

the Dandy

*Most
of us feel trapped within the
limited roles that the world expects us to
play. We are instantly attracted to those who are
more fluid, more ambiguous, than we are—those who
create their own persona. Dandies excite us because they can-
not be categorized, and hint at a freedom we want for ourselves.
They play with masculinity and femininity; they fashion their
own physical image, which is always startling; they are mysteri-
ous and elusive. They also appeal to the narcissism of each
sex: to a woman they are psychologically female, to a man
they are male. Dandies fascinate and seduce in large
numbers. Use the power of the Dandy to create
an ambiguous, alluring presence that
stirs repressed desires.*

The Feminine Dandy

When the eighteen-year-old Rodolpho Guglielmi emigrated from Italy to the United States in 1913, he came with no particular skills apart from his good looks and his dancing prowess. To put these qualities to advantage, he found work in the *thés dansants*, the Manhattan dance halls where young girls would go alone or with friends and hire a taxi dancer for a brief thrill. The taxi dancer would expertly twirl them around the dance floor, flirting and chatting, all for a small fee. Guglielmi soon made a name as one of the best—so graceful, poised, and pretty.

In working as a taxi dancer, Guglielmi spent a great deal of time around women. He quickly learned what pleased them—how to mirror them in subtle ways, how to put them at ease (but not too much). He began to pay attention to his clothes, creating his own dapper look: he danced with a corset under his shirt to give himself a trim figure, sported a wristwatch (considered effeminate in those days), and claimed to be a marquis. In 1915, he landed a job demonstrating the tango in fancy restaurants, and changed his name to the more evocative Rodolpho di Valentina. A year later he moved to Los Angeles: he wanted to try to make it in Hollywood.

Now known as Rudolph Valentino, Guglielmi appeared as an extra in several low-budget pictures. He eventually landed a somewhat larger role in the 1919 film *Eyes of Youth*, in which he played a seducer, and caught women's attention by how different a seducer he was: his movements were graceful and delicate, his skin so smooth and his face so pretty that when he swooped down on his victim and drowned her protests with a kiss, he seemed more thrilling than sinister. Next came *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, in which Valentino played the male lead, Julio the playboy, and became an overnight sex symbol through a tango sequence in which he seduced a young woman by leading her through the dance. The scene encapsulated the essence of his appeal: his feet smooth and fluid, his poise almost feminine, combined with an air of control. Female members of the audience literally swooned as he raised a married woman's hands to his lips, or shared the fragrance of a rose with his lover. He seemed so much more attentive to women than other men did; but mixed in with this delicacy was a hint of cruelty and menace that drove women wild.

In his most famous film, *The Sheik*, Valentino played an Arab prince (later revealed to be a Scottish lord abandoned in the Sahara as a baby) who rescues a proud English lady in the desert, then conquers her in a manner

Once a son was born to Mercury and the goddess Venus, and he was brought up by the naiads in Ida's caves. In his features, it was easy to trace resemblance to his father and to his mother. He was called after them, too, for his name was Hermaphroditus. As soon as he was fifteen, he left his native hills, and Ida where he had been brought up, and for the sheer joy of travelling visited remote places. . . . He went as far as the cities of Lycia, and on to the Carians, who dwell nearby. In this region he spied a pool of water, so clear that he could see right to the bottom. . . . The water was like crystal, and the edges of the pool were ringed with fresh turf and grass that was always green. A nymph [Salmacis] dwelt there. . . . Often she would gather flowers, and it so happened that she was engaged in this pastime when she caught sight of the boy, Hermaphroditus. As soon as she had seen him, she longed to possess him. . . . She addressed him: "Fair boy, you surely deserve to be thought a

god. If you are, perhaps you may be Cupid? . . . If there is such a girl [engaged to you], let me enjoy your love in secret: but if there is not, then I pray that I may be your bride, and that we may enter upon marriage together." The naiad said no more; but a blush stained the boy's cheeks, for he did not know what love was. Even blushing became him: his cheeks were the colour of ripe apples, hanging in a sunny orchard, like painted ivory or like the moon when, in eclipse, she shows a reddish hue beneath her brightness. . . .

