

**EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL
PRODUCED FOR IAN BURNS and THAT THEATRE COMPANY
AUTUMN PRODUCTION 2009**

In Extremis by Neil Bartlett

Dear English Teachers,

This autumn, we are very lucky because the focus of That Theatre Company's autumn production will be the life and works of Oscar Wilde.

In Krudttønden, Serridslevvej 2, Østerbro.
October 21st – November 21st 2009
Monday – Friday at 8 p.m.
Saturdays at 5 p.m.

Oscar Wilde goes to see a palm-reader, while he waits for the start of the trial against him for being homosexual. The title of the play is In Extremis and the writer is Neil Bartlett.

That Theatre Company presents both classic and modern English drama of a high and challenging standard. One of its aims is to inspire and engage teachers & students. Our productions will bring the texts that you study to life. You can have your own classroom on the stage as you go through the educational material.

The idea is that you choose for yourself what you would like to focus on: we hope that the following material will be of use to you.

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EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL

In Extremis **by Neil Bartlett**

First performed at the Royal National Theatre, London, in 2001.

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1. IAN BURNS' INTRODUCTION: THE STORY IN BRIEF

Dear Reader,

The British state in Victorian England did everything in its power to crush Europe's most provocative homosexual, the Irish playwright Oscar Wilde. But his commitment to the "Cause" was too powerful to shake. On March 24, 1895 on the eve of his trial for sodomy, he visited Mrs. Robinson, a society palm-reader. He could have chosen to run away and not to face the humiliation and degradation of the trial, and the ruin of his reputation, but he chose to stay.

His Irish parents had both experienced imprisonment by the English government for being too "patriotic". His mother said that if he was convicted and sent to prison she'd always be his mother, but that if he chose to flee that she'd never speak to him again...
No pressure there then eh?

"In Extremis" is a play about a man at the height of his fame asking a complete stranger about a potentially life-changing decision.

<http://www.neil-bartlett.com/>

There is no shortage of material about one of the greatest writers in the English language. *In Extremis* focuses on the time shortly before his trial at the Old Bailey took place and in particular the time when he went to see a palm-reader.

What was he hoping to achieve by that? Seems a strange but wonderfully eccentric thing to choose to do.

Was he hoping that she would tell him the truth? That she could predict the future accurately?

The fact is that no one knows what was actually said during that short encounter, but the writer, Neil Bartlett has created a fascinating play out of what **might** have taken place and we look forward to sharing it with you.

***N.B:** I know that the length of our productions sometimes makes it difficult for students to remain on the alert after their long day at gymnasium etc. Please note that this production is short and will play for approximately one hour. Maybe time for some questions afterwards? If this is something that you would like please email us at: pr@that-theatre.com*

With Ian Burns & Annemette Andersen

Director: Claus Bue

Krudttønden. Serridslevvej 2, 2100 Kbh Ø

October 21 – November 21 2009

Mon –Fri: 8 p.m./ Sats: 5 p.m.

Performance time approximately 1 hour

Tickets: www.taiteatret.dk / 7024 5500

2. OSCAR WILDE: BIOGRAPHY

Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oscar_Wilde

For other uses, see [Oscar Wilde \(disambiguation\)](#).

	Oscar Wilde
Born	16 October 1854 Dublin , Ireland
Died	30 November 1900 (aged 46) Paris, France
Occupation	Playwright, short story writer, poet
Nationality	Irish
Writing period	Victorian era

Oscar Wilde (Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde/ 16 October 1854 – 30 November 1900) was born in Dublin on 16 October 1854 to Sir William Wilde and his wife Jane.

He was an [Irish playwright](#), [poet](#) and [author](#) of numerous [short stories](#) and one [novel](#). He was not an overtly political commentator but through his plays there is an underlying critique of social norms that are illumined for their absurdities.

His works have inspired countless fellow authors, have been translated to numerous languages, and have been adapted to the stage and screen many times over. Fiction by Wilde includes *The Canterville Ghost* (1887), *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888), *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* (1889), *A House of Pomegranates* (1891), *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime* (1891), and *Intentions* (essays, 1891). His plays include *Vera, or the Nihilists* (1880), *The Duchess of Padua* (1883), *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *A Florentine Tragedy (La Sainte Courtisane* 1893), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *Salomé* (1894), *An Ideal Husband*(1895), and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895).

Oscar Wilde is one of the most iconic figures from late Victorian society. Enjoying a meteoric rise to the top of society.

Known for his biting wit, he became one of the most successful playwrights of the late [Victorian era](#) in London, and one of the greatest [celebrities](#) of his day. Several of his plays continue to be widely performed, especially *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

His wit, humour and intelligence shine through his plays and writings. For his sexuality he suffered the indignity and shame of imprisonment. For a long time his name was synonymous with scandal and intrigue. However with changing social attitudes he is remembered with great affection for his biting social criticism, wit and linguistic skills.

“To get back my youth I would do anything in the world, except take exercise, get up early or be respectable.” - Oscar Wilde

Oscar's mother, Lady Jane Francesca Wilde (1820-1896), was a successful poet and journalist. She wrote patriotic Irish verse under the pseudonym "Speranza". Oscar's father, Sir William Wilde (1815 - 1876), was a leading ear and eye surgeon, a renowned philanthropist and gifted writer who wrote books on archaeology and folklore. Oscar had an elder brother, Willie, and a younger sister, Isola Francesca, who died at the early age of 10.

As the result of a widely covered series of trials, Wilde suffered a dramatic downfall and was imprisoned for two years **hard labour** after being convicted of "gross indecency" with other men. After Wilde was released from prison he set sail for **Dieppe** by the night ferry. He never returned to Ireland or Britain, and died penniless and in exile three years later in 1900. He was 46.

