

# Why Do We Do the Things We Do?

## A Comparison of Tartuffe, Earnest, and the Bald Soprano

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a character from a novel or play who responds in some significant way to justice or injustice. Then write a well-developed essay in which you analyze the character's understanding of justice, the degree to which the character's search for justice is successful, and the significance of this search for the work as a whole.

**2012** "And, after all, our surroundings influence our lives and characters as much as fate, destiny or any supernatural agency." Pauline Hopkins, *Contending Forces*.

Choose a novel or play in which cultural, physical, or geographical surroundings shape psychological or moral traits in a character. Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how surroundings affect this character and illuminate the meaning of the work as a whole.

**2013** A bildungsroman, or coming-of-age novel, recounts the psychological or moral development of its protagonist from youth to maturity, when this character recognizes his or her place in the world. Select a single pivotal moment in the psychological or moral development of the protagonist of a bildungsroman. Then write a well-organized essay that analyzes how that single moment shapes the meaning of the work as a whole.

**2014** It has often been said that what we value can be determined only by what we sacrifice. Consider how this statement applies to a character from a novel or play. Select a character that has deliberately sacrificed, surrendered, or forfeited something in a way that highlights that character's values. Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how the particular sacrifice illuminates the character's values and provides a deeper understanding of the meaning of the work as a whole.

**Both Character and Characterization reveal "Why Do We Do the Things We Do". All Three of the plays included here examine hypocrisy, social class differences, and the constraints of morality as well as other topics.**

### Characteristics of Tragedy & Comedy -- A Debatable List

The following list by John Morreall represents a conglomeration of varying theory on the nature of tragedy and comedy. Personally, I find (depending on the play) some of the characteristics more convincing and others less so. Try testing a play we're reading in class against these ideas. Do they successfully explain what's going on in the work?

The Cognitive Psychology of the Tragic and Comic Visions	
TRAGEDY	COMEDY
<b>Simplicity:</b> Tragic heroes tend to approach problems and situations in a fairly straight-forward manner. Life can be understood in simple binaries -- good/bad; just/unjust; beautiful/ugly.	<b>Complex:</b> Comic heroes tend to be more flexible. Life tends to be messier, full of diversity and unexpected twists and turns. It is more difficult to classify experience.

<p><b>Low Tolerance for Disorder:</b> Tragic plots tend to stress order and process -- the end follows from the beginning.</p>	<p><b>High Tolerance for Disorder:</b> Comic plots tend to be more random; they seem to be improvised, leaving a number of loose ends.</p>
<p><b>Preference for the Familiar:</b> Tragic heroes and plots have "a low tolerance for cognitive dissonance." The violation of the norm is what brings about a tragic fall.</p>	<p><b>Seeking out the Unfamiliar:</b> Comic heroes and plots tend to see the unexpected and surprising as an opportunity rather than a norm-violation.</p>
<p><b>Low Tolerance for Ambiguity:</b> In tragedy, things should have one meaning and have clear-cut application to problems.</p>	<p><b>High Tolerance for Ambiguity:</b> In comedy, ambiguity is what makes humor possible. Equally, not everything has to make sense in comedy.</p>
<p><b>Convergent Thinking:</b> Tragedy stresses what is past and what is real. It tends to be more information-gathering based, wanting to find and resolve nagging problems.</p>	<p><b>Divergent Thinking:</b> Comedy is more imaginative, stressing playfulness. It tends to look for a variety of answers and doesn't need to solve everything.</p>
<p><b>Uncritical Thinking:</b> Tragedy tends not to call into question the accepted order of things. To do so is to suffer the consequences.</p>	<p><b>Critical Thinking:</b> Comedy tends to call attention to the incongruities in the order of things, be it political, social, religious.</p>
<p><b>Emotional Engagement:</b> Tragic heroes tend to respond with strong, overpowering emotions--pride, lust, grief, rage. This often results in extremist attitudes and reactions. In the same way, the audience is expected to respond with cathartic involvement.</p>	<p><b>Emotional Disengagement:</b> Comic heroes are often ironic and disengaged from the situation; they tend to respond with wit, imagination, or cynicism. They tend to abstract themselves from their misfortunes. The audience is expected to react in much the same way to what the characters undergo.</p>
<p><b>Stubbornness:</b> Tragic heroes tend to stick with a course of action and follow it to their doom. They are firm and committed.</p>	<p><b>Adaptable:</b> Comic heroes are more willing to change. Or if they are not, we as the audience find this funny rather than tragic.</p>
<p><b>Idealistic:</b> The tragic vision longs for a clear-cut world driven by principle. It tends to value ethical abstractions, such as Truth, Justice, and Beauty</p>	<p><b>Pragmatic:</b> The comic vision is more aware of concrete realities. Comic heroes seek how to make it from day-to-day.</p>
<p><b>Finality:</b> Tragic actions lead to inevitable consequences.</p>	<p><b>Reversal:</b> At least for the clever, comic actions allow one to escape the consequences, to have a second chance.</p>
<p><b>Spirit:</b> The tragic vision tends to value the human spirit. It can often be dualistic, prizing the spirit/soul above the body.</p>	<p><b>Body:</b> The comic vision is very concerned with the human body--its sexual desires, bodily functions, craving for food. Suffering is often slap-stick.</p>

