

OSCAR WILDE

# THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

Edited by Russell Jackson



NEW MERMAIDS

*New Mermaids*

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*New Mermaids*

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OSCAR WILDE

*The  
Importance  
of Being  
Earnest*

A Trivial Comedy for Serious People

Edited by Russell Jackson

*Fellow of the Shakespeare Institute,  
University of Birmingham*

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## CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	vi
Introduction	1
THE AUTHOR	1
THE PLAY	8
REACTIONS TO THE FIRST PRODUCTION	27
NOTE ON THE TEXT	31
Further Reading	37
Abbreviations	39
<i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i>	41
Dedication	42
The Persons of the Play	43
The Scenes of the Play	43
Text	45
Appendix I	
The Gribbsby Episode in the Manuscript Draft	148
Appendix II	
The Dictation Episode (Act II) in the Licensing Copy	155
Appendix III	
The Conclusion of Act Two in the Licensing Copy	157
Appendix IV	
Longer Textual Notes	159

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I have taken the opportunity of a fourth impression to add to the list of further reading. I have also revised the account of the play's text to take notice of a letter by Wilde recently published for the first time in its entirety (see page 32).

1992

R.J.

# INTRODUCTION

## THE AUTHOR

André Gide describes Oscar Wilde as he appeared in 1891, when 'his success was so certain that it seemed that it preceded [him] and that all he needed do was go forward and meet it':

. . . He was rich; he was tall; he was handsome; laden with good fortune and honours. Some compared him to an Asiatic Bacchus; others to some Roman emperor; others to Apollo himself—and the fact is that he was radiant.<sup>1</sup>

The melodramatic contrast between this triumphant figure and the pathetic convict serving two years' hard labour was drawn by Wilde himself in *De Profundis*, the letter written from prison to his lover, Lord Alfred Douglas. He described his transfer in November 1895 from Wandsworth to Reading Gaol, little care being taken for his privacy:

From two o'clock till half-past two on that day I had to stand on the centre platform at Clapham Junction in convict dress and handcuffed, for the world to look at. I had been taken out of the Hospital Ward without a moment's notice being given to me. Of all possible objects I was the most grotesque. When people saw me they laughed. Each train as it came up swelled the audience. Nothing could exceed their amusement. That was of course before they knew who I was. As soon as they had been informed, they laughed still more. For half an hour I stood there in the grey November rain surrounded by a jeering mob.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> André Gide, 'In Memoriam' from *Oscar Wilde*, translated Bernard Frechtman (New York, 1949): quoted from the extract in Richard Ellmann, ed., *Oscar Wilde: a Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1969), pp. 25–34. The principal sources for the present account of Wilde's career are H. Montgomery Hyde, *Oscar Wilde* (1975) and Rupert Hart-Davis, ed., *The Letters of Oscar Wilde* (revised ed., 1963). Subsequent references to Wilde's *Letters* are to this edition.

<sup>2</sup> Wilde, *Letters*, pp. 490–1. This long letter was written in Reading Gaol in January–March 1897. An abridged version was published by Robert Ross in 1905 as *De Profundis*: the most reliable edition is that contained in *Letters*, pp. 423–511.



Wilde insisted that his life was as much an artistic endeavour as his works—in *De Profundis* he claimed to have been ‘a man who stood in symbolic relations to the art and culture of my age’, and in conversation with Gide he remarked that the great drama of his life lay in his having put his talent into his works, and his genius into his life.<sup>3</sup> For an author who returned as often as Wilde to the proposition that art transforms and is the superior of Nature, such claims were more than boasting—they were an affirmation of faith.

Oscar Wilde was born in Dublin on 16 October 1854, second son of Sir William and Lady Wilde. The father was an eminent surgeon, the mother a poetess and fervent Irish nationalist who wrote as ‘Speranza’. To medical distinction Sir William joined notoriety as a philanderer.<sup>4</sup> Both parents were enthusiasts for the study of Irish legend, folk-lore, and history, an interest reflected in the first two of the names given to their son, Oscar Fingal O’Flahertie Wills Wilde. He was educated at Portora Royal School and Trinity College, Dublin, where he became a protégé of the classicist John Pentland Mahaffy. In 1875 he won a scholarship—a ‘Classical Demyship’—to Magdalen College, Oxford, where he subsequently took first-class honours in the final school of *Literae Humaniores* (Greek and Roman literature, history, and philosophy). He picked up a reputation for wit, charm, and conversational prowess. Most important, he came under the influence of two eminent writers on art and its relation to life, John Ruskin and Walter Pater. Ruskin, the most distinguished contemporary art critic, championed the moral and social dimensions of art, and its ability to influence men’s lives for the better. Under Ruskin’s supervision, Wilde and a few other undergraduates had begun the construction of a road near Hinksey, as a practical demonstration of the aesthetic dignity of labour and the workmanlike qualities essential to the labours of the artist. From Pater, Wilde learned a conflicting interpretation of art as a means to the cultivation of the individual, an idea which received its most notorious statement in the ‘Conclusion’ to Pater’s book *The Renaissance*. There the fully-developed sensibility is claimed as the expression of a full existence: ‘To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life.’<sup>5</sup> These two theories of the relation between art and life were to dominate Wilde’s writing. The arguments of the painter James McNeill Whistler against the conservative critics’ insistence on moral significance and pictorial verisimilitude in art also influenced

<sup>3</sup> Wilde, *Letters*, p. 466; Gide, ‘In Memoriam’, ed. cit., p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> On Sir William and Lady Wilde see Terence de Vere White, *Parents of Oscar Wilde* (1967).

<sup>5</sup> Walter Pater, *The Renaissance* (1873; Library ed., 1910), p. 236. This ‘Conclusion’ was omitted in the second edition (1877) and restored, in a modified form, in the third edition (1888).

Wilde deeply.<sup>6</sup> The close of his Oxford career was marked by two triumphs—his first-class degree and the Newdigate Prize for his poem ‘Ravenna’—and two failures. Wilde was not given the Chancellor’s English Essay Prize for his essay ‘The Rise of Historical Criticism’ and he was not offered a fellowship at Magdalen.

Moving to London, Wilde set about making himself a name in the capital’s fashionable artistic and literary worlds. He had enough poems to make a collected volume, published at his own expense in 1881, and he was seen at the right parties, first nights, and private views. Occasionally he wore the velvet coat and knee-breeches, soft-collared shirt and cravat, that became fixed in the popular imagination as ‘aesthetic’ dress (and which derived from a fancy-dress ball he had attended when an undergraduate). In December 1881 he embarked on a lecture-tour of the United States organized by the impresario Richard D’Oyly Carte. This was a shrewd back-up to the tour of Gilbert and Sullivan’s comic opera *Patience*, but it was also a simple exploitation of the American appetite for being lectured to. Although *Patience*, which satirized the Aesthetic Movement, featured rival poets dressed in a costume closely resembling that adopted by Wilde, the lecturer was taken seriously as a prophet of the ‘new renaissance’ of art. In his lectures he insisted on comparing the new preoccupation with life-styles with the aspirations of the Italian Renaissance and the Romantic Movement—this was ‘a sort of new birth of the spirit of man’, like the earlier rebirth ‘in its desire for a more gracious and comely way of life, its passion for physical beauty, its exclusive attention to form, its seeking for new subjects for poetry, new forms of art, new intellectual and imaginative enjoyments . . .’<sup>7</sup> The blend of aesthetic theory and enthusiasm for reform of design and colouring in dress and decorative art was derived from a variety of sources, not all successfully synthesized. In addition to Ruskin, Pater, and Whistler, Wilde had absorbed the ideas of William Morris and the architect E. W. Godwin. The lectures were exercises in *haute vulgarisation* and not all the sources were acknowledged. Japanese and other oriental art, eighteenth-century furniture, distempered walls in pastel colours, stylized floral motifs—all had made their appearance in English art before Wilde became their advocate. But the influence of his popularizing talents was, for all that, considerable. ‘In fact’, wrote Max Beerbohm in 1895, looking back on 1880 as

<sup>6</sup> Whistler later quarrelled with Wilde, accusing him of plagiarism. Some of their exchanges appeared in Whistler’s *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (1890) and in *Wilde vs. Whistle*, (1906).

<sup>7</sup> Wilde, ‘The English Renaissance of Art’, in Ross’s edition of his *Essays and Lectures* (1909), pp. 111–55; pp. 111f. The text was edited by Ross from four drafts of a lecture first given in New York on 9 January 1882.

though it were a remote historical period, 'Beauty had existed long before 1880. It was Mr Oscar Wilde who managed her *début*'.<sup>8</sup>

As well as establishing him as a popular oracle on matters of art and taste, Wilde's lecture-tour made him a great deal of badly-needed money—he had no prospect of inheriting a family fortune, and would have to make his own way. On his return the velvet suits were discarded, and his hair, worn long and flowing in his 'Aesthetic' period, was cut short in a style resembling the young Nero. The figure described by Gide was beginning to emerge. After a holiday in Paris, Wilde moved into rooms at 9 Charles Street, Grosvenor Square. He returned briefly to New York for the first performance of his melodrama *Vera; or the Nihilists* and then prepared for an autumn lecture-tour of the United Kingdom. On 26 November he became engaged to Constance Lloyd, and they married on 29 May 1884. In January 1885 they moved into a house designed by Godwin at 16 Tite Street, Chelsea. Two sons, Cyril and Vyvyan, were born in 1885 and 1886 respectively. In the early years of his marriage Wilde was working hard as a journalist. He contributed reviews to magazines (including the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Dramatic World*) and even for a while undertook the editorship of one, *Woman's World*, which he hoped to turn into 'the recognized organ through which women of culture and position will express their views, and to which they will contribute'.<sup>9</sup> By and by Constance came into a small inheritance, but money was never plentiful. The life of a professional journalist was laborious and demanded a high degree of craftsmanship, but it offered a training from which Wilde, like Shaw, Wells, and many others, profited immensely. Wilde became a fastidious and tireless reviser of his own work, and his reviews show him as an acute critic of others.

In 1891 four of Wilde's books appeared, all consisting of earlier work, some of it in a revised form: *Intentions*, a collection of critical essays; *Lord Arthur Saville's Crime and Other Stories*; *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, considerably altered from the version published in *Lippincott's Magazine* in 1890; and a collection of children's stories, *A House of Pomegranates*. In the same year a verse tragedy written in 1882, *The Duchess of Padua*, was produced in New York by Lawrence Barrett under the title *Guido Ferranti*. Like *Vera* it was poorly received, but Wilde was already turning away from the pseudo-Elizabethan dramatic form that had preoccupied so many nineteenth-century poets and contemplating a newer, more commercially acceptable mode. In the summer of 1891 he began work on the first of a series of successful plays for the fashionable theatres of the West End: *Lady*

<sup>8</sup> Max Beerbohm, *Works* (1896; 'collected' edition, 1922, p. 39).

<sup>9</sup> Wilde, *Letters*, p. 202 (to Mrs Alfred Hunt, August 1887).

*Windermere's Fan* (St James's, 20 February 1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (Haymarket, 19 April 1893), and *An Ideal Husband* (Haymarket, 3 January 1895). The refusal of a performance licence to the exotic biblical tragedy *Salomé* (in 1892) proved a temporary setback: acclaim as a dramatic author confirmed Wilde's career in what seemed an irresistible upward curve.

The summer of 1891 was also remarkable for the beginning of an association that was to be the direct cause of his downfall: the poet Lionel Johnson introduced him to 'Bosie', Lord Alfred Douglas, third son of the Marquis of Queensberry. Wilde appears to have been already a practising homosexual, and his marriage was under some strain. The affair with Douglas estranged him further from Constance, and the drain it caused on Wilde's nervous and financial resources was formidable. Douglas was happy to let Wilde spend money on him after his father had stopped his allowance: more seriously, he made ceaseless demands on the time set aside for writing. In *De Profundis* Wilde described his attempts to finish *An Ideal Husband* in an apartment in St James's Place:

I arrived . . . every morning at 11.30, in order to have the opportunity of thinking and writing without the interruptions inseparable from my own household, quiet and peaceful as that household was. But the attempt was vain. At twelve o'clock you drove up, and stayed smoking cigarettes and chattering till 1.30, when I had to take you out to luncheon at the Café Royal or the Berkeley. Luncheon with its *liqueurs* lasted usually till 3.30. For an hour you retired to White's [Club]. At tea-time you appeared again, and stayed until it was time to dress for dinner. You dined with me either at the Savoy or at Tite Street. We did not separate as a rule till after midnight, as supper at Willis's had to wind up the entrancing day.<sup>10</sup>

This was in 1893. A year later Wilde was working on what was to prove his last play, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the first draft of which had been composed during a family holiday (largely Douglas-free) at Worthing. In October, Constance had returned to London with the children. Wilde and Douglas stayed together in Brighton, first at the Metropole Hotel, then in private lodgings. Douglas developed influenza and Wilde nursed him through it. He in turn suffered an attack of the virus, and Douglas (by Wilde's account) more or less neglected him. The result was what seemed like an irrevocable quarrel, with Douglas living at Wilde's expense in a hotel but hardly bothering to visit him. In hindsight Wilde claimed that this cruelty afforded him a moment of clear understanding:

<sup>10</sup> Wilde, *Letters*, p. 426

Is it necessary for me to state that I saw clearly that it would be a dishonour to myself to continue even an acquaintance with such a one as you had showed [*sic*] yourself to be? That I recognized that ultimate moment had come, and recognized it as being really a great relief? And that I knew that for the future my Art and Life would be freer and better and more beautiful in every possible way? Ill as I was, I felt at ease.<sup>11</sup>

But reconciliation followed.

On 3 January 1895 *An Ideal Husband* was given its first performance. Meanwhile George Alexander, actor-manager of the St James's Theatre, had turned down the new comedy. It found a taker in Charles Wyndham, who intended to bring it out at the Criterion. Then Alexander found himself at a loss for a play to replace Henry James's *Guy Domville*, which had failed spectacularly. Wyndham agreed to release *The Importance of Being Earnest* on the condition that he had the option on Wilde's next play, and it was put into rehearsal at the St James's. At first Wilde attended rehearsals, but his continual interruptions made Alexander suggest that he might leave the manager and his company to their own resources. He agreed with good grace and left with Douglas for a holiday in Algeria. There they encountered André Gide, who was told by Wilde that he had a premonition of some disaster awaiting him on his return.<sup>12</sup> Although his artistic reputation was beyond question, and he was shortly to have two plays running simultaneously in the West End, Wilde was already worried by the activities of Douglas's father. Queensberry was a violent, irrational man, who hated his son's lover and was capable of hurting both parties. Bosie insisted on flaunting his relationship with Wilde to annoy his father and he was reckless of the effect of this public display of unconventional behaviour. Homosexuality was no less a fact of life in 1895 than it is now: moreover, the artistic and theatrical world accommodated it better than society at large. It had a flourishing and varied subculture and a number of sophisticated apologists. The double life that it entailed was by no means a simple matter of deceit and guilt for Wilde: it suited the cultivation of moral independence and detachment from society that he considered essential to art. None the less, if his affair with Douglas should ever come to be more public, and if the law were to be invoked, Wilde would be ruined. There had been scandals and trials involving homosexuals of the upper classes, which

<sup>11</sup> Wilde, *Letters*, p. 438.

<sup>12</sup> 'I am not claiming that Wilde clearly saw prison rising up before him; but I do assert that the dramatic turn which surprised and astounded London, abruptly turning Wilde from accuser to accused, did not, strictly speaking, cause him any surprises' (Gide, 'In Memoriam', ed. cit., p. 34).

had to a degree closed their ranks to protect their own. But Wilde had made powerful enemies in a country whose leaders, institutions, and press seemed devoted to Philistinism and where art itself was always suspect as constituting a threat to the moral fibre of the nation. *Dorian Gray* in particular had aroused violent mistrust, especially in its original form, and a satirical novel by Robert Hichens, *The Green Carnation* (1894), had hinted at a homosexual relationship between two characters obviously based on Wilde and Douglas. Queensberry had made his feelings about his son's private life well known in Clubland. On the first night of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, which opened on 14 February 1895, he tried to cause a disturbance at the theatre, but was thwarted by the management. The play was a great success—according to one of the actors, 'The audience rose in their seats and cheered and cheered again'.<sup>13</sup> As it settled down to what promised to be a long run, Wilde's career was at its height.

A fortnight later, on 28 February, Queensberry left a card at the Albemarle Club 'For Oscar Wilde posing as a somdomite' [*sic*]. The club porter put the card in an envelope, noting on the back the time and date, and Wilde was given it when he arrived at the club later that evening. The events that followed ruined him within a few months. Urged on by Douglas, but against the advice of most of his friends, Wilde sued Queensberry for criminal libel. The case went against Wilde, who found himself answering charges under the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act, which made both private and public homosexual relations between men illegal. Significantly, the accusations against him did not include his affair with Douglas: he was alleged to have committed acts of gross indecency on a number of occasions and to have conspired to procure the committing of such acts. The men involved were 'renters', young, lower-class, male prostitutes, and there was a strong sense in the proceedings that Wilde was being tried for betraying his class's social as well as sexual ethics. Much was made of the alleged immorality of his works, especially *Dorian Gray*. The jury at what was effectively the second trial of Wilde (after the hearings in his charge against Queensberry) failed to agree, and a retrial was ordered. Finally, on 25 May 1895, Wilde was convicted and sentenced to two years' imprisonment with hard labour. In the autumn he was declared bankrupt and all his effects were auctioned, including drafts and manuscripts of published and unpublished works. On 19 May 1897 he was released, and took up residence in France. During his imprisonment he had composed a long, bitter letter to Douglas, later published under the title *De Profundis*. Shortly after his release he completed a narrative poem, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. These and a few letters

<sup>13</sup> Allen Aynsworth, quoted by Hesketh Pearson, *The Life of Oscar Wilde* (1946), p. 257.

to the press on prison reform apart, Wilde published nothing new after his imprisonment. He did manage to arrange for the publication of *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *An Ideal Husband*, which appeared in 1899. Projects for further plays came to nothing. The affair with Douglas was taken up again and continued sporadically. They led a nomadic life on the continent, Wilde often chronically in debt despite the good offices of his friends. His allowance from Constance was withdrawn when he resumed living with Bosie. His plays were not yet being revived in England and his published works brought in little by way of royalties.

Wilde died on 30 November 1900 in Paris, from cerebral meningitis which set in after an operation on his ear. The day before he had been received into the Roman Catholic Church. He was buried at Bagneux, but in 1909 his remains were moved to the Père Lachaise cemetery, where they now rest under a monument by Jacob Epstein.

#### THE PLAY

Reviewing the first production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* William Archer asked what 'a poor critic' could do with a play that 'raises no principles, whether of art or morals, creates its own canons and conventions, and is nothing but an absolutely wilful expression of an irrepressibly witty personality'.<sup>14</sup> Another contemporary remarked that one might as well sit down gravely to discuss 'the true inwardness of a soufflé' and Max Beerbohm, in a notice of the 1902 revival, skilfully avoided defining the comedy: 'In kind the play always was unlike any other, and in its kind it still seems perfect'.<sup>15</sup> Despite the forcefulness of these claims, it is possible to see that Wilde's play does touch on principles of art and morals, and that it does have some relation to existing canons and conventions. Like a soufflé, it has its ingredients.

The St James's Theatre, where *The Importance of Being Earnest* was produced, was particularly associated with what was claimed to be a renaissance of dramatic art in England. Since November 1890 it had been under the management of the actor George Alexander, who had built up its reputation for stylish and accomplished productions of well-written plays. The St James's was identified with Alexander in a way almost unknown today but natural in a period when leading actors and actresses aspired to the management of a theatre and its company, and were expected to take the

<sup>14</sup> William Archer, *The Theatrical 'World' of 1895* (1896), pp. 56–60; p. 57.

<sup>15</sup> Anonymous review, *Truth*, 21 February 1895. Max Beerbohm, *Around Theatres* (1953), pp. 188–91, p. 189.

leading roles in the plays they produced. Alexander was unusually self-effacing in not insisting on this prerogative and in his readiness to accommodate as far as possible the author who wished to supervise the staging of his plays—although the ultimate authority lay with the manager in these days before the ascendancy of the independent director. He was disinclined to have plays altered to give undue prominence to the character he played, and treated his fellow-performers with the same courtesy he extended to authors, considering himself as a collaborator rather than a tyrant. Before 1895 his most notable successes at the St James's were R. C. Carton's farce *Liberty Hall* (December 1892), Pinero's drama *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* (May 1893) and Henry Arthur Jones's *The Masqueraders* (April 1894). A command performance of *Liberty Hall* before Queen Victoria consolidated the social standing of the theatre. In the words of Alexander's biographer, the playwright A. E. W. Mason,

... Alexander was gradually gathering a regular band of theatre-goers at his theatre, people who must see the new play at the St James's whatever the newspapers said about it; people from the big houses in the suburbs as well as the artists, doctors, judges and dwellers in inner London who filled the stalls and dress-circle during the first performances.<sup>16</sup>

This audience was fashionable but not raffish, reflecting the theatre's location: near the West End without adjoining its less respectable areas; handy for Clubland in St James's and Pall Mall and the expensive houses and apartments of Mayfair and Belgravia.

Although he made successful forays into more romantic regions—including productions of *Much Ado about Nothing* and *As You Like It* and an adaptation of *The Prisoner of Zenda*—Alexander's repertoire was made up chiefly of plays domestic and upper-class (or upper-middle-class) in milieu, reflecting the status and tastes of his audience. He insisted on meticulously realistic settings that would serve rather than overshadow the author's intentions, and his audiences expected that good manners, taste, and the values of polite society would prevail on both sides of the curtain. His acting was skilful and subtle. Wilde singled him out for mention in a review of Irving's *Hamlet* published in 1885 when Alexander was acting in the Lyceum

<sup>16</sup> A. E. W. Mason, *Sir George Alexander and the St James's Theatre* (1935), p. 97. See also Ray Mander and Joe Mitchenson, *Lost Theatres of London* (2nd ed., 1977); Paul C. Wadleigh, 'Earnest at the St James's Theatre', *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 52 (1966), 58–62; Joseph Donohue, 'The First Production of *The Importance of Being Earnest*: A Proposal for a Reconstructive Study' in Kenneth Richards and Peter Thomson, eds., *Nineteenth Century British Theatre* (1971), pp. 125–43.



company: in his Laertes, Wilde saw evidence of 'a most effective presence . . . charming voice, and . . . capacity for wearing costumes with ease and elegance'.<sup>17</sup> Alexander retained the qualities of an attractive *jeune premier* well into middle age. His knighthood in 1911 seemed the appropriate honour for an actor of gentlemen.

Society Drama reflected the values of the stalls and dress-circles of the West End as accurately as Alexander's acting reflected upper-class standards of politeness and ease of address. It was a modification of the serious drama and domestic comedy of the mid-century decades. Melodrama survived at the Adelphi and Drury Lane, and at many suburban and provincial theatres, but its original preoccupations of kinship and personal guilt and innocence were increasingly overshadowed by ever more sophisticated representations of public events, famous sights, and natural or man-made disasters. Melodrama plots were progressing rapidly from the highly improbable to the practically impossible and its settings were drawn more often from 'high life'—however badly rendered—than from the middle- and lower-class background popular in earlier days.<sup>18</sup> Society Drama may be seen as an attempt to revive the virtues associated with melodrama in its best manifestations—its ability to move audiences, simplicity and directness of effect, combination of comic, didactic, and spectacular elements—and to produce a native drama that would be the rival, indeed superior, of French work. Arthur Wing Pinero, Henry Arthur Jones, and a number of other dramatists were attempting to do without spectacle and avoid gross improbabilities while keeping the 'strong' situations and moral clarity of the older plays. In comic writing the break with stock characterization associated with the plays of T. W. Robertson and the Bancrofts' management at the Prince of Wales's in the 1860s was now confirmed: but the setting of one class against (or beside) another, which provided the motive power of plays like Robertson's *Caste* (1867), was superseded by concern with the dynamics of characters *within* a particular class. Society Drama, serious, comic, and mixed, deals with the ways in which the ruling class policed itself.

The moral world of these plays is clearly defined. Between about 1885 and the Great War of 1914–18 there is a remarkable degree of agreement

<sup>17</sup> Wilde, 'Hamlet at the Lyceum', *Dramatic Review*, 9 May 1885.

<sup>18</sup> 'Society' in this context, with a capital 'S', refers to the values and fashions of the ruling élite, as distinct from the community ('society') at large. On Society Drama, see J. C. Trewin, *The Edwardian Theatre* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1976)—especially Chapter Two—and George Rowell, *The Victorian Theatre, 1792–1914* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 1978), which provides a useful bibliography. On the decline of melodrama, see Michael Booth, *English Melodrama* (1965), Chapters Six and Seven.

among playwrights in the commercial theatre as to what constitute the moral norms of Society, and what conflicts might arise between these and human weakness. The chief material responsibilities of their class and their country are borne by men, on whose strength of character all depends. The man who makes nothing of his life can command no respect, and it is one of the principal functions of women to determine who merits respect and to make their discrimination apparent in their choice of whom to marry. Women set the spiritual tone, and without a supply of good women, Society will crumble. Camilla, the title-character of Pinero's *Lady Bountiful* (Garrick, 1891) makes this clear to her feckless cousin Dennis Heron:

... Dennis, it isn't great men women love dearest, or even fortunate men; often, I tell you, their deepest love goes out to those who labour and fail. But for those who make no effort, who are neither great nor little, who are the nothings of the world . . . For those, a true woman has only one feeling—anger and contempt!<sup>19</sup>

Such men might behave in a mean or unmanly way, and will need the support of a good woman if they are to redeem themselves. In Jones's *The Triumph of the Philistines* (which followed *The Importance of Being Earnest* at the St James's in May 1895) Lady Beauboys pleads with Mrs Suleny to help such a reprobate:

Do take pity on him! He'll go to the dogs if you don't. Remember what we women are sent into this world for—remember there is no reason for our existence except to save these poor wretches of men from following their natural bent of going to the dogs. Do save him.<sup>20</sup>

Such is to be Cecily's mission in helping the wicked Ernest to reform himself.<sup>21</sup> If a man meets a bad woman, her influence is likely to have the opposite effect. In Hubert Henry Davies's comedy *Mrs Gorrings's Necklace* (Wyndham's, 1903) David Cairns is desperately in need of his fiancée's help—unbeknown to her he has stolen a necklace that belongs to a fellow house-guest. He suggests bitterly that he is not worthy of her, but she insists, 'Suppose you loved a bad woman?'

<sup>19</sup> A. W. Pinero, *Lady Bountiful* (1891), p. 37.

<sup>20</sup> Henry Arthur Jones, *The Triumph of the Philistines* (1899), p. 93.

<sup>21</sup> *The Importance of Being Earnest*, II, 159–65. (This and all subsequent references are to the line-numbers of the present edition.)

How could I bear to see you dragged down by a bad woman, knowing that I might have saved you? (*Goes to him with a sudden impulse, kneels beside him and puts her arms about him*) David! David! You must try—try hard—for my sake.<sup>22</sup>

She marries him, still unaware of his guilt, and a friend decides to take the blame for David's crime in order to spare her the shame of his unmasking. David, however, pre-empts the friend's chivalry by shooting himself.

A less drastic means of reforming the man who has erred is emigration. Active service in the colonies, farming in New Zealand or Australia, and even mining and general pioneering in North America will clear a man's mind and give him a fresh view of Society. This kind of experience is often used to establish character—as in the case of Gunning in Haddon Chambers's *The Tyranny of Tears* (Criterion, 1899), who has been adventuring in Upper India, and has done 'a rather fine thing . . . saved a lot of miserable lives—an ordinary, manly, commonplace, heroic, English sort of thing'.<sup>23</sup> The colonies assume the pastoral virtues traditionally associated with the countryside and serve as a useful contrast with the city. In Alfred Sutro's *The Walls of Jericho* (Garrick, 1903), Jack Frobisher, having made his fortune sheep-farming in Queensland, has come back to marry a Society beauty in London. She falls in with a fast set of wives who play bridge for a shilling a point, run up debts, and flirt with other men ('All the women we know', she explains, 'call the men by their Christian names'). Hankey Bannister, a friend newly arrived from Australia, puts the choice frankly before Frobisher: 'Which will you be—the Man of Queensland or the Gentleman of Mayfair?'<sup>24</sup> Frobisher wavers, but the discovery of his wife in a compromising situation with a known philanderer decides him. He will take his child and go back to the sheep. At first defiant, his wife relents in the final moments of the play and agrees to accompany him to a new life. As well as possessing this figurative significance, the colonies are of great practical use to dramatists who want to get rid of characters or introduce them suddenly. The device had worked well for a long time, in melodrama and elsewhere, although the old business of the transported criminal's return (exemplified by Magwitch in *Great Expectations*) no longer served.

The kind of conduct that might necessitate a tour of duty abroad (or even permanent exile) is made clear by Pinero's Aubrey Tanqueray in his angry denunciation of 'a man's life'. Hugh Ardale, suitor for the hand of Tanqueray's

<sup>22</sup> Hubert Henry Davies, *Mrs Gorrings's Necklace* (1910), p. 49.

<sup>23</sup> C. Haddon Chambers, *The Tyranny of Tears*, ed. Michael Booth, *English Plays of the Nineteenth Century, III: Comedies* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 412–13.

<sup>24</sup> Alfred Sutro, *The Walls of Jericho* (1906), p. 49.

daughter Ellean, led in younger days a dissolute life, went to India to recover his moral stamina, and acted valorously there. Ellean has heard Ardale's confession of his past sins, and has forgiven him, but neither of them realize that Ellean's stepmother, the 'Second Mrs Tanqueray' of the title, once had a liaison with Ardale. Pinero makes it plain that even a good woman's forgiveness cannot always put right the consequences of past evil or cut away the tangle of deceit for which both man and woman are equally responsible. Aubrey Tanqueray has himself acted recklessly in marrying a woman 'with a past' and recognizes Ardale's behaviour as consistent with a pattern:

He has only led 'a man's life'—just as I, how many of us, have done! The misery he has brought on me and mine it's likely enough we, in our own time, have helped to bring on others by this leading 'a man's life' . . .<sup>25</sup>

The man who marries a woman whose reputation is not secure faces a life of social ostracism, possibly exile. Although his male friends will not openly shun him, they are not likely to allow his wife to meet their wives or daughters—the very presence of a bad woman was offensive to the good.<sup>26</sup> As for the man who marries a good woman without confessing his past, he is likely to find himself unmasked in the fifth act. In *The Profligate* Pinero sets up as target an outspoken defender of the double standard, Lord Dungars, who replies to an upright Scots lawyer's insistence that the husband who does not admit all 'wrongs his wife and fools himself':

Why, my dear Mr Murray, you're actually putting men on a level with ladies. Ladies, I admit, are like nations—to be happy they should have no histories. But don't you know that Marriage is the tomb of the past, as far as a man is concerned?

Later in the play a conversation between two of the women leaves no doubt as to the author's sympathies: a man's past is his wife's 'pride or her shame,

<sup>25</sup> A. W. Pinero, *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*, ed. George Rowell, *Late Victorian Plays* (1968), pp. 1–79; p. 79. The speech occurs in the final act, just before Ellean tells Tanqueray (and the audience) that Paula has killed herself—another victim of 'a man's life'.

<sup>26</sup> Readers of *Manners and Rules of Good Society* . . . *By a Member of the Aristocracy* (32nd ed., 1910) are warned against the casual acquaintanceships that might be picked up without formal introduction by English people abroad, who might not be aware that they had encountered an exile 'perhaps well bred and agreeable, although tabooed at home for some good and sufficient reason'. It was painful for kind-hearted travellers when they were 'subsequently compelled to avoid and to relinquish the acquaintance of those with whom they [had] become pleasantly intimate' (p. 66).

the jewel she wears upon her brow or the mud which clings to her skirts! It is her light or her darkness: her life or her death!<sup>27</sup> The attack on a man's right to 'sow his wild oats' carried the implication not that men and women alike should be pardoned, but that both should be equally punished. This is the plea of Hester in *A Woman of No Importance*: 'Set a mark, if you wish on each . . .'<sup>28</sup> But this was a radical suggestion, and the wisdom of the world maintained that men could get away with adventures absolutely forbidden to women. In Jones's *The Case of Rebellious Susan* (Criterion, 1894) a woman decides to pay back in his own coin a husband who has been paying attention to other women. She gets no further than flirtation, and reconciliation is effected through the good offices of Sir Richard Kato, a *raisonneur* of the kind that the actor Charles Wyndham excelled in. In the first act Kato warns Susan:

My dear Sue, believe me, what is sauce for the goose will never be sauce for the gander. In fact, there is no gander sauce, eh, Lady Derby?<sup>29</sup>

Wyndham was concerned that the play might be judged flippant or indecent, and wrote Jones a long cautionary letter while he was working on it:

The tendency of the drama should always, if possible, be elevating. If we depart from this ever, as in the case of Mrs Tanqueray, and such like, the subject has to be grappled with seriously.<sup>30</sup>

The presence of a *raisonneur* like Kato was a guarantee against this—he might even act as a detective in the police-force guarding Society, unearthing past indiscretions before they can cause harm (as Kato does) or even interrogating a suspect, as Sir Daniel Carteret interrogates Mrs Dane in Jones's *Mrs Dane's Defence* (Wyndham's, 1900) to find out whether she is indeed unfit for good Society.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> A. W. Pinero, *The Profligate* (1891), pp. 5; 57.

<sup>28</sup> *A Woman of No Importance*, p. 72/CW, p. 450. Wilde was himself the victim of a 'double standard' implicit in the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885, which dealt exclusively with relations between men.

<sup>29</sup> Henry Arthur Jones, *The Case of Rebellious Susan* (1897), p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Wyndham, letter to Jones quoted by Doris Arthur Jones, *The Life and Letters of Henry Arthur Jones* (1930), pp. 166–7. Cf. the account of Pinero's ambitions in M. C. Salaman's 'Introductory Note' to *The Profligate* (1891): Pinero hopes to write 'plays which should, by means of a simple and reasonable dramatic deduction, record actual experience flowing in the natural irregular rhythm of life, which should at the same time embody lofty ideals of conduct and character.' (p.v.)

<sup>31</sup> *Mrs Dane's Defence* is available in Michael Booth, ed., *The Magistrate and Other Plays* (1974) and the second volume (1969) of the same editor's *English Plays of the Nineteenth Century*.

A dramatic form in which so much depended upon discriminations and the concept of 'Society', and in which the settings and characters were almost exclusively upper-class might be expected to appeal to Wilde. But the emphasis on moral judgements was less attractive to one who favoured the substitution of aesthetic for ethical values. The three Society plays reflect this, as well as a lack of sympathy with some of the practical conventions of the genre. *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance*, and *An Ideal Husband* all deal with indiscretions that have been or must be concealed. In the first Mrs Erlynne, a woman with a 'past', is making her entry into Society with the help of Lord Windermere: her secret is that she is Lady Windermere's mother. In *A Woman of No Importance* Mrs Arbuthnot urges her son not to accept the advancement in his career that Lord Illingworth offers him, but she cannot tell him her reason: he is illegitimate and Illingworth is his father. Sir Robert Chiltern, in *An Ideal Husband*, is a cabinet minister whose career was launched on the proceeds of disclosing information to one Baron Arnheim, a sinister foreign profiteer. Chiltern cannot admit this to his wife and he is being blackmailed by an adventuress (with a selection of pasts) called Mrs Cheveley. In all three plays the background is one of receptions, balls, and house parties, which give Wilde the chance to write witty dialogue appropriate to the kind of social occasion at which he himself shone, but the plots need serious confrontations to propel the characters through the necessary moral dilemmas, and here he is less happy. The affinity he feels with a brilliant and dominating personality makes him write tellingly for Lord Illingworth when nothing important is happening, and lapse into stiff, melodramatic mannerisms when a crisis has to be dealt with. As Ian Gregor has remarked, 'The more Illingworth moves into the plot, the less Wilde cares about what he says'.<sup>32</sup> Other dramatists were happy to write the occasional impassioned, rhetorical, somewhat old-fashioned speech, but Wilde's distrust of cant makes him give Hester, in *A Woman of No Importance*, an impressive harangue on the double standard of morality, and then undercut it with the witty and blithely complacent reaction of the Englishwomen she is addressing:

... And till you count what is a shame in a woman to be infamy in a man, you will always be unjust, and Right, that pillar of fire, and Wrong, that pillar of cloud, will be made dim to your eyes, or not be seen at all, or if seen, not regarded.

<sup>32</sup> Ian Gregor, 'Comedy and Oscar Wilde', *Sewanee Review*, 74 (1966), 501–21; p. 508. See also Arthur Ganz, 'The Divided Self in the Society Comedies of Oscar Wilde', *Modern Drama*, 3 (1960), 16–23.

