

DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

MASTER OF ARTS-ENGLISH

SEMESTER –II

19TH CENTURY STUDIES III

ELECTIVE-204

BLOCK-1

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

Postal Address:

The Registrar,

University of North Bengal,

Raja Rammohunpur,

P.O.-N.B.U.,Dist-Darjeeling,

West Bengal, Pin-734013,

India.

Phone: (O) +91 0353-2776331/2699008

Fax:(0353) 2776313, 2699001

Email: regnbu@sancharnet.in ; regnbu@nbu.ac.in

Website: www.nbu.ac.in

First Published in 2019



All rights reserved. No Part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without permission in writing from University of North Bengal. Any person who does any unauthorised act in relation to this book may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages. This book is meant for educational and learning purpose. The authors of the book has/have taken all reasonable care to ensure that the contents of the book do not violate any existing copyright or other intellectual property rights of any person in any manner whatsoever. In the even the Authors has/ have been unable to track any source and if any copyright has been inadvertently infringed, please notify the publisher in writing for corrective action.

FOREWORD

The Self Learning Material (SLM) is written with the aim of providing simple and organized study content to all the learners. The SLMs are prepared on the framework of being mutually cohesive, internally consistent and structured as per the university's syllabi. It is a humble attempt to give glimpses of the various approaches and dimensions to the topic of study and to kindle the learner's interest to the subject

We have tried to put together information from various sources into this book that has been written in an engaging style with interesting and relevant examples. It introduces you to the insights of subject concepts and theories and presents them in a way that is easy to understand and comprehend.

We always believe in continuous improvement and would periodically update the content in the very interest of the learners. It may be added that despite enormous efforts and coordination, there is every possibility for some omission or inadequacy in few areas or topics, which would definitely be rectified in future.

We hope you enjoy learning from this book and the experience truly enrich your learning and help you to advance in your career and future endeavors.



19TH CENTURY STUDIES III

BLOCK 1

UNIT: 1 OSCAR WILDE- Insight In His Life	7
UNIT: 2 OSCAR WILDE- Analysis Of Works And Literature	31
UNIT: 3 The IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST : Analysis Of Acts	58
UNIT: 4 Oscar WILDE'S :The IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST : Interpretation.....	89
UNIT: 5 Oscar Wilde's – Dualism In “The Importance Of Being Earnest” .	115
UNIT 6: THOMAS CARLYLE'S LIFE & INFLUENCES.....	141
UNIT 7: RECEPTION THE HISTORY OF THOMAS CARLYLE	165

BLOCK 2

Unit 8 Thomas Carlyle- <i>The Hero as a Poet</i>	
Unit 9 John Ruskin : Life	
Unit 10 John Ruskin : Work	
Unit11 John Ruskin- “Of Pathetic Fallacy”	
Unit 12 Mathew Arnold- “Life	
Unit 13 Mathew Arnold : Work”	
Unit 14 Mathew Arnold- “Sweetness and Light”	

BLOCK-1 19TH CENTURY STUDIES III

Introduction To Block

This subject helps to understand the various aspects of the life and literary work of Oscar Wilde and Thomas Carlyle.. This Block comprises of seven units related to Life and works of Oscar Wilde along with his famous work Importance of being Earnest. This Unit also have the aspects of the life of Thomas Carlyle.

Unit **1** introduce to the life of Oscar wilde. It gives the insight of the early days of him along with personal life.

Unit **2** moreover gives the interpretation and analysis of literary career of Oscar Wilde. It shows how his various works carried out. It represents various phases of his literary art.

Unit **3** gives the analysis of the artwork of Oscar Wilde the Importance of Being Earnest. It gives act wise analysis of it.

Unit **4** helps to interpret the Importance of being earnest. It gives the critical insight into the Importance of Being Earnest. It helps to understand and interpret in easier manner.

Unit **5** find out that how dualism plays an important factor in Importance of Being earnest. It shows critical aspects of dualism in the play.

Unit **6** introduce to the life of Thomas Carlyle. It gives the insight of the early days of him along with personal life. It shows how his career moves forward till his death.

Unit **7** gives the interpretation and analysis of literary career of Thomas Carlyle.. It shows how his various works carried out. It represents various phases of his literary art. It represents the legacy of Thomas Carlyle.

UNIT: 1 OSCAR WILDE- INSIGHT IN HIS LIFE

STRUCTURE

1.0 Objectives

1.1 Introduction

1.2 Personal and early years of Oscar Wilde

1.2.1 Education of Oscar Wilde

1.2.2 Apprenticeship of Oscar Wilde

1.3 Imprisonment

1.4 Last Days & Death

1.5 Let's Sum Up

1.6 Keywords

1.7 Questions for Review

1.8 Suggested Readings and References

1.9 Answers for check your Progress

1.0 OBJECTIVE

The objective of the Unit is to study life and works of Oscar Wilde.

Unit helps to achieve following objectives:

- **Introduction about life of Oscar Wilde**
- **Personal and early years of Oscar Wilde**
- **Imprisonment**
- **Final years of Wilde's life**

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Oscar Wilde was an Anglo-Irish playwright, novelist, poet, and critic. He is regarded as one of the greatest playwrights of the Victorian Era. In his lifetime he wrote nine plays, one novel, and numerous poems, short stories, and essays. Wilde was a proponent of the Aesthetic movement,

Notes

which emphasized aesthetic values more than moral or social themes. This doctrine is most clearly summarized in the phrase 'art for art's sake'. Besides literary accomplishments, he is also famous, or perhaps infamous, for his wit, flamboyance, and affairs with men. He was tried and imprisoned for his homosexual relationship (then considered a crime) with the son of an aristocrat.

As anyone who has visited Ireland will know, we're intensely proud of our rich literary heritage. James, Joyce, W.B Yeats and a vast collection of other writers, poets, playwrights and authors set an extremely high standard for the modern era. One of them however was a little more off-centre than the rest. When others were using their work to encourage political debates or to experiment with revolutionary new literary genres, a gregarious man by the name of Oscar Wilde was making waves for his thorny, hilarious and always pin-point accurate social commentary in his novels, short stories and plays. As well as that, he had arguably one of the most turbulent private lives of the lot. Here's a brief glimpse into the life and work of Oscar Wilde.

1.2 PERSONAL LIFE & EARLY YEARS

Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde (16 October 1854 – 30 November 1900) was an Irish poet and playwright. After writing in different forms throughout the 1880s, the early 1890s saw him become one of the most popular playwrights in London. He is best remembered for his epigrams and plays, his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and the circumstances of his criminal conviction for "gross indecency", imprisonment, and early death at age 46. Oscar Wilde was born at 21 Westland Row, Dublin (now home of the Oscar Wilde Centre, Trinity College), the second of three children born to Anglo-Irish Sir William Wilde and Jane Wilde, two years behind his brother William ("Willie"). Wilde's mother had distant Italian ancestry, and under the pseudonym "Speranza" (the Italian word for 'hope'), wrote poetry for the revolutionary Young Irelanders in 1848; she was a lifelong Irish nationalist. She read the Young Irelanders' poetry to Oscar and Willie, inculcating a love of these poets in her sons. Lady Wilde's interest in the

neo-classical revival showed in the paintings and busts of ancient Greece and Rome in her home.

William Wilde was Ireland's leading oto-ophthalmologic (ear and eye) surgeon and was knighted in 1864 for his services as medical adviser and assistant commissioner to the censuses of Ireland. He also wrote books about Irish archaeology and peasant folklore. A renowned philanthropist, his dispensary for the care of the city's poor at the rear of Trinity College, Dublin, was the forerunner of the Dublin Eye and Ear Hospital, now located at Adelaide Road. On his father's side Wilde was descended from a Dutchman, Colonel de Wilde, who went to Ireland with King William of Orange's invading army in 1690, and numerous Anglo-Irish ancestors. On his mother's side, Wilde's ancestors included a bricklayer from County Durham, who emigrated to Ireland sometime in the 1770s.

Wilde was baptised as an infant in St. Mark's Church, Dublin, the local Church of Ireland (Anglican) church. When the church was closed, the records were moved to the nearby St. Ann's Church, Dawson Street. Davis Coakley mentions a second baptism by a Catholic priest, Father Prideaux Fox, who befriended Oscar's mother circa 1859. According to Fox's testimony in Donahoe's Magazine in 1905, Jane Wilde would visit his chapel in Glencree, County Wicklow, for Mass and would take her sons with her. She asked Father Fox in this period to baptise her sons.

Fox described it in this way:

"I am not sure if she ever became a Catholic herself but it was not long before she asked me to instruct two of her children, one of them being the future erratic genius, Oscar Wilde. After a few weeks I baptized these two children, Lady Wilde herself being present on the occasion."

In addition to his children with his wife, Sir William Wilde was the father of three children born out of wedlock before his marriage: Henry Wilson, born in 1838 to one woman, and Emily and Mary Wilde, born in 1847 and 1849, respectively, to a second woman. Sir William acknowledged paternity of his illegitimate or "natural" children and

Notes

provided for their education, arranging for them to be reared by his relatives rather than with his legitimate children in his family household with his wife.

In 1855, the family moved to No. 1 Merrion Square, where Wilde's sister, Isola, was born in 1857. The Wildes' new home was larger. With both his parents' success and delight in social life, the house soon became the site of a "unique medical and cultural milieu". Guests at their salon included Sheridan Le Fanu, Charles Lever, George Petrie, Isaac Butt, William Rowan Hamilton and Samuel Ferguson.

Until he was nine, Oscar Wilde was educated at home, where a French *bonne* and a German governess taught him their languages. He attended Portora Royal School in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh, from 1864 to 1871. Until his early twenties, Wilde summered at the villa, Moytura House, which his father had built in Cong, County Mayo. There the young Wilde and his brother Willie played with George Moore.

Isola died at age nine of meningitis. Wilde's poem "Requiescat" is written to her memory.

**"Tread lightly, she is near
Under the snow
Speak gently, she can hear
the daisies grow"**

The relationships of Oscar Wilde

Interest in Wilde spread across the ocean to America. Miss Mary Anderson, a New York actress, asked him to write a play for her. He began a five-act tragedy that developed into *The Duchess of Padua*. Soon after, he was invited to come to America himself to lecture on aesthetics. On his arrival he told the customs agent: "I have nothing to declare but my genius."

When Wilde returned from America he went to Paris. In France he met Victor Hugo, Paul Verlaine, Mallarme, Toulouse Lautrec, Degas, and Pissaro.

Wilde attracted attention from the ladies wherever he went, and often returned the favour. He fell for a girl for the first time when he met Florence Balcombe and gave her a cross inscribed with his name. He also did a delicate pencil sketch of her, showing a sweet, wistful look. Florence later married Bram Stoker, author of Dracula. Wilde was later smitten with the actress Lillie Langtry.

On 29th May 1884 he married Constance Mary Lloyd, daughter of an Irish barrister living in London. The two made their home in Chelsea at No. 16 Tite Street. Wilde took a job as a book reviewer for the Pall Mall Gazette. He had little money but quite a reputation as a conversationalist. Their first son, Cyril, was born in 1885, followed the next year by another, Vyvyan. Wilde adored his children and spent hours playing with them.

circa 1880: Constance Lloyd (1858 - 1898), who married playwright Oscar Wilde in 1884 and bore him two sons. Although never divorced, the couple became estranged, and she changed her name and that of her sons to Holland. (Photo by Hulton Archive/Getty Images)⁶

circa 1880: Constance Lloyd (1858 - 1898), who married playwright Oscar Wilde in 1884 and bore him two sons. Although never divorced, the couple became estranged, and she changed her name and that of her sons to Holland. (Photo by Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

He seemed poised to consummate a perfectly respectable, if somewhat flamboyant, career. But two pivotal events set his life on a different course. First, he wrote the now-classic book, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a story about a beautiful man who stays young while his portrait grows old and ugly. The press was almost unanimous in their condemnation of the book, considering it prurient, immoral, vicious, coarse, and crude.

Notes

Unconcerned, Wilde commented, "There is no such thing as a moral or immoral book. Books are well-written or badly written. That is all."

Oscar Wilde & Bosie

Also during this time he met someone who forever changed his life, and who had the beauty of Dorian Gray, Lord Alfred Bruce Douglas, or Bosie, the third son of the 8th Marquess of Queensberry. Wilde was drawn to Bosie for several reasons. He was from an aristocratic family, good looking, young, and showed promise as a poet of sonnets. Some biographers think Bosie may have reminded Wilde of Isola.

Irish dramatist Oscar Wilde (1854 - 1900) with Lord Alfred Douglas (1870 - 1945) at Oxford, 1893. (Photo by Hulton Archive/Getty Images)⁶

Irish dramatist Oscar Wilde (1854 - 1900) with Lord Alfred Douglas (1870 - 1945) at Oxford, 1893. (Photo by Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

Wilde's relationship with Bosie put him in dangerous territory, since all homosexual acts were illegal in England at that time. Wilde's next several works were well received, and the controversy of Dorian Gray receded. His play *Lady Windemere's Fan* opened at the St. James Theatre to a rousing reception. When the audience shouted 'Author!' Wilde gave this now-famous speech: "Your appreciation has been most intelligent. I congratulate you on the great success of your performance, which persuades me that you think almost as highly of the play as I do."

His wit poked fun at the hierarchies of society and aimed to remove the masks of the upper crust. Further successes included *Salome*, a biblical play in one act, *A Woman of No Importance*, *An Ideal Husband*, and *The Importance of Being Earnest*. George Bernard Shaw wrote in the *Saturday Review*: "In a certain sense Mr. Wilde is to me our only thorough playwright. He plays with everything: with wit, with philosophy, with drama, with actors and with audience, with the whole theatre." And *The New York Times* said of *The Importance of Being*

Earnest: "Wilde may be said to have at last, and by a single stroke, put his energies under his feet."

But Bosie's father had a different opinion of Wilde and was furious at the praise heaped on him. Four days after *The Importance of Being Earnest* opened, Queensberry drove to the Albemarle Club on Dover Street, where Oscar was a member. He left his card, and wrote: "To Oscar Wilde, posing as a sodomite." The porter, perhaps because of the misspelling or because he was unfamiliar with the word, put it in an envelope and addressed it to Wilde, leaving it in the hall letter rack.

Wilde took it very seriously and told a friend: "Bosie's father has left a card at my club with hideous words on it. I don't see anything now but a criminal prosecution. My whole life seems ruined by this man."

1.2.1 Education (1870)

Trinity College, Dublin

Wilde left Portora with a royal scholarship to read classics at Trinity College, Dublin, from 1871 to 1874, sharing rooms with his older brother Willie Wilde. Trinity, one of the leading classical schools, placed him with scholars such as R. Y. Tyrell, Arthur Palmer, Edward Dowden and his tutor, Professor J. P. Mahaffy, who inspired his interest in Greek literature. As a student Wilde worked with Mahaffy on the latter's book *Social Life in Greece*. Wilde, despite later reservations, called Mahaffy "my first and best teacher" and "the scholar who showed me how to love Greek things". For his part, Mahaffy boasted of having created Wilde; later, he said Wilde was "the only blot on my tutorship".

The University Philosophical Society also provided an education, as members discussed intellectual and artistic subjects such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Algernon Charles Swinburne weekly. Wilde quickly became an established member – the members' suggestion book for 1874 contains two pages of banter (sportingly) mocking Wilde's emergent aestheticism. He presented a paper titled "Aesthetic Morality". At Trinity, Wilde established himself as an outstanding student: he came first in his class in his first year, won a scholarship by competitive examination in his second and, in his finals, won the Berkeley Gold Medal in Greek, the University's highest academic award. He was encouraged

Notes

to compete for a demyship to Magdalen College, Oxford – which he won easily, having already studied Greek for over nine years.

Magdalen College, Oxford

At Magdalen, he read Greats from 1874 to 1878, and from there he applied to join the Oxford Union, but failed to be elected.

Oscar Wilde posing for a photograph, looking at the camera. He is wearing a checked suit and a bowler hat. His right foot is resting on a knee high bench, and his right hand, holding gloves, is on it. The left hand is in the pocket.

Oscar Wilde at Oxford

Attracted by its dress, secrecy, and ritual, Wilde petitioned the Apollo Masonic Lodge at Oxford, and was soon raised to the "Sublime Degree of Master Mason". During a resurgent interest in Freemasonry in his third year, he commented he "would be awfully sorry to give it up if I secede from the Protestant Heresy". Wilde's active involvement in Freemasonry lasted only for the time he spent at Oxford; he allowed his membership of the Apollo University Lodge to lapse after failing to pay subscriptions.

Catholicism deeply appealed to him, especially its rich liturgy, and he discussed converting to it with clergy several times. In 1877, Wilde was left speechless after an audience with Pope Pius IX in Rome. He eagerly read the books of Cardinal Newman, a noted Anglican priest who had converted to Catholicism and risen in the church hierarchy. He became more serious in 1878, when he met the Reverend Sebastian Bowden, a priest in the Brompton Oratory who had received some high-profile converts. Neither his father, who threatened to cut off his funds, nor Mahaffy thought much of the plan; but mostly Wilde, the supreme individualist, balked at the last minute from pledging himself to any formal creed. On the appointed day of his baptism, Wilde sent Father Bowden a bunch of altar lilies instead. Wilde did retain a lifelong interest in Catholic theology and liturgy.

While at Magdalen College, Wilde became particularly well known for his role in the aesthetic and decadent movements. He wore his hair long, openly scorned "manly" sports though he occasionally boxed, and he decorated his rooms with peacock feathers, lilies, sunflowers, blue china and other objets d'art. He once remarked to friends, whom he entertained lavishly, "I find it harder and harder every day to live up to my blue china." The line quickly became famous,

accepted as a slogan by aesthetes but used against them by critics who sensed in it a terrible vacuousness. Some elements disdained the aesthetes, but their languishing attitudes and showy costumes became a recognised pose. Wilde was once physically attacked by a group of four fellow students, and dealt with them single-handedly, surprising critics. By his third year Wilde had truly begun to develop himself and his myth, and considered his learning to be more expansive than what was within the prescribed texts. This attitude resulted in his being rusticated for one term, after he had returned late to a college term from a trip to Greece with Mahaffy.

Wilde did not meet Walter Pater until his third year, but had been enthralled by his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, published during Wilde's final year in Trinity. Pater argued that man's sensibility to beauty should be refined above all else, and that each moment should be felt to its fullest extent. Years later, in *De Profundis*, Wilde described Pater's *Studies...* as "that book that has had such a strange influence over my life". He learned tracts of the book by heart, and carried it with him on travels in later years. Pater gave Wilde his sense of almost flippant devotion to art, though he gained a purpose for it through the lectures and writings of critic John Ruskin. Ruskin despaired at the self-validating aestheticism of Pater, arguing that the importance of art lies in its potential for the betterment of society. Ruskin admired beauty, but believed it must be allied with, and applied to, moral good. When Wilde eagerly attended Ruskin's lecture series *The Aesthetic and Mathematic Schools of Art* in Florence, he learned about aesthetics as the non-mathematical elements of painting. Despite being given to neither early rising nor manual labour, Wilde volunteered for Ruskin's project to convert a swampy country lane into a smart road neatly edged with flowers.

Wilde won the 1878 Newdigate Prize for his poem "Ravenna", which reflected on his visit there the year before, and he duly read it at Encaenia. In November 1878, he graduated with a double first in his B.A. of Classical Moderations and *Literae Humaniores* (Greats). Wilde wrote to a friend, "The dons are 'astonied' beyond words – the Bad Boy doing so well in the end!"

1.2.2 Apprenticeship of an aesthete: 1880s

A hand-drawn cartoon of Wilde, his face depicted in a wilted sunflower standing in a vase. His face is sad and inclined towards a letter on the floor. A larger

china vase, inscribed "Waste..." is placed behind him, and an open cigarette case to his left.

Debut in society

After graduation from Oxford, Wilde returned to Dublin, where he met again Florence Balcombe, a childhood sweetheart. She became engaged to Bram Stoker and they married in 1878. Wilde was disappointed but stoic: he wrote to her, remembering "the two sweet years – the sweetest years of all my youth" during which they had been close. He also stated his intention to "return to England, probably for good." This he did in 1878, only briefly visiting Ireland twice after that.

Unsure of his next step, Wilde wrote to various acquaintances enquiring about Classics positions at Oxford or Cambridge. The Rise of Historical Criticism was his submission for the Chancellor's Essay prize of 1879, which, though no longer a student, he was still eligible to enter. Its subject, "Historical Criticism among the Ancients" seemed ready-made for Wilde – with both his skill in composition and ancient learning – but he struggled to find his voice with the long, flat, scholarly style. Unusually, no prize was awarded that year.

With the last of his inheritance from the sale of his father's houses, he set himself up as a bachelor in London. The 1881 British Census listed Wilde as a boarder at 1 (now 44) Tite Street, Chelsea, where Frank Miles, a society painter, was the head of the household. Wilde spent the next six years in London and Paris, and in the United States, where he travelled to deliver lectures.

He had been publishing lyrics and poems in magazines since entering Trinity College, especially in Kottabos and the Dublin University Magazine. In mid-1881, at 27 years old, he published Poems, which collected, revised and expanded his poems.

The book was generally well received, and sold out its first print run of 750 copies. Punch was less enthusiastic, saying "The poet is Wilde, but his poetry's tame". By a tight vote, the Oxford Union condemned the book for alleged plagiarism. The librarian, who had requested the book for the library, returned the presentation copy to Wilde with a note of apology. Biographer Richard Ellmann argues that Wilde's poem "Hélas!" was a sincere, though flamboyant, attempt to explain the dichotomies the poet saw in himself; one line reads:

"To drift with every passion till my soul

Is a stringed lute on which all winds can play".

The book had further printings in 1882. It was bound in a rich, enamel parchment cover (embossed with gilt blossom) and printed on hand-made Dutch paper; over the next few years, Wilde presented many copies to the dignitaries and writers who received him during his lecture tours.

America: 1882

A Satirical cartoon shows a dandy figure, fancily dressed in a long coat and breeches, floating across the crowd in a tightly packed ballroom.

Aestheticism was sufficiently in vogue to be caricatured by Gilbert and Sullivan in *Patience* (1881). Richard D'Oyly Carte, an English impresario, invited Wilde to make a lecture tour of North America, simultaneously priming the pump for the US tour of *Patience* and selling this most charming aesthete to the American public. Wilde journeyed on the SS *Arizona*, arriving 2 January 1882, and disembarking the following day. Originally planned to last four months, it continued for almost a year due to the commercial success. Wilde sought to transpose the beauty he saw in art into daily life. This was a practical as well as philosophical project: in Oxford he had surrounded himself with blue china and lilies, and now one of his lectures was on interior design.

When asked to explain reports that he had paraded down Piccadilly in London carrying a lily, long hair flowing, Wilde replied, "It's not whether I did it or not that's important, but whether people believed I did it". Wilde believed that the artist should hold forth higher ideals, and that pleasure and beauty would replace utilitarian ethics.

Wilde and aestheticism were both mercilessly caricatured and criticised in the press; the *Springfield Republican*, for instance, commented on Wilde's behaviour during his visit to Boston to lecture on aestheticism, suggesting that Wilde's conduct was more a bid for notoriety rather than devotion to beauty and the aesthetic. T. W. Higginson, a cleric and abolitionist, wrote in "Unmanly Manhood" of his general concern that Wilde, "whose only distinction is that he has written a thin volume of very mediocre verse", would improperly influence the behaviour of men and women.

According to biographer Michèle Mendelssohn, Wilde was the subject of anti-Irish caricature and was portrayed as a monkey, a blackface performer and a Christy's Minstrel throughout his career. "Harper's Weekly put a sunflower-worshipping monkey dressed as Wilde on the front of the January 1882 issue.

Notes

The magazine didn't let its reputation for quality impede its expression of what are now considered odious ethnic and racial ideologies. The drawing stimulated other American maligners and, in England, had a full-page reprint in the *Lady's Pictorial*. ... When the *National Republican* discussed Wilde, it was to explain 'a few items as to the animal's pedigree.' And on 22 January 1882 the *Washington Post* illustrated the WildeMan of Borneo alongside Oscar Wilde of England and asked 'How far is it from this to this?' " Though his press reception was hostile, Wilde was well received in diverse settings across America; he drank whiskey with miners in Leadville, Colorado, and was fêted at the most fashionable salons in many cities he visited.

London life and marriage

His earnings, plus expected income from *The Duchess of Padua*, allowed him to move to Paris between February and mid-May 1883. While there he met Robert Sherard, whom he entertained constantly. "We are dining on the Duchess tonight", Wilde would declare before taking him to an expensive restaurant. In August he briefly returned to New York for the production of *Vera*, his first play, after it was turned down in London. He reportedly entertained the other passengers with "Ave Imperatrix!, A Poem on England", about the rise and fall of empires. E. C. Stedman, in *Victorian Poets*, describes this "lyric to England" as "manly verse – a poetic and eloquent invocation". The play was initially well received by the audience, but when the critics wrote lukewarm reviews, attendance fell sharply and the play closed a week after it had opened.

Wilde had to return to England, where he continued to lecture on topics including *Personal Impressions of America*, *The Value of Art in Modern Life*, and *Dress*. A semi-detached red-brick Georgian house, with a small blue plaque on the wall.

In London, he had been introduced in 1881 to Constance Lloyd, daughter of Horace Lloyd, a wealthy Queen's Counsel, and his wife. She happened to be visiting Dublin in 1884, when Wilde was lecturing at the Gaiety Theatre. He proposed to her, and they married on 29 May 1884 at the Anglican St James's Church, Paddington, in London. Although Constance had an annual allowance of £250, which was generous for a young woman (equivalent to about £25,600 in current value), the Wildes had relatively luxurious tastes. They had preached to others for so long on the subject of design that people expected their home to set new standards. The couple had two sons together, Cyril (1885) and Vyvyan

(1886). Wilde became the sole literary signatory of George Bernard Shaw's petition for a pardon of the anarchists arrested (and later executed) after the Haymarket massacre in Chicago in 1886.

Robert Ross had read Wilde's poems before they met at Oxford in 1886. He seemed unrestrained by the Victorian prohibition against homosexuality, and became estranged from his family. By Richard Ellmann's account, he was a precocious seventeen-year-old who "so young and yet so knowing, was determined to seduce Wilde". According to Daniel Mendelsohn, Wilde, who had long alluded to Greek love, was "initiated into homosexual sex" by Ross, while his "marriage had begun to unravel after his wife's second pregnancy, which left him physically repelled".

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS I :

Q1. What do you remember of Wilde's life?

Answer.....
.....
.....
.....

Q2. Write a short note on Oscar Wilde's apprenticeship of an aesthete

Answer.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

1.3 IMPRISONMENT

He first entered Newgate Prison in London for processing, then was moved to Pentonville Prison, where the "hard labour" to which he had been sentenced consisted of many hours of walking a treadmill and picking oakum (separating the fibres in scraps of old navy ropes), and where prisoners were allowed to read only the Bible and The Pilgrim's Progress.

Notes

A few months later he was moved to Wandsworth Prison in London. Inmates there also followed the regimen of "hard labour, hard fare and a hard bed", which wore harshly on Wilde's delicate health. In November he collapsed during chapel from illness and hunger. His right ear drum was ruptured in the fall, an injury that later contributed to his death. He spent two months in the infirmary.

Richard B. Haldane, the Liberal MP and reformer, visited Wilde and had him transferred in November to Reading Gaol, 30 miles (48 km) west of London on 23 November 1895. The transfer itself was the lowest point of his incarceration, as a crowd jeered and spat at him on the railway platform. He spent the remainder of his sentence there, addressed and identified only as "C33" – the occupant of the third cell on the third floor of C ward.

About five months after Wilde arrived at Reading Gaol, Charles Thomas Wooldridge, a trooper in the Royal Horse Guards, was brought to Reading to await his trial for murdering his wife on 29 March 1896; on 17 June Wooldridge was sentenced to death and returned to Reading for his execution, which took place on Tuesday, 7 July 1896 – the first hanging at Reading in 18 years. From Wooldridge's hanging, Wilde later wrote *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*.

Wilde was not, at first, even allowed paper and pen but Haldane eventually succeeded in allowing access to books and writing materials. Wilde requested, among others: the Bible in French; Italian and German grammars; some Ancient Greek texts, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Joris-Karl Huysmans's new French novel about Christian redemption *En route*, and essays by St Augustine, Cardinal Newman and Walter Pater.

Between January and March 1897 Wilde wrote a 50,000-word letter to Douglas. He was not allowed to send it, but was permitted to take it with him when released from prison. In reflective mode, Wilde coldly examines his career to date, how he had been a colourful agent provocateur in Victorian society, his art, like his paradoxes, seeking to subvert as well as sparkle. His own estimation of himself was: one who "stood in symbolic relations to the art and culture of my age". It was

from these heights that his life with Douglas began, and Wilde examines that particularly closely, repudiating him for what Wilde finally sees as his arrogance and vanity: he had not forgotten Douglas' remark, when he was ill, "When you are not on your pedestal you are not interesting." Wilde blamed himself, though, for the ethical degradation of character that he allowed Douglas to bring about in him and took responsibility for his own fall, "I am here for having tried to put your father in prison." The first half concludes with Wilde forgiving Douglas, for his own sake as much as Douglas's. The second half of the letter traces Wilde's spiritual journey of redemption and fulfilment through his prison reading. He realised that his ordeal had filled his soul with the fruit of experience, however bitter it tasted at the time.

... I wanted to eat of the fruit of all the trees in the garden of the world ...
And so, indeed, I went out, and so I lived. My only mistake was that I confined myself so exclusively to the trees of what seemed to me the sun-lit side of the garden, and shunned the other side for its shadow and its gloom.

Wilde was released from prison on 19 May 1897 and sailed that evening for Dieppe, France. He never returned to the UK.

On his release, he gave the manuscript to Ross, who may or may not have carried out Wilde's instructions to send a copy to Douglas (who later denied having received it). The letter was partially published in 1905 as *De Profundis*; its complete and correct publication first occurred in 1962 in *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*.

Oscar Wilde & France

Oscar went to France and never set foot in England again.

He spent two years in Dieppe and wrote a letter to the press telling of the cruelties of prison life and the evil of incarcerating children under 14. He also spoke of the horror of watching a mentally disabled convict being flogged. The letter resulted directly in the Prisons Act of 1898.

Notes

Wilde soon moved to the little village of Bernaval-sur-Mer where he began his last serious work, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, about the execution of a murderer and celebrating the desire for freedom.

In Bernaval-sur-Mer he was popular with the villagers, including the parish priest. But soon he grew lonely, and eventually when Bosie visited him they went off to Italy where Oscar finished *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*.

Irish writer and dramatist Oscar Wilde (1854 - 1900), 28th May 1889.
(Photo by W. and D. Downey/Hulton Archive/Getty Images)⁶

Irish writer and dramatist Oscar Wilde (1854 - 1900), 28th May 1889.
(Photo by W. and D. Downey/Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

Wilde's life was winding down. In May 1899 he returned to Paris, to the Hotel d'Alsace. He fell into the life of the cafs, begged money from friends, drank absinthe, and grew fat on cheap food. On 30th November 1900, Wilde died of cerebral meningitis at age 46 after being accepted into the Catholic Church the day before. A wit to the end, during his final fever he is reported to have said. "My wallpaper and I are fighting a duel to the death. One or the other of us has to go."

In 1954 Sir Travers Humphreys, who had as a junior barrister taken part in Wilde's trials, wrote: "Reflecting upon the events of nearly 60 years ago one fact is plain beyond argument. The persecution of Oscar Wilde should never have been brought."

Except for Shakespeare, perhaps Wilde is our most quotable writer. Yet more than that, it has been said that his life and work changed the direction of art. He put the artists' vision first, ignoring the claims of conventionality, and drew attention to the hypocrisy and intolerance of his day. By doing so he extended the boundaries of literature and redefined the role of the artist. And through his life and his art he extolled the values of wit, charm, and grace.

1.4 LAST DAYS & DEATH

Though Wilde's health had suffered greatly from the harshness and diet of prison, he had a feeling of spiritual renewal. He immediately wrote to the Society of Jesus requesting a six-month Catholic retreat; when the request was denied, Wilde wept. "I intend to be received into the Catholic Church before long", Wilde told a journalist who asked about his religious intentions.

He spent his last three years impoverished and in exile. He took the name "Sebastian Melmoth", after Saint Sebastian and the titular character of *Melmoth the Wanderer* (a Gothic novel by Charles Maturin, Wilde's great-uncle). Wilde wrote two long letters to the editor of the *Daily Chronicle*, describing the brutal conditions of English prisons and advocating penal reform. His discussion of the dismissal of Warder Martin for giving biscuits to an anaemic child prisoner repeated the themes of the corruption and degeneration of punishment that he had earlier outlined in *The Soul of Man under Socialism*.

Wilde spent mid-1897 with Robert Ross in the seaside village of Berneval-le-Grand in northern France, where he wrote *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, narrating the execution of Charles Thomas Wooldridge, who murdered his wife in a rage at her infidelity. It moves from an objective story-telling to symbolic identification with the prisoners. No attempt is made to assess the justice of the laws which convicted them but rather the poem highlights the brutalisation of the punishment that all convicts share. Wilde juxtaposes the executed man and himself with the line "Yet each man kills the thing he loves". Wilde too was separated from his wife and sons. He adopted the proletarian ballad form and the author was credited as "C33", Wilde's cell number in Reading Gaol. He suggested that it be published in *Reynolds' Magazine*, "because it circulates widely among the criminal classes – to which I now belong – for once I will be read by my peers – a new experience for me". It was an immediate roaring commercial success, going through seven editions in less than two years, only after which "[Oscar Wilde]" was added to the

Notes

title page, though many in literary circles had known Wilde to be the author. It brought him a small amount of money.

Although Douglas had been the cause of his misfortunes, he and Wilde were reunited in August 1897 at Rouen. This meeting was disapproved of by the friends and families of both men. Constance Wilde was already refusing to meet Wilde or allow him to see their sons, though she sent him money – a meagre three pounds a week. During the latter part of 1897, Wilde and Douglas lived together near Naples for a few months until they were separated by their families under the threat of cutting off all funds.

Wilde's final address was at the dingy Hôteld'Alsace (now known as L'Hôtel), on rue des Beaux-Arts in Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Paris. "This poverty really breaks one's heart: it is so sale [filthy], so utterly depressing, so hopeless. Pray do what you can" he wrote to his publisher. He corrected and published *An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the proofs of which, according to Ellmann, show a man "very much in command of himself and of the play" but he refused to write anything else: "I can write, but have lost the joy of writing".

He wandered the boulevards alone and spent what little money he had on alcohol. A series of embarrassing chance encounters with hostile English visitors, or Frenchmen he had known in better days, drowned his spirit. Soon Wilde was sufficiently confined to his hotel to joke, on one of his final trips outside, "My wallpaper and I are fighting a duel to the death. One of us has got to go". On 12 October 1900 he sent a telegram to Ross: "Terribly weak. Please come". His moods fluctuated; Max Beerbohm relates how their mutual friend Reginald 'Reggie' Turner had found Wilde very depressed after a nightmare. "I dreamt that I had died, and was supping with the dead!" "I am sure", Turner replied, "that you must have been the life and soul of the party." Turner was one of the few of the old circle who remained with Wilde to the end and was at his bedside when he died.

1.4.1 Death

By 25 November 1900 Wilde had developed meningitis, then called "cerebral meningitis". Robbie Ross arrived on 29 November, sent for a priest, and Wilde was conditionally baptised into the Catholic Church by Fr Cuthbert Dunne, a Passionist priest from Dublin, Wilde having been baptised in the Church of Ireland and having moreover a recollection of Catholic baptism as a child, a fact later attested to by the minister of the sacrament, Fr Lawrence Fox. Fr Dunne recorded the baptism,

As the voiture rolled through the dark streets that wintry night, the sad story of Oscar Wilde was in part repeated to me... Robert Ross knelt by the bedside, assisting me as best he could while I administered conditional baptism, and afterwards answering the responses while I gave Extreme Unction to the prostrate man and recited the prayers for the dying. As the man was in a semi-comatose condition, I did not venture to administer the Holy Viaticum; still I must add that he could be roused and was roused from this state in my presence. When roused, he gave signs of being inwardly conscious... Indeed I was fully satisfied that he understood me when told that I was about to receive him into the Catholic Church and gave him the Last Sacraments... And when I repeated close to his ear the Holy Names, the Acts of Contrition, Faith, Hope and Charity, with acts of humble resignation to the Will of God, he tried all through to say the words after me.