Incessantly the nymph demanded at least sisterly kisses, and tried to put her arms round his ivory neck. "Will you stop!" he cried, "or I shall run away and leave this place and you!"

Salmacis was afraid: "I yield the spot to you, stranger, I shall not intrude," she said; and, turning from him, pretended to go away. . . . The boy,

meanwhile, thinking himself unobserved and alone, strolled this way and that on the grassy sward, and dipped his toes in the lapping water—then his feet, up to the ankles.

Then, tempted by the enticing coolness of the waters, he quickly stripped his young body of its soft garments. At the sight, Salmacis was spell-bound.

She was on fire with passion to possess his naked beauty, and her very eyes flamed with a brilliance like that of the dazzling sun, when his bright disc is reflected in a mirror. . . . She longed to embrace him then, and with difficulty restrained her frenzy.

Hermaphroditus, clapping his hollow palms against

that borders on rape. When she asks, "Why have you brought me here?," he replies, "Are you not woman enough to know?" Yet she ends up falling in love with him, as indeed women did in movie audiences all over the world, thrilling at his strange blend of the feminine and the masculine. In one scene in *The Sheik*, the English lady points a gun at Valentino; his response is to point a delicate cigarette holder back at her. She wears pants; he wears long flowing robes and abundant eye makeup. Later films would include scenes of Valentino dressing and undressing, a kind of striptease showing glimpses of his trim body. In almost all of his films he played some exotic period character—a Spanish bullfighter, an Indian rajah, an Arab sheik, a French nobleman—and he seemed to delight in dressing up in jewels and tight uniforms.

In the 1920s, women were beginning to play with a new sexual freedom. Instead of waiting for a man to be interested in them, they wanted to be able to initiate the affair, but they still wanted the man to end up sweeping them off their feet. Valentino understood this perfectly. His off-screen life corresponded to his movie image: he wore bracelets on his arm, dressed impeccably, and reportedly was cruel to his wife, and hit her. (His adoring public carefully ignored his two failed marriages and his apparently nonexistent sex life.) When he suddenly died—in New York in August 1926, at the age of thirty-one, from complications after surgery for an ulcer—the response was unprecedented: more than 100,000 people filed by his coffin, many female mourners became hysterical, and the whole nation was spellbound. Nothing like this had happened before for a mere actor.

There is a film of Valentino's, *Monsieur Beaucaire*, in which he plays a total fop, a much more effeminate role than he normally played, and without his usual hint of dangerousness. The film was a flop. Women did not respond to Valentino as a swish. They were thrilled by the ambiguity of a man who shared many of their own feminine traits, yet remained a man. Valentino dressed and played with his physicality like a woman, but his image was masculine. He wooed as a woman would woo if she were a man—slowly, attentively, paying attention to details, setting a rhythm instead of hurrying to a conclusion. Yet when the time came for boldness and conquest, his timing was impeccable, overwhelming his victim and giving her no chance to protest. In his movies, Valentino practiced the same gigolo's art of leading a woman on that he had mastered as a teenager on the dance floor—chatting, flirting, pleasing, but always in control.

Valentino remains an enigma to this day. His private life and his character are wrapped in mystery; his image continues to seduce as it did during his lifetime. He served as the model for Elvis Presley, who was obsessed with this star of the silents, and also for the modern male dandy who plays with gender but retains an edge of danger and cruelty.

Seduction was and will always remain the female form of power and warfare. It was originally the antidote to rape and violence. The man who uses this form of power on a woman is in essence turning the game around,

employing feminine weapons against her; without losing his masculine identity, the more subtly feminine he becomes the more effective the seduction. Do not be one of those who believe that what is most seductive is being devastatingly masculine. The Feminine Dandy has a much more sinister effect. He lures the woman in with exactly what she wants—a familiar, pleasing, graceful presence. Mirroring feminine psychology, he displays attention to his appearance, sensitivity to detail, a slight coquettishness—but also a hint of male cruelty. Women are narcissists, in love with the charms of their own sex. By showing them feminine charm, a man can mesmerize and disarm them, leaving them vulnerable to a bold, masculine move.