Tragic heroes often long for some higher, greater level of life than common human existence.	Comic heroes seem comfortable in such a world.
<b>Seriousness:</b> The tragic vision takes its characters and plots seriously. They are treated as important and make demands upon us.	<b>Playfulness:</b> Even if it has its serious side, the comic vision tends to treat large portions of life as not quite so serious.
<b>The Social Differences between the Tragic and Comic Visions</b>	
<b>Heroism:</b> Characters tend to be "superhuman, semidivine, larger-than-life" beings.	<b>Antiheroism:</b> Characters tend to be normal, down-to-earth individuals. Comedies tend to parody authority.
<b>Militarism:</b> Tragedies often arise in warrior cultures. And its values are those of the good soldier--duty, honor, commitment.	<b>Pacifism:</b> Comedies tend to call into question warrior values: Better to lose your dignity and save your life.
<b>Vengeance:</b> Offending a tragic hero often results in a cycle of vengeance.	<b>Forgiveness:</b> In comedies, forgiveness, even friendship among former enemies, happens.
<b>Hierarchy:</b> Tragedies tend to stress the upper-class, the noble few, royalty, and leaders.	<b>Equality:</b> Comedies tend to include all classes of people. The lower classes are often the butt of the jokes, but they also tend to triumph in unexpected ways.
<b>Less Sexual Equality:</b> Tragedies are often male-dominated.	<b>More Sexual Equality:</b> Comedies, while often sexist too, are sometimes less so. Women play a larger, more active role.
<b>Respect for Tradition:</b> Tragic heroes often uphold the accepted order or champion one tradition against another.	<b>Questions Authority:</b> Comic heroes more often question tradition and those in authority.
<b>Rule-based Ethics:</b> The tragic vision tends to stress the consequences of disobeying the accepted order of things.	<b>Situation-based Ethics:</b> Comic heroes tend to make up the rules as they go along or at least be wary of generalizations.
<b>Social Isolation:</b> Tragedies tend to stress the individual and the consequences of the individual's actions.	<b>Social Integration:</b> Comedies tend to focus on the larger community and spend more time paying attention to the interaction between groups.

"ComedyTragedyCharacteristics." *ComedyTragedyCharacteristics*. Web. 12 Nov. 2014.  
<<http://www3.dbu.edu/mitchell/comedytr.htm>>.

### Tartuffe Character Profiles

In the columns below are speeches or conversations of the characters in Moliere's *Tartuffe*. As you examine each of them, decide what **you can say** about the character. What predictions can you make about the character?

What The Characters Say	What I Say
<p><b>ORGON</b> - (Parisian gentleman, husband, and father of the house. In his quest for religious piety, Orgon has allowed Tartuffe into his home.)</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Villain, be still!</i></p> <p><i>I know your motives; I know you wish him ill: Yes, all of you—wife, children, servants, all— Conspire against him and desire his fall, Employing every shameful trick you can To alienate me from this saintly man. Ah, but the more you seek to drive him away, The more I'll do to keep him. Without delay, I'll spite this household and confound its pride By giving him my daughter as his bride. (III. vi.)</i></p>	
<p><b>ELMIRE</b> - (Orgon's wife.)</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>...I'll be content if he Will study to deserve my leniency. I've promised silence—don't make me break my word; To make a scandal would be too absurd. Good wives laugh off such trifles, and forget them; Why should they tell their husbands, and upset them? (III. iv.)</i></p>	
<p><b>DAMIS</b> - (Orgon's son, Elmire's stepson)</p> <p><i>You have reasons for taking such a course, And I have reasons, too, of equal force. To spare him now would be insanely wrong. I've swallowed my just wrath for far too long And watched this insolent bigot bringing strife And bitterness into our family life. (III. iv.)</i></p>	
<p><b>MARIANE</b> - (Orgon's daughter, Elmire's stepdaughter)</p>	

<p><i>If I defied my father, as you suggest, Would it not seem unmaidenly, at best? Shall I defend my love at the expense Of brazenness and disobedience? (II. iii.)</i></p>	
<p><b>VALERE</b> - (Mariane's love.) <i>I'll do my best to take it in my stride. The pain I feel at being cast aside Time and forgetfulness may put an end to. Or if I can't forget, I shall pretend to. No self-respecting person is expected To go on loving once he's been rejected. (II. iv.)</i></p>	
<p><b>CLEANTE</b> - (Elmire's brother, Orgon's friend and brother-in-law.) <i>Brother, I don't pretend to be a sage, Nor have I all the wisdom of the age. There's just one insight I would dare to claim: I know that true and false are not the same... (I. v.)</i></p>	
<p><b>TARTUFFE</b> - (A hypocrite and imposter posing as a holy man.) <i>Hand up my hair-shirt, put my scourge in place, And pray, Laurent, for Heaven's perpetual grace. I'm going to the prison now, to share My last few coins with the poor wretches there. (III. ii.)</i></p>	
<p><b>DORINE</b> - (Mariane's lady's-maid) <i>Dorine: Oh, he's a man of destiny; He's made for horns, and what the stars demand Your daughter's virtue surely can't withstand. Orgon: Don't interrupt me further. Why can't you learn That certain things are not of your concern? Dorine: It's for your own sake that I interfere.</i></p>	
<p><b>MADAME PERNELLE</b> - (Orgon's mother)</p>	

*Orgon:*

*You're talking nonsense. Can't you realize  
I saw it; saw it; saw it with my eyes?  
Saw, do you understand me? Must I shout it  
Into your ears before you'll cease to doubt it?*

*Madame Pernelle:*

*Appearances can deceive, my son. Dear me,  
We cannot always judge by what we see.*