Wilde died of meningitis on 30 November 1900. Different opinions are given as to the cause of the disease: Richard Ellmann claimed it was syphilitic; Merlin Holland, Wilde's grandson, thought this to be a misconception, noting that Wilde's meningitis followed a surgical intervention, perhaps a mastoidectomy; Wilde's physicians, Dr Paul Cleiss and A'Court Tucker, reported that the condition stemmed from an old suppuration of the right ear (from the prison injury, see above) treated for several years (une ancienne suppuration de l'oreille droite ailleurs traitement depuis plusieurs années) and made no allusion to syphilis.

1.4.2 Burial

A large rectangular granite tomb. A large, stylised angel leaning forward is carved into the top half of the front. There are a few flowers beside a small plaque at the base. The tomb is surrounded by a protective glass barrier that is covered with graffiti.

The tomb of Oscar Wilde in Père Lachaise Cemetery

Wilde was initially buried in the Cimetière de Bagneux outside Paris; in 1909 his remains were disinterred and transferred to Père Lachaise Cemetery, inside the city. His tomb there was designed by Sir Jacob Epstein. It was commissioned by Robert Ross, who asked for a small compartment to be made for his own ashes, which were duly transferred in 1950. The modernist angel depicted as a relief on the tomb was originally complete with male genitalia, which were initially censored by French Authorities with a golden leaf. The genitals have since been vandalised; their current whereabouts are unknown. In 2000, Leon Johnson, a multimedia artist, installed a silver prosthesis to replace them. In 2011, the tomb was cleaned of the many lipstick marks left there by admirers and a glass barrier was installed to prevent further marks or damage.

The epitaph is a verse from The Ballad of Reading Gaol,

**And alien tears will fill for him
Pity's long-broken urn,
For his mourners will be outcast men,
And outcasts always mourn**

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS II :

Q1. Oscar Wilde was imprisoned for two years after being convicted of this crime.

Answer.....
.....
.....
.....

Q2. How did the years in prison change his view of life?

Answer.....

1.5 LET'S SUM UP

Author Oscar Wilde was known for his acclaimed works including 'The Picture of Dorian Gray' and 'The Importance of Being Earnest,' as well as his brilliant wit, flamboyant style and infamous imprisonment for homosexuality. Author, playwright and poet Oscar Wilde was a popular literary figure in late Victorian England. After graduating from Oxford University, he lectured as a poet, art critic and a leading proponent of the principles of aestheticism. In 1891, he published *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, his only novel which was panned as immoral by Victorian critics, but is now considered one of his most notable works. As a dramatist, many of Wilde's plays were well received including his satirical comedies *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* (1895) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), his most famous play. Unconventional in his writing and life, Wilde's affair with a young man led to his arrest on charges of "gross indecency" in 1895. He was imprisoned for two years and died in poverty three years after his release at the age of 46. Throughout his entire life, Wilde remained deeply committed to the principles of aestheticism, principles that he expounded through his lectures and demonstrated through his works as well as anyone of his era. "All art is at once surface and symbol," Wilde wrote in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. "Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. Those who read the symbol do so at their peril. It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors. Diversity of opinion about a work of art shows that the work is new, complex and vital."

1.6 KEYWORDS

1. marred

blemished by injury or rough wear

"... by all forgot, we rot and rot, / With soul and body **marred**"

2. masquerade

a party of guests wearing costumes and masks

"... shaven head and feet of lead / Make a merry **masquerade**"

3. nard

an aromatic ointment used in antiquity

"... filled the unclean leper's house / With the scent of costliest **nard**"

4. pall

burial garment in which a corpse is wrapped

"... he has a **pall**, this wretched man, / Such as few men can claim"

5. parricide

the murder of your own father or mother

"With iron heel it slays the strong, / The monstrous **parricide**!"

1.7 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- Why was Oscar Wilde known as having a flamboyant style?
- Why was Oscar Wilde publically shamed while he lived, but embraced and elevated to the status of a literary genius and cultural icon after his death?
- What reputation did he gain first in Oxford and then in London?

1.8 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

- Hesketh Pearson, *The Life of Oscar Wilde*, reprinted by Penguin Books, 1985. p. 18.
- "Literary Encyclopedia – Oscar Wilde". Litencyc.com. 25 January 2001. Retrieved 3 April 2009.
- Sandulescu (1994:53)
- McGeachie, James (2004). "Wilde, Sir William Robert Wills (1815–1876)". *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Transcript of Wilde's trial, published online by University of Missouri-Kansas City Law School Archived 23 December 2010 at the Wayback Machine; See also Ellmann (1988:435)
- Old Bailey Proceedings Online (accessed 22 April 2010), Trial of Oscar Fingal O'Flahartie Wills Wilde, Alfred Waterhouse Somerset Taylor. (t18950520-425, 22nd April 1895).
- Turing's Law: Oscar Wilde among 50,000 convicted gay men granted posthumous pardons". *The Daily Telegraph*. 31 January 2017.
- "DEATH OF OSCAR WILDE; He Expires at an Obscure Hotel in the Latin Quarter of Paris. Is Said to Have Died from Meningitis, but There Is a Rumor that He Committed Suicide". *The New York Times*. 1 December 1900. Retrieved 1 June 2018.
- Mason, Stuart (1914; new ed. 1972) *Bibliography of Oscar Wilde*. Rota pub; Haskell House Pub. ISBN 0-8383-1378-7.
- Morley, Sheridan (1976). *Oscar Wilde*. London: Weidenfeld& Nicolson. p. 39. ISBN 978-0-297-77160-9.
- Raby, Peter, ed. (1997). *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*. London: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 978-0-521-47987-5.
- Ransome, Arthur (1912). *Oscar Wilde: A Critical Study*. New York: Mitchell Kennerly.
- Ross, Alex. 8 August 2011 "Deceptive Picture: How Oscar Wilde painted over "Dorian Gray"" *The New Yorker*. Retrieved 3 August 2011.

1.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1 :

Answer 1 : Check Section 1.3

Answer 2 : Check Section 1.3.2

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2 :

Answer 1 : Check Section 1.4

Answer 2 : Check Section 1.4

UNIT: 2 OSCAR WILDE- ANALYSIS OF WORKS AND LITERATURE

STRUCTURE

2.0 Objectives

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Theatrical Career

2.2.1 Salome

2.2.2 Comedies of Society

2.2.3 Queensberry family

2.2.4 The Importance of Being Earnest

2.2.5 A Woman of No Importance

2.2.6 An Ideal Husband

2.2.7 A House of Promogantes

2.3 Trails

2.3.1 Wilde v. Queesberry

2.3.2 Regina v. Wilde

2.4 Biographies

2.5 Let's Sum Up

2.6 Keywords

2.7 Questions for Review

2.8 Suggested Readings and References

2.9 Answer to check your progress

2.0 OBJECTIVE

The objective of the Unit is to study the literary and of Oscar Wilde.

Unit helps to achieve following objectives:

- Introduction about work of Oscar Wilde
- Theatrical career of Oscar Wilde
- Trials
- Biographies

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Journalism and editorship: 1886–89

A tall man rests on a chaise longue, facing the camera. On his knees, which are held together, he holds a slim, richly bound book. He wears knee breeches which feature prominently in the photograph's foreground.

Wilde reclining with *Poems*, by Napoleon Sarony in New York in 1882. Wilde often liked to appear idle, though in fact he worked hard; by the late 1880s he was a father, an editor, and a writer.

Criticism over artistic matters in *The Pall Mall Gazette* provoked a letter in self-defence, and soon Wilde was a contributor to that and other journals during 1885–87. He enjoyed reviewing and journalism; the form suited his style. He could organise and share his views on art, literature and life, yet in a format less tedious than lecturing. Buoyed up, his reviews were largely chatty and positive. Wilde, like his parents before him, also supported the cause of Irish nationalism. When Charles Stewart Parnell was falsely accused of inciting murder, Wilde wrote a series of astute columns defending him in the *Daily Chronicle*.

His flair, having previously been put mainly into socialising, suited journalism and rapidly attracted notice. With his youth nearly over, and a family to support, in mid-1887 Wilde became the editor of *The Lady's World* magazine, his name prominently appearing on the cover. He promptly renamed it as *The Woman's World* and raised its tone, adding serious articles on parenting, culture, and politics, while keeping discussions of fashion and arts. Two pieces of fiction were usually included, one to be read to children, the other for the ladies themselves. Wilde worked hard to solicit good contributions from his wide artistic acquaintance, including those of Lady Wilde and his wife Constance, while his own "Literary and Other Notes" were themselves popular and amusing.

The initial vigour and excitement which he brought to the job began to fade as administration, commuting and office life became tedious. At the

same time as Wilde's interest flagged, the publishers became concerned anew about circulation: sales, at the relatively high price of one shilling, remained low. Increasingly sending instructions to the magazine by letter, Wilde began a new period of creative work and his own column appeared less regularly. In October 1889, Wilde had finally found his voice in prose and, at the end of the second volume, Wilde left *The Woman's World*. The magazine outlasted him by one issue.

If Wilde's period at the helm of the magazine was a mixed success from an organizational point of view, it played a pivotal role in his development as a writer and facilitated his ascent to fame. Whilst Wilde the journalist supplied articles under the guidance of his editors, Wilde the editor was forced to learn to manipulate the literary marketplace on his own terms.

Shorter fiction

Wilde published *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* in 1888, and had been regularly writing fairy stories for magazines. In 1891 he published two more collections, *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories*, and in September *A House of Pomegranates* was dedicated "To Constance Mary Wilde". "The Portrait of Mr. W. H.", which Wilde had begun in 1887, was first published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in July 1889. It is a short story, which reports a conversation, in which the theory that Shakespeare's sonnets were written out of the poet's love of the boy actor "Willie Hughes", is advanced, retracted, and then propounded again. The only evidence for this is two supposed puns within the sonnets themselves.

The anonymous narrator is at first sceptical, then believing, finally flirtatious with the reader: he concludes that "there is really a great deal to be said of the Willie Hughes theory of Shakespeare's sonnets." By the end fact and fiction have melded together. Arthur Ransome wrote that Wilde "read something of himself into Shakespeare's sonnets" and became fascinated with the "Willie Hughes theory" despite the lack of biographical evidence for the historical William Hughes' existence. Instead of writing a short but serious essay on the question, Wilde tossed the theory amongst the three characters of the story, allowing it to unfold

Notes

as background to the plot. The story thus is an early masterpiece of Wilde's combining many elements that interested him: conversation, literature and the idea that to shed oneself of an idea one must first convince another of its truth. Ransome concludes that Wilde succeeds precisely because the literary criticism is unveiled with such a deft touch.

Though containing nothing but "special pleading", it would not, he says "be possible to build an airier castle in Spain than this of the imaginary William Hughes" we continue listening nonetheless to be charmed by the telling. "You must believe in Willie Hughes," Wilde told an acquaintance, "I almost do, myself."

Essays and dialogues

Sheet music cover, 1880s

Wilde, having tired of journalism, had been busy setting out his aesthetic ideas more fully in a series of longer prose pieces which were published in the major literary-intellectual journals of the day. In January 1889, *The Decay of Lying: A Dialogue* appeared in *The Nineteenth Century*, and *Pen, Pencil and Poison*, a satirical biography of Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, in *The Fortnightly Review*, edited by Wilde's friend Frank Harris. Two of Wilde's four writings on aesthetics are dialogues: though Wilde had evolved professionally from lecturer to writer, he retained an oral tradition of sorts. Having always excelled as a wit and raconteur, he often composed by assembling phrases, *bons mots* and witticisms into a longer, cohesive work.

Wilde was concerned about the effect of moralising on art; he believed in art's redemptive, developmental powers: "Art is individualism, and individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force. There lies its immense value. For what it seeks is to disturb monotony of type, slavery of custom, tyranny of habit, and the reduction of man to the level of a machine." In his only political text, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, he argued political conditions should establish this primacy – private property should be abolished, and cooperation should be substituted for competition. At the same time, he stressed that the government most

amenable to artists was no government at all. Wilde envisioned a society where mechanisation has freed human effort from the burden of necessity, effort which can instead be expended on artistic creation. George Orwell summarised, "In effect, the world will be populated by artists, each striving after perfection in the way that seems best to him."

This point of view did not align him with the Fabians, intellectual socialists who advocated using state apparatus to change social conditions, nor did it endear him to the monied classes whom he had previously entertained. Hesketh Pearson, introducing a collection of Wilde's essays in 1950, remarked how *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* had been an inspirational text for revolutionaries in Tsarist Russia but laments that in the Stalinist era "it is doubtful whether there are any uninspected places in which it could now be hidden".

Wilde considered including this pamphlet and *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.*, his essay-story on Shakespeare's sonnets, in a new anthology in 1891, but eventually decided to limit it to purely aesthetic subjects. Intentions packaged revisions of four essays: *The Decay of Lying*, *Pen, Pencil and Poison*, *The Truth of Masks* (first published 1885), and *The Critic as Artist* in two parts. For Pearson the biographer, the essays and dialogues exhibit every aspect of Wilde's genius and character: wit, romancer, talker, lecturer, humanist and scholar and concludes that "no other productions of his have as varied an appeal". 1891 turned out to be Wilde's *annus mirabilis*; apart from his three collections he also produced his only novel.

The Picture of Dorian Gray

The first version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was published as the lead story in the July 1890 edition of Lippincott's *Monthly Magazine*, along with five others. The story begins with a man painting a picture of Gray. When Gray, who has a "face like ivory and rose leaves", sees his finished portrait, he breaks down. Distraught that his beauty will fade while the portrait stays beautiful, he inadvertently makes a Faustian bargain in which only the painted image grows old while he stays beautiful and

young. For Wilde, the purpose of art would be to guide life as if beauty alone were its object. As Gray's portrait allows him to escape the corporeal ravages of his hedonism, Wilde sought to juxtapose the beauty he saw in art with daily life.

Reviewers immediately criticised the novel's decadence and homosexual allusions; The Daily Chronicle for example, called it "unclean", "poisonous", and "heavy with the mephitic odours of moral and spiritual putrefaction". Wilde vigorously responded, writing to the editor of the Scots Observer, in which he clarified his stance on ethics and aesthetics in art – "If a work of art is rich and vital and complete, those who have artistic instincts will see its beauty and those to whom ethics appeal more strongly will see its moral lesson." He nevertheless revised it extensively for book publication in 1891: six new chapters were added, some overtly decadent passages and homo-eroticism excised, and a preface was included consisting of twenty two epigrams, such as "Books are well written, or badly written. That is all."

Contemporary reviewers and modern critics have postulated numerous possible sources of the story, a search Jershua McCormack argues is futile because Wilde "has tapped a root of Western folklore so deep and ubiquitous that the story has escaped its origins and returned to the oral tradition." Wilde claimed the plot was "an idea that is as old as the history of literature but to which I have given a new form". Modern critic Robin McKie considered the novel to be technically mediocre, saying that the conceit of the plot had guaranteed its fame, but the device is never pushed to its full.

2.2 THEATRICAL CAREER

2.2.1 Salomé

The 1891 census records the Wildes' residence at 16 Tite Street, where he lived with his wife Constance and two sons. Wilde though, not

content with being better known than ever in London, returned to Paris in October 1891, this time as a respected writer. He was received at the salons littéraires, including the famous mardis of Stéphane Mallarmé, a renowned symbolist poet of the time. Wilde's two plays during the 1880s, *Vera*; or, *The Nihilists* and *The Duchess of Padua*, had not met with much success. He had continued his interest in the theatre and now, after finding his voice in prose, his thoughts turned again to the dramatic form as the biblical iconography of *Salome* filled his mind. One evening, after discussing depictions of *Salome* throughout history, he returned to his hotel and noticed a blank copybook lying on the desk, and it occurred to him to write in it what he had been saying. The result was a new play, *Salomé*, written rapidly and in French.

A tragedy, it tells the story of *Salome*, the stepdaughter of the tetrarch Herod Antipas, who, to her stepfather's dismay but mother's delight, requests the head of Jokanaan (John the Baptist) on a silver platter as a reward for dancing the Dance of the Seven Veils. When Wilde returned to London just before Christmas the *Paris Echo* referred to him as "le great event" of the season. Rehearsals of the play, starring Sarah Bernhardt, began but the play was refused a licence by the Lord Chamberlain, since it depicted biblical characters. *Salome* was published jointly in Paris and London in 1893, but was not performed until 1896 in Paris, during Wilde's later incarceration.

2.2.2 Comedies Of Society

Wilde, who had first set out to irritate Victorian society with his dress and talking points, then outrage it with *Dorian Gray*, his novel of vice hidden beneath art, finally found a way to critique society on its own terms. *Lady Windermere's Fan* was first performed on 20 February 1892 at St James's Theatre, packed with the cream of society. On the surface a witty comedy, there is subtle subversion underneath: "it concludes with collusive concealment rather than collective disclosure". The audience, like *Lady Windermere*, are forced to soften harsh social codes in favour of a more nuanced view. The play was enormously popular, touring the country for months, but largely trashed by conservative critics. It was

followed by *A Woman of No Importance* in , another Victorian comedy, revolving around the spectre of illegitimate births, mistaken identities and late revelations. Wilde was commissioned to write two more plays and *An Ideal Husband*, written in 1894, followed in January 1895.

Peter Raby said these essentially English plays were well-pitched, "Wilde, with one eye on the dramatic genius of Ibsen, and the other on the commercial competition in London's West End, targeted his audience with adroit precision".

2.2.3 Queensberry Family

In mid-1891 Lionel Johnson introduced Wilde to Lord Alfred Douglas, Johnson's cousin and an undergraduate at Oxford at the time. Known to his family and friends as "Bosie", he was a handsome and spoilt young man. An intimate friendship sprang up between Wilde and Douglas and by 1893 Wilde was infatuated with Douglas and they consorted together regularly in a tempestuous affair. If Wilde was relatively indiscreet, even flamboyant, in the way he acted, Douglas was reckless in public. Wilde, who was earning up to £100 a week from his plays (his salary at *The Woman's World* had been £6), indulged Douglas's every whim: material, artistic or sexual.

Douglas soon initiated Wilde into the Victorian underground of gay prostitution and Wilde was introduced to a series of young working-class male prostitutes from 1892 onwards by Alfred Taylor. These infrequent rendezvous usually took the same form: Wilde would meet the boy, offer him gifts, dine him privately and then take him to a hotel room. Unlike Wilde's idealised, pederastic relations with Ross, John Gray, and Douglas, all of whom remained part of his aesthetic circle, these consorts were uneducated and knew nothing of literature. Soon his public and private lives had become sharply divided; in *De Profundis* he wrote to Douglas that "It was like feasting with panthers; the danger was half the excitement... I did not know that when they were to strike at me it was to be at another's piping and at another's pay."

Douglas and some Oxford friends founded a journal, *The Chameleon*, to which Wilde "sent a page of paradoxes originally destined for the

Saturday Review". "Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young" was to come under attack six months later at Wilde's trial, where he was forced to defend the magazine to which he had sent his work. In any case, it became unique: The Chameleon was not published again.

Lord Alfred's father, the Marquess of Queensberry, was known for his outspoken atheism, brutish manner and creation of the modern rules of boxing. Queensberry, who feuded regularly with his son, confronted Wilde and Lord Alfred about the nature of their relationship several times, but Wilde was able to mollify him. In June 1894, he called on Wilde at 16 Tite Street, without an appointment, and clarified his stance: "I do not say that you are it, but you look it, and pose at it, which is just as bad. And if I catch you and my son again in any public restaurant I will thrash you" to which Wilde responded: "I don't know what the Queensberry rules are, but the Oscar Wilde rule is to shoot on sight". His account in *De Profundis* was less triumphant: "It was when, in my library at Tite Street, waving his small hands in the air in epileptic fury, your father... stood uttering every foul word his foul mind could think of, and screaming the loathsome threats he afterwards with such cunning carried out". Queensberry only described the scene once, saying Wilde had "shown him the white feather", meaning he had acted in a cowardly way. Though trying to remain calm, Wilde saw that he was becoming ensnared in a brutal family quarrel. He did not wish to bear Queensberry's insults, but he knew to confront him could lead to disaster were his liaisons disclosed publicly.

2.2.4 The Importance Of Being Earnest

Wilde's final play again returns to the theme of switched identities: the play's two protagonists engage in "bunburying" (the maintenance of alternative personas in the town and country) which allows them to escape Victorian social mores. *Earnest* is even lighter in tone than Wilde's earlier comedies. While their characters often rise to serious themes in moments of crisis, *Earnest* lacks the by-now stock Wildean characters: there is no "woman with a past", the principals are neither villainous nor cunning, simply idle cultivés, and the idealistic young

Notes

women are not that innocent. Mostly set in drawing rooms and almost completely lacking in action or violence, Earnest lacks the self-conscious decadence found in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Salome*.

The play, now considered Wilde's masterpiece, was rapidly written in Wilde's artistic maturity in late 1894. It was first performed on 14 February 1895, at St James's Theatre in London, Wilde's second collaboration with George Alexander, the actor-manager. Both author and producer assiduously revised, prepared and rehearsed every line, scene and setting in the months before the premiere, creating a carefully constructed representation of late-Victorian society, yet simultaneously mocking it. During rehearsal Alexander requested that Wilde shorten the play from four acts to three, which the author did. Premieres at St James's seemed like "brilliant parties", and the opening of *The Importance of Being Earnest* was no exception. Allan Aynesworth (who played Algernon) recalled to Hesketh Pearson, "In my fifty-three years of acting, I never remember a greater triumph than [that] first night." Earnest's immediate reception as Wilde's best work to date finally crystallised his fame into a solid artistic reputation. *The Importance of Being Earnest* remains his most popular play.

Wilde's professional success was mirrored by an escalation in his feud with Queensberry. Queensberry had planned to insult Wilde publicly by throwing a bouquet of rotting vegetables onto the stage; Wilde was tipped off and had Queensberry barred from entering the theatre. Fifteen weeks later Wilde was in prison.

2.3.5 A Woman Of No Importance

In *A Woman of No Importance*, money is presented as unlimited due to the majority of the characters belonging to the luxurious aristocracy, who rely on the fortune provided by their predecessors so they have gotten away with never working a day in their lives. However, Mrs. Arbuthnot has had to struggle through life in order to supply herself and her son, Gerald, the basics in life. This symbolises the rest of the population of Victorian Britain, who have had to work hard whilst the upper classes are

given an unfair advantage, highlighting the massive divide in Victorian society at that time.

Innocence in *A Woman of No Importance* is presented in the character of Hester. She is an American girl who is foreign to the beliefs of the British aristocracy and their uptight morals and etiquette. Hester is often taken aback by their views and so are the others by her. She represents the new woman emerging of the new world and due to this is considered naïve and has a hidden agenda. However, she finds the others far too materialistic and inclined to judge people too harshly. This replicates the beliefs held by the aristocracy in Victorian Britain.

2.2.6 An Ideal Husband

Many of the themes of *An Ideal Husband* were influenced by the situation Oscar Wilde found himself in during the early 1890s. Stressing the need to be forgiven for past sins, and the irrationality of ruining lives of great value to society because of people's hypocritical reactions to those sins, Wilde may have been speaking to his own situation, and his own fears regarding his affair (still secret). Other themes include the position of women in society. In a climactic moment Gertrude Chiltern "learns her lesson" and repeats Lord Goring's advice "A man's life is of more value than a woman's." Often criticised by contemporary theatre analysts as overt sexism, the idea being expressed in the monologue is that women, despite serving as the source of morality in Victorian era marriages, should be less judgmental of their husbands' mistakes because of complexities surrounding the balance that husbands of that era had to keep between their domestic and their worldly obligations. Further, the script plays against both sides of feminism and sexism as, for example, Lord Caversham, exclaims near the end that Mabel displays "a good deal of common sense" after concluding earlier that "Common sense is the privilege of our sex."

A third theme expresses anti-upper class sentiments. Lady Basildon, and Lady Markby are consistently portrayed as absurdly two-faced, saying one thing one moment, then turning around to say the exact opposite (to great comic effect) to someone else. The overall portrayal of the upper

class in England displays an attitude of hypocrisy and strict observance of arbitrary rules.

2.2.7 A House Of Pomegrates

A House of Pomegranates is a collection of fairy tales, written by Oscar Wilde, that was published in 1891 as a second collection for *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888). Wilde once said that this collection was "intended neither for the British child nor the British public."

The stories included in this collection are as follows:

- The Young King
- The Birthday of the Infanta
- The Fisherman and his Soul
- The Star-Child

The Young King

"The Young King" tells the story of the illegitimate shepherd son of the recently dead king's daughter of an unnamed country. Being his only heir, the sixteen-year-old is brought to the palace to await his accession. There, he is in awe of the splendor of his new home and anxiously awaits his new crown, scepter, and robe which are soon to be delivered to him for his coronation in the morning.

During the night, he has three nightmares, one for each element of his raiment, showing him where they came from and how they were obtained. The first dream shows a group of starving, haggard peasants - including children - working at looms to weave his robe where they receive little payment or food despite being worked so hard. The second dream shows a group of slaves on a ship where the youngest slave has his ears and nostrils filled with wax and is sent underwater to find pearls for the young King's scepter but dies after finding the best pearl. The third dream is the most elaborate and deals with the source of his new crown's rubies. In it, men excavate a dry riverbed in a tropical jungle, while overlooking them, the god Death tries to bargain with the goddess Avarice for a single grain of her corn. Each time Avarice refuses, Death

summons Ague, Fever and Plague to kill one third of her servants, leaving the place devoid of life. Avarice flees in terror and Death leaves to attend to his duties caused by war and famine around the world.

On the coronation day, the Young King refuses the costume brought to him, and makes a crown from a loop of dried briars, a scepter from his shepherd's staff, and wears his threadbare tunic in place of the royal robe. On his way to the cathedral, the nobles rebuke him for bringing shame to their class, the peasants for trying to deprive them of work, and the bishop for foolishly trying to take all the world's suffering upon himself. As he approaches the altar of the cathedral alone and prays, his staff-scepter blossoms with pearly white lilies, his dry briar-crown with ruby-red roses and his robe is coloured gold by the rays of sunlight streaming through the stained-glass windows; the people fall on their knees in reverence, rioting noblemen bow and swear fealty to him and the awestruck bishop declares that a much higher being (God) has officially crowned the young king.

The Birthday of the Infanta

"The Birthday of the Infanta" is about a hunchbacked dwarf, found in the woods by courtiers of the King of Spain. The hunchback's father sells him to the palace for the amusement of the king's daughter, the Infanta, on her twelfth birthday.

Her birthday is the only time she is allowed to mingle with other children, and she much enjoys the many festivities arranged to mark it, especially the Dwarf's performance. He dances, as he did in the woods, thoroughly unaware of his audience's laughing at him. She insists on his performing a second time for her after dinner.

The Dwarf mistakenly believes that the Infanta must love him, and tries to find her, passing through a garden where the flowers, sundial, and fish ridicule him, but birds and lizards do not. He finds his way inside the palace, and searches through rooms hoping to find the Infanta, but finding them all devoid of life.

Notes

Eventually, he stumbles upon a grotesque monster that mimicks his every move in one of the rooms. When the realisation comes that it was his own reflection, he knows then that the Infanta did not love him, but was laughing out of mockery, and he falls to the floor, kicking and screaming. The Infanta and the other children chance upon him and, imagining it to be another act, laugh and applaud while his flailing grows more and more weak before he stops moving altogether. When the Infanta demands more entertainment, a servant tries to rouse him, only to discover that he has died of a broken heart. Telling this to the Infanta, she speaks the last line of the story "For the future, let those who come to play with me have no hearts."

The Fisherman and his Soul

In "The Fisherman and his Soul", a young Fisherman finds a Mermaid and wants nothing more than to marry her, but he cannot, for one cannot live underwater if one has a soul. He goes to his priest, but the priest tells him his soul is his most precious possession, and the soulless mermen are lost. He tries to sell it to merchants, who tell him it is not worth anything. He goes to a witch, who tells him his soul is his shadow, and says how it can be cut away with a viper-skin knife after he dances with her.

After cutting his shadow and soul free from his body, his Soul tells him that the world is cruel and asks to take with him his heart to allay his fears. The Fisherman, however, refuses to give his Soul his heart, because his love needs it, and he sends the Soul away and joins his Mermaid under the sea.

Each year that passed, the Soul comes to the Fisherman to tell him what he has done in his absence. Each year, he travels in a different direction and meets different people from distant cultures, and each time, he comes into the possession of a magical object, but the Fisherman values love greater than everything the Soul tried to tempt him with. He first talks of the Mirror of Wisdom, which is worshipped as a 'God' in the East, then the Ring of Riches from an Emperor who was willing to give his whole treasury to the Soul rather than this after the Soul survived all his attacks.

The third year, the Soul tells the Fisherman about a nearby city where a woman dances barefooted. Deciding that, since it is so near and he could easily come back to his legless Mermaid, he agreed to go with the Soul to see her dance. Rising up from the water, he and his Soul are reunited. Passing through cities on the way, the Soul tells the Fisherman to do things: in the first, he tells him to steal a silver cup; in the second, to beat a child; in the third to kill and rob the man in whose house they were guests. The Fisherman confronted his Soul, who reminds him that he had not given him a heart. The Fisherman tries to cut away his Soul again, but discovers that, once reunited, they could never again be parted.

Returning to the shore, the Fisherman built a shelter near the water and calls the Mermaid daily, but she never came. After years pass, the lifeless body of the Mermaid washes ashore, and the Fisherman held it while the violent waves enveloped him.

The Priest, finding the drowned Fisherman cradling the dead Mermaid, pronounces them accursed and has them buried in an unmarked grave in the corner of a field, and refuses to bless the water as was his intent to do. Three years later, the Priest goes to the flower-covered altar, prepared to give a sermon on God's vengeful wrath, but, for reasons he cannot explain, he cannot do so and instead spoke of God's love. Asking the deacons where the flowers came from, they tell him they came from the corner of the field. The next day, the Priest blesses the water, but the flowers never grew again and the mermen move to a different bay.

The Star-Child

"The Star-Child" is the story of an infant boy found abandoned in the woods by a poor woodcutter, who pities him and takes him in. He grows up to be exceedingly beautiful, but vain, cruel, and arrogant, believing himself to be the divine child of the stars. He lords over the other children, who follow him devotedly, and takes pleasure in torturing the forest animals and village beggars alike.

Notes

One day, a beggar woman, emaciated, haggard and with bleeding feet, arrives in the village in search of her lost son, who the Star-Child is revealed to be. However, he scorns her and sends her away, and in doing so, is transformed into a loathsome cross between a toad and a snake as a punishment. His followers abandon him, and he sets off to seek forgiveness from his mother. He also repents his cruelty and asks forgiveness from the animals he had tortured.

At length, he comes to a city, where he is captured and sold into slavery. His master, a malevolent sorcerer, treats him cruelly and gives him three tasks which he must complete. First, he sends him to find a piece of white gold hidden in the forest. The Star-Child searches all day, but cannot find it. Upon returning to the city, he sees a rabbit caught in a trap and stops to free him. In gratitude, the rabbit shows him where the gold is and the Star-Child happily takes it. However, returning with the gold, an ailing beggar calls to him that he will surely starve unless he can give him money for food. The Star-Child gives him the piece of gold, and his master beats him and gives him neither food nor water that night.

For the second task, he is told to go find a piece of yellow gold hidden in the forest. Again, the rabbit shows him where it is, and again, the beggar meets him at the gate, and again, the Star-Child gives him the gold. The sorcerer beats him and chains him up.

For the final task, his master tells him that unless he finds the hidden piece of red gold, he will beat him to death. The rabbit shows him where the gold is hidden, and he returns to the city with it. Along the way, he again meets the beggar and gives him the gold, deciding it means more to him than it does to himself.

Upon entering the city, everyone awaits him to crown him the new king, and he discovers the city's present rulers to be his mother, the beggar woman, and his father, the beggar he had given the gold pieces to. At that point also, he is transformed to his former beautiful self. The Star-Child embraces his parents, has the wicked sorcerer banished and endows riches upon his foster father and his family. At the story's end, we are told of his kind, loving, and charitable reign, but that it only lasted for three years, and the king that followed him was cruel and evil.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS I :

- 3. Q1. How many comedies did Wilde write? List them. Which is his most famous one ?

Answer.....
.....
.....
.....

Q2. Write a short introduction about the A House of Pomegrates by Oscar Wilde.

Answer.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2.3 TRIALS

A rectangular calling card printed with "Marquess of Queensberry" in copperplate script.

The Marquess of Queensberry's calling card with the handwritten offending inscription "For Oscar Wilde posing Somdomite [sic]". The card was marked as exhibit 'A' in Wilde's libel action.

2.3.1 Wilde V. Queensberry

On 18 February 1895, the Marquess left his calling card at Wilde's club, the Albemarle, inscribed: "For Oscar Wilde, posing somdomite" [sic]. Wilde, encouraged by Douglas and against the advice of his friends, initiated a private prosecution against Queensberry for libel, since the note amounted to a public accusation that Wilde had committed the crime of sodomy.

Queensberry was arrested for criminal libel; a charge carrying a possible sentence of up to two years in prison. Under the 1843 Libel Act, Queensberry could avoid conviction for libel only by demonstrating that

Notes

his accusation was in fact true, and furthermore that there was some "public benefit" to having made the accusation openly. Queensberry's lawyers thus hired private detectives to find evidence of Wilde's homosexual liaisons.

Wilde's friends had advised him against the prosecution at a Saturday Review meeting at the Café Royal on 24 March 1895; Frank Harris warned him that "they are going to prove sodomy against you" and advised him to flee to France. Wilde and Douglas walked out in a huff, Wilde saying "it is at such moments as these that one sees who are one's true friends". The scene was witnessed by George Bernard Shaw who recalled it to Arthur Ransome a day or so before Ransome's trial for libelling Douglas in 1913. To Ransome it confirmed what he had said in his 1912 book on Wilde; that Douglas's rivalry for Wilde with Robbie Ross and his arguments with his father had resulted in Wilde's public disaster; as Wilde wrote in *De Profundis*. Douglas lost his case. Shaw included an account of the argument between Harris, Douglas and Wilde in the preface to his play *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*.

The libel trial became a cause célèbre as salacious details of Wilde's private life with Taylor and Douglas began to appear in the press. A team of private detectives had directed Queensberry's lawyers, led by Edward Carson QC, to the world of the Victorian underground. Wilde's association with blackmailers and male prostitutes, cross-dressers and homosexual brothels was recorded, and various persons involved were interviewed, some being coerced to appear as witnesses since they too were accomplices to the crimes of which Wilde was accused.

A semi-detached red-brick Georgian house, with a small blue plaque on the wall.

The trial opened on 3 April 1895 before Justice Richard Henn Collins amid scenes of near hysteria both in the press and the public galleries. The extent of the evidence massed against Wilde forced him to declare meekly, "I am the prosecutor in this case". Wilde's lawyer, Sir Edward George Clarke, opened the case by pre-emptively asking Wilde about

two suggestive letters Wilde had written to Douglas, which the defence had in its possession. He characterised the first as a "prose sonnet" and admitted that the "poetical language" might seem strange to the court but claimed its intent was innocent. Wilde stated that the letters had been obtained by blackmailers who had attempted to extort money from him, but he had refused, suggesting they should take the £60 (equal to £6,800 today) offered, "unusual for a prose piece of that length". He claimed to regard the letters as works of art rather than something of which to be ashamed.

Carson, a fellow Dubliner who had attended Trinity College, Dublin at the same time as Wilde, cross-examined Wilde on how he perceived the moral content of his works. Wilde replied with characteristic wit and flippancy, claiming that works of art are not capable of being moral or immoral but only well or poorly made, and that only "brutes and illiterates", whose views on art "are incalculably stupid", would make such judgements about art. Carson, a leading barrister, diverged from the normal practice of asking closed questions. Carson pressed Wilde on each topic from every angle, squeezing out nuances of meaning from Wilde's answers, removing them from their aesthetic context and portraying Wilde as evasive and decadent. While Wilde won the most laughs from the court, Carson scored the most legal points. To undermine Wilde's credibility, and to justify Queensberry's description of Wilde as a "posing somdomite", Carson drew from the witness an admission of his capacity for "posing", by demonstrating that he had lied about his age on oath. Playing on this, he returned to the topic throughout his cross-examination.[Carson also tried to justify Queensberry's characterization by quoting from Wilde's novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, referring in particular to a scene in the second chapter, in which Lord Henry Wotton explains his decadent philosophy to Dorian, an "innocent young man", in Carson's words.

