

Queering the Fop: Masculinity of James Rushworth in Austen's *Mansfield Park* and Count Cassel in Inchbald's *Lover's Vows*

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Abstract

Jane Austen is an author who plays with gender roles in all of her novels. *Mansfield Park* is also not different. However, in *Mansfield Park* she takes up a play called *Lover's Vows* by Elizabeth Inchbald and makes it a central focal point in this novel. What happens in this play similarly happens to the characters in the novel as well in not the same but a similar manner. Younger characters in Austen's novel decides to stage *Lover's Vows* after lengthy discussions. When they distribute the characters among them, similarities between the characters in the plays and in the novel start to appear too. In Inchbald's play, there is a fop character named Count Cassel. James Rushworth decides to take up this role in the play becoming the fop in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*. According to Melikoglu, the fop character was used in theatre to "show that the notion of the born gentleman and his inherent prerogative is ultimately not tenable" (Melikoglu). This effect is achieved through mocking the masculinity of the fop character which is seen both in Inchbald's play and Austen's novel respectively. The intention of this paper is to examine James Rushworth in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* and Count Cassel in Elizabeth Inchbald's *Lover's Vows* as fop characters. The role of masculinity in the eighteenth century and in the beginning of the nineteenth century will be discussed. We will also try to conceive how the notion of masculinity is reflected upon the fop characters in the play and in the novel mentioned above. It will be seen that by mocking the fop characters Count Cassel and James Rushworth, the norms of masculinity at the time were supported by the literary works as well. The analysis will be made with the Queer Theory.

Keywords: literature, gender

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Introduction

Fop was a significant part of the eighteenth century stage in England. Fop did not only exist as a character in theatre but also as a word used by the society in England too. Staves states that "Foppery is a historical phenomenon, not simply a theatrical convention" (Staves 414). Its meaning at the time still resonates in our dictionaries today. What fop signifies is important since the locutionary features of the word has an effect on how gender was constructed at the time and how it affects us today. Cambridge Dictionary defines the word as "(especially in the past) a man who is extremely interested in his appearance and who wears very decorative clothes" (Cambridge Dictionary Online). In Cambridge dictionary, fop is a word that was used for "disapproving".

We can deduce from the definitions that a man who is interested in their appearance and wears very decorative clothes are disapproved within this definition. Staves also observes the "effeminacy" of fop (Staves 419). Indeed, the word itself was used at the time to criticize men when they were not behaving "manly" (Williamson 9). Both the definition of the dictionary and Staves' observation of the issue creates a framework for us what a fop is. Fop is a character on stage as well as a phenomenon in the society who overdresses and is interested in himself and becomes an outcast for it. What is palpable from the definitions and opinions concerning fop that the fop is used to construct both genders.

In order to conceive what fop represents if we want to focus on his gender, we need to understand what masculinity meant for the eighteenth century British society. Melikoglu observes that: "The figure of the comic fop, a caricature of the affected gentleman, rose to popularity on the Restoration stage" (Melikoglu). Since fop is a mockery of the gentleman, our focus will be on the masculinity of the eighteenth century gentlemen. According to Butler: "Language gains power to create "the socially real" through the locutionary acts of speaking subjects" ("Gender Trouble" 145).

Restoration fop was outside this socially real and at the same time it was used to construct it. It became "the other" of this society while reinstating the position of masculinity in the society. Each illocutionary act surrounding the fop character was there to support the gender roles in the society while criticizing the gentility. Each laughter aimed at the fop on stage was a perlocutionary reaction to reinstate what was seen as masculine and feminine in the eighteenth century.

It is now commonly known that gender is a constructed notion rather than a natural occurrence. Butler says: "Gender is the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized, but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized" ("Undoing Gender" 42). What we choose to do with the existing situation is up to us. Gender is a field where one can do or undo it. As we progress, we still do and undo our genders since it is a fluid conception. In the eighteenth century,

naturalizing genders were more common. Masculinity and femininity were heavily regulated. There were a lot of rules surrounding the notions of femininity and masculinity. Almost all the rules concerning masculinity was used to create the fop character.

