

Emily McClay
Wilde
Review
2/8/13

Annotated Bibliography

Rev. of *Lady Windermere's Fan*, by Oscar Wilde. *Black and White* iii (1892): 264. Rpt. in *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. Beckson, Karl. New York: Routledge, 1997. 126-7. Print. The critic in this review compares *Lady Windermere's Fan* to Tristram's *The Red Lamp*, another play revolving around an inanimate object, as well as several other plays in which the characters do not seem true-to-life. But the critic admits to finding *Lady Windermere's Fan* amusing nonetheless because it is more of a vehicle for a series of paradoxes than it is a play, though he adds that "were the trick to become too stale it might prove tiresome, for it is, after all, but a question of inverted vocabulary." He concludes that once one is able to accept the fantasy world Wilde has created with its cynical and over-the-top characters, the play is enjoyable, albeit less than original.

Rev. of *Lady Windermere's Fan*, by Oscar Wilde. *Westminster Review* cxxxvii (1892): 478-80. Rpt. in *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. Beckson, Karl. New York: Routledge, 1997. 129-30. Print. The views of the critic differ considerably from those of the others; in fact, he does briefly attribute originality to Wilde and does not compare *Lady Windermere's Fan* to any other works. His main criticisms surround one of the actors who was cast in the play's first showings, a Mr. George Alexander whom the critic believes was not right for his part, and the fact that as amusing as Wilde's paradoxical dialogue is, it should be taken in small doses because overall it does not surmount to a play with a solid plot or believable characters. He, too, takes issue with the immorality of the female characters, but he is not as adamant about it as other critics. For

the sake of this particular play, the critic concedes that “the plot does not matter, as the whole interest lies in the conversation, which is as if many Wildes, male and female, were talking together,” and he recommends all go see the play.

McCarthy, Justin Huntly. Rev. of *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, by Oscar Wilde. *Gentleman’s Magazine* cclxxii

(1892): 476. Rpt. in *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. Beckson, Karl. New York:

Routledge, 1997. 131. Print. This review is rather straightforward in its admitting that the play is entertaining, but it is not artful and should not be regarded as such by anyone, especially its creator who is said to think so highly of himself and his work. The critic states that other critics have been kind to Wilde, perhaps too much so. He suggests that Wilde speaks so much about art “because he had so little in his soul,” and ultimately, “he is not an artist.”

Scott, Clement. Rev. of *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, by Oscar Wilde. *Illustrated London News* c (1982): 278.

Rpt. in *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. Beckson, Karl. New York: Routledge, 1997. 124-6.

Print. Scott makes evident in the beginning of his review his annoyance with Wilde’s actions on the opening night of the play in which he congratulated the audience for their good taste. The near entirety of his review is given through the assumed thoughts of Wilde in the justification of his decision to write such a play and debut it. Scott sidesteps directly giving his own opinion of *Lady Windermere’s Fan* by putting words in Wilde’s mouth, but ultimately it would appear that Scott was not a fan of the play due to its unchallenged lack of morality. Within his false monologue of Wilde’s, he declares that Wilde can get away with this because “the best test of the justice of my picture is found in the fact that society does not reprimand it.” The critic cannot forgive the willingness of the two fictional mothers to abandon their children on a whim, never mind the details of the situation that led to each case and never mind that each woman

showed regret and did or attempted to make up for their error of judgment in the end. Scott not only criticizes the play and Wilde's cynical attributes that show through in his work, but the audiences as well who will inevitably go to see the play because they find it smart and the absence of morality amusing and pardonable.

Walkley, A.B. Rev. of *Lady Windermere's Fan*, by Oscar Wilde. *The Speaker* v (1982): 257-8. Rpt. in *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. Beckson, Karl. New York: Routledge, 1997. 119-23. Print.

Walkley presents a two-sided view of Wilde's play. He begins by expressing his sentiments that life needs changes or it would be boring. He goes on to say that Wilde is anything but boring, despite some flaws in the individuality of *Lady Windermere's Fan*. Walkley states that the play "is by no means a good play: its plot is always thin, often stale; indeed, it is full of faults," which he later pinpoints as dull similarities to French plays such as Dumas' *L'Etrangère*, lack of character motivation, and the inclusion of unconventional surprises such as the revelation of Lady Erlynne's true identity. Still, it is the surprises which cause the critic to declare that this is as much a good play as it is bad. He admires that Wilde never allows the audience to become tired, and it is the forward, albeit uncalled for, actions of the characters – such as Lady Erlynne's entering Lord Windermere's study or even Lord Windermere's extreme desire to shield his wife from the knowledge of her moth – which suggest that life need not be monotonous.

Wedmore, Fredrick. Rev. of *Lady Windermere's Fan*, by Oscar Wilde. *Academy* xli (1982): 236-7. Rpt. in *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. Beckson, Karl. New York: Routledge, 1997. 127-9. Print.

Wedmore, like many others, criticizes Wilde for being perhaps not quite as original as he thinks he is, though the critic admits that the similarities involving a fan in another play that came before *Lady Windermere's Fan* are purely coincidence. Despite that, Wedmore points out that

much of the play is nothing new, that "the construction, the story, even the very moral of the story – unassisted even by speech and cigarette – these things could have been much as they are." He does comment on the way Lady Erlynne does not officially repent at the end, which breaks with the tradition of plays at the time, though Wedmore is not necessarily in favor of this Bohemian turn. His ultimate conclusion, however, is that the play was on the whole enjoyable.