LADY CAROLINE

Might I, my dear Miss Worsley, as you are standing up, ask you for my cotton that is just behind you? Thank you.<sup>33</sup>

Nonchalance is more congenial to Wilde than enthusiasm. In *An Ideal Husband* he finds an integral function for his preferred attitude by making a dandy, Lord Goring, the *raisonneur*, in place of the usual lawyer, doctor, or avuncular ‘man of the world’. Goring finds the solution to Chiltern’s dilemma, but maintains his detachment. He is intolerant of the public’s regard for morality:

... in England a man who can’t talk morality twice a week to a large, popular, immoral audience is quite over as a serious politician. There would be nothing left for him as a profession except Botany or the Church.<sup>34</sup>

By making Chiltern a *man* with a past Wilde is able to invert the clichés associated with a moral situation without forfeiting its validity in the scheme of the play. He has Chiltern reproach his wife in terms familiar from discussions of her own sex: ‘Why can’t you women love us, faults and all? Why do you place us on monstrous pedestals?’ It was in this speech that Shaw recognized the ‘modern note’ of the play.<sup>35</sup>

From the preliminary scheme for a serious drama that he sent Alexander in the summer of 1894 it is clear that Wilde was looking for new ways of handling the materials appropriate to success in the commercial theatre. *Salomé* had been banned by the Lord Chamberlain in 1892, on the grounds that it represented Biblical characters: that kind of experiment was clearly not going to find a place in the West End and certainly would not make money. The new serious play was never written by Wilde, although Frank Harris later worked up a drama, *Mr and Mrs Daventry*, along the lines indicated in the proposals. It was to show a ‘man of rank and fashion’ married to ‘a simple sweet country girl—a lady—but simple and ignorant of fashionable life.’<sup>36</sup> The man would become bored, and would invite ‘a lot of fashionable *fin-de-siècle* men and women’ to stay. Among them would be Gerald Lancing, with whom the wife would be allowed to flirt. The husband would himself flirt with a Lady X, and the wife would fall in love with

<sup>33</sup> Cf. note 28, above.

<sup>34</sup> *An Ideal Husband*, p. 86/CW, p. 507.

<sup>35</sup> *An Ideal Husband*, p. 133/CW, p. 521.

<sup>36</sup> Wilde, *Letters*, pp. 360–2. Harris’s play has been published with an introduction by H. Montgomery Hyde (1956).

Lancing. The final scene would depict the triumph of love: the husband would shoot himself, leaving Gerald and the wife ‘clinging to each other as if with a mad desire to make love eternal’. Wilde assured Alexander that he thought this was ‘extremely strong’.

... I want the sheer passion of love to dominate everything. No morbid self-sacrifice. No renunciation. A sheer flame of love between a man and a woman.

This was to be a modern tragedy, and it is clear from Wilde’s outline that the love of Gerald and the wife was to be shown developing in the course of the play, rather than exist already as some secret to be unearthed in the conventional way. The contrast of simplicity and sophistication is there in the wife and her husband’s friends, and the passionate sexuality tentatively explored in *Salomé* is to be the dominating force.

The summer of 1894 also produced a parallel comic scheme for developing and transcending the conventions of the theatre: *The Importance of Being Earnest*. In this everything depends upon the rediscovery of the past, and the appropriate material exhibits are produced in evidence: a cigarette-case, a hand-bag, the Army Lists of the last forty years. The credentials of a prospective son-in-law are checked and the grounds of his admissibility to Society are investigated. A scapegrace is to be rescued by a good woman from the alternatives of the next world and Australia. Innocence is set against sophistication, the country against the town, in the persons of Cecily and Gwendolen (‘A girl with a simple, unspoiled nature’, who ‘could hardly be expected to reside in the country’; I, 518–19). The audience is kept aware of the dictates of Divine justice (‘As a man sows so let him reap’; II, 37) and its poetic equivalent (‘The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means’; II, 54–5). The play ends with the promise of three weddings and the discovery of kinship between two of the bridegrooms.

Wilde uses this material to create neither a straightforward dramatic parody—that would have been nothing new—nor a farcical comedy of the kind written by Brandon Thomas (*Charley’s Aunt*) or Pinero (*Dandy Dick*, *The Magistrate*, *The Schoolmistress*). His characters do not collide with the real world, but are endowed with an enviable control over it. Their rare moments of helplessness are enjoyed as though they had wished them upon themselves—‘The suspense is terrible’, says Gwendolen as Jack searches for the hand-bag, ‘I hope it will last’ (III, 387). Parts of the play are written with a quasi-operatic formality that makes the characters appear as Wilde’s collaborators. The tea-table scene between Cecily and Gwendolen, their joint confrontation of the two men, and the opening sequence of Act III are



composed in this manner. The speakers cap each other's lines, rhythm for rhythm and word for word. When Gwendolen observes, '*meditatively*',

If the poor fellow has been entrapped into any foolish promise I shall consider it my duty to rescue him at once, and with a firm hand,

Cecily announces her own resolution, '*thoughtfully and sadly*',

Whatever unfortunate entanglement my dear boy may have got into, I will never reproach him with it after we are married.

(II, 664–9)<sup>37</sup>

In the earlier Society plays of Wilde the necessity of using such language was an embarrassing duty: here it has become a pleasure. Jack's speech of forgiveness when he thinks Miss Prism is his mother is the most striking example:

Unmarried! I do not deny that is a serious blow. But after all, who has the right to cast a stone against one who has suffered? Cannot repentance wipe out an act of folly? Why should there be one law for men, and another for women? Mother, I forgive you. (III, 406–10)

It is appropriate that Jack should invoke Christ's words on the woman taken in adultery, as Miss Prism herself has used a sterner judgement derived from St Paul—'As a man sows, so let him reap'. For a moment we are reminded of the most pathetic of Victorian wronged women, Lady Isabel Vane in *East Lynne*, who returned disguised as a governess from an exile in which she was thought to have died, to watch over the death bed of a son who expired without having called her 'mother'.<sup>38</sup> Wilde uses this kind of effect sparingly, just as serious dramas of the new school avoided excessive reliance on techniques associated with melodrama.

*The Importance of Being Earnest* also observes a degree of decorum in characterization, keeping well away from the stock types. Neither Jack nor Algernon speaks with the ebullient raciness of the stage 'swell' or the slangy

<sup>37</sup> W. H. Auden suggested that the play is 'the only pure verbal opera in English' ('An Improbable Life', *New Yorker*, 9 March 1963—reprinted by Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde: a Collection of Critical Essays*, pp. 116–37). On the formal qualities of the play (especially the second act), cf. Otto Reinert, 'The Courtship Dance in *The Importance of Being Earnest*', *Modern Drama*, 1 (1959), 256–7.

<sup>38</sup> Mrs Henry Wood's novel *East Lynne* (published in book form in 1861) was dramatized a number of times: T. A. Palmer's version (1874) is reprinted by Leonard R. N. Ashley, *Nineteenth Century British Drama* (Glenview, Ill., 1967). The most famous line occurs at the end of Act Three: 'Oh, Willie, my child dead, dead, dead! and he never knew me, never called me mother' (p. 390).

drawl of the dim theatrical younger son. Aynsworth, who played Algernon, was well known for his ‘clever impersonations of masherdom’,<sup>39</sup> and a comparison of the lines Wilde gave him with a specimen from Pinero’s *The Weaker Sex* (Royal Court, 1889) shows how little the new play owed to popular comic cliché. In Pinero’s play Aynsworth appeared as the Hon. George Liptrott, idle, rich, and vacant. In this speech he is telling his mother about one of the other guests at an evening party:

Why Ma, that’s Wade Green, the man who’s so awfully entertaining at the piano with those frightfully amusing songs—don’t you know. When he sings it’s as much as people can do to keep from laughing. (To GREEN) H’are yah?<sup>40</sup>

‘Ma’, ‘awfully’, ‘frightfully’, ‘don’t you know’, and ‘H’are yah?’ would be inconceivable in the language of Wilde’s characters, who speak like their creator in well-formed complete sentences and rarely use slang or vogue-words. In the course of revision Wilde removed from the play a number of references to debts, traditional in the life-style of the man-about-town. The touches that identify Jack and Algernon as well-to-do bachelors are few: the consumption of champagne, the restaurant meals, the location of their apartments, and the list of alternative amusements at the end of Act I (ll. 682–92). The young women diverge from type in a similar way. Cecily is more knowing than the *ingénues* she is based on; Gwendolen is clever and independent-minded, but her fashionable elegance distinguishes her from the common image of the ‘modern’, intellectual woman as dowdy, straight-haired, and faddish—an image retailed in Pinero’s *The Weaker Sex* and Grundy’s *The New Woman* (Comedy Theatre, 1894). Miss Prism and Dr Chasuble are characterized by a few carefully-selected details: their ecclesiastical and educational enthusiasms are suggestive of the mid-century years. Chasuble’s fussy precision of language is established in his first scene with Miss Prism and her pupil: even the commas are telling in ‘Miss Prism, you are, I trust, well?’ (II, 63–4). Wilde’s revisions between the manuscript draft and the 1899 edition show that he wanted to avoid farcical exaggeration: the greater number of references to their respective preoccupations in the original version gave Miss Prism and the rector an obsessive quality. By the same process Lady Bracknell (whose name was Lady Brancaster in texts before that used by Alexander) was deprived of several lines in which

<sup>39</sup> *The Dramatic Peerage* (1895).

<sup>40</sup> A. W. Pinero, *The Weaker Sex* (1894), p. 52.



GWENDOLEN AND CECILY.

*GWENDOLEN: "Well—I speak quite candidly—I wish that you were fully thirty-five, and more than usually plain for your age."*

Irene Vanbrugh and Evelyn Millard: studio photograph by Alfred Ellis of characters in the first production.  
(Reproduced from the *Sketch*, 20 March 1895)

the supine Lord Bracknell was mentioned.<sup>41</sup> Moulton the gardener originally appeared briefly in Act II (see note to ll. 1–4), but this conventionally comic rustic disappeared in the licensing copy. The remaining servants at Woolton, Merriman and the footman, are practically silent, although their presence during the tea-table scene in Act II is valuable. Lane, Algernon's butler, is anything but the confidential scheming servant of tradition—if he conforms to a type, it is a Wildean one, reminiscent of Phipps in *An Ideal Husband*: 'a mask with a manner . . . He represents the dominance of form.'<sup>42</sup>

Sparing and strategic use of parody, and the avoidance (or modification) of stock characterization are complemented by restraint in the physical action of the play. There is little of the violence associated with farce—no desperate concealments or rushing in and out of doors. The struggle for the cigarette-case, the sugar and cake forced on Gwendolen, the hunt (off-stage) for the hand-bag, and Jack's search through the Army Lists are the most violent actions. The first two acts end with Jack impotently indignant and Algernon refusing to be flurried. In Act I he is complacently looking forward to a weekend's Bunburying and in Act II he is finishing his tea.

The sense of decorum in Wilde's comedy suggests the control of polite behaviour over Society. The interdependence of art, etiquette, and insincerity had been proposed in *Dorian Gray*:

For the canons of good society are, or should be, the same as the canons of art. Form is absolutely essential to it. It should have the dignity of a ceremony, as well as its unreality, and should combine the insincere character of a romantic play with the wit and beauty that make such plays delightful to us. Is insincerity such a terrible thing? I think not. It is merely a method by which we can multiply our personalities.<sup>43</sup>

In *The Importance of Being Earnest* there are three major instances of etiquette in action—two afternoon calls, with tea served to the visitors, and Jack's mourning for Ernest. The manuals of etiquette devote much space to the formalities involved in the paying and receiving of calls, and death was the occasion of elaborate and carefully graduated alterations in dress and social behaviour.<sup>44</sup> Each of these three sequences in the play combines the practice of social forms with some kind of deception. In Act I, Lane and

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, notes to II, 295 and III, 192–3.

<sup>42</sup> *An Ideal Husband*, p. 137/CW, p. 522.

<sup>43</sup> *Dorian Gray*, ed. Murray, pp. 142–3/CW, p. 112. An interesting study of 'form' is Leonora Davidoff, *The Best Circles: Society Etiquette and the Season* (1973).

<sup>44</sup> On Victorian mourning see John Morley, *Death, Heaven and the Victorians* (1971), Chapter Six ('Mourning Dress and Etiquette').

Algernon jointly lie about the availability of cucumbers, Jack courts Gwendolen behind her mother's back (at one point literally so), and Algernon invokes Bunbury to avoid a dinner with his aunt. Jack's behaviour, like Algernon's, is part of a general lie concerning a mythical being, in his case Ernest. In the tea-table scene in Act II the formalities of hospitality are played off against the antagonism of Gwendolen and Cecily—an antagonism that is in any case based upon misinformation deriving from the greater deceit of Bunbury and Ernest. In this sequence the sense of artifice—which has already been mentioned—is enhanced by the progression of Gwendolen from insincere and effusively proffered friendship ('My first impressions of people are never wrong'; II, 569–70) through naked hostility ('This is no time for wearing the shallow mask of manners'; II, 675–6) to genuine solidarity ('You will call me sister, will you not?'; II, 759)—all in fulfilment of Algernon's prophetic remark that women only call each other sister 'when they have called each other a lot of things first' (I, 675–6). As for Jack's mourning attire, which provides the play's most visually striking moment (especially if the audience sees him before the other characters do), it is a lie for which we have been well prepared without being told exactly what form it will take.<sup>45</sup> Cecily's indecorous exclamation—'But what horrid clothes you have got on!' (II, 296–7)—does not (as the audience knows) break the rules concerning mourning, for Ernest is not in fact dead. It does break the rules of Jack's game, and when he protests, 'What nonsense! I haven't got a brother' (II, 306), he is in the unusual position of speaking an untruth without meaning to. He means it literally, Cecily takes it figuratively ('Oh don't say that. However badly he may have behaved to you in the past he is still your brother'; II, 307–8), and within his charade it could mean that Ernest is no longer alive. The virtuous brother mourning the profligate and the unforgiving one denying his existence are figures out of some serious play, and so is the new role in which Jack is shortly to be cast—the brother forgiving a prodigal he had given up for dead. Personalities are being multiplied faster than Jack can cope with them.

It would be possible to compile an etiquette book from precepts uttered by Wilde's characters—it would include notes on the impropriety of reading a private cigarette-case and the vulgarity of arguments. A similar dossier might be provided on acceptable attitudes to political, social, and aesthetic matters, from French songs to bomb outrages. The comedy is addressed to those whose concern with life is as 'serious' as their taste in drama. Ideas that aroused enthusiasm and partisanship in the 1890s are treated not merely with flippancy but with an earnest, confident wrongness (in Gwendolen's

<sup>45</sup> Wilde wisely deleted an anticipation of the effect in Act I: see note to ll. 658–9.

announcement that we live in ‘an age of ideals’ and Lady Bracknell’s remarks on education, for example). The opening conversation between Algernon and Lane establishes the manner in which serious topics will be handled. Lane is honest but alarmingly matter-of-fact about his married life:

... I have only been married *once*. That was in consequence of a misunderstanding between myself and a young person.

Algernon’s reaction is dismissive and is spoken ‘*languidly*’:

I don’t know that I am much interested in your family life, Lane.

Lane is not to be outdone in off-handedness:

No, sir; it is not a very interesting subject. I never think of it myself.

Lane clearly has the upper hand here, much as Algernon has it later in his conversations with Jack. After he has gone out, Algernon reflects:

Lane’s views on marriage seem somewhat lax. Really, if the lower orders don’t set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them? They seem, as a class, to have absolutely no sense of moral responsibility. (I, 33–6)

The topics of marriage and class will be followed up later in the play and the comic inversion of priorities will recur. So will the appeal to morality.

It would be wrong to infer from this that Wilde did not care about morality or social problems: his ideas on both do not amount to a satisfyingly coherent or original philosophy, but they are indicative of a good deal more than egotistic scepticism. Wilde did try in ‘The Soul of Man under Socialism’ to reconcile socialist utopianism with the cultivation of the individual. It is the style of moral and political life that he objects to, and its humbug. The references to philanthropy in *The Importance of Being Earnest* are significant in this respect, for doing good among the poor was at once the working-out of the conscience of the upper classes, the only outlet in practical life available to many Victorian women, and an arena for the practice of cant. In *An Ideal Husband* Mrs Cheveley observes that philanthropy has become ‘the refuge of people who wish to annoy their fellow-creatures’, and in Act II of *The Importance of Being Earnest* Cecily assumes that Miss Fairfax must be ‘one of the many good elderly women who are associated with Uncle Jack in some of his philanthropic work in London’:

I don't quite like women who are interested in philanthropic work. I think it is so forward of them.<sup>46</sup>

We are also told that Miss Prism lectures the villagers (with no apparent influence on the rate of growth in the population), and that Mr Bunbury, if he was interested in social legislation, was well punished for his morbidity (II, 256–9; III, 103). The most suggestive reference is not directly concerned with poverty, but with health. Lady Bracknell, told of Bunbury's illness, remarks that she does not share 'the modern sympathy with invalids', which she thinks 'morbid', that 'Health is the primary duty of life' and that she has often said as much to Lord Bracknell—without producing any improvement in his ailments (I, 341–9). Wilde is echoing words he had used before in *Dorian Gray* and *A Woman of No Importance* where Lord Henry Wotton and Lord Illingworth take part in debates on the question of social justice. In *Dorian Gray* Wotton proclaims himself unable to sympathize with suffering:

It is too ugly, too horrible, too distressing. There is something terribly morbid in the modern sympathy with pain. One should sympathise with the colour, the beauty, the joy of life. The less said about life's sores the better.<sup>47</sup>

In *A Woman of No Importance* the pompous politician Kelvil maintains that the House of Commons has always 'shown great sympathy with the sufferings of the poor'. Illingworth counters:

That is its special vice. That is the special vice of the age. One should sympathise with the joy, the beauty, the colour of life. The less said about life's sores the better, Mr Kelvil.

Kelvil persists—'Still our East End is a very important problem'—and Illingworth replies with another echo of Wotton:

Quite so. It is the problem of slavery. And we are trying to solve it by amusing the slaves.

<sup>46</sup> II, 561–3. Cf. the Duchess of Berwick's description in *Lady Windermere's Fan* of the 'Saville girls': '... they're always at the window doing fancy work, and making ugly things for the poor, which I think so useful of them in these dreadful socialistic days' (p. 25/CW, p. 391).

<sup>47</sup> *Dorian Gray*, ed. Murray, pp. 39–40/CW, p. 44. Cf. Lord Henry's first conversation with Dorian in Basil Hallward's studio: 'To realize one's nature perfectly—that is what each of us is here for. People are afraid of themselves, nowadays. They have forgotten the highest of all duties, the duty that one owes to one's self. Of course they are charitable. They feed the hungry, and clothe the beggar. But their own souls starve, and are naked' (ed. Murray, p. 17/CW, p. 29).

Lady Hunstanton observes that ‘much good may be done by means of a magic lantern, or a missionary, or some popular amusement of that kind’, and Lady Caroline retorts:

I am not at all in favour of amusements for the poor, Jane. Blankets and coals are sufficient. There is too much love of pleasure among the upper classes as it is. Health is what we want in modern life. The tone is not healthy, not healthy at all.<sup>48</sup>

In ‘The Soul of Man under Socialism’ Wilde claims that up to now man has only cultivated sympathy with pain, and that this is not the highest form of sympathy:

It is tainted with egotism. It is apt to become morbid. There is in it a certain element of terror for our own safety . . . It is curiously limiting, too. One should sympathise with the entirety of life, not with life’s sores and maladies merely, but with life’s joy and beauty and energy and health and freedom.<sup>49</sup>

In *The Importance of Being Earnest* these ideas appear and some of the same words are used, but the context is not one of debate, as in *Dorian Gray* and *A Woman of No Importance*, or theoretical exposition, as in ‘The Soul of Man under Socialism’. Lady Bracknell is talking about two characters of almost equally fictional status, Bunbury and her husband, and illness rather than poverty is the subject of a couple of passing remarks. The notion of the lower classes setting the ‘tone’, implicit in Lady Hunstanton’s speech, is present in Algernon’s reaction to Lane’s views on marriage and Chasuble’s having preached for the Society for the Prevention of Discontent among the Upper Orders. Lady Bracknell is never anything less than authoritative in her remarks, but she feels no obligation to engage in any kind of debate or to justify herself in any way.

One of Jack’s reasons for creating Ernest was to enable him to escape the guardian’s duty of maintaining ‘a very high moral tone on all subjects’—a duty which ‘can hardly be said to conduce very much to either one’s health or one’s happiness’ (I, 205–9). One of Wilde’s purposes in writing *The Importance of Being Earnest* can be seen as something of the same kind: the

<sup>48</sup> *A Woman of No Importance*, pp. 22–3/*CW*, p. 437. Cf. the exchange in *Dorian Gray* immediately after the speech cited in note 47 above: “Still the East End is a very important problem”, remarked Sir Thomas, with a grave shake of the head. “Quite so”, answered the young lord. “It is the problem of slavery, and we try to solve it by amusing the slaves”.

<sup>49</sup> ‘The Soul of Man under Socialism’, *Intentions*, p. 329/*CW*, p. 1101.



author is able to shed his responsibilities by inventing characters who have perfect confidence in their own fulfilment of the demands of Society and the justice of their opinions. They are themselves literary inventors of considerable accomplishment: their collected works amount to two complete human beings, a diary of events that have not yet occurred, a three-volume novel and several unpublished sermons. The combination of life and works is especially appropriate to Wilde's situation and state of mind at the time the play was written and performed—the double life with Douglas, the hindrances despite which he managed to continue working, the confession to Gide, and ultimately the questioning in court on the moral qualities of his books. This engagement with the author's ways of living, thinking, and writing prevents the play from becoming a simple social satire. The author identifies himself closely with a group of characters whose appetites and attitudes are vindicated in a conventionally happy ending. Pinero's farces for the Court Theatre in the 1880s (*The Magistrate*, *Dandy Dick*, and *The Schoolmistress* are the best known) showed respectable characters indulging a concealed or unsuspected capacity for self-expressive enjoyment and entering on a comic collision course with the dignity of their social and professional position. Gilbert in his libretti for Sullivan and his comedies shows a distrust of rhetoric and a sense of the absurd similar to Wilde's. Some degree of influence seems likely, and it is probable that some of Gilbert's jokes in *Engaged* (Haymarket, 1877) are recalled in *The Importance of Being Earnest*.<sup>50</sup> But Gilbert shows little sympathy for his characters and builds his play upon the contrast between their conventional and often extravagant professions of feeling and the material ambitions that in fact motivate them. Wilde's comedy is more radical than Pinero's and he has more in common with the characters he creates than Gilbert with his. *The Importance of Being Earnest* does not return its characters (as Pinero does his magistrate, dean, and schoolmistress) to the security of their accustomed life: it liberates them. It is especially fitting that Dr Chasuble and Miss Prism should share in this freedom:

CHASUBLE (*To MISS PRISM*)

Laetitia!

*Embraces her*

MISS PRISM (*Enthusiastically*)

Frederick! At last!

(III, 482–3)

<sup>50</sup> The possible influence of *Engaged* can be traced in the similarity of incidents in the older play and Wilde's comedy (the greedy eating of jam tarts, Symperson's mourning for a man who has changed his mind about suicide) and the gravity of tone demanded by Gilbert of his actors. Gilbert's name was invoked by several reviewers of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. The relationship of the two pieces is interestingly discussed by Lynton Hudson, *The English Stage, 1850–1950* (1951), pp. 101–5.

This is the comic counterpart of the 'sheer flame of love' that Wilde anticipated for his unwritten drama, and its benefits are enjoyed by the representatives of religion and learning—the traditional guardians of earnestness. It was a generous act on Wilde's part and one that would not be reciprocated when he found himself in court.

#### REACTIONS TO THE FIRST PRODUCTION

Wilde was the first reviewer of his own work. In interviews given before the production of his new play he claimed that it was 'exquisitely trivial, a delicate bubble of fancy, and it has its philosophy'. The 'philosophy' was that 'we should treat all the trivial things of life very seriously, and all the serious things of life with sincere and studied triviality'.<sup>51</sup> He also suggested a suitable critical verdict: 'the first act is ingenious, the second beautiful, the third abominably clever'.<sup>52</sup>

Some of the notices of *The Importance of Being Earnest* suggest that Wilde's frequently-expressed dislike of newspaper critics was not unfounded, and that there was more than playful arrogance in his contention that it was the audience, not the play, that was tested at a first night.<sup>53</sup> In a period when originality—independence of French models in particular—was at a premium, it was not unusual for reviewers to spend many column-inches on a catalogue of the alleged sources of a new piece. Marivaux, Sterne, Gilbert, Shaw, Meilhac, Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, and a handful of contemporary works were among the suggested originals or influences of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, which the *Sketch* claimed to be 'as full of echoes as Prospero's Isle'.<sup>54</sup> The same paper offered a criticism repeated in many other reviews:

Certainly it cannot be pretended that in such matters as construction, invention—or adaptation—of subject, contrivance of comic business or delineation of character, Mr Wilde has shown much ability.

<sup>51</sup> Hyde, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 177.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in *Black and White*, 16 February 1895. In letters to Alexander during the composition of the play Wilde described it as 'sheer comedy, and the best I have ever written', insisting that it was 'in idea farcical' and not really suitable for the repertoire of 'serious and classical pieces' that the actor intended to take to America (*Letters*, p. 369). It was outside the 'definite artistic line of progress' adopted by Alexander (p. 376). Perhaps Wilde was 'angling' for Alexander, but the fact that Wyndham took up the option on his play suggests that the misgivings were real (Wilde had suggested that it might be more in Wyndham's line). When he first approached Alexander, Wilde wrote: 'The real charm of the play, if it is to have a charm, must be in the dialogue. The plot is slight, but, I think, adequate . . . Well, I think an amusing thing with lots of fun might be made' (p. 359).

<sup>53</sup> Hyde, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 177.

<sup>54</sup> The *Sketch*, 20 February 1895.

The compensation—if the critic was well-disposed—lay in the author’s wit. For an ill-disposed critic Wilde’s wit was the final insult: an anonymous reporter in the *Theatre* dismissed the play as ‘a bid for popularity in the direction of farce’ and observed that it showed ‘the advantage of being frivolous, which, in a pecuniary sense, is likely to accrue to an author who caters for the less intelligent section of the public’. Wilde’s wit was meretricious, but sufficient for an audience ‘unable or unwilling to distinguish between the tinsel glitter of sham epigram and the authentic sheen of true wit.’<sup>55</sup> *Truth*, in a reasonably sympathetic review, described the author’s technique as ‘dressing up an old-fashioned screaming farce in the very latest and smartest verbal fashion’, while *Black and White*, intending a compliment, announced: ‘Its title is a pun, its story a conundrum, its characters are lunatics, its dialogue is *galimatias*, and its termination is a “sell”.’<sup>56</sup> Many of the witty sayings were reported, and the plot was narrated at a length no longer permitted to dramatic correspondents. The *Graphic* solemnly advised Wilde that he would do well ‘to discard a silly pun by changing “Earnest” in his title, which has no meaning, into “Ernest”, which is what is really meant.’<sup>57</sup>

The most interesting notices are those by Archer in the *World*, A. B. Walkley in the *Speaker*, and Shaw in the *Saturday Review*. Archer’s begins with the claim that dramatic critics have four categories within which plays can be classified: those which are good to see, those which are good to write about, those which are both, and those which are neither. Wilde’s comedy is placed without hesitation in the first category, but this leads to the proposal (quoted above, p. 8) that it is impossible to write about. The material is such as in other hands would have made ‘a capital farce’, but ‘farce is too gross and commonplace a word to apply to such an iridescent filament of fantasy.’<sup>58</sup> Wilde’s humour ‘transmutes’ hackneyed incidents of plot into ‘something new and individual’. To this positive version of an idea that figures in other reviews as a negative Archer adds praise for Wilde as a craftsman, especially in the incident of Jack’s entrance ‘in deep mourning (even down to his cane)’ in the second act: ‘In all his plays, and certainly not least in this one, the story is excellently told and illustrated with abundance of scenic detail’—Archer had been to see the play twice, and found that on second viewing some passages that seemed drawn-out on the first night no longer

<sup>55</sup> *The Theatre*, 20 February 1895. The editor of the *Theatre*, and probable author of this anonymous notice, was Clement Scott, an arch-conservative whose verdict on *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* would have pleased Miss Prism: ‘That is the modern Play. Every vicious person seems to succeed, every virtuous person suffers horribly’ (*Illustrated London News*, 22 July 1893).

<sup>56</sup> *Truth*, 21 February 1895; *Black and White*, 23 February 1895.

<sup>57</sup> *Graphic*, 23 February 1895.

<sup>58</sup> William Archer, *The Theatrical ‘World’ of 1895* (1896), pp. 56–60.

worried him. His major reservation concerned a trick of dialogue that he identified as Gilbertian: Wilde was ‘least fortunate where he drops into Mr Gilbert’s Palace of Truth mannerism, as he is apt to do in the characters of Gwendolen and Cecily’. The reference was to Gilbert’s *The Palace of Truth* (1870) in which characters find themselves speaking the truth in spite of the rules of polite discourse that under normal circumstances enforce hypocrisy.

For Walkley, as for Archer, the new comedy represents a breakthrough in Wilde’s dramatic writing:

Believe me, it is with no ironic intention that I declare Mr Oscar Wilde to have ‘found himself’ at last, as an artist in sheer nonsense. There has been good nonsense in his previous stage-work, but it failed to give unalloyed pleasure, either because it adopted serious postures or was out of harmony with an environment of seriousness.<sup>59</sup>

Wilde is compared with Pinero and Gilbert, whose work contains an element of ‘realism’ that has the effect of mingling ‘a little contempt with the laughter’ (*Engaged* had been ‘as grim as *The Duchess of Malfi*’). Wilde uses types in order to induce laughter ‘at their conduct for its sheer whimsicality, not as illustrating the foibles of their class’. Walkley sees in *The Importance of Being Earnest* a cunning use of the familiar ‘shaken up, as it were, and rearranged in a strange, unreal pattern’—‘a world that is real yet fantastic’. In an introductory essay to an edition of Wilde’s *Works*, published in New York in 1923, he referred to Jack’s entrance in Act II as ‘a supreme example of that rare thing, wit in action’, regarding this, as Archer had done, as evidence of the dramatist’s skill as a craftsman.<sup>60</sup> The term ‘farce’ is defended on both occasions against disparagement by those (including Archer) who would use it as a pejorative.

Archer and Walkley anticipate those more recent critics who have seen *The Importance of Being Earnest* in the light of Absurdism, and have pointed to Wilde’s witty use of logic as a weapon against its advocates.<sup>61</sup> Shaw’s criticism is remarkable for its biographical basis, on which hindsight enabled

<sup>59</sup> A. B. Walkley, *The Speaker*, 23 February 1895—reprinted in Karl Beckson, *Oscar Wilde: the Critical Heritage* (1970), pp. 196–9.

<sup>60</sup> A. B. Walkley, introduction to Volume VII, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (New York, 1923)—reprinted in Beckson, pp. 400–2.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. D. J. Spingler, ‘Profiles and Principles: The Sense of the Absurd in *The Importance of Being Earnest*’, *Papers on Language and Literature*, 12 (1976), 49–72; G. Stone, ‘Serious Bunburyism: the Logic of *The Importance of Being Earnest*’, *Essays in Criticism*, 26 (1976), 28–41. On farce, cf. David Parker, ‘Oscar Wilde’s Great Farce: *The Importance of Being Earnest*’, *Modern Language Quarterly*, 35 (1974), 173–86.

him to speculate more freely in his memoir of Wilde in Frank Harris's *Oscar Wilde: his Life and Confessions*. In the review Shaw described the scene between Cecily and Gwendolen in Act II as 'quite in the literary style of Mr Gilbert, and almost inhuman enough to have been conceived by him'. The humour was 'adulterated by stock mechanized fun' and the effect was that of 'a farcical comedy dating from the seventies, unplayed during that period because it was too clever and decent, and brought up to date as far as possible by Mr Wilde in his now completely formed style'.<sup>62</sup> The suggestion of development ('now completely formed') and of the reworking of old material is at once qualified by a reservation: Shaw insists that he goes to the theatre to be moved to laughter, and that farcical comedy merely produces 'miserable mechanical laughter' in him. The new play has plenty of this 'rib-tickling'—'for instance the lies, the deceptions, the cross-purposes, the sham mourning, the christening of the two grown-up men, the muffin eating, and so forth'.

These could only have been raised from the farcical plane by making them occur to characters who had, like Don Quixote, convinced us of their reality and obtained some hold on our sympathy. But that unfortunate moment of Gilbertism breaks our belief in the humanity of the play. Thus we are thrown back on the force and daintiness of its wit, brought home by an exquisitely grave, natural, and unconscious execution on the part of the actors. Alas! the latter is not forthcoming.

The criticism of the performance is in itself unusual—it was generally agreed that the acting had for the most part been appropriately subdued in tone—but the sense of annoyance in Shaw's account of the play is more so. The fact that Shaw's own theatrical work had a similarly oblique relationship with the commercial drama must have had some influence on his opinion of Wilde's comedy (he refers in his review to *Arms and the Man*, performed in 1894), but the 'Memories of Oscar Wilde' printed with Harris's biography suggests a more personal reason for Shaw's hostility:

Our sixth meeting . . . was the one at the Café Royal. On that occasion he was not too preoccupied with his danger to be disgusted with me because I, who had praised his first plays handsomely, had turned traitor over *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Clever as it was, it was his first really heartless play. In the others the chivalry of the eighteenth century Irishman and the romance of the disciple of Theophile

<sup>62</sup> George Bernard Shaw, *Our Theatres in the Nineties* (3 vols., 1932), I, 41–4.

Gautier (Oscar was really old-fashioned in the Irish way, except as a critic of morals) not only gave a certain kindness and gallantry to the serious passages and to the handling of women, but provided that proximity of emotion without which laughter, however irresistible, is destructive and sinister. In *The Importance of Being Earnest* this had vanished; and the play, though extremely funny, was essentially hateful. I had no idea that Oscar was going to the dogs, and that this represented a real degeneracy produced by his debaucheries. I thought he was still developing; and I hazarded the unhappy guess that *The Importance of Being Earnest* was in idea a young work written or projected under the influence of Gilbert and furbished up for Alexander as a potboiler.<sup>63</sup>

Shaw's critical reaction was evidently a function of his own romantic attitude to women—the mixture of gallantry and wistful idealization found in his letters to Ellen Terry and Mrs Patrick Campbell—and his preoccupations as a dramatic author. His conviction that art must embody principles and show men and women how to change their lives is obviously challenged. The clash suggests the fundamental differences between Shaw's and Wilde's trivial comedies for serious people.

#### NOTE ON THE TEXT

This edition is based on the first edition of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, published in 1899 by Leonard Smithers and limited to one thousand copies. Smithers sent Wilde a typed copy of a text owned by George Alexander, which Wilde marked with alterations and corrections and which served as copy for the printers. This typescript (WD) is in the Arents Tobacco Collection, New York Public Library: corrected page-proofs are in the Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas at Austin, Texas. Wilde added phrases and words, marked passages for omission, and struck out some stage directions present in the copy sent him, and his corrections in page-proof include, apart from literals, the removal of all but a few italicizations, a number of alterations bringing the Smithers edition in line with the extant copy owned by Alexander, and some innovations not pres-

<sup>63</sup> George Bernard Shaw, 'My Memories of Oscar Wilde', in Frank Harris, *Oscar Wilde: his Life and Confessions* (2nd ed., 2 vols., New York, 1918). Shaw's contribution was printed with separate pagination at the end of the second volume (the quotation is from pp. 13–14): it was reprinted in *Pen Portraits and Reviews* (1932) and by Richard Ellmann, in *Oscar Wilde: a Collection of Critical Essays*.

ent in any earlier text that is known to have survived.<sup>64</sup> The omission of the detailed stage directions (mainly, it seems, those indicating the ‘blocking’—the positioning of characters on stage) is a feature of plays published in the late nineteenth century by authors who wished to avoid the clutter of technical directions customary in French’s and Lacy’s acting editions. Unlike *An Ideal Husband*, which was published by Smithers in the same year, *The Importance of Being Earnest* does not carry descriptive stage directions designed to help the reader visualize the character.<sup>65</sup>

Wilde appears to have offered the play to Alexander in the summer of 1894 with a request for an advance of £150: the outline of a three-act comedy is included in a letter only recently published in its entirety in an article by Peter Raby (‘The Making of *The Importance of Being Earnest* . . .’, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 20 December 1991; the previously published portion of the letter is quoted above, p. 27, note 52). As Raby notes, fragments of dialogue—including Lady Bracknell finding Jack on his knees to Gwendolen and telling him to rise from his ‘semi-recumbent posture’—are found in some notebooks in the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library. The summary sent to Alexander in Wilde’s letter has most of the play’s incidents, including an episode (later discarded) in which Algernon is to be arrested for debt, but most of the characters do not bear the names later used: Lady Bracknell is the Duchess of Selby; John Worthing and Algernon Moncrieff are Lord Alfred Rufford and Bertram Ashton respectively. The crucial name is ‘George’, but by the time of the Clark notebook fragments, which include a list of other possible names, it has become ‘Ernest’ and the central pun has been born. Miss Prism ‘has designs on the guardian’, a point that survives more or less subtextually in the play as written. Wilde indicates the origins of Dr Chasuble, telling Alexander that ‘the local doctor, or clergyman, must be brought in, in the play, for Prism’. The letter anticipates that the comedy will be ready by October.