Masculinity of the Gentility in the Eighteenth Century England

There were various anxieties towards masculinity some of which can be still seen today. The norms were not always stable for the gentility throughout the eighteenth century and sometimes they even contradicted each other at the time. Any person would be blamed for being effeminate as a result of existing contradictory masculine roles. Norms at the time created an anxiety for everyone. The laughter at the fop in theatre was a result of this anxiety. While the male spectator could not conform all the norms of masculinity and failed in their genders in the Butlerian sense, they found relief watching the exaggerated feminine characteristics of the male fop on the stage.

While gentlemen were supposed to act politely, too much politeness created a masculinity crisis. A lot of discussions were made over how polite a man should be in the eighteenth century. Williamson argues that “at the start of the Seven Years’ War, some contemporaries blamed the adverse effects of politeness for Britain’s poor military performance” (Williamson 9). Masculinity was such a significant issue that non-conformity towards the norms of the society concerning masculinity would result in being blamed for the bad result of a whole war. It was not entirely certain what was polite and what was too polite. The solution to the problem was being firm but kind, daring but polite. Since again the boundaries given are still vague, that was not exactly a solution either. Another solution to the problem was sensibility instead of politeness.

Gentility was supposed to follow the fashion. They were supposed to buy the best clothes for themselves especially at the court. Also, women and men were supposed to make conversations at various social gatherings. However, there were also contradiction with this issue too. Williamson claims that: “Too much frivolous interaction with women and the worlds of fashion and shopping associated with them could feminize a man” (Williamson 9). It can be deduced that being interested in clothes was a feminine trait in the eighteenth century. Therefore, if a man was interested in a subject like fashion, this would have signified that he was effeminate. Yet again, he was also supposed to follow fashion in some extent so that he would not be seen as a lower class person which was frowned upon among gentility.

Another problematic norm was being financially independent. Men were expected to be financially independent. However, working in a lot of fields were not welcome among higher classes. The phrase “buying one’s own furniture” was common at the time. It meant that, gentility should not do physical labour. They were supposed to do activities that required mental capacity instead of physical one. In 1756 Lord Chesterfield explained some of the jobs that he deemed appropriate for the higher class men:

The law was the most prestigious: ‘the truly independent profession’ for ‘one of quick, lively and distinguishing parts’, the army or navy suitable for ‘a boy of warm constitution, strong animal spirits, and a cold genius’, and the Church least dignified, fit for ‘a good, dull and decent boy’ and, significantly, only one rung above trade for ‘an acute thinking, and laborious one’ (Williamson 85).

The more mental capacity the job required, the more masculine and gentlemanly the job was. The effects of such categorizations concerning the jobs can be seen in literature too. Most of the male characters in Jane Austen’s literary works have the jobs mentioned above. Of course, being in the politics or managing one’s own land were also for the higher class men too.

High financial credit of men were the most valued feature. That feature would follow a man from birth to grave. Obituaries are important part of the cultural studies. They show what the most important thing in any given era was. In addition, they can hold a lot of other information too. As is said, for men, it was money in the eighteenth century England. In the newspapers and magazines, only information obituaries contained other than the name and the surname of the deceased men was that how much land the deceased men had or how much money he earned annually. It was different for women. Obituaries of women contained the information of how they were related to men such as being a mother, sister etc. (Williamson 163-164). Money gave men self-mastery which was also a masculine feature.

Because of the laws concerning inheritance, having a son was also important. If a man had a son, he celebrated it. Having a son reinforced the masculinity of a man. The poem by William Coke was published in a magazine in the eighteenth century to celebrate the birth of a son:

That bless’d thy father with a better store,
Than all his wishes met before (Williamson 80).

Masculinity of the Fop Character in *Lover’s Vows*

Theatre in the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century England was a reflection of its time on the issue of gender. Gender construction of the society was on the stage too. The fop character on stage held the exact opposite of the traits of masculinity in the eighteenth century.

The fop usually did not have any children. They were also very foolish. According to Mark S. Dawson: “Throughout the seventeenth century, the term ‘fop’ had served to dismiss a person as foolish” (Dawson 145). It

became a character trait of the typical fop character too. This was also not a masculine trait. Men were expected to be sensible and reasonable. The kind of jobs men were expected to do required mental capabilities which the fop did not have. They were also interested in fashion and talking to women about it too. This was also thought to be an effeminate trait. They were also exaggeratedly polite as well.