The Feminine Dandy can seduce on a mass scale. No single woman really possesses him—he is too elusive—but all can fantasize about doing so. The key is ambiguity: your sexuality is decidedly heterosexual, but your body and psychology float delightfully back and forth between the two poles.

I am a woman. Every artist is a woman and should have a taste for other women. Artists who are homosexual cannot be true artists because they like men, and since they themselves are women they are reverting to normality.

—PABLO PICASSO

The Masculine Dandy

In the 1870s, Pastor Henrik Gillot was the darling of the St. Petersburg intelligentsia. He was young, handsome, well-read in philosophy and literature, and he preached a kind of enlightened Christianity. Dozens of young girls had crushes on him and would flock to his sermons just to look at him. In 1878, however, he met a girl who changed his life. Her name was Lou von Salomé (later known as Lou Andreas-Salomé), and she was seventeen; he was forty-two.

Salomé was pretty, with radiant blue eyes. She had read a lot, particularly for a girl her age, and was interested in the gravest philosophical and religious issues. Her intensity, her intelligence, her responsiveness to ideas cast a spell over Gillot. When she entered his office for her increasingly frequent discussions with him, the place seemed brighter and more alive. Perhaps she was flirting with him, in the unconscious manner of a young girl—yet when Gillot admitted to himself that he was in love with her, and proposed marriage, Salomé was horrified. The confused pastor never quite got over Lou von Salomé, becoming the first of a long string of famous men to be the victim of a lifelong unfulfilled infatuation with her.

In 1882, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche was wandering around Italy alone. In Genoa he received a letter from his friend Paul Rée, a Prussian philosopher whom he admired, recounting his discussions with a remarkable young Russian woman, Lou von Salomé, in Rome. Salomé was

his body, dived quickly into the stream. As he raised first one arm and then the other, his body gleamed in the clear water, as if someone had encased an ivory statue or white lilies in transparent glass. "I have won! He is mine!" cried the nymph, and flinging aside her garments, plunged into the heart of the pool. The boy fought against her, but she held him, and snatched kisses as he struggled, placing her hands beneath him, stroking his unwilling breast, and clinging to him, now on this side, and now on that. • Finally, in spite of all his efforts to slip from her grasp, she twined around him, like a serpent when it is being carried off into the air by the king of birds: for, as it hangs from the eagle's beak, the snake coils round his head and talons and with its tail hampers his beating wings. . . . "You may fight, you rogue, but you will not escape. May the gods grant me this, may no time to come ever separate him from me, or me from him!" Her prayers found favour with the gods: for, as they lay together, their bodies were united and from being two persons they became one. As when a gardener grafts a branch on to a tree, and sees the two unite as they grow, and come to maturity together, so when their limbs met in that clinging embrace the nymph and the boy were no longer two, but a single form, possessed of a dual nature, which could not be called male or female, but seemed to be at once both and neither.

—OVID, *METAMORPHOSES*,
TRANSLATED BY MARY M. INNES

Dandyism is not even, as many unthinking people seem to suppose, an immoderate interest in personal appearance and material elegance. For the true dandy these things are only a symbol of the aristocratic superiority of his personality. . . . What, then, is this ruling passion that has turned into a creed and created its own skilled tyrants? What is this unwritten constitution that has created so haughty a caste? It is, above all, a burning need to acquire originality, within the apparent bounds of convention. It is a sort of cult of oneself, which can dispense even with what are commonly called illusions. It is the delight in causing astonishment, and the proud satisfaction of never oneself being astonished. . . .

