a more conventional one is also included in a symptomatic way. Indeed, most of the texts opt for a voice and focalization which not less paradoxically materialize in the *persona*, making the presence of a conscience felt by the reader. It is this *persona* which first dramatizes the tension between visible and invisible forms of masculinity in the textual configurations.

This ethos screens out reality and in so doing proves self-assertive, while masculinity becomes palpable in the demiurgic capacity to bring the world into existence for the reader, as the *persona* words it. Whereas he—a man or a he-woman—seems to be absent from the scene, he is performatively incorporated as the source of the linguistic representation. His reports are subsumed by his own standards of verbalization, all of them bearing witness to his presence. In this insistent presence of an apparent absence, there lies an undetected performance of masculinity—a coating surrounding every being with its normative codes, apparently adhering to it but in fact informing it through and through to fit the only possible world of meaning and social exchange, one devised by dominant men for themselves. The reader is sucked in as these popular poems and songs trap him/her into their specific vision and he/she is engulfed in their discourse.

There does the over-arching presence of the *persona* serve as a frame for the exercise of masculine authority—a visible though sometimes unobtrusive enforcement of masculine laws. He introduces an asymmetrical relationship with the dandy he describes, making most of the scopic power his narrative status endows him with. This “I-eye” stands in the dignified position of a full subject who uses his perception as well as his mind to make sense of this creature of fashion. By

describing a dandy, the *persona* reifies him and claims the power to spell out the truth: "'tis a creature / Of listless form and vacant feature" ("Dandies," *The Man of Kent*). Every detail constitutive to this dandy's character contributes to the emergence of a masculine center of consciousness placed at the heart of the cognitive apparatus. Since the commanding position of the subject remains unquestioned in the portrayal, which unfolds evenly, the *persona* imposes himself as an authoritative source of enunciation, a master of the *logos*. He sees, understands and words whatever comes under the jurisdiction of his attention, concern and literary project. In consequence, he imposes himself as a reliable, knowing reporter whose tale occasionally seeks support in technical sartorial accuracy, and consequently rings even more true for the public: "their coats are lin'd with sarsenet to cut a flaming dash, / All other sorts of lining they consider merely trash" (*Chit Chat, The Fashionable Dandies' Songster*). The reference to sarsenet gives credentials to the utterance, and validates the subsequent statement on the dandies' exclusive taste, although the formulation—possibly the information—subjectively articulates the dominant males' condemnation.

When the fashionable becomes the enunciator, he is fed the words of a self-deprecating speech:

For playing the fool I seem made;
But what's to become of poor me! (*Fashion's all Fiddle-de-dee, The New Sadler's Wells*)

As for third-person narratives, the *persona's* certified knowledge tends to breed an authoritarian attitude in him. His criticism of the dandies' fixation on dress is final, as exemplified by the recurrent use of the imperative mode, sometimes in the same text:

Neglect thy gaudy dress,
Adorn thy mind the more within,
And prune thy person less.
Boast not that thus you outward shine,
At Folly's vain expense;
Lament the fate that made thee fine, (*The Beau Butterfly, Satirical Songs and Poems on Costume*)

The injunctive tone structures the address as an overt exercise in self-assertion. In the process, authority reveals its two sides, and intellectual ascendancy sometimes offers a pretext to exert coercive power.

Moreover, the discursive categories are typical of the Derridean phallogocentric paradigm, organizing a man's world for man's own personal profit. This means that whatever use the *persona* makes of his epistemological tools, he already asserts his power by imposing heuristic notions which in the first place echo his vision of creation. Hence, in a quote like "[s]uch weak-wing'd May flies" (*Fashion, an Epistolary Satire, Poems, 1685-1801*), not only is it relevant that the dandies described are "weak" but it must be noted that the opposition between "weak" and "strong" is implicitly validated and turned into an axiology. Dandies have to live in a world where a line of divide is drawn between the two notions, marking out a typically masculine territory where these beings branded as weaklings are unwelcome. This segregating move is dramatically demonstrated by the reference to their damning bristle phallic spears:

How would our tender *British* Beauties shriek,
To see slim *Beaux* on Bulls their Lances break! (*Fashion, an Epistolary Satire, Poems, 1685-1801*)

Physical ability, gender and nationality form a triangular touchstone revealing that the golden youths are at best gilded. The *persona* proves similarly aggressive towards any complex factor which fails to meet his requirements or does not fit into his categories, thus threatening the coherence of the phallogocentric system—that is the system itself.