Lover's Vows by Elizabeth Inchbald was first staged in 1798. The date is significant in many senses. It was staged after the French Revolution. The clothes of the time also started to change too. The fashion at the time was wearing French clothes. However, French fashion was abandoned in the 1790s. England had a national fashion style. Almost for a hundred years, England copied France in their clothing. Brooke and Laver says: "In masculine attire the beginning of the seventeen-nineties marked the victory of English modes over French ones" (Brooke and Laver 160). Therefore, the fop who was a frenchified character became more distinct in its attire.

In the play, Count Cessel wears "an amber coloured tunic, trimmed with silver-hat and feathers" (Inchbald 8). Such colourful attires were not worn by men at the end of the eighteenth century. As for feathers, it was fashionable among women at the time. The fashion of wearing feathers on hats came from France. As a frenchified character, the fop wearing feathers on his hat is not a surprising fact. Although the original acting copies of Elizabeth Inchbald's *Lover's Vows* gives detailed account of everything concerning the play, there is no change of clothes. In Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, when they decide to perform the play, we learn that two different kinds of clothing are presented to be worn which emphasizes the fop's obsession with the fashion more obvious.

Count Cessel is first introduced to the spectator in Act 2 Scene 2 of the play. The very first instance he is mentioned in the play is about his perfume. Baron says: "The whole castle smells of his perfumery" (Inchbald 20). Wearing heavy perfumes, Count Cessel is clearly a feminine figure since being interested in oneself that much was seen as a feminine feature at the time. He is disliked by all the characters he meets in the play. When Baron first mentions him in the play, he thinks that the count is like "an ape" (Inchbald 20).

In the very beginning, we know that Count Cessel will be "the other" in this play. The intention for such a character is to show the absurdity of gentility. However, the means to do that with a fop is through feminizing the character. By feminizing, it was thought that the character of fop becomes a second class citizen. In other words, womanhood was seen as a diminishing feature. Both on stage and offstage, the fop becomes the one that is not wanted. He has the illegitimate gender of the play. Nonetheless, it is also important to note that the fop does not have desire for a same-sex relationship. At least, the spectator is not informed that he does. On the contrary, he tells that he sleeps around with a lot of women. The reason for it stems from the notion that men being with and talking to a lot of women become effeminate. Therefore, for the late eighteenth century spectator, seeing a womanizer who is effeminate on the stage is a normal concept. In *Lover's Vows*, we learn that Count Cessel has slept with a lot of women.

Contrary to the concept of the rake, the fop is not seen having a lot of intimate relationships on stage but rather he only talks about it. Count Cessel says: "My meaning is, that when a man is young and rich, has travelled, and is no personal object of disapprobation, to have made vows but to one woman, is an absolute slight upon the rest of the sex"(). We do not know if he spreads such rumours himself to prove himself as a predatory male or he is actually one. The fop character tries to prove his gentility by showing off even if he did not have much money or gentility. As Melikoglu states: "The born gentleman's claim to innate gentility was potentially as false as the pretender's" (Melikoglu). We can claim a similar notion for the masculinity/femininity of any person too.

Norms are not stable concerning masculinity/femininity. Nevertheless, this notion was not known in the eighteenth century and the author of the play would not have been able to toy with such a notion. Therefore, if we are to question the masculinity/femininity of the fop character, we can only do it within the era when the fop was on the stage in the eighteenth century. It is possible that Count Cessel is spreading the rumours himself. Amelia, the young girl who is eligible to get married in the play, is not interested in Count Cessel. She does not find him attractive. When Baron asks her if she blushes when he talks of him, she simply answers: "No" (Inchbald 20). In the same conversation, we learn that Count Cessel is a frenchified character. It is also a typical feature of the fop. Frenchification was seen as a feminine trait in the eighteenth century since the French fashion was popular until 1790s and being interested in fashion was a feminine trait. It is mentioned above that the fop character was used to be laughed at and even if the spectator did not understand it, they were informed by the actors on the stage that the fop is laughable. Amelia says in the play: "I love to laugh at him myself" (Inchbald 22). The count takes a long time to get dressed. This characteristic attributed to women is still believed today. He is also much involved in himself. He has a narcissistic tendency. He loves to be admired and complemented. Even if nobody did not complement him. He complements to himself. In the play, Count Cessel talks about his travels and how he educated himself via those travels.