—CHARLES BAUDELAIRE, *THE DANDY*, QUOTED IN *VICE: AN ANTHOLOGY*, EDITED BY RICHARD DAVENPORT-HINES

In the midst of this display of statesmanship, eloquence, cleverness, and exalted ambition, Alcibiades lived a life of prodigious luxury, drunkenness, debauchery, and insolence. He was effeminate in his dress and would walk through the market-place trailing his long purple robes, and he spent extravagantly. He had the decks of his triremes cut away to allow him to sleep more comfortably, and his bedding was slung on cords, rather than spread on the hard planks. He had a golden shield made for him, which was emblazoned not with any

there on holiday with her mother; Rée had managed to accompany her on long walks through the city, unchaperoned, and they had had many conversations. Her ideas on God and Christianity were quite similar to Nietzsche's, and when Rée had told her that the famous philosopher was a friend of his, she had insisted that he invite Nietzsche to join them. In subsequent letters Rée described how mysteriously captivating Salomé was, and how anxious she was to meet Nietzsche. The philosopher soon went to Rome.

When Nietzsche finally met Salomé, he was overwhelmed. She had the most beautiful eyes he had ever seen, and during their first long talk those eyes lit up so intensely that he could not help feeling there was something erotic about her excitement. Yet he was also confused: Salomé kept her distance, and did not respond to his compliments. What a devilish young woman. A few days later she read him a poem of hers, and he cried; her ideas about life were so like his own. Deciding to seize the moment, Nietzsche proposed marriage. (He did not know that Rée had done so as well.) Salomé declined. She was interested in philosophy, life, adventure, not marriage. Undaunted, Nietzsche continued to court her. On an excursion to Lake Orta with Rée, Salomé, and her mother, he managed to get the girl alone, accompanying her on a walk up Monte Sacro while the others stayed behind. Apparently the views and Nietzsche's words had the proper passion effect; in a later letter to her, he described this walk as "the most beautiful dream of my life." Now he was a man possessed: all he could think about was marrying Salomé and having her all to himself.

A few months later Salomé visited Nietzsche in Germany. They took long walks together, and stayed up all night discussing philosophy. She mirrored his deepest thoughts, anticipated his ideas about religion. Yet when he again proposed marriage, she scolded him as conventional: it was Nietzsche, after all, who had developed a philosophical defense of the superman, the man above everyday morality, yet Salomé was by nature far less conventional than he was. Her firm, uncompromising manner only deepened the spell she cast over him, as did her hint of cruelty. When she finally left him, making it clear that she had no intention of marrying him, Nietzsche was devastated. As an antidote to his pain, he wrote *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, a book full of sublimated eroticism and deeply inspired by his talks with her. From then on Salomé was known throughout Europe as the woman who had broken Nietzsche's heart.

Salomé moved to Berlin. Soon the city's greatest intellectuals were falling under the spell of her independence and free spirit. The playwrights Gerhart Hauptmann and Franz Wedekind became infatuated with her; in 1897, the great Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke fell in love with her. By that time her reputation was widely known, and she was a published novelist. This certainly played a part in seducing Rilke, but he was also attracted by a kind of masculine energy he found in her that he had never seen in a woman. Rilke was then twenty-two, Salomé thirty-six. He wrote her love letters and poems, followed her everywhere, and began an affair with her that was to last several years. She corrected his poetry, imposed discipline

on his overly romantic verse, inspired ideas for new poems. But she was put off by his childish dependence on her, his weakness. Unable to stand weakness of any kind, she eventually left him. Consumed by her memory, Rilke long continued to pursue her. In 1926, lying on his deathbed, he begged his doctors, "Ask Lou what is wrong with me. She is the only one who knows."

One man wrote of Salomé, "There was something terrifying about her embrace. Looking at you with her radiant blue eyes, she would say, 'The reception of the semen is for me the height of ecstasy.' And she had an insatiable appetite for it. She was completely amoral . . . a vampire." The Swedish psychotherapist Poul Bjerre, one of her later conquests, wrote, "I think Nietzsche was right when he said that Lou was a thoroughly evil woman. Evil however in the Goethean sense: evil that produces good. . . . She may have destroyed lives and marriages but her presence was exciting."