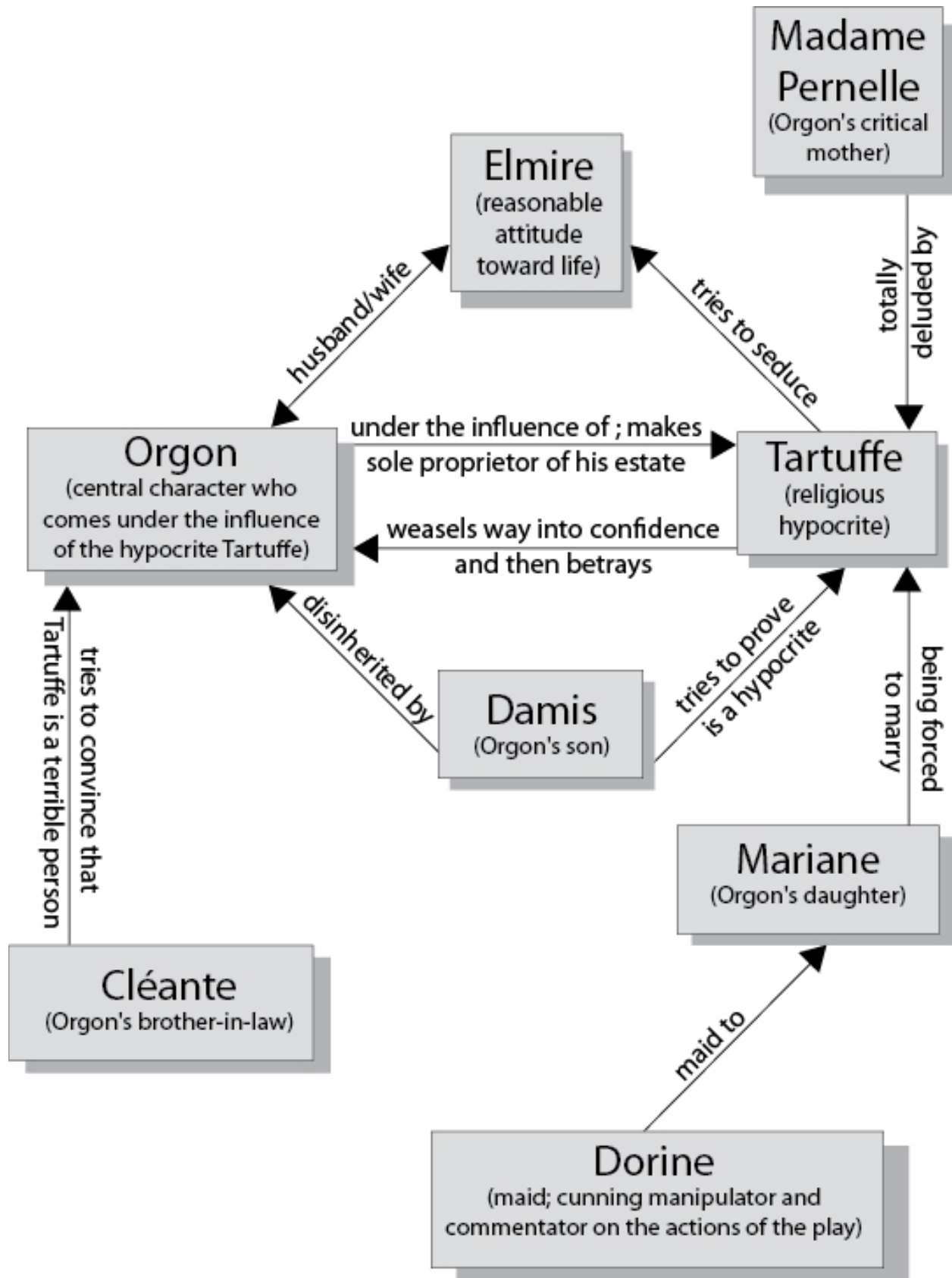
*Orgon:*

*Drat! Drat!*

*Madame Pernelle:*

*One often interprets things awry;  
Good can seem evil to a suspicious eye. (V. iii.)*





## Hypocrisy in Tartuffe

What is a hypocrite? A person who pretends to have virtues they do not actually possess.

### Instruction

1. Possible warm up Journal Prompt: What is hypocrisy?
2. Discuss with students the definition of hypocrisy. What does it mean? Why would some people pretend to be more virtuous than they really are? Is this something that is more common in the present or the past?
3. Divide the class into groups. Ask them to create and present a short scene that demonstrates understanding of the public/private, truth/lies world of hypocrisy. It can be abstract, it can be a series of tableaux, it can use dialogue.
4. Explain to students that they are going to research and present a modern day hypocrite. The criteria for the hypocrite is that they are a person who has expressed publicly that they were virtuous, and then it was later revealed they led a much different private life. Their pious actions were all in pretence. Students are looking for information on:  
What makes the individual a hypocrite?  
Examples of how a hypocrite can deceive people.  
How was their public/private life exposed?  
Are there people who still support the hypocrite after the fact?
5. Students will work in pairs or groups of three to do their research. They have one class period to gather their information. Additional research is done for homework.
6. Students will have a class period to work on their presentation. Additional presentation preparation is done for homework.
7. Groups give their oral presentation of their specific modern day hypocrite based on their research. This oral presentation should be no more than five minutes in length, and demonstrate an equal participation from all group members.