The very act of selecting in dandies the parts to be integrated in the portraits supposedly describes but in fact constructs them. Such characterization as "[t]heir pretty little fingers too all dizen'd out with rings" (*Chit Chat, The Fashionable Dandies' Songster*) foregrounds elements so as to compose a picture and impose an image, which undercuts dandiacal eccentricity while empowering the *persona*. The focus is then normative, and every text contributes to the elaboration of a caricatural type, blowing some features out of proportion, were it through the mere ignorance of

other ones. This points to the necessity for dominant males to re-assert their authority in order to secure the borders of the masculine dominion.

The fictional dandy is not described but defined in the texts, and ultimately serves as a pattern against which any young man with an eye for fashionable clothes might be read, understood and finally sanctioned:

Before the people's dazzled sight
Raise gaudy phantoms which the little mind,
Deems Beauty, height of Taste, and Elegance refin'd (*Fashion, an Ode*)

The *persona* performs the ritual act of marking the limits of a territory by assailing any contravener; namely, here, every young man visibly rejecting traditional masculinity. It is no coincidence if otherness is construed as difference, then inferiority, and the texts become moral mechanisms of social vindictiveness, resorting to a judgmental approach to dissenters. Variation is automatically considered abnormal deviation, as evidenced by Michel Foucault in his *History of Sexuality*. In consequence, dandies and Exquisites are pathologized, and a mention of their uselessness – with sexual undertones of impotence – carries the criticism further in the reader's mind:

They both should be sent out to nurse,
Till they learn to be useful and handy. (*The Dandy and the Exquisite, The Fashionable Dandies' Songster*)

Masculinity is seen performing its self-foundational activity as a juridical instance. It polices each and everyone in the name of abstract, universal values often rooted in nature, which legitimize men's authority, as these men are both the self-proclaimed sources and actual recipients of these values. Natural physical strength for instance is supposed to guarantee the individual's worth, but in fact it is dominant men's physical superiority which led them to impose such a feature as a sign of election rightfully entitling them to rule. Yet, the accumulation in one line of "learn," "useful" and "handy" in the lyrics quoted indicates that masculinity is also shaped by a civilizing force. Elsewhere, however, non-conformists are not so much treated as dissenters, defectors or barbarians but as degenerates, "our alter'd race" (*Fashion, an Epistolary Satire, Poems, 1685-1801*), who coexist with the true men, but will not qualify.

Still, juggling categories—however biased they might be—supposedly follows the order of reason and its procedures. Yet, the corpus mainly strives to disparage the dandies in a most illogical regime of exposition. In other words, the *persona* is little interested in giving the dressy reprobates a fair trial with proofs and structured arguments but discredits them by adopting grotesque modes of description emphasizing the incompatibility of manhood and fashion. Masculinity shows in its ability to crush resistance by all possible means, and the amount of ridicule produced is an index of its power. Thus the *persona* neutralizes iconoclastic streaks in the dandies through equation with totally different classes of beings, none of which even remotely competes with dominant masculinity for precedence, prestige or predominance.

For instance, dandies are feminized, consequently ranking rather low in the androcentric hierarchy. A striking example occurs when the words “ball” and “powder” are used to evoke the virility of a military Beau, before they are redirected towards the feminine sphere of futile recreation and artifice:

For there ne'er was more money expended in balls;
Or a greater consumption of powder. (*The Military Beau, The Spirit of English Wit*)

This insists on the monstrosity of un-masculine dandies, significantly associating the abnormal with the category of women, the only other possible gender. This demotion is only one remove from infantilization, and points out the idle fashionables' arrested development and their reversion to a pre-genital stage, hyperbolized in a comparison with infancy: “[a]s mirthful infants, idling out the Day” (*Fashion, an Epistolary Satire, Poems, 1685-1801*). Of course, they are neither children nor females, except in the eye of the *persona*, whose statement superimposes an image upon them so as to control gender definition in a society he insists on shaping to his exclusive liking and persists in calling his own, in compliance with masculine logic².

