## Glossary for *The Importance of Being Earnest*

**The Albany** Ernest Worthing's address on his calling cards was actually the home of George Ives, a friend of Wilde's and an activist for homosexual rights.

**Anabaptists** a religious group that believes the only form of baptism should be complete immersion of the body in water.

**Army Lists** published lists of commissioned officers in the British Army.

**"As a man sows, so let him reap."** This is a verse from the *Bible,*Galatians 6:7, meaning that actions determine fate.

**Belgrave Square** another affluent London area in Belgravia.

**Bunbury** the name of a school friend of Wilde's. Here, someone who deceives.

**canonical practice** church law.

**corrupt French Drama** possibly a reference to the plays of Alexander Dumas in the 1850s.

**Court Guides** an annual reference manual listing the names and addresses of members of the upper class and aristocracy.

**Divorce Court** Before 1857, divorces could only be granted by Parliament at great expense, and they rarely happened. In 1857, Divorce Court was passed by Parliament, making divorce easier.

**Earnest** - resulting from or showing sincere and intense conviction. Synonyms : serious, solemn, grave, sober, humorless, staid, intense

**effeminate** having the qualities generally attributed to women, such as weakness, timidity, delicacy and so on; unmanly; not virile.

**effrontery** unashamed boldness.

**egeria** chastity. Egeri, a nymph, gave wise laws to Numa Pompilius of Rome that were used for the vestal virgins.

**The Empire** a theatre in Leicester Square, London.

**Evensong** a Sunday evening religious service.

**Farce** is a comedy that uses highly exaggerated situations to entertain its audience. These situations are more often than not exaggerated to an extent that ultimately renders them improbable.

**Funds** government stocks that give a low yield of interest but are conservative and safe.

**German skepticism** a German philosophy that examines style or appearance rather than substance.

**Grosvenor Square** a very affluent area of London in the Mayfair district.

**Half Moon Street** a very fashionable street in London's West End; its location is handy to gentlemen's clubs, restaurants and theatres.

**Irony** describes situations that are strange or funny because things happen in a way that seems to be the opposite of what you expected. Note the "opposite" here. If an expectation is black, then an ironic outcome would be white, not off-white or gray.

**John -** a toilet, a prostitutes client, Biblical name

**Liberal Unionist** a political group that voted against Home Rule for Ireland in 1886. Liberals were the conservative political group.

**lorgnette** a pair of eyeglasses attached to a handle.

**machinations** an artful or secret plot or scheme.

**the Morning Post** a newspaper read by the upper class because of its reporting on engagements, marriages and social gossip.

**Mudie** a lending library.

**"only eighteen"** Cecily is the precise age to "come out" as a Society debutante. During the Season, 18-year-olds were introduced as marriage material for suitable men.

**Oxonian** someone who graduated from Oxford University.

**Parody** (sometimes referred to as a spoof) is essentially imitative work. It uses the skeleton of an original work and adds its own comedic elements that strive towards either exaggerating the flaws of the original work or trivializing it, or in some cases both. There are many examples of parodies out in the mainstream media right now. A good one would be the S*cary Movie* franchise in which each movie borrows from the most popular shows and movies as well as current events from the last year or so and creates a story line parodying them. There are also channels on YouTube entirely dedicated to building parodies of hit videos and movies.

**perambulator** (chiefly British) a baby carriage; buggy.

**pew-opener** a person who works for a church by opening the private pews of the wealthy.

**the Primitive Church** the pre-Reformation Catholic Church, whose priest remained celibate.

**Prism -** In literature often used figuratively with reference to the clarification or distortion afforded by a particular viewpoint. A Mistake

**The Railway Guide** an indispensable timetable of railway departures and arrivals, probably invented by Robert Diggles Kay in either 1838 or 1839.

**"a restraining influence"** the presence of servants that causes the principal characters to be careful in their speech.

**Satire**  uses irony, and in some cases, exaggeration to expose vices and shortcomings of an entity, be it an individual or a complex and interdependent system such as our society. Humor might be part of it, but the end result is almost never funny. It is used to elicit thinking and realization in the audience. *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift is considered one of the best satirical works in English literature. Some contemporary examples of satire would be shows like The Colbert Report, The Daily Show, etc. where the hosts use humor to provide social commentary on issues that currently plague the society.

**sent down** to act as a lady's escort for dinner.

**sententiously** full of, or fond of using, maxims, proverbs and so on, especially in a way that is ponderously trite and moralizing.

**"Shropshire is your county"** a reference to Jack Worthing's position as county magistrate.

**"slight refreshment at five o'clock"** known as light tea, served to people who visit at this time of day.

**Temperance beverage** a drink that expressly does not contain alcohol.

**terminus** (British)either the end of a transportation line, or a station or town located there; terminal.

**three-volume novels** Lending libraries circulated novels in three parts so that three different readers could be reading at the same time. This practice ended in the late 1800s.

**Tories** members of the more conservative political circles. Lady Bracknell and other wealthy socialites would approve.

**Tunbridge Wells** a fashionable resort in Kent.

**University Extension Scheme** The University of London began these extension courses that were early developments in adult education.

**Wagnerian** relating to or characteristic of the dark operas of Richard Wagner. Whose music was adored by Adolf Hitler.

**womanthrope** a humorous word made up by Miss Prism for a person who hates women.