### Useful Information

*Tartuffe, or, The Imposter*, written in 1664, was banned in Paris and not allowed a public performance until 1669, which is just one indication that Molière's comedy attacking religious hypocrisy had struck a nerve in French society. During this period, the Paris Parliament was struggling to suppress Catholic secret societies that were infiltrating the government and starting a puritanical war condemning all human instincts as inherently evil. **The comedy of Tartuffe functioned as a healthy satire of this behavior which Molière perceived as a dangerous deviation from societal norms.** [Bold Text not in original] A romantic comedy doesn't structurally support social commentary from the playwright. A playwright like Shakespeare, who wrote in this romantic comedy form, would instead insert or embed commentary within the story, often using certain characters as mouthpieces. **For a neoclassical comedy of character like Tartuffe, the substance and subject of the play is society and the problems within it.** [Bold text not in original] Molière adheres to the neoclassical formula of abstracting an essentially human quality or flaw and presenting it as a character type, with no specific past history, physical descriptions, or details beyond that general essence. This type interacts with other types in a highly organized situation designed to expose the human flaw

and its deviation from the norms of society.

Molière exposes the actions of the professionally pious by presenting the character of Tartuffe, the religious hypocrite, as essentially a hustler or con man. And every con man needs an easy mark, and Orgon fits the bill as the gullible new convert. The two types exist only in combination. The character of Orgon is also vital to the comedy of the play. **Comedy requires a certain intellectual detachment for the audience to laugh.** [Bold text not in original] The threat of religious hypocrisy was too serious in French society to laugh at directly. By making Orgon and Madame Pernelle the only members of the family that buy what Tartuffe is selling, their gullibility weakens the threat of Tartuffe's deceptions enough for the comedy to emerge.

Understanding the comedic purpose of Orgon suggests that the major dramatic action for the play involves a struggle between Tartuffe and the Pernelle family over the trust of Orgon. One possible major dramatic action statement is: This is the day that Tartuffe runs a con game on Orgon and his family, but the family finally reveals him to Orgon as a fraud. With this dramatic action, the family supplies the normal point of view on Tartuffe. They are the norm and Tartuffe and Orgon are the deviation from it. The audience can more clearly see and laugh at the incongruity of Orgon's and Tartuffe's behavior when set against that of the family. The gap created by their deviation from the norm is the major source of comedy and the primary delivery device of social comment, because the gap reveals and highlights the absurdity of the human foibles represented in the types.

"Jeremy Lee Cudd - Essay - Moliere's Tartuffe, Wycherley's The Country Wife, and Shaw's Arms and the Man." *Jeremy Lee Cudd - Essay - Moliere's Tartuffe, Wycherley's The Country Wife, and Shaw's Arms and the Man*. Web. 12 Nov. 2014.

<<http://www.jlcudd.com/writing/thea506cudd.htm>>.

In *Tartuffe*, Orgon represents one kind of dangerous ruler. He is saved in the end by a *deus ex machina* intervention by the Sun King himself, Molière's patron Louis XIV, who was actually in the audience during several performances of the play. The King orders the arrest of the traitorous villain Tartuffe, restores to Orgon the estate he has so improvidently devolved upon this confidence man, and pardons his offense in harboring incriminating papers for a political exile friend. This intervention is portrayed as enabled by Louis' vigilance, justice, and discriminating mercy (he recognizes Tartuffe as a scoundrel with whose record of crime he is already familiar, and he recognizes the loyal services Orgon had done him in the late civil wars). Orgon, on the other hand, has insisted on acting dictatorially out of spite for his subjects, who insist that his confidence is being abused by his chosen spiritual advisor, that the religious regime that latter has been empowered to impose on the household is extreme, and that his designation of Tartuffe as a husband for Marianne is wrongheaded.

Molière's point is not that absolute monarchs should rule without consulting advisors. On the contrary, (1) they should prudently weigh the advice of all whose interest is in question. At the same time, (2) the monarch must never delegate his judgment to another: he remains responsible for the wisdom of whatever advice he takes, and therefore must always retain the

independent exercise of his own powers of mind. Most importantly, (3) this judgment itself must always be ruled in turn by **reason and common sense**.

"English 233: Political Parable in Moliere's TARTUFFE." *English 233: Political Parable in Moliere's TARTUFFE*. Web. 12 Nov. 2014. <<http://www.k-state.edu/english/baker/english233/Tartuffe-politics.htm>>.

### **Orgon speaks about Tartuffe and the influence Tartuffe wields over him**

Compare the opening of the speech where Orgon speaks of Tartuffe's prayers with the following passage from Matthew 6:5 where Jesus says, "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full."

What is Moliere implying about Tartuffe?

Orgon continues in his speech to refer to Tartuffe giving to the poor from the small amount given to him by Orgon. Compare that to this passage Luke 11:42: "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others."

What is Moliere implying about Tartuffe's approach to religion?

Why does Orgon not see that Tartuffe is actually attracted to Elmire, Orgon's wife?

<b>ORGON Speaks of Tartuffe</b>	<b>My Analysis of ORGON'S Speech</b>
<p><b>ORGON</b> Oh, had you seen Tartuffe, as I first knew him, Your heart, like mine, would have surrendered to him. He used to come into our church each day And humbly kneel nearby, and start to pray. He'd draw the eyes of everybody there By the deep fervor of his heartfelt prayer; He'd sign and weep, and sometimes with a sound Of rapture he would bend and kiss the ground; And when I rose to go, he'd run before To offer me holy-water at the door. His serving-man, no less devout than he, Informed me of his master's poverty; I gave him gifts, but in his humbleness He'd beg me every time to give him less. "Oh, that's too much," he'd cry, "too much by twice!</p>	

<p>I don't deserve it. The half, Sir, would suffice." And when I wouldn't take it back, he'd share Half of it with the poor, right then and there. At length, Heaven prompted me to take him in To dwell with us, and free our souls from sin. He guides our lives, and to protect my honor Stays by my wife, and keeps an eye upon here; He tells me whom she see, and all she does, And seems more jealous than I ever was! And how austere he is! Why, he can detect A mortal sin where you would least suspect; In smallest trifles, he's extremely strict, Last week, his conscience was severely pricked Because, while praying, he had caught a flea And killed it, so he felt, too wrathfully.</p>	
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**Excerpt from *The Importance of Being Earnest* - Act I**

**As you read the scene below consider how the following are revealed in the dialogue:**

**The importance of social class;**

**The importance of financial wealth;**

**How the scene reveals the hypocrisy of the characters;**

**And the constraints of the morality of the period.**

**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.

**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?

**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.

**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?

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**Lady Bracknell.** Lady Bloxham? I don't know her.