As subsequently drafted in August 1894 the play was in four acts: exercise books, containing a fair copy in Wilde’s autograph, have survived and are divided between the Arents Tobacco Collection, New York Public Library (Acts I and II) and the British Library (Acts III and IV). Typescripts of Acts I, III, and IV, with Wilde’s manuscript notes and alterations, are now in the Arents Collection: the typescript of Act I is dated November 1894 and those of Acts III and IV are from September. A four-act typescript from 31 October

<sup>64</sup> Correspondence relating to the edition will be found in Wilde’s *Letters*, pp. 734–804 *passim*.

<sup>65</sup> In March 1899 Wilde wrote asking Ross to help him with the ‘wills’ and ‘shalls’ in *An Ideal Husband*, and to advise him on the descriptive stage directions (*Letters*, p. 789). Ross had already been asked to check ‘will’ and ‘shall’ and ‘should’ and ‘would’ in the text of *The Importance of Being Earnest* (*Letters*, pp. 765–6).

1894 is in the Frohman Collection, New York Public Library. Of the four stages of revision between the manuscript and the reduction of the play to three acts, these typescripts are the only evidence the editor can rely on. A German translation, published in Leipzig in 1903 and based on material sent by Robert Ross, has been assumed to reflect the final four-act version, but there are signs that Ross or the translator may have introduced features of the 1899 edition. Although a useful reconstruction of a four-act version of the play has been founded on this translation, its authority is too doubtful for it to be accepted as Wilde's 'preferred' text.<sup>66</sup> For the same reason it has not been included in the collations given in footnotes to the text of the present edition: Wilde's manuscript draft of August 1894 is cited from Sarah Augusta Dickson's transcription (referred to as 'MS draft') and the three typescripts in the Arents Collection are cited as evidence of his revisions up to November 1894 (referred to as 'Arents I', etc.).<sup>67</sup>

The text submitted for licensing to the Lord Chamberlain's office in January 1895 is in three acts (this is designated 'LC' in the collations). Another revision is embodied in the typescript owned by George Alexander and marked by him with numerous alterations, additions and stage directions (in the collations 'HTC' indicates the readings of this copy; 'HTC1' the readings of the typescript where Alexander has made alterations). This is not the prompt-book of the first production—there are none of the calls and cues that would indicate its having been used by prompter or stage-manager—but the authority of its origin makes it the best available evidence of the performed text and its interpretation.<sup>68</sup>

The first performance of the play took place on 14 February 1895 after about a month's rehearsal—most of it in the author's absence (he was in

<sup>66</sup> Vyvyan Holland's phrase in the 'Introduction' to the Collins *Complete Works* (CW), which contains his four-act reconstruction, first published in 1957 as 'The Original Four-Act Version', Freiherr Hermann von Teschenberg's translation, *Ernst Sein, Eine Triviale Komödie für Seriöse Leute* (Leipzig, 1903), includes the full version of the piano-playing business at the opening of Act I (which first appears in full in 1899), the lines in which Algernon queries Lane's statement concerning the lack of cucumbers (added by Wilde to WD); the pauses in 1. 386 of the same act (which are also added by Wilde in this typescript and do not appear before then); and the reference to 'the provincial pulpits' ('und ist schon bis zu den Kanzeln der Provinz gedrungen'—another of Wilde's additions to his copy). These and similar features elsewhere in the text would appear to suggest that Teschenberg's copy was altered in places to agree with 1899 (or HTC).

<sup>67</sup> Sarah Augusta Dickson, ed., *The Importance of Being Earnest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People In Four Acts as Originally Written by Oscar Wilde* (New York, 2 vols., 1956).

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Donohue's article, cited in note 16 above. There is some doubt as to the date of Alexander's annotations, many of which appear to post-date the 1899 edition: Joseph Donohue and Ruth Berggren suggest that HTC may have been prepared for a projected revival. But the directions in HTC1 and HTC still reflect Alexander's treatment of the play and HTC1 probably represents the text of the first production.



Algeria with Douglas). He returned in time for the dress-rehearsal on 12 February (Tuesday) and ‘staggered the company by telling Alexander that he supposed “we must start rehearsals on Monday”’.<sup>69</sup> After the scandal of Wilde’s prosecution Alexander tried to save matters by removing the author’s name from the theatre’s advertisements, but he was obliged to withdraw the play on 8 May. Altogether there had been 83 performances.<sup>70</sup> The first American production of the play, presented by Charles Frohman at the Empire Theatre, New York, opened on 22 April 1895 and closed after a week.<sup>71</sup>

The first London revival of *The Importance of Being Earnest* was staged by Alexander at the St James’s on 7 January 1902. It closed after a run of 52 performances on 28 February. Max Beerbohm’s notice in the *Saturday Review* refers to ‘several faults of textual omission’: ‘the line is immaterial’ was not spoken; Miss Prism described the Fall of the Rupee as somewhat too ‘exciting’ (rather than ‘sensational’); in her mention of the overturning of the Gower Street omnibus ‘in younger and happier days’, the phrase ‘and happier’ was omitted. Beerbohm also complained of excessive speed and self-consciously farcical acting—a stricture from which even Alexander was not exempt.<sup>72</sup> The first two of the omissions noticed by Beerbohm occur in the edition published by Samuel French. This edition is undated, but the date stamp in the British Library copy provides a *terminus ad quem* of 23 February 1903. The French’s edition incorporates many features of the copy owned by Alexander (HTC), but its text is very heavily cut. A prompt-book based on the French’s edition restores a number of lines and some stage directions found in Alexander’s copy.<sup>73</sup> This may be the working prompt-book of a tour or of the 1909 revival, which opened on 30 November and played for eleven months. Aynesworth and Alexander repeated their roles of Algernon and Jack, and Stella Patrick Campbell appeared as Gwendolen.

Although the theatre was—if the French’s edition and the prompt-book based on it are to be taken as evidence—temporarily moving further away from Wilde’s text, Robert Ross’s edition of 1908–09 returned to the 1899 version, slightly emended. This text was reproduced in the Tauchnitz edition

<sup>69</sup> Hyde, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 178.

<sup>70</sup> Performance figures in J.P. Wearing, *The London Stage, 1890–1899: a Calendar of Performances* (2 vols, 1976). At some performances Mrs Edward Saker replaced Rose Leclercq as Lady Bracknell and Violet Lyster appeared as Cecily in place of Evelyn Millard. The curtain-raiser, *In the Season* by Langdon Elwyn Mitchell, ran with Wilde’s play for 68 performances.

<sup>71</sup> On Frohman’s production, see Dickson’s edition, l.xxiv, where a page from the programme and a photograph of the moment when Jack finds his father’s name are reproduced.

<sup>72</sup> Beerbohm, *Around Theatres* (1951), pp. 188–191.

<sup>73</sup> British Theatre Museum (library housed at Senate House, University of London), TM 5907–PR 5818. I. 4.

of 1910 (for distribution on the continent). A special issue of Ross's edition, and appropriate preface by the editor, was prepared to mark the twentieth anniversary of Alexander's management (1 February 1910). Ross's edition was reprinted many times and became accepted as the standard text of the play.

The 1899 three-act edition has been adopted for the present edition because it has the clear authority of an edition prepared in accordance with Wilde's wishes, and because it is the product of a series of revisions by two meticulous craftsmen, Wilde and Alexander.<sup>74</sup> The notes show the principal differences between this text and its predecessors and attempt to give an impression of the play's effect in performance by drawing on Alexander's stage directions. In the collations (which represent only major variations in the text) the revisions are listed in *reverse* chronological order, beginning with 1899 and going back to the manuscript draft. Ross's, French's, and other posthumous editions are cited only where their readings shed light on the process by which the 1899 text or Alexander's was arrived at.

Wilde's punctuation in the first edition has been followed, with the silent correction of some minor errors and the substitution of a dash for the stops ('...') he sometimes used as marks of suspension. In the stage-directions quoted from Alexander's copy (HTC) 'right' and 'left' indicate positions on stage as seen by the performers: they should be reversed to give the audience's view of the action.

<sup>74</sup> The following emendations have been made to the 1899 text: 'Shoreham' for 'Shoreman', I, 12; 'Algernon' for 'Ernest', I, 151 s.d.; 'on' for 'an', I, 224; revision of first sentences in I, 539f. (see note); 'reminds' for 'remind', I, 572; 'Maréchal' for 'Maréchale', II, 174; 'stockbrokers' for 'stockbroker's', II, 825; 'you can' for 'can you', II, 827.



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## ABBREVIATIONS

References to *The Importance of Being Earnest* are to the line-numbers of the present edition. References to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* are to Isobel Murray's edition in the Oxford English Novels series (1974). Other works by Wilde are referred to by the title of the volume in which they appear in Ross's edition of the *Works* (14 vols., 1908). I have followed Murray's practice of giving additional references to the page-numbers of the Collins *Complete Works* (1967), which is designated CW. The following abbreviations are used to designate texts of *The Importance of Being Earnest* cited in the collations:

- MS draft The manuscript drafts of the four acts (August 1894) as transcribed in Volume I of Sarah Augusta Dickson, ed., *The Importance of Being Earnest . . . In Four Acts as Originally Written by Oscar Wilde* (New York Public Library: publication number 6 of the Arents Tobacco Collection, 2 vols., 1956). Acts I and II are in the Arents Collection, New York Public Library: Acts III and IV in the British Library.
- Arents I, III, IV Typescripts of Acts I, III, and IV, now in the Arents Collection, reproduced in collotype facsimile in Volume II of Dickson's edition.
- OCT Typescript of four-act version, dated 31 October 1894: Burnside-Frohman Collection, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center (+NCOF 1894).
- LC Licensing Copy, British Library MS Add. 53567 (17) (*Lady Lancing. A Serious Comedy for Trivial People by Oscar Wilde*).
- HTC/HTC<sub>1</sub> Typescript owned by George Alexander: Harvard Theatre Collection. Where Alexander has made manuscript alterations, the original state of the typescript is referred to as HTC<sub>1</sub>.
- WD Typescript (typed by Winifred Dolan) revised by Wilde to provide copy for 1899: Arents Tobacco Collection, New York Public Library.
- PR Page-proofs of the 1899 edition, with Wilde's autograph alterations: manuscripts section of the Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin, Texas.

1899 *The Importance of Being Earnest, A Trivial Comedy for Serious People by the Author of 'Lady Windermere's Fan'* (London, Leonard Smithers, 1899).

French's 1903 *The Importance of Being Earnest, A Trivial Comedy for Serious People in Three Acts by Oscar Wilde* (London, Samuel French, n.d. [1903]): French's Acting Edition, number 1036.

*Other Abbreviations*

om.        omits  
s.d.        stage direction(s)

THE  
IMPORTANCE OF  
BEING EARNEST

*A Trivial Comedy  
for Serious People*

*By*  
OSCAR WILDE



To Robert Baldwin Ross  
In Appreciation  
In Affection

*Dedication* Robert Ross (1869–1918) was one of Wilde’s closest and most loyal friends, and his literary executor. In his edition of the play the third line of this dedication is ‘And Affection’, but the version printed by Smithers in 1899 is that given by Wilde in a letter of 14 December 1898 (*Letters*, p. 770). In the copy sent to Ross, Wilde wrote: ‘To the Mirror of Perfect Friendship: Robbie: whose name I have written on the portal of this little play. Oscar. February ’99’ (*Letters*, p. 783n).

## THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

[St James's Theatre, 14 February 1895]

JOHN WORTHING, J.P., <i>of the Manor House,</i> <i>Woolton, Hertfordshire</i>	<i>Mr George Alexander</i>
ALGERNON MONCRIEFF, <i>his friend</i>	<i>Mr Allen Aynesworth</i>
REV. CANON CHASUBLE, D. D., <i>Rector of</i> <i>Woolton</i>	<i>Mr H.H. Vincent</i>
MERRIMAN, <i>butler to Mr Worthing</i>	<i>Mr Frank Dyll</i>
LANE, <i>Mr Moncrieff's manservant</i>	<i>Mr F. Kinsey Peile</i>
LADY BRACKNELL	<i>Miss Rose Leclercq</i>
HON. GWENDOLEN FAIRFAX, <i>her daughter</i>	<i>Miss Irene Vanbrugh</i>
CECILY CARDEW, <i>John Worthing's Ward</i>	<i>Miss Evelyn Millard</i>
MISS PRISM, <i>her governess</i>	<i>Mrs George Canninge</i>

## THE SCENES OF THE PLAY

**Act I** *Algernon Moncrieff's Flat in Half Moon Street, W.*

**Act II** *The Garden at the Manor House, Woolton*

**Act III** *Morning-Room at the Manor House, Woolton*

*Time—The Present*

*The Persons of the Play* A conflation of the first-night cast listed in 1899 with HTC's list of characters (which has fuller descriptions).

JOHN WORTHING, J. P. Jack is a Justice of the Peace: as squire of Woolton he takes his duties seriously and has undertaken the responsibilities of magistrate.

ALGERNON MONCRIEFF LC and earlier texts give 'Montford'. The first-night programme has 'Moncrieffe'.

REV. CANON CHASUBLE, D.D. A chasuble is 'the outermost garment worn by bishops and priests in celebrating the Eucharist, and rarely at other times' (*Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*). It had fallen out of use in the Church of England until the revival of interest in ceremonial in the mid-19th century. Like his acquaintance with the practice of the Primitive Church, this suggests that the rector of Woolton has 'High Church' leanings. He is a Doctor of Divinity.

MERRIMAN Max Beerbohm wrote in his copy of 1899: 'I remember that in '94 O.W. told me that in his new play there were two butlers, and that he had named the first Mathews and the second Lane. He was at that time vexed with the Bodley Head [that is, with the publishers Elkin Mathews and John Lane] for some reason or other. The name Merriman is, I suppose, a token of forgiveness.'

LADY BRACKNELL Originally named 'Lady Brancaster', replaced in HTC<sub>1</sub> by 'Bracknell'. Lord Alfred Douglas's mother lived at Bracknell in Berkshire.

HON. GWENDOLEN FAIRFAX The courtesy title of 'Honourable' indicates that Gwendolen is the daughter of a viscount or a baron—the title is never used colloquially, and Gwendolen is properly addressed as 'Miss Fairfax'.

MISS PRISM Arthur H. Nethercot has traced the likely source for this name in a maxim uttered by Mrs General, the governess who appears in Book Two of Dickens's *Little Dorrit* (1857): 'Papa, potatoes, poultry, prunes, and prism, are all very good words for the lips: especially prunes and prism.' ('Prunes and Miss Prism', *Modern Drama*, 6, September 1963.)

# The Importance of Being Earnest

## Act I

*Scene: Morning-room in ALGERNON's flat in Half Moon Street. The room is luxuriously and artistically furnished. The sound of a piano is heard in the adjoining room. LANE is arranging afternoon tea on the table, and after the music has ceased, ALGERNON enters*

ALGERNON

Did you hear what I was playing, Lane?

LANE

I didn't think it polite to listen, sir.

ALGERNON

I'm sorry for that, for your sake. I don't play accurately—anyone can play accurately—but I play with wonderful expression. As far as the piano is concerned, sentiment is my forte. I keep science for Life. 5

LANE

Yes, sir.

ALGERNON

And, speaking of the science of Life, have you got the cucumber sandwiches cut for Lady Bracknell?

LANE

Yes, sir. *Hands them on a salver* 10

ALGERNON (*Inspects them, takes two, and sits down on the sofa*)

Oh!—by the way, Lane, I see from your book that on Thursday night, when Lord Shoreham and Mr Worthing were dining with me, eight bottles of champagne are entered as having been consumed.

LANE

Yes, sir; eight bottles and a pint. 15

1 s.d. *Half Moon Street* runs between Curzon Street and Piccadilly : in LC only, Algernon's rooms are located in Piccadilly itself.

3–8 *for your sake . . . science of Life* (om. HTC) The piano-playing episode, and the corresponding reference in the first s.d., first appear in full in revisions to WD. Wilde added ll. 1–8 in manuscript to the Arents I typescript (November 1894), but they were omitted in the licensing copy (January 1895) and only partially restored in Alexander's copy (?February 1895). French's acting edition (?1903) omits ll. 3–8 (*I don't play . . . the science of Life*).

12 *Shoreham*, a Sussex place-name, appears in earlier texts: 'Shoreman' (1899, HTC, Ross, etc.) is surely a mistake. In Act IV of the MS draft Lord Shoreham is referred to as the father of Lady Lancing (another Sussex coast place-name).

ALGERNON

Why is it that at a bachelor's establishment the servants invariably drink the champagne? I ask merely for information.

LANE

I attribute it to the superior quality of the wine, sir. I have often observed that in married households the champagne is rarely of a first-rate brand. 20

ALGERNON

Good heavens! Is marriage so demoralizing as that?

LANE

I believe it *is* a very pleasant state, sir. I have had very little experience of it myself up to the present. I have only been married once. That was in consequence of a misunderstanding between myself and a young person. 25

ALGERNON (*Languidly*)

I don't know that I am much interested in your family life, Lane.

LANE

No, sir; it is not a very interesting subject. I never think of it myself. 30

ALGERNON

Very natural, I am sure. That will do, Lane, thank you.

LANE

Thank you, sir. LANE *goes out*

ALGERNON

Lane's views on marriage seem somewhat lax. Really, if the lower orders don't set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them? They seem, as a class, to have absolutely no sense of moral responsibility. 35

*Enter* LANE

LANE

Mr Ernest Worthing.

32 In the MS draft Lane tells Algernon that two creditors—his wine-merchant and tailor—are waiting to see him. This reference to debt was dropped by the time the Arents I typescript was made.

37 *Mr Ernest Worthing* 1899, LC (Mr Worthing HTC, etc.) Alexander's directions show that Jack brings his hat, stick and gloves with him into the room (to leave them with Lane would have implied a longer visit) and shakes hands with Algernon when he is greeted by him.

Enter JACK. LANE goes out

ALGERNON

How are you, my dear Ernest? What brings you up to town?

JACK

Oh, pleasure, pleasure! What else should bring one anywhere? Eating as usual, I see, Algy! 40

ALGERNON (*Stiffly*)

I believe it is customary in good society to take some slight refreshment at five o'clock. Where have you been since last Thursday?

JACK (*Sitting down on the sofa*)

In the country. 45

ALGERNON

What on earth do you do there?

JACK (*Pulling off his gloves*)

When one is in town one amuses oneself. When one is in the country one amuses other people. It is excessively boring.

ALGERNON

And who are the people you amuse? 50

JACK (*Airily*)

Oh, neighbours, neighbours.

ALGERNON

Got nice neighbours in your part of Shropshire?

JACK

Perfectly horrid! Never speak to one of them.

42-3 *in good society* 1899 (om. HTC, etc.) Added to WD.

*at five o'clock* Distinction was made between this early tea (with cake, small sandwiches, tea-cake, and thinly-cut and rolled bread-and-butter) and the more substantial 'meat' or 'high' tea: 'Now that dinners are late and that "teas proper" are postponed in consequence to such an unnatural hour as ten p.m., the want is felt of the old-fashioned meal at five, and so it has been reinstated, though not in quite the same form as before' (*Etiquette of Good Society*, n.d.). It was not considered polite to eat very much of the abundance customarily provided at afternoon tea—the afternoon was the appropriate time for paying calls, and the refreshments were a courtesy to visitors.

45 *In the country* Cf. Lord Henry Wotton in *Dorian Gray*: 'My dear boy . . . anybody can be good in the country. There are no temptations there. That is the reason why people who live out of town are so absolutely uncivilized. Civilization is not by any means an easy thing to attain to. There are only two ways by which a man can reach it. One is by being cultured, the other by being corrupt. Country people have no opportunity of being either, so they stagnate' (ed. Murray, p. 209/CW, pp. 157-8).

ALGERNON

How immensely you must amuse them! (*Goes over and takes sandwich*) By the way, Shropshire is your county, is it not? 55

JACK

Eh? Shropshire? Yes, of course. Hallo! Why all these cups? Why cucumber sandwiches? Why such reckless extravagance in one so young? Who is coming to tea?

ALGERNON

Oh! merely Aunt Augusta and Gwendolen. 60

JACK

How perfectly delightful!

ALGERNON

Yes, that is all very well; but I am afraid Aunt Augusta won't quite approve of your being here.

JACK

May I ask why?

ALGERNON

My dear fellow, the way you flirt with Gwendolen is perfectly disgraceful. It is almost as bad as the way Gwendolen flirts with you. 65

JACK

I am in love with Gwendolen. I have come up to town expressly to propose to her.

ALGERNON

I thought you had come up for pleasure?—I call that business. 70

JACK

How utterly unromantic you are!

ALGERNON

I really don't see anything romantic in proposing. It is very romantic to be in love. But there is nothing romantic about a definite proposal. Why, one may be accepted. One usually is, I believe. Then the excitement is all over. The very essence of romance is uncertainty. If ever I get married, 75

57 In the MS draft it emerges that the last time Jack referred to his country house, it was in Wiltshire. Jack explains that the house is on the border, the stables being in Wiltshire. 150 miles from the house?—

My dear fellow! Surely you don't expect me to be accurate about geography? No gentleman is accurate about geography. Why, I got a prize for geography when I was at school—I can't be expected to know anything about it now . . .

58–9 *Why such . . . so young?* (om. HTC, etc.) The sentence was added to WD.

I'll certainly try to forget the fact.

JACK

I have no doubt about that, dear Algy. The Divorce Court was specially invented for people whose memories are so curiously constituted. 80

ALGERNON

Oh! there is no use speculating on that subject. Divorces are made in heaven—(JACK *puts out his hand to take a sandwich.* ALGERNON *at once interferes*) Please don't touch the cucumber sandwiches. They are ordered specially for Aunt Augusta. 85  
*Takes one and eats it*

JACK

Well, you have been eating them all the time.

ALGERNON

That is quite a different matter. She is my aunt. (*Takes plate from below*) Have some bread and butter. The bread and butter is for Gwendolen. Gwendolen is devoted to bread and butter. 90

JACK (*Advancing to table and helping himself*)

And very good bread and butter it is too.

ALGERNON

Well, my dear fellow, you need not eat as if you were going to eat it all. You behave as if you were married to her already. You are not married to her already, and I don't think you ever will be. 95

JACK

Why on earth do you say that?

ALGERNON

Well, in the first place, girls never marry the men they flirt with. Girls don't think it right.

JACK

Oh, that is nonsense! 100

ALGERNON

It isn't. It is a great truth. It accounts for the extraordinary number of bachelors that one sees all over the place. In the

83 s.d. HTC makes the nature of the interference clear: 'ALGY *takes up plate and puts it on his knees*'

92 *it is too*, (it looks too PR, HTC only) Altered by Wilde in proof.

102 *the place* The MS draft has the bachelors 'going about the place', which Wilde struck out and replaced with 'that one sees all over the shop'. This slang phrase was changed in subsequent drafts to 'all over Town'. In his alterations to WD Wilde substituted 'the place', settling for a neutral expression.



second place, I don't give my consent.

JACK

Your consent!

ALGERNON

My dear fellow, Gwendolen is my first cousin. And before 105  
I allow you to marry her, you will have to clear up the  
whole question of Cecily. *Rings bell*

JACK

Cecily! What on earth do you mean? What do you mean,  
Algy, by Cecily? I don't know anyone of the name of  
Cecily. 110

*Enter LANE*

ALGERNON

Bring me that cigarette case Mr Worthing left in the  
smoking-room the last time he dined here.

LANE

Yes, sir. *LANE goes out*

JACK

Do you mean to say you have had my cigarette case all this  
time? I wish to goodness you had let me know. I have been 115  
writing frantic letters to Scotland Yard about it. I was very  
nearly offering a large reward.

ALGERNON

Well, I wish you would offer one. I happen to be more than  
usually hard up.

JACK

There is no good offering a large reward now that the thing 120  
is found.

105 In the MS draft Algernon refers to the country house (and its remote stables). If Jack marries Gwendolen, Algernon will spend the greater part of the year with them:

JACK

You certainly won't do anything of the kind, if I have anything to say in the matter.

ALGERNON (*Carelessly, while taking another sandwich*) You won't, dear boy. Gwendolen has one of those soft yielding natures that always have their own way . . .

116 *Scotland Yard* In 1891 the Metropolitan Police moved to New Scotland Yard, on the Embankment near Westminster Bridge. Contemporary guide-books direct travellers to the Lost Property Office there, but Jack seems to have a full-scale investigation in mind.  
117, 120 *a large reward* 1899, HTC(a reward PR, WD, HTC1, etc.) A happy touch added in proof: Alexander may be altering HTC1 to correspond with 1899.

*Enter LANE with the cigarette case on a salver. ALGERNON takes it at once. LANE goes out*

ALGERNON

I think that is rather mean of you, Ernest, I must say. (*Opens case and examines it*) However, it makes no matter, for, now that I look at the inscription inside, I find that the thing isn't yours after all.

125

JACK

Of course it's mine. (*Moving to him*) You have seen me with it a hundred times, and you have no right whatsoever to read what is written inside. It is a very ungentlemanly thing to read a private cigarette case.

ALGERNON

Oh! it is absurd to have a hard-and-fast rule about what one should read and what one shouldn't. More than half of modern culture depends on what one shouldn't read.

130

JACK

I am quite aware of the fact, and I don't propose to discuss modern culture. It isn't the sort of thing one should talk of in private. I simply want my cigarette case back.

135

ALGERNON

Yes; but this isn't your cigarette case. This cigarette case is a present from someone of the name of Cecily, and you said you didn't know anyone of that name.

JACK

Well, if you want to know, Cecily happens to be my aunt.

ALGERNON

Your aunt!

140

JACK

Yes. Charming old lady she is, too. Lives at Tunbridge Wells. Just give it back to me, Algy.

121 s.d. Alexander's copy is helpfully explicit: '*Enter LANE with cigarette-case on salver. ALGY and JACK both try to take it. ALGY takes it and moves down R.*'

122 *mean* 1899, HTC, MS (horrid WD, HTC1, etc.) Wilde substituted 'mean' in his revisions to WD.

130-5 1899, HTC1 (om. HTC only) Wilde altered the Arents I typescript, deleting 'should talk of in private' and inserting 'discuss at afternoon tea. It is a little too exotic'; but LC reverts to the typescript's version. In the MS draft the joke is not as neat: 'One should read everything. That is the true basis of modern culture. More than half of modern culture depends on the unreadable.'

141-2 *Tunbridge Wells* An inland watering-place in Kent fashionable since the 17th century. An expensive resort much favoured by the upper classes.

ALGERNON (*Retreating to back of sofa*)

But why does she call herself little Cecily if she is your aunt and lives at Tunbridge Wells? (*Reading*) 'From little Cecily with her fondest love'

145

JACK (*Moving to sofa and kneeling upon it*)

My dear fellow, what on earth is there in that? Some aunts are tall, some aunts are not tall. That is a matter that surely an aunt may be allowed to decide for herself. You seem to think that every aunt should be exactly like your aunt! That is absurd! For heaven's sake give me back my cigarette case.

150

*Follows ALGERNON round the room*

ALGERNON

Yes. But why does your aunt call you her uncle? 'From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack'. There is no objection, I admit, to an aunt being a small aunt, but why an aunt, no matter what her size may be, should call her own nephew her uncle, I can't quite make out. Besides, your name isn't Jack at all; it is Ernest.

155

JACK

It isn't Ernest; it's Jack.

ALGERNON

You have always told me it was Ernest. I have introduced you to everyone as Ernest. You answer to the name of Ernest. You look as if your name was Ernest. You are the most earnest looking person I ever saw in my life. It is perfectly absurd your saying that your name isn't Ernest. It's on your cards. Here is one of them (*Taking it from case*) 'Mr Ernest Worthing, B.4, The Albany'. I'll keep this as a proof that your name is Ernest if ever you attempt to deny it to me, or to Gwendolen, or to anyone else.

160

165

*Puts the card in his pocket*

JACK

Well, my name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country, and the cigarette case was given to me in the country.

ALGERNON

Yes, but that does not account for the fact that your small Aunt Cecily, who lives at Tunbridge Wells, calls you her dear uncle. Come, old boy, you had much better have the thing out at once.

170

151 s.d. In 1899 Algernon is misnamed 'Ernest' here: Ross's edition corrects the mistake.

165 See Appendix IV, p. 159.

JACK

My dear Algy, you talk exactly as if you were a dentist. It is very vulgar to talk like a dentist when one isn't a dentist. It produces a false impression. 175

ALGERNON

Well, that is exactly what dentists always do. Now, go on! Tell me the whole thing. I may mention that I have always suspected you of being a confirmed and secret Bunburyist; and I am quite sure of it now. 180

JACK

Bunburyist? What on earth do you mean by a Bunburyist?

ALGERNON

I'll reveal to you the meaning of that incomparable expression as soon as you are kind enough to inform me why you are Ernest in town and Jack in the country.

JACK

Well, produce my cigarette case first. 185

ALGERNON

Here it is. (*Hands cigarette case*) Now produce your explanation, and pray make it improbable. *Sits on sofa*

JACK

My dear fellow, there is nothing improbable about my explanation at all. In fact it's perfectly ordinary. Old Mr Thomas Cardew, who adopted me when I was a little boy, made me in his will guardian to his grand-daughter, Miss Cecily Cardew. Cecily, who addresses me as her uncle 190

186 Alexander's notes show that Algernon takes a cigarette from the case before handing it over, and Jack takes one before he puts it in his pocket. They light their cigarettes at ll. 202 and 213, respectively. Cigarettes (preferably gold-tipped) were a favourite Wildean prop, in both life and works. Cf. *Dorian Gray*, where Lord Henry insists that the painter Basil Hallward smoke one: '... I can't allow you to smoke cigars. You must have a cigarette. A cigarette is the perfect type of a perfect pleasure. It is exquisite, and it leaves one unsatisfied. What more can one want?' (ed. Murray, p. 84/CW, p. 70).

187 *improbable* (remarkable HTC1, etc.) Alexander deletes the whole phrase, ending Algernon's speech with 'explanation'. He retains the s.d. '*sits on sofa*', cuts the first two sentences of Jack's reply, and lets a further s.d. '*sits C.*' remain. After the struggle for the cigarette-case this creates stillness and concentration on stage for the vital information that Jack is an adopted child and Cecily's guardian. In LC Algernon's speech continues after 'remarkable': 'The bore about most explanations is that they are never half so remarkable as the things they try to explain, that is why modern science is so absolutely tedious.'

188-9 *My dear fellow . . . ordinary* (om. HTC only) HTC1 and earlier versions read 'remarkable' for 'improbable'.

from motives of respect that you could not possibly appreciate, lives at my place in the country under the charge of her admirable governess, Miss Prism. 195

ALGERNON

Where is that place in the country, by the way?

JACK

That is nothing to you, dear boy. You are not going to be invited—I may tell you candidly that the place is not in Shropshire.

ALGERNON

I suspected that, my dear fellow! I have Bunburied all over Shropshire on two separate occasions. Now, go on. Why are you Ernest in town and Jack in the country? 200

JACK

My dear Algy, I don't know whether you will be able to understand my real motives. You are hardly serious enough. 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. And as a high moral tone can hardly be said to conduce very much to either one's health or one's happiness, in order to get up to town I have always pretended to have a younger brother of the name of Ernest, who lives in the Albany, and gets into the most dreadful scrapes. That, my dear Algy, is the whole truth pure and simple. 205 210

ALGERNON

The truth is rarely pure and never simple. Modern life would be very tedious if it were either, and modern literature a complete impossibility! 215

JACK

That wouldn't be at all a bad thing.

ALGERNON

Literary criticism is not your forte my dear fellow. Don't try it. You should leave that to people who haven't been at a University. They do it so well in the daily papers. What you really are is a Bunburyist. I was quite right in saying 220

193-4 *that . . . appreciate* 1899, HTC (om. HTC1, etc.)

203-4 *I don't know . . . enough* 1899, HTC1, etc. (om. HTC only)

214-20 See Appendix IV, pp. 159.

221-2 *I was quite right . . . Bunburyist* 1899, HTC1, etc. (om. HTC only)

you were a Bunburyist. You are one of the most advanced Bunburyists I know.

JACK

What on earth do you mean?

ALGERNON

You have invented a very useful younger brother called Ernest, in order that you may be able to come up to town as often as you like. I have invented an invaluable permanent invalid called Bunbury, in order that I may be able to go down into the country whenever I choose. Bunbury is perfectly invaluable. If it wasn't for Bunbury's extraordinary bad health, for instance, I wouldn't be able to dine with you at Willis's to-night, for I have been really engaged to Aunt Augusta for more than a week. 225 230

JACK

I haven't asked you to dine with me anywhere to-night.

ALGERNON

I know. You are absurdly careless about sending out invitations. It is very foolish of you. Nothing annoys people so much as not receiving invitations. 235

JACK

You had much better dine with your Aunt Augusta.

ALGERNON

I haven't the smallest intention of doing anything of the kind. To begin with, I dined there on Monday, and once a week is quite enough to dine with one's own relations. In the second place, whenever I do dine there I am always treated as a member of the family, and sent down with either no woman at all, or two. In the third place, I know perfectly well whom she will place me next to, to-night. 240 245

232 *Willis's* 1899, WD, HTC1, MS (the Savoy HTC, LC, etc.) *Willis's* was a fashionable restaurant in King Street, near the St James's Theatre: like the Savoy Hotel in the Strand it was much frequented by Wilde. In the MS draft of Act II an attempt is made to arrest Algernon for a debt to the Savoy (see Appendix I) and in LC 'Nothing annoys people so much as not receiving invitations' is followed by a four-speech exchange in which Jack admits to owing the hotel £120—he could afford to settle up, but feels he must maintain Ernest's reputation as 'one of those chaps who never pay a bill'.

239 In HTC Algernon makes himself comfortable for this speech: he '*crosses to sofa, R., takes cushion from lower end, puts it against the one at upper end*' and then '*Sits upper end, puts feet up, head on cushions*'.

241-4 Guests assembled upstairs in the drawing-room before dinner, and each gentleman was appointed escort to a lady for the evening—he was 'sent down' to the dining-room with her.

She will place me next Mary Farquhar, who always flirts with her own husband across the dinner-table. That is not very pleasant. Indeed, it is not even decent—and that sort of thing is enormously on the increase. The amount of women in London who flirt with their own husbands is perfectly scandalous. It looks so bad. It is simply washing one's clean linen in public. Besides, now that I know you to be a confirmed Bunburyist I naturally want to talk to you about Bunburying. I want to tell you the rules. 250

JACK

I'm not a Bunburyist at all. If Gwendolen accepts me, I am going to kill my brother, indeed I think I'll kill him in any case. Cecily is a little too much interested in him. It is rather a bore. So I am going to get rid of Ernest. And I strongly advise you to do the same with Mr—with your invalid friend who has the absurd name. 260

ALGERNON

Nothing will induce me to part with Bunbury, and if you ever get married, which seems to me extremely problematic, you will be very glad to know Bunbury. A man who marries without knowing Bunbury has a very tedious time of it. 265

JACK

That is nonsense. If I marry a charming girl like Gwendolen, and she is the only girl I ever saw in my life that I would marry, I certainly won't want to know Bunbury.

ALGERNON

Then your wife will. You don't seem to realize, that in married life three is company and two is none. 270

JACK (*Sententiously*)

That, my dear young friend, is the theory that the corrupt

246–52 Cf. the less sophisticated joke in *Lady Windermere's Fan*: 'It's most dangerous nowadays for a husband to pay any attention to his wife in public. It always makes people think that he beats her when they're alone. The world has grown suspicious of anything that looks like a happy married life' (p. 63/*CW*, p. 400).

263 *you will be very glad to know Bunbury* Cf. Lord Henry Wotton in *Dorian Gray*: '... the one charm of marriage is that it makes a life of deception absolutely necessary for both parties' (ed. Murray, p. 4/*CW*, p. 20).

272–3 *the corrupt French Drama* The plays of Dumas fils, Scribe, Augier, and others were enormously popular and influential in Britain, but considerable alteration was necessary to suit them to British attitudes: their treatment of sexual misconduct was considered far too liberal and frank.

French Drama has been propounding for the last fifty years.

ALGERNON

Yes; and that the happy English home has proved in half the time. 275

JACK

For heaven's sake, don't try to be cynical. It's perfectly easy to be cynical.

ALGERNON

My dear fellow, it isn't easy to be anything nowadays. There's such a lot of beastly competition about. (*The sound of an electric bell is heard*) Ah! that must be Aunt Augusta. 280 Only relatives, or creditors, ever ring in that Wagnerian manner. Now, if I get her out of the way for ten minutes, so that you can have an opportunity for proposing to Gwendolen, may I dine with you to-night at Willis's?

JACK

I suppose so, if you want to. 285

ALGERNON

Yes, but you must be serious about it. I hate people who are not serious about meals. It is so shallow of them.

276 Texts before HTC and 1899 have a different version of the conversation after l. 275. Algy continues (in the MS draft):

That is the worst of the English. They are always degrading truths into facts, and when truths become facts they lose all their intellectual value.

JACK

Do you always really understand what you say, Algy?

ALGERNON (*After consideration*)

Yes—if I listen attentively.

JACK

Then you have certainly more brains than I have ever given you credit for.

ALGERNON

My dear fellow, until you believe that I have got absolute genius there will always be a slight coldness between us. (*A ring*) . . .