The two emotions that almost every male felt in the presence of Lou Andreas-Salomé were confusion and excitement—the two prerequisite feelings for any successful seduction. People were intoxicated by her strange mix of the masculine and the feminine; she was beautiful, with a radiant smile and a graceful, flirtatious manner, but her independence and her intensely analytical nature made her seem oddly male. This ambiguity was expressed in her eyes, which were both coquettish and probing. It was confusion that kept men interested and curious: no other woman was like this. They wanted to know more. The excitement stemmed from her ability to stir up repressed desires. She was a complete nonconformist, and to be involved with her was to break all kinds of taboos. Her masculinity made the relationship seem vaguely homosexual; her slightly cruel, slightly domineering streak could stir up masochistic yearnings, as it did in Nietzsche. Salomé radiated a forbidden sexuality. Her powerful effect on men—the lifelong infatuations, the suicides (there were several), the periods of intense creativity, the descriptions of her as a vampire or a devil—attest to the obscure depths of the psyche that she was able to reach and disturb.

The Masculine Dandy succeeds by reversing the normal pattern of male superiority in matters of love and seduction. A man's apparent independence, his capacity for detachment, often seems to give him the upper hand in the dynamic between men and women. A purely feminine woman will arouse desire, but is always vulnerable to the man's capricious loss of interest; a purely masculine woman, on the other hand, will not arouse that interest at all. Follow the path of the Masculine Dandy, however, and you neutralize all a man's powers. Never give completely of yourself; while you are passionate and sexual, always retain an air of independence and self-possession. You might move on to the next man, or so he will think. You have other, more important matters to concern yourself with, such as your work. Men do not know how to fight women who use their own weapons against them; they are intrigued, aroused, and disarmed. Few men can resist the taboo pleasures offered up to them by the Masculine Dandy.

ancestral device, but with the figure of Eros armed with a thunderbolt. The leading men of Athens watched all this with disgust and indignation and they were deeply disturbed by his contemptuous and lawless behaviour, which seemed to them monstrous and suggested the habits of a tyrant. The people's feelings towards him have been very aptly expressed by Aristophanes in the line: "They long for him, they hate him, they cannot do without him. . . ." • The fact was that his voluntary donations, the public shows he supported, his unrivalled munificence to the state, the fame of his ancestry, the power of his oratory and his physical strength and beauty . . . all combined to make the Athenians forgive him everything else, and they were constantly finding euphemisms for his lapses and putting them down to youthful high spirits and honourable ambition.

—PLUTARCH, "THE LIFE OF ALKIBIADES," *THE RISE AND FALL OF ATHENS: NINE GREEK LIVES*, TRANSLATED BY IAN SCOTT-KILVERT

Further light—a whole flood of it—is thrown upon this attraction of the male in petticoats for the female, in the diary of the Abbé de Choisy, one of the most brilliant men-women of history, of whom we shall hear a great deal more later. The abbé, a churchman of Paris, was a constant masquerader in female attire. He lived in the days of Louis XIV, and was a great friend of Louis' brother, also addicted to women's clothes. A young

girl, Mademoiselle
Charlotte, thrown much
into his company, fell
desperately in love with the
abbé, and when the affair
had progressed to a
liaison, the abbé asked her
how she came to be won . . .

• "I stood in no need of
caution as I should have
with a man. I saw nothing
but a beautiful woman,
and why should I be
forbidden to love you?
What advantages a
woman's dress gives you!
The heart of a man is
there, and that makes a
great impression upon us,
and on the other hand, all
the charms of the fair sex
fascinate us, and prevent us
from taking precautions. "

—C.J. BULLIET,
VENUS CASTINA

Beau Brummell was
regarded as unbalanced in
his passion for daily
ablutions. His ritualistic
morning toilet took upward
of five hours, one hour
spent inching himself into
his skin-tight buckskin
breeches, an hour with the
hairdresser and another two
hours tying and "creasing
down" a series of starched
cravats until perfection was
achieved. But first of all
two hours were spent
scrubbing himself with
fetish zeal from head to toe
in milk, water and eau de
Cologne. . . . Beau
Brummell said he used
only the froth of
champagne to polish his
Hessian boots. He had
365 snuff boxes, those
suitable for summer wear
being quite unthinkable in
winter, and the fit of his
gloves was achieved by
entrusting their cut to two
firms—one for the fingers,
the other for the thumbs.