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

**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.

**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.

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

**Jack.** I have lost both my parents.

**Lady Bracknell.** To lose one parent, Mr. Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness. Who was your 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 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 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.

**Lady Bracknell.** Where did the charitable gentleman who had a first-class ticket for this seaside resort find you?

**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.

**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.

**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 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 recognised 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.]

"Eugene Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano* has even greater elements of burlesque humor than Beckett, as Ionesco exposes the inanities within commonplace behavior and thought. The "well-made play" is parodied as being conventionally predictable and innately stereotypical in character and plot. Feeling that the absurdity of modern existence cannot be communicated intellectually, Ionesco makes his audience sense and feel it through the experience of a play that mocks those who believe in causality, and exposes the meaninglessness and irrationality of people's lives and relationships in its presentation of characters whose inability to communicate leads them to dehumanize themselves and others. Although the experimental nature of his plays allies him to the surrealists, his work is not fully surreal in that it is never entirely divorced from reality. Likewise, his allegiance to existentialism is only partial, in that he would agree with Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre that modern existence is meaningless, irrational, and absurd, but, unlike them, does not feel that such notions can be communicated through traditional literary mode."

Abbotson, Susan C. W. "Absurdity of Life." *Thematic Guide to Modern Drama*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2003. 2. Print.

**How does Ionesco reveal the "absurdity of modern existence" in the following passage from *The Bald Soprano*? How does the "inability to communicate" dehumanize the characters? How does the scene reveal some of the hypocrisy in our modern day "text driven" society?**

\* In Nicholas Bataille's production, this dialogue was spoken in a tone and played in a style sincerely tragic.

**MR. MARTIN:** Excuse me, madam, but it seems to me, unless I'm mistaken, that I've met you somewhere before.

**MRS. MARTIN:** I, too, sir. It seems to me that I've met you somewhere before.

**MR. MARTIN:** Was it, by any chance, at Manchester that I caught a glimpse of you, madam?

**MRS. MARTIN:** That is very possible. I am originally from the city of Manchester. But I do not have a good memory, sir. I cannot say whether it was there that I caught a glimpse of you or not!

**MR. MARTIN:** Good God, that's curious! I, too, am originally from the city of Manchester, madam!

**MRS. MARTIN:** That is curious!

**MR. MARTIN:** Isn't that curious! Only, I, madam, I left the city of



Manchester about five weeks ago.

**MRS. MARTIN:** That is curious! What a bizarre coincidence! I, too, sir, I left the city of Manchester about five weeks ago.

**MR. MARTIN:** Madam, I took the 8:30 morning train which arrives in London at 4:45.

**MRS. MARTIN:** That is curious! How very bizarre! And what a coincidence! I took the same train, sir, I too.

**MR. MARTIN:** Good Lord, how curious! Perhaps then, madam, it was on the train that I saw you?

**MRS. MARTIN:** It is indeed possible that is, not unlikely. It is plausible and, after all, why not!--But I don't recall it, sir!

**MR. MARTIN:** I traveled second class, madam. There is no second class in England, but I always travel second class.

**MRS. MARTIN:** That is curious! How very bizarre! And what a coincidence! I, too, sir, I traveled second class.

**MR. MARTIN:** How curious that is! Perhaps we did meet in second class, my dear lady!

**MRS. MARTIN:** That is certainly possible, and it is not at all unlikely. But I do not remember very well, my dear sir!

**MR. MARTIN:** MY seat was in coach No. 8, compartment 6, my dear lady.

**MRS. MARTIN:** How curious that is! MY seat was also in coach No. 8, compartment 6, my dear sir!

**MR. MARTIN:** How curious that is and what a bizarre coincidence! Perhaps we met in compartment 6, my dear lady?

**MRS. MARTIN:** It is indeed possible, after all! But I do not recall it, my dear sir!

**MR. MARTIN:** To tell the truth, my dear lady, I do not remember it either, but it is possible that we caught a glimpse of each other there, and as I think of it, it seems to me even very likely.

**MRS. MARTIN:** Oh! truly, of course, truly, sir!

**MR. MARTIN:** How curious it is! I had seat No. 3, next to the window, my dear lady.

**MRS. MARTIN:** Oh, good Lord, how curious and bizarre! I had seat No. 6, next to the window, across from you, my dear sir.

**MR. MARTIN:** Good God, how curious that is and what a coincidence! We were then seated facing each other, my dear lady! It is there that we must have seen each other!

**MRS. MARTIN:** How curious it is! It is possible, but I do not recall it, sir!

**MR. MARTIN:** To tell the truth, my dear lady, I do not remember it either. However, it is very possible that we saw each other on that occasion.

**MRS. MARTIN:** It is true, but I am not at all sure of it, sir.

**MR. MARTIN:** Dear madam, were you not the lady who asked me to place her suitcase in the luggage rack and who thanked me and gave me permission to

smoke?