281 *Wagnerian* (argumentative PR) The sentence was added to WD and revised in proof. The operas of Richard Wagner, especially *Tristan und Isolde* and *Tannhäuser*, were much favoured by the *avant-garde*, but Wilde was quite happy to use the popular joke of the loudness of the music. In *Dorian Gray* Lady Henry Wotton professes to like Wagnerian opera best: 'It is so loud that one can talk the whole time without other people hearing what one says. That is a great advantage . . .' (ed. Murray, p. 45/CW, p. 47).

284 *Willis's* Changed to 'the Savoy' by Alexander to agree with his earlier reference.



*Enter* LANE

LANE

Lady Bracknell and Miss Fairfax.

ALGERNON *goes forward to meet them. Enter* LADY BRACKNELL  
and GWENDOLEN

LADY BRACKNELL

Good afternoon, dear Algernon, I hope you are behaving  
very well. 290

ALGERNON

I'm feeling very well, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL

That's not quite the same thing. In fact the two things  
rarely go together.

*Sees* JACK *and bows to him with icy coldness*

ALGERNON (*To* GWENDOLEN)

Dear me, you are smart!

GWENDOLEN

I am always smart! Aren't I, Mr Worthing? 295

JACK

You're quite perfect, Miss Fairfax.

GWENDOLEN

Oh! I hope I am not that. It would leave no room for  
developments, and I intend to develop in many directions.

GWENDOLEN *and* JACK *sit down together in the corner*

289 *Good afternoon, dear Algernon* (Well, dear Algernon HTC, LC, MS) The alteration (to WD) probably reflects the repetitions of 'well' in the lines following.

289–90 *behaving very well* 1899 (behaving well, PR, HTC, etc.)

291 *very well* 1899 (well PR, HTC; quite well LC, Arents I)

292–3 *In fact . . . together* 1899, HTC (om. HTC1, etc.) The s.d. following ('*Bows distantly to JACK*') was added to WD to replace a greeting ('Good afternoon, Mr Worthing') There is no MS equivalent of ll. 290–3: this intensive reworking of details reflects the anxiety to make Lady Bracknell's first words effective.

295 The MS draft includes a brief exchange between Algernon and Gwendolen on her smartness (being clever may not suit others, but it is 'excessively becoming' to her) and a reference by Lady Brancaster to Algernon's debts: 'Of course I never mention anything about them to your uncle. Indeed, as you know, I never mention anything to him at all'. Like a number of other references to debts and Lord Bracknell, these were removed at an early stage in revision.

297–8 The speech was added to WD. In Alexander's copy Jack and Gwendolen '*go up to fireplace*' at this point.

LADY BRACKNELL

I'm sorry if we are a little late, Algernon, but I was obliged to call on dear Lady Harbury. I hadn't been there since her poor husband's death. I never saw a woman so altered; she looks quite twenty years younger. And now I'll have a cup of tea, and one of those nice cucumber sandwiches you promised me. 300

ALGERNON

Certainly, Aunt Augusta. *Goes over to tea table* 305

LADY BRACKNELL

Won't you come and sit here, Gwendolen?

GWENDOLEN

Thanks, mamma, I'm quite comfortable where I am.

ALGERNON (*Picking up empty plate in horror*)

Good heavens! Lane! Why are there no cucumber sandwiches? I ordered them specially.

LANE (*Gravely*)

There were no cucumbers in the market this morning, sir. I went down twice. 310

ALGERNON

No cucumbers!

LANE

No, sir. Not even for ready money.

ALGERNON

That will do, Lane, thank you.

LANE

Thank you, sir. *Goes out* 315

ALGERNON

I am greatly distressed, Aunt Augusta, about there being no cucumbers, not even for ready money.

299–304 After the first sentence of this speech Alexander has Lane enter with a tea-pot and pour a cup for Lady Bracknell (milk is added later by Algernon). Among published texts, only the two French's editions provide this s.d., which is necessary if the tea is to be drinkable (which it will not be if the pot has been on stage since the opening of the act).

312–15 *No cucumbers!* . . . *Thank you, sir.* 1899, HTC (om. HTC<sub>1</sub>, etc.) Added to WD.

316 *I am . . . there being* (I'm greatly distressed, Aunt Augusta, there were HTC; om. HTC<sub>1</sub>, etc.) Added by Wilde to the WD typescript, ll. 312–17 are not found before HTC<sub>1</sub>.

LADY BRACKNELL

It really makes no matter, Algernon. I had some crumpets with Lady Harbury, who seems to me to be living entirely for pleasure now. 320

ALGERNON

I hear her hair has turned quite gold from grief.

LADY BRACKNELL

It certainly has changed its colour. From what cause I, of course, cannot say. (ALGERNON *crosses and hands tea*) Thank you. I've quite a treat for you to-night, Algernon. I am going to send you down with Mary Farquhar. She is such a nice woman, and so attentive to her husband. It's delightful to watch them. 325

ALGERNON

I am afraid, Aunt Augusta, I shall have to give up the pleasure of dining with you to-night after all.

LADY BRACKNELL (*Frowning*)

I hope not, Algernon. It would put my table completely out. Your uncle would have to dine upstairs. Fortunately he is accustomed to that. 330

ALGERNON

It is a great bore, and, I need hardly say, a terrible disappointment to me, but the fact is I have just had a telegram to say that my poor friend Bunbury is very ill again. (*Exchanges glances with JACK*) They seem to think I should be with him. 335

LADY BRACKNELL

It is very strange. This Mr Bunbury seems to suffer from curiously bad health.

ALGERNON

Yes; poor Bunbury is a dreadful invalid. 340

LADY BRACKNELL

Well, I must say, Algernon, that I think it is high time that Mr Bunbury made up his mind whether he was going to

321 *quite gold from grief* Cf. Lord Henry Wotton's description of Mme de Ferrol, in *Dorian Gray*: 'Her capacity for family affection is extraordinary. When her third husband died, her hair turned quite gold from grief' (ed. Murray, p. 178/CW, p. 136).

322 Alexander has Gwendolen and Jack come to the tea-table on this line: she '*pours out two cups, they both drink and talk*'.

333-4 *and . . . to me* (om. HTC, etc.) Added to WD.

live or to die. This shilly-shallying with the question is absurd. Nor do I in any way approve of the modern sympathy with invalids. I consider it morbid. Illness of any kind is hardly a thing to be encouraged in others. Health is the primary duty of life. I am always telling that to your poor uncle, but he never seems to take much notice—as far as any improvement in his ailments goes. I should be much obliged if you would ask Mr Bunbury, from me, to be kind enough not to have a relapse on Saturday, for I rely on you to arrange my music for me. It is my last reception, and one wants something that will encourage conversation, particularly at the end of the season when everyone has practically said whatever they had to say, which, in most cases, was probably not much.

ALGERNON

I'll speak to Bunbury, Aunt Augusta, if he is still conscious, and I think I can promise you he'll be all right by Saturday. Of course the music is a great difficulty. You see, if one plays good music, people don't listen, and if one plays bad music people don't talk. But I'll run over the programme I've drawn out, if you will kindly come into the next room for a moment.

LADY BRACKNELL

Thank you, Algernon. It is very thoughtful of you. (*Rising, and following ALGERNON*) I'm sure the programme will be delightful, after a few expurgations. French songs I cannot possibly allow. People always seem to think that they are improper, and either look shocked, which is vulgar, or laugh, which is worse. But German sounds a thoroughly

344-5 *the modern . . . invalids* Cf. Introduction, pp. 24-5.

356 *which . . . not much* (om. HTC, etc.) Added to WD.

357 *if he is still conscious* 1899, HTC (om. HTC1, etc.) Added to WD.

361 *people don't talk* The joke of musicians invited to play at receptions and annoyed to find their music drowned by conversation occurs frequently in *Punch* cartoons of the 1880s and 1890s. In the MS draft Wilde includes references to Gwendolen's cleverness (Algernon cannot discuss music with her—'She has grown far too intellectual . . . She seems to think that music does not contain enough useful information')—and to the University Extension Scheme (see III, 76-82 and Appendix IV, p. 166).

366-70 *French songs . . . I believe is so* (om. HTC, LC) Added to WD. ArentsI has a manuscript revision derived from a passage in the MS draft, but not adopted in either of its forms: 'You see, I should like your uncle to be able to be present, as most of the music of our day discusses

respectable language, and indeed, I believe is so. Gwendolen, 370  
you will accompany me.

GWENDOLEN

Certainly, mamma.

LADY BRACKNELL *and* ALGERNON *go into the music-room.*

GWENDOLEN *remains behind*

JACK

Charming day it has been, Miss Fairfax.

GWENDOLEN

Pray don't talk to me about the weather, Mr Worthing.  
Whenever people talk to me about the weather, I always 375  
feel quite certain that they mean something else. And that  
makes me so nervous.

JACK

I do mean something else.

GWENDOLEN

I thought so. In fact, I am never wrong.

JACK

And I would like to be allowed to take advantage of Lady 380  
Bracknell's temporary absence—

GWENDOLEN

I would certainly advise you to do so. Mamma has a way of  
coming back suddenly into a room that I have often had to  
speak to her about.

JACK (*Nervously*)

Miss Fairfax, ever since I met you I have admired you 385  
more than any girl—I have ever met since—I met you.

GWENDOLEN

Yes, I am quite aware of the fact. And I often wish that in  
public, at any rate, you had been more demonstrative. For  
me you have always had an irresistible fascination. Even  
before I met you I was far from indifferent to you. (JACK 390  
*looks at her in amazement*) We live, as I hope you know,

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every modern topic far too openly: especially orchestral music. A little more reticence would be an advantage.

374 Alexander's s.d. suggests a certain matter-of-fact assurance in Gwendolen's manner: she '*comes down right, throws wrap over back of sofa then sits down-stage*'.

379 *In fact . . . wrong* 1899 (om. HTC, etc.) Added to WD.

386 The pauses in this line are added to WD. In Arents I the first 'met' and the final 'you' are underlined—if the line is spoken quickly and stressed in the way this indicates, the comic effect produced is less sympathetic than the hesitation indicated by the dashes.

Mr Worthing, in an age of ideals. The fact is constantly mentioned in the more expensive monthly magazines, and has reached the provincial pulpits I am told : and my idea has always been to love some one 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. 395

JACK

You really love me, Gwendolen? 400

GWENDOLEN

Passionately!

JACK

Darling! You don't know how happy you've made me.

GWENDOLEN

My own Ernest!

JACK

But you don't mean to say that you couldn't love me if my name wasn't Ernest? 405

GWENDOLEN

But your name is Ernest.

JACK

Yes, I know it is. But supposing it was something else? Do you mean to say you couldn't love me then?

GWENDOLEN (*Glibly*)

Ah! that is clearly a metaphysical speculation, and like most metaphysical speculations has very little reference at all to the actual facts of real life, as we know them. 410

JACK

Personally, darling, to speak quite candidly, I don't much care about the name of Ernest—I don't think the name suits me at all.

393-4 *and has reached . . . I am told* 1899, HTC (om. HTC<sub>1</sub>, etc.) Added to WD. There is no equivalent in the MS draft for the whole sentence. Given Wilde's views on the press, the implication that provincial pulpits are the ultimate stage in the progress of popular ethics through the media is particularly barbed. Cf. Dr Chasuble's preaching, as hinted at in II, 240-51 and III, 310-12.

400 *You really love me, Gwendolen?* Jack uses her Christian name for the first time, an intimacy appropriate only between close relatives and those married or engaged to be married. The conversation becomes more intimate (in Alexander's s.d. she '*puts arms around JACK's neck*' at l. 401) until Jack mentions marriage, and Gwendolen reminds him that an essential formality has been left out by reverting to 'Mr Worthing'.

410 *most* (all PR, HTC, etc.) Altered in proof.

GWENDOLEN

It suits you perfectly. It is a divine name. It has a music of its own. It produces vibrations. 415

JACK

Well, really, Gwendolen, I must say that I think there are lots of other much nicer names. I think Jack, for instance, a charming name.

GWENDOLEN

Jack?—No, there is very little music in the name Jack, if any at all, indeed. It does not thrill. It produces absolutely no vibrations—I have known several Jacks, and they all, without exception, were more than usually plain. Besides, Jack is a notorious domesticity for John! And I pity any woman who is married to a man called John. She would probably never be allowed to know the entrancing pleasure of a single moment's solitude. The only really safe name is Ernest. 420  
425

JACK

Gwendolen, I must get christened at once—I mean we must get married at once. There is no time to be lost. 430

GWENDOLEN

Married, Mr Worthing?

JACK (*Astounded*)

Well—surely. You know that I love you, and you led me to believe, Miss Fairfax, that you were not absolutely indifferent to me.

GWENDOLEN

I adore you. But you haven't proposed to me yet. Nothing has been said at all about marriage. The subject has not even been touched on. 435

JACK

Well—may I propose to you now?

GWENDOLEN

I think it would be an admirable opportunity. And to spare you any possible disappointment, Mr Worthing, I think it only fair to tell you quite frankly beforehand that I am fully determined to accept you. 440

420 *Jack?* Alexander adds a repetition of the name, with three exclamation marks.

435 *I adore you* In Alexander's s.d. she 'puts hands on JACK's shoulders for a moment'.

JACK

Gwendolen!

GWENDOLEN

Yes, Mr Worthing, what have you got to say to me?

JACK

You know what I have got to say to you.

445

GWENDOLEN

Yes, but you don't say it.

JACK

Gwendolen, will you marry me?

*Goes on his knees*

GWENDOLEN

Of course I will, darling. How long you have been about it! I am afraid you have had very little experience in how to propose.

450

JACK

My own one, I have never loved anyone in the world but you.

GWENDOLEN

Yes, but men often propose for practice. I know my brother Gerald does. All my girl-friends tell me so. What wonderfully blue eyes you have, Ernest! They are quite, quite, blue. I hope you will always look at me just like that, especially when there are other people present.

455

*Enter* LADY BRACKNELL

LADY BRACKNELL

Mr Worthing! Rise, sir, from this semi-recumbent posture. It is most indecorous.

GWENDOLEN

Mamma! (*He tries to rise; she restrains him*) I must beg you to retire. This is no place for you. Besides, Mr Worthing has not quite finished yet.

460

443-6 *Gwendolen! . . . say it* 1899, HTC1, etc. (om. HTC only)

447 Alexander alters this to 'Then, Gwendolen, you will marry me?'

454 *All my girl-friends tell me so* 1899, HTC (He tells me so PR, HTC1, etc.)458-9 Alexander emphasizes the way in which Gwendolen takes the initiative. Lady Bracknell repeats her exclamation, 'Mr Worthing!', but when Jack tries to stand up, Gwendolen '*pushes him down with her hands on his shoulders*', business repeated after Gwendolen's first reply to her mother. When she announces the engagement, Gwendolen rises and '*lifts JACK up by placing her hand underneath his elbows*'. In the MS draft Lady Bracknell asks whether it is the 'modern idea' that 'the engagement should come first, and the proposal afterwards'.



LADY BRACKNELL

Finished what, may I ask?

GWENDOLEN

I am engaged to Mr Worthing, mamma. *They rise together*

LADY BRACKNELL

Pardon me, you are not engaged to anyone. When you do 465  
become engaged to some one, I, or your father, should his  
health permit him, will inform you of the fact. An engagement  
should come on a young girl as a surprise, pleasant or  
unpleasant, as the case may be. It is hardly a matter that  
she could be allowed to arrange for herself—And now I 470  
have a few questions to put to you, Mr Worthing. While I  
am making these inquiries, you, Gwendolen, will wait for  
me below in the carriage.

GWENDOLEN (*Reproachfully*)

Mamma!

LADY BRACKNELL

In the carriage, Gwendolen! (GWENDOLEN goes to the door. She and 475  
JACK blow kisses to each other behind LADY BRACKNELL's back. LADY  
BRACKNELL looks vaguely about as if she could not understand what  
the noise was. Finally turns round) Gwendolen, the carriage!

GWENDOLEN

Yes, mamma. *Goes out, looking back at JACK*

LADY BRACKNELL (*Sitting down*)

You can take a seat, Mr Worthing.  
*Looks in her pocket for note-book and pencil*

JACK

Thank you, Lady Bracknell, I prefer standing.

468 *pleasant* In Alexander's copy Lady Bracknell 'stares at JACK, then goes L. a little, turns', after this word, making it quite evident which sort of surprise she considers the present one to be.

475 s.d. Alexander's alterations to this business suggest that Jack kissed Gwendolen's hand, and that the blowing of kisses to one another may have been omitted.

479 The MS draft has stage-business here not adopted in any subsequent version: '*Pulls out cigarette case from his pocket and opens it. LADY BRANCASTER glares at him. He looks ashamed and replaces it quietly in his pocket*'. This may have been dropped on the grounds that it would be unmannerly (and therefore uncharacteristic) of Jack to smoke in the presence of a lady.

LADY BRACKNELL (*Pencil and note-book in hand*)

I feel bound to tell you that you are not down on my list of eligible young men, although I have the same list as the dear Duchess of Bolton has. We work together, in fact. However, I am quite ready to enter your name, should your answers be what a really affectionate mother requires. Do you smoke? 480  
485

JACK

Well, yes, I must admit I smoke.

LADY BRACKNELL

I am glad to hear it. A man should always have an occupation of some kind. There are far too many idle men in London as it is. How old are you?

JACK

Twenty-nine. 490

LADY BRACKNELL

A very good age to be married at. I have always been of opinion that a man who desires to get married should know either everything or nothing. Which do you know?

JACK (*After some hesitation*)

I know nothing, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL

I am pleased to hear it. I do not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance. Ignorance is like a delicate exotic fruit; touch it and the bloom is gone. The whole theory of modern education is radically unsound. Fortunately in England, at any rate, education produces no effect whatsoever. If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes, and probably lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square. What is your income? 495  
500

490 *Twenty-nine* Jack's age in 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub>, LC, and Arents I. (The MS draft has twenty-five.) Alexander altered HTC<sub>1</sub> to thirty-five—he was thirty-six himself when the play was first performed.

493 *either everything or nothing* Cf. *Dorian Gray*, where Lord Henry Wotton comforts Dorian after the hero has realized that Sybil Vane, the actress he loves, is without talent: 'She is very lovely, and if she knows as little about life as she does about acting, she will be a delightful experience. There are only two kinds of people who are really fascinating—people who know absolutely everything, and people who know absolutely nothing' (ed. Murray, p. 84/CW, p. 73).

495 *I am pleased to hear it* Alexander has Jack sit down at this point.

500–2 *If it did . . . in Grosvenor Square* 1899, HTC (om. HTC<sub>1</sub>, etc.). In proof Wilde added the final three words, with their dark suggestion of an uprising in the fashionable districts.

JACK

Between seven and eight thousand a year.

LADY BRACKNELL (*Makes a note in her book*)

In land, or in investments?

JACK

In investments, chiefly.

505

LADY BRACKNELL

That is satisfactory. What between the duties expected of one during one's lifetime, and the duties exacted from one after one's death, land has ceased to be either a profit or a pleasure. It gives one position, and prevents one from keeping it up. That's all that can be said about land.

510

JACK

I have a country house with some land, of course, attached to it, about fifteen hundred acres, I believe; but I don't depend on that for my real income. In fact, as far as I can make out, the poachers are the only people who make anything out of it.

515

LADY BRACKNELL

A country house! How many bedrooms? Well, that point can be cleared up afterwards. You have a town house, I hope? A girl with a simple, unspoiled nature, like Gwendolen, could hardly be expected to reside in the country.

503 *Between seven . . . year* Quite a fortune, at a time when a working man was lucky if he was paid 20 shillings a week and £1,000 a year 'represented considerable worldly success, though not great wealth, and placed a man, economically speaking, well towards the top of the middle classes' (W. J. Reader, *Professional Men: the Rise of the Professional Classes in Nineteenth-Century England*, 1962, p. 202). F. M. L. Thompson (*English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century*, 1963), reckoning income at a pound per annum per acre, considers £10,000 a year as a high level among the landowning class, exceeded only by the income of the great magnates.

510 *land* 1899, HTC (it HTC1, etc.) The MS draft of this pronouncement is less elegantly expressed: 'Land, nowadays, is simply a question of life-duties and death-duties. Both of them intolerable! The 1894 budget had consolidated the death-duties on inherited estates, a measure hardly calculated to please Lady Bracknell. She shares the anxieties of her class in what Thompson calls their 'Indian Summer' of influence. He quotes (p. 315) a private letter from a Kent landowner to a neighbour in the 1890s: 'Land is no longer an enviable possession unless it is coupled with a good income from other sources.'

513-15 *In fact . . . out of it* (om. HTC, etc.) Added to WD.

JACK

Well, I own a house in Belgrave Square, but it is let by the year to Lady Bloxham. Of course, I can get it back whenever I like, at six months' notice. 520

LADY BRACKNELL

Lady Bloxham? I don't know her.

JACK

Oh, she goes about very little. She is a lady considerably advanced in years. 525

LADY BRACKNELL

Ah, nowadays that is no guarantee of respectability of character. What number in Belgrave Square?

JACK

149.

LADY BRACKNELL (*Shaking her head*)

The unfashionable side. I thought there was something. However, that could easily be altered. 530

JACK

Do you mean the fashion, or the side?

LADY BRACKNELL (*Sternly*)

Both, if necessary, I presume. What are your politics?

JACK

Well, I am afraid I really have none. I am a Liberal Unionist.

521–9 *Bloxham* is a village in Oxfordshire, but Wilde may have recalled John Francis Bloxam, editor of *The Chameleon*, in which his 'Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young' appeared in December 1894. In the MS draft Lady Brancaster consults a red book before pronouncing on the status of number 149 (in fact there were only forty-nine numbers in the square) and adds: 'But I do not wish to seem in any way to speak slightly of Belgrave Square—There is far too little reverence shown, nowadays, as it is, for the few places left to us in England that are of any social importance. I merely mentioned that the side was not the fashionable side. But that could be altered.' HTC follows earlier texts in adding Lady Bracknell's name at the end of Jack's query (l. 531).

533–4 *a Liberal Unionist* Strictly speaking, Liberal Unionists were originally members of Gladstone's Liberal Party who voted against his 1886 bill for Home Rule in Ireland, but Jack uses the term as if it were the equivalent of 'don't know'. Wilde evidently wanted some kind of political joke, but could not at first decide on its form. In the MS draft Jack is asked if he has any sympathy with the Radicals and replies: 'Oh, I don't want to pit [?] the asses against the classes, if that is what you mean, Lady Brancaster'. To the Arents I typescript Wilde added an additional line—'the difficulty is to find out which side the asses are'—but this was not adopted in LC. After LC the joke disappeared, perhaps because a reference to Radicalism added at l. 542 made it redundant.

LADY BRACKNELL

Oh, they count as Tories. They dine with us. Or come in 535  
the evening, at any rate. Now to minor matters. Are your  
parents living?

JACK

I have lost both my parents.

LADY BRACKNELL

Both? To lose one parent may be regarded as a misfortune—  
to lose *both* seems like carelessness. Who was your 540  
father? He was evidently a man of some wealth. Was he  
born in what the Radical papers call the purple of commerce,  
or did he rise from the ranks of the aristocracy?

JACK

I am afraid I really don't know. The fact is, Lady  
Bracknell, I said I had lost my parents. It would be nearer 545  
the truth to say that my parents seem to have lost me—  
I don't actually know who I am by birth. I was—well, I  
was found.

LADY BRACKNELL

Found!

JACK

The late Mr Thomas Cardew, an old gentleman of a very 550  
charitable and kindly disposition, found me, and gave me  
the name of Worthing, because he happened to have a  
first-class ticket for Worthing in his pocket at the time.  
Worthing is a place in Sussex. It is a seaside resort.

539–40 *Both? To lose one parent may be regarded as a misfortune—to lose both seems like carelessness* HTC (Both?—that seems like carelessness 1899) Wilde made this alteration in WD, but Ross gives a longer version (“To lose one parent, Mr Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness”) which has become current and which actresses and readers may prefer. The present edition defies the author's final decision, reverting to the line as it appears in texts before WD: the authority for the precise form of Ross's reading is not apparent.

541 *was evidently* (seems to have been HTC) LC and earlier versions read simply ‘Who was your father? A country gentleman?’ and omit the final sentence of the speech.

542 *what the radical papers call* 1899, HTC (what we must call nowadays PR) Changed by Wilde in proof: Alexander seems to be following 1899 in adding this phrase to HTC1. The transfer of power from the landed aristocracy to those who had acquired wealth through trade was accompanied in the period 1880–1914 by what Thompson calls a ‘partial but definite transformation of the titled upper class’ through the creation of new peerages.

554 The two concluding sentences of the speech are omitted by Alexander.

LADY BRACKNELL

Where did the charitable gentleman who had a first-class ticket for this seaside resort find you? 555

JACK (*Gravely*)

In a hand-bag.

LADY BRACKNELL

A hand-bag?

JACK (*Very seriously*)

Yes, Lady Bracknell. I was in a hand-bag—a somewhat large, black leather hand-bag, with handles to it—an ordinary hand-bag in fact. 560

LADY BRACKNELL

In what locality did this Mr James, or Thomas, Cardew come across this ordinary hand-bag?

JACK

In the cloak-room at Victoria Station. It was given to him in mistake for his own. 565

LADY BRACKNELL

The cloak-room at Victoria Station?

JACK

Yes. The Brighton line.

LADY BRACKNELL

The line is immaterial. Mr Worthing, I confess I feel somewhat bewildered by what you have just told me. To be born, or at any rate bred, in a hand-bag, whether it had handles or not, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life that reminds one of the 570

556 *this seaside resort* 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub> (Worthing HTC; the seaside resort, LC, Arents I, OCT) There is no equivalent for the line in the MS draft.

562 *In what locality* . . . Cardew 1899, Arents I. The proof (PR) and HTC<sub>1</sub> omit 'or Thomas' which Wilde added to WD: LC reads simply 'In what locality did Mr Cardew' and the MS draft 'Where did Mr Cardew'. (Alexander adds 'particular' before 'locality'.) It is hard to see the significance of Lady Bracknell's uncertainty (unless she is above remembering the first names of unimportant people?). Wilde and Alexander obviously thought the point worth pursuing.

566-7 (om. HTC) In PR, HTC<sub>1</sub>, and earlier texts the lines are included and Jack replies 'Yes, Brighton line'. The *cloak-room* is the left-luggage office. Victoria was the terminus for two railway companies, the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway and the London, Chatham and Dover Railway: they had separate but adjoining facilities.

568 *The line is immaterial* 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub>, etc. (om. HTC only) Alexander has Lady Bracknell 'rise' on this line.

572 *reminds* LC, etc. (remind 1899, HTC only) This edition follows Ross in correcting this grammatical slip.

worst excesses of the French Revolution. And I presume you know what that unfortunate movement led to? As for the particular locality in which the hand-bag was found, a cloak-room at a railway station might serve to conceal a social indiscretion—has probably, indeed, been used for that purpose before now—but it could hardly be regarded as an assured basis for a recognized position in good society.

JACK

May I ask you then what you would advise me to do? I need hardly say I would do anything in the world to ensure Gwendolen's happiness.

LADY BRACKNELL

I would strongly advise you, Mr Worthing, to try and acquire some relations as soon as possible, and to make a definite effort to produce at any rate one parent of either sex, before the season is quite over.

JACK

Well, I don't see how I could possibly manage to do that. I can produce the hand-bag at any moment. It is in my dressing-room at home. I really think that should satisfy you, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL

Me, sir! What has it to do with me? You can hardly imagine that I and Lord Bracknell would dream of allowing our only daughter—a girl brought up with the utmost care—to marry into a cloak-room, and form an alliance with a parcel? Good morning, Mr Worthing!

LADY BRACKNELL *sweeps out in majestic indignation*

JACK

Good morning! (ALGERNON, *from the other room, strikes up the Wedding March. JACK looks perfectly furious, and goes to the door*) For goodness' sake don't play that ghastly tune, Algy! How idiotic you are!

*The music stops, and ALGERNON enters cheerily*

590 *dressing-room* 1899 (bedroom PR, HTC1, etc.) Alexander omits the whole sentence.  
592–6 See Appendix IV, p. 159–60.

597 s.d. *Wedding March* Presumably Mendelssohn's, from his incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

ALGERNON

Didn't it go off all right, old boy? You don't mean to say Gwendolen refused you? I know it is a way she has. She is always refusing people. I think it is most ill-natured of her. 600

JACK

Oh, Gwendolen is as right as a trivet. As far as she is concerned, we are engaged. Her mother is perfectly unbearable. Never met such a Gorgon—I don't really know what a Gorgon is like, but I am quite sure that Lady Bracknell is one. In any case, she is a monster, without being a myth, which is rather unfair. I beg your pardon, Algy, I suppose I shouldn't talk about your own aunt in that way before you. 605  
610

ALGERNON

My dear boy, I love hearing my relations abused. It is the only thing that makes me put up with them at all. Relations are simply a tedious pack of people, who haven't got the remotest knowledge of how to live, nor the smallest instinct about when to die. 615

JACK

Oh, that is nonsense!

ALGERNON

It isn't!

JACK

Well, I won't argue about the matter. You always want to argue about things.

ALGERNON

That is exactly what things were originally made for. 620

JACK

Upon my word, if I thought that, I'd shoot myself—(A pause)  
You don't think there is any chance of Gwendolen becoming like her mother in about a hundred and fifty years, do you Algy?

601–2 *I know . . . of her* 1899 (om. HTC, etc.) Added to WD. Alexander has the men take cigarettes during the sequence following, but they do not light them until ll. 639–45.

603 See Appendix IV, p. 160.

605–21 *I don't really know . . . I'd shoot myself* 1899, HTC1, etc. (om. HTC only) The MS draft of this passage is longer, but includes these lines.

612–15 See Appendix IV, p. 160–1.



ALGERNON

All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. 625  
No man does. That's his.

JACK

Is that clever?

ALGERNON

It is perfectly phrased! and quite as true as any observation  
in civilized life should be.

JACK

I am sick to death of cleverness. Everybody is clever nowadays. 630  
You can't go anywhere without meeting clever people. The  
thing has become an absolute public nuisance. I wish to  
goodness we had a few fools left.

ALGERNON

We have.

JACK

I should extremely like to meet them. What do they talk 635  
about?

ALGERNON

The fools? Oh! about the clever people, of course.

JACK

What fools!

ALGERNON

By the way, did you tell Gwendolen the truth about your  
being Ernest in town, and Jack in the country? 640

JACK (*In a very patronizing manner*)

My dear fellow, the truth isn't quite 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!

ALGERNON

The only way to behave to a woman is to make love to her if

625–6 In all texts before 1899 this speech is preceded by the s.d. '(Drawingly and sentimentously)'.  
It was deleted from WD.

628–9 *as any observation in civilized life should be* 1899 (as anything in civilized life should be  
PR; as anything in modern life should be HTC, etc.)

638 See Appendix IV, pp. 161.

643 *a woman* 1899, HTC (women HTC1, etc., with appropriate changes in following line).  
Altered in WD.

644 *to make love to her* The older, more general sense of 'court, pay amorous attention'. Cf. Grundy's  
*The New Woman* (Comedy Theatre, September 1894): 'Do you suppose you are the only man  
that's ever made love to me? It's a man's business to make love, and it's a woman's business to  
stop him—when he makes love too hard' (Lord Chamberlain's copy, British Library).

she is pretty, and to someone else if she is plain. 645

JACK

Oh, that is nonsense.

ALGERNON

What about your brother? What about the profligate Ernest?

JACK

Oh, before the end of the week I shall have got rid of him. I'll say he died in Paris of apoplexy. Lots of people die of apoplexy, quite suddenly, don't they? 650

ALGERNON

Yes, but it's hereditary, my dear fellow. It's a sort of thing that runs in families. You had much better say a severe chill.

JACK

You are sure a severe chill isn't hereditary, or anything of that kind? 655

ALGERNON

Of course it isn't!

JACK

Very well, then. My poor brother Ernest is carried off suddenly in Paris, by a severe chill. That gets rid of him.

ALGERNON

But I thought you said that—Miss Cardew was a little too much interested in your poor brother Ernest? Won't she feel his loss a good deal? 660

JACK

Oh, that is all right. Cecily is not a silly romantic girl, I am glad to say. She has got a capital appetite, goes long walks, and pays no attention at all to her lessons. 665

ALGERNON

I would rather like to see Cecily.

658–9 In the MS draft the speech anticipates Jack's appearance in Act II:

Very well then. That is settled. Ernest is carried off by a severe chill in Paris. I'll wear mourning for him of course; that would be only decent. I don't at all mind wearing mourning. I think that all black, with a good pearl pin, rather smart [*sic*]. Then I'll go down home and break the news to my household. Of course, I know they will insist on being awfully sympathetic about it. But I don't mind that. The thing will be forgotten in a week.

661–2 *Won't she . . . deal?* (om. HTC, etc.). Added to WD.

665 *pays no attention at all* 1899 (is not at all interested in PR; pays no attention to HTC; is much interested in HTC; is very much interested in LC).

JACK

I will take very good care you never do. She is excessively pretty, and she is only just eighteen.

ALGERNON

Have you told Gwendolen yet that you have an excessively pretty ward who is only just eighteen? 670

JACK

Oh! one doesn't blurt these things out to people. Cecily and Gwendolen are perfectly certain to be extremely great friends. I'll bet you anything you like that half an hour after they have met, they will be calling each other sister.

ALGERNON

Women only do that when they have called each other a lot of other things first. Now, my dear boy, if we want to get a good table at Willis's, we really must go and dress. Do you know it is nearly seven? 675

JACK (*Irritably*)

Oh! it always is nearly seven.

ALGERNON

Well, I'm hungry. 680

JACK

I never knew you when you weren't—

ALGERNON

What shall we do after dinner? Go to a theatre?

JACK

Oh, no! I loathe listening.

667–8 *She is . . . eighteen* Cecily has just reached the marriageable age (at which girls 'came out' in Society). In the MS draft this admission is provoked by Algernon's insisting that she is probably plain: 'She is one of those dull, intellectual girls one meets all over the place. Girls who have got large minds and large feet . . .'

670 *ward* 1899, LC, Arents I (young ward HTC, MS)

673 *I'll bet . . . that* 1899, HTC (Probably HTC<sub>1</sub>, etc.) Altered in WD.

677 *Willis's Alexander* alters his typescript to 'the Savoy', *dress* Evening dress (for men, black tail-coat and trousers, white shirt, tie, and waistcoat) was usually worn at better-class restaurants and in the stalls and dress-circle of theatres, as well as at private functions. At the moment Jack and Algernon are wearing dark coat, grey trousers, and waistcoat, as is appropriate for afternoon wear and paying calls.

677–80 *Do you know . . . Well* 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub>, etc. (om. HTC only)

ALGERNON

Well, let us go to the Club?

JACK

Oh, no! I hate talking.

685

ALGERNON

Well, we might trot round to the Empire at ten?

JACK

Oh, no! I can't bear looking at things. It is so silly.

ALGERNON

Well, what shall we do?

JACK

Nothing!

ALGERNON

It is awfully hard work doing nothing. However, I don't  
mind hard work where there is no definite object of any  
kind. 690

*Enter LANE*

LANE

Miss Fairfax.

*Enter GWENDOLEN. LANE goes out*

ALGERNON

Gwendolen, upon my word!

684 *the Club* The old-established clubs were concentrated in the area around Pall Mall and St James's: 'The West-End, and "Clubland" in particular, was formerly peopled by a great number of individuals who were without a regular profession or occupation . . . To many of those who were bachelors a club served as a home—they lived there, lunched there, dined there, and occasionally died there' (Ralph Nevill and Charles Edward Jermyingham, *Piccadilly to Pall Mall*, 1908, pp. 200–1).

686 *Empire* The Empire Theatre of Varieties, in Leicester Square, one of the best-known music-halls in London, especially notable for its spectacular ballets with designs by C. Wilhelm. The Promenade at the back of the stalls was notorious as a rendezvous for prostitutes, and was the subject of a campaign by Mrs Ormiston Chant. The Promenade was for a while partitioned off, but the screen was removed in the course of a demonstration in the autumn of 1894. The theatre closed in 1927 and was replaced by the Empire Cinema (rebuilt 1962)

690–2 *It is . . . any kind* 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub> (om. HTC; LC substitutes 'But' for 'However'; Arents has only 'I don't . . . any kind'; MS has 'nothing to be gained, and no definite').

GWENDOLEN

Algy, kindly turn your back. I have something very particular to say to Mr Worthing. 695

ALGERNON

Really, Gwendolen, I don't think I can allow this at all.

GWENDOLEN

Algy, you always adopt a strictly immoral attitude towards life. You are not quite old enough to do that.

ALGERNON *retires to the fireplace*

JACK

My own darling! 700

GWENDOLEN

Ernest, we may never be married. From the expression on mamma's face I fear we never shall. Few parents nowadays pay any regard to what their children say to them. The old-fashioned respect for the young is fast dying out. Whatever influence I ever had over mamma, I lost at the age of three. But although she may prevent us from becoming man and wife, and I may marry someone else, and marry often, nothing that she can possibly do can alter my eternal devotion to you. 705

JACK

Dear Gwendolen! 710

GWENDOLEN

The story of your romantic origin, as related to me by mamma, with unpleasing comments, has naturally stirred the deeper fibres of my nature. Your Christian name has an irresistible fascination. The simplicity of your character makes you exquisitely incomprehensible to me. Your town address at the Albany I have. What is your address in the country? 715

695–6 In PR there is another sentence at the end of this speech: 'Also pray oblige me by looking out of the window'. This also appears in Arents I, altered in manuscript to 'in another direction' (although LC reverts to 'window'). In HTC 'Pray oblige me by turning your back' is followed by an s.d., 'ALGERNON *turns away up C.*', and Gwendolen moves down to Jack with an exclamation of 'Ernest!'