*The seduction emanating from a person of uncertain or dis-
simulated sex is powerful.*

—COLETTE

Keys to the Character

Many of us today imagine that sexual freedom has progressed in recent years—that everything has changed, for better or worse. This is mostly an illusion; a reading of history reveals periods of licentiousness (imperial Rome, late-seventeenth-century England, the "floating world" of eighteenth-century Japan) far in excess of what we are currently experiencing. Gender roles are certainly changing, but they have changed before. Society is in a state of constant flux, but there is something that does not change: the vast majority of people conform to whatever is normal for the time. They play the role allotted to them. Conformity is a constant because humans are social creatures who are always imitating one another. At certain points in history it may be fashionable to be different and rebellious, but if a lot of people are playing that role, there is nothing different or rebellious about it.

We should never complain about most people's slavish conformity, however, for it offers untold possibilities of power and seduction to those who are up for a few risks. Dandies have existed in all ages and cultures (Alcibiades in ancient Greece, Korechika in late-tenth-century Japan), and wherever they have gone they have thrived on the conformist role playing of others. The Dandy displays a true and radical difference from other people, a difference of appearance and manner. Since most of us are secretly oppressed by our lack of freedom, we are drawn to those who are more fluid and flaunt their difference.

Dandies seduce socially as well as sexually; groups form around them, their style is wildly imitated, an entire court or crowd will fall in love with them. In adapting the Dandy character for your own purposes, remember that the Dandy is by nature a rare and beautiful flower. Be different in ways that are both striking and aesthetic, never vulgar; poke fun at current trends and styles, go in a novel direction, and be supremely uninterested in what anyone else is doing. Most people are insecure; they will wonder what you are up to, and slowly they will come to admire and imitate you, because you express yourself with total confidence.

The Dandy has traditionally been defined by clothing, and certainly most Dandies create a unique visual style. Beau Brummel, the most famous Dandy of all, would spend hours on his toilette, particularly the inimitably styled knot in his necktie, for which he was famous throughout early-nineteenth-century England. But a Dandy's style cannot be obvious, for Dandies are subtle, and never try hard for attention—attention comes to them. The person whose clothes are flagrantly different has little imagination or taste. Dandies show their difference in the little touches that mark

their disdain for convention: Théophile Gautier's red vest, Oscar Wilde's green velvet suit, Andy Warhol's silver wigs. The great English Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli had two magnificent canes, one for morning, one for evening; at noon he would change canes, no matter where he was. The female Dandy works similarly. She may adopt male clothing, say, but if she does, a touch here or there will set her truly apart: no man ever dressed quite like George Sand. The overall hat, the riding boots worn on the streets of Paris, made her a sight to behold.

Remember, there must be a reference point. If your visual style is totally unfamiliar, people will think you at best an obvious attention-getter, at worst crazy. Instead, create your own fashion sense by adapting and altering prevailing styles to make yourself an object of fascination. Do this right and you will be wildly imitated. The Count d'Orsay, a great London dandy of the 1830s and 1840s, was closely watched by fashionable people; one day, caught in a sudden London rainstorm, he bought a *paltrok*, a kind of heavy, hooded duffle coat, off the back of a Dutch sailor. The *paltrok* immediately became *the* coat to wear. Having people imitate you, of course, is a sign of your powers of seduction.

The nonconformity of Dandies, however, goes far beyond appearances. It is an attitude toward life that sets them apart; adopt that attitude and a circle of followers will form around you.

Dandies are supremely impudent. They don't give a damn about other people, and never try to please. In the court of Louis XIV, the writer La Bruyère noticed that courtiers who tried hard to please were invariably on the way down; nothing was more anti-seductive. As Barbey d'Aurevilly wrote, "Dandies please women by displeasing them."