**MRS. MARTIN:** But of course, that must have been I, sir. How curious it is, how curious it is, and what a coincidence!

**MR. MARTIN:** How curious it is, how bizarre, what a coincidence! And well, well, it was perhaps at that moment that we came to know each other, madam?

**MRS. MARTIN:** How curious it is and what a coincidence! It is indeed possible, my dear sir! However, I do not believe that I recall it.

**MR. MARTIN:** Nor do I, madam. [A moment of silence. The clock strikes twice, then once.] Since coming to London, I have resided in Bromfield Street, my dear lady.

**MRS. MARTIN:** How curious that is, how bizarre! I, too, since coming to London, I have resided in Bromfield Street, my dear sir.

**MR. MARTIN:** How curious that is, well then, well then, perhaps we have seen each other in Bromfield Street, my dear lady.

**MRS. MARTIN:** How curious that is, how bizarre! It is indeed possible, after all! But I do not recall it, my dear sir.

**MR. MARTIN:** I reside at No. 19, my dear lady.

**MRS. MARTIN:** How curious that is. I also reside at No. 19, my dear sir.

**MR. MARTIN:** Well then, well then, well then, well then, perhaps we have seen each other in that house, dear lady?

**MRS. MARTIN:** It is indeed possible but I do not recall it, dear sir.

**MR. MARTIN:** My flat is on the fifth floor, No. 8, my dear lady.

**MRS. MARTIN:** How curious it is, good Lord, how bizarre! And what a coincidence! I too reside on the fifth floor, in flat No. 8, dear sir!

**MR. MARTIN** [musing]: How curious it is, how curious it is, how curious it is, and what a coincidence! You know, in my bedroom there is a bed, and it is covered with a green eiderdown. This room, with the bed and the green eiderdown, is at the end of the corridor between the w.c. and the bookcase, dear lady!

**MRS. MARTIN:** What a coincidence, good Lord, what a coincidence! My bedroom, too, has a bed with a green eiderdown and is at the end of the corridor, between the w.c., dear sir, and the bookcase!

**MR. MARTIN:** How bizarre, curious, strange! Then, madam, we live in the same room and we sleep in the same bed, dear lady. It is perhaps there that we have met!

**MRS. MARTIN:** How curious it is and what a coincidence! It is indeed possible that we have met there, and perhaps even last night. But I do not recall it, dear sir!

**MR. MARTIN:** I have a little girl, my little daughter, she lives with me, dear lady. She is two years old, she's blonde, she has a white eye and a red eye, she is very pretty, her name is Alice, dear lady.

**MRS. MARTIN:** What a bizarre coincidence! I, too, have a little girl. She is two years old, has a white eye and a red eye, she is very pretty, and her name is Alice, too, dear sir!

**MR. MARTIN** [in the same drawling monotonous voice]: How curious it is and what a coincidence! And bizarre! Perhaps they are the same, dear lady!

**MRS. MARTIN**: How curious it is! It is indeed possible, dear sir. [A rather long moment of silence. The clock strikes 29 times.]

**MR. MARTIN** [after having reflected at length, gets up slowly and, unhurriedly, moves toward **Mrs. Martin**, who, surprised by his solemn air, has also gotten up very quietly. **Mr. Martin**, in the same flat, monotonous voice, slightly singsong]: Then, dear lady, I believe that there can be no doubt about it, we have seen each other before and you are my own wife... Elizabeth, I have found you again!

[Mr. Martin approaches **Mr. Martin** without haste. They embrace without expression. The clock strikes once, very loud. This striking of the clock must be so loud that it makes the audience jump. The Martins do not hear it.]

**MRS. MARTIN**: Donald, it's you, darling!

[They sit together in the same armchair, their arms around each other, and fall asleep. The clock strikes several more times. Mary, on tiptoe, a finger to her lips, enters quietly and addresses the audience.]

**MARY**: Elizabeth and Donald are now too happy to be able to hear me. I can therefore let you in on a secret. Elizabeth is not Elizabeth, Donald is not Donald. And here is the proof: the child that Donald spoke of is not Elizabeth's daughter, they are not the same person. Donald's daughter has one white eye and one red eye like Elizabeth's daughter. Whereas Donald's child has a white right eye and a red left eye, Elizabeth's child has a red right eye and a white left eye! Thus all of Donald's system of deduction collapses when it comes up against this last obstacle which destroys his whole theory. In spite of the extraordinary coincidences which seem to be definitive proofs, Donald and Elizabeth, not being the parents of the same child, are not Donald and Elizabeth. It is in vain that he thinks he is Donald, it is in vain that she thinks she is Elizabeth. He believes in vain that she is Elizabeth. She believes in vain that he is Donald--they are sadly deceived. But who is the true Donald? Who is the true Elizabeth? Who has any interest in prolonging this confusion? I don't know. Let's not try to know. Let's leave things as they are. [She takes several steps toward the door, then returns and says to the audience:] My real name is Sherlock Holmes. [She exits.]

[The clock strikes as much as it likes. After several seconds, Mr. and Mrs. Martin separate and take the chairs they had at the beginning.]

**MR. MARTIN**: Darling, let's forget all that has not passed between us, and, now that we have found each other again, let's try not to lose each other anymore, and live as before.