707 *and marry often* Wilde reviewed an anonymous work, *How to be Happy though Married*, in the *Pall Mall Gazette* for 18 November 1885. An anecdote that particularly amused him was that of 'the wicked bachelor who spoke of marriage as "a very harmless amusement" and advised a young friend of his to "marry early and marry often"' (*Reviews*, p. 36).

JACK

The Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire.

ALGERNON, *who has been carefully listening, smiles to himself, and writes the address on his shirt cuff. Then picks up the Railway Guide*

GWENDOLEN

There is a good postal service, I suppose? It may be necessary to do something desperate. That of course will require serious consideration. I will communicate with you daily. 720

JACK

My own one!

GWENDOLEN

How long do you remain in town?

JACK

Till Monday. 725

GWENDOLEN

Good! Algy, you may turn round now.

ALGERNON

Thanks, I've turned round already.

GWENDOLEN

You may also ring the bell.

JACK

You will let me see you to your carriage, my own darling?

GWENDOLEN

Certainly. 730

JACK (*To LANE, who now enters*)

I will see Miss Fairfax out.

LANE

Yes, sir.

JACK and GWENDOLEN *go off*

718 s.d. HTC<sub>1</sub> has Algernon write on *an envelope at desk*, but all other versions have him use his shirt-cuff, as the business that closes the act demands. Wilde altered WD (which agreed with HTC<sub>1</sub>) to give the present reading.

719–23 (om. HTC) Wilde struck out the speeches in Arents I, but they reappear in LC and HTC<sub>1</sub>.

729 See Appendix IV, p. 161–2.

732 *Yes sir* 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub> (Thank you, sir HTC<sub>1</sub>) Alexander adds an s.d.: '*As LANE enters JACK and GWENDOLEN are kissing R. U. As JACK looks up he turns his back and stands below door R. U.*' In the Theatre Museum prompt-book (?1909), which is based on French's edition, the s.d. is cruder: '*They embrace. LANE appears with the letters on tray and is embarrassed at the scene: so are they.*'

LANE *presents several letters on a salver to ALGERNON. It is to be surmised that they are bills, as ALGERNON, after looking at the envelopes, tears them up*

ALGERNON

A glass of sherry, Lane.

LANE

Yes, sir.

ALGERNON

To-morrow, Lane, I'm going Bunburying. 735

LANE

Yes, sir.

ALGERNON

I shall probably not be back till Monday. You can put up my dress clothes, my smoking jacket, and all the Bunbury suits—

LANE

Yes, sir. *Handing sherry* 740

ALGERNON

I hope to-morrow will be a fine day, Lane.

LANE

It never is, sir.

ALGERNON

Lane, you're a perfect pessimist.

LANE

I do my best to give satisfaction, sir.

*Enter JACK. LANE goes off*

JACK

There's a sensible, intellectual girl! the only girl I ever cared for in my life. (*ALGERNON is laughing immoderately*) What on earth are you so amused at? 745

ALGERNON

Oh, I'm a little anxious about poor Bunbury, that is all.

JACK

If you don't take care, your friend Bunbury will get you into a serious scrape some day. 750

737 *put up pack*

738 *smoking jacket* A jacket for casual indoor wear, usually made of some light material, with quasi-military frogging and silk (sometimes quilted) facings on the cuffs and lapels.

ALGERNON

I love scrapes. They are the only things that are never serious.

JACK

Oh, that's nonsense, Algy. You never talk anything but nonsense.

ALGERNON

Nobody ever does.

755

JACK looks indignantly at him, and leaves the room.

ALGERNON lights a cigarette, reads his shirt-cuff, and smiles

*Act-Drop*

## Act II

*Scene: Garden at the Manor House. A flight of gray stone steps leads up to the house. The garden, an old-fashioned one, full of roses. Time of year, July. Basket chairs, and a table covered with books, are set under a large yew tree. MISS PRISM discovered seated at the table. CECILY is at the back watering flowers.*

MISS PRISM (*Calling*)

Cecily, Cecily! Surely such a utilitarian occupation as the watering of flowers is rather Moulton's duty than yours? Especially at a moment when intellectual pleasures await you. Your German grammar is on the table. Pray open it at page fifteen. We will repeat yesterday's lesson.

5

755 s.d. See Appendix IV, pp. 162.

1 s.d. In HTC and earlier texts there are no stone steps and the garden contains yew hedges, rather than a yew tree. An illustration in the *Illustrated London News* (23 February 1895) shows a tree behind the tea-table.

1-3 *such a . . . await you* (it is more Moulton's duty to water the roses than yours HTC, LC) The original draft contains a brief appearance for Moulton: Cecily asks him if he would like to take the German lesson in her place, but he declines ('I don't hold with them fur-rin tongues miss') and disappears behind the hedge. This was deleted by hand from the LC typescript. Three further lines for Moulton (at l. 99) appear in the MS draft only.

4-5 *Your German grammar . . . yesterday's lesson* 1899, HTC (Your German lesson has been waiting for you now nearly twenty minutes. Pray open your Schiller at once. HTC<sub>1</sub>, LC). Altered in revisions to WD.



CECILY (*Coming over very slowly*)

But I don't like German. It isn't at all a becoming language. I know perfectly well that I look quite plain after my German lesson.

MISS PRISM

Child, you know how anxious your guardian is that you should improve yourself in every way. He laid particular stress on your German, as he was leaving for town yesterday. Indeed, he always lays stress on your German when he is leaving for town. 10

CECILY

Dear Uncle Jack is so very serious! Sometimes he is so serious that I think he cannot be quite well. 15

MISS PRISM (*Drawing herself up*)

Your guardian enjoys the best of health, and his gravity of demeanour is especially to be commended in one so comparatively young as he is. I know no one who has a higher sense of duty and responsibility.

CECILY

I suppose that is why he often looks a little bored when we three are together. 20

MISS PRISM

Cecily! I am surprised at you. Mr Worthing has many troubles in his life. Idle merriment and triviality would be out of place in his conversation. You must remember his constant anxiety about that unfortunate young man his brother. 25

CECILY

I wish Uncle Jack would allow that unfortunate young man, his brother, to come down here sometimes. We might have a good influence over him, Miss Prism. I am sure you certainly would. You know German, and geology, and things of that kind influence a man very much. 30

CECILY *begins to write in her diary*

6 *a becoming language* Cf. Lady Bracknell's feelings on its respectability (I, 369–70). In November 1896 Wilde wrote to Robert Ross from his cell in Reading Gaol: '... I am going to take up the study of German: indeed this seems to be the proper place for such a study' (*Letters*, p. 413).

11–13 *Indeed... town* (om. HTC, etc.) Added to WD.

25–6, 27–8 that unfortunate young man, his brother (him HTC, etc.) Altered in revisions to WD.

MISS PRISM (*Shaking her head*)

I do not think that even I could produce any effect on a character that according to his own brother's admission is irretrievably weak and vacillating. Indeed I am not sure that I would desire to reclaim him. I am not in favour of this modern mania for turning bad people into good people at a moment's notice. As a man sows so let him reap. You must put away your diary, Cecily. I really don't see why you should keep a diary at all. 35

CECILY

I keep a diary in order to enter the wonderful secrets of my life. If I didn't write them down I should probably forget all about them. 40

MISS PRISM

Memory, my dear Cecily, is the diary that we all carry about with us.

CECILY

Yes, but it usually chronicles the things that have never happened, and couldn't possibly have happened. I believe that Memory is responsible for nearly all the three-volume novels that Mudie sends us. 45

MISS PRISM

Do not speak slightly of the three-volume novel, Cecily. I wrote one myself in earlier days. 50

CECILY

Did you really, Miss Prism? How wonderfully clever you are! I hope it did not end happily? I don't like novels that end happily. They depress me so much.

MISS PRISM

The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means. 55

CECILY

I suppose so. But it seems very unfair. And was your novel ever published?

MISS PRISM

Alas! no. The manuscript unfortunately was abandoned. I use

37 *As a man . . . reap* Cf. Galatians VI, 7: ' . . . whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap'.  
 47-8 See Appendix IV, p. 162-3.  
 49 *the three-volume novel* 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub>, etc. (novels HTC only).  
 51-6 *Did you really . . . And was* (Was HTC) Miss Prism's definition of fiction was added to WD.  
 58 *Alas! no* (No HTC, etc.) In Alexander's notes Cecily '*Rises, looks astonished*' at 'abandoned'.

the word in the sense of lost or mislaid. To your work, child,  
these speculations are profitless. 60

CECILY (*Smiling*)

But I see dear Dr Chasuble coming up through the garden.

MISS PRISM (*Rising and advancing*)

Dr Chasuble! This is indeed a pleasure.

*Enter CANON CHASUBLE*

CHASUBLE

And how are we this morning? Miss Prism, you are, I  
trust, well?

CECILY

Miss Prism has just been complaining of a slight headache. I 65  
think it would do her so much good to have a short stroll with you  
in the Park, Dr Chasuble.

MISS PRISM

Cecily, I have not mentioned anything about a headache.

CECILY

No, dear Miss Prism, I know that, but I felt instinctively 70  
that you had a headache. Indeed I was thinking about that,  
and not about my German lesson, when the Rector came  
in.

CHASUBLE

I hope, Cecily, you are not inattentive.

CECILY

Oh, I am afraid I am.

CHASUBLE

That is strange. Were I fortunate enough to be Miss Prism's 75  
pupil, I would hang upon her lips. (MISS PRISM *glares*) I  
spoke metaphorically.—My metaphor was drawn from bees.  
Ahem! Mr Worthing, I suppose, has not returned from town  
yet?

MISS PRISM

We do not expect him till Monday afternoon. 80

CHASUBLE

Ah yes, he usually likes to spend his Sunday in London.  
He is not one of those whose sole aim is enjoyment, as, by

63 In HTC Chasuble shakes hands with Cecily and Miss Prism.

all accounts, that unfortunate young man his brother seems to be. But I must not disturb Egeria and her pupil any longer.

85

MISS PRISM

Egeria? My name is Laetitia, Doctor.

CHASUBLE (*Bowing*)

A classical allusion merely, drawn from the Pagan authors. I shall see you both no doubt at Evensong?

MISS PRISM

I think, dear Doctor, I will have a stroll with you. I find I have a headache after all, and a walk might do it good.

90

CHASUBLE

With pleasure, Miss Prism, with pleasure. We might go as far as the schools and back.

MISS PRISM

That would be delightful. Cecily, you will read your Political Economy in my absence. The chapter on the Fall of the Rupee you may omit. It is somewhat too sensational. Even these metallic problems have their melodramatic side.

95

*Goes down the garden with* DR CHASUBLE

CECILY (*Picks up books and throws them back on table*)

Horrid Political Economy! Horrid Geography! Horrid, horrid German!

84 *Egeria* The Nymph who, in Roman legend, taught King Numa Pompilius the principles later enshrined in the city's laws. Nethercot ('Prunes and Miss Prism') suggests that her associations with law-giving, the chaste goddess Diana, and discipline are appropriate for Miss Prism. *Laetitia*, Miss Prism's first name, means 'joy' or 'happiness' in Latin.

94 See Appendix IV, pp. 163.

94-5 *the Fall of the Rupee* About 1873 the value of the Indian rupee began to fall; at one point it reached half its pre-1873 sterling value of 2 shillings. In 1893 the government of India decided to close the mints in an attempt to check its fall.

95-7 *sensational. Even . . . side* (exciting for a young girl HTC, etc.). Final sentence added to WD. Beerbohm bracketed it in his copy of 1899 and noted: 'This sentence should certainly be omitted. It labours, and spoils, the fun of what goes before. I wonder if Oscar added it for the printed version? I don't remember hearing it at the St. James's, and I rather think the speech ended thus: "It is somewhat too sensational for a young girl".'

*Enter MERRIMAN with a card on a salver*

MERRIMAN

Mr Ernest Worthing has just driven over from the station. He has brought his luggage with him. 100

CECILY (*Takes the card and reads it*)

'Mr Ernest Worthing, B. 4, The Albany, W.' Uncle Jack's brother! Did you tell him Mr Worthing was in town?

MERRIMAN

Yes, Miss. He seemed very much disappointed. I mentioned that you and Miss Prism were in the garden. He said he was anxious to speak to you privately for a moment. 105

CECILY

Ask Mr Ernest Worthing to come here. I suppose you had better talk to the housekeeper about a room for him.

MERRIMAN

Yes, Miss.

MERRIMAN *goes off*

CECILY

I have never met any really wicked person before. I feel rather frightened. I am so afraid he will look just like everyone else. 110

*Enter ALGERNON, very gay and debonair*

He does!

ALGERNON (*Raising his hat*)

You are my little cousin Cecily, I'm sure.

CECILY

You are under some strange mistake. I am not little. In fact, I believe I am more than usually tall for my age (*ALGERNON is rather taken aback*). But I am your cousin Cecily. You, I see from your card, are Uncle Jack's brother, my cousin Ernest, my wicked cousin Ernest. 115

100 Franklin Dyall, who played Merriman, recalled the effect of this announcement on the first night: 'This was received with the loudest and most sustained laugh that I have ever experienced, culminating in a round of applause; and as I came off Wilde said to me: "I'm so glad you got that laugh. It shows they have followed the plot"' (Hesketh Pearson, *The Life of Oscar Wilde*, 1946, p. 257).

114 *little cousin Cecily* 1899, HTC, LC, OCT (little Miss Cecily HTC 1, MS) This passage was carefully revised in WD, where Wilde decided on 'cousin Cecily', added the repetition in l. 119 ('my cousin Ernest, my wicked cousin Ernest') and inserted 'all the time' in l. 125. In HTC and the WD typescript Algernon reacts to 'Uncle Jack's Brother' (ll. 118–19) with the echo 'Brother!': this was deleted by Wilde but retained by Alexander.

ALGERNON

Oh! I am not really wicked at all, Cousin Cecily. You mustn't think that I am wicked. 120

CECILY

If you are not, then you have certainly been deceiving us all in a very inexcusable manner. 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. 125

ALGERNON (*Looks at her in amazement*)

Oh! Of course I have been rather reckless.

CECILY

I am glad to hear it.

ALGERNON

In fact, now you mention the subject, I have been very bad in my own small way.

CECILY

I don't think you should be so proud of that, though I am sure it must have been very pleasant. 130

ALGERNON

It is much pleasanter being here with you.

CECILY

I can't understand how you are here at all. Uncle Jack won't be back till Monday afternoon.

ALGERNON

That is a great disappointment. I am obliged to go up by the first train on Monday morning. I have a business appointment that I am anxious—to miss. 135

CECILY

Couldn't you miss it anywhere but in London?

ALGERNON

No: the appointment is in London.

CECILY

Well, I know, of course, how important it is not to keep a business engagement, if one wants to retain any sense of the beauty of life, but still I think you had better wait till Uncle Jack arrives. I know he wants to speak to you about your emigrating. 140

133-4 Alexander has Algernon bring up a chair. He sits at l. 136 ('... on Monday morning'), but at the mention of Australia he rises and moves right.

136-42 *I have . . . beauty of life* (om. HTC, etc.) Added to WD.

ALGERNON

About my what? 145

CECILY

Your emigrating. He has gone up to buy your outfit.

ALGERNON

I certainly wouldn't let Jack buy my outfit. He has no taste in neckties at all.

CECILY

I don't think you will require neckties. Uncle Jack is sending you to Australia. 150

ALGERNON

Australia! I'd sooner die.

CECILY

Well, he said at dinner on Wednesday night, that you would have to choose between this world, the next world, and Australia.

ALGERNON

Oh, well! The accounts I have received of Australia and the next world are not particularly encouraging. This world is good enough for me, Cousin Cecily. 155

CECILY

Yes, but are you good enough for it?

ALGERNON

I'm afraid I'm not that. That is why I want you to reform me. You might make that your mission, if you don't mind, Cousin Cecily. 160

CECILY

I'm afraid I've no time, this afternoon.

ALGERNON

Well, would you mind my reforming myself this afternoon?

156 *particularly* (om. HTC, etc.). On Australia, cf. Introduction pp. 11–12.

160 In the MS draft and LC Cecily's objection to 'You might make that your mission' is indignant: 'How dare you suggest that I have a mission'. When Algy protests that he thought every woman had a mission, nowadays, she retorts 'Every female has! No woman—'. Algy claims that he was good, once: 'Oh, everyone is good until they learn to talk'. Cecily replies:

Then the world must be very moral. Very few people know how to talk nowadays. There is far more culture than conversation. That is why society is so dull.

CECILY

It is rather Quixotic of you. But I think you should try. 165

ALGERNON

I will. I feel better already.

CECILY

You are looking a little worse.

ALGERNON

That is because I am hungry.

CECILY

How thoughtless of me. I should have remembered that when one is going to lead an entirely new life, one requires regular and wholesome meals. Won't you come in? 170

ALGERNON

Thank you. Might I have a button-hole first? I never have any appetite unless I have a button-hole first.

CECILY

A Maréchal Niel?

ALGERNON

No, I'd sooner have a pink rose. 175

CECILY

Why? *Cuts a flower*

ALGERNON

Because you are like a pink rose, Cousin Cecily.

165 *Quixotic* With the impulsive, impractical, and chivalrous idealism of Cervantes's hero in *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615).

171 After *wholesome meals* the MS draft and LC continue:  
... Miss Prism and I lunch at 2 off some roast mutton.

ALGERNON

I fear that would be too rich for me.

CECILY

Uncle Jack, whose health has been sadly undermined by the late hours you keep in town, has been ordered by his London doctor to have *pâté-de-foie-gras* sandwiches and 1874 champagne at 12. I don't know if such invalid's fare would suit you.

ALGERNON

You are sure the champagne is '74?

CECILY

Poor Uncle Jack has not been allowed to drink anything else for the last two years. Even the cheaper clarets are, he tells us, strictly forbidden to him.

This is the basis of Jack's accusation in III, 227–30.

173 *a button-hole* Cf. 'Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young', published in *The Chameleon*, December 1894 (CW, pp. 1205–6): 'A really well-made button-hole is the only link between Art and Nature'.

174 *Maréchal Niel* A yellow noisette rose, first introduced into England in the 1860s.

177 *Cousin Cecily* 1899, HTC, LC (Miss Cecily HTC1; Cecily MS).



CECILY

I don't think it can be right for you to talk to me like that.  
Miss Prism never says such things to me.

ALGERNON

Then Miss Prism is a short-sighted old lady. (CECILY *puts the rose in his button-hole*) You are the prettiest girl I ever saw. 180

CECILY

Miss Prism says that all good looks are a snare.

ALGERNON

They are a snare that every sensible man would like to be caught in. 185

CECILY

Oh! I don't think I would care to catch a sensible man. I shouldn't know what to talk to him about.

*They pass into the house.* MISS PRISM and DR CHASUBLE return

MISS PRISM

You are too much alone, dear Dr Chasuble. You should get married. A misanthrope I can understand—a womanthrope, never! 190

CHASUBLE (*With a scholar's shudder*)

Believe me, I do not deserve so neologistic a phrase. The precept as well as the practice of the Primitive Church was distinctly against matrimony.

MISS PRISM (*Sententiously*)

That is obviously the reason why the Primitive Church has not lasted up to the present day. And you do not seem to realize, dear Doctor, that by persistently remaining single, a man converts himself into a permanent public temptation. Men should be more careful; this very celibacy leads weaker vessels astray. 195

CHASUBLE

But is a man not equally attractive when married? 200

186–7 *Oh! I don't think . . . talk to him about* Alexander adds a reply to this speech: 'Oh, well, I'll soon tell you, if you'll allow me'.

187 s.d. Alexander has Dr Chasuble and Miss Prism enter arm in arm.

189–90 *womanthrope* This new synonym for 'misogynist' appears in *The Critic as Artist*. Reviewers do not—or should not—read through all the works they judge: 'If they did so, they would become confirmed misanthropes, or if I may borrow a phrase from one of the pretty Newnham graduates, confirmed womanthropes for the rest of their lives' (*Intentions*, p. 131/CW, p. 1022).

MISS PRISM

No married man is ever attractive except to his wife.

CHASUBLE

And often, I've been told, not even to her.

MISS PRISM

That depends on the intellectual sympathies of the woman. Maturity can always be depended on. Ripeness can be trusted. Young women are green. (DR CHASUBLE *starts*) I spoke horticulturally. My metaphor was drawn from fruits. But where is Cecily? 205

CHASUBLE

Perhaps she followed us to the schools.

*Enter JACK slowly from the back of the garden. He is dressed in the deepest mourning, with crape hat-band and black gloves*

MISS PRISM

Mr Worthing!

CHASUBLE

Mr Worthing? 210

MISS PRISM

This is indeed a surprise. We did not look for you till Monday afternoon.

JACK (*Shakes MISS PRISM's hand in a tragic manner*)

I have returned sooner than I expected. Dr Chasuble, I hope you are well?

CHASUBLE

Dear Mr Worthing, I trust this garb of woe does not betoken some terrible calamity? 215

JACK

My brother.

MISS PRISM

More shameful debts and extravagance?

CHASUBLE

Still leading his life of pleasure?

208 s.d. Alexander's s.d. make sure that the audience catches sight of Jack before he is seen by Miss Prism (who has moved to the right) or Dr Chasuble (over on the left): 'Enter JACK slowly from the back of the garden R. He goes C. He is dressed entirely in black. DR CHASUBLE and MISS PRISM both turn, come down-stage, then toward C., see JACK for the first time'. Chasuble's exclamation (1. 210) is omitted. The entrance is much simpler in LC and the MS draft.

JACK (*Shaking his head*)

Dead!

220

CHASUBLE

Your brother Ernest dead?

JACK

Quite dead.

MISS PRISM

What a lesson for him! I trust he will profit by it.

CHASUBLE

Mr Worthing, I offer you my sincere condolence. You have at least the consolation of knowing that you were always the most generous and forgiving of brothers. 225

JACK

Poor Ernest! He had many faults, but it is a sad, sad blow.

CHASUBLE

Very sad indeed. Were you with him at the end?

JACK

No. He died abroad; in Paris, in fact. I had a telegram last night from the manager of the Grand Hotel. 230

CHASUBLE

Was the cause of death mentioned?

JACK

A severe chill, it seems.

MISS PRISM

As a man sows, so shall he reap.

CHASUBLE (*Raising his hand*)

Charity, dear Miss Prism, charity! None of us are perfect. I myself am peculiarly susceptible to draughts. Will the interment take place here? 235

JACK

No. He seemed to have expressed a desire to be buried in Paris.

227 *He had many faults* Alexander has Jack take out 'a large black-bordered handkerchief' and dry his eyes.

230 *from the manager* 1899, HTC1, etc. (from him from the manager HTC only) His addition seems to imply that in Alexander's performance Jack represented Ernest as announcing his own death by telegram, then hastily corrected himself. The *Grand Hotel* in the Boulevard des Capucines was one of the most luxurious in Paris, and is memorably described by George DuMaurier in part six of his novel *Trilby* (1895). Wilde stayed at the Grand Hotel in November–December 1891. 'Grand' was added to the WD typescript, making the reference specific.

CHASUBLE

In Paris! (*Shakes his head*) I fear that hardly points to any very serious state of mind at the last. You would no doubt wish me to make some slight allusion to this tragic domestic affliction next Sunday. (*JACK presses his hand convulsively*) My sermon on the meaning of the manna in the wilderness can be adapted to almost any occasion, joyful, or, as in the present case, distressing. (*All sigh*) I have preached it at harvest celebrations, christenings, confirmations, on days of humiliation and festal days. The last time I delivered it was in the Cathedral, as a charity sermon on behalf of the Society for the Prevention of Discontent among the Upper Orders. The Bishop, who was present, was much struck by some of the analogies I drew. 240 245 250

JACK

Ah! that reminds me, you mentioned christenings I think, Dr Chasuble? I suppose you know how to christen all right? (*DR CHASUBLE looks astounded*) I mean, of course, you are continually christening, aren't you? 255

MISS PRISM

It is, I regret to say, one of the Rector's most constant duties in this parish. I have often spoken to the poorer classes on the subject. But they don't seem to know what thrift is.

CHASUBLE

But is there any particular infant in whom you are interested, Mr Worthing? Your brother was, I believe, unmarried, was he not? 260

JACK

Oh yes.

243 *manna* Sustenance provided by God for the children of Israel during their forty years in the wilderness (Exodus, XVI).

249 *Discontent . . . Upper Orders* (Discontent among the Lower Orders PR; Discontent among the Higher Orders HTC; Cruelty to Children HTC<sub>1</sub>, LC OCT, MS) Changed from 'Cruelty to Children' in WD, and further revised in proof.

258-9 *But . . . thrift is* Wilde added 'in any sphere of conduct' to the end of the sentence in the WD typescript, then deleted his addition. In the MS draft Miss Prism speaks of 'a certain recklessness of living' among the poor. 'Thrift' reflects the frequent exhortations aimed at persuading the poor to exercise self-restraint (not necessarily with the aid of contraceptive techniques) for reasons of economy—arguments derived from Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population*, first published in 1798.

260-1 Alexander has Jack register shock at Chasuble's enquiry.

263 *Oh yes* 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub>, etc. (Quite unmarried HTC only)

MISS PRISM (*Bitterly*)

People who live entirely for pleasure usually are.

JACK

But it is not for any child, dear Doctor. I am very fond of children. No! the fact is, I would like to be christened myself, this afternoon, if you have nothing better to do. 265

CHASUBLE

But surely, Mr Worthing, you have been christened already?

JACK

I don't remember anything about it. 270

CHASUBLE

But have you any grave doubts on the subject?

JACK

I certainly intend to have. Of course I don't know if the thing would bother you in any way, or if you think I am a little too old now.

CHASUBLE

Not at all. The sprinkling, and, indeed, the immersion of adults is a perfectly canonical practice. 275

JACK

Immersion!

CHASUBLE

You need have no apprehensions. Sprinkling is all that is necessary, or indeed I think advisable. Our weather is so changeable. At what hour would you wish the ceremony performed? 280

JACK

Oh, I might trot round about five if that would suit you.

CHASUBLE

Perfectly, perfectly! In fact I have two similar ceremonies to perform at that time. A case of twins that occurred recently in one

272 *I certainly intend to have* (I have the very gravest doubts PR, HTC, etc.) Alexander marks this sentence and the preceding line for omission, but does not strike them out.

277 Alexander adds the exclamation 'Ugh!!!'

278–81 Alexander adds 'Oh, no' to the beginning of the speech. In the MS draft Chasuble shows more of his concern with liturgy and the climate:

Oh, no. You need have no apprehensions. That form of ritual, strangely enough, is now confirmed to certain religious bodies not in direct communion with us. Sprinkling is all that is necessary, or indeed, I think, advisable. Our weather is so changeable there is great mortality amongst the Baptists. At what hour would you wish the ceremony performed?

of the outlying cottages on your own estate. Poor Jenkins the carter, 285  
a most hard-working man.

JACK

Oh! I don't see much fun in being christened along  
with other babies. It would be childish. Would half-past five  
do?

CHASUBLE

Admirably! Admirably! (*Takes out watch*) And now, dear 290  
Mr Worthing, I will not intrude any longer into a house of  
sorrow. I would merely beg you not to be too much bowed  
down by grief. What seem to us bitter trials are often blessings in  
disguise.

MISS PRISM

This seems to me a blessing of an extremely obvious kind. 295

*Enter CECILY from the house*

CECILY

Uncle Jack! Oh, I am pleased to see you back. But what horrid  
clothes you have got on! Do go and change them.

MISS PRISM

Cecily!

CHASUBLE

My child! my child!

*CECILY goes towards JACK; he kisses her brow  
in a melancholy manner*

CECILY

What is the matter, Uncle Jack? Do look happy! You look as 300  
if you had toothache, and I have got such a surprise for  
you. Who do you think is in the dining-room? Your  
brother!

JACK

Who?

CECILY

Your brother Ernest. He arrived about half an hour ago. 305

JACK

What nonsense! I haven't got a brother.

290 *And now, In HTC he 'goes to JACK and takes his hand'.*

299 *My child! my child!* (om. HTC) Alexander has Jack take out his handkerchief again and put it to his eyes. The line was added to WD.

CECILY

Oh, don't say that. However badly he may have behaved to you in the past he is still your brother. You couldn't be so heartless as to disown him. I'll tell him to come out. And you will shake hands with him, won't you, Uncle Jack? 310

*Runs back into the house*

CHASUBLE

These are very joyful tidings.

MISS PRISM

After we had all been resigned to his loss, his sudden return seems to me peculiarly distressing.

JACK

My brother is in the dining-room? I don't know what it all means. I think it is perfectly absurd. 315

*Enter ALGERNON and CECILY hand in hand. They come slowly up to JACK*

JACK

Good heavens! *Motions ALGERNON away*

ALGERNON

Brother John, I have come down from town to tell you that I am very sorry for all the trouble I have given you, and that I intend to lead a better life in the future.

*JACK glares at him and does not take his hand*

CECILY

Uncle Jack, you are not going to refuse your own brother's hand? 320

JACK

Nothing will induce me to take his hand. I think his coming down here disgraceful. He knows perfectly well why.

316 *Good heavens!* (Go away! HTC) Alexander's s.d. show that Algernon is on the right, Cecily slightly further left, Jack centre-stage, and Miss Prism and Chasuble extreme left.

317-19 In the MS draft Dr Chasuble remarks to Miss Prism 'There is good in that young man. He seems to me sincerely repentant', and she retorts, 'These sudden conversions do not please me. They belong to dissent. They savour of the laxity of the Nonconformist'. After Algernon's speech Alexander adds another 'Go away!' for Jack and the direction '*Kicks out backwards with R. leg.*'

CECILY

Uncle Jack, do be nice. There is some good in everyone. 325  
 Ernest has just been telling me about his poor invalid  
 friend Mr Bunbury whom he goes to visit so often. And surely  
 there must be much good in one who is kind to an invalid,  
 and leaves the pleasures of London to sit by a bed of  
 pain. 330

JACK

Oh! he has been talking about Bunbury has he?

CECILY

Yes, he has told me all about poor Mr Bunbury, and his  
 terrible state of health.

JACK

Bunbury! Well, I won't have him talk to you about Bun- 335  
 bury or about anything else. It is enough to drive one perfectly  
 frantic.

ALGERNON

Of course I admit that the faults were all on my side. But I  
 must say that I think that Brother John's coldness to me is  
 peculiarly painful. I expected a more enthusiastic welcome, espe- 340  
 cially considering it is the first time I have come  
 here.

CECILY

Uncle Jack, if you don't shake hands with Ernest I will never  
 forgive you.

JACK

Never forgive me?

CECILY

Never, never, never! 345

JACK

Well, this is the last time I shall ever do it.

*Shakes hands with ALGERNON and glares*

327-36 *whom . . . frantic* (om. HTC)—first appears in this form in WD.

342-3 *I will never forgive you* Alexander adds the s.d. 'Pushes Jack over R. to ALGIE'. Cecily goes over to join Miss Prism and Chasuble on the left.

344 *Never forgive me?* (om. HTC, etc.). Added to WD.

345 *Never, never, never!* (Never PR; om. HTC, etc.)

346 (I suppose I must then HTC) In HTC he 'squeezes ALGIE's hand violently'. In PR 'and glares' is omitted from the s.d.



CHASUBLE

It's pleasant, is it not, to see so perfect a reconciliation? I think we might leave the two brothers together.

MISS PRISM

Cecily, you will come with us.

CECILY

Certainly, Miss Prism. My little task of reconciliation is 350  
over.

CHASUBLE

You have done a beautiful action to-day, dear child.

MISS PRISM

We must not be premature in our judgements.

CECILY

I feel very happy. *They all go off*

JACK

You young scoundrel, Algy, you must get out of this place as 355  
soon as possible. I don't allow any Bunburying here.

*Enter MERRIMAN*

MERRIMAN

I have put Mr Ernest's things in the room next to yours, sir. I suppose that is all right?

JACK

What?

MERRIMAN

Mr Ernest's luggage, sir. I have unpacked it and put it in 360  
the room next to your own.

JACK

His luggage?

350-4 *My . . . happy* (om. HTC) Alexander has the s.d. 'ALGIE runs L. to follow CECILY. JACK catches him by the leg with his stick and drags him back'.

356 Alexander adds the s.d. 'ALGIE goes to entrance by which CECILY has made her exit. Whistles and makes signs off stage'.

357 *I have put Mr Ernest's things* (Mr Ernest's things, I have put them HTC only)

362-4 *His luggage? . . . luncheon-basket* (om. HTC, etc.) A man's *dressing-case*, 'ordinarily made of rosewood, mahogany or cormandel wood', was supposed to include 'scent bottles, jars for pomade and tooth-powders, hair brushes and combs, shaving, nail and tooth brushes, razors and strop, nail scissors, button-hook, tweezer, nail file and penknife'. A *luncheon-basket* was 'a convenient little receptacle in which gentlemen who are going out shooting

MERRIMAN

Yes, sir. Three portmanteaus, a dressing-case, two hat-boxes, and a large luncheon-basket.

ALGERNON

I am afraid I can't stay more than a week this time. 365

JACK

Merriman, order the dog-cart at once. Mr Ernest has been suddenly called back to town.

MERRIMAN

Yes, sir. *Goes back into the house*

ALGERNON

What a fearful liar you are, Jack. I have not been called back to town at all. 370

JACK

Yes, you have.

ALGERNON

I haven't heard anyone call me.

JACK

Your duty as a gentleman calls you back.

ALGERNON

My duty as a gentleman has never interfered with my pleasures in the smallest degree. 375

JACK

I can quite understand that.

ALGERNON

Well, Cecily is a darling.

JACK

You are not to talk of Miss Cardew like that. I don't like it.

ALGERNON

Well, I don't like your clothes. You look perfectly ridiculous in them. Why on earth don't you go up and change? It is 380

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for the day, or artists who wish to sketch, can carry their luncheon with them' (*Cassell's Domestic Dictionary*, n.d.). See Appendix I for the episode in the MS draft in which Gribby the solicitor serves a writ of attachment on Algernon/Ernest for debt.

364 *large* (om. PR, HTC)

365 In HTC Algernon '*Looks after* CECILY'.

366 *dog-cart* 'This carriage, now extensively in use where rapidity of transit rather than the conveyance of goods is the main object, derives its name from the fact that it was originally adapted as a lightly-made sporting vehicle with a box for carrying pointers' (*Cassell's Domestic Dictionary*).

369-76 *What . . . that* (om. HTC, etc.) Added to WD.

perfectly childish to be in deep mourning for a man who is actually staying for a whole week in your house as a guest. I call it grotesque.

JACK

You are certainly not staying with me for a whole week as a guest or anything else. You have got to leave—by the four-five train. 385

ALGERNON

I certainly won't leave you so long as you are in mourning. It would be most unfriendly. If I were in mourning you would stay with me, I suppose. I should think it very unkind if you didn't. 390

JACK

Well, will you go if I change my clothes?

ALGERNON

Yes, if you are not too long. I never saw anybody take so long to dress, and with such little result.

JACK

Well, at any rate, that is better than being always overdressed as you are. 395

ALGERNON

If I am occasionally a little over-dressed, I make up for it by being always immensely over-educated.

JACK

Your vanity is ridiculous, your conduct an outrage, and your presence in my garden utterly absurd. However, you have got to catch the four-five, and I hope you will have a pleasant journey back to town. This Bunburying, as you call it, has not been a great success for you. *Goes into the house* 400

ALGERNON

I think it has been a great success. I'm in love with Cecily, and that is everything.

382, 384 *a whole week* 1899, HTC (a week PR, HTC<sub>1</sub>, LC, etc.) Altered by Wilde in proof.

391–402 *Well . . . for you* (om. HTC) Only ll. 391–3 appear LC and earlier texts.

396–7 Cf. Lord Henry Wotton's description of Lord Grotrian: 'He atones for being occasionally somewhat overdressed, by being always absolutely over-educated. He is a very modern type' (*Dorian Gray*, ed. Murray, p. 182/CW, p. 138). The epigram also appeared in 'Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young'.

403–6 See Appendix IV, p. 163–4.

*Enter CECILY at the back of the garden. She picks up the can and begins to water the flowers*

But I must see her before I go, and make arrangements for another Bunbury. Ah, there she is. 405

CECILY

Oh, I merely came back to water the roses. I thought you were with Uncle Jack.

ALGERNON

He's gone to order the dog-cart for me.

CECILY

Oh, is he going to take you for a nice drive? 410

ALGERNON

He's going to send me away.

CECILY

Then have we got to part?

ALGERNON

I am afraid so. It's a very painful parting.

CECILY

It is always painful to part from people whom one has known for a very brief space of time. The absence of old friends one can endure with equanimity. But even a momentary separation from anyone to whom one has just been introduced is almost unbearable. 415

ALGERNON

Thank you.