Carson then moved to the factual evidence and questioned Wilde about his friendships with younger, lower-class men. Wilde admitted being on a first-name basis and lavishing gifts upon them, but insisted that nothing

untoward had occurred and that the men were merely good friends of his. Carson repeatedly pointed out the unusual nature of these relationships and insinuated that the men were prostitutes. Wilde replied that he did not believe in social barriers, and simply enjoyed the society of young men. Then Carson asked Wilde directly whether he had ever kissed a certain servant boy, Wilde responded, "Oh, dear no. He was a particularly plain boy – unfortunately ugly – I pitied him for it." Carson pressed him on the answer, repeatedly asking why the boy's ugliness was relevant. Wilde hesitated, then for the first time became flustered: "You sting me and insult me and try to unnerve me; and at times one says things flippantly when one ought to speak more seriously."

In his opening speech for the defence, Carson announced that he had located several male prostitutes who were to testify that they had had sex with Wilde. On the advice of his lawyers, Wilde dropped the prosecution. Queensberry was found not guilty, as the court declared that his accusation that Wilde was "posing as a Somdomite [sic]" was justified, "true in substance and in fact". Under the Libel Act 1843, Queensberry's acquittal rendered Wilde legally liable for the considerable expenses Queensberry had incurred in his defence, which left Wilde bankrupt.

2.3.2 Regina V. Wilde

After Wilde left the court, a warrant for his arrest was applied for on charges of sodomy and gross indecency. Robbie Ross found Wilde at the Cadogan Hotel, Pont Street, Knightsbridge, with Reginald Turner; both men advised Wilde to go at once to Dover and try to get a boat to France; his mother advised him to stay and fight. Wilde, lapsing into inaction, could only say, "The train has gone. It's too late." On 6 April 1895, Wilde was arrested for "gross indecency" under Section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885, a term meaning homosexual acts not amounting to buggery (an offence under a separate statute). At Wilde's instruction, Ross and Wilde's butler forced their way into the bedroom and library of 16 Tite Street, packing some personal effects,

manuscripts, and letters. Wilde was then imprisoned on remand at Holloway where he received daily visits from Douglas.

Events moved quickly and his prosecution opened on 26 April 1895, before Mr Justice Charles. Wilde pleaded not guilty. He had already begged Douglas to leave London for Paris, but Douglas complained bitterly, even wanting to give evidence; he was pressed to go and soon fled to the Hotel du Monde. Fearing persecution, Ross and many others also left the United Kingdom during this time. Under cross examination Wilde was at first hesitant, then spoke eloquently:

Charles Gill (prosecuting): What is "the love that dare not speak its name"?

Wilde: "The love that dare not speak its name" in this century is such a great affection of an elder for a younger man as there was between David and Jonathan, such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy, and such as you find in the sonnets of Michelangelo and Shakespeare. It is that deep spiritual affection that is as pure as it is perfect. It dictates and pervades great works of art, like those of Shakespeare and Michelangelo, and those two letters of mine, such as they are. It is in this century misunderstood, so much misunderstood that it may be described as "the love that dare not speak its name", and on that account of it I am placed where I am now. It is beautiful, it is fine, it is the noblest form of affection. There is nothing unnatural about it. It is intellectual, and it repeatedly exists between an older and a younger man, when the older man has intellect, and the younger man has all the joy, hope and glamour of life before him. That it should be so, the world does not understand. The world mocks at it, and sometimes puts one in the pillory for it.

This response was counter-productive in a legal sense as it only served to reinforce the charges of homosexual behaviour.

The trial ended with the jury unable to reach a verdict. Wilde's counsel, Sir Edward Clarke, was finally able to get a magistrate to allow Wilde

and his friends to post bail. The Reverend Stewart Headlam put up most of the £5,000 surety required by the court, having disagreed with Wilde's treatment by the press and the courts. Wilde was freed from Holloway and, shunning attention, went into hiding at the house of Ernest and Ada Leveson, two of his firm friends. Edward Carson approached Frank Lockwood QC, the Solicitor General and asked "Can we not let up on the fellow now?" Lockwood answered that he would like to do so, but feared that the case had become too politicised to be dropped.

The final trial was presided over by Mr Justice Wills. On 25 May 1895 Wilde and Alfred Taylor were convicted of gross indecency and sentenced to two years' hard labour. The judge described the sentence, the maximum allowed, as "totally inadequate for a case such as this", and that the case was "the worst case I have ever tried". Wilde's response "And I? May I say nothing, my Lord?" was drowned out in cries of "Shame" in the courtroom.

2.4 BIOGRAPHIES

A low rectangular public monument, with a bust of Wilde's face built into one raised end, at the other at seat that one straddles to experience being in conversation with Wilde.

A Conversation with Oscar Wilde – a civic monument to Wilde by Maggi Hambling, on Adelaide Street, near Trafalgar Square, London

Wilde's life has been the subject of numerous biographies since his death. The earliest were memoirs by those who knew him: often they are personal or impressionistic accounts which can be good character sketches, but are sometimes factually unreliable. Frank Harris, his friend and editor, wrote a biography, *Oscar Wilde: His Life and Confessions* (1916); though prone to exaggeration and sometimes factually inaccurate, it offers a good literary portrait of Wilde. Lord Alfred Douglas wrote two books about his relationship with Wilde. *Oscar Wilde and Myself* (1914), largely ghost-written by T. W. H. Crosland, vindictively reacted to Douglas's discovery that *De Profundis* was addressed to him and defensively tried to distance him from Wilde's scandalous reputation. Both authors later regretted their work. Later, in

Oscar Wilde: A Summing Up (1939) and his Autobiography he was more sympathetic to Wilde. Of Wilde's other close friends, Robert Sherard; Robert Ross, his literary executor; and Charles Ricketts variously published biographies, reminiscences or correspondence. The first more or less objective biography of Wilde came about when Hesketh Pearson wrote *Oscar Wilde: His Life and Wit* (1946). In 1954 Wilde's son Vyvyan Holland published his memoir *Son of Oscar Wilde*, which recounts the difficulties Wilde's wife and children faced after his imprisonment. It was revised and updated by Merlin Holland in 1989.

Oscar Wilde, a critical study by Arthur Ransome was published in 1912. The book only briefly mentioned Wilde's life, but subsequently Ransome (and The Times Book Club) were sued for libel by Lord Alfred Douglas. In April 1913 Douglas lost the libel action after a reading of *De Profundis* refuted his claims.

Richard Ellmann wrote his 1987 biography *Oscar Wilde*, for which he posthumously won a National (USA) Book Critics Circle Award in 1988 and a Pulitzer Prize in 1989. The book was the basis for the 1997 film *Wilde*, directed by Brian Gilbert and starring Stephen Fry as the title character.

Neil McKenna's 2003 biography, *The Secret Life of Oscar Wilde*, offers an exploration of Wilde's sexuality. Often speculative in nature, it was widely criticised for its pure conjecture and lack of scholarly rigour. Thomas Wright's *Oscar's Books* (2008) explores Wilde's reading from his childhood in Dublin to his death in Paris. After tracking down many books that once belonged to Wilde's Tite Street library (dispersed at the time of his trials), Wright was the first to examine Wilde's marginalia.

Later on, I think everyone will recognise his achievements; his plays and essays will endure. Of course, you may think with others that his personality and conversation were far more wonderful than anything he wrote, so that his written works give only a pale reflection of his power.

Notes

Perhaps that is so, and of course, it will be impossible to reproduce what is gone forever.

Robert Ross, 23 December 1900.

In 2018, Matthew Sturgis' "Oscar: A Life," was published in London. The book incorporates rediscovered letters and other documents and is the most extensively researched biography of Wilde to appear since 1988.

Parisian literati, also produced several biographies and monographs on him. André Gide wrote *In Memoriam, Oscar Wilde* and Wilde also features in his journals. Thomas Louis, who had earlier translated books on Wilde into French, produced his own *L'esprit d'Oscar Wilde* in 1920. Modern books include Philippe Jullian's *Oscar Wilde*, and *L'affaire Oscar Wilde, ou, Du danger de laisser la justice mettre le nez dans nos draps* (*The Oscar Wilde Affair, or, On the Danger of Allowing Justice to put its Nose in our Sheets*) by Odon Vallet, a French religious historian.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS II :

Q1. Write a short note on trial Wilde v. Queensberry.

Answer.....
.....
.....
.....

Q2. Write a short note on trial Regina v. Wilde.

Answer.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2.5 LET'S SUM UP

Author playwright and poet Oscar Wilde was a popular literary figure in late Victorian England. He published *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, his only novel which was panned as immoral by Victorian critics, but is now considered one of his most notable works. As a dramatist, many of Wilde's plays were well received including his satirical comedies *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* (1895) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), his most famous play. "All art is at once surface and symbol," Wilde wrote in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. "Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. Those who read the symbol do so at their peril. It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors."

2.6 KEYWORDS

1. brackish

slightly salty

"The **brackish** water that we drink / Creeps with a loathsome slime"

2. casque

any armor for the head; usually ornate without a visor

"... the sky above my head became / Like a **casque** of scorching steel"

3. changeling

a child secretly exchanged for another in infancy

"... / Those witless men who dare / To try to rear the **changeling** Hope /
In the cave of black Despair"

4. contrite

feeling or expressing pain or sorrow for sins or offenses

"... a broken and a **contrite** heart / The Lord will not despise"

5. fawning

attempting to win favor by flattery

"... with subtle sneer, and **fawning** leer, / Each helped us at our prayers"

2.7 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- What are the dominant themes/preoccupation of late Victorian and Edwardian fiction?
- What were the main topics about which Oscar Wilde wrote? Was he interested in youth and the concept of staying young and beautiful?
- How does Oscar Wilde explore gender identity in his society comedies?
- How did the new aesthetic ideas from France influence Oscar Wilde?

2.8 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

- Ken Bullock. "Wilde's Humorous An Ideal Husband Staged by Cal Shakes". Berkeley Daily Planet, 17 July 2008.
- "An Ideal Husband Pitlochry review", The Guardian, 13 September 2010.
- A House of Pomegranates with illustrations by Jessie M. King (HTML)
- A House of Pomegranates Librivox audio recording
- "A Woman of No Importance by Oscar Wilde". Agora-Kolleg. AGORA. Retrieved 13 October 2014.
- Richard Ellmann, Oscar Wilde, p. 360.
- Frankel, Nicholas (2017). Oscar Wilde: The Unrepentant Years. Harvard University Press. p. 34. ISBN 978-0-674-98202-4.
- Belford 2000, p. 251.

- The Autobiography of Arthur Ransome pp 151–152 (1976, Jonathan Cape, London) ISBN 0-224-01245-2

2.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1 :

Answer 1 : Check Section 2.3.2

Answer 2 : Check Section 2.3.7

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2 :

Answer 1 : Check Section 2.4.1

Answer 2 : Check Section 2.4.2

UNIT: 3 THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST : ANALYSIS OF ACTS

STRUCTURE

3.0 Objective

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Character in play

3.3 Act I (Summary & Analysis)

3.4 Act II (Summary & Analysis)

3.5 Act III (Summary & Analysis)

3.6 Let's Sum Up

3.7 Keywords

3.8 Question to review

3.9 Suggestive Reading and References

3.10 Answers to Check your progress

3.0 OBJECTIVE

In this chapter you can get to know about the Act's in play (I, II, III), There summary and analysis.

Also one can get to learn about the characters in this play.

Its helps to achieve the following objective:

- Gives the summary of the play
- Provide the detailed analysis if the plat
- Give the detail of the characters

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* opened at the St. James's Theatre in London on February 14, 1895, only a month after Wilde's previous success, *An Ideal Husband*. The packed-in audience rollicked with laughter at the on-stage caricatures. Considered Wilde's best play, many hail it as the greatest stage comedy of all time.

Part of *The Importance of Being Earnest*'s success comes from Wilde's seemingly infinite supply of piquant epigrams. Though some of the concise, often paradoxical statements refer to contemporary events (the state of 19th-century French drama, for instance), most are universal, reflections on beauty, art, men, women, and class; they are endlessly quotable and continue to delight audiences with their blend of sophistication and absurdity.

One feature of epigrams which ensure their durability is that they can be separated from the play's narrative. Epigrams have little effect on the story because they encapsulate many of Wilde's beliefs on how art should function: above all, art should be beautiful and serve little use. The epigram is the epitome of this ideal; beautiful in its elegant construction, it is also dramatically useless to the play.

Beyond reflecting on beauty, the play is also a masterful send-up of Victorian manners, especially in regards to marriage and morality. Marriage had long been an important issue in English literature, and Wilde exposed its manipulative use as a social tool of advancement; except for Miss Prism, all the women in the play have ulterior motives when it comes to romance. As for morality, Wilde critiqued the starchy facade of politeness he observed in society; he details the "shallow mask of manner," as Cecily calls it, that aristocratic Victorians wore.

One of the chief sources of humor in *The Importance of Being Earnest* is the characters' confused sense of values. Wilde described the play as "exquisitely trivial, a delicate bubble of fancy, and it has its philosophy that we should treat all the trivial things of life seriously, and all the serious things of life with sincere and studied triviality." Wilde directed

Notes

his actors to speak all their lines in deadly earnest, without signaling to the audience that they were in on the joke. While it is in essence a comedy of manners, the play also uses overtly farcical techniques to downplay its seriousness, and the audience is willing to forgive the characters' irresponsibility and various indiscretions.

Within the play's framework of false identities, Wilde also planted several possible allusions to the male characters' homosexuality. By the time he wrote *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Wilde was leading a dual life as a married man and an active homosexual. The play's original audience is reputed to have howled at the inside references to London's homosexual subculture. Unfortunately, the heady success of *Earnest* was short-lived; the Marquess of Queensbury, father of Wilde's young lover, Lord Alfred Douglas ("Bosie"), showed up to the opening night. Though he was barred entrance, Wilde's infamous trial began soon after, and his life and career began to unravel.

Algernon Moncrieff prepares for the arrival of his aunt, Lady Bracknell, and her daughter, Gwendolen, in his stylish London flat in 1895. His butler, Lane, brings in "Ernest Worthing" (who is listed as "John Worthing" in the cast list and "Jack" in the body of the play, although both Lane and Algernon believe his name is Ernest), who has just returned from the country. Jack reveals he has come to London to propose to Gwendolen. Algernon ridicules the notion of marriage, and says that before Jack can marry Gwendolen, he has to clear up the issue of Cecily. Algernon orders Lane to bring in Jack's cigarette case and shows the inscription: "From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack." Jack says his name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country. Algernon says he has always suspected Jack was a "Bunburyist," and now he has proof.

Jack explains that Thomas Cardew, who adopted him, willed Jack to be guardian to his granddaughter, Cecily. Cecily now lives at Jack's place in the country under the guidance of her governess, Miss Prism. Since Jack must maintain a high level of morality to set an example, he needs an excuse to get into town. He has invented a ne'er-do-well younger brother named Ernest who lives in Albany, and whose problems frequently

require Jack's attendance. Algernon confesses that he has invented an invalid in the country, Bunbury, for when he needs to get out of town. Jack insists that he is through with "Ernest," but Algernon maintains that he will need him more than ever if he marries.

Lady Bracknell and Gwendolen arrive. Algernon tells Lady Bracknell that he will be unable to attend her dinner tonight, as Bunbury is ill. They go into the music room. Jack confesses his feelings to Gwendolen, and she admits that she likes him, too, especially since she has always wanted to love someone named Ernest. Jack asks if she would still love him if his name were not Ernest. She would not, she maintains. He proposes to her, and she accepts. Lady Bracknell comes in, and Gwendolen informs her of their engagement. Lady Bracknell says that only she or her father can engage Gwendolen, and orders her to wait in the carriage. After she leaves, Lady Bracknell learns from Jack that he was an orphan, found in a handbag on a train. She is aghast and says she will not allow her daughter to marry him. She leaves and Algernon enters.

Jack tells Algernon what happened, and promises to "kill off" his brother Ernest later in the week. Algernon expresses interest in meeting Cecily, but Jack does not want this to happen, as she is young and pretty. Gwendolen returns. She tells Algernon to turn his back. She asks Jack his address in the country, and Algernon slyly writes this down and checks a train timetable. Gwendolen promises to write Jack daily when he returns to the countryside, and Jack escorts her out. Algernon informs Lane that he will be going Bunburying tomorrow.

In the garden at Jack's country house, Miss Prism and Cecily discuss Jack's seemingly serious demeanor; Miss Prism believes it is due to his anxiety over his reckless brother. Dr. Chasuble enters the garden. He and Miss Prism leave for a walk together. Merriman, their butler, announces the arrival of Ernest Worthing. Algernon enters, pretending to be Ernest. He and Cecily briefly discuss his "wicked" reputation. When he learns that Jack will be back Monday afternoon, Algernon announces that he must leave Monday morning. He flirts with Cecily and they exit into the house.

Notes

Miss Prism and Chasuble return. She urges him to get married to a mature lady. Jack enters the garden, dressed in black. He tells Miss Prism he has returned earlier than expected, and explains that he is dressed in black for his brother, who died in Paris last night. Jack asks Chasuble if he would christen him this afternoon. He agrees, and Cecily emerges from the house. She tells him that his brother is in the dining room; Jack says he doesn't have a brother. She runs into the house and brings out Algernon. Jack refuses to shake Algernon's hand, but Cecily says that "Ernest" has been telling him about his friend Bunbury, and that someone who takes care of an invalid must have some good in him. Everyone but Jack and Algernon leaves. Jack orders Merriman to get the dogcart, as Ernest has been called back to town (he wants to get rid of Algernon). Jack tells Algernon he must leave, while Algernon expresses an interest in Cecily. Jack exits.

Cecily enters the garden. Merriman tells Algernon that the dogcart is ready, but Cecily says it can wait. Algernon compliments Cecily to her great delight. She then tells Merriman that the dogcart can come back next week. He asks Cecily to marry him, and she points out that they have been engaged for three months. "Ever since [she] heard of Jack's wicked brother Ernest" she has loved him. Cecily shows him the box of letters he "wrote" to her (which she really wrote to herself). She also admits that she loves him because his name is Ernest. Upon promptin, she doubts she would be able to love him were his name Algernon. He says he needs to see Chasuble quickly about "christening...I mean on most important business." Algernon exits.

Merriman announces that Gwendolen has asked to see Mr. Worthing (Jack). Cecily informs him that he has gone off to see Chasuble some time ago, but invites her in. Gwendolen immediately takes to Cecily, but wishes Cecily were not so young and alluring, as "Ernest," despite his moral nature, is still susceptible to temptation. Cecily tells her that she is not Ernest's ward, but his brother Jack's. Rather, she is going to marry Ernest. They compare diary entries. Gwendolen feels she has the prior claim, since Ernest asked to marry her yesterday. The girls argue and insult each other.

Jack enters the garden, and Gwendolen asks if he is engaged to Cecily; he laughs and denies it. Cecily says the man before them is her Uncle Jack. As Gwendolen goes into shock, Algernon enters, and Cecily calls him Ernest. She asks if he is married to Gwendolen; he denies it. Gwendolen says that his name is Algernon. Cecily is shocked, and she and Gwendolen hold each other and make up. Jack confesses he has no brother Ernest, nor any brother at all. The women retire to the house. Jack is angry at Algernon for stirring up trouble with his Bunburying. They have both arranged for Chasuble to christen them "Ernest" later that evening. Jack tells Algernon to go, but he refuses.

Jack and Algernon join Gwendolen and Cecily inside the country house. The women tell the men their "Christian names are still an insuperable barrier." The men reveal that they are to be re-christened this afternoon, and the couples hug. Lady Bracknell arrives, and Gwendolen informs her of her engagement. Lady Bracknell tells Jack that he may not speak any more to her daughter.

Jack introduces Cecily to Lady Bracknell, and Algernon says that he is engaged to her. Only when Lady Bracknell discovers Cecily has a large personal fortune does she give her consent for their marriage. However, Jack claims that, as his ward, Cecily may not marry without his consent until age 35. He declines to give the necessary consent. He says that he suspects Algernon of being untruthful. He recounts this afternoon's events, in which Algernon impersonated Jack's brother. Jack tells Lady Bracknell that if she consents to his marriage with Gwendolen, he will consent to Cecily's with Algernon. Lady Bracknell refuses and tells Gwendolen to get ready for the train.

Chasuble enters and announces that he is prepared for the christenings. Lady Bracknell refuses to allow Algernon to be baptized, and Jack tells Chasuble that the christenings will not be necessary any more. Chasuble says he will leave, and mentions that Miss Prism is waiting for him. Lady Bracknell asks to see Miss Prism. When she enters, she goes pale upon seeing Lady Bracknell, who accuses her of kidnapping a baby boy from her house 28 years ago. Under Jack's questioning, Miss Prism reveals

that she accidentally left the baby in a handbag on the Brighton railway line. Jack leaves excitedly.

Jack returns with this very handbag. Jack tells her he was the baby. Lady Bracknell informs Jack that he is the son of her sister, making him Algernon's older brother. Jack asks Lady Bracknell what his original name was. She says he was named after his father; after locating his name under the Army Lists, they learn his full name is Ernest John Moncrieff. All three couples, Chasuble and Miss Prism, Algernon and Cecily, and Jack and Gwendolen, embrace. Jack tells Lady Bracknell that he has realized, for the first time in his life, "the vital Importance of Being Earnest."

3.2 CHARACTERS IN PLAY

3.2.1 John "Jack" Worthing

Jack is the play's protagonist and the play's most sympathetic character. He was found in a handbag on a railway line, and feels less at home in aristocratic society than does Algernon. He lives in the country but has invented a wicked brother named "Ernest" whose scrapes require Jack's attendance in the city.

3.2.2 Algernon Moncrieff

Algernon, the foil to Jack, is a hedonist who has created a friend named Bunbury whose status as a permanent invalid allows Algernon to leave the city whenever he pleases. He believes this activity, "Bunburying," is necessary, especially if one is going to get married-something he vows never to do.

3.2.3 Lady Bracknell

Lady Bracknell is the antagonist of the play, blocking both potential marriages. She embodies typical Victorian classism; she does not allow

Gwendolen to marry Jack when she finds out he is an orphan, and she dislikes Cecily as a mate for her nephew Algernon until she learns that Cecily is wealthy.

3.3.4 Gwendolen Fairfax

Gwendolen is Lady Bracknell's daughter, and is the object of Jack's romantic attention. Though she returns his love, Gwendolen appears self-centered and flighty. Like Cecily, she desires nothing but to marry someone named Ernest.

3.2.5 Cecily Cardew

Cecily is Jack's ward and lives with him in the country. Young and pretty, she is favored by Algernon, who pretends to be Jack's brother Ernest. Cecily has heard about this brother, and has written correspondences between the two of them for months by the time she meets Algernon/Ernest. Like Gwendolen, she is only interested in marrying a man named Ernest.

3.2.6 Miss Prism

Miss Prism is the Cecily's governess. She obviously loves Chasuble, though the fact that he is a priest prohibits her from telling him so directly.

3.2.7 Lane

Algernon's butler delivers a number of droll lines which show that he is far from a passive servant.

3.2.8 Chasuble

A rector, Chasuble frequently visits Jack's country house to see Miss Prism. Though he is celibate, he seems well matched for the educated Miss Prism.

3.2.9 Merriman

Jack's butler, Merriman has a less significant role than Lane has, but in one scene he and another servant force the bickering Gwendolen and Cecily to maintain supposedly polite conversation.

3.3 ACT I SUMMARY & ANALYSIS

Scene 1

In Algernon Moncrieff's stylish London flat in 1895, his butler, Lane, arranges afternoon tea. After playing piano in an adjoining room, Algernon enters. He says that while he does not play with accuracy, he plays with "wonderful expression." He asks Lane if he has prepared the cucumber sandwiches for Lady Bracknell's arrival, then takes two of the finished sandwiches and sits on the sofa. They discuss marriage and Algernon expresses the opinion that it is "demoralising" before he excuses Lane. After he muses on the lower class's inability to set a good example for the upper class, Lane brings in Ernest Worthing (who is listed as "John Worthing" in the cast list and "Jack" in the body of the play, although both Lane and Algernon believe his name is Ernest), who has just returned from the country.

When Jack discovers that Lady Bracknell--Algernon's aunt--and Gwendolen, her daughter, are coming to tea, he reveals he has come to London to propose to her. Algernon ridicules the notion of marriage, vowing he will never marry, while fending Jack off from the cucumber sandwiches (which Algernon gladly eats). Jack joins him on the sofa, and Algernon says before Jack can marry Gwendolen, he has to clear up the issue of Cecily. Algernon calls Lane to bring in Jack's cigarette case; he shows that the inscription is from someone named Cecily. Jack says she

is his aunt, and that he wants the case back. Algernon is doubtful, since she has written "From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack." Jack says his name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country. Algernon says he has always suspected Jack was a "Bunburyist," and now he has proof.

Jack explains that Thomas Cardew, who adopted him, willed Jack to be guardian to his granddaughter, Cecily. Cecily now lives at Jack's place in the country under the guidance of her governess, Miss Prism. Since Jack must maintain a high level of morality to set an example, he needs an excuse to get into town. Therefore, he has invented a ne'er-do-well younger brother named Ernest who lives in Albany. "Ernest's" constant problems require Jack's attendance. Algernon confesses that he has created an invalid friend in the countryside, Bunbury, for when he needs to get out of town. Jack insists that he is through with "Ernest," but Algernon maintains that he will need him more than ever if he marries.

ANALYSIS

Algernon's throwaway quip to Lane that "anyone can play [piano] accurately but I play with wonderful expression" is a good thumbnail of Wilde's philosophy of art. Wilde was heavily influenced by Walter Pater and the other aesthetes of the Victorian age. They believed art should concern itself only with its aesthetic qualities, that art should exist for art's sake alone. Therefore, art should not be a straightforward representation of reality--it should not be "accurate," as Algernon would say--but rather it should be an extension of its creator's artistic styles. Hence, it should have "wonderful expression."

Wilde, through the skeptical Algernon, makes an immediate critique of marriage as "demoralising," and throughout the scene the best bon mots are reserved for mocking that most traditional romantic covenant. Wilde is the master of the epigram, a concise, typically witty or paradoxical saying. His skill lies not only in coining wholly new epigrams, but in

Notes

subverting established ones. For instance "in married life, three is company and two is none" captures the monotony of monogamy by playing it against the commonplace "two is company, three's a crowd."

That Wilde chose "Bunbury" as the name for double identities may prove telling. Wilde is one of history's most famous homosexuals, convicted in 1895 for homosexual sodomy with Lord Alfred Douglas ("Bosie"). Prior to that, Wilde made greater attempts to hide his sexual orientation, even marrying a woman. Does Wilde connect his characters' need to Bunbury to his own dual identities: the public heterosexual and the private homosexual? Some critical attention has been given to the word "Bunbury." Separating "bun" and "bury," some read it as a description of male-to-male intercourse. Indeed, it has been confirmed that there are several allusions to London's homosexual world intended for Wilde's contemporary, homosexual audience. However, we can read a homosexual subtext into many of the lines now: "Nothing will induce me to part with Bunbury. A man who marries without knowing Bunbury has a very tedious time of it." Aside from continuing the motif of intercourse with the word "part," Algernon clearly relates the need for an alter ego to the oppressive sexuality of marriage.

Another staple of the play is its humorous depiction of class tensions. Lane, the butler, is given his fair share of droll sayings, and even Algernon seems to recognize that the lower class has more power than they seem to: "If the lower orders don't set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them?" But this is not a serious play, and all the conflicts are quickly resolved through humor; when Algernon is upset over his depleted supply of champagne, Lane deflates the discussion of class and turns the topic to marriage.

We see two great symbols of the upper class here. The sofa is the center of the leisure class's idleness, a comfortable place to while away the afternoon without work. Wilde himself would spend hours in deep thought upon his sofa, but in this play he makes the sofa a place for

social chatter. The cucumber sandwiches also become a motif for the hedonism of rich. Algernon supposedly saves them for Lady Bracknell, but he cannot resist devouring them himself.

Scene 2

Lane introduces Lady Bracknell and Gwendolen. Algernon express horror that there are no cucumber sandwiches. He tells Lady Bracknell that he will be unable to attend her dinner tonight, as Bunbury is ill. He promises to be present to arrange music at her reception next Saturday. He goes with her into the music room. Jack confesses his feelings to Gwendolen and she admits that she likes him most especially because she has always wanted to marry someone named Ernest. Jack is happy, but he asks her if she would still love him if his name were not Ernest, for example, if it were Jack. She would not, she maintains. He proposes to her, and she accepts.

Lady Bracknell comes in, and Gwendolen informs her of their engagement. Lady Bracknell says that only she or her father can engage Gwendolen, and orders her to wait in the carriage. After she leaves, Lady Bracknell interrogates Jack, asking about his habits, his income, his background, and so on. He admits that he was an orphan, found in a handbag on a train. She is aghast at this disclosure and says she will not allow her daughter to marry him. She leaves and Algernon enters.

Jack tells Algernon what happened, and also says he will "kill off" his brother Ernest later in the week. Algernon expresses interest in meeting Cecily, but Jack does not want this to happen, as she is young and pretty. He has no doubt, however, that she and Gwendolen will become good friends. They debate what to do tonight and settle on doing nothing. Lane introduces Gwendolen, who has re-entered the house. She tells Algernon to turn his back, and expresses her fear to Jack that her mother will not let them marry. She asks for his address in the country, and Algernon slyly writes this down and checks a train timetable. She promises to write Jack daily when he returns to the countryside, and Jack escorts her out. Lane comes in, and Algernon tells him he will be going Bunburying

Notes

tomorrow. Jack returns, glowing over Gwendolen, but Algernon expresses some anxiety over Bunbury. Jack warns him that Bunbury will only get him in trouble.

Analysis:

The main conflict of the play, Lady Bracknell's snobbery about Jack's disreputable background, is presented in this act. The conventional parental blockade to love maintains our interest in the plot, but the secondary conflict is far more original and engaging: Gwendolen will only marry someone named Ernest, which she believes Jack's real name to be. Jack's warning to Algernon that Bunbury will get him into trouble some day is a projection of his own anxieties--he has already gotten himself into a mess with his own dual identity.

While the play is a farce, and we are not expected to take the relationships too seriously, it is possible to examine Gwendolen's desire to marry someone named Ernest. She calls it her "ideal," and this word resounds with Wilde's aesthetic philosophy. He believes art should strive to attain an ideal beauty and not mirror a dull reality. In the same sense, Gwendolen's idea of marriage--and most people's--revolves around an ideal romance that does not exist. The many epigrammatic critiques of marriage in the play demonstrate the cruel reality of marriage. Romance, Wilde shows, is the only kind of art most people can practice; it is the one field in which they can project ideals, as artists do. Marriage, however, frequently falls short of its ideal, whereas art--at least good art--can survive in the rarified atmosphere of the ideal.

Lady Bracknell is a remarkable comic creation, the paragon of the Victorian lady who stresses good breeding above all else. But she is far from a flat stereotype. Wilde gives her some of his wittiest lines to bring out her quirky way of seeing the world, for example one of her most famous pronouncements: "To lose one parent, Mr. Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness." But these

lines are always linked to her character; when Jack informs her that he was found in a handbag on the Brighton line, she replies "The line is immaterial." That he was found in a handbag on a train is enough of a black mark on his record, and even the word "immaterial" reminds us that it is Jack's very lack of a material (substantial, or money-related) background that disturbs her so greatly.

When Jack and Algernon debate what do at night, we get a glimpse into their social options: ballet, theater, restaurants. They live the life of Victorian dandies, indulging in art and pleasure. Algernon states that "It is awfully hard work doing nothing. However, I don't mind hard work where there is no definite object of mind." He swiftly diagnoses the "problem" of the leisure class, that maintaining their idleness is "work" itself. This renders leisure similar to art (which, it is clear, does require hard work). Neither should have a point, no "definite object of mind." Prefacing his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* with a series of maxims about art, Wilde ends with "All art is quite useless." He does not suggest that art has no place in society--quite the contrary--but argues that it should not be used as a social tool. In this view, Wilde pitted himself against more traditional writers like Charles Dickens, a man who used his art to galvanize reform for England's oppressed working class. Jack and Algernon, then, are two social aesthetes who recognize that their lives, like art, are "quite useless" and have little effect on reality. If anything, they appreciate their lives as works of art, playgrounds which they can manipulate to their pleasing. Their creation of alter egos makes them virtual playwrights, authors of not only their own destinies, but of fictional lives.

CHECK IN PROGRESS I:

1. What analysis you get from Act I?

Answer.....

2. Explain any two characters from the play.

Answer.....
.....
.....
.....

3.4 ACT II SUMMARY & ANALYSIS

Scene 1

In the garden at Jack's country house, Miss Prism and Cecily discuss Jack's serious nature; Miss Prism believes it is due to his anxiety over his brother. Dr. Chasuble enters the garden. He and Miss Prism leave for a walk together. Merriman, their butler, announces the arrival of Ernest Worthing. Cecily, excited to meet Jack's brother, tells Merriman to bring him to her. Algernon enters, pretending to be Ernest. He and Cecily briefly discuss his "wicked" reputation. When he learns that Jack will be back Monday afternoon, Algernon announces that he must leave Monday morning. Cecily also discloses that Jack has decided to send Ernest to Australia. He flirts with Cecily and they exit into the house.

Miss Prism and Chasuble return. She urges him to get married, especially to a mature lady. Jack enters the garden, dressed in black. He tells Miss Prism he has returned earlier than expected, and explains that he is dressed in black for his brother, who died in Paris last night. Chasuble suggests he will discuss it in his sermon next Sunday, and Jack asks him if he would christen him this afternoon. He agrees, and Cecily emerges from the house. She tells him his brother is in the dining room; Jack says he doesn't have a brother. She tells him not to disown his own brother, and runs into the house and brings out Algernon.

Jack refuses to shake Algernon's hand, but Cecily says that "Ernest" has been telling him about his friend Bunbury, and that someone who takes care of an invalid must have some good in him. Under pressure from Cecily, Jack shakes his hand. Everyone but Jack and Algernon leaves. Merriman enters and says he has put up Ernest in the room next to Jack's. Jack orders the dogcart, as Ernest has been called back to town.

Merriman leaves. Jack tells Algernon he must leave, while Algernon expresses an interest in Cecily.

Analysis:

Cecily explicitly states the major theme of the play to Algernon: "I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time. That would be hypocrisy." Of course, Wilde's main interest is in those who pretend to be good but are really wicked all the time. His claim is that everyone in Victorian society wears some kind of social mask; while his happens to revolve around his sexual orientation, others are constantly engaged in varying games of deception that are no less hypocritical. Even those who are seemingly pure--Gwendolen and Cecily--are attracted by the purportedly "wicked," disreputable backgrounds of Jack and Algernon, and care less about who they really are.

The plot thickens in this scene: Jack needs to get the fake "Ernest" out of the house before he is christened in the early evening. The fact that names play such a big role in the plot is another manifestation of the theme of social masking. A name is only a label; the infant does not choose his own name, and in this respect is at the mercy of his family. Likewise, the unsuspecting infant also inherits his family's money and is destined from birth to be a prince or a pauper. In the same way, people are forced into labeled expectations of society; Cecily, for instance, must learn to behave like a lady, much as Lady Bracknell insists others accord to the conventions of Victorian society. It is precisely these societal restraints that Algernon rebels against; he cannot stand letting others label him, so he creates his own mischievous persona in Bunbury.

As before, we see the characters treat solemn matters with carefree abandon. "Ernest's" (Algernon's) death and amazing resurrection is hardly given a second thought, but the characters obsess over small problems instead. Wilde himself described the play as holding the philosophy that "we should treat all the trivial things of life very seriously, and all the serious things of life with sincere and studied

Notes

triviality." The play's original subtitle was "A Trivial Comedy for Serious People," and Wilde also directed his actors before the play's first production to deliver their lines with full-blown sincerity. This seriocomic tone of sincerity not only keeps the laughs coming as the characters trivialize or solemnize the solemn and trivial, respectively, but further develops one of Wilde's major themes: despite the fact that everyone whole-heartedly believes that he or she leads an earnest life, they may just be earnestly flouting convention, like Algernon.

This scene also begins to hint that Miss Prism wants to marry Chasuble. They are a more rational counterpoint to the rash romances of the younger couples. While Miss Prism also mocks many of marriage's effects, she also seems to care genuinely about Chasuble, they share an interest in scholarly pursuits, and she is not interested in him solely because of a supposedly "wicked" background. Miss Prism suggests a solution to the problems of so many marriages: one should marry only when one has gained some maturity.

Scene 2

Cecily enters the garden to water the flowers, and Algernon tells her that Jack has ordered him to leave. Merriman tells him the dogcart is ready, but Cecily says it can wait. Algernon compliments Cecily to her great delight, then tells Merriman on his reappearance that the dogcart can come back next week. He asks Cecily to marry him, and she points out that they have been engaged for three months. Cecily claims that ever since she heard of Jack's wicked brother Ernest, she has loved him. She shows him the box of letters he "wrote" to her (which she really wrote to herself). She admits that she loves him because his name is Ernest; upon promptin she says that she doubts she would be able to love him were his name Algernon. He says he needs to see Chasuble quickly about "christening...I mean on most important business," then leaves.