Using a gun or a sword and defending one's country in a war were masculine features. Britain was a land and land signified womanhood as far back as in Ancient Greece. Therefore, defending the land was defending women and defending women was a "manly" job. So, we know that with the fop character, the exact opposite of

that will happen. Issue of war is only a table talk for the fop. He does not understand the concept of war and defending a country. In the play on the issue of war Baron tells Count: "I love to laugh at him myself" (Inchbald 21).

Also when the Baron talks about using guns, the count gets excited not because he wants to use a gun but because he will have an opportunity to talk about and show off his gun. The gun becomes merely ornamental in the fop's hands. He describes his gun in detail in *Lover's Vows*. We are also informed that he has never used it. As opposed to the general view that when there is a gun on stage it will be used, when the fop is the one who has the gun, it will definitely not be used. When he is offered to use the gun in the play, he volunteers for it only to have a relationship with a woman. He sees that as a sacrifice.

Another masculine trait of the century was morality. It was emphasized by a lot of authors of the eighteenth century. As it can be seen, being on the opposite side of the masculinity is the fop's main feature. In Count Cessel's case, it is true too. Even when he is told that it is not right what he does, he does not understand it. He does not think that what he does is not wrong within the moral code of the eighteenth century. When Count Cessel got confronted for his relationships, he proudly accepts them. This is seen as amoral by the baron. The baron states that he dislike the idea of deceiving women. Count Cessel answers: "In a gay, lively, inconsiderate, flimsy, frivolous coxcomb, such as myself, it is excusable: for me to keep my word to a woman, would be deceit" (Inchbald 44).

The only masculine trait that seems that the fop is not opposed to is having money. The fop likes money. He does not seem to work to earn it but he has it and wants more. In the *Lover's Vows*, Count Cassel says: "And give me the English good man before that of any other nation" (Inchbald 24). He uses "English good man" as a metaphor for money. The reason for Baron wanting him to get married to his daughter is his money. That is seen as a good trait by the baron. Then he realizes that it is not enough to make a person good. In the end, he decides not to give away his daughter to the fop.

Inchbald's motives for creating the fop character in her play can only be speculated. Nonetheless, one of the issues of the play is tackling with giving women a right to choose. In the play, Amelia proposes to a man. Her choice seems better than his father's at the end of the play. Reason and sensibility at the time were seen the traits of men. Therefore, it was an important step forwards. To show the poor choice of her father, Inchbald gives us the fop character. The only problematic issue here is that, though Inchbald empowers a woman in the play, giving feminine traits to a male character diminishes the value given to the women.

The Fop in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*

The fop in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* has a lot of common traits with the fop in Elizabeth Inchbald's play *Lover's Vows*. However, the difference is that Jane Austen's fop character is much more ambiguous than Elizabeth Inchbald's. The traits of masculinity and femininity are mixed. Such an ambiguity creates a more complex character and is harder to see the intentions of the author for creating the character as well.

The fop character in Austen's *Mansfield Park* is called James Rushworth. When the readers are first introduced to the character, they are informed that he is in love with Maria. That instantly differentiates him from Inchbald's fop character since he is not interested in being in love and getting married. James Rushworth, on the other hand, is shown as a rich suitor who is in love with Maria.

The similarity between the first scenes of the fops is that we are introduced to both characters as rich suitors. Just two sentences after we are introduced to Rushworth, we are also informed that he is richer than Maria's father. Unlike Amelia, however, Maria relishes the idea of getting married for the money at first. It is said in the novel that "...as a marriage with Mr. Rushworth would give her the enjoyment of a larger income than her father's..." (Austen 29).

By the titles mentioned (Mr Rushworth and Mrs. Rushworth) in the novel, it is not certain that they are of nobility. Although later on in the novel we are informed that their mansion dates back to the times of Queen Elizabeth, we also know that Jane Austen used the nobility titles in her novels too. Therefore, the gentility from birth is in question for the Rushworths. This is another trait that Rushworth does not share with Count Cassel. Though he is not of gentility, we will see that he will try to justify himself as one.