*Enter MERRIMAN*

MERRIMAN

The dog-cart is at the door, sir. 420

*ALGERNON looks appealingly at CECILY*

CECILY

It can wait, Merriman—for—five minutes.

407 See Appendix IV, pp. 164–5.

415–18 *The absence . . . unbearable* 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub>, etc. (om. HTC only) Algernon's 'Thank you' is added in HTC<sub>1</sub>.

MERRIMAN

Yes, miss.

*Exit* MERRIMAN

ALGERNON

I hope, Cecily, I shall not offend you if I state quite frankly and openly that you seem to me to be in every way the visible personification of absolute perfection.

425

CECILY

I think your frankness does you great credit, Ernest. If you will allow me I will copy your remarks into my diary.

*Goes over to table and begins writing in diary*

ALGERNON

Do you really keep a diary? I'd give anything to look at it. May I?

CECILY

Oh no. (*Puts her hand over it*) You see, it is simply a very young girl's record of her own thoughts and impressions, and consequently meant for publication. When it appears in volume form I hope you will order a copy. But pray, Ernest, don't stop. I delight in taking down from dictation. I have reached 'absolute perfection'. You can go on. I am quite ready for more.

430

435

ALGERNON (*Somewhat taken aback*)

Ahem! Ahem!

CECILY

Oh, don't cough, Ernest. When one is dictating one should speak fluently and not cough. Besides, I don't know how to spell a cough.

*Writes as* ALGERNON *speaks*

440

ALGERNON (*Speaking very rapidly*)

Cecily, ever since I first looked upon your wonderful and incomparable beauty, I have dared to love you wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly.

CECILY

I don't think that you should tell me that you love me

432-3 *When it appears . . . copy* 1899, HTC (om. HTC1, etc.) Added to WD.

439-40 *Besides, I don't know how to spell a cough* 1899, HTC, Arents III, MS (om. HTC1, LC)

In the MS draft Cecily adds 'I know it is done by realistic novelists who write in horrid dialect, but I don't think it ever looks quite nice on a page'. In a review of G. Manville Fenn's *The Master of Ceremonies* (1886) Wilde had rebuked the novelist for trying to convey phonetically 'the impression of a lady coughing' (*Pall Mall Gazette*, 16 September 1886: *Reviews*, pp. 82-3). For LC's version of the dictation sequence (ll. 439-47 of the present edition) see Appendix II.

wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly. Hopelessly doesn't seem to make much sense, does it? 445

ALGERNON

Cecily!

*Enter MERRIMAN*

MERRIMAN

The dog-cart is waiting, sir.

ALGERNON

Tell it to come round next week, at the same hour.

MERRIMAN (*Looks at CECILY, who makes no sign*)

Yes, sir. MERRIMAN *retires* 450

CECILY

Uncle Jack would be very much annoyed if he knew you were staying on till next week, at the same hour.

ALGERNON

Oh, I don't care about Jack. I don't care for anybody in the whole world but you. I love you, Cecily. You will marry me, won't you? 455

CECILY

You silly boy! Of course. Why, we have been engaged for the last three months.

ALGERNON

For the last three months?

CECILY

Yes, it will be exactly three months on Thursday.

ALGERNON

But how did we become engaged? 460

CECILY

Well, ever since dear Uncle Jack first confessed to us that he had a younger brother who was very wicked and bad, you of course have formed the chief topic of conversation between myself and Miss Prism. And of course a man who is much talked about is always very attractive. One feels there must be something in him after all. I daresay it was foolish of me, but I fell in love with you, Ernest. 465

ALGERNON

Darling! And when was the engagement actually settled?

453 *Oh, I don't care about Jack* Alexander's s.d. shows that Algernon is getting bolder: he '*leans across table and takes CECILY's hands*'.

CECILY

On the 14th of February last. Worn out by your entire  
 ignorance of my existence, I determined to end the matter 470  
 one way or the other, and after a long struggle with myself I  
 accepted you under this dear old tree here. The next day I  
 bought this little ring in your name, and this is the little  
 bangle with the true lovers' knot I promised you always to  
 wear. 475

ALGERNON

Did I give you this? It's very pretty, isn't it?

CECILY

Yes, you've wonderfully good taste, Ernest. It's the excuse I've  
 always given for your leading such a bad life. And this is the  
 box in which I keep all your dear letters.

*Kneels at table, opens box, and produces letters  
 tied up with blue ribbon*

ALGERNON

My letters! But my own sweet Cecily, I have never written 480  
 you any letters.

CECILY

You need hardly remind me of that, Ernest. I remember  
 only too well that I was forced to write your letters for you. I wrote  
 always three times a week, and sometimes oftener.

ALGERNON

Oh, do let me read them, Cecily! 485

CECILY

Oh, I couldn't possibly. They would make you far too  
 conceited. (*Replaces box*) 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. 490

ALGERNON

But was our engagement ever broken off?

CECILY

Of course it was. On the 22nd of last March. You can see  
 the entry if you like. (*Shows diary*) 'To-day I broke off my

469 February 1899, Arents III, MS (April PR, WD etc.).

472 under this dear old tree here 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub> (om. HTC; one evening in the garden LC, Arents III, MS) Cf. the opening s.d. of the act.

487-502 The three . . . was out 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub>, etc. (om. HTC).

engagement with Ernest. I feel it is better to do so. The weather still continues charming? 495

ALGERNON

But why on earth did you break it off? What had I done? I had done nothing at all. Cecily, I am very much hurt indeed to hear you broke it off. Particularly when the weather was so charming.

CECILY

It would hardly have been a really serious engagement if it hadn't been broken off at least once. But I forgave you before the week was out. 500

ALGERNON (*Crossing to her, and kneeling*)

What a perfect angel you are, Cecily.

CECILY

You dear romantic boy. (*He kisses her, she puts her fingers through his hair*) I hope your hair curls naturally, does it? 505

ALGERNON

Yes, darling, with a little help from others.

CECILY

I am so glad.

ALGERNON

You'll never break off our engagement again, Cecily?

CECILY

I don't think I could break it off now that I have actually met you. Besides, of course, there is the question of your name. 510

ALGERNON (*Nervously*)

Yes, of course.

CECILY

You must not laugh at me, darling, but it had always been a girlish dream of mine to love some one whose name was Ernest. (*ALGERNON rises, CECILY also*) There is something in that name that seems to inspire absolute confidence. I pity any poor married woman whose husband is not called Ernest. 515

ALGERNON

But, my dear child, do you mean to say you could not love me if I had some other name? 520

519 *child* 1899, HTC1, etc. (Cecily HTC only)



CECILY

But what name?

ALGERNON

Oh, any name you like—Algernon—for instance—

CECILY

But I don't like the name of Algernon.

ALGERNON

Well, my own dear, sweet, loving little darling, I really can't see why you should object to the name of Algernon. It is not at all a bad name. In fact, it is rather an aristocratic name. Half of the chaps who get into the Bankruptcy Court are called Algernon. But seriously, Cecily—(*Moving to her*)—if my name was Algy, couldn't you love me? 525

CECILY (*Rising*)

I might respect you, Ernest, I might admire your character, but I fear that I should not be able to give you my undivided attention. 530

ALGERNON

Ahem! Cecily! (*Picking up hat*) Your Rector here is, I suppose, thoroughly experienced in the practice of all the rites and ceremonials of the Church? 535

CECILY

Oh yes. Dr Chasuble is a most learned man. He has never written a single book, so you can imagine how much he knows.

ALGERNON

I must see him at once on a most important christening—I mean on most important business. 540

CECILY

Oh!

ALGERNON

I shan't be away more than half an hour.

527–8 *Half of the chaps . . . Algernon* 1899 (Half the chaps . . . Algernon HTC; om. HTC<sub>1</sub>) In the MS draft, Arents III, LC and OCT 'In fact it is rather an Aristocratic name' is followed by a speech for Cecily: 'I fear it must be. I have often come across it in the newspapers in connection with rather painful cases. Cases that judges and magistrates have had to decide unfairly.'

541–7 *Oh! . . . twenty minutes?* 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub>, LC (om. HTC) The passage replaces a longer one in Arents III and the MS draft, where Cecily assumes that Algernon is going to make arrangements for their wedding. ('Marriage is a very serious thing. One has to order a lot of dresses when one's going to get married!')

CECILY

Considering that we have been engaged since February the 14th, and that I only met you today for the first time, I think it is rather hard that you should leave me for so long a period as half an hour. Couldn't you make it twenty minutes? 545

ALGERNON

I'll be back in no time.

*Kisses her and rushes down the garden*

CECILY

What an impetuous boy he is! I like his hair so much. I must enter his proposal in my diary. 550

*Enter MERRIMAN*

MERRIMAN

A Miss Fairfax has just called to see Mr Worthing. On very important business Miss Fairfax states.

CECILY

Isn't Mr Worthing in his library?

MERRIMAN

Mr Worthing went over in the direction of the Rectory some time ago. 555

CECILY

Pray ask the lady to come out here; Mr Worthing is sure to be back soon. And you can bring tea.

MERRIMAN

Yes, miss.

*Goes out*

CECILY

Miss Fairfax! I suppose one of the many good elderly women who are associated with Uncle Jack in some of his philanthropic work in London. I don't quite like women who are interested in philanthropic work. I think it is so forward of them. 560

*Enter MERRIMAN*

MERRIMAN

Miss Fairfax.

*Enter GWENDOLEN. Exit MERRIMAN*

543 *February* (April PR only)

549 *boy* (fellow HTC only)

CECILY (*Advancing to meet her*)

Pray let me introduce myself to you. My name is Cecily Cardew. 565

GWENDOLEN

Cecily Cardew? (*Moving to her and shaking hands*) What a very sweet name! Something tells me that we are going to be great friends. I like you already more than I can say. My first impressions of people are never wrong. 570

CECILY

How nice of you to like me so much after we have known each other such a comparatively short time. Pray sit down.

GWENDOLEN (*Still standing up*)

I may call you Cecily, may I not?

CECILY

With pleasure!

GWENDOLEN

And you will always call me Gwendolen, won't you? 575

CECILY

If you wish.

GWENDOLEN

Then that is all quite settled, is it not?

CECILY

I hope so.

*A pause. They both sit down together*

GWENDOLEN

Perhaps this might be a favourable opportunity for my mentioning who I am. My father is Lord Bracknell. You have never heard of papa, I suppose? 580

CECILY

I don't think so.

GWENDOLEN

Outside the family circle, papa, I am glad to say, is entirely unknown. I think that is quite as it should be. The home seems to me to be the proper sphere for the man. And certainly once a man begins to neglect his domestic duties he becomes painfully effeminate, does he not? And I don't like that. It makes men so very attractive. Cecily, mamma, whose views on education are remarkably strict, has brought me up to be extremely short-sighted; it is part of 590

585-8 *And certainly . . . attractive* (om. HTC)—added by Wilde to the Arents III typescript.

her system; so do you mind my looking at you through my glasses?

CECILY

Oh! not at all, Gwendolen. I am very fond of being looked at.

GWENDOLEN (*After examining CECILY carefully through a lorgnette*)

You are here on a short visit I suppose? 595

CECILY

Oh no! I live here.

GWENDOLEN (*Severely*)

Really? Your mother, no doubt, or some female relative of advanced years, resides here also?

CECILY

Oh no! I have no mother, nor, in fact, any relations.

GWENDOLEN

Indeed? 600

CECILY

My dear guardian, with the assistance of Miss Prism, has the arduous task of looking after me.

GWENDOLEN

Your guardian?

CECILY

Yes, I am Mr Worthing's ward.

GWENDOLEN

Oh! It is strange he never mentioned to me that he had a ward. How secretive of him! He grows more interesting hourly. I am not sure, however, that the news inspires me with feelings of unmixed delight. (*Rising and going to her*) I am very fond of you, Cecily; I have liked you ever since I met you! But I am bound to state that now that I know that you are Mr Worthing's ward, I cannot help expressing a wish you were—well just a little older than you seem to be—and not quite so very alluring in appearance. In fact, if I may speak candidly— 605

CECILY

Pray do! I think that whenever one has anything unpleasant to say, one should always be quite candid. 615

GWENDOLEN

Well, to speak with perfect candour, Cecily, I wish that

you were fully forty-two, and more than usually plain for your age. Ernest has a strong upright nature. He is the very soul of truth and honour. Disloyalty would be as impossible to him as deception. But even men of the noblest possible moral character are extremely susceptible to the influence of the physical charms of others. Modern, no less than Ancient History, supplies us with many most painful examples of what I refer to. If it were not so, indeed, History would be quite unreadable.

CECILY

I beg your pardon, Gwendolen, did you say Ernest?

GWENDOLEN

Yes.

CECILY

Oh, but it is not Mr Ernest Worthing who is my guardian.

It is his brother—his elder brother.

GWENDOLEN (*Sitting down again*)

Ernest never mentioned to me that he had a brother.

CECILY

I am sorry to say they have not been on good terms for a long time.

GWENDOLEN

Ah! that accounts for it. And now that I think of it I have never heard any man mention his brother. The subject seems distasteful to most men. Cecily, you have lifted a load from my mind. I was growing almost anxious. It would have been terrible if any cloud had come across a friendship like ours, would it not? Of course you are quite, quite sure that it is not Mr Ernest Worthing who is your guardian?

618 *forty-two* (thirty-five HTC, etc.) Altered in WD.

620-1 *Disloyalty . . . deception* (om. HTC, etc.) Added to WD.

623-6 *Modern . . . unreadable* (om. HTC, LC) The MS draft and the Arents III typescript differ:

The prominent facts of both English and French history, ancient and modern, seem to me to point entirely to that conclusion—and, high-principled though Ernest is, and I know no one whose principles are so remarkably high and varied, I see no reason why he should be an exception to what my researches have told me is undoubtedly the general rule.

(Wilde struck this out in the Arents typescript.)

636-9 *Cecily . . . not?* 1899, HTC1, etc. (om. HTC only)

CECILY

Quite sure. (*A pause*) In fact, I am going to be his.

GWENDOLEN (*Enquiringly*)

I beg your pardon?

CECILY (*Rather shy and confidingly*)

Dearest Gwendolen, there is no reason why I should make a secret of it to you. Our little county newspaper is sure to chronicle the fact next week. Mr Ernest Worthing and I are engaged to be married. 645

GWENDOLEN (*Quite politely, rising*)

My darling Cecily, I think there must be some slight error. Mr Ernest Worthing is engaged to me. The announcement will appear in the *Morning Post* on Saturday at the latest. 650

CECILY (*Very politely, rising*)

I am afraid you must be under some misconception. Ernest proposed to me exactly ten minutes ago. *Shows diary*

GWENDOLEN (*Examines diary through her lorgnette carefully*)

It is certainly very curious, for he asked me to be his wife yesterday afternoon at 5.30. If you would care to verify the incident, pray do so. (*Produces diary of her own*) I never travel without my diary. One should always have something sensational to read in the train. I am so sorry, dear Cecily, if it is any disappointment to you, but I am afraid I have the prior claim. 655

CECILY

It would distress me more than I can tell you, dear Gwendolen, if it caused you any mental or physical anguish, but I feel bound to point out that since Ernest proposed to you he clearly has changed his mind. 660

GWENDOLEN (*Meditatively*)

If the poor fellow has been entrapped into any foolish

650 *Morning Post* For many years this, rather than the more expensive (*3d.* as against *1d.*) and austere *Times*, was the chief source of fashionable gossip, and the proper place to announce engagements and marriages. Cf. *An Ideal Husband*, where Lord Goring insists that he never reads *The Times*: 'I only read *The Morning Post*. All that one should know about modern life is where the Duchesses are; anything else is quite demoralizing' (*An Ideal Husband*, p. 198/CW, p. 538). In the MS draft's version of her Act I interview with Jack, Lady Bracknell insists that the *Morning Post* 'is the only document of our time from which the history of the English people in the XIXth century could be written with any regard to decency'.

656-7 *One should . . . in the train* 1899, HTC1, etc. (om. HTC only: earlier texts read 'a train') In HTC Gwendolen moves down right.

660-79 Alexander's s. d. show that this sequence was planned more or less symmetrically, with

promise I shall consider it my duty to rescue him at once, and with a firm hand. 665

CECILY (*Thoughtfully and sadly*)

Whatever unfortunate entanglement my dear boy may have got into, I will never reproach him with it after we are married.

GWENDOLEN

Do you allude to me, Miss Cardew, as an entanglement? 670  
You are presumptuous. On an occasion of this kind it becomes more than a moral duty to speak one's mind. It becomes a pleasure.

CECILY

Do you suggest, Miss Fairfax, that I entrapped Ernest into an engagement? How dare you? This is no time for wearing the shallow mask of manners. When I see a spade I call it a spade. 675

GWENDOLEN (*Satirically*)

I am glad to say that I have never seen a spade. It is obvious that our social spheres have been widely different.

*Enter MERRIMAN, followed by the FOOTMAN. He carries a salver, table cloth, and plate stand. CECILY is about to retort. The presence of the servants exercises a restraining influence, under which both girls chafe*

MERRIMAN

Shall I lay tea here as usual, miss? 680

CECILY (*Sternly, in a calm voice*)

Yes, as usual.

*MERRIMAN begins to clear table and lay cloth. A long pause.*

*CECILY and GWENDOLEN glare at each other*

GWENDOLEN

Are there many interesting walks in the vicinity, Miss Cardew?

---

Gwendolen moving right of centre on l. 670 and Cecily left of centre on her reply. Both are well down-stage.

682-8 *Are there . . . in town?* (om, HTC, LC) Added to WD. The earlier versions set this act indoors, and provide an appropriate exchange:

GWENDOLEN (*Looking round*)

Charming room this is, of yours, Miss Cardew.

CECILY

I am so glad you like it, Miss Fairfax.

CECILY

Oh! Yes! a great many. From the top of one of the hills quite close one can see five counties.

685

GWENDOLEN

Five counties! I don't think I should like that. I hate crowds.

CECILY (*Sweetly*)

I suppose that is why you live in town?

GWENDOLEN *bites her lip, and beats her foot nervously with her parasol*

GWENDOLEN (*Looking round*)

Quite a well-kept garden this is, Miss Cardew.

CECILY

So glad you like it, Miss Fairfax.

690

GWENDOLEN

I had no idea there were any flowers in the country.

CECILY

Oh, flowers are as common here, Miss Fairfax, as people are in London.

GWENDOLEN

Personally I cannot understand how anybody manages to exist in the country, if anybody who is anybody does. The country always bores me to death.

695

CECILY

Ah! This is what the newspapers call agricultural depression,

GWENDOLEN

I had no idea there was anything approaching good taste in the more remote country districts. It is quite a surprise to me.

CECILY

Ah! I am afraid you judge of the country from what one sees in the large towns, Miss Fairfax. I know most London houses are extremely vulgar.

693 After this line Alexander has Merriman re-enter '*carrying wicker cake stand containing cut bread and butter, plate of muffins, of tea cake, puts it down behind garden seat.*' This replaces a longer s.d. in the typescript (HTC<sub>1</sub>) in which a footman brings the tea things out to Merriman, making two trips to and from the house in order to do so. LC, Arents III, and the MS draft all have a simpler direction, bringing Merriman and a footman on together. French's (? 1903) has the HTC<sub>1</sub> s.d. word-for-word—which suggests that it was based on a theatre copy similar to but not identical with Alexander's.

697 *agricultural depression* From the early 1870s British agriculture suffered a severe depression, the principal causes being the increased importation of cheap foreign produce (especially cereals from North America) and the succession of bad seasons. Protectionist legislation had been removed and transport had improved. The great industrial cities were taking more and more workers from the land.



is it not? I believe the aristocracy are suffering very much from it just at present. It is almost an epidemic amongst them, I have been told. May I offer you some tea, Miss Fairfax? 700

GWENDOLEN (*With elaborate politeness*)

Thank you. (*Aside*) Detestable girl! But I require tea!

CECILY (*Sweetly*)

Sugar?

GWENDOLEN (*Superciliously*)

No, thank you. Sugar is not fashionable any more.

CECILY *looks angrily at her, takes up the tongs, and puts four lumps of sugar into the cup*

CECILY (*Severely*)

Cake or bread and butter? 705

GWENDOLEN (*In a bored manner*)

Bread and butter, please. Cake is rarely seen at the best houses nowadays.

CECILY (*Cuts a very large slice of cake, and puts it on the tray*)

Hand that to Miss Fairfax.

MERRIMAN *does so, and goes out with FOOTMAN.*

GWENDOLEN *drinks the tea and makes a grimace. Puts down cup at once, reaches out her hand to the bread and butter, looks at it, and finds it is cake. Rises in indignation*

GWENDOLEN

You have filled my tea with lumps of sugar, and though I asked most distinctly for bread and butter, you have given me cake. I am known for the gentleness of my disposition, and the extraordinary sweetness of my nature, but I warn you, Miss Cardew, you may go too far. 710

CECILY (*Rising*)

To save my poor, innocent, trusting boy from the machinations of any other girl there are no lengths to which I would not go. 715

GWENDOLEN

From the moment I saw you I distrusted you. I felt that you were false and deceitful. I am never deceived in such matters. My first impressions of people are invariably right. 720

708 See Appendix IV, p. 165.

CECILY

It seems to me, Miss Fairfax, that I am trespassing on your valuable time. No doubt you have many other calls of a similar character to make in the neighbourhood.

*Enter JACK*

GWENDOLEN (*Catching sight of him*)

Ernest! My own Ernest!

JACK

Gwendolen! Darling! *Offers to kiss her* 725

GWENDOLEN (*Drawing back*)

A moment! May I ask if you are engaged to be married to this young lady? *Points to CECILY*

JACK (*Laughing*)

To dear little Cecily! Of course not! What could have put such an idea into your pretty little head?

GWENDOLEN

Thank you. You may! *Offers her cheek* 730

CECILY (*Very sweetly*)

I knew there must be some misunderstanding, Miss Fairfax. The gentleman whose arm is at present round your waist is my dear guardian, Mr John Worthing.

GWENDOLEN

I beg your pardon?

CECILY

This is Uncle Jack. 735

GWENDOLEN (*Receding*)

Jack! Oh!

*Enter ALGERNON*

CECILY

Here is Ernest.

ALGERNON (*Goes straight over to CECILY without noticing anyone else*)

My own love! *Offers to kiss her*

CECILY (*Drawing back*)

A moment, Ernest! May I ask you—are you engaged to be married to this young lady? 740

733 *Mr John Worthing Alexander adds the s.d.: 'JACK crosses to CECILY, takes her hand and tries to stop her speaking. She disengages herself. He crosses R. to GWENDOLEN and tries to explain.'*

736 *s.d. As Algernon enters, Alexander notes that he 'throws hat on seat'.*

ALGERNON (*Looking round*)

To what young lady? Good heavens! Gwendolen!

CECILY

Yes! to good heavens, Gwendolen, I mean to Gwendolen.

ALGERNON (*Laughing*)

Of course not! What could have put such an idea into your pretty little head?

CECILY

Thank you. (*Presenting her cheek to be kissed*) You may.

745

ALGERNON *kisses her*

GWENDOLEN

I felt there was some slight error, Miss Cardew. The gentleman who is now embracing you is my cousin, Mr Algernon Moncrieff.

CECILY (*Breaking away from ALGERNON*)

Algernon Moncrieff! Oh!

*The two girls move towards each other and put their arms round each other's waists as if for protection*

CECILY

Are you called Algernon?

750

ALGERNON

I cannot deny it.

CECILY

Oh!

GWENDOLEN

Is your name really John?

JACK (*Standing rather proudly*)

I could deny it if I liked. I could deny anything if I liked. But my name certainly is John. It has been John for years.

755

CECILY (*To GWENDOLEN*)

A gross deception has been practised on both of us.

742 *Yes . . . Gwendolen* (om. HTC only)

749–85 Alexander's s.d. match the verbal patterning of this sequence with a formal arrangement on stage. The two women move together to the centre as they put their arms around one another, and the two men stand a little downstage to the left (Algernon) and right of them. As the women embrace (l. 759 s.d.), the men '*groan and walk up L. and R.*' and '*Shake fists at each other when up C.*' Jack moves to the centre for his admission that he never has had a brother (ll. 767–74).

751 *I cannot deny it* A melodramatic s.d. has been crossed out in LC: '*Flinging himself in despair on the sofa*'.

GWENDOLEN

My poor wounded Cecily!

CECILY

My sweet wronged Gwendolen!

GWENDOLEN (*Slowly and seriously*)

You will call me sister, will you not?

*They embrace.* JACK *and* ALGERNON *groan*  
*and walk up and down*

CECILY (*Rather brightly*)

There is just one question I would like to be allowed to ask my guardian. 760

GWENDOLEN

An admirable idea! Mr Worthing, there is just one question I would like to be permitted to put to you. Where is your brother Ernest? We are both engaged to be married to your brother Ernest, so it is a matter of some importance to us to know where your brother Ernest is at present. 765

JACK (*Slowly and hesitatingly*)

Gwendolen—Cecily—it is very painful for me to be forced to speak the truth. It is the first time in my life that I have ever been reduced to such a painful position, and I am really quite inexperienced in doing anything of the kind. However I will tell you quite frankly that I have no brother Ernest. I have no brother at all. I never had a brother in my life, and I certainly have not the smallest intention of ever having one in the future. 770

763–6 In the MS draft this request is followed by a duet of enquiries concerning Ernest:

CECILY

We would naturally like to learn something about Ernest's personal appearance.

GWENDOLEN

Any information regarding Ernest's income would be eagerly welcomed.

CECILY

Would the excitements of a country life be too much for Ernest?

GWENDOLEN

Could Ernest stand the quiet of a London season?

CECILY

Is Ernest physically repulsive? Let us know the worst.

GWENDOLEN

Is Ernest socially possible? Let us face facts.

This passage survived into the Arents III typescript, but was omitted in subsequent versions.

CECILY (*Surprised*)

No brother at all?

775

JACK (*Cheerily*)

None!

GWENDOLEN (*Severely*)

Had you never a brother of any kind?

JACK (*Pleasantly*)

Never. Not even of any kind.

GWENDOLEN

I am afraid it is quite clear, Cecily, that neither of us is engaged to be married to anyone.

780

CECILY

It is not a very pleasant position for a young girl suddenly to find herself in. Is it?

GWENDOLEN

Let us go into the house. They will hardly venture to come after us there.

CECILY

No, men are so cowardly, aren't they?

785

*They retire into the house with scornful looks*

JACK

This ghastly state of things is what you call Bunburying, I suppose?

ALGERNON

Yes, and a perfectly wonderful Bunbury it is. The most wonderful Bunbury I have ever had in my life.

JACK

Well, you've no right whatsoever to Bunbury here.

790

ALGERNON

That is absurd. One has a right to Bunbury anywhere one

785 s.d. Alexander's s.d. has the women 'snort' as they enter the house 'with a scornful look'. Then Jack 'hits ALGIE in chest with elbow imitating girls' snort'. In the MS draft Wilde suggests more elaborate business, which survived through the Arents III and LC typescripts: *Exeunt into garden, with scornful looks. CECILY takes a hat from the table as she passes. Each stops in front of a glass for a moment, and arranges her hair. JACK and ALGERNON look at each other for a short time. Then they turn away from each other. JACK, who looks very angry, walks up and down the room. Kicks footstool aside in a very irritated way. ALGERNON goes over to tea-table and eats some muffins after lifting up the covers of several dishes.*

In French's edition (?1903) the s.d. is cruder than Alexander's:

*Exeunt into house with scornful look, R.; ALGY kicks JACK, and JACK returns it spitefully.*

chooses. Every serious Bunburyist knows that.

JACK

Serious Bunburyist! Good heavens!

ALGERNON

Well, one must be serious about something, if one wants to have any amusement in life. I happen to be serious about Bunburying. What on earth you are serious about I haven't got the remotest idea. About everything, I should fancy. You have such an absolutely trivial nature. 795

JACK

Well, the only small satisfaction I have in the whole of this wretched business is that your friend Bunbury is quite exploded. You won't be able to run down to the country quite so often as you used to do, dear Algy. And a very good thing too. 800

ALGERNON

Your brother is a little off colour, isn't he, dear Jack? You won't be able to disappear to London quite so frequently as your wicked custom was. And not a bad thing either. 805

JACK

As for your conduct towards Miss Cardew, I must say that your taking in a sweet, simple, innocent girl like that is quite inexcusable. To say nothing of the fact that she is my ward. 810

ALGERNON

I can see no possible defence at all for your deceiving a brilliant, clever, thoroughly experienced young lady like Miss Fairfax. To say nothing of the fact that she is my cousin.

JACK

I wanted to be engaged to Gwendolen, that is all. I love her. 815

ALGERNON

Well, I simply wanted to be engaged to Cecily. I adore her.

JACK

There is certainly no chance of your marrying Miss Cardew.

815-16 As Jack says 'I love her', Alexander has him place his hand on his heart. Jack imitates this action on 'I adore her'.

ALGERNON

I don't think there is much likelihood, Jack, of you and Miss Fairfax being united. 820

JACK

Well, that is no business of yours.

ALGERNON

If it was my business, I wouldn't talk about it. (*Begins to eat muffins*) It is very vulgar to talk about one's business. Only people like stockbrokers do that, and then merely at dinner parties. 825

JACK

How you can sit there, calmly eating muffins when we are in this horrible trouble, I can't make out. You seem to me to be perfectly heartless.

ALGERNON

Well, I can't eat muffins in an agitated manner. The butter would probably get on my cuffs. One should always eat muffins quite calmly. It is the only way to eat them. 830

JACK

I say it's perfectly heartless your eating muffins at all, under the circumstances.

ALGERNON

When I am in trouble, eating is the only thing that consoles me. Indeed, when I am in really great trouble, as anyone who knows me intimately will tell you, I refuse everything except food and drink. At the present moment I am eating muffins because I am unhappy. Besides, I am particularly fond of muffins. 835  
*Rising* 840

822–6 *Well . . . dinner parties* This exchange appears in every text from the MS draft to the HTC<sub>1</sub> typescript, where Alexander marks it for omission. French's (?1903) follows him in this, but 1899 and other subsequent editions include it. (PR and HTC have 'were' for 'was' in l. 823.) On minding one's own business, cf. *Lady Windermere's Fan*, Act III:

LORD WINDERMERE

Well, that is no business of yours, is it, Cecil?

CECIL GRAHAM

None! That is why it interests me. My own business always bores me to death. I prefer other people's.

(*Lady Windermere's Fan*, pp. 120–1/CW, p. 414).

827 *you can* LC, Arents III (can you 1899, HTC, MS) Ross (1908) follows 1899: French's (?1903) and the current French's edition print these words as they appear in LC.

JACK (*Rising*)

Well, that is no reason why you should eat them all in that greedy way, *Takes muffins from ALGERNON*

ALGERNON (*Offering tea-cake*)

I wish you would have tea-cake instead. I don't like tea-cake.

JACK

Good heavens! I suppose a man may eat his own muffins in his own garden. 845

ALGERNON

But you have just said it was perfectly heartless to eat muffins.

JACK

I said it was perfectly heartless of you, under the circumstances. That is a very different thing. 850

ALGERNON

That may be, but the muffins are the same. *He seizes the muffin-dish from JACK*

JACK

Algy, I wish to goodness you would go.

ALGERNON

You can't possibly ask me to go without having some dinner. It's absurd. I never go without my dinner. No one ever does, except vegetarians and people like that. Besides I have just made arrangements with Dr Chasuble to be christened at a quarter to six under the name of Ernest. 855

JACK

My dear fellow, the sooner you give up that nonsense the better. I made arrangements this morning with Dr Chasuble to be christened myself at 5.30, and I naturally will take the name of Ernest. Gwendolen would wish it. We can't both be christened Ernest. It's absurd. Besides, I have a perfect right to be christened if I like. There is no evidence at all that I ever have been christened by anybody. I should think it extremely probable I never was, and so does Dr Chasuble. It is 860  
865

853 *You can't . . . without having some dinner* 1899, HTC1, etc. (I can't go yet, I haven't had my dinner HTC)

854-5 *No one . . . like that* 1899, HTC1, etc. (om. HTC) In the MS draft the sentence ends: 'and people who have got fads' (deleted in Arents III)

864-5 *I should think . . . Dr Chasuble* 1899, HTC1, etc. (om. HTC)



entirely different in your case. You have been christened already.

ALGERNON

Yes, but I have not been christened for years.

JACK

Yes, but you have been christened. That is the important thing.

870

ALGERNON

Quite so. So I know my constitution can stand it. If you are not quite sure about your ever having been christened, I must say I think it rather dangerous your venturing on it now. It might make you very unwell. You can hardly have forgotten that someone very closely connected with you was very nearly carried off this week in Paris by a severe chill.

875

JACK

Yes, but you said yourself that a severe chill was not hereditary.

ALGERNON

It usen't to be, I know—but I daresay it is now. Science is always making wonderful improvements in things.

880

JACK (*Picking up the muffin-dish*)

Oh, that is nonsense; you are always talking nonsense.

ALGERNON

Jack, you are at the muffins again! I wish you wouldn't. There are only two left. (*Takes them*) I told you I was particularly fond of muffins.

885

JACK

But I hate tea-cake.

ALGERNON

Why on earth then do you allow tea-cake to be served up for your guests? What ideas you have of hospitality!

878–82 *Yes, but . . . nonsense* Marked for omission by Alexander. In HTC<sub>1</sub> the first of these speeches has the form common to LC, Arents III, and the MS draft: 'Yes, but you said yourself that it was not hereditary or anything of the kind'.

882 The MS draft at this point moves to an ending for the scene shorter than any subsequent versions. This was added to by Wilde in manuscript alterations to the typescript of Arents III, the whole reproduced in LC and finally abandoned in HTC<sub>1</sub>. The ending of the act as it appears in LC is printed in Appendix III.

884 *There are only two left* 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub> (om. HTC) 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub> (om. HTC)

JACK

Algernon! I have already told you to go. I don't want you here. Why don't you go!

890

ALGERNON

I haven't quite finished my tea yet! and there is still one muffin left.

JACK *groans, and sinks into a chair.* ALGERNON *still continues eating*

*Act-Drop*

**Act III**

*Scene: Morning-room at the Manor House. GWENDOLEN and CECILY are at the window, looking out into the garden.*

GWENDOLEN

The fact that they did not follow us at once into the house, as anyone else would have done, seems to me to show that they have some sense of shame left.

CECILY

They have been eating muffins. That looks like repentance.

5

GWENDOLEN (*After a pause*)

They don't seem to notice us at all. Couldn't you cough?

CECILY

But I haven't got a cough.

GWENDOLEN

They're looking at us. What effrontery!

CECILY

They're approaching. That's very forward of them.

GWENDOLEN

Let us preserve a dignified silence.

10

892 See Appendix IV, pp. 166.

1 s.d. *Morning-room* The morning-room was quite distinct from the more formal drawing-room, showpiece of the house and special province of its lady. *Etiquette of Good Society* suggests that it should be 'cheerful and sunshiny, and wear a cosy, domestic look'. Formal calls were made in the afternoon, and visitors would be received in the drawing-room: morning calls were customary only between intimate friends, who might be welcomed in the 'general tidy *déshabille*' of the morning-room.

7 Alexander notes '*Both cough.* GWEN *first then* CECILY'.

9 Alexander has the women '*turn in and come down L.*

CECILY

Certainly. It's the only thing to do now.

*Enter JACK followed by ALGERNON. They whistle some dreadful popular air from a British Opera*

GWENDOLEN

This dignified silence seems to produce an unpleasant effect.

CECILY

A most distasteful one.

GWENDOLEN

But we will not be the first to speak. 15

CECILY

Certainly not.

GWENDOLEN

Mr Worthing, I have something very particular to ask you. Much depends on your reply.

CECILY

Gwendolen, your common sense is invaluable. Mr Moncrieff, kindly answer me the following question. Why did you pretend to be my guardian's brother? 20

ALGERNON

In order that I might have an opportunity of meeting you.

CECILY (*To GWENDOLEN*)

That certainly seems a satisfactory explanation, does it not?

GWENDOLEN

Yes, dear, if you can believe him. 25

CECILY

I don't. But that does not affect the wonderful beauty of his answer.

GWENDOLEN

True. In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity is the vital thing. Mr Worthing, what explanation can you offer to

11 s.d. In Alexander's s.d. the men '*enter R.C. arm in arm. They whistle out of tune*'. LC and HTC provide no clue as to which dreadful popular air from a British opera Wilde had in mind. In Arents IV and the MS draft the men are already on stage when the curtain rises.

17 Alexander has the s.d. '*crossing CECILY and going to JACK*'.

19 *Gwendolen . . . invaluable* 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub>, etc. (om. HTC only) Alexander has her move to Algernon to ask this question: both men are sitting on a settee at the right.

23-4 In HTC both girls '*arm in arm move a little L. to C.*'

25-9 *Yes, dear . . . the vital thing* 1899, HTC, etc. (om. HTC<sub>1</sub> only)

me for pretending to have a brother? Was it in order that you might have an opportunity of coming up to town to see me as often as possible? 30

JACK

Can you doubt it, Miss Fairfax?