Merriman announces that Gwendolen has asked to see Mr. Worthing (Jack). Cecily informs him that he has gone off to see Chasuble some time ago, but invites her in. Gwendolen immediately takes to Cecily, but is put off when she learns that Cecily is Mr. Worthing's ward. She wishes Cecily were not so young and alluring, as "Ernest," despite his moral nature, is still susceptible to temptation. Cecily tells her that she is not Ernest's ward, but his brother Jack's. Rather, she is going to marry Ernest. They compare diary entries. Gwendolen feels she has the prior claim, because Ernest asked to marry her yesterday. The girls argue and insult each other.

Merriman enters with another servant to set out tea. Cecily and Gwendolen assume coldly polite manners, while continuing to insult each other by passing the wrong tea-things. Merriman and the servant leave, and the women launch full-blown verbal attacks. Jack enters the garden, and he and Gwendolen kiss. She asks if he is engaged to Cecily; he laughs and denies it. Cecily says she knew there was a misunderstanding, as the man before them is her Uncle Jack. As Gwendolen goes into shock, Algernon enters, and Cecily calls him Ernest and they kiss. She asks if he is married to Gwendolen; he denies it. Gwendolen says that his name is Algernon. Cecily is shocked, and she and Gwendolen hold each other for protection and make up. They ask Jack to explain. He confesses he has no brother Ernest, nor any brother at all. The women retire to the house.

Jack is angry at Algernon for what his Bunburying has gotten them into, and for deceiving Cecily. Algernon thinks that Jack has deceived Gwendolen. They both simply want to marry the women that they love, although the possibility of that is beginning to seem unlikely. They bicker greedily over the muffins that have been laid out, and it is revealed that they have both arranged for Chasuble to christen them "Ernest" later that evening. Jack repeatedly tells Algernon to go, but he refuses.

Analysis:

Notes

This scene provides the strongest demonstration of Wilde's view of marriage as a sham and a device used purely for social advancement. Cecily's acceptance of Algernon's proposal is anything but an act of true love; she had accepted before she even met him, solely on the basis of his wicked reputation. Ironically, she has "arranged" her own marriage. But with 21st-century hindsight, we can sympathize with her decision. While the men in the play are free to wander about, inventing fictional personae to unburden their responsibilities, the women are far more restricted. Cecily, like Jack and Algernon, has created a character--that of Jack's brother Ernest--and she has taken the motif of the character-as-author a step further by literally writing correspondence between herself and "Ernest."

As one might expect, Cecily holds the same feelings for the name Ernest as Gwendolen: both believe it inspires "absolute confidence." The name, sounding like "earnest," seems to show only uprightness and honesty. Of course, this is the great irony of the play; as Jack and Algernon have both falsified the name. The significance of names is made more ridiculous when Gwendolen says she likes Cecily's name and can tell immediately they will be great friends; we can already sense the conflict that will arise over the confusion of their respective Ernests. Gwendolen later says she knew from the start that she disliked Cecily; the belief in names as a signifier of a person's worth is ill-founded.

Wilde relies less on epigrams in this scene but utilizes more classic comic devices. Repetition of dialogue and action is the main tool. Certain phrases, such as Cecily's idea of Earnest as a name that inspires "absolute confidence," echo prior phrases (Gwendolen's same words), and Algernon's slip when he says he must be christened repeats Jack's earlier words. When Algernon asks Cecily if she would still love him were his name not Ernest, it mirrors Jack's previous question to Gwendolen. The dialogue when all four characters are present and revelations are made relies most heavily on repetition, as the two couples mimic each other almost perfectly, and even speak in unison. Wilde also uses visual contrasts to produce humor; Cecily and Gwendolen sit and rise several times as they speak to show their various agitated states, and Algernon and Jack wrestle over the muffins. While most of *The Importance of*

Being Earnest, with its biting social critiques, comes straight from the tradition of the comedy of manners, these hyperkinetic, blunt devices of repetition and contrast are more in line with the genre of French farce.

Still, it is foremost a comedy of manners, and the characters' postured manners are where Wilde creates most of his humor. As Wilde points out in his stage directions, the "presence of servants exercises a restraining influence, under which both girls chafe." Reminded of their social standing, the arguing girls put on all the cold airs of noblesse oblige Wilde has ridiculed throughout (though previously Cecily indignantly states: "This is no time for the shallow mask of manners!") Even Jack and Algernon's fight over the muffins reminds us of how absurd the idle rich can be. Rather than focus on the "Ernest" problem at hand, both men, especially Algernon, are slavishly reduced to their insatiable hedonism (as Algernon was with the cucumber sandwiches). Once again, they trivialize the solemn and solemnize the trivial.

3.5 ACT III SUMMARY & ANALYSIS

Scene 1

Cecily and Gwendolen have retreated to the drawing room of the Manor House to get away from Algernon and Jack. They are eager to forgive the men and be reconciled. When Algernon and Jack enter from the garden, Cecily and Gwendolen confront them about their motives. Cecily asks Algernon why he pretended to be Jack's brother, and Algernon says it was in order to meet her. Gwendolen asks Jack if he pretended to have a brother so as to be able to come to London to see her as often as possible, and he asks if she can doubt it. Gwendolen says she has the gravest doubts but intends to crush them.

Cecily and Gwendolen are on the verge of forgiving Algernon and Jack when they remember that neither of them is any longer engaged to a man called Ernest. Algernon and Jack explain that each has made arrangements to be rechristened Ernest before the day is out, and the

Notes

young women, bowled over by men's "physical courage" and capacity for "self-sacrifice," are won over.

As the couples embrace, Lady Bracknell enters, having bribed Gwendolen's maid for information about her destination. On seeing Algernon, she asks whether this house is the house where his friend Bunbury resides. Algernon, forgetting momentarily that he is supposed to be at his friend's bedside, says no, but quickly tries to cover himself and blurts that Bunbury is dead. He and Lady Bracknell briefly discuss Bunbury's sudden demise. Jack then introduces Cecily to Lady Bracknell, and Algernon announces their engagement. Lady Bracknell asks about Cecily's background, asking first, rather acidly, whether she is "connected with any of the larger railway stations in London." Jack obligingly volunteers information about Cecily, answering Lady Bracknell's presumptuous questions with a withering irony that goes over Lady Bracknell's head. Her interest is greatly piqued when she learns that Cecily is actually worth a great deal of money and stands to inherit even more when she comes of age.

Jack refuses to give his consent to Cecily's marriage to Algernon until Lady Bracknell grants her consent to his union with Gwendolen, but Lady Bracknell refuses. She summons Gwendolen to her side and prepares to depart. Before they can leave, however, Dr. Chasuble arrives to announce that everything is ready for the christenings. Jack explains that he and Algernon no longer need the christenings immediately and suggests that the ceremonies be postponed. The rector prepares to withdraw, explaining that Miss Prism is waiting for him back at the rectory. At the sound of Miss Prism's name, Lady Bracknell starts. She asks a number of incisive questions about Miss Prism then demands that she be sent for. Miss Prism herself arrives at that moment.

Analysis

Gwendolen's and Cecily's conversation at the beginning of Act III reveals exactly how eager they are to forgive Jack and Algernon, even to the point of bestowing on the men shame and repentance the men don't

actually feel. Gwendolen and Cecily observe Jack and Algernon through the window of the morning room that looks out on the garden, where the two men are squabbling over the refreshments that have been laid out for tea. Gwendolen's opening line, "The fact that they did not follow us at once into the house . . . seems to me to show that they have some sense of shame left," indicates how eager she is for a reconciliation and anxious to find any reason at all to effect one. Her eagerness also reveals how willing she is to deceive herself about Jack. The fact that the men don't follow the women into the house is morally neutral, but Gwendolen projects onto it a moral interpretation: the men did not follow them, therefore they must be ashamed of themselves. We know, however, that they are not the least bit ashamed. The men think merely that they are in trouble, a circumstance Algernon, but not Jack, seems to relish. Cecily underscores the irony of Gwendolen's inane logic when she echoes Gwendolen's sentiments, remarking, "They have been eating muffins. That looks like repentance." Both women want to believe the men are truly sorry for what they've done.

The two couples have symmetrical conflicts and seem to have nearly symmetrical reconciliations, but an essential difference sets the two reconciliations apart: Algernon tells the truth about his deception, but Jack does not. When Cecily asks Algernon why he deceived her, he tells her he did it in order to have the opportunity of meeting her, and this is the truth. Algernon really didn't have any other reason for pretending to be Ernest. Jack, however, is another story. Gwendolen doesn't ask Jack directly why he deceived her, and instead frames the answer she wants from him in the form of a question. She asks if he pretended to have a brother in order to come to town to see her. Jack asks if she can doubt it, and Gwendolen declares she will "crush" the doubts she has. Gwendolen is right to have those doubts. Jack's reasons for inventing Ernest and then impersonating him were many, but getting away to see Gwendolen wasn't one of them. Jack could easily have courted Gwendolen as himself, and being Ernest to her was merely the result of having met her through Algernon. Despite the apparent uniformity of the two romances, only the relationship between Cecily and Algernon is now on truthful ground.

Notes

Just before Lady Bracknell begins her inquiry into Cecily's background, she makes a complicated pun that underscores the elaborate underpinnings of the joke of Victoria Station being Jack's ancestral home. In Act I she exclaimed indignantly on the idea of allowing the well-bred Gwendolen "to marry into a cloakroom, and form an alliance with a parcel." Now she asks whether Cecily is "at all connected with any of the larger railway stations in London." The word connection was commonly used to refer to a person's social milieu (his or her friends and associates) as well as to family background. Lady Bracknell is making a joke on the fact that a railway station is as far back as Jack can trace his identity. The word connection also refers to transport: a connection was where a person could transfer from one railway line to another. The joke is even more involved than that. When Lady Bracknell says, "I had no idea that there were any families or persons whose origin was a Terminus," she is punning on the fact that in England, in Wilde's day as well as now, a "terminus" is the last stop on a railway line, and the first stop is its "origin." In calling Victoria Station Jack's family's "origin," Lady Bracknell is getting off a very good line indeed, one that manages to be, like the joke in the title of the play, both pun and paradox.

Scene 2

When Miss Prism sees Lady Bracknell, she begins behaving in a frightened and furtive manner. Lady Bracknell asks her severely about the whereabouts of a certain baby that Miss Prism was supposed to have taken for a walk twenty-eight years ago. Lady Bracknell proceeds to recount the circumstances of the baby's disappearance: Miss Prism left a certain house in Grosvenor Square with a baby carriage containing a male infant and never returned, the carriage was found some weeks later in Bayswater containing "a three-volume novel of more than usually revolting sentimentality," and the baby in question was never found. Miss Prism confesses apologetically that she doesn't know what happened to the baby. She explains that on the day in question she left the house with both the baby and a handbag containing a novel she had been working on, but that at some point she must have absentmindedly

confused the two, placing the manuscript in the carriage and the baby in the handbag.

Now Jack joins the discussion, pressing Miss Prism for further details: where did she leave the handbag? Which railway station? What line? Jack excuses himself and hurries offstage, returning a moment or two later with a handbag. He presents the handbag to Miss Prism and asks her if she can identify it. Miss Prism looks the handbag over carefully before acknowledging that it is the handbag she mislaid. She expresses delight at having it back after so many years. Jack, under the impression that he has discovered his true parentage, throws his arms melodramatically around Miss Prism with a cry of “Mother!” Miss Prism, shocked, reminds Jack that she is unmarried. Jack, misunderstanding her point, launches into a sentimental speech about forgiveness and redemption through suffering and society’s double standard about male and female transgression. With great dignity, Miss Prism gestures toward Lady Bracknell as the proper source of information about Jack’s history and identity. Lady Bracknell explains that Jack is the son of her poor sister, which makes him Algernon’s older brother.

The revelation removes all obstacles to Jack’s union with Gwendolen, but the problem of Jack’s name remains. Gwendolen points out that they don’t know his true name. Though Lady Bracknell is sure that as the elder son he was named after his father, no one can recall what General Moncrieff’s first name was. Fortunately, Jack’s bookshelves contain recent military records, and he pulls down and consults the appropriate volume. Jack’s father’s Christian names turn out to have been “Ernest John.” For all these years, Jack has unwittingly been telling the truth: his name is Ernest, it is also John, and he does indeed have an unprincipled younger brother—Algernon. Somewhat taken aback by this turn of events, Jack turns to Gwendolen and asks if she can forgive him for the fact that he’s been telling the truth his entire life. She tells him she can forgive him, as she feels he is sure to change. They embrace, as do Algernon and Cecily and Miss Prism and Dr. Chasuble, and Jack

acknowledges that he has discovered “the vital Importance of Being Earnest.”

Analysis

In Victorian England, Lady Bracknell’s sudden start at the mention of Miss Prism’s name would have been a signal to the audience that a wild coincidence and recognition scene was approaching. Victorian melodrama was full of such coincidences and recognition scenes, in which true identities were revealed and long-lost family members were reunited. Wilde was playing with genre here, making fun of the very form in which he’d been so successful in recent years. In these plays, the revelation of identity was often predicated on a long-kept secret that involved a woman who had committed a transgression in the past. The title character in *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, for instance, discovers that a woman with a dubious past is her own mother. Wilde draws out the recognition scene in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, not only having Jack go to absurd lengths to identify the handbag Miss Prism lost, but also having Miss Prism entirely miss the implications of the handbag’s reappearance: if the bag has been found, the baby has been found as well. Miss Prism’s final comment on the whole incident is to express delight at being reunited with the handbag as it’s been “a great inconvenience being without it all these years.”

In the recognition scene, the image of the missing baby carriage containing the manuscript of a not-very-good novel allows Wilde to mock yet another social element of his time. On one level, Wilde is lampooning the kind of popular fiction that was considered respectable and acceptable for women to read—a trenchant observation from a writer whose own novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, had been reviled as “immoral.” Beyond this, however, he’s also crystallizing the theme of life as a work of art. In proposing the substitution of the baby for the manuscript and the manuscript for the baby, he connects, in a light-hearted way, the fiction that is the fruit of Miss Prism’s imagination and the fiction that Jack’s own life has been up to this point.

Jack’s discovery that his life has not been a fiction, that he has indeed been both “Ernest” and “earnest” during the years he thought he was deceiving his friends and family, amounts to a complex moral paradox based on an elaborate pun. For years he has been a liar, but at the same time he spoke the truth: he really was being both “earnest” (sincere) and “Ernest.” In a way, Jack has become his own fiction, and his real life has become the deception. His apology to Gwendolen and his observation that it is “a terrible thing for a man to find out suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth” is both a characteristic Wildean inversion of conventional morality and a last jibe at the hypocrisy of Victorian society.

CHECK IN PROGRESS:

1. What role “Cailey Cardew” playing?

Answer.....

2. What analysis you get from Act III?

Answer.....

3. Who are 2 persons playing almost similar character?

Answer.....

3.6 LET’S SUM UP

Notes

In many ways, *The Importance of Being Earnest* was an artistic breakthrough for Wilde, something between self-parody and a deceptively flippant commentary on the dramatic genre in which Wilde had already had so much success. Wilde's genre of choice was the Victorian melodrama, or "sentimental comedy," derived from the French variety of "well-made play" popularized by Scribe and Sardou. In such plays, fallen women and abandoned children of uncertain parentage figure prominently, letters cross and recross the stage, and dark secrets from the past rise to threaten the happiness of seemingly respectable, well-meaning characters. In Wilde's hands, the form of Victorian melodrama became something else entirely. Wilde introduced a new character to the genre, the figure of the "dandy" (a man who pays excessive attention to his appearance). This figure added a moral texture the form had never before possessed. The character of the dandy was heavily autobiographical and often a stand-in for Wilde himself, a witty, overdressed, self-styled philosopher who speaks in epigrams and paradoxes, ridicules the cant and hypocrisy of society's moral arbiters, and self-deprecatingly presents himself as trivial, shallow, and ineffectual. In fact, the dandy in these plays always proves to be deeply moral and essential to the happy resolution of the plot.

The Importance of Being Earnest was an early experiment in Victorian melodrama. Part satire, part comedy of manners, and part intellectual farce, this play seems to have nothing at stake because the world it presents is so blatantly and ostentatiously artificial. Below the surface of the light, brittle comedy, however, is a serious subtext that takes aim at self-righteous moralism and hypocrisy, the very aspects of Victorian society that would, in part, bring about Wilde's downfall.

During 1895, however, a series of catastrophes stemming from Wilde's relationship with Lord Alfred, also a poet, led to personal humiliation and social, professional, and financial ruin. On February 28, 1895, two weeks after *The Importance of Being Earnest's* opening night, Lord Alfred's belligerent, homophobic father, the Marquess of Queensberry, publicly accused Wilde of "posing as a sodomite." The nobleman meant "sodomite," of course, an insulting and potentially defamatory term for a homosexual. Queensberry had for some time been harassing

Wilde with insulting letters, notes, and confrontations and had hoped to disrupt the opening night of *The Importance of Being Earnest* with a public demonstration, which never took place. Against the advice of his friends, Wilde sued for libel and lost. Wilde probably should have fled the country, as the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 had made homosexual acts punishable by up to two years' imprisonment. However, Wilde chose to stay and was arrested. Despite information about Wilde's private life and writings that emerged at the trial, the prosecution initially proved unsuccessful. However, Wilde was tried a second time, convicted, and sentenced to prison for two years.

Wilde may have remained in England for a number of reasons, including self-destructiveness, denial, desperation, and a desire for martyrdom. However, some historians have suggested that Wilde's relentless persecution by the government was a diversionary tactic. Lord Alfred's older brother was reportedly also having a homosexual affair with Archibald Philip Primrose, Lord Rosebery, the man who would become prime minister. Queensberry was apparently so outraged that he threatened to disclose the relationship, and the government reacted by punishing Wilde and his lover in an effort to assuage the marquess. In any case, Wilde served his full sentence under conditions of utmost hardship and cruelty. Following his release from prison, his health and spirit broken, he sought exile in France, where he lived out the last two years of his life in poverty and obscurity under an assumed name. He died in Paris in 1900.

For sixty or seventy years after Wilde's death, critics and audiences regarded *The Importance of Being Earnest* as a delightful but utterly frivolous and superficial comedy, a view that partly reflects the mindset of a period in which homosexuality remained a guarded topic. The decriminalization of homosexuality in England in 1967 and the emergence in America of an interest in gay culture, and particularly in the covert homosexual literature of the past, has made it possible to view the play in a different light. The play's danger and subversion are easier

to see from a twenty-first-century perspective. In the ambiguity over exactly what people refer to when they speak of “wicked” or immoral behavior, we can detect a system of coded references to homosexuality, just as we can infer a more general comment on the hypocrisy of late Victorian society.

3.7 KEYWORDS

- **Credulity** :tending to believe too quickly
- **Effrontery** :presumptuousness
- **Egeria** :a Roman nymph who advised a king; any female advisor
- **Gorgon**: in Greek mythology, the three sisters including Medusa who had snakes for hair; here, an ugly or terrifying woman
- **Horticultural** :having to do with a garden
- **Lorgnette** :a pair of eyeglasses with a handle
- **Misanthrope** :one who hates people
- **Perambulator** : baby carriage
- **portmanteau** : a large, hinged leather suitcase
- **quixotic** :idealistic without being practical; seeking something unattainable
- **salver** :tray for serving food and/or drinks
- **smart** :well-dressed

- **the Club:** private location where men gather together to drink, discuss politics, gossip, and smoke

3.8 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- To what extent can Oscar Wilde's plays and stories be read as serious social criticism? How did the new aesthetic ideas from France influence Oscar Wilde?
- Compare and contrast Cecily and Gwendolyn in the Importance of being Earnest
- In Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, what is important about the scene where Lady Bracknell interviews Jack?

3.9 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

- Bloom, Harold. *Oscar Wilde*. New York: Chelsea House, 1985.
- Ellmann, Richard. *Oscar Wilde*. New York: Knopf, 1987.
- Ericksen, Donald H. *Oscar Wilde*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977.
- Freedman, Jonathan, ed. *Oscar Wilde, A Collection of Critical Essays*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1996.
- Gagnier, Regenia. *Idylls of the Marketplace, Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public*. Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press, 1986.
- Pearce, Joseph. *The Unmasking of Oscar Wilde*. London: HarperCollins UK, 2001.
- Ransome, Arthur. *Oscar Wilde, A Critical Study*. London: Martin Secker, 1912.
- Raby, Peter. *Oscar Wilde*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- ———, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- ———, ed. *The Importance of Being Earnest: A Reader's Companion*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995.

- Siebold, Thomas. Readings on The Importance of Being Earnest. San Diego, California: Greenhaven Press, 2001.

3.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check in progress 1

Answer 1. Check topic 3.4

Answer 2. Check topic 3.3

Check in progress 1

Answer 1. Check topic 3.3

Answer 2 . Check topic 3.6

Answer 3. Check topic 3.3

UNIT: 4 OSCAR WILDE'S :THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST : INTERPRETATION

STRUCTURE

4.0 Objective

4.1 Introduction To Play

4.2 Composition Of Play

4.3 Production Of Play

4.3.1 Premiere

4.3.2 Critical Reception

4.3.3 Revivals

4.4 Themes

4.4.1 Triviality

4.4.2 As A Satire Of Society

4.4.3 Suggested Homosexual Subtext

4.5 Dramatic Analysis

4.5.1 Use Of Language

4.5.2 Characterisation

4.5.3 Structure And Genre

4.6 Bunburying

4.7 Publication

4.7.1 First Edition

4.7.2 In Translation

4.8 Symbols

4.8.1 The Double Life

4.8.2 Food

4.8.3 Fiction And Writing

4.9 Motifs

4.9.1 Puns

4.9.2 Inversion

4.9.3 Death

4.9.4 The Dandy

4.10 Let's Sum Up

4.11 Keywords

4.12 Questions For Review

4.13 Suggestive Reading and References

4.14 Answers To Check Your Progress

4.0 OBJECTIVE

The objective of this unit is to study the detail of “THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST”

Unit helps to achieve following objective:

- **Composition of play**
- **Production of play**
- **Theme**
- **Dramatization**
- **Bunburying**

4.1 INTRODUCTION TO PLAY

The Importance of Being Earnest, A Trivial Comedy for Serious People is a play by Oscar Wilde. First performed on 14 February 1895 at the St James's Theatre in London, it is a farcical comedy in which the protagonists maintain fictitious personæ to escape burdensome social obligations. Working within the social conventions of late Victorian London, the play's major themes are the triviality with which it treats institutions as serious as marriage, and the resulting satire of Victorian ways. Some contemporary reviews praised the play's humour and the culmination of Wilde's artistic career, while others were cautious about its lack of social messages. Its high farce and witty dialogue have helped make The Importance of Being Earnest Wilde's most enduringly popular play.

The successful opening night marked the climax of Wilde's career but also heralded his downfall. The Marquess of Queensberry, whose son Lord Alfred Douglas was Wilde's lover, planned to present the writer

with a bouquet of rotten vegetables and disrupt the show. Wilde was tipped off and Queensberry was refused admission. Their feud came to a climax in court, where Wilde's homosexuality was revealed to the Victorian public and he was sentenced to imprisonment. Despite the play's early success, Wilde's notoriety caused the play to be closed after 86 performances. After his release from prison, he published the play from exile in Paris, but he wrote no further comic or dramatic work.

The Importance of Being Earnest has been revived many times since its premiere. It has been adapted for the cinema on three occasions. In *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1952), Dame Edith Evans reprised her celebrated interpretation of Lady Bracknell; *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1992) by Kurt Baker used an all-black cast; and Oliver Parker's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (2002) incorporated some of Wilde's original material cut during the preparation of the original stage production.

The Importance of Being Earnest opened at the St. James's Theatre in London on February 14, 1895, only a month after Wilde's previous success, *An Ideal Husband*. The packed-in audience rollicked with laughter at the on-stage caricatures. Considered Wilde's best play, many hail it as the greatest stage comedy of all time.

Part of *The Importance of Being Earnest*'s success comes from Wilde's seemingly infinite supply of piquant epigrams. Though some of the concise, often paradoxical statements refer to contemporary events (the state of 19th-century French drama, for instance), most are universal, reflections on beauty, art, men, women, and class; they are endlessly quotable and continue to delight audiences with their blend of sophistication and absurdity.

One feature of epigrams which ensure their durability is that they can be separated from the play's narrative. Epigrams have little effect on the story because they encapsulate many of Wilde's beliefs on how art should function: above all, art should be beautiful and serve little use. The epigram is the epitome of this ideal; beautiful in its elegant construction, it is also dramatically useless to the play.

Beyond reflecting on beauty, the play is also a masterful send-up of Victorian manners, especially in regards to marriage and morality. Marriage had long been an important issue in English literature, and Wilde exposed its manipulative use as a social tool of advancement; except for Miss Prism, all the women in the play have ulterior motives when it comes to romance. As for morality, Wilde critiqued the starchy facade of politeness he observed in society; he details the "shallow mask of manner," as Cecily calls it, that aristocratic Victorians wore.

One of the chief sources of humor in *The Importance of Being Earnest* is the characters' confused sense of values. Wilde described the play as "exquisitely trivial, a delicate bubble of fancy, and it has its philosophy that we should treat all the trivial things of life seriously, and all the serious things of life with sincere and studied triviality." Wilde directed his actors to speak all their lines in deadly earnest, without signaling to the audience that they were in on the joke. While it is in essence a comedy of manners, the play also uses overtly farcical techniques to downplay its seriousness, and the audience is willing to forgive the characters' irresponsibility and various indiscretions.

Within the play's framework of false identities, Wilde also planted several possible allusions to the male characters' homosexuality. By the time he wrote *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Wilde was leading a dual life as a married man and an active homosexual. The play's original audience is reputed to have howled at the inside references to London's homosexual subculture. Unfortunately, the heady success of *Earnest* was short-lived; the Marquess of Queensbury, father of Wilde's young lover, Lord Alfred Douglas ("Bosie"), showed up to the opening night. Though he was barred entrance, Wilde's infamous trial began soon after, and his life and career began to unravel.

4.2 COMPOSITION OF PLAY

After the success of Wilde's plays *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *A Woman of No Importance*, Wilde's producers urged him to write further plays. In July 1894, he mooted his idea for *The Importance of Being Earnest* to George Alexander, the actor-manager of the St James's Theatre. Wilde spent the summer with his family at Worthing, where he wrote the play quickly in August. His fame now at its peak, he used the working title *Lady Lancing* to avoid preemptive speculation of its content. Many names and ideas in the play were borrowed from people or places the author had known; Lady Queensberry, Lord Alfred Douglas's mother, for example, lived at Bracknell. Wilde scholars agree the most important influence on the play was W. S. Gilbert's 1877 farce *Engaged*, from which Wilde borrowed not only several incidents but also "the gravity of tone demanded by Gilbert of his actors".

Wilde continually revised the text over the next months. No line was left untouched and the revision had significant consequences. SosEltis describes Wilde's revisions as refined art at work. The earliest and longest handwritten drafts of the play labour over farcical incidents, broad puns, nonsense dialogue and conventional comic turns. In revising, "Wilde transformed standard nonsense into the more systemic and disconcerting illogicality which characterises *Earnest's* dialogue". Richard Ellmann argues Wilde had reached his artistic maturity and wrote more surely and rapidly.

Wilde hesitated about submitting the script to Alexander, worrying it might be unsuitable for the St James's Theatre, whose typical repertoire was more serious, and explaining it had been written in response to a request for a play "with no real serious interest". When Henry James's *Guy Domville* failed, Alexander agreed to put on Wilde's play. After working with Wilde on stage movements with a toy theatre, Alexander asked the author to shorten the play from four acts to three. Wilde agreed and combined elements of the second and third acts. The largest cut was the removal of the character of Mr. Gribsby, a solicitor who comes from London to arrest the profligate "Ernest" (i.e., Jack) for unpaid dining bills. The four-act version was first played on a BBC radio production and is still sometimes performed. Some consider the three-act structure

more effective and theatrically resonant than the expanded published edition

4.3 PRODUCTION OF PLAY

4.3.1 Premiere

The play was first produced at the St James's Theatre on Valentine's Day 1895. It was freezing cold but Wilde arrived dressed in "florid sobriety", wearing a green carnation. The audience, according to one report, "included many members of the great and good, former cabinet ministers and privy councillors, as well as actors, writers, academics, and enthusiasts". Allan Aynesworth, who played Algernon Moncrieff, recalled to Hesketh Pearson that "In my fifty-three years of acting, I never remember a greater triumph than [that] first night". Aynesworth was himself "debonair and stylish", and Alexander, who played Jack Worthing, "demure".

The Marquess of Queensberry, the father of Wilde's lover Lord Alfred Douglas (who was on holiday in Algiers at the time), had planned to disrupt the play by throwing a bouquet of rotten vegetables at the playwright when he took his bow at the end of the show. Wilde and Alexander learned of the plan, and the latter cancelled Queensberry's ticket and arranged for policemen to bar his entrance. Nevertheless, he continued harassing Wilde, who eventually launched a private prosecution against the peer for criminal libel, triggering a series of trials ending in Wilde's imprisonment for gross indecency. Alexander tried, unsuccessfully, to save the production by removing Wilde's name from the billing, but the play had to close after only 86 performances.[]

The play's original Broadway production opened at the Empire Theatre on 22 April 1895, but closed after sixteen performances. Its cast included William Faversham as Algy, Henry Miller as Jack, Viola Allen as Gwendolen, and Ida Vernon as Lady Bracknell. The Australian premiere was in Melbourne on 10 August 1895, presented by Dion Boucicault Jr. and Robert Brough, and the play was an immediate success. Wilde's

downfall in England did not affect the popularity of his plays in Australia.

4.3.2 Critical Reception

In contrast to much theatre of the time, the light plot of *The Importance of Being Earnest* does not tackle serious social and political issues, something of which contemporary reviewers were wary. Though unsure of Wilde's seriousness as a dramatist, they recognised the play's cleverness, humour and popularity with audiences. George Bernard Shaw, for example, reviewed the play in the *Saturday Review*, arguing that comedy should touch as well as amuse, "I go to the theatre to be moved to laughter." Later in a letter he said, the play, though "extremely funny", was Wilde's "first really heartless [one]". In *The World*, William Archer wrote that he had enjoyed watching the play but found it to be empty of meaning: "What can a poor critic do with a play which raises no principle, whether of art or morals, creates its own canons and conventions, and is nothing but an absolutely wilful expression of an irrepressibly witty personality?"

In *The Speaker*, A. B. Walkley admired the play and was one of few to see it as the culmination of Wilde's dramatic career. He denied the term "farce" was derogatory, or even lacking in seriousness, and said "It is of nonsense all compact, and better nonsense, I think, our stage has not seen." H. G. Wells, in an unsigned review for *The Pall Mall Gazette*, called *Earnest* one of the freshest comedies of the year, saying "More humorous dealing with theatrical conventions it would be difficult to imagine.". He also questioned whether people would fully see its message, "... how Serious People will take this Trivial Comedy intended for their learning remains to be seen. No doubt seriously." "The play was so light-hearted that many reviewers compared it to comic opera rather than drama. W. H. Auden later[when?] called it "a pure verbal opera", and *The Times* commented, "The story is almost too preposterous to go without music." Mary McCarthy, in *Sights and Spectacles* (1959), however, and despite thinking the play extremely funny, called it "a ferocious idyll"; "depravity is the hero and the only character."

Notes

The Importance of Being Earnest is Wilde's most popular work and is continually revived. Max Beerbohm called the play Wilde's "finest, most undeniably his own", saying that in his other comedies—Lady Windermere's Fan, A Woman of No Importance and An Ideal Husband—the plot, following the manner of Victorien Sardou, is unrelated to the theme of the work, while in Earnest the story is "dissolved" into the form of the play.

4.3.3 Revivals

The Importance of Being Earnest and Wilde's three other society plays were performed in Britain during the author's imprisonment and exile, albeit by small touring companies. A. B. Tapping's company toured Earnest between October 1895 and March 1899 (their performance at the Theatre Royal, Limerick, in the last week of October 1895 was almost certainly the first production of the play in Ireland). Elsie Lanham's company also toured 'Earnest' between November 1899 and April 1900. Alexander revived Earnest in a small theatre in Notting Hill, outside the West End, in 1901; in the same year he presented the piece on tour, playing Jack Worthing with a cast including the young Lilian Braithwaite as Cecily. The play returned to the West End when Alexander presented a revival at the St James's in 1902. Broadway revivals were mounted in 1902 and again in 1910, each production running for six weeks.

A collected edition of Wilde's works, published in 1908 and edited by Robert Ross, helped to restore his reputation as an author. Alexander presented another revival of Earnest at the St James's in 1909, when he and Aynesworth reprised their original roles; the revival ran for 316 performances. Max Beerbohm said that the play was sure to become a classic of the English repertory, and that its humour was as fresh then as when it had been written, adding that the actors had "worn as well as the play".

For a 1913 revival at the same theatre the young actors Gerald Ames and A. E. Matthews succeeded the creators as Jack and Algy. John Deverell as Jack and Margaret Scudamore as Lady Bracknell headed the cast in a

1923 production at the Haymarket Theatre. Many revivals in the first decades of the 20th century treated "the present" as the current year. It was not until the 1920s that the case for 1890s costumes was established; as a critic in *The Manchester Guardian* put it, "Thirty years on, one begins to feel that Wilde should be done in the costume of his period—that his wit today needs the backing of the atmosphere that gave it life and truth. ... Wilde's glittering and complex verbal felicities go ill with the shingle and the short skirt."

In Sir Nigel Playfair's 1930 production at the Lyric, Hammersmith, John Gielgud played Jack to the Lady Bracknell of his aunt, Mabel Terry-Lewis. Gielgud produced and starred in a production at the Globe (now the Gielgud) Theatre in 1939, in a cast that included Edith Evans as Lady Bracknell, Joyce Carey as Gwendolen, Angela Baddeley as Cecily and Margaret Rutherford as Miss Prism. *The Times* considered the production the best since the original, and praised it for its fidelity to Wilde's conception, its "airy, responsive ball-playing quality." Later in the same year Gielgud presented the work again, with Jack Hawkins as Algy, Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies as Gwendolen and Peggy Ashcroft as Cecily, with Evans and Rutherford in their previous roles. The production was presented in several seasons during and after the Second World War, with mostly the same main players. During a 1946 season at the Haymarket the King and Queen attended a performance, which, as the journalist Geoffrey Wheatcroft put it, gave the play "a final accolade of respectability." The production toured North America, and was successfully staged on Broadway in 1947.

As Wilde's work came to be read and performed again, it was *The Importance of Being Earnest* that received the most productions. By the time of its centenary the journalist Mark Lawson described it as "the second most known and quoted play in English after *Hamlet*."

For Sir Peter Hall's 1982 production at the National Theatre the cast included Judi Dench as Lady Bracknell,^[n 7] Martin Jarvis as Jack, Nigel Havers as Algy, Zoë Wanamaker as Gwendolen and Anna Massey as Miss Prism. Nicholas Hytner's 1993 production at the Aldwych Theatre,

starring Maggie Smith, had occasional references to the supposed gay subtext.

In 2005 the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, produced the play with an all-male cast; it also featured Wilde as a character—the play opens with him drinking in a Parisian café, dreaming of his play. The Melbourne Theatre Company staged a production in December 2011 with Geoffrey Rush as Lady Bracknell.

In 2011 the Roundabout Theatre Company produced a Broadway revival based on the 2009 Stratford Shakespeare Festival production featuring Brian Bedford as director and as Lady Bracknell. It opened at the American Airlines Theatre on 13 January and ran until 3 July 2011. The cast also included Dana Ivey as Miss Prism, Paxton Whitehead as Canon Chasuble, Santino Fontana as Algernon, Paul O'Brien as Lane, Charlotte Parry as Cecily, David Furr as Jack and Sara Topham as Gwendolen. It was nominated for three Tony Awards.

The play was also presented internationally, in Singapore, in October 2004, by the British Theatre Playhouse, and the same company brought it to London's Greenwich Theatre in April 2005.

A 2018 revival was directed by Michael Fentiman for the Vaudeville Theatre, London, as part of a season of four Wilde plays produced by Dominic Dromgoole. The production received largely negative press reviews.