Divergence and irrelevance are also efficiently underlined by strategies of alienating reification: “[n]ow a dandy's a thing” (*The Dandies, Songs*). The manipulative use of pronouns conveys this ontological reduction unnoticed: “[w]hat's a Dandy?” (“Dandies,” *The Man of Kent*). And yet, not only do texts openly

designate the dandy as a “thing,” but they sometimes add dismissive adjectives to complete the picture of inconsistency: “[a] Dandy’s the queerest thing ever aw saw” (*The Pitman’s Account of a Dying Dandy, The Fashionable Dandies’ Songster*), and “[i]t’s age is twenty five, / But the oddest thing alive” (*A Dandy Lost, The Fashionable Dandies’ Songster*). Such massive, direct tactics of accumulation also bear witness to the *persona’s* self-assurance and artificially strive to produce a sense of unerring judgment in him. This mouthpiece of dominant men files otherness with oddity and queerness, this time, using superlatives to oust the dandies off limits.

Animalizing them symbolically represents an even more drastic turn, and more dramatically deploys men’s power to name and classify in a punitive way, so as to keep immaculate the sanctity of the masculinity they defend and cherish. The animalistic paradigm locates the unrepresentative embodiment of masculinity a rung or two down the scale of beings. It is hardly surprising to find over-determined animals such as the artful ape, the sly monkey or the stupid donkey:

But if for once could the fashion prevail,
He’d be more like an ape if he had but a tail,
Derry down, & c.
I know what would make him a dandy complete,
And all other dandies I’m sure he’d surpass,
By placing instead, the ears of an ass,

Derry down, & c. (*The Dandies, Songs*)

The cynical *persona* occasionally resorts to the image of the dog: “[l]ike curs, sometimes they’ll bite and snap”; and even a reference to vermin, italicized for effect, is to be found in the same text:

To naturalists, therefore, I leave to determine
To what it belong’d – to which species of *vermin*. (*A Non-Descript of 1818, The Mirror of Asses!*)

This bestiary incarnates human flaws, and in return drags down the dandies to the dregs of creation. Through these various literary sanctions, the *persona* only looks for striking ways to invalidate their efforts to cut a praiseworthy figure, sometimes carrying repetition to an astounding effect:

How brimful of nothing’s the life of a beau!

They've nothing to think, they've nothing to do;
Nor nothing to talk of, for nothing they know,
And nothing all day, but sing, saunter, and stare,
For nothing, at night, to the play-house they crowd;
To mind nothing done there they always are proud,
But to bow, and to grin, and talk nothing aloud.
For nothing, on Sundays, at church they appear,
For they've nothing to hope, nor they've nothing to fear;
They nothing are no where, who nothing are here. (*The Life of a Beau, The Fashionable Dandies' Songster*)

In the corpus, then, dandyism displays what part in man should be eradicated, or at least remain invisible, and the ethos of the *persona* leaves a juridical mark on the dandies portrayed, thus assuming the ultimate acceptable form of masculinity. However, the discourse dandyism articulates thoroughly deconstructs and reconfigures this hegemonic model—after a fashion. With a shift in perspectives, I will indeed reinterpret what I first described as the display of the un-masculine in masculinity, from the censorious point of view of a *persona*, in terms of the staged embodiment of the masculine un-masculine in men. It means that from the dandies'—and my own—standpoint, a part usually deemed unfit is nonetheless assimilated as a truly acceptable component of a form of masculinity—for dandies are not cross-dressers and do identify as masculine beings. This underlines the necessity in a liberalizing context to produce new models of social postures disenfranchised from conventional models, among which the gentleman reigns supreme. But such a radical intervention on the institution of masculinity requires that it be defamiliarized and destabilized to allow of some elbow room for play.

This is easily achieved because dandyism opens up new horizons for the very reasons which brought it its bad name – its dramatic performance brings out the very arbitrariness of standard naturalized masculinity. It reveals its fundamental performativity. As a result, because the gendered social identification of men is constructed, the dandies' artificiality is not pitted against the other men's genuineness, but mimics the very contrived convention of masculinity, as evidenced in Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*. Of course, the rejection of the inherited essentialist

system in favour of a constructionist perspective deprives patriarchs of their claim to domination, one Pierre Bourdieu has convincingly demonstrated to be supposedly rooted in their nature and the order of things they come to represent. The dandies' parade as men paroxysmically shows that it is a construction, with little or no base in nature: "[l]ife is a mere masquerade" (*An Old Friend with a New Face, Songs*). Their theatrical mode of appearance is unambiguously considered as an act in disguise, and the attitude of "young Squire Lumpkin" at a ball serves as an allegory for life in society:

I'll put on fine cloths, and go to the ball, Sir,
Then pull out my glass and squint at them all, Sir;
To be blind is the fashion, so I'll be blind too, Sir
And if you peep at me, why then, I'll squint at you, Sir.
[...]
As I strut round the room, I stare in their faces,
Then pull down my ruffles all cover'd in laces; (*The Modern Beau, The New Sadler's Wells*)

By deliberately endorsing a stagy part, they do not flout accepted norms and codes but uncover their constructedness, and compose "changing fictions of masculinity"³. This indicates that just like anyone dandies were not born with their outfits on, but selected them in order to create an impression, as part of a global existential strategy⁴. In contrast with the current dress codes whose conformity carried to the point of unremarkable drabness is meant to inspire respect in everyone, the dandies opt for colourful sartorial compositions. They invest the world of sensuous luxury more fully, in order to dramatize their lives and reconcile masculinity with flamboyance.

As a consequence of this posture, their wardrobes turn the heterosexual scenario into a choreographed carnival, which leaves little room for natural instinct or determination. The visible organization of patriarchal society, based on perpetuation through mating assisted by social controls to secure the adequate pairing, is thus demonstrated to be an artificial set up, alienating men by forcing them to construct their sense of an identity in the perspective of socially sanctioned heteronormativity. It must be noted that the corpus strives to impose this theme

upon the dandies' characterization. Here, one of them manages to fascinate young girls:

Thus equipt he'll far excel
Every beau, and charm each belle. (*Female Advice to a Painter, Satirical Songs and Poems on Costume*)

There, another stands as an agent of temptation: "[m]aids, resist him, you that can" (*Ladies, Pray Admire a Figure*); elsewhere, yet another merely acknowledges his ascendancy:

I read it in their eyes, and I hear it in their sighs,
The ladies all are dying for the dandy, O. (*The Dandy, The New Sadler's Wells*)

In this case, their sartorial construction is not expressive of individual subjectivity but communitarian sexual reproductive function. Gender is the key to anatomical sex, which is the unambiguous index of sexuality, in a monovalent semiotic system which structures patriarchy. Because facilitating sexual encounters requires that biological facts of nature be *signified*, it stands as a well-propped drama in which social stakes always rate high. In this perspective, fops would only offer variations in what remains a straight game of seduction between the sexes, and their difference would be but a distinction adding a titillating sense of novelty to a timeless scene. They would reconcile themselves to their lot by over-dramatizing an inescapable plot, which is exposed as a biased ritual, but still operates in society at large.

However, some dandies in the corpus oppose this fatal situation at least obliquely, first taking into account the fact that masculinity does not only concern procreative virility proper, but for instance brands a series of accessories which become symbols of manliness. The paraphernalia provides valuable items to disseminate masculinity visibly throughout the public scene, all of them necessary indexes, for decency imposes that genitals remain private. This is the paradoxical dimension of patriarchy, which encourages sexual activity all the while checking and policing it to instrumentalize it for managing the transmission of patrimony, in a capitalist organization of society. The dandiacal subversive reconfiguration of such symbols of masculinity uncovers their purely conventional meaning, as is the case with the most phallic example of a sword:

A sword-knot of ribband to answer his dress,
Most completely ty'd up with tassels of lace. (*Female Advice to a Painter,*
Satirical Songs and Poems on Costume)

The connotation of the weapon is implicitly redirected outside the phallogocentric paradigm. The decorative prop no longer threatens violent action against whoever might resist its owner's authority and is hardly evocative of aggressive penetration, like the "wooden swords" mentioned in *Fashion, an Epistolary Satire (Poems)*. Flourishing it deconstructs the symbolic order of society and its well-arranged networks of over-determined objects, whose meaning is reoriented, allowing polysemy to creep into the dual world of masculinity. A space is wedged within androcentry, very much like a Trojan horse in its functioning, implanting new representational schemes, supplanting the phallogocentric structural hegemony.