Rushworth is described as "a heavy young man, with not more than common sense" (Austen 29). Both masculine and feminine traits can be seen even on the first page that the fop character Rushworth is introduced in the novel. While he can get married for love which is a masculine attribute, he is also not very intelligent. As mentioned before, mental capacity was an important masculine feature of the gentility. Rushworth's stupidity is overseen by the Bertrams solely because of her money. Richard says that: "If this man had not twelve thousand a year, he would be a very stupid fellow" (Austen 30).

We also know that Amelia dances with Count Cassel before and he accidentally steps on her foot while they are dancing Minuet which is a ball room dance. Similarly, Maria Bertram and James Rushworth also attend balls together. Then again, Rushworth does not do the same while dancing. The dance issue seems like a direct reference to *Lover's Vows*. But this time instead of showing the stupidity of the fop, it is used to show a kind of responsibility that Rushworth takes. He conforms to the traditions and treats Maria Bertram accordingly.

There was a great emphasis on Christianity for men in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century. Williamson who analysed magazine for men in the eighteenth century observed that: “Between 1731 and 1756 readers were, therefore, presented with model and real versions of the polite gentleman motivated by an active Christianity” (Williamson 78). This notion was extended well into the twentieth century. But the fop character in Austen’s novel does not seem to be interested in the religion much. In the novel Mrs. Rushworth says: “Prayers were always read in it by the domestic chaplain, within the memory of many. But the late Mr Rushworth left it off” (Austen 30). Since religion became a trait of masculinity at the time, being not interested in it anymore makes Rushworth less masculine.

Rushworth also does not achieve self-mastery in the novel. Self-mastery was seen as an important masculine trait at the time as mentioned before. Nonetheless, in several instances he proves otherwise. He lives with his mother and does not leave her very often. Then he also does not feel much responsibility towards Maria. He leaves her when he realizes he did not bring the key of the gate and he does not rush back when he goes to get them leaving Maria and Mr Crawford alone together.

After they decide about having a private theatrical play, each of them take up a character in the play. Rushworth chooses to be Count Cassel because he thought that Anhalt-the other choice- was “stupid” (Austen 23). As we know that Count Cassel as the fop character is the fool of the play. Rushworth ironically becomes the fool without realizing. However, Maria realizes the situation. She understands that Rushworth is a fool and the part of Count Cassel is suitable for him. It is said in the novel that: “Miss Bertram approved the decision, for the less he had to learn the better” (Austen 103). It is clear that this line has more than one meaning. Maria Bertram knows that Rushworth is stupid so she approves that Rushworth can be the fop in the play. Also, she wants to flirt with another person so she does not want Rushworth to understand the situation and if he is the fop, they will not have any acts together so he will not see her flirtations during the rehearsals.

The most important feature that effeminizes the fop character is his interest in fashion and colourful clothes and accessories. And in *Mansfield Park* the emphasis is doubled compared to *Lover’s Vows* since the fop character in *Mansfield Park* has two different outfits. And Rushworth says: “I shall hardly know myself in a blue dress, and a pink satin cloak” (Austen 104). At first it seems that the fop is not interested in the clothes and the fashion that comes with them. But then again, he starts to like the idea of being the fop with the clothes.

The last blow to Rushworth’s masculinity comes from Maria as a metaphoric blow for the castration. Melikoglu says that “...in an implied act of social castration, his lines have been trimmed considerably by Maria”. Indeed, he is castrated and put aside by Maria. After their marriage, the fop’s castration becomes more apparent when Maria runs away with another man.

Conclusion

Elizabeth Inchbald’s brave attempt to create a free woman was supported by the effeminate fop character. The concept of masculinity has been examined through this character. Though blurring the boundaries between the two genders, the fop character was used as a comedic relief in the play. In Jane Austen’s version of Inchbald’s fop character gender ambiguity is heightened. The whole novel, in fact, revolves around the issue of gender ambiguity. In both cases, this ambiguity resulted in more empowered female characters. While the spectators of the theatre tried to cover their gender failures with the laughter at the fop, the fop introduced the unsuspecting spectator and unknowing author with the gender fluidity.

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