4.4 THEMES

4.4.1 Triviality

Arthur Ransome described *The Importance...* as the most trivial of Wilde's society plays, and the only one that produces "that peculiar exhilaration of the spirit by which we recognise the beautiful." "It is", he wrote, "precisely because it is consistently trivial that it is not ugly." Ellmann says that *The Importance of Being Earnest* touched on many themes Wilde had been building since the 1880s—the languor of

aesthetic poses was well established and Wilde takes it as a starting point for the two protagonists. While *Salome*, *An Ideal Husband* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* had dwelt on more serious wrongdoing, vice in *Earnest* is represented by Algy's craving for cucumber sandwiches. Wilde told Robert Ross that the play's theme was "That we should treat all trivial things in life very seriously, and all serious things of life with a sincere and studied triviality." The theme is hinted at in the play's ironic title, and "earnestness" is repeatedly alluded to in the dialogue, Algernon says in Act II, "one has to be serious about something if one is to have any amusement in life" but goes on to reproach Jack for "being serious about everything". Blackmail and corruption had haunted the double lives of Dorian Gray and Sir Robert Chiltern (in *An Ideal Husband*), but in *Earnest* the protagonists' duplicity (Algernon's "bunburying" and Worthing's double life as Jack and Ernest) is undertaken for more innocent purposes—largely to avoid unwelcome social obligations. While much theatre of the time tackled serious social and political issues, *Earnest* is superficially about nothing at all. It "refuses to play the game" of other dramatists of the period, for instance Bernard Shaw, who used their characters to draw audiences to grander ideals.

4.4.2 As A Satire Of Society

The play repeatedly mocks Victorian traditions and social customs, marriage and the pursuit of love in particular. In Victorian times earnestness was considered to be the over-riding societal value, originating in religious attempts to reform the lower classes, it spread to the upper ones too throughout the century. The play's very title, with its mocking paradox (serious people are so because they do not see trivial comedies), introduces the theme, it continues in the drawing room discussion, "Yes, but you must be serious about it. I hate people who are not serious about meals. It is so shallow of them," says Algernon in Act 1; allusions are quick and from multiple angles.

Gwendolen and Cecily discover that they are both engaged to "Ernest"

Notes

Wilde managed both to engage with and to mock the genre, while providing social commentary and offering reform. The men follow traditional matrimonial rites, whereby suitors admit their weaknesses to their prospective brides, but the foibles they excuse are ridiculous, and the farce is built on an absurd confusion of a book and a baby. When Jack apologises to Gwendolen during his marriage proposal it is for not being wicked:

JACK: Gwendolen, it is a terrible thing for a man to find out suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth. Can you forgive me?

GWENDOLEN: I can. For I feel that you are sure to change.

In turn, both Gwendolen and Cecily have the ideal of marrying a man named Ernest, a popular and respected name at the time. Gwendolen, quite unlike her mother's methodical analysis of John Worthing's suitability as a husband, places her entire faith in a Christian name, declaring in Act I, "The only really safe name is Ernest".[76] This is an opinion shared by Cecily in Act II, "I pity any poor married woman whose husband is not called Ernest"[77] and they indignantly declare that they have been deceived when they find out the men's real names.

Wilde embodied society's rules and rituals artfully into Lady Bracknell: minute attention to the details of her style created a comic effect of assertion by restraint.[78] In contrast to her encyclopaedic knowledge of the social distinctions of London's street names, Jack's obscure parentage is subtly evoked. He defends himself against her "A handbag?" with the clarification, "The Brighton Line". At the time, Victoria Station consisted of two separate but adjacent terminal stations sharing the same name. To the east was the ramshackle LC&D Railway, on the west the up-market LB&SCR—the Brighton Line, which went to Worthing, the fashionable, expensive town the gentleman who found baby Jack was travelling to at the time (and after which Jack was named).

4.4.3 Suggested homosexual subtext

It has been argued that the play's themes of duplicity and ambivalence are inextricably bound up with Wilde's homosexuality, and that the play exhibits a "flickering presence-absence of... homosexual desire". On re-reading the play after his release from prison, Wilde said: "It was extraordinary reading the play over. How I used to toy with that Tiger Life." [80] As one scholar has put it, the absolute necessity for homosexuals of the period to "need a public mask is a factor contributing to the satire on social disguise."

The use of the name Earnest may have been a homosexual in-joke. In 1892, three years before Wilde wrote the play, John Gambriel Nicholson had published the book of pederastic poetry *Love in Earnest*. The sonnet *Of Boys' Names* included the verse: "Though Frank may ring like silver bell / And Cecil softer music claim / They cannot work the miracle / – 'Tis Ernest sets my heart a-flame.". The word "earnest" may also have been a code-word for homosexual, as in: "Is he earnest?", in the same way that "Is he so?" and "Is he musical?" were employed.

Sir Donald Sinden, an actor who had met two of the play's original cast (Irene Vanbrugh and Allan Aynesworth), and Lord Alfred Douglas, wrote to *The Times* to dispute suggestions that "Earnest" held any sexual connotations:

Although they had ample opportunity, at no time did any of them even hint that "Earnest" was a synonym for homosexual, or that "bunburying" may have implied homosexual sex. The first time I heard it mentioned was in the 1980s and I immediately consulted Sir John Gielgud whose own performance of Jack Worthing in the same play was legendary and whose knowledge of theatrical lore was encyclopaedic. He replied in his ringing tones: "No-No! Nonsense, absolute nonsense: I would have known".

A number of theories have also been put forward to explain the derivation of Bunbury, and Bunburying, which are used in the play to imply a secretive double life. It may have derived from Henry Shirley Bunbury, a hypochondriacal acquaintance of Wilde's youth. Another

Notes

suggestion, put forward in 1913 by Aleister Crowley, who knew Wilde, was that Bunbury was a combination word: that Wilde had once taken a train to Banbury, met a schoolboy there, and arranged a second secret meeting with him at Sunbury.

Check in Progress:

1. Write a short note on themes of the play.

Answer.....
.....
.....
.....

2. Write a short note on composition of the play.

Answer
.....
.....
.....
.....

4.5 DRAMATIC ANALYSIS

4.5.1 Use Of Language

While Wilde had long been famous for dialogue and his use of language, Raby (1988) argues that he achieved a unity and mastery in *Earnest* that was unmatched in his other plays, except perhaps *Salomé*. While his earlier comedies suffer from an unevenness resulting from the thematic clash between the trivial and the serious, *Earnest* achieves a pitch-perfect style that allows these to dissolve. There are three different registers detectable in the play. The dandyish insouciance of Jack and Algernon—established early with Algernon's exchange with his manservant—betrays an underlying unity despite their differing attitudes. The formidable pronouncements of Lady Bracknell are as startling for her use of hyperbole and rhetorical extravagance as for her disconcerting opinions. In contrast, the speech of Dr. Chasuble and Miss Prism is

distinguished by "pedantic precept" and "idiosyncratic diversion". Furthermore, the play is full of epigrams and paradoxes. Max Beerbohm described it as littered with "chiselled apophthegms—witticisms unrelated to action or character", of which he found half a dozen to be of the highest order.

Lady Bracknell's line, "A handbag?", has been called one of the most malleable in English drama, lending itself to interpretations ranging from incredulous or scandalised to baffled. Edith Evans, both on stage and in the 1952 film, delivered the line loudly in a mixture of horror, incredulity and condescension. Stockard Channing, in the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin in 2010, hushed the line, in a critic's words, "with a barely audible 'A handbag?', rapidly swallowed up with a sharp intake of breath. An understated take, to be sure, but with such a well-known play, packed full of witticisms and aphorisms with a life of their own, it's the little things that make a difference."

4.5.2 Characterisation

Though Wilde deployed characters that were by now familiar—the dandy lord, the overbearing matriarch, the woman with a past, the puritan young lady—his treatment is subtler than in his earlier comedies. Lady Bracknell, for instance, embodies respectable, upper-class society, but Eltis notes how her development "from the familiar overbearing duchess into a quirkier and more disturbing character" can be traced through Wilde's revisions of the play. For the two young men, Wilde presents not stereotypical stage "dudes" but intelligent beings who, as Jackson puts it, "speak like their creator in well-formed complete sentences and rarely use slang or vogue-words". Dr Chasuble and Miss Prism are characterised by a few light touches of detail, their old-fashioned enthusiasms, and the Canon's fastidious pedantry, pared down by Wilde during his many redrafts of the text.

4.5.3 Structure And Genre

Ransome argues that Wilde freed himself by abandoning the melodrama, the basic structure which underlies his earlier social comedies, and basing the story entirely on the Earnest/Ernest verbal conceit. Freed from "living up to any drama more serious than conversation" Wilde could now amuse himself to a fuller extent with quips, bons mots, epigrams and repartee that really had little to do with the business at hand.

The genre of the Importance of Being Earnest has been deeply debated by scholars and critics alike who have placed the play within a wide variety of genres ranging from parody to satire. In his critique of Wilde, Foster argues that the play creates a world where "real values are inverted [and], reason and unreason are interchanged". Similarly, Wilde's use of dialogue mocks the upper classes of Victorian England lending the play a satirical tone. Reinhart further stipulates that the use of farcical humour to mock the upper classes "merits the play both as satire and as drama".

4.6 BUNBURYING

Bunburying is a stratagem used by people who need an excuse for avoiding social obligations in their daily life. The word "bunburying" first appears in Act I when Algernon explains that he invented a fictional friend, a chronic invalid named "Bunbury", to have an excuse for getting out of events he does not wish to attend, particularly with his Aunt Augusta (Lady Bracknell). Algernon and Jack both use this method to secretly visit their lovers, Cecily and Gwendolen

4.7 PUBLICATION

4.7.1 First Edition

“ TO

ROBERT BALDWIN ROSS

IN APPRECIATION

IN AFFECTION ”

— Dedication of *The Importance of Being Earnest*[97]

Wilde's two final comedies, *An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, were still on stage in London at the time of his prosecution, and they were soon closed as the details of his case became public. After two years in prison with hard labour, Wilde went into exile in Paris, sick and depressed, his reputation destroyed in England. In 1898, when no-one else would, Leonard Smithers agreed with Wilde to publish the two final plays. Wilde proved to be a diligent reviser, sending detailed instructions on stage directions, character listings and the presentation of the book, and insisting that a playbill from the first performance be reproduced inside. Ellmann argues that the proofs show a man "very much in command of himself and of the play". Wilde's name did not appear on the cover, it was "By the Author of *Lady Windermere's Fan*". His return to work was brief though, as he refused to write anything else, "I can write, but have lost the joy of writing".

On 19 October 2007, a first edition (number 349 of 1,000) was discovered inside a handbag in an Oxfam shop in Nantwich, Cheshire. Staff were unable to trace the donor. It was sold for £650.

4.7.2 In translation

The Importance of Being Earnest's popularity has meant it has been translated into many languages, though the homophonous pun in the title ("Ernest", a masculine proper name, and "earnest", the virtue of steadfastness and seriousness) poses a special problem for translators. The easiest case of a suitable translation of the pun, perpetuating its sense and meaning, may have been its translation into German. Since English and German are closely related languages, German provides an equivalent adjective ("ernst") and also a matching masculine proper name ("Ernst"). The meaning and tenor of the wordplay are exactly the same. Yet there are many different possible titles in German, mostly

Notes

concerning sentence structure. The two most common ones are "Bunbury oderernst / Ernst sein istalles" and "Bunbury oderwiewichtigesist, ernst / Ernst zu sein". In a study of Italian translations, Adrian Pablé found thirteen different versions using eight titles. Since wordplay is often unique to the language in question, translators are faced with a choice of either staying faithful to the original—in this case the English adjective and virtue earnest—or creating a similar pun in their own language

Four main strategies have been used by translators. The first leaves all characters' names unchanged and in their original spelling: thus the name is respected and readers reminded of the original cultural setting, but the liveliness of the pun is lost. Eva Malagoli varied this source-oriented approach by using both the English Christian names and the adjective earnest, thus preserving the pun and the English character of the play, but possibly straining an Italian reader. A third group of translators replaced Ernest with a name that also represents a virtue in the target language, favouring transparency for readers in translation over fidelity to the original. For instance, in Italian, these versions variously call the play *L'importanza di essere Franco/Severo/Fedele*, the given names being respectively the values of honesty, propriety, and loyalty. French offers a closer pun: "Constant" is both a first name and the quality of steadfastness, so the play is commonly known as *De l'importance d'être Constant*, though Jean Anouilh translated the play under the title: *Il est important d'être Aimé* ("Aimé" is a name which also means "beloved"). These translators differ in their attitude to the original English honorific titles, some change them all, or none, but most leave a mix partially as a compensation for the added loss of Englishness. Lastly, one translation gave the name an Italianate touch by rendering it as Ernesto; this work liberally mixed proper nouns from both languages.

4.8 SYMBOLS

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

4.8.1 The Double Life

The double life is the central metaphor in the play, epitomized in the notion of “Bunbury” or “Bunburying.” As defined by Algernon, Bunburying is the practice of creating an elaborate deception that allows one to misbehave while seeming to uphold the very highest standards of duty and responsibility. Jack’s imaginary, wayward brother Ernest is a device not only for escaping social and moral obligations but also one that allows Jack to appear far more moral and responsible than he actually is. Similarly, Algernon’s imaginary invalid friend Bunbury allows Algernon to escape to the country, where he presumably imposes on people who don’t know him in much the same way he imposes on Cecily in the play, all the while seeming to demonstrate Christian charity. The practice of visiting the poor and the sick was a staple activity among the Victorian upper and upper-middle classes and considered a public duty. The difference between what Jack does and what Algernon does, however, is that Jack not only pretends to be something he is not, that is, completely virtuous, but also routinely pretends to be someone he is not, which is very different. This sort of deception suggests a far more serious and profound degree of hypocrisy. Through these various enactments of double lives, Wilde suggests the general hypocrisy of the Victorian mindset.

4.8.2 Food

Food and scenes of eating appear frequently in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and they are almost always sources of conflict. Act I contains the extended cucumber sandwich joke, in which Algernon, without realizing it, steadily devours all the sandwiches. In Act II, the climax of Gwendolen and Cecily’s spat over who is really engaged to Ernest Worthing comes when Gwendolen tells Cecily, who has just offered her sugar and cake, that sugar is “not fashionable any more” and “Cake is rarely seen at the best houses nowadays.” Cecily responds by filling Gwendolen’s tea with sugar and her plate with cake. The two women have actually been insulting each other quite steadily for some time, but Cecily’s impudent actions cause Gwendolen to become even angrier, and

she warns Cecily that she “may go too far.” On one level, the jokes about food provide a sort of low comedy, the Wildean equivalent of the slammed door or the pratfall. On another level, food seems to be a stand-in for sex, as when Jack tucks into the bread and butter with too much gusto and Algernon accuses him of behaving as though he were already married to Gwendolen. Food and gluttony suggest and substitute for other appetites and indulgences.

4.8.3 Fiction And Writing

Writing and the idea of fiction figure in the play in a variety of important ways. Algernon, when the play opens, has begun to suspect that Jack’s life is at least partly a fiction, which, thanks to the invented brother Ernest, it is. Bunbury is also a fiction. When Algernon says in Act I, “More than half of modern culture depends on what one shouldn’t read,” he may be making a veiled reference to fiction, or at least reading material perceived to be immoral. In Act II, the idea of fiction develops further when Cecily speaks dismissively of “three-volume novels” and Miss Prism tells her she once wrote one herself. This is an allusion to a mysterious past life that a contemporary audience would have recognized as a stock element of stage melodrama. Cecily’s diary is a sort of fiction as well: In it, she has recorded an invented romance whose details and developments she has entirely imagined. When Cecily and Gwendolen seek to establish their respective claims on Ernest Worthing, each appeals to the diary in which she recorded the date of her engagement, as though the mere fact of having written something down makes it fact. Ultimately, fiction becomes related to the notion of life as an art form. Several of the characters attempt to create a fictional life for themselves which then, in some capacity, becomes real. Wilde seems to regard as the most fundamentally moral those who not only freely admit to creating fictions for themselves but who actually take pride in doing so.

4.9 MOTIFS

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text’s major themes.

4.9.1 Puns

In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the pun, widely considered to be the lowest form of verbal wit, is rarely just a play on words. The pun in the title is a case in point. The earnest/Ernest joke strikes at the very heart of Victorian notions of respectability and duty. Gwendolen wants to marry a man called Ernest, and she doesn't care whether the man actually possesses the qualities that comprise earnestness. She is, after all, quick to forgive Jack's deception. In embodying a man who is initially neither "earnest" nor "Ernest," and who, through forces beyond his control, subsequently becomes both "earnest" and "Ernest," Jack is a walking, breathing paradox and a complex symbol of Victorian hypocrisy.

In Act III, when Lady Bracknell quips that until recently she had no idea there were any persons "whose origin was a Terminus," she too is making an extremely complicated pun. The joke is that a railway station is as far back as Jack can trace his identity and therefore a railway station actually is his "origin," hence the pun. In Wilde's day, as in the England of today, the first stop on a railway line is known as the "origin" and the last stop as the "terminus." There's also a whole series of implicit subsidiary puns on words like line and connection that can refer to either ancestry or travel. Wilde is poking fun at Lady Bracknell's snobbery. He depicts her as incapable of distinguishing between a railway line and a family line, social connections and railway connections, a person's ancestral origins and the place where he chanced to be found. In general, puns add layers of meaning to the characters' lines and call into question the true or intended meaning of what is being said.

4.9.2 Inversion

One of the most common motifs in *The Importance of Being Earnest* is the notion of inversion, and inversion takes many forms. The play contains inversions of thought, situation, and character, as well as inversions of common notions of morality or philosophical thought. When Algernon remarks, "Divorces are made in Heaven," he inverts the

cliché about marriages being “made in heaven.” Similarly, at the end of the play, when Jack calls it “a terrible thing” for a man to discover that he’s been telling the truth all his life, he inverts conventional morality. Most of the women in the play represent an inversion of accepted Victorian practices with regard to gender roles. Lady Bracknell usurps the role of the father in interviewing Jack, since typically this was a father’s task, and Gwendolen and Cecily take charge of their own romantic lives, while the men stand by watching in a relatively passive role. The trick that Wilde plays on Miss Prism at the end of the play is also a kind of inversion: The trick projects onto the play’s most fervently moralistic character the image of the “fallen woman” of melodrama.

4.9.3 Death

Jokes about death appear frequently in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Lady Bracknell comes onstage talking about death, and in one of the play’s many inversions, she says her friend Lady Harbury looks twenty years younger since the death of her husband. With respect to Bunbury, she suggests that death is an inconvenience for others—she says Bunbury is “shilly-shallying” over whether “to live or to die.” On being told in Act III that Bunbury has died suddenly in accordance with his physicians’ predictions, Lady Bracknell commends Bunbury for acting “under proper medical advice.” Miss Prism speaks as though death were something from which one could learn a moral lesson and piously says she hopes Ernest will profit from having died. Jack and Algernon have several conversations about how to “kill” Jack’s imaginary brother. Besides giving the play a layer of dark humor, the death jokes also connect to the idea of life being a work of art. Most of the characters discuss death as something over which a person actually has control, as though death is a final decision one can make about how to shape and color one’s life.

4.9.4 The Dandy

To the form of Victorian melodrama, Wilde contributed the figure of the dandy, a character who gave the form a moral texture it had never before possessed. In Wilde's works, the dandy is a witty, overdressed, self-styled philosopher who speaks in epigrams and paradoxes and ridicules the cant and hypocrisy of society's moral arbiters. To a very large extent, this figure was a self-portrait, a stand-in for Wilde himself. The dandy isn't always a comic figure in Wilde's work. In *A Woman of No Importance* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, he takes the form of the villains Lord Illingworth and Lord Henry Wootton, respectively. But in works such as *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *An Ideal Husband*, and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Wilde seems to be evolving a more positive and clearly defined moral position on the figure of the dandy. The dandy pretends to be all about surface, which makes him seem trivial, shallow, and ineffectual. Lord Darlington and Lord Goring (in *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *An Ideal Husband*) both present themselves this way. In fact, the dandy in both plays turns out to be something very close to the real hero. He proves to be deeply moral and essential to the happy resolution of the plot.

In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Algernon has many characteristics of the dandy, but he remains morally neutral throughout the play. Many other characters also express dandiacal sentiments and views. Gwendolen and Lady Bracknell are being dandiacal when they assert the importance of surfaces, style, or "profile," and even Jack echoes the philosophy of the dandy when he comes onstage asserting that "pleasure" is the only thing that should "bring one anywhere." For the most part, these utterances seem to be part of Wilde's general lampooning of the superficiality of the upper classes. The point is that it's the wrong sort of superficiality because it doesn't recognize and applaud its own triviality. In fact, Cecily, with her impatience with self-improvement and conventional morality and her curiosity about "wickedness," is arguably the character who, after Algernon, most closely resembles the dandy. Her dandiacal qualities make her a perfect match for him.

Check your progress II:

Q1. Discuss the use of language in the play.

Answer.....
.....
.....
.....

Q2. Describe Characterization of The Importance of Being Earnest.

Answer.....
.....
.....
.....

4.10 LET'S SUM UP

The Importance of Being Earnest, A Trivial Comedy for Serious People is a play by Oscar Wilde. First performed on 14 February 1895 at the St James's Theatre in London, it is a farcical comedy in which the protagonists maintain fictitious personæ to escape burdensome social obligations. Working within the social conventions of late Victorian London, the play's major themes are the triviality with which it treats institutions as serious as marriage, and the resulting satire of Victorian ways. Some contemporary reviews praised the play's humour and the culmination of Wilde's artistic career, while others were cautious about its lack of social messages. Its high farce and witty dialogue have helped make The Importance of Being Earnest Wilde's most enduringly popular play.

4.11 KEYWORDS

- 1 **christening** : a ceremony of baptism

2. **Anabaptist:** a radical Christian sect that saw christening as a confirmation of faith so deemed it inappropriate for infants and supported adult baptism, instead
3. **Apoplexy:** a fit of extreme anger that causes death; a stroke
4. **Bunburying:** inventing a false person to allow one to leave one's own unpleasant situation
5. **Credulity:** tending to believe too quickly
6. **Effrontery** :presumptuousness

4.12 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- Who is "Ernest" in the play "The Importance of Being Earnest"?
- What is a dandy?
- How do characters in "The Importance of Being Earnest" view marriage differently?
- Interpret "The truth is rarely pure and never simple".
- Interpret "Women only call each other sister when they have called each other a lot of other things first".

4.13 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

- Bloom, Harold. Oscar Wilde. New York: Chelsea House, 1985.
- Ellmann, Richard. Oscar Wilde. New York: Knopf, 1987.
- Ericksen, Donald H. Oscar Wilde. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977.
- Freedman, Jonathan, ed. Oscar Wilde, A Collection of Critical Essays. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1996.
- Gagnier, Regenia. Idylls of the Marketplace, Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public. Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press, 1986.

Notes

- Pearce, Joseph. *The Unmasking of Oscar Wilde*. London: HarperCollins UK, 2001.
- Ransome, Arthur. *Oscar Wilde, A Critical Study*. London: Martin Secker, 1912.
- Raby, Peter. *Oscar Wilde*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- ———, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- ———, ed. *The Importance of Being Earnest: A Reader's Companion*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995.
- Siebold, Thomas. *Readings on The Importance of Being Earnest*. San Diego, California: Greenhaven Press, 2001.

4.14 ANSWERS TO CHECK IN PROGRESS

Answers to check in progress:

Check topic: 4.2

Check topic: 4.4

Answers to check in progress:

Check topic: 4.5.1

Check topic: 4.5.2

UNIT: 5 OSCAR WILDE’S – DUALISM IN “THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST”

STRUCTURE

- 5.0 Objective
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Characters And Connotation
- 5.3 Language
- 5.4 Let’s Sum Up
- 5.5 Keywords
- 5.6 Questions For Review
- 5.7 Suggested Readings And References
- 5.8 Answers To Check In Progress

5.0 OBJECTIVE

The objective of this unit is to study the detail of “THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST”.

By the end of this chapter you will get to know about the Dualism of Oscar wilde’s play The importance of being earnest. What character of the play is and connotations?

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Oscar Wilde was one of the most successful playwrights of his day but he was also a complex person full of contradictions. Wilde was born in Dublin in 1854, the son of a distinguished surgeon and a nationalist poetess. He went to Trinity College in Dublin and then to Magdalen College in Oxford. After graduating he was forced to earn a living and moved to London, where his fellow Irishmen Bernard Shaw and William Butler Yeats were settled. Wilde established himself as lecturer and a writer for periodicals but foremost as a spokesperson for the aesthetic movement whose credo was “art for art’s sake.” In 1882 he visited America on a successful lecture tour where he claimed that “to disagree

Notes

with three fourths of all England on all points of view is one of the first elements of sanity” (Norton 1720). He married in 1884 and had two sons. He wrote three volumes of short fiction with little success but excelled as a critic of literature and of society in essays like “The Decay of Lying” (1889),

“The Soul of Man under Socialism” (1890) and “The Critic as Artist” (1890). His only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) created a sensation but his most outstanding success came as a writer of society comedies staged in London between 1892 and 1895, including *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance*, *An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*. However, in 1895, after having a relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas, he was accused of homosexuality and was sentenced to prison with hard labour for two years. In prison he wrote the poem *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898) and his prose confession and critique of himself, *De Profundis* (1905). When he was released, in 1897, he was a ruined man, divorced and declared a bankrupt. He went into exile to France, where he lived under an assumed name until his death in 1900.

The duality of Wilde is fascinating as well as confusing. He was a man of numerous identities and his position in society was ambivalent. He was at the same time a colonized Irishman and a socialite, a husband and a homosexual, a successful playwright accepted in high society and a socialist. He was “the Anglo-Irishman with Nationalist sympathies; the Protestant with life-long Catholic leanings” (Holland 3). As a dandy he dressed in colourful costumes in contrast to the sober black suits of the Late Victorian middle classes and yet he was admitted to good society because of his charismatic manners and witty conversation. As a spokesperson for the “aesthetes,” who revolted against the earnestness of Victorian ideals and enjoyed mocking middle-class opinions, Wilde challenged and shocked his audience by using sensational imagery, hyperbole, dandyism and decadence. In his own life and in his art he criticized society; he “criticized his audience while he entertained it” (Peter Hall, *Guardian*), and like a jester he was allowed to do so. But

when he was arrested he went from fool to martyr, from comic to tragic. He became a mere Irishman and commoner who had dared to have had “an intimate relationship with the son of a peer of the realm” (Cave vii). Three days before he died, when asked about his life, Wilde said: “Some said my life was a lie but I always knew it to be the truth; for like the truth it was rarely pure and never simple” (Wilde qtd. in Holland 3).

The last line echoes one of the characters in Wilde’s most famous play, *The Importance of Being Earnest – A Trivial Comedy for Serious People* (1895), a play very much concerned with double identities and the question of what is true. My thesis is that Wilde, in this play, employed the well-established Late Victorian concept of double identity as well as a dualistic theme, revealed in the language and in the strategies of lying, in order to exploit the hypocrisy of society. In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, there are two principal male characters, Jack and Algy, who have invented aliases that enable them to lead a double life. The dualistic theme is not only displayed in the characters’ use of double identities but in the language of the play and the play as a whole. The name Ernest is a pun and the dialogue is full of contradictions, misunderstandings and lies which are true and vice versa: the characters say one thing and mean something else and are sometimes more truthful when they actually are lying. What does the theme of double identity and dualistic language convey? What is true and what is false? Why all these paradoxes? Why lie? In this essay I will show that in *The Importance of Being Earnest* the notion of double identity and duality is connected to the language and the lying and reveals a society of double standards of morality and turn out to be a deconstruction of Victorian moral and social values. I will also argue that the duality, the double identities and the lying might be explained partly in a colonial context. Since Wilde was Irish and a covert homosexual, he represented a despised ‘other’. Through his studies, reading Classics at Oxford, Wilde was granted access to the privileged though. He could thereby be regarded as a part-time outsider. Peter Raby asserts in “Wilde’s comedies of Society” that Wilde used this position to portrait and expose English society, a society that still ruled a large part

Notes

of the world, and that he imitated Englishness as “a subtle form of insult” (Raby 158).

The notion of double identity was a well-established theme during the Late Victorian era, a theme Wilde shared with many of his fellow writers. In Robert Louis Stevenson’s best-selling horror novella *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), “a work which Wilde knew and admired” (Mighall xiii), there is a preoccupation with the idea of a double life and the divided self, a respectable public identity and an amoral self. Dr Jekyll creates a potion that can transform him into the dreadful Mr Hyde. This ‘twin’ as he terms Hyde, provides him with an alibi and gives him “release from the constraints of social conformity, and [allows] Jekyll himself to still walk the path of righteousness” (Mighall xiii). In “Henry Jekyll’s Full Statement of the Case” at the end of the novella, when it is revealed that two people are actually one, Jekyll claims to be “committed to a profound duplicity of life” and explains “man’s dual nature [...] that man is not truly one, but truly two [...] because all human beings, as we meet them, are commingled out of good and evil” (Norton 1709-1711).

Another narrative where dualism, split personality, is treated is Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s stories about Sherlock Holmes (the first published in 1887), where the two male characters have a complementary relationship. Sherlock Holmes is the brilliant detective with dark secrets and Dr. Watson is his faithful side-kick and chronicler. Conan Doyle spoke about Wilde’s only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, as a novel on a high moral plane (Ackroyd 224), and morality was indeed something crucial to Victorian society. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) is full of images of duality and a ‘double life’. The main character, a selfish young man in pursuit of pleasures, offers his soul in return for perpetual youth but while he remains young and handsome his portrait becomes more and more horrid and reflects his corrupted soul. At the time it was written Wilde himself had “been indulging in in activities that were illegal and vilified by ‘respectable’ society, and

which therefore forced him to live a double life” (Mighall xi). In the novel Dorian tells his friend Basil “My dear fellow, you forget that we are in the native land of the hypocrite” whereupon Basil answers “England is bad enough I know, and English society is all wrong” (Wilde 145). Hence, in his novel Wilde mocked the pretensions and the social moralities of the English; “Wilde, an Irishman, was putting a mirror up to his oppressors” (Ackroyd 227). Even though *The Importance of Being Earnest* is a light- spirited comedy my aim is to show that in the play this Late Victorian, fin-de-siècle, dualistic theme is the same as in the works mentioned above and in particular the notions of double identity and complementary character.

The method I have used as a starting point has been a close reading of the text and an analysis of the characters and the language. I have used historical and biographical criticism as a framework to the analysis. Even though biographical criticism is not to be regarded entirely solid, I have provided facts about the author as well as cultural context in the introduction since I believe these facts suggest meanings to the play. Further in the essay I have tried to link my ideas to Wilde’s life as well as to the intellectual movement of the time. Wilde has been a key-figure to queer studies, but his versatility has also rendered him a position in political criticism – being a socialist, gender criticism – deconstructing gender roles and postcolonial criticism – being an Irish writer. These different standpoints overlap but I have looked upon the postcolonial aspect as one context in which the doubling is borne out. Imperialistic rhetoric deploys binary oppositions: good and bad, conqueror and subject or self and other (Cave 223). According to Peter Barry in *Beginning Theory*, postcolonial critics use three major concepts, first the notion of otherness, second a concern with the language and third emphasis on identity as doubled or fluid (Barry 187-8). I have thus in part structured the essay round these characteristics. The notion of otherness is implied in Wilde’s position as an Irishman and homosexual.

Notes

Otherness is linked to double identity examined in a chapter called “Characters and Connotation” and the concern with the language and how it is used is explored in a chapter called “Language and Lying”.

I have used a number of secondary sources for commentary on the play and of particular importance have been the all-embracing “The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde” edited by Peter Raby, which includes among others “Wilde’s fiction(s)” by Jerusha McCormack and “Oscar Wilde: the resurgence of lying” by Declan Kiberd, discussing the Irish question and the language and lying. Peter Raby’s “Wilde’s comedies of society” and “The Origins of The Importance of Being Earnest” have explored the characters and the origins of their names. Jeremy Lalonde’s “A ‘Revolutionary Outrage’: The Importance of Being Earnest as Social Criticism” and Geoffrey Stone’s “Serious Bunburism: The logic of The Importance of Being Earnest” has discussed issues like language, dandies, morality and deconstruction.

5.2 CHARACTERS AND CONNOTATIONS

In this chapter I will explore the characters in the play. First, I will investigate whether the names reveal anything about the characters and whether the characters have double identities or aliases. Then, I will examine the dualistic themes of doubling and complementary character.

In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, there is an obsession with names, and especially with the name of Ernest. Griffith states in *Writing Essays about Literature* that playwrights usually keep their characters simple enough for the audience to understand during the course of a performance and therefore often use stock characters and give them names to indicate their traits (Griffith 93). Investigating the characters’ names and their possible connotations can therefore add to the understanding of the characters and their identity. To name something is to give it an identity, which is particularly interesting in a play so utterly concerned with identity. Moreover many of the characters lead double lives or at least have a secret past, i.e. a double identity.

John Worthing, called Jack, is the protagonist of the play. Jack has a country estate in Hertfordshire where he is the Justice of Peace. He is a serious, responsible guardian to his adoptive father's granddaughter Cecily and he stands for all the Victorian values of morality: duty, honour and respectability; "When one is placed in the position of guardian, one has to adopt a very high moral tone on all subjects. It's one's duty to do so" (Wilde 301). However, he pretends to have an irresponsible brother, named Ernest, who lives a scandalous life and always gets into trouble, which requires Jack to rush off to London to his assistance; "In order to get up to town I have always pretended to have a younger brother of the name of Ernest, who lives in Albany, and gets into the most dreadful scrapes" (301). Thereby, Jack can disappear for days and do as he likes. In London, Jack goes under the name of Ernest; "My name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country" (300), and can live the life he pretends to disapprove of. He thus uses Ernest, his alter-ego, both as an excuse and a disguise to keep his honourable image intact. Jack does, in fact, not know his real name and who he is for as a baby he was found in a hand-bag in the cloak-room at Victoria Station. Wilde used to incorporate place-names, as well as other material at hand, into his comedies, and the name of Worthing was borrowed from a seaside resort in Sussex where Wilde had spent a holiday while he worked on the play (Raby 143). Worthing had the serious properties apposite to a guardian and a Justice of Peace and the name of John/Jack is traditionally and plain enough as we are to understand from Gwendolen: "there is very little music in the name of Jack... It does not thrill. It produces absolutely no vibrations... And I pity any woman who is married to a man called John" (307). John Worthing is accordingly a solid, respectable name, suitable to the protagonist's position and identity as a Justice of peace, a guardian and a pillar of society. However, his name and identity are not exciting and therefore restrictive. Hence, his invention of Ernest gives him new possibilities.

The name Ernest had previously appeared in one of Wilde's comedies of society, *A Woman of No Importance*, in which Mrs Allonby mocks her absent husband Ernest. Russell Jackson admits in his essay "The

Notes

Importance of Being Earnest” that ‘earnest’ in some circles was a code-word for homosexuals, but claims that it first and foremost had connotations of ‘probity’ and ‘high-mindedness’ and that “The claims that Wilde was writing out his Irishness in the double selves of his protagonists are more convincing than the argument for The Importance of Being Earnest as a specifically gay play” (Jackson 173). In The Importance of being Earnest, the characters are more occupied with the name Ernest than the fact of actually being earnest. Marrying a man called Ernest can be a goal in life; Gwendolen exclaims: “my ideal has always been to love someone of the name of Ernest. There is something in that name that inspires absolute confidence. The moment Algernon first mentioned to me that he had a friend called Ernest, I knew I was destined to love you” (306), and Cecily is of the same opinion “it had always been a girlish dream of mine to love some one whose name was Ernest... There is something in that name that seems to inspire absolute confidence. I pity any poor married woman whose husband is not called Ernest” (332). At the end of the play Jack has to reconcile his two names and identities and then he finally understands who he really is.

Algernon Moncrieff, Algy, is the other main principal character of the play and he invents an imaginary friend to conceal his double life as well as borrow Jack’s alias Ernest to impose on Cecily. Algernon Moncrieff’s name is Scottish and aristocratic in sound; “It is not at all a bad name. In fact, it is an aristocratic name. Half of the chaps who get in to bankruptcy Court is called Algernon” (332). He is the charming, idle, selfish, witty dandy of the play, Wilde’s alter-ego, just as Lord Goring in *An Ideal Husband*, Lord Darlington in *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, Lord Illingworth in *A Woman of No Importance* and Lord Henry Wotton in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. While the latter two are evil and the two former are good, Algy has no moral convictions other than to live beautifully. To be able to escape dull social obligations: “in order that I can go down into the country whenever I choose” (301), he has invented an imaginary invalid friend called Bunbury who lives in the country and constantly summons Algy to his deathbed. In that way Algy can indulge himself while

suggesting seriousness and duty. Further in the play he impersonates Jack's invented brother, Ernest, to approach Cecily. Consequently, in spite of his high position in the aristocracy, Algy employs Bunbury as an alibi and Ernest as a double character in order to escape society and improve his prospects.