GWENDOLEN

I have the gravest doubts upon the subject. But I intend to crush them. This is not the moment for German scepticism. (*Moving to CECILY*) Their explanations appear to be quite satisfactory, especially Mr Worthing's. That seems to me to have the stamp of truth upon it. 35

CECILY

I am more than content with what Mr Moncrieff said. His voice alone inspires one with absolute credulity. 40

GWENDOLEN

Then you think we should forgive them?

CECILY

Yes. I mean no.

GWENDOLEN

True! I had forgotten. There are principles at stake that one cannot surrender. Which of us should tell them? The task is not a pleasant one. 45

CECILY

Could we not both speak at the same time?

33 Wilde deleted a long direction in WD: Alexander retains only its first instruction (up to 'movement'):

JACK and ALGY both move together like Siamese twins in every movement until both say 'christened this afternoon'. First to front of sofa, then fold hands together, then raise eyes to ceiling, then sit on sofa, unfold hands, lean back, tilting up legs with both feet off ground, then twitch trousers above knee à la dude, so as not to crease them, then both feet on ground, fold hands together, on knee and look perfectly unconcerned.

No subsequent text has this s.d. except French's (?1903), where it appears in full. The British Theatre Museum prompt-book based on that edition cuts all but the first sentence.

34–8 Alexander omits all but the fourth sentence of this speech ('Their explanations appear to be quite satisfactory') and has the girls 'go left by turning in arm in arm'. The HTC<sub>1</sub> and WD typescripts omit only the first sentence: LC, Arents IV, and the MS draft read 'This is no time for scepticism'. 'German' was added by Wilde to the proofs of 1899. The reference is probably to the objective, scientific spirit associated with German academic research (particularly into the historical background and texts of the Bible and Classical literature) rather than to German philosophy.

39–40 *I am . . . credulity* (om. HTC only)

GWENDOLEN

An excellent idea! I nearly always speak at the same time as other people. Will you take the time from me?

CECILY

Certainly. GWENDOLEN *beats time with uplifted finger*

GWENDOLEN *and* CECILY (*Speaking together*)

Your Christian names are still an insuperable barrier. That is all! 50

JACK *and* ALGERNON (*Speaking together*)

Our Christian names! Is that all? But we are going to be christened this afternoon.

GWENDOLEN (*To* JACK)

For my sake you are prepared to do this terrible thing?

JACK

I am! 55

CECILY (*To* ALGERNON)

To please me you are ready to face this fearful ordeal?

ALGERNON

I am!

GWENDOLEN

How absurd to talk of the equality of the sexes! Where questions of self-sacrifice are concerned, men are infinitely beyond us. 60

JACK

We are! (*Clasps hands with* ALGERNON)

50–65 In the MS draft this passage is longer, and the effect of a ‘duet’ even more accentuated. At one point the women divide a sentence between them:

CECILY

But as it is—

GWENDOLEN

We see no possible hope

CECILY

of reconciliation

GWENDOLEN

of any kind.

This passage was included in the Arents IV typescript, but deleted by Wilde.

52–3 Alexander has Jack beat time with his hat. HTC inserts ‘Ugh!’ after ‘Is that all?’ Wilde deleted this in WD.

55, 57 As they make their declarations, Jack and Algernon rise and approach their fiancées, so that the couples are downstage, right (Jack and Gwendolen) and half-way upstage, left centre (Algernon and Cecily).

61 *We are!* This first appears as an addition to WD.

CECILY

They have moments of physical courage of which we women know absolutely nothing.

GWENDOLEN (*To JACK*)

Darling!

ALGERNON (*To CECILY*)

Darling!

*They fall into each other's arms* 65

*Enter MERRIMAN. When he enters he coughs loudly, seeing the situation*

MERRIMAN

Ahem! Ahem! Lady Bracknell!

JACK

Good heavens!

*Enter LADY BRACKNELL. The couples separate, in alarm. Exit*

MERRIMAN

LADY BRACKNELL

Gwendolen! What does this mean?

GWENDOLEN

Merely that I am engaged to be married to Mr Worthing, mamma. 70

LADY BRACKNELL

Come here. Sit down. Sit down immediately. Hesitation of any kind is a sign of mental decay in the young, of physical weakness in the old. (*Turns to JACK*) Apprised, sir, of my daughter's sudden flight by her trusty maid, whose confidence I purchased by means of a small coin, I followed her at once 75  
by a luggage train. Her unhappy father is, I am glad to say, under the impression that she is attending a more than usually lengthy lecture by the University Extension Scheme on the Influence of a permanent income on Thought. I do

71–3 *Come here . . . Apprised, sir* This passage underwent a good deal of revision. The 1899 version is essentially that given by Alexander. (He reverses the order of Lady Bracknell's second sentence: 'a sign of physical weakness in the old, and mental decay in the young.') HTC<sub>1</sub> is shorter:

Come here at once (*Points to her to sit on sofa, R.C.*) (*Turns to JACK*) Apprised, sir . . .

The proofs of 1899 read 'Come here. Sit down at once. Sit down at once' and follow Alexander's order: 'weakness . . . mental decay'. LC and Arents IV have a protest from Gwendolen, and the MS draft includes a reference to a girl's engagement coming to her as a surprise—material used in Act I.

76–82 See Appendix IV, p. 166.

- not propose to undeceive him. Indeed I have never undeceived him on any question. I would consider it wrong. But of course, you will clearly understand that all communication between yourself and my daughter must cease immediately from this moment. On this point, as indeed on all points, I am firm. 80
- JACK  
I am engaged to be married to Gwendolen, Lady Bracknell! 85
- LADY BRACKNELL  
You are nothing of the kind, sir. And now, as regards Algernon!—  
Algernon!
- ALGERNON  
Yes, Aunt Augusta. 90
- LADY BRACKNELL  
May I ask if it is in this house that your invalid friend Mr Bunbury resides?
- ALGERNON (*Stammering*)  
Oh! No! Bunbury doesn't live here. Bunbury is somewhere else at present. In fact, Bunbury is dead.
- LADY BRACKNELL  
Dead! When did Mr Bunbury die? His death must have been extremely sudden. 95
- ALGERNON (*Airily*)  
Oh! I killed Bunbury this afternoon. I mean poor Bunbury died this afternoon.
- LADY BRACKNELL  
What did he die of?
- ALGERNON  
Bunbury? Oh, he was quite exploded. 100
- LADY BRACKNELL  
Exploded! Was he the victim of a revolutionary outrage? I was not aware that Mr Bunbury was interested in social legislation. If so, he is well punished for his morbidity.
- ALGERNON  
My dear Aunt Augusta, I mean he was found out! The

85 Alexander's notes show that by the end of this speech Lady Bracknell is centre-stage, with the couples on her right (Gwendolen and Jack) and left. In the MS draft and the Arents IV typescript Algernon and Cecily were hidden from her (but not from the audience) by a screen until the equivalent of l. 91.

97–106 See Appendix IV, pp. 166–7.

doctors found out that Bunbury could not live, that is what I mean—so Bunbury died. 105

LADY BRACKNELL

He seems to have had great confidence in the opinion of his physicians. I am glad, however, that he made up his mind at the last to some definite course of action, and acted under proper medical advice. And now that we have finally got rid of this Mr Bunbury, may I ask, Mr Worthing, who is that young person whose hand my nephew Algernon is now holding in what seems to me a peculiarly unnecessary manner? 110

JACK

That lady is Miss Cecily Cardew, my ward. 115

LADY BRACKNELL *bows coldly to CECILY*

ALGERNON

I am engaged to be married to Cecily, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL

I beg your pardon?

CECILY

Mr Moncrieff and I are engaged to be married, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL (*With a shiver, crossing to the sofa and sitting down*)

I do not know whether there is anything peculiarly exciting in the air of this particular part of Hertfordshire, but the number of engagements that go on seems to me considerably above the proper average that statistics have laid down for our guidance. I think some preliminary enquiry on my part would not be out of place. Mr Worthing, is Miss Cardew at all connected with any of the larger railway stations in London? I merely desire information. Until yesterday I had no idea that there were any families or persons whose origin was a Terminus. JACK *looks perfectly furious, but restrains himself* 120  
125

110–11 *finally* . . . *Bunbury* (buried Mr Bunbury at last HTC, LC; buried this Mr Bunbury at last Arents IV; comfortably buried Mr Bunbury at last MS) Wilde changed 'buried' to 'got rid of' in proof.

125–9 *Mr Worthing* . . . *Terminus* 1899, HTC1, etc. (Mr Worthing, who is Miss Cardew? HTC only) All earlier texts have the full version of Lady Bracknell's enquiry (reading 'I ask merely for' instead of 'I merely desire', which Wilde substituted in proof).



JACK (*In a clear, cold voice*)

Miss Cardew is the grand-daughter of the late Mr Thomas Cardew of 149, Belgrave Square, S.W.; Gervase Park, Dorking, Surrey; and the Sporran, Fifeshire, N.B. 130

LADY BRACKNELL

That sounds not unsatisfactory. Three addresses always inspire confidence, even in tradesmen. But what proof have I of their authenticity? 135

JACK

I have carefully preserved the Court Guides of the period. They are open to your inspection, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL (*Grimly*)

I have known strange errors in that publication.

JACK

Miss Cardew's family solicitors are Messrs. Markby, Markby and Markby. 140

LADY BRACKNELL

Markby, Markby and Markby? A firm of the very highest position in their profession. Indeed I am told that one of the Mr Markbys is occasionally to be seen at dinner parties. So far I am satisfied.

JACK (*Very irritably*)

How extremely kind of you, Lady Bracknell! I have also in my possession, you will be pleased to hear, certificates of Miss Cardew's birth, baptism, whooping cough, registration, vaccination, confirmation and the measles; both the German and the English variety. 145

- 132 1899 and HTC give the Scottish address as printed here: earlier texts read 'the Glen'. *N.B.* (North Britain) was commonly used for postal addresses north of the border. A conscientious Scot might insist that Fife is a kingdom, not a county, and that '-shire' is incorrect.
- 134-5 *even in tradesmen* 1899, HTC (om. HTC<sub>1</sub>, etc.) Added to WD.  
*But what proof have I of their authenticity?* 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub>, etc. (om. HTC only)
- 136-43 *I have carefully . . . dinner parties* 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub>, etc. (om. HTC only) In the MS draft Mr Markby is seen 'if not at dinner parties, at any rate at evening receptions'—a distinction used in Act I to establish the social status of Liberal Unionists. Cf. the treatment of the Solicitor in the 'Gribsby' episode from the MS draft (Appendix I) and the snobish Mrs Vane in *Dorian Gray*, chapter 5: 'Solicitors are a very respectable class, and in the country often dine with the best families' (ed. Murray, p. 63/CW, p. 59).
- 145 *How extremely kind of you* 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub>, etc. (om. HTC only) In the list following, texts before 1899 place 'registration' after 'birth'. The alteration was made by Wilde in the proofs of 1899.

LADY BRACKNELL

Ah! A life crowded with incident, I see; though perhaps 150  
 somewhat too exciting for a young girl. I am not myself in  
 favour of premature experiences. (*Rises, looks at her watch*)  
 Gwendolen! the time approaches for our departure. We  
 have not a moment to lose. As a matter of form, Mr  
 Worthing, I had better ask you if Miss Cardew has any little 155  
 fortune?

JACK

Oh! about a hundred and thirty thousand pounds in the  
 Funds. That is all. Good-bye, Lady Bracknell. So pleased to  
 have seen you.

LADY BRACKNELL (*Sitting down again*)

A moment, Mr Worthing. A hundred and thirty thousand 160  
 pounds! And in the Funds! Miss Cardew seems to me a  
 most attractive young lady, now that I look at her. Few  
 girls of the present day have any really solid qualities, any  
 of the qualities that last, and improve with time. We live, I  
 regret to say, in an age of surfaces. (*To CECILY*) Come over 165  
 here, dear. (*CECILY goes across*) Pretty child! your dress is  
 sadly simple, and your hair seems almost as Nature might  
 have left it. But we can soon alter all that. A thoroughly  
 experienced French maid produces a really marvellous result  
 in a very brief space of time. I remember recommending 170  
 one to young Lady Lancing, and after three months her own hus-  
 band did not know her.

152 In the MS draft Lady Bracknell adds:

In the life of a well-ordered and well-balanced young woman marriage should be the  
 first event of any importance, and the last. But the modern girl, as I am now only too  
 well aware, has a mania for collecting experiences. A somewhat expensive hobby. The  
 experiences of a modern girl fetch little, when they come to be valued.

160-1 *A hundred . . . Funds* Government stocks (Consolidated Funds—also known as ‘Con-  
 sols’) yielding an unspectacular but dependable income. Cf. Shaw’s *Widowers’ Houses*  
 (1892). Sartorius has been paying 7 per cent interest to Dr Trench:

It really matters nothing to me, Dr Trench, how you decide. I can easily raise the money  
 elsewhere and pay you off. Then, since you are resolved to run no risks, you can invest  
 your ten thousand pounds in Consols and get two hundred and fifty pounds a year  
 for it instead of seven hundred.

(*Plays Unpleasant*, 1931, p. 60)162-5 *Few girls . . . an age of surfaces*. 1899, HTC1, etc. (om. HTC only)

JACK (*Aside*)

And after six months nobody knew her.

LADY BRACKNELL (*Glares at JACK for a few moments. Then bends, with a practised smile, to CECILY*)

Kindly turn round, sweet child. (*CECILY turns completely round*) No, the side view is what I want. (*CECILY presents her profile*) Yes, quite as I expected. There are distinct social possibilities in your profile. The two weak points in our age are its want of principle and its want of profile. The chin a little higher, dear. Style largely depends on the way the chin is worn. They are worn very high, just at present. Algernon! 175

ALGERNON

Yes, Aunt Augusta!

LADY BRACKNELL

There are distinct social possibilities in Miss Cardew's profile.

ALGERNON

Cecily is the sweetest, dearest, prettiest girl in the whole world. And I don't care twopence about social possibilities. 185

LADY BRACKNELL

Never speak disrespectfully of Society, Algernon. Only people who can't get into it do that. (*To CECILY*) Dear child, of course you know that Algernon has nothing but his debts to depend upon. But I do not approve of mercenary marriages. 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. Well, I suppose I must give my consent. 190 195

175–80 See Appendix IV, p. 167.

179–80 *the way the chin is worn* Cf. Wilde on dress reform, in *Woman's World*, December 1887:

The fashionable English waist, also, is not merely far too small . . . but it is worn far too low down. I use the expression 'worn' advisedly, for a waist nowadays seems to be regarded as an article of apparel to be put on when and where one likes.

(*Reviews*, p. 237)

192–3 In the MS draft Lady Brancaster adds that her husband was 'one of the wealthiest commoners in England' when they married.

ALGERNON

Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL

Cecily, you may kiss me!

CECILY (*Kisses her*)

Thank you, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL

You may also address me as Aunt Augusta for the future.

CECILY

Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

200

LADY BRACKNELL

The marriage, I think, had better take place quite soon.

ALGERNON

Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

CECILY

Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL

To speak frankly, I am not in favour of long engagements. They give people the opportunity of finding out each other's character before marriage, which I think is never advisable.

205

JACK

I beg your pardon for interrupting you, Lady Bracknell, but this engagement is quite out of the question. I am Miss Cardew's guardian, and she cannot marry without my consent until she comes of age. That consent I absolutely decline to give.

210

LADY BRACKNELL

Upon what grounds may I ask? Algernon is an extremely, I may almost say an ostentatiously, eligible young man. He has nothing, but he looks everything. What more can one desire?

215

JACK

It pains me very much to have to speak frankly to you, Lady Bracknell, about your nephew, but the fact is that I

199–200 *You may . . . Aunt Augusta* 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub>, etc. (om. HTC only)

207 The MS draft contains further reflections on Lord Brancaster's habit of acquiescence ('It is the keynote of his character').

213–16 *Algernon . . . desire?* 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub>, etc. (om. HTC only) LC and earlier texts add: 'To my own knowledge he is on the list of nearly all the mothers in London'.

do not approve at all of his moral character. I suspect him  
of being untruthful. 220

ALGERNON *and* CECILY *look at him in indignant amazement*

LADY BRACKNELL

Untruthful! My nephew Algernon? Impossible! He is an  
Oxonian.

JACK

I fear there can be no possible doubt about the matter.  
This afternoon, during my temporary absence in London  
on an important question of romance, he obtained admission 225  
to my house by means of the false pretence of being my  
brother. Under an assumed name he drank, I've just been  
informed by my butler, an entire pint bottle of my Perrier-  
Jouet, Brut, '89; a wine I was specially reserving for myself. Con-  
tinuing his disgraceful deception, he succeeded in 230  
the course of the afternoon in alienating the affections  
of my only ward. He subsequently stayed to tea, and  
devoured every single muffin. And what makes his conduct  
all the more heartless is, that he was perfectly well aware  
from the first that I have no brother, that I never had a 235  
brother, and that I don't intend to have a brother, not even  
of any kind. I distinctly told him so myself yesterday  
afternoon.

LADY BRACKNELL

Ahem! Mr Worthing, after careful consideration I have  
decided entirely to overlook my nephew's conduct to you. 240

JACK

That is very generous of you, Lady Bracknell. My own  
decision, however, is unalterable. I decline to give my  
consent.

221-2 *He is an Oxonian* Added by Wilde in proof Alexander added 'He's an Oxonian' to his typescript. Algernon has been educated at Oxford.

228-9 *Perrier-Jouet, Brut, '89* ('74 champagne HTC, etc.) An unsweetened champagne bottled by Perrier-Jouet in 1889. Cf. *De Profundis*, where Wilde includes among the extravagances of his life with Douglas 'The suppers at Willis's, the special *cuvée* of Perrier-Jouet reserved always for us . . .' (*Letters*, p. 507).

232-3 *and devoured every single muffin 1899* (om. HTC only) The proof of 1899 reads 'and consumed every one of the muffins'.

238 See Appendix IV, pp. 168.

LADY BRACKNELL (*To CECILY*)

Come here, sweet child. (*CECILY goes over*) How old are you, dear?

245

CECILY

Well, I am really only eighteen, but I always admit to twenty when I go to evening parties.

LADY BRACKNELL

You are perfectly right in making some slight alteration. Indeed, no woman should ever be quite accurate about her age. It looks so calculating—(*In a meditative manner*) Eighteen, but admitting to twenty at evening parties. Well, it will not be very long before you are of age and free from the restraints of tutelage. So I don't think your guardian's consent is, after all, a matter of any importance.

250

JACK

Pray excuse me, Lady Bracknell, for interrupting you again, but it is only fair to tell you that according to the terms of her grandfather's will Miss Cardew does not come legally of age till she is thirty-five.

255

LADY BRACKNELL

That does not seem to me to be a grave objection. Thirty-five is a very attractive age. London society is full of women of the very highest birth who have, of their own free choice, remained thirty-five for years. Lady Dumbleton

260

248–51 *You are perfectly right . . . evening parties* 1899, HTC1, etc. (om. HTC only) Cf. Lord Illingworth in *A Woman of No Importance*: 'One should never trust a woman who tells one her real age. A woman who would tell one that, would tell one anything' (p. 36/CW, p. 441). Lord Goring, in *An Ideal Husband*, is described by a stage direction as '*Thirty-four, but always says he is younger*' (p. 20/CW, p. 488).

253 After 'tutelage' the MS draft adds:

And to speak frankly, I am personally strongly in favour of somewhat lengthy engagements. People have time to get rid of that demonstrative period of affection which in married people is always out of place, and indeed, I am glad to say, practically unknown nowadays in good society at any rate. There is no reason for impatience of any kind. A few more roses in the garden, and in your pretty cheeks, and you will be twenty-one, Cecily. At that period Mr Worthing will cease to have the right to exercise any tyrannical supervision over you, and your little fortune.

This was deleted from the Arents IV typescript: references elsewhere to married couples flirting (I, 246–52) and long engagements (III, 204–7) made it redundant.

258 Alexander adds an s.d. '*CECILY pinches JACK's arm*'.

262–8 *Lady Dumbleton . . . property* 1899, HTC1 (om. HTC only) After 'many years ago now' LC and earlier texts insert 'And Lady Dumbleton is very much admired in the evening' and read 'now' for 'at present' in the sentence following. The MS draft's lines on long engagements and

is an instance in point. To my own knowledge she has been thirty-five ever since she arrived at the age of forty, which was many years ago now. I see no reason why our dear Cecily should not be even still more attractive at the age you mention than she is at present. There will be a large accumulation of property. 265

CECILY

Algy, could you wait for me till I was thirty-five?

ALGERNON

Of course I could, Cecily. You know I could. 270

CECILY

Yes, I felt it instinctively, but I couldn't wait all that time. I hate waiting even five minutes for anybody. It always makes me rather cross. I am not punctual myself, I know, but I do like punctuality in others, and waiting, even to be married, is quite out of the question. 275

ALGERNON

Then what is to be done, Cecily?

CECILY

I don't know, Mr Moncrieff.

LADY BRACKNELL

My dear Mr Worthing, as Miss Cardew states positively that she cannot wait till she is thirty-five—a remark which I am bound to say seems to me to show a somewhat impatient nature—I would beg of you to reconsider your decision. 280

JACK

But my dear Lady Bracknell, the matter is entirely in your own hands. The moment you consent to my marriage with Gwendolen, I will most gladly allow your nephew to form an alliance with my ward. 285

LADY BRACKNELL (*Rising and drawing herself up*)

You must be quite aware that what you propose is out of the question.

---

flirting by married couples (see note to l. 253 above) were transposed to continue this speech in Wilde's manuscript alterations to Arents IV, but were discarded in LC.

272-5 *I hate . . . question* 1899, HTC1, etc. (om. HTC only)

277 *Mr Moncrieff* 1899, HTC (om. HTC1, etc; added in proof) Alexander marks the opening of this gulf between Algernon and Cecily by the resumed formality of her using his surname and a move in which '*she crosses ALGIE and goes up L. ALGIE is up L.C. they talk across table*'.

JACK

Then a passionate celibacy is all that any of us can look forward to.

290

LADY BRACKNELL

That is not the destiny I propose for Gwendolen. Algernon, of course, can choose for himself. (*Pulls out her watch*) Come, dear; (*GWENDOLEN rises*) we have already missed five, if not six, trains. To miss any more might expose us to comment on the platform.

295

*Enter DR CHASUBLE*

CHASUBLE

Everything is quite ready for the christenings.

LADY BRACKNELL

The christenings, sir! Is not that somewhat premature?

CHASUBLE (*Looking rather puzzled, and pointing to JACK and ALGERNON*)

Both these gentlemen have expressed a desire for immediate baptism.

LADY BRACKNELL

At their age? The idea is grotesque and irreligious! Algernon, I forbid you to be baptized. I will not hear of such excesses. Lord Bracknell would be highly displeased if he learned that that was the way in which you wasted your time and money.

300

289–90 *a passionate celibacy* 1899, HTC (a passionate and careful celibacy WD, HTC<sub>1</sub>) Wilde struck out ‘and careful’ in proof: he may have felt that it was ambiguous, or that it made the line too ‘melodramatic’.

290 Alexander’s s.d. carries the division between the lovers a stage further: ‘*JACK and ALGIE turn arm in arm and go up to French windows. The girls turn their backs and sob*’. At this point the MS draft has a sequence in which Cecily makes one more appeal to Jack, rebuking him for being selfish. He replies that she obviously doesn’t know the meaning of the word: ‘A selfish person is surely one who seeks to keep his joys and sorrows to himself. I am not like that. When I am unhappy, as I am now, I desire everyone else to share in my unhappiness’. Cecily asks Gwendolen to appeal to Jack, but she tells him that from admiring him she has now progressed to adoring him: ‘It requires merely physical courage to sacrifice oneself. To sacrifice others moral courage is necessary’. The passage was modified in Wilde’s alterations to Arents IV, and disappeared altogether by the time LC was prepared.

293–5 *we have already . . . platform* 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub>, LC (we must be going HTC; om. Arents IV, MS)

297 *The christenings* In the MS draft she adds ‘The marriages have not taken place yet’ (deleted in Arents IV).



CHASUBLE

Am I to understand then that there are to be no christenings at all this afternoon? 305

JACK

I don't think that, as things are now, it would be of much practical value to either of us, Dr Chasuble.

CHASUBLE

I am grieved to hear such sentiments from you, Mr Worthing. They savour of the heretical views of the Anabaptists, views that I have completely refuted in four of my unpublished sermons. However, as your present mood seems to be one peculiarly secular, I will return to the church at once. Indeed, I have just been informed by the pew-opener that for the last hour and a half Miss Prism has been waiting for me in the vestry. 310 315

LADY BRACKNELL (*Starting*)

Miss Prism! Did I hear you mention a Miss Prism?

CHASUBLE

Yes, Lady Bracknell. I am on my way to join her.

LADY BRACKNELL

Pray allow me to detain you for a moment. This matter may prove to be one of vital importance to Lord Bracknell and myself. Is this Miss Prism a female of repellent aspect, remotely connected with education? 320

CHASUBLE (*Somewhat indignantly*)

She is the most cultivated of ladies, and the very picture of respectability.

310–13 *They savour . . . secular* In the MS draft Dr Chasuble refers Jack to the Fathers of the Church, and their opinion that baptism is a new birth. LC substitutes:

However, where adults are concerned, compulsory christening, except in the case of savage tribes, is distinctly uncanonical, so I shall return to the church at once . . .

HTC omits the passage, and the reference to Anabaptists (a dissenting sect who believed that baptism conferred by the established church was ineffective, and that a second baptism was necessary) was added to WD. The Anabaptists flourished in Europe in the 16th century, but the name was applied by their enemies to contemporary Baptists. (Cf. II 278–81 n. and 317–19 n.)

314 *pew-opener* A person employed to open the doors of private pews for their occupants.

LADY BRACKNELL

It is obviously the same person. May I ask what position she holds in your household? 325

CHASUBLE (*Severely*)

I am a celibate, madam.

JACK (*Interposing*)

Miss Prism, Lady Bracknell, has been for the last three years Miss Cardew's esteemed governess and valued companion. 330

LADY BRACKNELL

In spite of what I hear of her, I must see her at once. Let her be sent for.

CHASUBLE (*Looking off*)

She approaches; she is nigh.

*Enter MISS PRISM hurriedly*

MISS PRISM

I was told you expected me in the vestry, dear Canon. I have been waiting for you there for an hour and three quarters. 335

*Catches sight of LADY BRACKNELL who has fixed her with a stony glare. MISS PRISM grows pale and quails. She looks anxiously round as if desirous to escape*

LADY BRACKNELL (*In a severe, judicial voice*)

Prism! (*MISS PRISM bows her head in shame*) Come here, Prism! (*MISS PRISM approaches in a humble manner*) Prism! Where is that baby? (*General consternation. The CANON starts back in horror. ALGERNON and JACK pretend to be anxious to shield CECILY and GWENDOLEN from hearing the details of a terrible public scandal*) Twenty-eight years ago, Prism, you left Lord Bracknell's house, Number 104, Upper Grosvenor 340

325 *It is obviously the same person* The s.d. in HTC and earlier texts, '*thoughtfully*', makes it clear that this line must be spoken without sarcasm.

333 *nigh* 1899, HTC (here HTC<sub>1</sub>, etc.) Altered in revisions to WD.

339 s.d. Alexander has the men '*turn the girls round, their backs to MISS PRISM*'.

340 *Twenty-eight* (thirty-four HTC; twenty-five LC, Arents IV, MS)

Street, in charge of a perambulator that contained a baby, of the male sex. You never returned. A few weeks later, through the elaborate investigations of the Metropolitan police, the perambulator was discovered at midnight, standing by itself in a remote corner of Bayswater. It contained the manuscript of a three-volume novel of more than usually revolting sentimentality. (MISS PRISM *starts in involuntary indignation*) But the baby was not there! (Everyone looks at MISS PRISM) Prism! Where is that baby? *A pause*

MISS PRISM

Lady Bracknell, I admit with shame that I do not know. I only wish I did. The plain facts of the case are these. On the morning of the day you mention, a day that is for ever branded on my memory, I prepared as usual to take the baby out in its perambulator. I had also with me a somewhat old, but capacious hand-bag in which I had intended to place the manuscript of a work of fiction that I had written during my few unoccupied hours. In a moment of mental abstraction, for which I never can forgive myself, I deposited the manuscript in the bassinette, and placed the baby in the hand-bag.

JACK (*Who has been listening attentively*)

But where did you deposit the hand-bag?

MISS PRISM

Do not ask me, Mr Worthing.

JACK

Miss Prism, this is a matter of no small importance to me. I insist on knowing where you deposited the hand-bag that contained that infant.

346 *Bayswater* (Hyde Park PR, HTC, etc.) Altered by Wilde in proof. A fashionable district to the north of Kensington Gardens.

361 *bassinette* perambulator.

363 In HTC Jack comes centre to ask this question. In LC and earlier texts Lady Bracknell interposes:

I do not see how that can matter now. It was, I suppose, left at the offices of one of those publishers who do not return rejected contributions unless accompanied by stamps. With your usual carelessness, Prism, I suppose you never dreamed of putting stamps with the baby. That unfortunate child is probably at the present moment lying in the waste-paper basket of some large commercial house.

365 *Miss Prism . . . to me* 1899, HTC1, etc. (om. HTC only)

MISS PRISM

I left it in the cloak-room of one of the larger railway stations in London.

JACK

What railway station? 370

MISS PRISM (*Quite crushed*)

Victoria. The Brighton line. *Sinks into a chair*

JACK

I must retire to my room for a moment. Gwendolen, wait here for me.

GWENDOLEN

If you are not too long, I will wait here for you all my life.  
*Exit JACK in great excitement*

CHASUBLE

What do you think this means, Lady Bracknell? 375

LADY BRACKNELL

I dare not even suspect, Dr Chasuble. I need hardly tell you that in families of high position strange coincidences are not supposed to occur. They are hardly considered the thing.

*Noises heard overhead as if someone was throwing trunks about. Everyone looks up*

CECILY

Uncle Jack seems strangely agitated. 380

CHASUBLE

Your guardian has a very emotional nature.

LADY BRACKNELL

This noise is extremely unpleasant. It sounds as if he was having an argument. I dislike arguments of any kind. They are always vulgar, and often convincing.

368–71 *I left it . . . Brighton line.* 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub>, LC (In the cloak-room at Victoria Station. The Brighton line HTC)

372–4 *Gwendolen . . . all my life* 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub> (om. HTC) Earlier texts differ: ‘If you are not too long’ is added in manuscript to Arents IV.

382–4 *It sounds . . . convincing* (om. HTC; It sounds as if he were having an argument. I dislike arguments of any kind. They are usually vulgar, and always violent HTC<sub>1</sub>, LC) In the MS draft and Arents IV Lady Brancaster suggests that ‘it sounds as if he were having an argument with the furniture’. The proof reads ‘usually vulgar’, which Wilde corrected to ‘always vulgar’.

CHASUBLE (*Looking up*)

It has stopped now.

*The noise is redoubled* 385

LADY BRACKNELL

I wish he would arrive at some conclusion.

GWENDOLEN

This suspense is terrible. I hope it will last.

*Enter JACK with a hand-bag of black leather in his hand*

JACK (*Rushing over to MISS PRISM*)

Is this the hand-bag, Miss Prism? Examine it carefully before you speak. The happiness of more than one life depends on your answer. 390

MISS PRISM (*Calmly*)

It seems to be mine. Yes, here is the injury it received through the upsetting of a Gower Street omnibus in younger and happier days. Here is the stain on the lining caused by the explosion of a temperance beverage, an incident that occurred at Leamington. And here, on the lock, are my initials. I had forgotten that in an extravagant mood I had had them placed there. The bag is undoubtedly mine. I am delighted to have it so unexpectedly restored to me. It has been a great inconvenience being without it all these years. 400

JACK (*In a pathetic voice*)

Miss Prism, more is restored to you than this hand-bag. I was the baby you placed in it.

MISS PRISM (*Amazed*)

You?

JACK (*Embracing her*)

Yes—mother!

MISS PRISM (*Recoiling in indignant astonishment*)

Mr Worthing! I am unmarried! 405

387 *This suspense . . . last* 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub>, etc. (om. HTC only).

392 *a Gower Street omnibus* Omnibuses (horse-drawn) were identified by their destination, painted on the coachwork, rather than by route-numbers.

393–5 *Here . . . Leamington* (om. HTC, LC) Added to WD. Leamington Spa is a genteel and thoroughly respectable watering-place in Warwickshire. The nature of the temperance beverage is made plain in the MS and Arents IV version of this passage: 'Here is the indelible stain left on the lining by the accidental explosion of a lemonade bottle, an event that occurred during the terribly hot summer of '62'.

JACK

Unmarried! I do not deny that is a serious blow. But after all, who has the right to cast a stone against one who has suffered? Cannot repentance wipe out an act of folly? Why should there be one law for men, and another for women? Mother, I forgive you. *Tries to embrace her again.*

410

MISS PRISM (*Still more indignant*)

Mr Worthing, there is some error. (*Pointing to* LADY BRACKNELL) There is the lady who can tell you who you really are.

JACK (*After a pause*)

Lady Bracknell, I hate to seem inquisitive, but would you kindly inform me who I am?

415

LADY BRACKNELL

I am afraid that the news I have to give you will not altogether please you. You are the son of my poor sister, Mrs Moncrieff, and consequently Algernon's elder brother.

JACK

Algy's elder brother! Then I have a brother after all. I knew I had a brother! I always said I had a brother! Cecily,—how could you have ever doubted that I had a brother. (*Seizes hold of* ALGERNON) Dr Chasuble, my unfortunate brother. Miss Prism, my unfortunate brother. Gwendolen, my unfortunate brother. Algy, you young scoundrel, you will have to treat me with more respect in the future.

420

425

407 *cast a stone* (throw HTC, etc.) The phrase's origin is biblical. Christ is asked for judgment on the woman taken in adultery and insists 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her' (John VIII, 7).

408–9 *Why . . . women?* 1899, etc. (om. HTC1 only) Alexander restores the sentence, but substitutes 'the man' and 'the woman' for 'man' and 'woman'. Cf. Hester's speech on the 'double standard' of morality in *A Woman of No Importance*, Act II (p. 72/CW, p. 450): 'Set a mark, if you wish, on each, but don't punish the one and let the other go free. Don't have one law for men and another for women'. In the MS draft Miss Prism's indignation at this suggestion is expanded upon: 'I have never had a child in my life. The suggestion, were it not made before such a large number of people, would be almost indelicate'. The latter of these sentences survived into LC, where the first was replaced by 'Maternity has never been an incident in my life'.

420–1 *I knew I had a brother!* 1899, HTC1, etc. (om. HTC only)

423–5 *Dr Chasuble . . . my unfortunate brother* These three introductions (comically polite and recalling 'that unfortunate young man, his brother'—Miss Prism's phrase at II, 25–6) were added to WD, and do not appear in any earlier text. In the proofs of 1899 the s.d. was omitted.

425–8 *Algy, you young scoundrel . . . all your life* 1899, HTC1, etc. (om. HTC only)

You have never behaved to me like a brother in all your life.

ALGERNON

Well, not till today, old boy, I admit. I did my best, however, though I was out of practice. *Shakes hands* 430

GWENDOLEN (*To JACK*)

My own! But what own are you? What is your Christian name, now that you have become someone else?

JACK

Good heavens!—I had quite forgotten that point. Your decision on the subject of my name is irrevocable, I suppose? 435

GWENDOLEN

I never change, except in my affections.

CECILY

What a noble nature you have, Gwendolen!

JACK

Then the question had better be cleared up at once. Aunt Augusta, a moment. At the time when Miss Prism left me in the hand-bag, had I been christened already? 440

LADY BRACKNELL

Every luxury that money could buy, including christening, had been lavished upon you by your fond and doting parents.

JACK

Then I was christened! That is settled. Now, what name was I given? Let me know the worst. 445

LADY BRACKNELL

Being the eldest son you were naturally christened after your father.

JACK (*Irritably*)

Yes, but what was my father's Christian name?

LADY BRACKNELL (*Meditatively*)

I cannot at the present moment recall what the General's

429–30 See Appendix IV, pp. 168–9.

437 *What a noble nature you have, Gwendolen!* (om. HTC, etc.) This line was added to WD.

Christian name was. But I have no doubt he had one. He was eccentric, I admit. But only in later years. And that was the result of the Indian climate, and marriage, and indigestion, and other things of that kind. 450

JACK

Algy! Can't you recollect what our father's Christian name was? 455

ALGERNON

My dear boy, we were never even on speaking terms. He died before I was a year old.

JACK

His name would appear in the Army Lists of the period, I suppose, Aunt Augusta?

LADY BRACKNELL

The General was essentially a man of peace, except in his domestic life. But I have no doubt his name would appear in any military directory. 460

JACK

The Army Lists of the last forty years are here. These delightful records should have been my constant study. (*Rushes to bookcase and tears the books out*) M. Generals—Mallam, Maxbohm, Magley, what ghastly names they have—Markby, Migsby, Mobbs, Moncrieff! Lieutenant 1840, Captain, Lieutenant-Colonel, Colonel, General 1869, Christian names, Ernest John. (*Puts book very quietly down and speaks quite calmly*) I always told you, Gwendolen, my name was Ernest, didn't I? Well, it is Ernest after all. I mean it naturally is Ernest. 470

450-3 *He was eccentric . . . of that kind* (om. HTC) Wilde added 'and indigestion' in proof. LC and earlier texts differ:

I cannot at the present moment recall *what* the General's Christian name was. Your poor dear mother always addressed him as 'General'. That I remember perfectly. Indeed I don't think she would have called him by his Christian name. But I have no doubt that he had one. He was *violent* in his manner, but there was nothing eccentric about him in any way. In *fact* he was rather a martinet about the little details of daily life. Too much so, I used to tell my dear sister.

