

THE DANDY

The word "dandy" which probably derives from the Scottish nickname for Andrew, was first used in the song "Yankee Doodle Dandy", sung by the British troops during the American Revolution in 1770. The words of the song mocked the brightly coloured uniform of the American soldiers: the imaginary character Yankee Doodle, standing for the American rebel, was depicted riding a pony, wearing colorful clothes and with a feather on his hat. So, the word dandy referred to a man who boasts about his appearance even though he is wearing odd and ordinary clothes.

Vanity, extravagance and refinement were linked to the more positive idea of the Dandy which developed thanks to the figure of George Byron Brummel. He became the leader of early 19th century fashion for the exquisiteness of his dress and manners, and for twenty years he had the Prince regent, who later became George IV, as a friend and admirer. A quarrel and gambling debts forced him to flee to France where he eventually died in a pauper asylum.

Brummel created dandyism as a life style. From England, this trend spread to France, where it was connected to artistic movements, such as Symbolism and Aestheticism, which rejected the capitalistic outlook. Reinforced by the French influence, dandyism reappeared in England towards the end of the 19th century with the figure of Oscar Wilde.

Dandies did not have noble blood nor any innate characteristic of aristocracy, but they had the time and the money to devote to living extravagantly. They were wealthier than bohemians – having enough to live on without employment. Dandies were friends of bohemians and attended the same cafés. Although bohemians and dandies affected different attitudes and adopted slightly different lifestyles, they were closely related and they both lived their lives in rejection of a bourgeois life.

<From Professor Jonas Mullan in *Performer Culture & Literature The nineteenth Century in Britain and America*, 2012>