Another example of dualism in the characters' behaviours is found in Lady Bracknell, Algy's aunt and Gwendolen's mother, who sets herself up as guardian of the morality of the society and implying that she is the only reliable source of taste and probity. She is found to be a parvenu, a social climber, and not an aristocrat at all; "When I married Lord Bracknell I had no fortune of any kind. But I never dreamed for a moment of allowing that to stand in my way" (349). Lady Bracknell's name is derived from a place in Berkshire where Lord Alfred Douglas's mother had a summer home, which Wilde had visited.

The two young ladies of the play, Gwendolen and Cecily, represent the city and the country and both of them have secret lives. The names of the two young ladies are differentiated in a way that: "Gwendolen Fairfax carries a certain weight and crisp urbanity, appropriate for Lady Bracknell's daughter", whereas the name "Cecily Cardew, has a musical lightness about it" (Raby 145). Gwendolen, the sophisticated city lady, leads a 'double life' in the sense that she pretends to go to a lecture but instead runs away to Ernest in the country. Cecily Cardew, Jack's ward, is a natural girl, almost a child of nature and she is just as imaginative, enthusiastic and as capable as Jack and Algy to invent a fantasy life. She lives a 'double life' in her diary where she invents a romance and even an engagement to Jack's wicked brother, Ernest. The diary becomes her fantasy world; "I keep a diary in order to enter the wonderful secrets of my life" (318). She even buys herself a ring and writes letters from him, "The three you wrote me after I had broken off the engagement are so beautiful, and so badly spelled, that even now I can hardly read them without crying a little" (331).

Notes

Cecily's governess, Miss Prism, in comparison, has two very different sides: one rigid and prude puritan side where she highly approves of respectability; "As a man sows, so shall he reap" (323), and harshly criticizes people who live for pleasure only, and one more soft romantic side where she talks about having written a novel. What is more, she has romantic feelings for Chasuble, the vicar. Her dark secret is that she confused a baby and a manuscript twenty-eight years ago and placed the baby by mistake in her handbag, which she deposited at Victoria Station. Chasuble, ever so fond of metaphors, calls Miss Prism 'Egeria', which is the name of the Roman nymph who taught the Roman king judicial responsibility and self-discipline and her name is as a consequence an epithet for a woman who provides guidance. Yet Miss Prism's real name is Laetitia, which means 'joy' and 'delight' and shows that she has two sides, the moralistic guiding governess and the softer romantic self.

In contrast, Canon Chasuble D.D. is aptly and properly named after the ecclesiastical canon and a liturgical vestment; a chasuble is an ornament garment worn by priests. D.D. stands for Doctor of Divinity and he is constantly carrying out christenings; it is as Miss Prism says: "one of the Rector's most constant duties in this parish" (324). Even Jack and Algy request christenings, and Chasuble can thereby be seen as highly connected to the notion of giving a name. To give a name is to give a definition. There is thus a theme of christenings in the play and when Jack and Algy ask to be christened it is as if they want to go back to childhood and change their identity. To change one's name and identity is an important concern from a postcolonial point-of-view where one can be almost doomed by a name since a name might reveal your nationality or your otherness: To change one's name and to gain a new identity is a device to fit in better and to get better prospects. Jack is not allowed to get married when he is Jack Worthing. However, his new identity in the end as Ernest Moncrieff gives him better prospects; a name is therefore of great importance.

Raby argues that Wilde used names in his plays as an act of revenge. In 1894 he was in a dispute with his publishers, Lane and Matthews, so he

used their names as the manservant and butler in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. He relented in the case of Matthews, though, and changed it to Merriman (Raby 145). In the play, even the seemingly unimpeachable Lane turns out to have led a double life when he lets slip that he has been married: “I have only been married once. That was in consequence of a misunderstanding between myself and a young lady” (296). It is, in short, not only the upper-class that is forced to lead a double life; the entire society seems to be constrained to the same device.

Beyond that, Wilde originally wrote a four-act version of the play but it was later to be reduced to three acts and one scene that Wilde himself thought to be one of the funniest was “The excised scene, involving Gribbsby”. In that scene ‘Parker and Gribbsby, Solicitors’ are announced but only one gentleman is in the hall. He later explains “I am both, sir. Gribbsby when I am on unpleasant business, Parker on occasions of a less severe kind” (Wilde 432). In the three-act version, however, the name of Miss Cardew’s solicitors is Markby, Markby and Markby. The name Markby is borrowed from an old-established firm of London solicitors connected to Wilde’s friend Robert Baldwin Ross, to whom *The Importance of being Earnest* was dedicated. Wilde tried to create a particular resonance in the selections of names and “Markby conveys an air of respectability, indeed gentility, far removed from the less salubrious solicitors of the four-act version, Gribbsby and Parker, in which ‘Gribbsby’ has the ring of a particularly ruthless, Dickensian kind of lawyer” (Raby 144). Merlin Holland, Wilde’s grandson writes in “Biography and the art of lying” that Wilde had an “almost childlike pleasure in the grandeur of historic names: ‘Surely everyone prefers Norfolk, Hamilton and Buckingham to Smith or Jones or Robinson’” (Holland 9), Wilde is supposed to have said. According to Holland this proves Wilde’s fascination with the aristocracy. In brief, the characters’ names are carefully chosen to give the right connotations, and the importance of names is emphasized as a theme in the play. Different names give different possibilities; names can be restrictive but also beneficial, depending on the situation. Since names are connected to identity, a new name can lead to an identity with new possibilities and

Notes

better prospects. In addition, there are other ways to escape restrictions: by leading a double life or inventing a double identity, i.e. a complement to their selves.

As shown in this chapter, the theme of dualism and complementary character is evident in the play. There are two male principles, Jack and Algy. They argue most of the time, very often about food, and accuse each other of trivial things just like siblings would do and in the end they in fact turn out to be brothers, i.e. complementary, and Jack can exclaim: "Then I have a brother after all. I knew I had a brother! I always said I had a brother" (356). Furthermore, there are two young ladies, Gwendolen and Cecily, who are even more complementary characters since they represent two sides of England. Gwendolen represents the fashionable city and Cecily the natural countryside; both of them reconcile and become sisters, sisters-in-law, but not until "they have called each other a lot of other things first" (314), as Algy so accurately predicted in the first act. These two brothers and two sisters make two couples. Jack escaped to the city and pretended to be Ernest and found his bride and Algy escaped to the country, pretended, just like his brother, to be Ernest and found his bride. Chasuble and Prism also ends up being a couple, reconciling church and education and Lane and Merriman, the perfect butlers add perfectly to the symmetry of the doublings. The only one who is on her own is Lady Bracknell, representing Victorian values and society, "insisting that she is the pinnacle of convention, good form and normality and that others must in consequence behave according to her dictate" (Mighall 430). She tells everyone what to do and stands, as suggested in the stage directions of the first production, in the middle of the stage at the end of the play with the couples grouped symmetrically around her (Cave 429).

1. The evidence so far suggests that Wilde was, just as the title of the play implies, highly aware of how important a name could be. Each name has a certain ring to it, including connotations, and is a starting-point to one's position in life. In Victorian society a

name could be an advantage point or a doom. Victorian morality was based on, and presumably even inseparable from, colonial and imperialistic morality, i.e. heavily self-righteous. The assumption was that the ruling class are ruling just because they are superior and implicitly good and the others are ruled over because they are inferior and accordingly bad. From our point of view it was a very oppressive morality, which contained a moral control of human behaviour. Hence, to escape the repressive morality, all the characters are compelled to lead a double life or invent a double character. The duplicity of the characters, their fluid identities, becomes a satire over Victorian behaviour as well as a more truthful description of what a human being is. The duality is enhanced by the complementary characters and the doublings but duplicity is also manifested in other aspects of the work, foremost in the language and in the lying.

Check in Progress I:

Q1. Define in brief about the characters in this play?

Answer.....
.....
.....
.....

Q2. Write a short note on connotations in the play?

Answer.....
.....
.....
.....

5.3 LANGUAGE AND LYING

Wilde used double identity as well as a dualistic theme in the play, revealed in the language and in the strategies of lying, to exploit the hypocrisy of the society.

Employing a double identity might be seen as lying, and in this chapter I will investigate how the dualistic theme is revealed through the language, the dialogue and the farcical tone, but first and foremost, in the lying.

Notes

Wilde, the wordsmith, had a way with words and used both wit and wordplay; *The Importance of Being Earnest* is described by W. H. Auden as “‘the purest example in English literature’ of a ‘verbal opera’” (Cave viii). For example, the name E(a)rnest and its obvious pun gives an absurd double meaning to both the name and the word. Another pun is on the agricultural depression, which Cecily describes as “the condition of aristocrats who find themselves depressed by country life” (337). The name of Bunbury can lead to a new verb, ‘bunburying’ or to an epithet ‘bunburist’; “now that I know you to be a confirmed Bunburist I naturally want to talk to you about Bunburying” (302) as Algy says. When Lady Bracknell hears that the fictitious Bunbury is dead, that he ‘quite exploded’, there is “a linguistic play on the double sense of ‘exploded’” (Lalonde 672): Algy uses the word figuratively but Lady Bracknell interprets it literally. Wilde was also fond of using the rhetorical device of inversions for comic effect, i.e. when a character starts to use an expression in one way but ends it in another unexpected way, for example, when Algy says: “I have a business appointment that I am anxious...to miss” (321).

There is also a frequent use of epigrams, paradoxical expressions, which are the typical emblem of the modern dandy. Epigrams can be seen as dualistic since they contain both truths and lies. All the characters, Merriman excepted, “exploit epigrammatic wit and paradox” (Lalonde 665). The epigrams, which are one of Wilde’s trademarks, “are centrally concerned with revising moral standards” (Mackie 156) and they are both declarative and didactic in tone and have a contrasting structure, for instance, placing truth and lies in opposition to one another. When the characters lie, they on occasion do so in pentameter and indeed alliteration, such as Algy’s remark about a widow who is now said to live entirely for pleasure, “I hear her hair has turned quite gold from grief” (304), a line recycled from *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a practice often repeated by Wilde.

Furthermore, there are many conflicts, verbal fights, double interests, between the characters. The conflicts are enhanced by the dualistic structure, the doubling of scenes and the repeating of dialogue, even talking in unison. The play opens with a verbal conflict between Algy and Lane. It is a conflict of class between master and servant; the upper and lower orders; of dominators and dominated. Algy, polite and civil, fights verbally with Lane about Lane listening to Algy's playing and Lane's stealing champagne, but he loses every exchange (Stone 32). "Did you hear what I was playing, Lane?" "I didn't think it was polite to listen, sir." "Why is it that at a bachelor's establishment the servants invariably drink the champagne? I ask merely for information." "I attribute it to the superiority of the wine, sir." (295).

The play then moves to conflicts within one social class. In the relationship between Jack and Algy, Algy is the clear dominator. He makes most of the jokes and forces Jack to tell the truth about his double life (Stone 33). The conflict is indeed very often about food, a general feature of Victorian farce. The characters are both eating and arranging to dine, or emphasizing the moral importance of being serious about meals; "I hate people who are not serious about meals" (303). Furthermore, the food is "always used as a weapon of domination" (Stone 38) in the play, just like the champagne mentioned above. In the first act Algy denies Jack any sandwiches since they are intended for Lady Bracknell, but that does not stop Algy from eating them all himself since she is his aunt. At the end of act two, Jack morally reproaches Algy for eating muffins: "I say it's perfectly heartless your eating muffins at all, under the circumstances", but he is defeated by Algy: "At the present moment I am eating muffins because I am unhappy. Besides, I am particularly fond of muffins" (341), and Algy moreover denies him any of the muffins. Arguing over muffins may seem trivial but here it comes to symbolize Algy's advantage on the social ladder.

As with Algy and Jack, Gwendolen and Cecily's conflict is not only between 'town' and 'country.' It also deals with class and is fought partly through talking about food; "No, thank you. Sugar is not

Notes

fashionable any more...Cake is rarely seen in the best houses nowadays” (337). Their tea-party conflict has a neat structure.

They both refer to the engagement in their respective diaries. Cecily’s diary is earlier described as “a very young girl’s record of her own thoughts and impressions, and consequently meant for publication” (329) while Gwendolen refers to her diary in a more superior way; “I never travel without my diary. One should always have something sensational to read in the train” (336). Cecily states that the engagements shall be announced shortly; “Our little country newspaper is sure to chronicle the fact next week”; Gwendolen counters that “the announcement will appear in the Morning Post on Saturday” (335). The ‘Morning Post’ is superior in terms of class and sophistication over Cecily’s ‘little country newspaper’ and Gwendolen’s ‘Saturday’ is more precise than Cecily’s ‘next week’ (Stone 34). The argument ends with yet another class-reference when Cecily says, “This is no time for wearing the shallow mask of manners. When I see a spade I call it a spade” and Gwendolen answers “I am glad to say that I have never seen a spade. It is obvious that our social spheres have been widely different” (336). When Gwendolen and Cecily have fought the battle over ‘Ernest’ and Jack and Algernon are exposed, the language becomes increasingly patterned and artificial “as the dialogue for each couple exactly mirrors the responses of the other pair to the point where both men and women begin to speak in unison” (Cave xviii). On the whole, the conflicts follow a neat dualistic pattern and the weapons used are words and/or food. Remarks about food can be seen as a symbol of class-bound superiority and withholding food as a counterattack.

Lady Bracknell is in conflict with Jack and gives many examples of verbal description or distortions of reality. She talks about Jack’s smoking as an ‘occupation’ and that “A man should always have an occupation of some kind. There are too many idle men in London as it is” (308). She approves of something she calls a ‘natural ignorance’ and disapproves of education; “education is radically unsound” (309). When

Jack states that he has lost both his parents, she talks about them as things: “Both? To lose one parent may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness” (310) and her “refusal to allow Gwendolen to ‘marry into a cloakroom, and form an alliance with a parcel’ is a perfect formulation of the upper order’s habit of treating people like things” (Stone 36). When she describes Jack as being “born, or at any rate bred, in a hand-bag” (311), an utterance derived from the phrase ‘born and bred,’ she is modifying reality verbally to suit the language. In act three she argues with Jack about Cecily and Algernon getting married, approving of Cecily only when she finds out about her fortune; “Miss Cardew seems to me a most attractive young lady, now that I look at her... There are distinct social possibilities in Miss Cardew’s profile” (349), and reckons Algy to be an utterly eligible man and suitable husband, despite his debts since “He has nothing but he looks everything” (350). Hence, she changes and dictates reality verbally.

My thesis is that Wilde used the concepts of double identity as well as a dualistic theme in the play, revealed in the language and in the lying, in order to exploit the hypocrisy of the society, i.e. the ruling class, and in doing so he deconstructed Englishness. There is a deconstruction of gender roles, the church, the family, the education and the legal system in the play and these are exposed through the characters and their lying. All the main characters in the play, both men and women, are in a sense dandies, since they have all “the mannerisms of the dandy –idleness, effeminacy [and] immorality” (Lalonde 664). Instead of a traditional patriarch, Lady Bracknell rules with authority and the other women are almost as assertive.

Lord Bracknell, on the other hand, is described as someone extraneous and replaceable and is used to dine upstairs if necessary when Lady Bracknell is having her dinner parties. Gwendolen refers to him as “painfully effeminate” but that it is something that “makes men so very attractive” (334). Dr Chasuble, representing the church, has one sermon which “can be adapted to almost any occasion” (324). But Jack and

Notes

Algy's baptisms have lost their meaning as a religious rite in the play and are reduced to an act of changing one's name. The institution of marriage and family life is mocked foremost by Algy: "If I get married, I'll certainly try to forget the fact" (297), but yet they all strive to become married. If one defies the rules of family life

it might lead to socialism as Lady Bracknell believes: "To be born, or at any rate, bred in a handbag, whether it had handles or not, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life that remind one of the worst excesses of the French Revolution. And I presume you know what that unfortunate movement led to?" (311). Lady Bracknell again has the strongest opinions about the educational system: "education produces no effect whatsoever. If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes" (309) and Gwendolen further explains Lady Bracknell's opinions: "mamma, whose views of education are remarkably strict, has brought me up to be extremely short-sighted" (334). Jeremy Lalonde claims in "A 'Revolutional Outrage': The Importance of Being Earnest as Social Criticism" that these observations are true from a Marxist outlook since "educational institutions serve the interests of the ruling class" (Lalonde 670). First and foremost it is the legal system that is deconstructed: Jack is a justice of peace, representing the judiciary system, and as a justice of peace he should speak nothing but the truth but in maintaining his identity as Ernest he is depicted as a liar and a lawbreaker. Wilde depicts a society with manners and morals used as a façade, a society where people try to conceal their secret lives with the use of language itself as a mask (Cave 224).

Despite the fact that all the characters have secret lives and constantly lie, they all claim to be speakers of truth. Almost all the characters are "Truth-speakers," often brutally so. The characters not only state truths conveying their morality, they also emphasize truthfulness, which runs as a theme through the play. Algy is the first to claim to be a speaker of truth when accused of talking nonsense in act one: "It isn't [nonsense]. It is a great truth" (298). He also accuses Jack of untruthfulness, when he thinks Jack speaks like a dentist, which is vulgar "when one isn't a dentist. It produces a false impression" (300). Jack tells Algy "candidly"

that he does not live in Shropshire and after telling him about his double identities states: "That, my dear Algy, is the whole truth pure and simple" (301), a statement Algy punctuates with an epigram: "The truth is rarely pure and never simple" (301). Jack insists on being truthful when talking to Gwendolen: "...darling, to speak quite candidly..." (306) and so is Gwendolen: "...to tell you quite frankly..." (307).

However, when Algy asks if Jack told Gwendolen the truth about his double identities, Jack answers "[in a very patronising manner]: ... the truth isn't the sort of thing one tells to a nice, sweet, refined girl. What extraordinary ideas you have about the way to behave to a woman" (313). In act two, Cecily hopes that Algy-as-Ernest has "not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time" since "That would be hypocrisy" (320) and when he later declares her to be the "personification of absolute perfection" she thinks that his "frankness" does him credit (329). The maintaining of truthfulness increases during the tea party scene. Gwendolen asks if she may "speak candidly," which Cecily encourages since "whenever one has anything unpleasant to say, one should always be quite candid," and Gwendolen asserts that she will "speak with perfect candour" (334). Later during their argument, Gwendolen is of the opinion that it is not only "a moral duty to speak one's mind" but a pleasure and Cecily agrees that they should not wear "the shallow mask of manners" but "call a spade a spade" (336). Jack admits when 'Ernest' "is exploded" that it is very painful for him "to be forced to speak the truth" and that it is the first time in his life that he has "been reduced to such a painful position" and is "really quite inexperienced in doing anything of the kind" but he nevertheless tells them "quite frankly" that he has no brother Ernest (339). In the third act, Gwendolen and Cecily choose to accept Jack and Algy's explanations, not because they believe them but because of the "beauty" of the answers and the "credulity" of their voices. Gwendolen says: "In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity, is the vital thing" (345). Lady Bracknell does not emphasize her own truthfulness. It is implied in everything she says.

Notes

However, she claims to “speak frankly” when engagements are discussed at the end of the play and she becomes somewhat upset when Algy is accused of being untruthful: “Untruthful! My nephew Algernon? Impossible! He is an Oxonian” (350). Jack completes the theme of truthfulness after he has found out that his real name is Ernest after all: “It is a terrible thing for a man to find out suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth. Can you forgive me?” (357). In conclusion, the theme of truthfulness illuminates the contrasted concept of lying; the characters often lie when they claim to speak the truth, but they also call attention to the fact that style and credulity is more important than actually speaking the truth. In the end of the play, the lies are revealed as the truths, which suggest a complementary relation between the two concepts.

Wilde grew up in a British colony, a colony where the peasants were forced to mirror their masters when they spoke. Wilde had witnessed this and had therefore learned how to ‘speak double’: he employed wit and irony as a counter-speech; he “turned the double-speak of the Empire back on itself” (McCormack 98). In “Oscar Wilde: the resurgence of lying,” Declan Kiberd argues that lying is a central element in Wilde’s plays and that the Irish Question might have caused lying itself to be considered a moralistic activity. In an oppressed country, “lying to government officials had long been seen as a genuinely alternative morality” (Kiberd 278).

Words could be seen as weapons and irony, ambiguity and deceit as modes of self-protection. There are two sides to every story and there was a contrast between British pretence of ruling and reality, that they did not rule, that “gave rise to that bifocal vision to be found in most of the Anglo-Irish writers” (Kiberd 279). All the laws could be considered lies since they were invented by the British and only represented ideal aspiration than actual practice. Wilde also lived in an age when philosophers were coming to the conclusion that language itself was “a dubious, slippery commodity and that to talk is to learn how to tell lies”

(Kiberd 276). Fluency and eloquence were distrusted and hesitation and inarticulacy admired and regarded as honesty. An Irish person often used English with a hesitation, 'a charming tilt.'

Certain words and phrases could have one meaning in Ireland and another in England and the result could be that they were saying something they never intended. Yet Yeats reported Wilde himself talking in perfect sentences (Norton 1720). In *The Importance of Being Earnest* Jack says: "Algy, you never talk anything but nonsense", and Algy answers: "Nobody ever does" (316). But in the play the truths eventually conform to the lies: Jack is Ernest and he has a brother, and Cecily becomes engaged just as she fabricated in her diary; she lies herself into an engagement.

Wilde asserted in his essay "The Decay of Lying" that there were many different kinds of lies – white lies, black lies, lies that are told to save face or to gain advantage – but the highest form of lying was lying for its own sake; lying as art. In another essay "The Artist as Critic", Wilde talks about the telling of beautiful untrue things and suggests that realism only is a lower form of truth. The lie can acquire "its own reality, and may indeed turn out to have been true all along in the world of art" (Kiberd 287). The conclusion is that the opposite of truth can also be true, like in the case of Jack, who really is both Jack and Ernest. Furthermore, if lies are a higher truth, truths might be lower lies. In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, everybody commits a lie or falsehood at some point which seems to reveal a society unable to function without them. Wilde creates a world of opposites and doubles where the self and the doppelgänger could be seen as creating a whole person and where truths and lies could create a higher truth.

In short, the duplicity in the language consists of wordplay with double meanings and epigrams with double meanings. The duplicity is also revealed in the double characters and in the conflicts, which include

Notes

double interests. Above all, embedded in wit and double language, the play consists of lying. The lying is enhanced and illuminated by the contrasted theme of truth-speaking and is employed to deconstruct sociocultural issues like gender, church, education, family and legal system. The double identities and the double language of the play are related to the lying since Wilde seems to suggest that lying is double and that the duplicity of lying is a useful as well as moralistic tool to reveal the truth of a repressive Imperialistic society. In order to fully understand the wit in Wilde's play, manifested in the language and lying, we might in part assume a colonial perspective where the comic rhetoric could be seen as an effect of Wilde's colonial position and of speaking double.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

2. Summarize the theme of the play.

3. Describe the "Dualistic Theme" word referred in this play?

5.4 LET'S SUM UP

In this essay I have explored the established Late Victorian dualistic theme in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. First I investigated the characters and their names in "Characters and Connotations," where I showed that their identities were double and that this was a function of escaping a repressive society. Then, in "Language and Lying," I investigated lying, manifested in witty wordplay and paradoxical epigrams. Furthermore, I demonstrated that the play as a whole, its structure and doubling, enhances the dualistic theme. It became obvious

that some of the characters were leading a double life and that they were lying about it. They claimed to be speakers of truth and they used assertive language to conceal their lies. The frequent use of lies and language with double meanings in the play suggests that there is duplicity in lying and that the truth has two sides, just like the characters in the play are dual and have two sides.

Besides, I have tried to find out whether Wilde might have had a more serious intent by employing themes of double character, double language and lying. I have looked upon Wilde as an Irishman who wanted to be an Englishman, fascinated by the ruling aristocracy. His position must have been ambivalent, though, knowing that despite his genius he could never fully be accepted, being both Irish and homosexual. He was an inferior, exotic 'Other,' almost the same but not quite. However, this position, as partly an insider partly and outsider, gave him the possibility, and perhaps the motivation, to scrutinize the ruling class. Through his works, his "modest proposals," Wilde could write back to the Empire and direct subtle critique to the ruling class. In consequence he did so by employing devices like theatrical dandyism to get the attention and witty language to keep it. Moreover, he produced this critique in the theatres in London, at the heart of society and at the heart of the British Empire.

All in all, the play unmask the society and says something about reality: that appearance can be deceptive and that duplicity is an essential part of reality. The notion of the double or divided identity suggests that no one is one thing and might even lead to an acknowledgement, that diversity is not only essential but something positive. This conclusion is based on the outcome of the play where everyone, even though they lead double lives and lie, get what they want in the end. To be dual, or more than one, or 'other' could, in contrast to the Victorian notion, actually be seen as something potential and beneficial. The Victorian view on what was true and what was real, was far too limited for Wilde, both as an artist and a person. Reality, morality and identity are complex and versatile, as we are to understand from his works and his own life. Truth and lie might

sometimes even go hand in hand to be fully true just as a person might be both good and bad to be whole and complete.

From a postcolonial point-of-view plurality can be seen as the source of energy and potential change. I like to think that the dualism in *The Importance of Being Earnest* celebrates diversity and difference, that first appearance, nationality, gender, sexuality or other labels are not more than starting-points.

5.5 KEYWORDS

1. **Horticultural** : having to do with a garden
2. **Lorgnette** : a pair of eyeglasses with a handle
3. **Misanthrope** : one who hates people
4. **Perambulator** : baby carriage

5.6 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- What does *The Importance of Being Earnest* tell us to think about marriage?
- To what extent can Oscar Wilde's works can be read as effective social criticism?
- "Although Wilde seems frivolous, he aims at illuminating serious issues about humanity." How far do you agree with this assertion?
- Comment on the presentation of aestheticism in the writings of Oscar Wilde.

5.7 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

- Ackroyd, Peter. Introduction to the First Penguin Classic Edition. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. By Oscar Wilde. London: Penguin Classic, 2003. 224-30. Print.
- Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory An introduction to literal and cultural theory*. 3rd ed. Manchester: Manchester University Press 2009. Print
- Cave, Richard Allan. Introduction. Notes. *The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Plays*. By Oscar Wilde. London: Penguin Books 2000. Vii-xxvi, 419-32. Print.
- Cave, Richard Allen. "Wilde's plays: some lines of influence." *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*. Ed. Peter Raby. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. 219-48. Print.
- Griffith, Kelley. *Writing Essays about Literature A Guide and Style Sheet*. 8th edition. Boston: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2011. Print.
- Holland, Merlin. "Biography and the art of lying." *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*. Ed. Peter Raby. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. 18-33. Print.
- Jackson, Russell. "The Importance of Being Earnest." *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*. Ed. Peter Raby. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. 161-80. Print.
- Kiberd, Declan. "Oscar Wilde: the resurgence of lying." *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*. Ed. Peter Raby. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. 276-94. Print.
- Lalonde, Jeremy. "A 'Revolutionary Outrage': The Importance of Being Earnest as Social Criticism." *Modern Drama*. Vol. 48:4 (2005): 659-76. Web.
- "Late Victorians." "Robert Louis Stevenson." "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." "Oscar Wilde." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Ed.
- M. H. Abrahams et al. 9th ed. Vol. E. New York: Norton. 2012. 1668-69, 1675- 721. Print.
- Mackie, Gregory. "The Function of Decorum at the Present Time: Manners, Moral Language, and Mordernity in 'an Oscar WildePlay.'" *Modern Drama*, Vol. 52:2. (2009): 145-67. Web.
- McCormack, Jerusha. "Wilde's fiction(s)." *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*. Ed. Peter Raby. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. 96-117. Print.

Notes

- Mighall, Robert. Introduction. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. By Oscar Wilde.
- London: Penguin Classics, 2003. Ix-xxix. Print.
- Raby, Peter. "The Origins of The Importance of Being Earnest." *Modern Drama*.
- Vol. 37:1 (1994): 139-47. Web.
- Raby, Peter. "Wilde's comedies of society." *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*. Ed. Peter Raby. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. 143-60. Print.
- Stone, Geoffrey. "Serious Bunburism: The Logic of 'The Importance of Being Earnest.'" *A Quarterly Journal of Literary Criticism*. Vol. 26 (1976): 28-41. Web.
- Wilde, Oscar. *The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Plays*. London: Penguin Books, 2000. Print.
- Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. London: Penguin Classics, 2003. Print.

5.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK IN PROGRESS

Check in Progress I

Answer 1. Check Section 3.3

Answer 2 . Check Section 3.3

Check in Progress II

Answer 1. Check section 3.4

Answer 2 . Check section 3.4

UNIT 6: THOMAS CARLYLE'S LIFE & INFLUENCES

STRUCTURE

6.0 Objectives

6.1 Introduction

6.2 Chronology Of Life Of Thomas Carlyle

6.3 Preface

- Early Years Untill 1826
- 1826-1834
- Craigenputtock
- 1866 Onwards

6.4 Major Works Of Thomas Carlyle

6.5 Carlyle's Influence

6.6 Let's Sum Up

6.7 Keywords

6.8 Question for Review

6.9 Suggested Reading And References

6.10 Answers To Check Your Progress

6.0 OBJECTIVE

The objective of the unit to understand the brief about the **Thomas Carlyle**.

This unit helps to understand the early days and personal life of Thomas Carlyle.

This unit helps to achieve following objectives:

- Introduce the life of Carlyle
- Introduce to his major works
- His major influences
- His life history

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Thomas Carlyle was a Scottish historian, satirical writer, essayist, translator, philosopher, mathematician, and teacher. Considered one of the most important social commentators of his time, he presented many lectures during his lifetime with certain acclaim in the Victorian era. One of those conferences resulted in his famous work *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History* where he argued that the key role in history lies in the actions of the "Great Man", claiming that "the history of the world is but the biography of great men".

A respected historian, his 1837 book *The French Revolution: A History* was the inspiration for Charles Dickens' 1859 novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, and remains popular today. Carlyle's 1836 *Sartor Resartus* is a notable philosophical novel.

A great polemicist, Carlyle coined the term "the dismal science" for economics, in his essay "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question", which remains controversial. He also wrote articles for the *Edinburgh Encyclopædia*. Once a Christian, Carlyle lost his faith while attending the University of Edinburgh, later adopting a form of deism.

In mathematics, he is known for the Carlyle circle, a method used in quadratic equations and for developing ruler-and-compass constructions of regular polygons.

6.2 CHRONOLOGY OF THE LIFE OF THOMAS CARLYLE

- 1795 Thomas Carlyle born December 4 at Ecclefechan, Annandale, Scotland
 1801 Jane Baillie Welsh, born July 14 at Haddington, East Lothian, Scotland.
 1806 – 1809 Carlyle attends Annan Academy.
- 1808 Carlyle first sees Edward Irving at Annan Academy.
 1809 – 1814 Attends Edinburgh University.
- 1814 Returns to Annan Academy as mathematic tutor.
- 1816 – 1818 Begins teaching in Burgh school in Kirkcaldy. Meets Margaret Gordon.
 Friendship with Irving begins.
- 1819 Moves to Edinburgh. Begins study of German
 1820 – 1823 Contributes articles to *Edinburgh Encyclopedia*.
 1821 Meets Jane Baillie Welsh in Haddington.
- 1822 Tutors Charles ND Arthur Buller.
- 1823 “Life of Schiller” published in *London Magazine*.
- 1824 Translation of “Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship” published.
 Travel to London and Paris
- 1825 “The Life of Schiller” published in book form.
- 1826 Marries Jane Baillie Welsh October 17; they move to Comely Bank, Edinburgh.
- 1827 “Jean Paul Friedrich Richter” published in June, Carlyle’s first contribution to *Edinburgh Review*.
 “German Romance” published, four volumes.
- 1828 Carlyles move to Craigenputtock. Burns published in *Edinburgh Review*.
 Articles on German literature published in *Foreign Review*.
- 1828 “Essay on Robert Burns”
- 1829 “Signs of the Times” published in *Edinburgh Review*.
 Articles on German literature published in *Foreign Review*.

Notes

- 1830 “On History” published in *Fraser’s Magazine*. Begins “Sartor Resartus”. Articles on German literature published in *Foreign Review* and *Fraser’s Magazine*.
- 1831 “Sartor Resartus” completed. “Characteristics” published in *Edinburgh Review*. Travels to London. Meets John Stuart Mill
- 1832 Death of James Carlyle, Carlyle’s father, January 22.
- 1833 Emerson visits Craigenputtock. “Sartor Resartus” begins in *Fraser’s Magazine*.
- 1834 Carlyles move to London, 5 Cheyne Row (now #24), Chelsea. Death of Edward Irving
- 1835 First volume of “The French Revolution” destroyed by Mill’s servant.
Meets John Sterling
- 1836 “Sartor Resartus” published in book form in Boston. 1837 “The French Revolution” completed and published. 1838 “Sartor Resartus” published in book form in England.
- 1839 “Critical and Miscellaneous” essays published, four volumes, “Chartism” published.
- 1840 Gives lecture series on “Heroes and Hero Worship”. 1841 “On Heroes and Hero Worship” published.
- 1842 Meets Mr. and Mrs. Baring (later Lord and Lady Ashburton). 1843 “Past and Present” published.
- 1844 Death of John Sterling.
- 1845 “Oliver Cromwell’s Letters and Speeches, with Elucidations” published, two volumes.
- 1846 Carlyle visits Ireland.
- 1847 Emerson visits Carlyle in London.
- 1850 “Latter Day Pamphlets” published.
- 1851 “The Life of John Sterling” published.
- 1852 Begins work on “Frederick the Great”; tours Germany.
- 1853 Death of Margaret Aitken Carlyle, Carlyle’s mother, December 25.
- 1856 – 1858 First collected edition of Carlyle’s works published.
- 1858 First two volumes of “History of Frederick the Great” published. Second visit to Germany

- 1859** “Life of Burns”
- 1863 Third volume of “History of Frederick the Great” published.
- 1864 Fourth volume of “History of Frederick the Great” published.
- 1865 Fifth and sixth volumes of “The History of Frederick the Great” published.
- 1866 Inaugural address as Rector of Edinburgh University, April 2. Death of Jane Baillie Welsh Carlyle, April 21. Begins writing “Reminiscences”
- 1867 “Shooting Niagara: and After?” published in *Macmillan’s*.
- 1869 Audience with Queen Victoria.
- 1874 Receives Prussian Order of Merit.
- 1875 “The Early Kings of Norway” and “The Portraits of John Knox” published.
- 1879 Death of John Carlyle, Carlyle’s brother.
- 1881 Death of Thomas Carlyle, February 4: burial in Ecclefechan churchyard. “Reminiscences” published.

6.3 PREFACE

Having been raised in a small Scottish town where it was the norm to find out about the ancestors of new people to the town, I felt it necessary to find out a little of the ancestry of both Thomas Carlyle and his wife, Jane Baillie Welsh, prior to putting pen to paper about the life of Thomas Carlyle, the Scottish satirical writer, essayist and historian who became a very controversial commentator of the Victorian era.

The Carlyles came with David II (mid 14th century AD) from an English town of the same name (but spelled slightly differently - Carlisle). They settled in the Annandale area and the cemetery of the Ecclefechan church contains many gravestones of the Carlyle family each bearing the Carlisle coat of arms – two griffins with adder stings. Ecclefechan first recorded as Eglesfeghan in 1303.

Thomas, the grandfather of our author, settled there as a carpenter. In 1745 he witnessed the rebel highlanders under Bonnie Prince Charlie march south. He was apparently "a fiery man, his stroke as ready as his word; of the toughness and springiness of steel; an honest but not an industrious man". He became a tenant of a small farm, which he did not manage well, and as a result the family was raised in very poor

Notes

conditions. Into this home were born and raised five sons, known as the fighting masons, described by an old apprentice of one of them as “a curious sample of folks, pithy, bitter speaking bodies, and awfu’ fighters”. The second son, James, born in 1757, married – first a full cousin, Janet Carlyle who bore him a son John who lived at Cockermouth; second Margaret Aitken by whom he had four sons – THOMAS, Alexander; John (Dr. Carlyle, translator of Dante; and James. They also had five daughters, one of whom, Jane, married her cousin James Aitken of Dumfries, and was mother of Mary, the niece who faithfully tended her famous uncle THOMAS during the last years of this life.

JANE BAILLIE WELSH was a direct descendant of John Knox, the Scottish Reformer. He married a Margaret Stewart with whom he had three daughters – Martha, Margaret and Elizabeth.

Elizabeth married John Welsh, Minister of Ayr and they had one son, Josias who became minister at Templepatrick, County Antrim. His son John Michael Welsh of Irongray, born 17th century, was a leader of the Scottish Covenanters. Irongray is a parish in Dumfriesshire.