In a similar way, the dandies deconstruct traditional masculinity by appropriating typical qualities, which are reconfigured in a gesture shaking up the authority of man, therefore delegitimizing his domination. A spectacular example is found in self-control. It demonstrates man's superiority over women, as it is claimed to come to him naturally whereas it has to be constantly—and paradoxically—imposed on the so-called weaker sex, who remain under his masculine scrutiny all their lives. The dandiical attitude indicates that self-discipline does not necessarily entitle men to be leaders, and is not even ethically commendable.

It is no longer an index of moral uprightness but of the artistic asceticism involved in achieving the dandy's most personal creation—his own self. His formalist exertion to coincide with his vision of himself materializes in the reference to constraining stays:

And a pair of stays, to keep in shape the Dandy, O:
And like a clock-work figure moves the Dandy, O. (*A Dandy Lost, The*
Fashionable Dandies' Songster)

In other words, the platonic shape comes in to have matter conform to a preconceived plan which posits the identification of the subject with an idea, or at least an ideal self, but in terms of aesthetic composition, rather than moral economy. Therefore, nature is kept at bay, or at least contained within the sturdy limits established by the dandies' strong will:

My stays are laced so tight that I'm forced to walk upright
My chin pok'd out, my neck cloth stiff and handy, O (*The Dandy, The
New Sadler's Wells*)

In subverting the category of self control, they prove transgressive, since they do not devote their determination to stand as exemplary citizens and spiritual guides but self-indulgently make their physical appearance more visible by enhancing its potential for beauty, so that the care of the self results in the sculpting of oneself.

This conspicuous display of self-mastery also functions as a means to seduce and fascinate the community, and in particular young girls: "[t]he ladies all giggle while their hearts are thumping" (*The Modern Beau, The New Sadler's Wells*). The fastidious design of his person reads in each dandy's insistence on sporting the right accessories at the right place: "[h]ang a tassel to that, or else it won't do" ("The Lady's Receipt for a Beaux' Dress", *Satirical Songs and Poems on Costume*).

And yet, such a narcissistic, artistic singleness of purpose proceeds unaffected by this basic function of self-control considered as a means to sublimate passion and build a society backed up by civilization. This centripetal self-control—a way of fashioning oneself carried out with careful attention to fashion—expresses unconcern for the expansion of the capitalistic society and the development of the British Empire, which the *persona* uselessly laments:

'Tis commerce, sirs, not Fashion's law,
That must support the nation. (*A Picture of the Times, The Fashionable
Dandies' Songster*)

Because the dandies strive to cut elegant figures instead of harnessing their energies to serve their country, they introduce a radical criticism of the masculinist way of life, and trouble the representation of genders. Their literally obscene posturing invades the sphere of the visible and celebrates a form of masculinity obviously derived but significantly departing from acknowledged standards.

In the conclusive movement of this study, I will explore the dandies' performance which makes apparent to all the usually concealed artificiality and arbitrariness of the gender line of divide, as well as its proclaimed coincidence with the difference between the biological sexes. The dandies seek to escape the tyranny of generalized heteronormativity. In particular, the coxcombs' fashions blur traditional

gendered identity and set them at odds with received dress codes, which insist that biological males should look masculine, showing the sexual inclinations patriarchy expects from them. In other words, dandyism draws the blueprints of a new form of masculinity, which is more inclusive, less normative and not oppressive for the male community. This self-engineering freely borrows from the props of conventional gender construction, but in a creatively detached, expressively playful fashion with remote bearing on the economy of the sexes.

Moreover, dandiacal narcissism amounts to a rejection of the heterosexual scenario. It stages a form of masculinity based on the refusal to be drawn to the other sex and the rejection of the binary approach to identity. This is illustrated in the textual reliance on *ekphrasis*, which mirrors the fashionable Beaux' appearance, exclusive of any other figure, as several titles indicate: *The Dandy, O; The New Dandy; The Beau Butterfly; A Dandy Lost; The Macaroni; The Modern Beau*. Even in *The Dandies' Ball*, the series of portraits does not convey a sense of community, but leaves each of them in a solipsistic world of insular distance. They embody the resistance to the patriarchal order which dictates the social rules of engagement as a staging of the meetings between the sexes set against the lawful horizon of procreation.