456-7 *My dear boy . . . a year old* (HTC om. 'even' and adds 'I believe' after 'He died') This and the preceding speech were added to the Arents IV typescript.

458-72 See Appendix IV, p. 169.



LADY BRACKNELL

Yes, I remember now that the General was called Ernest. I knew I had some particular reason for disliking the name.

GWENDOLEN

Ernest! My own Ernest! I felt from the first that you could have no other name! 475

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. 480

JACK

My own one!

CHASUBLE (*To MISS PRISM*)

Laetitia! *Embraces her*

MISS PRISM (*Enthusiastically*)

Frederick! At last!

ALGERNON

Cecily! (*Embraces her*) At last!

JACK

Gwendolen! (*Embraces her*) At last! 485

LADY BRACKNELL

My nephew, you seem to be displaying signs of triviality.

473 Alexander, having deleted the preceding passage, adds an appeal from Jack—‘Aunt Augusta!’—which stimulates her to an effort of memory.

475–6 *I felt from the first that you could have no other name.* In LC and earlier texts the speech continues: ‘Even all man’s useless information, wonderful though it is, is nothing compared to the instinct of a good woman.’

481–8 The final form of the ending is established in WD, where Wilde adds the ‘At lasts’ and inserts ‘vital’ before the concluding mention of the play’s title. Alexander follows suit, but adds an ‘At last!’ for Chasuble. In LC and earlier texts l. 485 is followed by a re-entry of Lady Bracknell (who has left at l. 474) and the final line is ‘I have missed the last train! Oh!’ Wilde replaced this with a ‘tag’ in which the punning title was spoken—a traditional and satisfyingly formal device to close a comedy. In the final tableau Alexander placed Lady Bracknell stage-centre, Gwendolen and Jack to her right, Algernon and Cecily to her left, and Miss Prism and Dr Chasuble to her right but further upstage.

JACK

On the contrary, Aunt Augusta, I've now realized for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest.

*Tableau*

*Curtain*

## APPENDIX I

### *The Gribbsby Episode in the Manuscript Draft*

The following sequence is transcribed from the manuscript draft of Act Two (New York Public Library), as reproduced in Sarah Augusta Dickson, *The Importance of Being Earnest . . . As Originally Written by Oscar Wilde* (New York, 2 volumes, 1956). The portion reprinted here corresponds to ff. 49–67 of the manuscript, and begins with lines 360–1 of Act II in the present edition.

MERRIMAN

Mr Ernest's luggage, sir. I have unpacked it and put it in the room next to your own.

ALGY

I am afraid I can't stay more than a week, Jack, this time.

CECILY

A week? Will you really be able to stay over Monday?

ALGY

I think I can manage to stop over Monday, now.

CECILY

I am so glad.

MERRIMAN (*To ERNEST*)

I beg your pardon, sir. There is an elderly gentleman wishes to see you. He has just co[m]e in a cab from the station.

*Holds card on salver*

ALGY

To see me?

MERRIMAN

Yes, sir.

ALGY (*Reads card*)

Parker and Gribbsby, Solicitors. I don't know anything about them. Who are they?

JACK (*Takes card*)

Parker and Gribbsby: I wonder who they can be [?] I expect Ernest they have come about some business for your friend Bunbury. Perhaps Bunbury wants to make his will, and wishes you to be executor. (*To MERRIMAN*) Show Messrs Parker and Gribbsby in at once.

MERRIMAN

There is only one gentleman in the hall, sir.

JACK

Show either Mr Parker or Mr Gribbsby in.

MERRIMAN

Yes, sir.

*Exit*

JACK

I hope, Ernest, that I may rely on the statement you made to me last week when I finally settled all your bills for you. I hope you have no outstanding accounts of any kind.

ALGY

I haven't any debts at all, dear Jack. Thanks to your generosity, I don't owe a penny, except for a few neckties I believe.

JACK

I am sincerely glad to hear it.

[*Enter* MERRIMAN]

MERRIMAN

Mr Gribbsby.

*Enter* GRIBSBY. [*Exit* MERRIMAN]

GRIBSBY (*To* CANON CHASUBLE)

Mr Ernest Worthing?

PRISM [*Indicating* ALGY]

This is Mr Ernest Worthing.

GRIBSBY

Mr Ernest Worthing?

ALGY

Yes.

GRIBSBY

Of B.4, The Albany—?

ALGY

Yes, that is my address—

GRIBSBY

I am very sorry, Mr Worthing, but we have a writ of attachment for 20 days against you at the suit of the Savoy Hotel Co. Limited for £762. 14. 2.

ALGY

What perfect nonsense! I never dine at the Savoy at my own expense. I always dine at Willis's. It is far more expensive. I don't owe a penny to the Savoy.

GRIBSBY

The writ is marked as having been [served] on you personally at the Albany on May the 27th. Judgement was given in default against you on the fifth of June—Since then we have written to you no less than thirteen times,

without receiving any reply. In the interest of our clients we had no option but to obtain an order for committal of your person. But, no doubt, Mr Worthing, you will be able to settle the account, without any further unpleasantness. Seven and six should be added to the bill of costs for the expense of the cab which was hired for your convenience in case of any necessity of removal, but that I am sure is a contingency that is not likely to occur.

ALGY

Removal! What on earth do you mean by removal? I haven't the smallest intention of going away. I am staying here for a week. I am staying with my brother.

*Points to JACK*

GRIBSBY (*To JACK*)

Pleased to meet you, sir.

ALGY (*To GRIBSBY*)

If you imagine I am going up to town the moment I arrive you are extremely mistaken.

GRIBSBY

I am merely a Solicitor myself. I do not employ personal violence of any kind. The officer of the Court whose function it is to seize the person of the debtor is waiting in the fly outside. He has considerable experience in these matters. In the point of fact he has arrested in the course of his duties nearly all the younger sons of the aristocracy, as well as several eldest sons, besides of course a good many members of the House of Lords. His style and manner are considered extremely good. Indeed, he looks more like a betting man than a court-official. That is why we always employ him. But no doubt you will prefer to pay the bill.

ALGY

Pay it? How on earth am I going to do that? You don't suppose I have got any money? How perfectly silly you are. No gentleman ever has any money.

GRIBSBY

My experience is that it is usually relations who pay.

JACK

Kindly allow me to see this bill, Mr Gribbsby—(*Turns over immense folio*)—£762. 14. 2 since last October. I am bound to say I never saw such reckless extravagance in all my life.

*Hands it to DR CHASUBLE*

PRISM

£762 for eating! How grossly materialistic! There can be little good in any young man who eats so much, and so often.

CHASUBLE

It certainly is a painful proof of the disgraceful luxury of the age. We are far away from Wordsworth's plain living and high thinking.

JACK

Now, Dr Chasuble [,] do you consider that I am in any way called upon to pay this monstrous account for my brother?

CHASUBLE

I am bound to say that I do not think so. It would be encouraging his profligacy.

PRISM

As a man sows, so let him reap. The proposed incarceration might be most salutary. It is to be regretted that it is only for 20 days.

JACK

I am quite of your opinion.

ALGY

My dear fellow, how ridiculous you are! You know perfectly well that the bill is really yours.

JACK

Mine[?]

ALGY

Yes: you know it is.

CHASUBLE

Mr Worthing, if this is a jest, it is out of place.

PRISM

It is gross effrontery. Just what I expected from him.

CECILY

It is ingratitude. I didn't expect that.

JACK

Never mind what he says. This is the way he always goes on. [*To ALGY*] You mean to say that you are not Ernest Worthing, residing at B.4, The Albany [?] I wonder, as you are at it, that you don't deny being my brother at all. Why don't you?

ALGY

Oh! I am not going to do that, my dear fellow, it would be absurd. Of course, I'm your brother. And that is why you should pay this bill for me. What is the use of having a brother, if he doesn't pay one's bills for one?

JACK

Personally, if you ask me, I don't see *any* use in having a brother. As for paying your bill I have not the smallest intention of doing anything of the kind. Dr Chasuble, the worthy Rector of this parish, and Miss Prism[,]

in whose admirable and sound judgement I place great reliance[,] are both of opinion that incarceration would do you a great deal of good. And I think so too.

GRIBSBY (*Pulls out watch*)

I am sorry to disturb this pleasant family meeting, but time presses. We have to be at Holloway not later than four o'clock; otherwise it is difficult to obtain admission. The rules are very strict.

ALGY

Holloway!

GRIBSBY

It is at Holloway that detentions of this character take place always.

ALGY

Well, I really am not going to be imprisoned in the suburbs for having dined in the West End. It is perfectly ridiculous.

GRIBSBY

The bill is for suppers, not for dinners.

ALGY

I really don't care. All I say is that I am not going to be imprisoned in the suburbs.

GRIBSBY

The surroundings I admit are middle class: but the gaol itself is fashionable and well-aired: and there are ample opportunities of taking exercise at certain stated hours of the day. In the case of a medical certificate[,] which is always easy to obtain[,] the hours can be extended.

ALGY

Exercise! Good God! no gentleman ever takes exercise. You don't seem to understand what a gentleman is.

GRIBSBY

I have met so many of them, sir, that I am afraid I don't. There are the most curious varieties of them. The result of cultivation, no doubt. Will you kindly come now, sir, if it will not be inconvenient to you.

ALGY (*Appealingly*)

Jack!

PRISM

Pray be firm, Mr Worthing.

CHASUBLE

This is an occasion on which any weakness would be out of place. It would be a form of self-deception.

JACK

I am quite firm: and I don't know what weakness or deception of any kind is.

CECILY

Uncle Jack ! I think you have a little money of mine haven't you? Let me pay this bill. I wouldn't like your own brother to be in prison.

JACK

Oh! you can't pay it, Cecily, that is nonsense.

CECILY

Then you will, won't you? I think you would be sorry if you thought your own brother was shut up. Of course, I am quite disappointed with him.

JACK

You won't speak to him again, Cecily, will you?

CECILY

Certainly not. Unless, of course[,] he speaks to me first[;] it would be very rude not to answer him.

JACK

Well, I'll take care he doesn't speak to you. I'll take care he doesn't speak to any body in this house. The man should be cut. Mr Gribbsy—

GRIBSBY

Yes, sir.

JACK

I'll pay this bill for my brother. It is the last bill I shall ever pay for him too. How much is it?

GRIBSBY

£762. 14. 2. May I ask your full name, sir?

JACK

Mr John Worthing, J.P., the Manor House, Woolton. Does that satisfy you?

GRIBSBY

Oh! certainly, sir, certainly. It was a mere formality. (*To MISS PRISM*) Handsome place. Ah! the cab will be 5/9 extra: hired for the convenience of the client.

JACK

All right.

PRISM

I must say that I think such generosity quite foolish. Especially paying the cab.

CHASUBLE (*With a wave of the hand*)

The heart has its wisdom as well as the head, Miss Prism.

JACK

Payable to Gribbsy and Parker I suppose?



GRIBSBY

Yes, sir. Kindly don't cross the cheque. Thank you.

JACK

You are Gribbsby aren't you? What is Parker like?

GRIBSBY

I am both, sir. Gribbsby when I am on unpleasant business, Parker on occasions of a less severe kind.

JACK

The next time I see you I hope you will be Parker.

GRIBSBY

I hope so, sir. (*To DR CHASUBLE*) Good day. (*DR CHASUBLE bows coldly*)  
Good day. (*MISS PRISM bows coldly*) Hope I shall have the pleasure of  
meeting you again. *To ALGY*

ALGY

I sincerely hope not. What ideas you have of the sort of society a gentleman wants to mix in. No gentleman ever wants to know a Solicitor, who wants to imprison one in the suburbs.

GRIBSBY

Quite so, quite so.

ALGY

By the way, Gribbsby. Gribbsby, you are not to go back to the station in that cab. That is my cab. It was taken for my convenience. You and the gentleman who looks like the betting man have got to walk to the station, and a very good thing too. Solicitors don't walk nearly enough. They bolt. But they don't walk. I don't know any solicitor who takes sufficient exercise. As a rule they sit in stuffy offices all day long neglecting their business.

JACK

You can take the cab, Mr Gribbsby.

GRIBSBY

Thank you, sir.

*Exit*

## APPENDIX II

### *The Dictation Episode (Act II) in the Licensing Copy*

The following appears in the licensing copy (LC) after Cecily's speech instructing Algernon not to cough (lines 438–40 of the present edition). It is a slightly revised version of a passage in the MS draft and the Arents III typescript.

ALGERNON (*Speaking very rapidly*)

Miss Cardew, ever since half past two this afternoon, when I first looked upon your wonderful and incomparable beauty, I have not merely been your abject slave and servant, but, soaring upon the pinions of a possibly monstrous ambition, I have dared to love you wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly.

CECILY (*Laying down her pen*)

Oh! Please say that all over again. You speak far too fast and too indistinctly. Kindly say it all over again.

ALGERNON

Ever since it was half past two this afternoon, when I first looked upon your wonderful and incomparable beauty—

CECILY

Yes, I have got that all right.

ALGERNON (*Stammering*)

I—I—(*CECILY lays down her pen and looks reproachfully at him*)

(*Desperately*) I have not merely been your abject slave and servant, but, soaring on the pinions of a possibly monstrous ambition, I have dared to love you wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly. *Takes out his watch and looks at it*

CECILY (*After writing for some time looks up*)

I have not taken down 'hopelessly'. It doesn't seem to make much sense, does it?

*A slight pause*

ALGERNON (*Starting back*)

Cecily!

CECILY

Is that the beginning of an entirely new paragraph? or should it be followed by a note of admiration?

ALGERNON (*Rapidly and romantically*)

It is the beginning of an entirely new existence for me, and it shall be followed by such notes of admiration that my whole life shall be a subtle and sustained symphony of Love, Praise and Adoration combined.

CECILY

Oh, I don't think *that* makes any sense at *all*. The fact is that men should never dictate to women. They never know *how* to do it, and when they *do* do it, they always say something particularly foolish.

ALGERNON

I don't care whether what I say is foolish or not. All that I know is that I love you, Cecily! I love you! I can't live without you, Cecily! You know I love you. Will you marry me? Will you be my wife?

*Rushes over to her and puts his hand on hers*

*Enter* MERRIMAN

MERRIMAN

The dog-cart is waiting, sir.

### APPENDIX III

#### *The Conclusion of Act Two in the Licensing Copy*

This extract begins at line 878 of the present edition.

JACK

Yes, but you said yourself it was not hereditary, or anything of the kind.

ALGERNON

It usen't to be, I know—but I daresay it *is* now. Science is always making wonderful improvements in things.

JACK

May I ask, Algy, what on earth do you propose to do?

ALGERNON

Nothing. That is what I have been trying to do for the last ten minutes, and you have kept on doing everything in your power to distract my attention from my work.

JACK

Well, *I* shall go into the house and see Gwendolen. I feel quite sure she expects me.

ALGERNON

I know from her extremely cold manner that Cecily expects me, so *I* certainly shan't go into the house. When a man does exactly what a woman expects him to do, she doesn't think much of him. One should always do what a woman doesn't expect, just as one should always say what she doesn't understand. The result is invariably perfect sympathy on both sides.

JACK

Oh, that is nonsense. You are always talking nonsense.

ALGERNON

It is much cleverer to talk nonsense than to listen to it, my dear fellow, and a much rarer thing too, in spite of all the public may say.

JACK

I don't listen to you. I can't listen to you.

ALGERNON

Oh, that is merely false modesty. You know perfectly well you could listen to me if you tried. You always underrate yourself, an absurd thing to do nowadays when there are such a lot of conceited people about. Jack, you are eating the muffins again! I wish you wouldn't. There are only two left. (*Removes plate*) I *told* you I was particularly fond of muffins.

JACK

But I hate tea-cake.

ALGERNON

Why on earth do you allow tea-cake to be served up for your guests, then? What ideas you have of hospitality!

JACK (*Irritably*)

Oh! that is not the point. We are not discussing tea-cake (*Crosses*) Algy! you are perfectly maddening. You can never stick to the point in any conversation.

ALGERNON (*Slowly*)

No: it always hurts me.

JACK

Good heavens! What affectation! I *loathe* affectation!

ALGERNON

Well, my dear fellow, if you don't like affectation I really don't see what you *can* like. Besides, it isn't affectation. The point always *does* hurt me and I hate physical pain of any kind.

JACK (*Glares at ALGERNON; walks up and down stage. Finally comes up to table*)

Algy! I have already told you to go. I don't want you here. *Why don't* you go?

ALGERNON

I haven't quite finished my tea yet.

*Takes last muffin*

JACK *groans and sinks down into a chair and buries his face in his hands*

*Act-Drop*

## APPENDIX IV

### *Longer Textual Notes*

- I, 164      *B.4, The Albany* 1899, HTC (E.4, The Albany HTC<sub>1</sub>, LC, etc.) The letter designating the set of rooms was altered to that of an unoccupied apartment (cf. Donohue, 'The First Production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* . . . ' in *Nineteenth Century British Theatre*, ed. Richards and Thomson, 1971, pp. 125–43; p. 129). The sets of rooms in this group of 'bachelor chambers' (on the north side of Piccadilly, between Sackville Street and Burlington House) surround a courtyard with a covered walkway down the middle, giving a collegiate atmosphere. In Act II of the MS draft Miss Prism observes that the wicked Ernest must be 'as bad as any young man who has chambers in the Albany, or indeed even in the vicinity of Piccadilly, can possibly be. And that is saying a good deal nowadays, when sin, I am told, has reached the suburbs'. Albany (as it is usually referred to) is a few minutes' walk from Half Moon Street.
- I, 214–20      *Modern life . . . daily papers* 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub>, LC, Arents I (om. HTC; MS omits final two sentences) The poor quality of English journalism, especially in its treatment of art and literature, was one of Wilde's favourite topics. In *The Critic as Artist* Ernest refers to 'ridiculous journalism monopolizing the seat of judgement when it should be apologizing in the dock' (*Intentions*, p. 113/CW, p. 1015). Mrs Cheveley in *An Ideal Husband* threatens Chiltern with exposure: 'Think of the hypocrite with his greasy smile penning his leading article, and arranging the foulness of the public placard' (p. 48/CW, p. 496). The journalists took more than ample revenge for these and similar taunts when Wilde found himself in the dock. Alexander has Algernon rise as he speaks l.214 and on 'What you really are is a Bunburyist'/he 'goes up C., throws match into fire-place then comes down C. to JACK'. Jack remains seated. This gives Jack command of the stage for the next four or five speeches.
- I, 592–6      Lady Bracknell's exit required a good deal of attention. In the MS draft and Arents I Jack 'starts indignantly' at the word 'parcel' (which he later complains about to Algernon) and she

crushes him with a conventional dismissal: 'You will, of course, sir, understand that for the future there is to be no communication of any kind between you and Miss Fairfax' (this was later transferred to III). In revision 'a parcel' became 'a gentleman who by his own admission is a form of unclaimed luggage', but LC incorporated the unrevised Arents I version. In WD this was finally discarded, but doubts still lingered, and Alexander changed 'parcel' to 'hand-bag'. He adds an s.d. after 'Me, sir!' for Lady Bracknell to go up-stage to the door, which Jack opens for her: this enables her to make a quick exit. Alexander then cuts Jack's 'Good morning!' and has him close the door and come down to the table to pick up his gloves—probably to allow for a round of applause after Lady Bracknell leaves the stage.

- I, 603 *right as a trivet* A trivet was originally a three-legged stand, and the proverbial phrase alludes to its always standing firmly on its three legs. The conversation is considerably different in the MS draft. Jack says that he is sure Algernon is going to tell him he will make Gwendolen a good husband:

ALGERNON

Oh, no good chap makes a good husband. If a chap makes a good husband there must have been something rather peculiar about him when he was a bachelor. To be a good husband requires considerable practice.

JACK

I think your views quite idiotic, absurd, and ridiculous. You'll find that out for yourself, too, some day, if you can get a charming good nice sweet girl to accept you. But I don't suppose you ever will be able to do that. I don't suppose you would take the trouble. No, all I said was that no-one likes to be told, formally told, in a serious voice, that it is confidently expected that he will make a good husband. It sounds so tedious and second-rate.

- I, 612–15 *Relations . . . when to die* In the MS draft Algernon adds a few particulars of his family (Mary Farquhar, Gladys, and Lord Bracknell—'uncle Geoffrey'—who 'isn't half a bad sort in his silly way, considering what a thoroughly typical woman Aunt Augusta is'). He also offers another definition of Relations: 'Relations never lend one money, and won't give one credit, even for genius. They are a sort of aggravated form of the public'. Later Jack tells of his interrogation at Lady Bracknell's hands:

Oh, she was positively violent. I never heard such language in the whole course of my life from anyone. She might just as well have been in a pulpit. I shouldn't be at all surprised if she took to philanthropy or something of the kind and abused her fellow creatures for the rest of her life.

(Cf. Introduction, pp. 23–4) Jack quotes Lady Bracknell's words (especially 'parcel') indignantly, and remarks that whether one has had a father or mother is of little importance: 'Mothers, of course, are all right. They pay a chap's bills and don't bother him. But fathers bother a chap and never pay his bills. I don't know a single chap at the club who speaks to his father . . . I bet you anything you like that there is not a single chap, of all the chaps that you and I know, who would be seen walking down St James's Street with his own father'. The worsening relations between Douglas and his father, who had cut off his allowance, are the obvious inspiration for this passage.

I, 638      *What fools!* In the MS draft Jack throws his cigarette away at this line:

JACK

I am tired of gold-tipped cigarettes. You can get them quite cheap now. No particular advantage in smoking them any longer.

ALGERNON

Ah! those cigarettes are rather smart. They have got my monogram on each of them.

JACK (*Sneeringly*)

I don't quite see how that can make the tobacco any better.

ALGERNON

It does, to me.

JACK

Oh! you are an egotist, Algy.

ALGERNON (*Imperturbable*)

I am, dear boy, that is why my temper is so astoundingly good.

The passage only appears in the MS. Alexander adds business for the lighting of cigarettes in the sequence following l. 639. Algernon lights a match, Jack takes it from him at l. 641, lights his cigarette as he finishes his speech. Algernon makes his next remark, takes the match from Jack, lights his cigarette, and puts the match in the ash-tray on the tea-table.

I, 729      *my own darling* (Miss Fairfax PR, HTC) LC, like earlier texts, has a shorter ending to the act (from l. 725):



GWENDOLEN

Algy, you may turn round now.

*Exit*

JACK

What a splendid creature. Only girl I have ever loved in my life. Let us go off and dine. I'll give you the best dinner in London. What on earth are you laughing at?

ALGERNON

I hope to goodness tomorrow will be a fine day.

JACK

It never is—but what are you going to do tomorrow?

ALGERNON

Tomorrow, my dear boy, I am going Bunburying.

JACK

What nonsense.

ALGERNON

I love nonsense.

*Act Drop*

I, 755, s.d.

The concluding s.d. was added by Wilde to the proof (PR). In HTC<sub>1</sub> and WD there is none, but 'Besides, I love nonsense!' is added to the final line: Wilde crossed the words out in revising WD. The earlier typescripts (LC, Arents I) and the MS draft all end with 'I love nonsense'. Alexander added another line and direction: 'The Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire. *Drinking as curtain falls*'. In his copy of the 1899 edition (presented and inscribed by Wilde) Max Beerbohm added the words 'And besides, I love nonsense!' Below this he wrote:

I have a good verbal and visual memory; and I can still see him raising his glass of sherry as he said them and the curtain fell. I don't see why Oscar cut them for the printed version; for they are just right.

Alexander's alteration of the s.d. at l. 718, where Algernon writes on his cuff, suggests that he read the address from it.

II, 47–8

*three-volume novels that Mudie sends us* (most interesting recent novels HTC; three-volume novels the circulating library sends down to us HTC<sub>1</sub>; three-volume novels which the circulating library sends us LC) Subscribers to Mudie's circulating library could arrange to be sent a monthly box of the latest publications. On the three-volume novel (a form associated

with this mode of distribution, and somewhat outmoded by the mid-1890s), cf. Gilbert's remarks in *The Critic as Artist*: 'Anybody can write a three-volume novel. It merely requires a complete ignorance of both life and literature' (*Intentions*, p. 130/*CW*, p. 1022). In the MS draft Cecily expresses her belief that Memory is responsible for 'nearly all the three-volume novels that every cultivated woman writes now-a-days, and that no cultivated man ever reads'; Miss Prism says that her effort in this *genre* was connected with 'the one great tragedy' of her life; Cecily adds:

How very strange! I knew that three-volume novels often saddened the lives of other people. But I had no idea that to write one was a tragedy. Though now that I think of it I feel it must be true.

II, 94

*Political Economy* An unusual element in the curriculum of a governess and her pupil. In the MS draft Chasuble comments on this and adds:

. . . I suppose you know all about the relations between Capital and Labour. I wish I did. I am compelled, like most of my brother clergy, to treat scientific subjects from the point of view of sentiment. But that is more impressive I think. Accurate knowledge is out of place in a pulpit. It is secular.

CECILY

I am afraid I'm not learned at all. All I know is about the relations between Capital and Idleness—and that is merely from observation, so I don't suppose it is true.

MISS PRISM

Cecily, that sounds like Socialism. And I suppose you know where Socialism leads to?

CECILY

Oh yes, that leads to Rational Dress, Miss Prism. And I suppose that when a woman is dressed rationally, she is treated rationally—She certainly deserves to be.

(The movement for Rational Dress—fashions for women that allowed greater freedom of movement and were more hygienic—was one in which Wilde was particularly interested.)

II, 403–6

*I think . . . she is* In HTC this speech is much shorter:

I'm in love with Cecily. (*Enter CECILY, L. She picks up can and begins to water flowers, L.*) I must see Cecily before I go. Ah, there she is.  
Goes up & L.

Then Alexander has stage-business with a watering-can throughout the sequence following. As Algernon approaches (l. 407), Cecily *'starts, turns round with can in her hands, sprinkles ALGERNON who rubs his clothes down with his handkerchief'*. At l. 409 he *'Takes hold of her hand which holds can'* and at l. 412 *'As CECILY moves down L. she leaves can in ALGIE'S R. hand. He puts it behind tree'*. This develops business barely indicated in the HTC<sub>1</sub> typescript: it is absent from French's edition (?1903) but the British Theatre Museum prompt-book, which is based on this French's edition and dates from the 1900s, restores it. LC omits ll. 394–413 ('Well, at any rate . . . afraid so').

II, 407

At this point the 3-act versions move to material originally placed near the beginning of Art III. In the MS draft Wilde had not decided how to get Jack off the stage and Cecily back on: the argument between Jack and Algernon is followed directly by a conversation in which Algernon proposes going to join the others at lunch and Cecily reproaches him with having tried to make Jack pay his debt to the Savoy. Algernon claims that the meals at the Savoy were for Bunbury, whose doctors will not allow him to eat anything but late suppers. (Cecily remarks, 'I don't wonder then that Mr. Bunbury is always so ill, if he eats supper for six people every night of the week'.) She has provided lunch for Algernon:

. . . As you said you thought roast mutton too rich for you I told the butler to bring you lobsters.

ALGERNON

Lobsters!

CECILY

Yes, six lobsters. Those are all the lobsters we seem to have in the house, I am sorry to say. Of course if we had known you were coming we would have asked the housekeeper to order twelve.

ALGERNON

I assure you six is quite enough. I never eat more than six lobsters for lunch.

CECILY

I am glad to hear you are not so greedy as Miss Prism and dear Doctor Chasuble seem to think you.

Cecily hints to Jack that a ruse to get rid of Miss Prism might be appropriate, and he decides to adopt her plan and tell the governess that Dr Chasuble is waiting for her somewhere. Jack

returns, to tell Algernon he must go, and Cecily stands in front of the lobsters:

JACK

What is behind you, Cecily? What are you trying to conceal?

CECILY

Nothing, Uncle Jack. I have no past of any kind. That is the great drawback of living in the country. It puts one at such a disadvantage with other girls.

At the beginning of Act III Miss Prism and Cecily are at work in the sitting-room. Algernon arrives and tells her his white lie: Dr Chasuble is waiting for her in the vestry. Cecily points out that the vestry is excessively damp.

MISS PRISM

True! I had not thought of that, and Dr Chasuble is sadly rheumatic. In spite of all that I can say he absolutely declines to wear flannels next the skin. I had better go at once. During my absence I trust you will proceed with your studies. The standard works on Political Economy are all here. If you wish for lighter reading you will find under my work-basket on that table a treatise on Physical Geography. It contains most interesting diagrams of the mountainous elevations of the world, drawn to scale and executed on copper plate.

After having her bonnet adjusted by Cecily, and reminding Algernon that as a man sows, so shall he reap, Miss Prism leaves, and the dialogue picks up with the equivalent of l. 413 in the present edition.

II, 708

*Hand that to Miss Fairfax* (om. HTC only) Alexander's s.d. for the tea-table sequence and his alterations to the HTC<sub>1</sub> typescript show the evolution of the stage-business. In the typescript the women '*both put down their cups*' on the word 'cake' in l. 9 (the s.d. is not in LC). Alexander let this stand, but made it redundant by adding more elaborate business. When Merriman has left, Gwendolen comes over to the table and puts down her cup. Then she '*goes up to CECILY and holds out cake*' ('And though I asked most distinctly for bread and butter'). As she warns Cecily that she may go too far, she '*Bangs cake down on tray and goes R. CECILY comes down R.C.*' ('To save my poor, innocent trusting boy . . .') and Gwendolen comes up to her to confront her ('From the moment I saw you . . .'). In the British Theatre Museum prompt-book some of the s.d. in the French's text on which it is based have been revised to agree with HTC.

- II, 891–2 *and there is still one muffin left* (om. HTC) Added to WD. The HTC<sub>1</sub> typescript ends with s.d. ‘JACK groans and sinks onto settee’. Like Wilde (in alterations to WD) Alexander alters the settee to a chair. In HTC business is added for a curtain-call: ‘*On second curtain, JACK takes tea-cakes; ALGIE takes it [sic] away, the same as he [i.e. JACK] starts to cut cake. JACK rises, comes over to garden seat to filch them.*’ French’s 1903 edition contains additional lines, which also appear in a typescript made for Frohman (possibly some time after the 1895 New York production) and now in New York Public Library at the Lincoln Center (+NCOF 1895):

ALGY (*sits R.C.*)

I haven’t quite finished my tea yet.

*Ring curtain down. ALGY sits back of table and takes JACK’s cup of tea and begins to drink it*

JACK

You are drinking my tea.

ALGY

It’s not your tea—you are eating my muffins—

JACK

They are not your muffins—

*Curtain down by this. JACK groans and sinks onto settee*

- III, 76–82 *Her unhappy father . . . But of course* (om. HTC) HTC<sub>1</sub> and earlier texts omit ‘on the Influence of a permanent income on Thought’ and ‘Indeed I have never undeceived him on any question. I would consider it wrong’. The insertion of the lecture-title compensates for the loss of a passage drafted for Act I, referring to Gwendolen’s attendance at University Extension Scheme lectures (‘I never return from one . . . without having been excessively admired’) and Algernon’s assertion (four speeches later in the same passage) that she and Jack share an interest in such questions as ‘Better housing of the upper classes’ and ‘The bringing of Culture within the easy reach of the rich’. The University of London’s Extension Scheme was a pioneer among extramural departments.
- III, 97–106 *Oh! I killed . . . so Bunbury died* HTC<sub>1</sub> and LC cut ll. 101–3 and the first phrase of l. 104 (‘My dear Aunt Augusta’). Alexander’s version is even shorter, being one speech for Algernon:

Oh! Bunbury, he has quite exploded. I mean I killed Bunbury this afternoon. I mean poor Bunbury died this afternoon. I should say, the doctors found out that Bunbury could not live, so poor Bunbury died.

In the longer version of the passage found in the MS draft and Arents IV, Lady Brancaster expresses surprise that Bunbury was 'a sufficiently eminent politician to be entitled to be in any way the object of revolutionary outrages'. Algernon explains that Bunbury was very useful in his way, but 'is not necessary any more':

Well, you bear his loss with wonderful equanimity, considering the devotion you displayed to him during his lifetime. I am glad to have the opportunity of noting that in that respect you take after my side of the family. I never indulge in useless regrets of any kind. They seem to me morbid . . .

The trial of the Walsall anarchists in 1892 and a series of incidents involving explosives on the Continent and (in 1894) in London had established political assassination in the public consciousness.

III, 175–80 *No, the side view . . . just at present* 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub>, etc. (om. HTC only) In LC and earlier texts the passage is slightly different:

. . . There are *distinct* social possibilities in your profile.

CECILY

Really, Lady Brancaster? How very gratifying!

LADY BRANCASTER

Child! Never fall into the habit, so unfortunately common nowadays, of talking trivially about serious things. The two weak points . . .

Wilde seems to have thought that this idea had been well enough established elsewhere. For *profile* (pronounced *pro-feel*, with the second syllable stressed) cf. 'Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young' (*Chameleon*, December 1894):

If the poor only had profiles there would be no difficulty in solving the problem of poverty . . . There is something tragic about the enormous number of young men there are in England at the present moment who start life with perfect profiles, and end by adopting some useful profession.

(CW, pp. 1205–6)

III, 238 The MS draft and Arents IV Cecily protests that Jack claimed untruthfully to have a brother. He insists that he has only been *inventing*:

To invent anything at all is an act of sheer genius, and, in a commercial age like ours, shows considerable physical courage—Few of our modern novelists ever dare to invent a single thing. It is an open secret that they don't know how to do it.

Algernon, on the other hand, has *corroborated* an untruth, which is 'not the act of a gentleman'. Jack tells of the debt he has paid for Algernon, then, changing his tack, protests indignantly that Algernon has obliged him to pay his own bills:

More young men are ruined nowadays by paying their bills than by anything else. I know many fashionable young men in London, young men of rank and position, whose rooms are absolutely littered with receipts, and who, with a callousness that seems to me absolutely cynical, have no hesitation in paying ready money for the mere luxuries of life. Such conduct seems to me to strike at the very foundation of things. The only basis for good Society is unlimited credit. Without that, Society, as we know it, crumbles. Why is it that we all despise the middle classes? Simply because they invariably pay what they owe . . .

Lady Brancaster insists that she will overlook her nephew's conduct. Cecily argues with Jack, but he will not respond ('Guardians, like judges, curates, and people in high authority never argue. It is safer, and more impressive'). Only the first three speeches of this sequence (on lying and corroborating) appear in LC. By WD the whole passage has been discarded.

III, 429–30 *Well . . . practice* 1899 (om. HTC only; HTC<sub>1</sub>, etc. om. second sentence) In LC and earlier texts this is followed by a passage in which Miss Prism tenders her resignation, apologizing to Jack for her negligent treatment of him. She has nothing more to teach Cecily: 'In the very difficult accomplishment of getting married I fear my sweet and clever pupil has far outstripped her teacher'. Dr Chasuble takes the hint and intervenes—he has 'come to the conclusion that the Primitive Church was in error on certain points. Corrupt readings seem to have crept into the text'. He offers her his hand in marriage. Laetitia tells Frederick (they are on first-name terms now)

that she is unable to express her feelings, but will send him the three volumes of her diary so that he will be able to peruse a full account of her feelings towards him for the past eight months. Merriman announces that Lady Brancaster's flyman cannot wait any longer: she and Gwendolen have missed nine trains and there is only one more. She leaves the company with good wishes and advice—Miss Prism, she hopes, will be more careful of her husband than she had been of Jack,

. . . and not leave poor Dr Chasuble lying about at railway stations in hand-bags or receptacles of any kind. Cloakrooms are notoriously draughty places.

Dr Chasuble would do well to have Miss Prism christened without delay. (In the MS version of Miss Prism's contrite apologies she admits 'It had never occurred to me before that as a woman sows, so shall she reap. I had thought that aphorism only applied to the male sex'.)

- III, 458–72 *His name . . . I mean it naturally is Ernest* 1899, HTC<sub>1</sub> (om. HTC only) In HTC<sub>1</sub> Maxbohm (a reference to Max Beerbohm) and Magley are not included in the list of Generals and 1860 (as in earlier texts) is the year of Moncrieff's promotion. The changes were made in revisions to WD. In the MS draft and Arents IV Jack distributes volumes among the others, but Dr Chasuble has been given the 1869 edition of Bradshaw's Railway Guide, Cecily a copy of Justin McCarthy's popular *History of Our Own Times*, and Miss Prism two copies of the price list of the Civil Service Stores (a department store for members of that body)—Generals are nowhere listed and appear to be either in little demand or poor supply. To Arents IV Wilde adds a speech for Lady Bracknell, who has been given a copy of Hichens's satire *The Green Carnation* (in which Wilde and Douglas had been lampooned): it 'seems to be a book about the culture of exotics. It contains no reference to Generals in it [*sic*]. It seems to be a morbid and middle class affair'. The distribution, but not the reactions to the books, was preserved in LC and then abandoned.