The ancestry continues through a number of John Welsh’s to the son a Dumfriesshire farming family, another John, who became a doctor in Haddington. [It is interesting to note that John Knox was born near Haddington.] This Dr. John Welsh married a Grace Baillie Welsh (no relative, but who could trace her ancestry to William Wallace). They had one daughter, Jane Baillie Welsh who became the wife of THOMAS CARLYLE.

Early Years Until 1826

Thomas Carlyle was born on December 4, 1795 in Ecclefechan, Dumfriesshire. He had three brothers, one stepbrother and five sisters. His parents, James and Margaret Carlyle raised their children in their strong Calvinist beliefs. They gave them a sound education and a loving home.

"It was not a joyful life," says Thomas--"what life is? - Yet a safe, quiet one; above most others, or any others I have witnessed, a wholesome one."

His mother taught him to read and write and his father taught him arithmetic. He was sent to the village school. There he was pronounced "complete in English" at age seven. At ten years of age he went off to Annan Academy where he learned Latin, some Greek, French, algebra and geometry. He had a violent temper and even his mother said that not only was he, "gey ill to deal wi'," but also "gey ill to live wi'." As a result his mother made him promise never to return a blow in the event that his temper might get him into trouble. He kept his promise but to his detriment it was taken as cowardice by his fellow students who continuously picked on him until one day he retaliated to an attack by the class bully. Although he lost the fight he was never picked on again. At age fourteen he still sought to have further learning and was supported in this by his father who wanted him to have the most complete education that he could get and so he set off one November morning to walk some eighty miles to Edinburgh where he would enroll at the University.

His parents had wanted him to become a minister but he lost his faith at university, indeed he lost respect for the university and never completed his degree. He also considered taking up law but gave that up when he realized that he had no particular bent for the subject. He believed that books were the source of all learning and it was the knowledge of books and how to use them that he felt was what the university had really taught him. The only academic subject that appealed to him, at which he became extremely competent, was mathematics. His ability in mathematics even gained him praise from his professor.

He left university in 1814. To fill in time before his intended ordination he returned to Annan where he took a post as a mathematics tutor for a salary of £60 to £70 per annum. He was now somewhat independent and was able to save a little from his meager salary. He was now near his

Notes

family who had moved to a farm at Mainhill, some two miles from Ecclefechan. He spent his holidays there. His life at Annan was very lonely and it was spent among his books.

A fellow named Edward Irving, whom Carlyle had met at Annan Academy in 1808, had become a schoolmaster in Kirkcaldy. However a number of the parents were a little dissatisfied with his teaching and decided to hire a second teacher. Based on references from his professors at Edinburgh University Carlyle was awarded the position in 1816 and became a rival of Irving. Irving showed him no animosity and the two formed a very close friendship. Carlyle made very good use of Irving's personal library. He found his duties as a teacher extremely distasteful and his reserved nature, his irritability and his sarcastic manner were unsuited to the position. Carlyle was not a very sociable individual and mixed little within the community. He was however attracted to a Miss Margaret Gordon, an ex-pupil of Irving's. Miss Gordon's aunt, with whom she lived, put a stop to any possibility of an engagement. Miss Gordon herself severed the relationship and very soon after married a member of parliament who became governor of Nova Scotia. About this time Carlyle found being a teacher intolerable and in 1818 he told his father that with his savings and by tutoring a few pupils mathematics he could survive. Accordingly in 1819 he went off to Edinburgh with Irving who had given up his school with the view of taking up the ministry. It was at this time that Carlyle began to suffer from dyspepsia which was to cause him great discomfort for the rest of his life. The discomfort of the dyspepsia made him even more irritable. The following three years were the 'most miserable' of his life. The misery of the lower classes at the time made a deep impression on him and he sympathized with the discontent. In 1821 he went through a 'spiritual rebirth' though for four more years he had many mental struggles. During this time of mental struggle he was greatly supported by his entire family and was always affectionately welcomed on his occasional visits to Mainhill.

Carlyle had taken great interest in German studies, particularly Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, whose more gentle personality was in great

contrast to his own. He had decided by this time that he wanted to be a writer and had applied without success to London booksellers. His friend Edward Irving had moved to London and was always on the lookout for employment for his young friend. Irving had made acquaintance with two sisters, Mrs. Strachey and Mrs. Buller. Mrs. Buller consulted Edward Irving regarding the education of her two sons, Charles and Arthur (later become Sir Arthur Buller, Liberal MP and member of the commission of inquiry into education in Lower Canada - now Quebec). Irving recommended the boys be sent to Edinburgh with Carlyle as tutor. This was acceptable to the Bullers and Carlyle; in the autumn of 1822 began an association between the Bullers and Carlyle which was to last for some time. The Bullers moved to Dunkeld in 1823 and Carlyle joined them there. At the end of January the Bullers returned to London but Carlyle stayed at Mainhill to finish a translation of Goethe's *Apprenticeship of Wilhelm Meister*. He followed the Bullers to London in June but soon gave up his position as tutor to young Charles who was now heading to Cambridge. Carlyle was still restless and had no definite plans. He had been actively writing and with his income from this and from the Bullers he was able to help his family financially. He supported his brother John as a medical student in Edinburgh and helped his brother Alexander by stocking up a farm for him.

His friend Irving, who had finally settled in London in 1822 mentioned Carlyle's name to Taylor, owner of the *London Magazine*. Taylor offered him sixteen guineas a sheet for a series of portraits of "Men of Genius and Character. The first was the "Life of Schiller" in 1823 - 24. An Edinburgh publisher, Boyd, accepted his "Wilhelm Meister" for publication in 1824. Since leaving the Bullers he was on his own and so the monies for these publications really established him in his own right. Given his frugal upbringing he was able to live comfortably on his earnings. Around this time he visited Paris and his experience there was to be of great value for his future work on the French Revolution. On his return from Paris he took lodgings in Islington near his friend Irving and occupied himself in negotiations for a book form of "The Life of

Notes

Schiller". Shortly after its publication in March 1825 he returned to Scotland.

Carlyle's views of the London society were not entirely favourable. It is best described by Leslie Stephen as "The rugged independence of the Scotch peasant, resenting even well-meant patronage, colours his judgments of the fashionable world, while an additional severity is due to his habitual dyspepsia". His contemporaries of the time were Coleridge, Hazlitt, Campbell, Lamb, Southey and Wordsworth. The last two mentioned had moved far from the city, which Carlyle thought was a good decision. It reinforced his resolution to present his views on the society of the time irrespective of the comments on his work that they might bring. He could not stand flattery and found London society a bit false.

At this point it is necessary to back track a few years to cover his meeting with Jane Baillie Welsh and their "courtship" which ran in conjunction with the events just previously described. Miss Welsh, born on July 14 1801, was a pupil of Carlyle's friend Edward Irving and had developed a crush on him. He had moved to Kirkcaldy where he became engaged to a Miss Martin (Miss Welsh being still a child at the time). He continued to visit Haddington and had come to a "mutual understanding" with Miss Welsh. They both hoped that the Martins would release him from the obligation of the engagement but since this was not forthcoming he and Miss Welsh agreed that he must honour the engagement. Irving was married in the autumn of 1823. While all this was going on Irving had taken Carlyle to Haddington in 1821 and introduced him to Miss Jane Welsh with a view to providing her some tuition. Carlyle obtained her permission to send her books and opened up a correspondence with her. During her occasional visits to Edinburgh they would meet. In 1800 Gilbert Burns, Robert's brother, and his large family had moved to East Lothian and then in 1804 had moved nearer Haddington. During a visit to Haddington Carlyle was to visit the home of Gilbert Burns whose daughters were school friends of Miss Welsh.

Carlyle, who was quite unaware of the “Irving affair”, was becoming much more attracted to Miss Welsh and she in turn was becoming more attracted to him with deeper feelings than she had ever had for Irving. And so the romance developed, albeit with some difficulties, until in the spring of 1824 she promised, in repentance after a quarrel, that she would marry him if he could achieve some independence. They corresponded regularly during his time in England and in his letters proposed that upon their marriage they should live at her farm (soon to become vacant) of Craigenputtock in Dumfriesshire where he could devote himself to his writing. She on the other hand was not keen on this idea as it meant her giving up the comforts and social life of the city. This led to a cooling off in the relationship but the interference of a Mrs. Montagu (a friend of both Carlyle and Irving) sought to bring them back together again. The two settled their differences and in 1825 Miss Welsh came to visit him at Mainhill where she was introduced to his family as his promised bride. She was politely received by them and thereafter remained on affectionate terms with them. Carlyle on the other hand was not liked by Mrs. Welsh who thought that he was socially beneath the Welsh family. Carlyle had saved £200 to start off his married life and had thoughts of a small cottage somewhere near Edinburgh. Mrs. Welsh ultimately relented to the engagement and suggested that the couple move in with her. Carlyle declined on the grounds that he had to be master in his own home. Several options for the couple were considered, including moving into the new Carlyle farm at Scotsbrig in Dumfriesshire. This was thought to be too rough a life for Miss Welsh by the Carlyle family, and so a house was taken at Comely Bank in Edinburgh. The wedding took place there on October 17, 1826.

1826 - 1834

And so began the marriage of two of the most remarkable people of their time. The marriage was based more on affection than that of lovers. In fact Froude in his biography of Carlyle indicates that the marriage was never consummated. Although it started off happily it deteriorated with time due to Carlyle’s passion for his work and his moodiness

Notes

exacerbated by his constant dyspepsia. This accompanied by Jane's dislike of illusions and forthright approach to uttering unpleasant truths resulted in many unpleasant situations. A contemporary of Carlyle's said

It was very good of God to let Carlyle and Mrs. Carlyle marry one another, and so make only two people miserable and not four.

Mrs. Carlyle, however, was a charming hostess and the Edinburgh literati came to see her and listen to her husband's monologues. Money was becoming tight and with sales of his works Meister and Schiller declining they began to think of moving to Craigenputtock, the Welsh family home in Dumfriesshire. Carlyle tried writing a novel. It was a disaster so he burnt it. (He never again tried fiction as his talent lay in the factual – history, biographies). It was agreed that Carlyle's brother, Alexander, would move into the farmhouse and run the farm whilst the Carlyles would move into the main house of Craigenputtock. In the interim Carlyle had formed an acquaintanceship with Francis Jeffrey (Lord Jeffrey), an Edinburgh lawyer and editor of the Edinburgh Review. Jeffrey had taken a liking (professional) to Mrs. Carlyle and resolved to help Carlyle in his efforts to have his essays published in the Review. Two appeared in 1827 and the slight improvement in the finances as a result allowed Carlyle to send his brother John to Germany to study medicine. Jeffrey also tried to get Carlyle an appointment of a professorship at the newly opened London University, but to no avail. He then supported Carlyle as a candidate for the post of professor of moral philosophy at St. Andrew's University. This failed due to the opposition of the then principal, Dr. Nicol. At this point the move to Craigenputtock became a necessity as the landlord at Comely Bank had accepted another tenant. They moved to Craigenputtock at the end of May 1828.

Craigenputtock

Carlyle had hopes that in the remoteness and seclusion of Craigenputtock, which he called his "Whinstane Castle", his writings would increase and that he would be able to make a comfortable living.

He struggled for the next six years with varied success. He wrote many articles for the Edinburgh Review, the Foreign Review and Fraser's Magazine. He wrote only articles which were worthy of future collection and some of these are among his finest works. It was here in 1828 he wrote his essay on "Robert Burns". The majority of his work was focused on German literature. However the interest in German literature was not a marketable topic. Finances were at a low ebb; in February of 1831 he only had £5. The farm at Craigenputtock was a failure, his brother John returned from Germany as a doctor but was unable to start a practice. His friend Jeffrey transferred his editorship of the Edinburgh Review to Macvey Napier and so that source of income dried up. Early in 1831 he worked hard on one of his major works "Sartor Resartus" (Translation being the Tailor Retailored) which is, in effect, an autobiography as seen through the eyes of a character who represented himself. In August 1831 he went off to London to try out the publishers there. No one was interested. His wife joined him in October of the same year. They found lodgings and Carlyle wrote a number of articles for different magazines which provided some income; his brother John secured a position as a travelling physician to the Countess of Clare thus relieving him of the need to support him. Carlyle had however not found a publisher for Sartor and so the Carlyles returned to Craigenputtock in April 1832. The loneliness, the absence of books and his wife's deteriorating health caused them to return Edinburgh in 1833. He found the Advocates Library in Edinburgh a great source of study and he collected a great deal of information for his historical articles on "Count Cagliostro" (Note 1) and the "Diamond Necklace" (Note 2). After four months, having found the Edinburgh society quite uncongenial, they returned to Craigenputtock.

Editors were once more becoming less interested in his work but Sartor was finally accepted in serial format (November 1833 through August 1834). The American essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson was quite impressed with Carlyle and came to visit him in 1833. He had with him a letter from John Stuart Mill, British philosopher. Mill and Carlyle began a correspondence which started Carlyle's thinking on the French Revolution. Life at Craigenputtock became monotonous over the winter

Notes

of 1833 – 34. There was no money coming in and the Carlyles found themselves at their lowest level financially. Carlyle was becoming more and more discontented, Mrs. Carlyle hated Craigenputtock and they made the decision to move permanently to London.

London

On May 19, 1834 Carlyle settled into his old London lodgings and began looking for a house. Eventually he found a small old fashioned house at number 5 (now 24) Cheyne Row, Chelsea. Mrs. Carlyle soon followed and approved his choice. They moved in on June 10, 1834. His mood improved in London and they had a more reasonable social life. He had begun work right away on the “French Revolution” and completed the first volume in February 1835 and lent the manuscript to his friend John Stuart Mill. Mill came to his house on March 6 to confess that the manuscript had been accidentally destroyed by his maid who had mistaken it for some old papers and burnt it. Carlyle was devastated; he accepted £100 from Mill for potential financial loss but his enthusiasm had gone. Ever so slowly his spirit returned and he rewrote his manuscript. This took him the rest of 1835 and all of 1836. He eventually completed it on January 12, 1837 but a further six months passed before its publication. The next three years were spent giving lectures. The first a series of six in May 1837 on German literature, twelve in May 1838 on the Spiritual History of Man from earliest time until now, the French Revolution in May 1839 and Hero Worship in May 1840. These were very successful financially but he felt the work, in his words, “unwholesome” and very trying. He never spoke again in public except for his address at Edinburgh University in 1866. In the winter of 1839 he began to push for the formation of the London library which grew out of his need for books during his work on the “French Revolution”. The library was successfully started in 1840 and Carlyle was president from 1870 until his death. Editors were now becoming more interested in his work; the Fraser Review proposed an edition of Sartor Resartus and an edition of his collected essays. Emerson (in the USA) secured for him the publication of the “French Revolution” and “Miscellanies”. His work

was popular in the United States but later books were appropriated by American publishers who never recompensed Carlyle.

With the monies from Emerson his financial wellbeing was pretty much secure. The Carlyles had made some valuable friendships in their few years in London and his growing fame opened the houses of some very well-known people. The Carlyles were the guests of many dinner parties but these only produced indigestion and his resentment of patronage and flattery (equally shared by his wife) made him a rather dangerous guest as his forthright views and intolerance of interruption could make him quite rude.

His radical views on society resulted in the end of his friendship with Mill although he still retained a high opinion of him. Mill had resigned his editorship of the Westminster to a young Scot named Robertson. He had earlier asked Carlyle to write on Cromwell which Robertson now announced that he meant to write the article himself. Carlyle was quite annoyed at this and began some research which ultimately led to the composition of his next great book. In the interim he had written an article for John Gilbert Lockhart (Sir Walter Scott's son in law) but, as it was considered unsuitable for the Quarterly Review Lockhart dare not take it. In the end it appeared as a separate book, "Chartism", at the end of 1839. Chartism was a Victorian era working class movement for political reform in Britain between 1838 and 1848. It was a good example of Carlyle's radical views. A thousand copies sold immediately and a second edition was published in 1840.

He struggled with his book on Cromwell which he seriously began in the fall of 1840. He studied the history around Cromwell in great depth but failed to put it all together and in the end burned what he had written. He began again but this time he made a collection of all of Cromwell's speeches and letters with explanatory comments. When he finished this he found that in fact he had produced the book. It appeared in the autumn of 1845 and was generally well received. His position as leader in literature was established.

The Carlyles were now very comfortable financially and were building up a wide circle of acquaintances; mostly it seems more due to his wife

Notes

than himself. Visitors to their house included Lord Tennyson, Charles Dickens (Whose Tale of Two Cities was inspired by Carlyle's "French Revolution") and William Makepeace Thackeray. The death of Mrs. Carlyle's mother in 1844 dealt her a terrible blow. She was already in a delicate state of health and this incapacitated her significantly so much so that Carlyle had to return to Dumfriesshire for two months in order to complete all the business. Home life was not very happy for Mrs. Carlyle, he was affectionate in his own way but he was obsessed with his work and would only appear at meal times when the conversation was entirely about his work.

Following the publication of "Cromwell" Carlyle found himself with little to do other than work of the inclusion of a few more discovered letters into a second edition which was published in 1846. The next few years were taken up with writing articles decrying the lack of order in society and government. Many of these ideas were published in "Latter Day Pamphlets" which were not well received and were considered to be the ramblings of a bitter recluse. In 1851 he wrote "The Life of John Sterling", a Scottish author of the time, whose work received little success. In fact Carlyle did him more good than his own works. Later in 1851 Carlyle began looking into the life of Frederick the Great and for the next six months he secluded himself in his study and read as much as he could with regard to Frederick.

The Carlyles had begun significant renovations to the house in 1852 and this was becoming too much for him as he tried to work and so in August 1852 he travelled up to Leith and sailed to Rotterdam and from there went on a tour of Germany with a Mr. Neuberg, a German admirer and London resident. He amassed an enormous amount of material for his book. This book gave him a lot of trouble and he went into his various fits of despondency and irritability before he even got started. He stayed in London through 1853, engrossed in his work despite the renovation work on the house. Mrs. Carlyle meanwhile went to stay with Carlyle's brother John at Scotsbrig. In December of 1853 Carlyle's mother passed away. He had been with her at the end but returned to London and worked continuously through 1854 on Frederick, emerging from his new 'sound proof' study built on top of the house only at tea time for a short

talk with his wife. For the next eighteen months he worked continuously and finally took a holiday in August of 1855. After his short holiday he was back at work again and in 1856 he and his wife went to Scotland for a holiday but he took his work with him. The monotony of his work was only relieved by riding his horse Fritz each afternoon. The first chapters of "Frederick" were getting into print in July 1857. A neighbour of his helped him with his maps and indices for his work and at last after six or seven years the first installment was finished. He visited Germany again in the fall of 1858 where he spent time fixing in his mind all the aspects of Frederick's battlefields. The first two volumes of his book (six volumes in total) were published soon after his return and by the end of the year some four thousand copies had been sold. Another thousand were printed. The later volumes appeared in 1862, 1864 and 1865. It is interesting to note that military students in Germany (following the publication of the book) studied Frederick's battles as described by Carlyle. In 1859 Carlyle wrote and had published his second work on Burns titled simply "Life of Robert Burns". He was a great admirer of Burns and included him as one of the 'Heroes' in "Heroes and Hero Worship" which had been published in 1841.

Carlyle was elected to the rectorship of Edinburgh University at the end of 1865 and delivered his inaugural address there on April 2, 1866. Mrs. Carlyle had not gone to Edinburgh with him due to her poor health so he went to Scotsbrig to visit his family following the inauguration and whilst there he suffered a sprain which caused him to delay his return to London. On Saturday April 21 Mrs. Carlyle had gone for a drive in her carriage (which Carlyle had bought her a few years earlier in her declining health). She had taken her dog with her and had let it out for a run. It was struck by a carriage; Mrs. Carlyle got out of her carriage and lifted it in. The driver went on but after a while having had no instruction from Mrs. Carlyle as to where to go he stopped to check on her. She was found sitting upright, dead. The news reached Carlyle at Dumfries and he immediately returned to London. Jane Baillie Welsh Carlyle was buried beside her father in Haddington.

1866 onward

From this time on Carlyle led a very secluded life. Serious work became impossible. He spent time staying with friends and did some travelling under the guardianship of Professor Tyndall, the nineteenth century physicist, returning to Cheyne Row in March 1867. During this time during which he suffered from melancholy he wrote most of his "Reminiscences". An article "Shooting Niagara" which gave his views on contemporary politics was published in Macmillan's Magazine in 1867 and in 1870 he wrote Defence of the German Case in the War with France. This article was warmly acknowledged through Count Bernstorff the German ambassador. In 1872 his right hand which had long shaken became almost unable to write, however in 1877 he did manage to write a remarkable letter which stated that he had absolute knowledge that a plan had been formulated by Disraeli's government which would result in war with Russia. His information source is still unknown as is the effect of the letter's influence in averting the war. Between April 1877 and February 1878, Queen Victoria threatened five times to abdicate while pressuring Disraeli to act against Russia during the Russo-Turkish War, but her threats had no impact on the events or their conclusion with the Congress of Berlin. Did Carlyle have an impact? Who knows? Froude is of the opinion that his letter was perhaps "the most useful act in his whole life".

He had become the acknowledged head of English literature amongst the literati of the time. In February 1874 he received the Prussian Order of Merit for his work as the historian of Frederick the Great. In December of the same year Disraeli offered him in very flattering terms the grand cross of Bath and a pension. Carlyle graciously declined both offers from the man of whom he had, in his own words "never spoken except with contempt". On his eightieth birthday he received a congratulatory letter and medal from Prince Bismarck. His melancholy worsened, his brother Alexander died in Canada in 1876. His brother John died in 1879. He walked daily as long as he was able but was severely bent with age. His health slowly deteriorated and he died on February 4 1881. A burial in

Westminster Abbey was offered but refused in accordance with his wish, as he disapproved of certain passages in the Anglican service. He was buried beside his parents in the old churchyard at Ecclefechan

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS I:

Q1. Write a short note on : Craigenputtock, “Whinstane Castle

Answer.....
.....
.....
.....

Q2. Give a brief about early days of Thomas Carlyle.

Answer.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

6.4 MAJOR WORKS OF THOMAS CARLYLE

- (1825) The Life of Schiller (Supplement 1872)
- (1828) Essay on Robert Burns
- (1829) Signs of the Times
- (1831) Sartor Resartus
- (1837) The French Revolution: A History
- Critical and Miscellaneous Essays
- (1840) Chartism
- (1841) On Heroes and Hero Worship and the Heroic in History
- (1843) Past and Present
- (1845) Oliver Cromwell's letters and speeches, with lucidations
- (1850) Latter-Day Pamphlets

Notes

- Characteristics
- Downing Street
- Model Prisons
- New Downing Street, The
- Present Time, The
- Stump-Orator
- (1851) The Life Of John Sterling (Scottish author)
- (1853) Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question
- (1858 – 65) History of Friedrich II of Prussia (6 Volumes)
- (1859) Life of Burns
- (1866) Inaugural Address at Edinburgh University
- (1867) Shooting Niagara:
- (1875) The Early Kings of Norway
- (1881) Reminiscences
- (1882) Reminiscences of my Irish Journey in 1849
- Last Words of Thomas Carlyle

6.5 CARLYLE'S INFLUENCE

Thomas Carlyle is notable both for his continuation of older traditions of the Tory satirists of the 18th century in England and for forging a new tradition of Victorian era criticism of progress known as sage writing. *Sartor Resartus* can be seen both as an extension of the chaotic, sceptical satires of Jonathan Swift and Laurence Sterne and as an enunciation of a new point of view on values.

Carlyle is also important for helping to introduce German Romantic literature to Britain. Although Samuel Taylor Coleridge had also been a proponent of Schiller, Carlyle's efforts on behalf of Schiller and Goethe would bear fruit

The reputation of Carlyle's early work remained high during the 19th century, but declined in the 20th century. George Orwell called him, "a master of belittlement. Even at his emptiest sneer (as when he said that Whitman thought he was a big man because he lived in a big country) the

victim does seem to shrink a little. That [...] is the power of the orator, the man of phrases and adjectives, turned to a base use." However, Whitman himself described Carlyle as lighting "up our Nineteenth Century with the light of a powerful, penetrating and perfectly honest intellect of the first-class" and "Never had political progressivism a foe it could more heartily respect". His reputation in Germany was always high, because of his promotion of German thought and his biography of Frederick the Great. Friedrich Nietzsche, whose ideas are comparable to Carlyle's in some respects, was dismissive of his moralism, calling him an "absurd muddlehead" in *Beyond Good and Evil* and regarded him as a thinker who failed to free himself from the very petty-mindedness he professed to condemn. Carlyle's distaste for democracy[66] and his belief in charismatic leadership was appealing to Joseph Goebbels, who frequently referenced Carlyle's work in his journal, and read his biography of Frederick the Great to Hitler during his last days in 1945. Many critics in the 20th century identified Carlyle as an influence on fascism and Nazism. Ernst Cassirer argued in *The Myth of the State* that Carlyle's hero worship contributed to 20th-century ideas of political leadership that became part of fascist political ideology. Further evidence for this argument can be found in letters sent by Carlyle to Paul de Lagarde, one of the early proponents of the Führer principle.

Sartor Resartus has recently been recognised once more as a remarkable and significant work, arguably anticipating many major philosophical and cultural developments, from Existentialism to Postmodernism. It has been argued that his critique of ideological formulas in *The French Revolution* provides a good account of the ways in which revolutionary cultures turn into repressive dogmatisms.

Essentially a Romantic, Carlyle attempted to reconcile Romantic affirmations of feeling and freedom with respect for historical and political fact. Many believe that he was always more attracted to the idea of heroic struggle itself, than to any specific goal for which the struggle was being made. However, Carlyle's belief in the continued use to humanity of the Hero, or Great Man, is stated succinctly at the end of his

Notes

essay on Muhammad (in *On Heroes, Hero Worship & the Heroic in History*), in which he concludes that: "the Great Man was always as lightning out of Heaven; the rest of men waited for him like fuel, and then they too would flame."

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS II :

Q1. Give any two works of Thomas Carlyle.

Answer.....
.....
.....
.....

Q2. Write in brief how Thomas Carlyle influence the writings of his era.

Answer.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

6.6 LET'S SUM UP

It must remain a matter of speculation what precise biographical material on Carlyle Conrad encountered. He may have read Froude's biography – he notes having borrowed a copy to read, much later, in 1917, but it is not clear if this was a first acquaintance. His image of Carlyle working on Frederick the Great indicates he had knowledge of Carlyle's biography, whether from Froude or elsewhere. Blackwood's, again, took a keen interest in the subject. An 1896 architectural anecdote takes a detour into reflection on the Carlyle-Froude controversy:

What arrant rubbish we talk and preach about our great men. We deify them, and rage if the truth, that they are much like their fellows, be told. The inner life of a Carlyle is published, and all.

6.7 KEYWORDS

- **Craigenputtock:** Craigenputtock is the craig/whinstone hill of the puttocks.
- **Descendant:** A person, plant, or animal that is descended from a particular ancestor.
- **Highlanders:** an inhabitant of a highland is termed as highlander
- **Dyspepsia:** Indigestion is also termed as Dyspepsia

6.8 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

Q1. In your words recount the Carlyle's childhood in detail.

Q2. Explore Carlyle's as a math tutor and teacher

Q3 Explain his most well-known writing in detail.

Q4. Give the Details about his impact on writers of future generations

6.9 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

- Caird, Edward (1892). "The Genius of Carlyle". In: *Essays on Literature and Philosophy*, Vol. I. Glasgow: James MacLehose & Sons, pp. 230–267.
- Cobban, Alfred (1963), "Carlyle's French Revolution," *History*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 164, pp. 306–316.
- Cumming, Mark (1988), *A Disimprisoned Epic: Form and Vision in Carlyle's French Revolution*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Harrold, Charles Frederick (1934), *Carlyle and German Thought: 1819–1834*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Kaplan, Fred (1983), *Thomas Carlyle: A Biography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Müller, Max (1886), "Goethe and Carlyle," *The Contemporary Review*, Vol. XLIX, pp. 772–793.
- Lecky, W.E.H. (1891), "Carlyle's Message to his Age," *The Contemporary Review*, Vol. LX, pp. 521–528.

Notes

- Norton, Charles Eliot (1886), "Recollections of Carlyle," The New Princeton Review, Vol. II, No. 4, pp. 1–19.

6.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1:

Answer 1: Check Section 6.4- Craigenputtock

Answer 2: Check Section 6.4 -Early days

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS II:

Answer 1: Check Section 6.6

Answer 2: Check Section 6.5

UNIT 7: RECEPTION THE HISTORY OF THOMAS CARLYLE

STRUCTURE

7.0 Objective

7.1 Introduction To Carlyle's History

7.2 1830-1881: 'The Sound of Ten Thousand Trumpets'

7.3 Sincerity and Madness

7.4 Counter to Utilitarianism And Political Economy

7.5 Provisionality, Prophecy and Palingenesia

7.6 The Condition-Of-England Novel

7.7 The Death of Prophecy

7.8 1881-1945 "The Most Insincere Of All" : The Froudian Turn

7.9 Coming of Age With Carlyle

7.10 Let's Sum Up

7.11 Keywords

7.12 Questions for Review

7.13 Suggested Readings And References

7.14 Answer to check your progress

7.0 OBJECTIVE

The objective of the unit to understand the History of Thomas Carlyle.

This unit helps to reception the history and understands 19th Century writing.

This unit helps to achieve following objectives:

- 1830's Sound of ten hundred trumpets'
- Sincerity and madness
- The condition of England novel
- The Death of Prophecy

7.1 INTRODUCTION

To demonstrate that the reading of Carlyle's work is an encounter with otherness, it is first necessary to present a historical summary of readings of Carlyle, one which will make clear that readings of Carlyle have been to a considerable degree temporally conditioned. The types of reading which will be concentrated on in the history following will be those of which explicit accounts have been left – mostly, then, by other writers. Each documented writer's reading of Carlyle contributes to a map of the various ways in which Carlyle has been read, the different reactions he has elicited in individuals and (most notably) across time periods, attesting to changes in structures of feeling on a large scale. Each such reading also suggests the possibility of residue of influence leading to second-hand encounters with Carlylean style and ideology, even in the absence of direct reading. Such changes begin to account for Carlyle's reputational trajectory from 'the noblest man of letters of his generation'¹ to a perceived irrelevance.

The principal hinge-point in Carlyle's reception history is often considered to be his death and its aftermath. G.B. Tennyson, in perhaps the most complete existing account of Carlyle's reception history, finds a 'rising curve' to characterise Carlyle's reputation through his life, followed by a 'drastic fall' after his death.² Simon Heffer, in a recent biography of Carlyle, avers that: 'Within four years of Carlyle's death his journey from literary colossus to hypocrite had been completed [...]. Carlyle's [reputation] seems never to have recovered. This is true not only in terms of his personal life, but also of his intellectual.'³ For the pragmatic purpose of structuring this chapter this point of division will

be accepted, but qualifications will be introduced. The chapter will have a tripartite structure, similar to Tennyson's account: the first section, after this introductory section, will cover his reception during his lifetime, from his first really substantial notices in the 1830s until his death in 1881. During this period Carlyle's reception was characterized in tone by idolizing endorsement or respectful dissent. The second section deals with the period from 1881 to approximately 1945, the end of the Second World War. The appearance of certain (auto)biographical materials in the period succeeding Carlyle's death led to the development of a much more ambivalent and questioning discourse around him as writer and as individual. Ultimately, this resulted in a notable reduction in the author's cultural cachet, and this was eventually furthered by the rise of Nazism, during which Carlyle's influence was frequently detected in Fascist politics. In the third section, then, the afterlife of a literary reputation will be discussed, and the limited paths the Chelsea Sage's direct influence has taken will be outlined. Each of these sections will be further subdivided into headed sub-sections, each concerned with a particular theme in reading Carlyle, and each detailing several roughly homogeneous examples of readings. Taken in all, these sections will demonstrate that there is no singular reading that can represent the reception history of this author, but that certain key concepts recur within specific cultural frames. The insights gained will be reverted to in the case-study chapters which follow.

7.2 1830-1881: 'THE SOUND OF TEN THOUSAND TRUMPETS'

Some of Carlyle's first appreciators were to go on, as he himself was, to be among the most prominent literary voices of the age. When his first significant longer work, *Sartor Resartus*,⁴ appeared in Fraser's Magazine in 1833, it was greeted with apathy or hostility, so much of the latter that following its reception, '[t]o the bookselling world Carlyle's name [...] had become an abomination,'⁵ according to Froude. However, of the

precisely two immediate converts it made, one was the then-unknown Ralph Waldo Emerson. At the same time, Carlyle had established a friendship based on mutual admiration with John Stuart Mill, who considered him ‘an artist, and perhaps the only genuine one now living in this country.’⁶ But despite the increasing esteem in which Carlyle was held in select literary circles, particularly after he and his wife Jane Welsh Carlyle moved from Dumfriesshire to Chelsea, London in 1834, it was not until the 1837 publication of his *The French Revolution: A History* that he began to be widely and substantially reviewed. In the wake of *French Revolution*’s success, Sartor was given its first English book publication⁷ (it had received a limited American publication, edited with a preface by Emerson, in 1836). Shortly thereafter, a four-volume collection of his essays appeared, collecting work going back over a decade, encompassing his early work on German literature, his first attempts at cultural prophecy (‘Signs of the Times’, ‘Characteristics’), and much else.⁸ These works, *French Revolution*, *Sartor Resartus*, and the early essays, each of which went on to be greatly influential, can from a reception point of view be seen as a unit, as the available work of Carlyle at the moment when his reputation first began to grow, and when his reputation among the literary men and women of Britain quickly reached a peak more lofty than it ever attained again.

7.3 SINCERITY AND MADNESS

There are several conspicuous threads that run through the critical reaction to Carlyle at this point in his career, and that begin to explain his enormous influence. Perhaps the most salient of these threads is the concept of sincerity. This is picked up on by Mill in his early and influential review of *French Revolution*: ‘A most original book; original not least in its complete sincerity.’⁹ Emerson, similarly, associated Carlyle with sincerity, as he reported after their first meeting: ‘The comfort of meeting a man is that he speaks sincerely.’¹⁰ And Carlyle himself encouraged this reading by the calls for and laudation of

sincerity that form a central thread of *On Heroes*, in which ‘sincere’ or ‘sincerity’ appear no less than 92 times, more than once every two pages in an average edition of that short work.¹¹ This is a testament to the importance of the concept of sincerity to Carlyle’s reading of heroism, as well as to the extreme repetition that characterizes the work in question. Though he was generally dismissive of his own works, he sometimes ameliorated his self-criticism by intimating that, whatever their faults, his were works born out of sincerity. Of French Revolution he wrote:

I do not know whether this book is worth anything, nor what the world will do with it, or misdo, or entirely forbear to do, as is likeliest; but this I could tell the world: You have not had for a hundred years any book that comes more direct and flamingly from the heart of a man. Do what you like with it

Carlyle’s sense of his own sincerity was picked up on and often unquestioningly accepted by his readers. This is a far more important criterion for the early reviewers of Carlyle than any substantive theories he propounds or specific political or ideological positions he takes up. Indeed, it is the apoliticism and atheoreticism of his early work that is most noted. While Mill took exception to Carlyle’s atheoreticism (and his aversion to the use of intellectual ‘spectacles’ instead of eyes) in his otherwise highly laudatory review,¹³ William Makepeace Thackeray, another of French Revolution’s earliest reviewers, remarked Carlyle’s absence of political agenda:

He is not a party historian like Scott, who could not, in his benevolent respect for rank and royalty, see duly the faults of either: he is as impartial as Thiers, but with a far loftier and nobler impartiality.[...]