**MRS. MARTIN**: Yes, darling.

## Further useful Information about *Tartuffe*

Tartuffe teaches us about Lack of trust in relationships; we can see it in relation of husband and wife, father and son and father and daughter. After returning from trip, Orgon asks about what is position in house hold. Orgon says to Dorine, "How are the family? What's been going on?" (515). Dorine told him about his wife, who had a bad fever two days ago, but Orgon continued his inquires about Tartuffe. For example, Orgon says to Dorine, "Ah, and Tartuffe?" (515). He repeated this question to Dorine, every time she said something about his wife. This shows that he is more concerned about Tartuffe than his own family and wife. He trust more to Tartuffe than his own wife, Orgon says to Cleante, "to protect my honor stays by my wife, and keeps an eye upon her" (516). This shows how he trusts Tartuffe more than his own wife; we can see the lack of trust in relationship of Husband and Wife. Orgon is in clash with his son, Damis. After Damis caught Tartuffe trying to seduce Elmire, he is convinced that he has enough evidence against Tartuffe to satisfy his father Orgon. Damis says to Elmire, "Ah, now I have my long-awaited chance to punish [Tartuffe] deceit and arrogance, and give my father clear and shocking proof of the black character of his dear Tartuffe" (525). Damis goes to his father to tell him about Tartuffe's hypocrisy. Orgon, however, after hearing of Damis about Tartuffe's hypocrisy, instead of believing his own son, he trusted Tartuffe and blame that Damis is wrong. Orgon says to Damis, "Ah, you deceitful boy, how dare you try, to stain [Tartuffe] purity with so foul a lie?" (526). Orgon also rebukes Damis, Orgon says to Damis, "Villain, be still!" (526). This argument between Orgon and Damis shows the unfair to Damis, and shows that father Orgon trust more to Tartuffe than his own son. Daughter of Orgon, Marine, wants to marry Valere, but Orgon decides that Mariane will marry Tartuffe instead. Orgon says to Mariane, "Daughter, I mean it; you're to be [Tartuffe] wife" (518). Orgon wants Mariane to marry Tartuffe, so that Tartuffe can gain a good position in society and be in house forever. For example he says to Mariane, "Tartuffe, allied by marriage to this family" (518). This also shows us Tartuffe's control over Orgon. Orgon's power over the family is great, for example Mariane says to Dorine, "What good would it do? A father's power is great" (520). This shows the he does control the family, but his behavior towards the family members suggest that he doesn't trust them. Moliere wants us to teach about family and trust that we should keep faith in our relationship with our family and we should trust over family members, and we should listen their opinions too.

Tartuffe also teach about be aware of hypocrisy. In the play Tartuffe is called a hypocrite pretty much immediately as the play begins. Although Tartuffe does not appear unit ACT III scene 2, Tartuffe is discussed widely by other household members. The more they talk about Tartuffe, the more obvious his hypocrisy becomes. Almost everyone realize that Tartuffe is a hypocrite who pretends to be holy man. However, Orgon and Madame Pernelle believe that Tartuffe is holy man, and they trust him. For example, Madame Pernelle says to Dorine, "[Tartuffe's] own great goodness I can guarantee" (514) and Orgon says to Cleante, "your heart, like mine, would have surrendered to [Tartuffe]" (516). As we can see that Madame Pernelle and Orgon both are trapped in Tartuffe's hypocrisy. Orgon told Cleante his story about how he mate Tartuffe at church and what he used to do in church. For example Orgon says to Cleante, "When I rose to

go, [Tartuffe]’d run before to offer me holy-water at the door” (516). Tartuffe was faking to be a holy man, he used prayer loudly, give holy-water to Orgon, he used to do this things just to draw attention of Orgon, that he is religious and holy man. Orgon believed him that Tartuffe will show us the pathway to heaven and free their souls from sin. For Example Orgon says to Tartuffe, “At length, Heaven prompted me to take him in to dwell with us, and free our souls from sin” (516). Tartuffe tries to seduce Elmire, He says to Elmire, “I offer you, my dear Elmire, love without scandal, pleasure without fear” (525). This shows that he is hypocrite, he wants to have scandals affair with already married woman. After Damis told Orgon about Tartuffe tries to seduce Elmire, Orgon did not trust Damis, but he trusts more to Tartuffe. Elmire decided to show his husband the true face of Tartuffe; she seduced Tartuffe while Orgon heard them as he is hiding under the table. After Orgon admitted the truth of Tartuffe, He says to Tartuffe, “Just leave this household, without more ado” (531). After this Tartuffe showed his true face, he says to Orgon, “this house belong to me, I’ll have you know” (531). Tartuffe wants to blackmail Orgon about secret box that Orgon got from his friend which can ruin his impression in society. Orgon says to Cleante, “[box is] full of papers which, if they came to light, would ruin [Orgon’s friend] - or such is my impression” (532). Tartuffe comes there with officer and order from prince to arrest Orgon, but the prince knew that Tartuffe is hypocrite. In the end they arrested Tartuffe instead of Orgon. Moliere wants us to be aware of hypocrite like Tartuffe and he also wants us to teach that don’t trust anyone until we know about him.

"Chegg.com." *Although Tartuffe And A Midsummer Night's Dream ...* Web. 12 Nov. 2014.  
<<http://www.chegg.com/homework-help/questions-and-answers/although-tartuffe-midsummer-night-s-dream-comedies-teach-us-different-life-lessons-shakesp-q1762827>>.

### **Glossary for *The Importance of Being Earnest***

#### **Act I:**

*Half Moon Street* -- a street in London’s fashionable Mayfair district.

*Shropshire* -- idyllic inland county well-known for pastoral landscapes.

*in town* – “town” (at least in southern England) always meant London.

*Divorce Court* – After 1858, Divorce Court had the power to hear and decide divorce cases.