Impudence was fundamental to the appeal of Oscar Wilde. In a London theater one night, after the first performance of one of Wilde's plays, the ecstatic audience yelled for the author to appear onstage. Wilde made them wait and wait, then finally emerged, smoking a cigarette and wearing an expression of total disdain. "It may be bad manners to appear here smoking, but it is far worse to disturb me when I am smoking," he scolded his fans. The Count d'Orsay was equally impudent. At a London club one night, a Rothschild who was notoriously cheap accidentally dropped a gold coin on the floor, then bent down to look for it. The count immediately whipped out a thousand-franc note (worth much more than the coin), rolled it up, lit it like a candle, and got down on all fours, as if to help light the way in the search. Only a Dandy could get away with such audacity. The insolence of the Rake is tied up with his desire to conquer a woman; he cares for nothing else. The insolence of the Dandy, on the other hand, is aimed at society and its conventions. It is not a woman he cares to conquer but a whole group, an entire social world. And since people are generally oppressed by the obligation of always being polite and self-sacrificing, they are delighted to spend time around a person who disdains such niceties.

Dandies are masters of the art of living. They live for pleasure, not for work; they surround themselves with beautiful objects and eat and drink

Sometimes, however, the tyranny of elegance became altogether insupportable. A Mr. Boothby committed suicide and left a note saying he could no longer endure the ennui of buttoning and unbuttoning.

—THE GAME OF HEARTS:
HARRIETTE WILSON'S
MEMOIRS, EDITED BY LESLEY
BLANCH

This royal manner which [the dandy] raises to the height of true royalty, the dandy has taken this from women, who alone seem naturally made for such a role. It is a somewhat by using the manner and the method of women that the dandy dominates. And this usurpation of femininity, he makes women themselves approve of this. . . . The dandy has something antinatural and androgynous about him, which is precisely how he is able to endlessly seduce.

—JULES LEMAÎTRE,
LES CONTEMPORAINS

with the same relish they show for their clothes. This was how the great Roman writer Petronius, author of the *Satyricon*, was able to seduce the emperor Nero. Unlike the dull Seneca, the great Stoic thinker and Nero's tutor, Petronius knew how to make every detail of life a grand aesthetic adventure, from a feast to a simple conversation. This is not an attitude you should impose on those around you—you can't make yourself a nuisance—but if you simply seem socially confident and sure of your taste, people will be drawn to you. The key is to make everything an aesthetic choice. Your ability to alleviate boredom by making life an art will make your company highly prized.

The opposite sex is a strange country we can never know, and this excites us, creates the proper sexual tension. But it is also a source of annoyance and frustration. Men do not understand how women think, and vice versa; each tries to make the other act more like a member of their own sex. Dandies may never try to please, but in this one area they have a pleasing effect: by adopting psychological traits of the opposite sex, they appeal to our inherent narcissism. Women identified with Rudolph Valentino's delicacy and attention to detail in courtship; men identified with Lou Andreas-Salomé's lack of interest in commitment. In the Heian court of eleventh-century Japan, Sei Shonagon, the writer of *The Pillow Book*, was powerfully seductive for men, especially literary types. She was fiercely independent, wrote poetry with the best, and had a certain emotional distance. Men wanted more from her than just to be her friend or companion, as if she were another man; charmed by her empathy for male psychology, they fell in love with her. This kind of mental transvestism—the ability to enter the spirit of the opposite sex, adapt to their way of thinking, mirror their tastes and attitudes—can be a key element in seduction. It is a way of mesmerizing your victim.

According to Freud, the human libido is essentially bisexual; most people are in some way attracted to people of their own sex, but social constraints (varying with culture and historical period) repress these impulses. The Dandy represents a release from such constraints. In several of Shakespeare's plays, a young girl (back then, the female roles in the theater were actually played by male actors) has to go into disguise and dresses up as a boy, eliciting all kinds of sexual interest from men, who later are delighted to find out that the boy is actually a girl. (Think, for example, of Rosalind in *As You Like It*.) Entertainers such as Josephine Baker (known as the Chocolate Dandy) and Marlene Dietrich would dress up as men in their acts, making themselves wildly popular—among men. Meanwhile the slightly feminized male, the pretty boy, has always been seductive to women. Valentino embodied this quality. Elvis Presley had feminine features (the face, the hips), wore frilly pink shirts and eye makeup, and attracted the attention of women early on. The filmmaker Kenneth Anger said of Mick Jagger that it was "a bisexual charm which constituted an important part of the attraction he had over young girls . . . and which acted upon their unconscious." In Western culture for centuries, in fact, feminine beauty has been far more

fetishized than male beauty, so it is understandable that a feminine-looking face like that of Montgomery Clift would have more seductive power than that of John Wayne.