Because they reject the fixed identity society allotted to them, they put themselves in a position to re-create their own social persons at will. Taking advantage of the constructedness of social individuals, they harvest the components of their identification both in feminine and masculine conventional characteristics. The *persona* unsurprisingly fails to acknowledge them by refusing to treat a fashionable creature as a true *alter ego*, conflating sex and gender:

It is neither man nor woman—how unhandy, O!
Lest its gender should perplex,
It is call'd the MIDDLE sex,
And in Middlesex was bred the pretty Dandy, O. (*A Dandy Lost, The Fashionable Dandies' Songster*)

The result may seem perplexingly hermaphroditic or androgynous to the common eye, and contrary to the indication in the poem, it is not located between the two sexes or genders. The young elegant men identify through a word—dandyism—which at the same time refers to manhood but conveys no connotation relative to

sexuality or maleness, and combines characteristics from both genders—masculinity and femininity—which it processes into fluid combinations. However, as indicated by the *persona*, in spite of their specific mode of visibility, they prove very “unhandy, O!”, since they cannot easily be handled, manipulated and put to use in patriarchy. This form of masculinity, though exclusive of biological female applicants, is an open one, and comprehends every sort of identifiers. The category of masculinity remains, but as a hollow structure, relieved of the patriarchs’ hegemonic definition.

However critical the voice and focus may be, the corpus bears the mark of a deep evolution in the masculine regimen. This shift can be felt in one dandy’s decision to rest satisfied at a distance from the ladies’ appreciation, discarding the heterosexual scenario both as an act and a drag:

So now I must make a stop and the character drop,
The favour of your smile on this night rewards my toils. (*The Dandy, The New Sadler’s Wells*)

Taking the hint to its most dramatic conclusion, dandies could easily be made to introduce the homoerotic theme, as their narcissism might suggest—although narcissism is by no means a gay prerogative. Alternately, I would like to insist that they embody a somewhat enigmatic form of individuality, a type of personhood identifying in a totally emancipated way cleared of any normative and prescriptive reference to gender, sex or sexuality, which recedes into the background of human definition. This drastic turn is on occasions alluded to in a conspicuously crude way:

Nor forget that his breeches be roomy between ‘em
‘Twill show that a great deal is wanting between ‘em. (“A Receipt for Modern Dress”, *Satirical Songs and Poems on Costume*)

The genitals will no longer be the source of identification in the institutional site of the poem. As a result, this dandy’s characterization is based on the absence of the ultimate phallic signifier and much to the dislike of the dominant males, he inaugurates a new existential representation of the self. This leaves the dandies free to aestheticize their existences through artistic gestures epitomized by metamorphic fashion. Hence, they reconcile the abstract and the concrete in the aesthetic experience of the world they inhabit, which is a social one and yet follows neither heteronormative prescriptions nor serious self-sacrificing injunctions: “[a]t revels,

balls and races, they place their whole delight" (*Chit Chat, The Fashionable Dandies' Songster*). The eccentric fashionables marginalize what is central in patriarchy. They renew the social contract by bending the clear-cut definition of the sex-gender attribution into protean polymorphism, with unprecedented opportunities for queer, campish, kitsch or drag regimes of identification⁵. Thus, they resist interpretation in the common taxonomy as experimentations with the self which seem to answer necessary indeterminacy as defined by Françoise Coblence⁶. It is in this creative impulse with potential post-genital inflexions that the dandies find their defining characteristic, while their whimsical fashions create a space of individuation inaugurating original types of visibility for males. They explore the multiplicity of possibilities and refuse to submit to uniformization, assimilating every available element of appearance into the knick-knack of fashion, with a flourish often fraught with parody, irony, capricious determination and most of all an aristocratic insistence to posit values without justifying them, thus reconfiguring masculinity by visibly performing the institutionally invisible in men and heralding the emergence of men in their own fashion.

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NOTES

¹ For specific profiles, see Marylène Delbourg-Delphis, *Masculin singulier, le dandysme et son histoire.*

² See Teresa de Lauretis's marxist analyses of the "technologies" of gender. "The Technology of Gender," *Technologies of Gender*, 1-30.

³ See David Rosen, *The Changing Fictions of Masculinity.*

⁴ See William J.F. Keenan. "Sartor Resartus Restored : Dress Studies in Carlylean Perspective", *Dressed to Impress*, 1-49.

⁵ See for an introduction to the queer theory *Queer Theory, Gender Theory*, Tiki Wilchins.

⁶ Françoise Coblenz. *Le dandysme, obligation d'incertitude.* Paris : PUF, 1988.