Before that time, a divorce had only been obtainable by a special Act of Parliament.

*Scotland Yard* – until 1890 the headquarters of the Metropolitan Police Force.

*Turnbridge Wells* – a quiet spa town in southern England.

*the Albany* – a block of expensive London apartments for single gentlemen.

*guardian* – someone placed in legal charge of an orphan, who is referred to as a ward.

*Willis’s* – fashionable Almack’s Assembly Rooms, later called Willis’s after the owner’s niece who inherited them.

*sent down* – When guests had assembled in the drawing room (on the second floor), they went down to the ground floor dining room in pairs of one man and one woman, the most important pair going first.

*corrupt French drama* – French plays of the period were popularly supposed to be concerned exclusively with questionable (i.e. scandalous) subject matter.

*ready money* – payment in cash, as opposed to credit.

*crumpets* – yeast buns (known to us as English muffins) served at tea.

*the Season* – short period in early summer when balls and parties were held in smart London society, mainly to arrange suitable marriages.

*christening* – baptism in a ceremony to give a child its “Christian” (or first) name.

*Grosvenor Square* – (pronounced “grove’-ner) fashionable square in London’s West End inhabited by the upper classes.

*duties* – Death duties, or taxes on money left in a will, were instituted in 1894.

*Belgrave Square* – fashionable square behind Buckingham Palace.

*Liberal Unionists* – political party which broke away from the Liberal Party and gradually became associated with the Conservative Party (Tories), so its members were almost respectable in Lady Bracknell’s view.

*come in the evening* – Guests invited to come after dinner were less important than those invited to dine first with the family.

*Radical* – supporting the more socially progressive, reforming views.

*Purple of Commerce* – Purple, being a royal color, suggest a superior group among those who have made their money by industry.

*handbag* -- small suitcase carried by either sex.

*Victoria Station* – large London railway station.

*Brighton line* – train route serving Brighton, a popular seaside resort in East Sussex.

*Gorgon* – mythological creature who turned people to stone with its gaze.

*the Club* – Gentlemen’s clubs in London were commonly used as meeting places.

*the Empire* – music hall in Leicester Square, which was famous for its ‘promenade’ of high-priced call girls. It had been attacked by a Purity Campaign only the year before the play opened.

*three-volume novel* – Most novels of the period were published in installments in weekly periodicals prior to being reissued in three hardbound volumes.

*Hertfordshire* – (pronounced “hart’-ford-sure”) county just north of London, much more accessible than Shropshire.

## **Act II:**

*Mudie* – Mudie’s Library was an old lending library which also exchanged books by mail.

*canon* – clergyman attached to a cathedral or in charge of the local parish.

*rector* – clergyman of the Church of England performing duties for a particular parish.

*Egeria* – in Roman mythology, one of the Muses, proverbially used of a woman who inspires.

*evensong* – the daily evening religious service.

*rupée* – unit of currency in India, which at the time was a troublesome part of the British Empire.

*Australia* – Once a destination for English criminals, by 1895 Australia was considered a good place to send unsatisfactory members of prominent families for a second chance, or to be forgotten.

*quixotic* – reference to the impractical hero of Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*.

*Maréchal Niel* – a variety of yellow rose.

*crape hatband* – It was customary to wear black clothes after the death of a family member or close friend. Black crape was a popular fabric in mourning wear during the Victorian period.

*Paris* – popularly considered a city of sin and frivolity.

*manna in the wilderness* – refers to the miraculous supply of food for the Israelites wandering in the wilderness in the Book of Exodus.

*immersion of adults* – Christening in the Church of England is generally accomplished by a token sprinkling of water, but certain sects require total immersion.

*canonical* – according to the rules or ‘canons’ of the Church of England.

*port manteaus* – large traveling cases.

*dog-cart* – a light, horse-drawn, two-wheeled vehicle.

*the four-five* – train scheduled to depart at five minutes after four o’clock.

*14th of February* – St. Valentines’ Day was also opening night for *Earnest* in 1895.

*Bankruptcy Court* – court where the affairs of possible bankruptcies would be discussed.

*Morning Post* – Most newspapers contained columns in which the upper classes could pay to insert announcements of engagements, weddings, births, etc.

**Act III:**

*dreadful popular air* – probably a derogatory reference to Gilbert & Sullivan’s operettas.

*University Extension Scheme* – provider of educational lectures and classes for the general public.

*Dorking, Surrey* – country town near enough to London to make it convenient for country houses.

*Fifeshire, N.B.* – N. B. stands for North Britain – that is, Scotland. Rich persons might own a house in Scotland so that they could pursue the country sports of hunting, fishing, and shooting.

*Court Guides* – generally annual publications recording ‘who was who’ at court.

*the Funds* – stocks issued by the Government, considered a very safe investment.

*comes of age* – legally attains full adult status, which in this period was usually twenty-one.

*Oxonian* – graduate of Oxford University.

*Perrier-Jouet, Brut ’89* – superior French champagne bottled in 1889.

*Anabaptists* – 16th-century Christian sect that was opposed to infant baptism.

*Upper Grosvenor Street* – street in the fashionable West End of London, off Grosvenor Square.

*Bayswater* – an unfashionable area west of the City of London.

*Gower Street omnibus* – Gower Street is just north of the West End. An omnibus of the period would have been horse-drawn, and the upper classes would not have traveled in it.

*temperance beverage* – any drink said not to contain alcohol.

*Leamington* – a spa visited for the sake of its mineral waters.

*Army Lists* – monthly distribution list of officers on active service. The quarterly list gave the seniority, appointments, and war services of officers in detail.