The Dandy figure has a place in politics as well. John F. Kennedy was a strange mix of the masculine and feminine, virile in his toughness with the Russians, and in his White House lawn football games, yet feminine in his graceful and dapper appearance. This ambiguity was a large part of his appeal. Disraeli was an incorrigible Dandy in dress and manner; some were suspicious of him as a result, but his courage in not caring what people thought of him also won him respect. And women of course adored him, for women always adore a Dandy. They appreciated the gentleness of his manner, his aesthetic sense, his love of clothes—in other words, his feminine qualities. The mainstay of Disraeli's power was in fact a female fan: Queen Victoria.

Do not be misled by the surface disapproval your Dandy pose may elicit. Society may publicize its distrust of androgyny (in Christian theology, Satan is often represented as androgynous), but this conceals its fascination; what is most seductive is often what is most repressed. Learn a playful dandyism and you will become the magnet for people's dark, unrealized yearnings.

The key to such power is ambiguity. In a society where the roles everyone plays are obvious, the refusal to conform to any standard will excite interest. Be both masculine and feminine, impudent and charming, subtle and outrageous. Let other people worry about being socially acceptable; those types are a dime a dozen, and you are after a power greater than they can imagine.

Symbol: *The*

Orchid. Its shape and color oddly sug-

gest both sexes, its odor is sweet and decadent

—it is a tropical flower of evil. Delicate and highly cultivated, it is prized for its rarity; it is unlike any other flower.

Dangers

The Dandy's strength, but also the Dandy's problem, is that he or she often works through transgressive feelings relating to sex roles. Although this activity is highly charged and seductive, it is also dangerous, since it touches on a source of great anxiety and insecurity. The greater dangers will often come from your own sex. Valentino had immense appeal for women, but men hated him. He was constantly dogged with accusations of being perversely unmasculine, and this caused him great pain. Salomé was equally disliked by women; Nietzsche's sister, and perhaps his closest friend, considered her an evil witch, and led a virulent campaign against her in the press long after the philosopher's death. There is little to be done in the face of resentment like this. Some Dandies try to fight the image they themselves have created, but this is unwise: to prove his masculinity, Valentino would engage in a boxing match, anything to prove his masculinity. He wound up looking only desperate. Better to accept society's occasional gibes with grace and insolence. After all, the Dandies' charm is that they don't really care what people think of them. That is how Andy Warhol played the game: when people tired of his antics or some scandal erupted, instead of trying to defend himself he would simply move on to some new image—decadent bohemian, high-society portraitist, etc.—as if to say, with a hint of disdain, that the problem lay not with him but with other people's attention span.

Another danger for the Dandy is the fact that insolence has its limits. Beau Brummel prided himself on two things: his trimness of figure and his acerbic wit. His main social patron was the Prince of Wales, who, in later years, grew plump. One night at dinner, the prince rang for the butler, and Brummel snidely remarked, "Do ring, Big Ben." The prince did not appreciate the joke, had Brummel shown out, and never spoke to him again. Without royal patronage, Brummel fell into poverty and madness.

Even a Dandy, then, must measure out his impudence. A true Dandy knows the difference between a theatrically staged teasing of the powerful and a remark that will truly hurt, offend, or insult. It is particularly important to avoid insulting those in a position to injure you. In fact the pose may work best for those who can afford to offend—artists, bohemians, etc. In the work world, you will probably have to modify and tone down your Dandy image. Be pleasantly different, an amusement, rather than a person who challenges the group's conventions and makes others feel insecure.