It is better to view it loftily from afar, like our mystic poet Mr Carlyle, than too nearly with sharp-sighted and prosaic Thiers.¹⁴

Notes

Thackeray used block capitals for emphasis when it came to defining the single most outstanding feature of the book:

Above all, it has no CANT.¹⁵

Though Carlyle was sometimes considered a philosopher, it was the lack of theoretical content that impressed both Mill and Emerson, and his lack of party partiality that appealed to Thackeray. Mill read French Revolution not primarily as history or historical theory, but as an epic poem,¹⁶ and always considered Carlyle a poet rather than historian or philosopher (though by this he may have intended an implied criticism, as this was not how Carlyle would have chosen to describe himself).¹⁷ As a poet, he was distinguished in Mill's view by '[a] deep catholic sympathy with human nature, with all natural human feelings'.¹⁸ Emerson likewise described Carlyle's work as primarily poetic;¹⁹ and also as not distinguished by theoretic substance: '[I]t is not so much that Carlyle cares for this or that dogma, but that he likes genuineness (the source of all strength) in his companions.'²⁰ None of these commentators endorsed in any degree the philosophical or political content of Carlyle's writings, approaching these writings less as thought than as feeling, the province of the poet. Sincerity was the characteristic that weighed heaviest in their enthusiastic readings of Carlyle. Even when he was writing in the genre of history, it was the sincerity and the sympathy with humanity in general that impressed Carlyle's early readers, which allies him less with the figure of the man of ideas than that of the creative artist. ²¹ Recently, Eugene Eoyang has described creativity in terms of a faculty for 'capacious intuition', associated with 'a generosity of spirit, an expansive vision, that borders on the mystical.'²² The appeal of such a quality in a work within the genre of history such as Carlyle's French Revolution is that it brings the reality of human life and endeavour temporarily home to the reader, actualizing a moment that is past and otherwise beyond recall, creating sympathy, empathy and engagement. It is a quality that partakes fundamentally of the poetic character, making it clear that judging Carlyle purely as a philosopher or as a historian is bound to miss the point of his 19th-century influence.

This association with sincerity is one that marks Carlyle out as a definitively pre-20th century thinker. Lionel Trilling defines sincerity as ‘a congruence between avowal and actual feeling’, and involving being true to oneself and thus true to the other, which latter is, according to Trilling, the final aim of sincerity.²³ It contrasts with a 20th-century emphasis on authenticity, associated with Eliot, Joyce and others, which retains only the former conception of truth to the self, disregarding truth to the other – the 19th-century means has become a 20th-century end. Yet more recently, sincerity has been critically rehabilitated by work on the ‘new sincerity’ of David Foster Wallace, wherein it emerges that these precise problems of being true to the other are no less relevant in a 21st-century context. Yet the possibilities for Carlyle’s rehabilitation within such a paradigm are lessened by the posthumous debate on Carlyle, discussed in the next section, wherein his sincerity or lack thereof became once again of the utmost importance.

A further near-constant of early Carlyle criticism, and one that was to follow throughout his lifetime, was the imputation of madness. Froude admits that the publication of *Sartor* had seen Carlyle dismissed as ‘a literary maniac’,²⁴ while Lady Sydney Morgan, a very hostile early reviewer of *French Revolution*, speculated that Carlyle had gained a qualification in ‘the university of Bedlam’; still more pointedly, she wondered if the excessive admiration for German culture evinced in the work was not ‘in some way connected to defects in the native constitution of [the author’s] mind.’²⁵ The reference to the university of Bedlam may be not only a reference to the extravagance of Carlyle’s style, but also his irregular education (he had attended Edinburgh University desultorily, but had not completed a degree) and deviation from scholarly norms in peppering his work with Germanic references and turns of phrase, providing little evidence of familiarity with classical thinkers such as Plato. But Morgan was not alone in finding something suggestive of insanity in Carlyle’s style, as was acknowledged by the more sympathetic Thackeray: ‘To hear one party you would fancy that the author was but a dull madman, indulging in wild vagaries of language and dispensing with common sense and reason, while,

according to another, his opinions are little short of inspiration, and his eloquence unbounded as his genius,' and, though Thackeray inclined to the latter view, he allowed that 'never did [...] a man's style so mar his subject and dim his genius.' 26 At this stage, it was Carlyle's style, rather than his opinions, which was cited as the best evidence of insanity, though that was to change.

Sincerity and madness were to become two poles around which Carlyle criticism swung in the 19th century. At the earliest stage, sincerity held the upper hand in the creation of an author-function who had a certain status as an observer of the course of human history. An observer of wide and unconventional learning and without political partiality or dogma; a historian-poet without a discipline, without a school, but with that most necessary of all appurtenances, an eye (to use Carlyle's own favourite term). It was what he saw that counted, what he saw and how he described it, not how he theorized it. Thus, it can be said that a critical consideration of Carlyle's ideas as a philosopher or thinker would be beside the point. This may have been how Carlyle presented himself, but it was not really how he was read, certainly not by his fellow writers, who saw him as standing apart from all orthodoxy, and thus partaking of originality and sincerity. He saw with clarity, and described with *energeia*, and the affective potential of this was not lost on his contemporaries, who nevertheless were rarely to go on to accept his philosophizing and political theorizing, in its developed forms.

7.4 COUNTER TO UTILITARIANISM AND POLITICAL ECONOMY

If the substantial positive content of Carlyle's theories was quite thin, his placing within the dominant political and social ideas of the time is crucial. It is perhaps as much a matter of what Carlyle's ideas were not, as what they were. The utilitarian philosophy of Jeremy Bentham and the

political economy of Adam Smith and his followers provided the bedrock on which the intellectual life of the times was built.²⁷ Smith posited enlightened self-interest as the key motivation for human behaviour, while Bentham went even further in his insistence on a rational basis for the study of humanity and society, constructing a felicific calculus to measure the pleasure and pain associated with any course of action in any situation. Bentham's intention was that at some point all human activity could be measured by this calculus or a variation thereof, and a greatest happiness for the greatest number principle could be put into effect. Writing in the mid-19th century, Marx and Engels held that '[p]olitical economy is the real science of this theory of utility', and that, indeed, utilitarian thinking was a superstructural product of a capitalist base, only possible when the relations between people had already been reduced in material practice to 'one abstract monetary-commercial relation.'²⁸ Thus utilitarianism was seen to be implicated in much social inequality and deprivation. Carlyle provided a powerful voice for anti-utilitarian sentiment, treating the utilitarian approach as an object of scorn throughout his career. Utilitarianism and its felicific calculus was the nadir of philosophizing activity, as Teufelsdröckh asserted in *Sartor Resartus*:

Fantastic tricks enough has man played in his time; has fancied himself to be most things, down even to an animated heap of Glass: but to fancy himself a dead Iron-Balance for weighing Pains and Pleasures in, was reserved for this his latter era. There stands he, his Universe one huge Manger, filled with hay and thistles to be weighed against each other, and looks long-eared enough.²⁹

Carlyle's philosophy, then, was understood partially in terms of what it most unequivocally was not: utilitarianism and political economy. To view the matter in Carlyle's own terms, the popularly felt antipathy towards coldly mechanistic theories of society was in need of a symbolic presence around which to articulate itself. Carlyle emerged at precisely the right time, from the right background, and evincing the right personal characteristics to provide a counterweight to a set of theories and approaches which seemed unimpugnable on their own terms, but whose

application to the industrial sphere and to society in general was nevertheless unpopular. Had the Marxist critique of capitalist ideology emerged some years earlier, perhaps Carlyle's pull would have been less. As it was, he came to symbolize a resistance to the dominant ideas of the time, and the quality and force of this resistance was an essential component of his rise to prominence.

7.5 PROVISIONALITY, PROPHECY AND PALINGENESIA

It is part of the received narrative of Carlyle's life that his peers began to grow disillusioned with his work late in the 1840s, even while he was gaining more recognition among the general public. This disillusionment is crystallized in the oft-quoted complaint the poet Arthur Hugh Clough made to Emerson in 1848: 'Carlyle led us out into the desert, and he has left us there.'³⁰ Clough's use of the narrative of the Biblical Exodus to allegorize the reading of Carlyle is not accidental: it points to the importance of religion in Carlyle's writing, and to the quasi-religious importance of Carlyle's writing to some of his readers, his status as prophet.³¹ It points also, I would argue, to the centrality of its perceived provisionality to the excitement created by Carlyle's early writing, particularly in this context SartorResartus.

Sartor, a critical study of a non-existent study of the origin and influence of clothes by the equally non-existent Professor Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, confronts the challenge to religion as a social force presented by the Enlightenment. In the chapter 'Church Clothes', Carlyle, through Teufelsdröckh, makes three key pronouncements, here summarized:

1: That the birth of religion and the birth of society are mutually interpenetrating processes, neither one of which can occur without the other; and that neither religion nor society can exist without the other –

‘Church Clothes are first spun and woven by society; outward Religion originates by Society, Society becomes possible by religion.’

2: That the Church Clothes in use in the 19th century are relics of an earlier stage of humanity’s development, and unfit for their purpose: ‘[T]hose same Church Clothes have gone sorrowfully out at elbows: nay, far worse, many of them have become mere hollow Shapes, or Masks, under which no living Figure or Spirit any longer dwells; but only spiders and unclean beetles, in horrid accumulation, drive their trade [...]’³³

3: That Teufelsdröckh himself is preparing a sequel to his work on clothes, entitled *On the Palingenesia, or Newbirth of Society*, in which the ‘Re-texture of Spiritual Tissues, or Garments’ will be the central theme.

It is this promised volume on *Palingenesia* that is vital to understanding Carlyle’s effect on the intellectual classes of his time, particularly in the absence of a sufficient theoretical underpinning to his work that would explain its effect. Carlyle never produced anything that could be seen as the fulfilment of this *Palingenesia* project. Indeed, in his more narrowly political texts he looks to the past for his models: a mythicized English past of heroic conquest is introduced in the latter part of *Chartism* (1839), and *Past and Present* (1843) is concerned to limn its critique of the materialism of 19th century society against the purportedly faith- and obedience-based social dynamics and hierarchical power structures of the past, specifically the late 12th/early 13th century, rendering his outlook basically reactionary. Though his positive prescriptions were not made very clear in *Sartor Resartus*, what that book did do effectively was to highlight the absurdity of church rituals and orthodox religious beliefs. The simultaneous insistence on the essentiality of religion to social existence tended to create a difficult double bind both for Carlyle himself and for any reader who took the book to heart, a resolution to which he was unable to provide in later works. Sartor took Clough and others ‘out into the desert’ by convincing them of the inadequacy of existing religious forms, and hinting towards a radical re-envisioning of religion

Notes

in concept and practice, but left them there by never adequately delineating this new religion. Carlyle's own wife, Jane Welsh Carlyle, underwent the same negative conversion under his influence, according to Froude: 'She had accepted the destructive part of his opinions like so many others, but he had failed to satisfy her that he knew where positive truth lay. He had taken from her, as she mournfully said, the creed in which she had been bred, but he had been unable to put anything in the place of it.'³⁴ That Carlyle was more effective as a destroyer of ideals than as a creator of new ones was eventually to become a fairly widespread view; however, had he been perceived as such from the beginning of his career, rather than as potential prophet of a new religion of palingenetic force, it is unlikely he would have attained the breadth of influence that he did.

At this point, to analysis of Carlyle's reception may be added a comparison intended to be illustrative. To make the illustration by way of comparison, and to take up Walt Whitman's comment quoted in the introduction to the thesis, I want to suggest that Carlyle's positioning as a cultural figure finds its nearest late 20th-century analogue not in the literary sphere but in the comedian Bill Hicks. Hicks, who died in 1994 at the age of 32, inhabited the borders between comedian and political commentator. His act was formally that of the stand-up comic: he played comedy clubs and performed slots on TV shows. His content, however, was heavily political, and frequently bluntly aggressive and scathing rather than obviously comedic. His principal targets were the political establishment and corporate and marketing culture. Indeed, perhaps his most famous speech is an angry and rather humourless tirade beginning with the directive: 'By the way, if anyone here is in advertising or marketing, kill yourself. Kill yourselves, seriously.'³⁵ Hicks, much like Carlyle, struggled through obscurity for his early career, only beginning to achieve wider recognition shortly before his death. As he put it: 'It's also hard for me to have a career, because there's no archetype for what I do. I have to create it, or uncover it.'³⁶ Indeed, Hicks' sense of purpose and his cultural and professional marginality for much of his lifetime recall Carlyle's Hero as Man of Letters, who, unlike the other Heroes

dealt with in *On Heroes*, is defined by a lifetime of failure, with penury his apportioned lot: '[T]here ought to be Literary Men poor,— to shew whether they are genuine or not!'³⁷ Only posthumously does the Hero as Man of Letters tend to receive his due: 'Ruling [...], from his grave, after death, whole nations and generations who would, or would not, give him bread while living [...].'³⁸ Hicks' struggle to build his career and to articulate his vision of his place in society was exacerbated by his self-image as being a comic of a new and transcendent type, aiming for something other than provision of entertainment; at one stage he denominated himself a 'shaman', which he considered to be 'somewhere between prophet and crackpot... though much closer to prophet'.³⁹ The aim he associated with this role was to 'heal [the] perception' of his audience. His notion of perception was a markedly transcendentalist one, a favoured trope being that of 'squeegeeing the third eye.'⁴⁰ Though this trope recalls Carlyle's central metaphor of the eye, Hicks' tendency to associate such insight with drug-taking is where these two sages part intellectual company. Yet for all his religious iconoclasm, Hicks was a theist of sorts, retaining the term 'God' as a name for the feeling of unconditional love that he found to be a part of the drug experience.⁴¹ In all of this, there are many similarities to Carlyle: in the tone of harsh righteousness and judgementality that permeates their works; in the centrality of tropes of the visual to the epistemology and moral philosophy of both; and in the unorthodox and inchoate but passionately felt notions of God that become central to the philosophies of both. Such similarities are also reflected in the manner in which Carlyle and Hicks were received by the media and their peers in their respective eras – in part, as prophets.

It has been noted that Carlyle appeared to his contemporaries somewhat in the guise of a prophet – and indeed the prophet image was one he fostered and invited, in an equivocal way.⁴² Hicks is discussed in similarly religious terms by admirers in the years since his death. Upon the release of a documentary on Hicks in 2010, *The Irish Times* asked: 'What would Bill Hicks have made of his current canonisation? It is now 16 years since the American comedian died of pancreatic cancer, but he

Notes

has remained impressively ubiquitous in the interim. Angrier young comics cite his influence. His tirades against American foreign policy are replayed to comment upon the nation's continuing inter-continental bellicosity. Hicks' routines - furious, righteous, unrelenting - have become holy texts for a new generation of politically tuned-in comedy fans.⁴³ The encomia collected as peritext to *Love All the People* confirm that 'comedian' is an inapt label for Hicks. The emphasis is rather on truth: 'All he did, really, was to tell the truth about himself, and about the way he saw the world' (Bill Bailey); 'blowtorch, excavator, truthsayer, and brain specialist [...]. He will correct your vision' (Tom Waits); 'Ten years after his death, his words still burn with righteous truth' (Kerrang [music magazine]). This sense, then, that Hicks was a truth-teller in an age of spin and lies, that his work is an expression of a purity of vision beyond his contemporaries, and that he suffered in his personal life and in his relationship to society on account of this, all point to

the arms industry and to prevent the realization that 'you're being fucked every day of your life'. affinities both with Carlyle's ideal of the Hero as Man of Letters, and with the discourse that surrounded Carlyle in the early part of his career. Perhaps most of all it is the searing bluntness – the sometimes abusive stance towards their audience – that marks their rhetoric out from other critics of consumer society. This contemptuous rage both expressed is the most accessible emotional entry point into their work, and requires of the audience a total submission to the moral sensibility of the author-prophet. It is this construction of Carlyle as prophetic voice, iconoclast and sincere and unbiased enemy of imposture that needs to be borne in mind when trying to understand his early reputation, in which such later connotations as racist, reactionary, power-worshipper and authoritarian play little or no part. Relating him to the righteous anger and contempt for worldliness of a latter-day alternative prophet like Bill Hicks may help in thus visualizing Carlyle.

7.6 THE CONDITION-OF-ENGLAND - NOVEL

One genre in which Carlyle's influence was particularly apparent was The Condition-of-England Novel, otherwise The Industrial Novel. Carlyle himself had coined the phrase Condition-of-England in opening pages of *Chartism* (1839):

Canada question, Irish Appropriation question, West-India question, Queen's Bedchamber question; Game Laws, Usury Laws; African Blacks, Hill Coolies, Smithfield cattle, and Dog-carts,— all manner of questions and subjects, except simply this the alpha and omega of all! Surely Honourable Members ought to speak of the Condition-of-England question too.⁴⁴

The ensuing debate was 'a discourse unto itself, creating and absorbing new fields of inquiry',⁴⁵ a moment of pure interdisciplinarity in the intellectual life of the time. The novel, in particular, became a place for reflection on the class struggle that Carlyle insisted was central to the Condition-of-England question. These novels were concerned to provide documentary accounts of the lives of the working and the ruling classes, and to provide models of response and behaviour among both classes, as will be shown in this project's reading of *North and South*. The essential canon of Condition-of-England novels is a small and fairly stable one. The classic texts are most often considered to be: Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845), Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1854-55), Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke* (1850), Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854), and George Eliot's *Felix Holt* (1866).⁴⁷ These novels aimed to be less escapist than documentary and exemplary.

They often incorporated didacticism and general reflections on social conditions and were in obvious dialogue with the philosophy and cultural criticism of the day, notably the utilitarianism whose chief exponent at the time was John Stuart Mill, and the various doctrines of Carlyle. This, too, will become clear in the reading of *North and South*. Gaskell's decision to use a quote from Carlyle's 1830 essay 'Biography' as

epigraph to her first Condition-of-England novel, *Mary Barton*, is revealing. It was in that essay that Carlyle ridiculed all of the ‘three Thousand men, women and children, that make up the army of British Authors’ because ‘there is no Reality in them [...] [they do not] see anything whatever’, and called on the said army to begin ‘the faithful study of Reality [...], of great, everlasting Nature, and of Man’s ways and doings therein’, the true task of the Poet, as he saw it.⁴⁸ It was precisely this subordination of the romantic notion of the imaginative task as involving *creatio ex nihilo*, to one wherein the imagination was deeply implicated in reality, and in the history, the present, and the future of humanity that underlay the development of the Condition-of-England novel, and, perhaps, the realist novel of the remainder of the 19th century.

7.7 THE DEATH OF PROPHECY

As a perceived prophet, Carlyle’s peak came in the early 1840s. As Froude put it: Amidst the controversies, the arguments, the doubts, the crowding uncertainties of forty years ago, Carlyle’s voice was to the young generation of Englishmen like the sound of ‘ten thousand trumpets’ in their ears[.]

But Arthur Hugh Clough’s lament quoted earlier is an indice of the partial turning away from Carlylean ideas that marked the late 1840s. According to Froude, the pivotal moment came with the ‘Occasional Discourse of the Negro Question’ pamphlet of 1849:50 the pro-slavery stance of this document finally made an association of Carlyle with 19th-century radicalism utterly impossible, particularly in conjunction with Carlyle’s rhetorical and anti-logical mode of argument, and the insulting caricatures of West Indian blacks, unnecessarily derogatory even within the context of a defence of slavery. One-time friend John Stuart Mill issued an angry rebuttal,⁵¹ but the long-term consequences to Carlyle’s reputation of this and the similarly extreme *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850) involved less a decline than a repositioning: through the 1850s and

beyond, it is still evident that Carlyle's contemporaries were respectful and generous in their written allusions to him, even while subtly but distinctly dissociating themselves from his practical politics.

Such an approach is seen in George Eliot's 1855 reflection on Carlyle, quoted at the beginning of this thesis. The final sentence of that quote needs to be re-emphasized here: 'The character of his influence is best seen in the fact that many of the men who have the least agreement with his opinions are those to whom the reading of *Sartor Resartus* was an epoch in the history of their minds.'⁵² Eliot makes the important distinction that the reading of Carlyle's works is epochal, but said works are not likely to provide concrete answers or guidance on socio-political or moral questions. It is significant also that she singles out Carlyle's first major work, *Sartor Resartus*, as the most important locus of influence in his oeuvre, avoiding his more specifically political works. If *Sartor* can be said to advocate any specific approach to politics, it is one of demystification, a disentanglement of the symbols of power and privilege from the bearers thereof, so that each may be accorded the respect to which they are entitled by intrinsic qualities. The provisionality of Carlyle's work is no longer a feature in Eliot's summation: there is no expectation of more to come, no refining or clarifying that can be done that will amend his position. He is seen to be quite unequivocally and finally wrong, in practical terms, which impacts his position, but does not by any means disqualify him from respect and admiration: 'It is not as a theorist, but as a great and beautiful human nature, that Carlyle influences us.'⁵³ His relevance is seen to lie most substantially in his much earlier work, and the respect he continues to receive is partly down to all of his later works being read through the earlier, and the residual persistence of the aura of sincerity he had earlier acquired. But, though this chapter is concentrating on his reception among the literary classes, where his standing diminished somewhat, among the wider population his popularity actually widened in the latter part of his career, peaking with the address he gave at his inauguration as rector of Edinburgh University,⁵⁴ and reaching a new peak shortly after his death. From an initial confinement to the literary classes, a growth from the literary

journals outwards, Carlyle had come to be accepted as a philosopher – even the philosopher of the age – by the mainstream of society.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS I :

Q1. Give brief of Idea of The Condition of England by the novelist.

Answer.....
.....
.....
.....

Q2. Draw a short note on sincerity in work of Carlyle.

Answer.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

7.8 1881-1945: ‘THE MOST INSINCERE OF ALL’

The Froudian Turn

Carlyle’s literary influence became manifest in the 1840s, notably in the Condition-of-England genre of novels described above. By 1859, literary reviewer George Gilfillan could write: ‘His power, though, we trust, lessening, is still great – especially over three classes – litterateurs, the more intelligent of ourworking men, and young thoughtful people generally.’⁵⁵ That Carlyle’s influence over working men and women long continued is apparent from Jonathan Rose’s *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, discussed below, while his influence on ‘young thoughtful people’ is perhaps best seen in the literary works of the next generation, still in an ideologically and professionally unformed state in 1859. Simon Heffer’s claim, quoted at the beginning of this

chapter, that within four years of his death, Carlyle was simply seen as a hypocrite thus needs considerable qualification, because Carlyle's influence on late 19th-century litterateurs was no less than that on his own contemporaries. Similarly, in nominating this period as 'the Reactionary Period', Tennyson underestimates the great influence Carlyle continued to have.⁵⁶ This is despite the fact that the discourse surrounding him in the press was indeed growing sharply more critical. Shortly after his death in 1881 came the publication of his *Reminiscences*, a two-volume set edited by Carlyle's friend, the historian James Anthony Froude, the reception of which involved many negative evaluations on Carlyle not only as writer, but as an individual – bitter, self-pitying, grudging in praise and profligate in contemptuous scorn for people who had apparently done little or nothing to incur his displeasure. The debate on *Reminiscences* was intense and protracted, the flames fanned further by the publication of four volumes of biography written by Froude, works composed to a great extent of Carlyle's letters, and revealing the strain in Carlyle's marriage to Jane Welsh Carlyle. Much has been written on the 'Carlyle-Froude Controversy', perhaps the most useful and in-depth recent account being that contained in Trev Broughton's *Men of Letters, Writing Lives*. Broughton notes that there is to the modern reader little that is shocking in the revelations of the Froude publications (as I will call them for convenience, referring to the four volumes of biography written by Froude, the two volumes of *Reminiscences* edited by him, and the edition of Jane Welsh Carlyle's letters annotated by Carlyle, edited by Froude and published in 1883), nothing that is illicit or immoral. She concludes: 'It was not the magnitude of Carlyle's offences that outraged public sensibility, but their pettiness, their pointlessness.'

A display of pettiness in itself is usually not the cause of controversy, but in this case it contrasts so markedly with Carlyle's expressed philosophy, expressed in such maxims as 'Do the duty that lies nearest thee', 'Close thy Byron, open thy Goethe', etc., that it tended to call into question Carlyle's sincerity, on which his reputation had to a large extent been based. The evidence of the Froude books made clear to any reader that

‘no effort at all was made to recast his own character, temper and habits, in accordance with those views of duty which he was perpetually inculcating upon others.’⁵⁸ It was the content of Carlyle’s philosophy that made his conduct so problematic; there was no way of assessing the one without the other coming to mind. Throughout the 1880s and into the 1890s, Carlyle’s character was debated in the English press. Broughton notes that ‘Carlyle was talked about more, and more heatedly, in the years after his death, than he had been for over a decade.’⁵⁹ Indeed, Carlyle may have been talked about more in the 1880s than at any time previous, though certainly far more critically.

7.9 COMING OF AGE WITH CARLYLE

But the period of the 1880s and 1890s was also that in which a generation which had grown up reading or being otherwise exposed to Carlyle’s writings was coming of age in literature, politics and elsewhere, and this fact has been perhaps under-emphasized in writing on Carlyle. In literary terms, Carlyle is an especially prominent presence in many of the English bildungsromans of the later 19th and early 20th century. In Samuel Butler’s semi-autobiographical *The Way of All Flesh* (published after Butler’s death in 1902, but written between 1873 and 1884), the life of the young hero, Ernest Pontifex, turns on an encounter with an old tinker called Mr Shaw, who in a short conversation questions the value of institutional education as opposed to the education he himself has gained from ‘examin[ing] the bottoms of old kettles and saucepans’,⁶⁰ advises the younger man to read the gospels carefully and critically, and tells him ‘I think you will make a kind of Carlyle sort of a man some day’.⁶¹ This is Shaw’s only appearance in the book, but Pontifex credits him with causing his loss of faith in Christian theology,⁶² ultimately leading him to the realization that: ‘By far the greater part, moreover, of his education had been an attempt, not so much to keep him in blinkers as to gouge his eyes out altogether.’⁶³ This realization arrived at, he determines that all of the ‘shams which want attacking, and yet no one attacks them’⁶⁴ are to be the great subject of his writings. This appears to be the fulfilment of Shaw’s prophecy: the

essence of the Carlylean worldview is the ‘deep fixed Determination to have done with Shams’,⁶⁵ foremost among them the ‘dead Letter of Religion’;⁶⁶ attacking shams, therefore, is precisely what a ‘Carlylean sort of man’ would do. Perhaps further echoing Carlyle’s development, this ultimately turns out not to be a political aim at all: in the closing paragraphs of *The Way of All Flesh*, the narrator clarifies that Pontifex always votes Conservative, but that, nevertheless ‘in all other respects, he is an advanced Radical’.⁶⁷ Ultimately, he has modified his definition of ‘truth’ such that ‘the dead letter of religion’ is politically true, if not so in a pedantic sense: ‘The spirit behind the Church is true, though her letter – once true – is now true no longer.’⁶⁸ The hatred of sham, originally linked to a rebellion against Victorian ideals and institutions of education and religious indoctrination, end in practice by being totally divorced from them, which are now revealed to be effectively true – though not actually so, according to a conventional definition of the word ‘true’. In this sense *The Way of All Flesh* is the quintessentially Carlylean novel, following his thought right to the end (‘the end’, temporally speaking – the implication is not that the radicalism of Carlyle’s early work logically ends in his later conservatism [though this is basically both Butler’s and {the later} Carlyle’s argument],⁶⁹ but that the personal and the political interacted so as to make this position most attractive to both writers), through declared Radicalism into a practical Conservatism that sees itself as ideologically Radical. This is the temporal logic of Carlylism, as enacted in Carlyle’s own journey from Sartorean radicalism to the political conservatism that dominates the *Occasional Discourse* and other late works: hatred of conventional shams turning itself into disillusioned defense of the ideological apparatus behind the ‘shams’, which are now seen as effectively true. It is not, however, the internal logic of Carlylism as expressed by Shaw in *The Way of All Flesh* (or in many of the earlier of Carlyle’s own articulations of it): here there is only the declaration of a commitment to truth in a straightforward and unmodified sense. But Butler and Carlyle’s own ideological trajectories appear to indicate that the practical logic of such a stance can be very different from its internal logic.

Notes

Butler's novel is – in the sense outlined above, at least – the paradigmatic Carlylean bildungsroman, but there are many English bildungsromans of the period heavily indebted to Carlyle. Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Stark Munro Letters* (1895) is certainly one, and that will be discussed in a later chapter. And in Jerome Klapka Jerome's semi-autobiographical *Paul Kever* (1902), there is the decidedly Carlylean quasi- father figure Dr Hal, employed among the poor of inner- city London, who regard him as 'medicine man and priest combined'.⁷⁰ Dr Hal's parting advice to the eponymous protagonist is as follows: 'Put your Carlyle in your pocket. He is not all voices, but he is the best maker of men I know. The great thing to Butler's diegetic narrator tells Pontifex: 'You are trying to make people resume consciousness about things, which, with sensible men, have already passed into the unconscious stage. The men whom you would disturb are in front of you, and not, as you fancy, behind you; it is you who are in the lagger, not they' (loc. 4813.). This is what Pontifex comes to accept himself: the implication is that practical Conservatism is a manifestation of developed Radicalism; practical Radicalism is simply an early stage of development.

Learn of life is not to be afraid of it.'⁷¹ And Paul does so, effectively 'reducing [his] denominator', as Carlyle had recommended; indeed, he finds that particular injunction to be nothing less than a solution to life.⁷² The reading of Carlyle by Paul Kever is a particularly active and dynamic one. The repercussions of this reading for Paul extended far beyond the sphere of the literary, its scope as wide as life itself. It provided a means of confronting societal shams, and of eventually coming to terms with said shams, guiding youthful impetuosity and idealism into a more conservative course, wherein what Freud called the pleasure principle makes way for the conformist reality principle.⁷³ Ironically, it was the very strength and passion of Carlyle's denunciations of societal forms that gave his ultimate endorsement of the socio -political status quo and alignment with the aristocratic classes such an authority and a ring of sincerity to readers like Butler and Jerome.

Influential as such a reading of Carlyle was, and helpful as it may have been in the coming-of-age process for ‘young thoughtful people generally’, as Gilfillan had noted, a politically opposed reading was also quite prevalent. H.G. Wells provides a partial example of this: a member of the socialist Fabian society at one point, he may at times have veered towards what would now be considered Fascism, but he never arrived at the Conservatism that Butler posits as the end of political reflection.⁷⁴ Wells’ career-long propensity for cultural prophecy was predicated to some extent on his early reading of Carlyle. A collection of Wells’ prophetic writings opens with an early piece called ‘The Man of the Year Million’, introduced by the volume’s editor with the observation that ‘traces of the crude Carlylean pomposity of his student writing are not difficult to detect’.⁷⁵ Indeed, as well as being an anticipation of the themes of *The Time Machine* (1895), the piece is a pastiche of Carlyle, being based on excerpts from a ‘great unwritten volume’ by one Professor Holzkopf, ‘presumably Professor at Weissnichtwo’⁷⁶ – Weissnichtwo being the fictional university where Professor Teufelsdröckh in *Sartor Resartus* held his Chair in *Allerley-wissenschaft*, and thus a direct evocation of the Carlylean intertext. Holzkopf theorizes extravagantly on the future of humankind, on the possible directions of physical and psychological evolution of the species: ‘great hands they have, enormous brains, soft, liquid, soulful eyes. Their whole muscular system, their legs, their abdomens, are shriveled to nothing, a dangling, degraded pendant to their minds.’⁷⁷ ‘The Man of the Year Million’ takes a Carlylean form, juxtaposing excerpts from a fictional treatise on the future development of humankind with blandly skeptical commentary from an unnamed narrator, comprising a generically unplaceable work, a non-narrative fiction with overtones of cultural prophecy. This is a form that allows for the most radical and unbounded speculation, and that prompts a reading without closure, as the competing voices are not organized in an identifiable hierarchy. It illustrates that still for Wells’ generation the Carlyle of *Sartor Resartus* represented an openness to the newest ideas (the future of human evolution, in this case), ideas that could only just be grasped, and were still too new to be unequivocally endorsed in their ultimate ramifications. Even within a post-Darwinian

Notes

cultural climate, Carlyle provided models for intellectual exploration. He represented, too, a directing of the mind towards the future rather than the past, a mind taking as its province no less a question than the future development of the human species, and of the world.

And in thus reading Carlyle Wells was characteristic of a large sector of the Carlyle -reading public. In *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, Jonathan Rose includes a section entitled 'Conservative Authors and Radical Readers', which mostly focusses on Carlyle, and makes Carlyle's effect on the developing trade union movement in the later -19th and early-20th century very clear, confirming Yeats' assertion that Carlyle was 'the chief inspirer of self-educated men in the 'eighties and early 'nineties.'⁷⁸ Rose finds Carlyle to have a particular 'ability to attract disciples from all points on the political spectrum, from Communists to Nazis', and concludes that he was particularly popular with auto-didactic members of the working-class.⁷⁹ Helen Crawford, described by Rose as a militant suffragette, testified:

He stripped naked the Law, the Church and many of the fraudulent shams of his day. I was deeply impressed by his denunciation of quackery masquerading as Truth, his honour of honest work, his exposure of war, his gift of stripping people of all the vestures designed to overawe the simple – the bombazine gown, the horsehair wig of the judge, the Crown and Scepter of the Kings and Queens [...].

The through line between such conservative readers as Butler and such radicals as Crawford was the shared sense of a necessary clearing away of shams which was performed with the help of an active reading of Carlyle. Reading Carlyle was for these readers a particularly encouraging experience: that is, it actively infused them with courage, a sense that obedience to social conventions and conventional authorities was not an unquestionable duty; that there was another narrative of selfhood available, involving a greater degree of faith in those convictions which have been arrived at on an individual level, and a much greater tendency

to mockery and open criticism of the received wisdom concerning the socio-political. This is undoubtedly a rather selective reading of Carlyle's actual texts, but it is a reading comprising the elements of most import in analyzing Carlyle's influence throughout the late-19th and early-20th centuries.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS II :

Q1. How was the work of Carlyle changed in 1840s.

Answer.....
.....
.....
.....

Q2. Write a note of Carlyle's work in later 1880s and 1890s.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

7.10 LET'S SUM UP

An elaborating the Carlylean viewpoint, this thesis has not sought to endorse it, but rather to keep options open as to the possibility that such a viewpoint (or, theoretically speaking, any oppositional viewpoint) may at some point bring into relief the inevitable lack in contemporary ideologies. That there was something wrong with contemporary ideologies was Carlyle's contention in his own time, and the intensity with which his writing registered this was a strong element of his popularity, and that there is something wrong with contemporary ideologies, and contemporary political and social structures is central to at least one of the four adaptations studied (The Dark Knight Rises). Indeed, it is central to all cultural criticism – from Bill Hicks to Slavoj Žižek, popular or academic – but it is when that lack comes to be symbolized, and theorized that disagreement comes in. There is always a

lack; each account is necessarily partial – but each attempt to account for this lack is similarly partial.

7.11 KEYWORDS

- **Enlightened:** having or showing a rational, modern, and well-informed outlook.
- **Perception:** the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses
- **Canonisation :** the treatment of someone or something as being above reproach or of great significance.
- **Unrelenting:** not yielding in strength, severity, or determination.

7.12 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- Which of Carlyle’s beliefs or features of language remind you of the English Romantics?
- Why do you think he fails to discuss individual works? What does Carlyle see as Shakespeare’s importance to the British nation?
- Discuss the literary art of Carlyle.
- Define three pronouncements in the Church Clothes, Carlyle, through Teufelsdröckh.

7.13 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

- Ackroyd, Peter, Dickens [one-volume abridged version] (London: Vintage, 2002)
- Aguirre, Robert D., “‘Affairs of State’: Mobilities, Communication, and Race in Trollope’s *The West Indies and the Spanish Main*’, *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 37:1 (2015), pp. 1-20
- Alexander, Patrick Proctor, *Mill and Carlyle: An Examination of Mr John Stuart Mill’s Doctrine of Causation in Relation to Moral*

Freedom with An Occasional Discourse on Sauerteig, by Smelfungus
(Edinburgh: Nimmo, 1866)

- Allison, Scott T., ‘The Initiation of Heroism Science’, *International Advances in Heroism Science*, 1(2015), pp. 1-8
- Amigoni, David, ed., *Life Writing and Victorian Culture* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2006)
- *Apocalypse Now: Collector’s Edition*, dir. by Francis Ford Coppola, scr. by John Milius, Francis Ford Coppola, 4 discs (American Zoetrope, OPTD2333, 2011)
- Ashton, Rosemary, *The German Idea: Four English Writers and the Reception of German Thought, 1800-1860* (London: Libris, 1994)
- -----, *Thomas and Jane Carlyle: Portrait of a Marriage* (Kindle: Random House, [2012])
- Ashworth, Anne, ‘A dashing object of desire’, *The Times* (22 December 2004)
[http://www.richardarmitageonline.com/articles/times-22dec2004-
lg.jpg](http://www.richardarmitageonline.com/articles/times-22dec2004-lg.jpg) [23 February 2015]
- Baker Street Wiki, http://bakerstreet.wikia.com/wiki/Main_Page
- Barchas, Janine, ‘Mrs. Gaskell’s North and South: Austen’s Early Legacy’, *Persuasions*, 30 (2008), pp. 53-66
- Baring-Gould, William S., *Sherlock Holmes: A Biography of the World’s First Consulting Detective* (St. Albans, Herts: Panther, 1975)

7.14 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1 :

Answer 1 : Check Section 7.3

Answer 2 : Check Section 7.4

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2 :

Answer 1 : Check Section 7.9

Answer 2 : Check Section 7.10