More on this Link:

<http://www.wilde-online.info/oscar-wilde-biography.htm>

As Stephen Fry wrote of Oscar Wilde:

“What of Wilde the man? He stood for Art. He stood for nothing less all his life.. He is still enormously underestimated as an artist and a thinker. Wilde was a great writer and a great man.”

More on this link:

http://www.biographyonline.net/poets/oscar_wilde.html

Oscar Wilde on Biography:

"Biography lends to death a new terror" - Oscar Wilde

"Every great man nowadays has his disciples, and it is always Judas who writes the biography"

(Intentions: 1891 "The Critic as Artist" part 1.)

Very useful links are:

Information about the trial:

<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/wilde/wilde.htm>

Brief introduction to Oscar Wilde:

<http://www.oscholars.com/Oxford08/Intro/Introduction1.htm>

Universal reaction to Oscar Wilde:

<http://www.oscholars.com/Oxford08/Abstracts/Abstracts.htm>

English & Irish newspaper coverage of the trial:

<http://www.oscholars.com/TO/Appendix/Library/walshe.htm>

(the first gay Irishman?)

http://www.oscholars.com/TO/Appendix/Library/walshe.htm#_edn36

Transcript of Wilde's defence. "The love that dare not speak its name":

<http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/364900.html>

3. WITTICISMS

Wilde was a fascinating character who lived life to the full, experiencing both the joy and tragedy of society's vacillating judgments. With the distance of over a century it is easier to judge Wilde for his unique contributions to literature rather than through the eyes of Victorian moral standards. His wit has become immortal.

Here is a selection of some of his most famous witticisms:

From The Importance of Being Earnest, (1895):

“The truth is rarely pure, and never simple”.

“In married life three is company and two none”

“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”

“The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what fiction means”

“All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That’s his”

From Lady Windermere’s fan (1892):

“I can resist everything except temptation”

“We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars”

“Experience is the name everyone gives to their mistakes”

“What is a cynic? A man who knows the price of everything but the value of nothing”

“I have nothing to declare except my genius” (At the New York Custom House)

From The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891):

“There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written”

“There is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about”

“A man cannot be too careful in the choice of his enemies”

As Oscar lay dying, penniless in a French hotel, he looked around at the room and said: ‘My wall paper and I are in a battle to the death, one or the other must go’.

Those were his final words.

4. ATTITUDES TOWARDS HOMOSEXUALITY

Then and now...

It is generally accepted by large parts of the world today that homosexuality is not a disease or something to be punished for by society. In some countries, “gay” men and women can get married and adopt children. They can be priests and vicars.

But in some places homosexuality is still a criminal offence and not tolerated.

For example: Moscow: Melody Grand-Prix Final. 16th of May 2009. A Gay-Parade is planned but neo-Fascist groups plan to disrupt it. The Government seems to be fanning the flames by adopting a “gay is evil and a threat to Russian culture” stance. Moscow’s Mayor, Jurij Lusjkov: “Homosexuals are weapons of mass destruction”

In the UK; “Queens” can now get knighted by Queen Elizabeth II. (Elton John, Cliff Richard) These were unthinkable possibilities in Victorian Britain 100 years ago. Being “gay” (a word that used to mean being happy and carefree before it was kidnapped by homosexuals about 20 years ago) is now almost a thing to be celebrated. At least here in liberal Copenhagen, London, Paris, San Francisco and Rio de Janeiro, where “Gay-Parades” take place annually. Flamboyant and colourful celebrations of being gay, which are tolerated and enjoyed by all.

Live and let live...

Love is love whatever form it takes, we say.

Are we more tolerant of a person’s sexual preference than we are say of other ethnic minorities we rub shoulders with in our increasingly global-village?

Fundamentalist Christians are very vehement in their attitude towards homosexuals. For them it is “un-Godly”. Odd that people who call themselves Christians or religious can be so intolerant...

Not so long ago in Britain and other countries there was a great deal of pressure on trying to “clean” homosexuality out of the armed forces. As if “gay” men and women would corrupt the rest of their comrades in arms. I seem to remember reading that the Spartans were encouraged to be lovers. To fight and protect your brother, comrade and *lover* made them a force to be reckoned with.

The Spartans have become a byword for supreme courage in the face of insuperable odds. I don’t imagine for one moment anyone would have

done a limp-wristed, camp, lisping impression of a homosexual in their presence.

A quick look at this link will confirm what I mean
<http://www.300spartanwarriors.com/>

Told you. ..

5. VICTORIAN ENGLAND AND HOMOSEXUALITY

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victorian_morality

In Victorian England homosexuality obviously existed across the spectrum of society and it was also to a large extent tolerated, a blind-eye being turned when possible.

Oscar Wilde made that position impossible for the authorities. His lover was Lord Alfred Douglas, (“Bosie”) whose father was the Marquis of Queensbury, an influential Scottish nobleman of outspoken views who did not approve of his son’s open “friendship” with the increasingly ostentatious Oscar Wilde. Wilde He brought charges of libel against the Marquis. .

This link will give you an impression of the kind of man we're talking about:

http://www.crimelibrary.com/gangsters_outlaws/cops_others/oscar_wilde/4.html

A short excerpt from the link above:

Marquis of Queensbury:

“Queensbury suspected Wilde was a homosexual who was bent on seducing Lord Alfred. The publication of “Two Loves” proved it to him.

(See Birgitte Holm’s material, p. 71)

The Marquis tried everything he could to pull his son from Wilde's clutches. He stalked the men as they went about London and accosted any restaurateur who served them. He threatened his son with excommunication from the family. Still Lord Alfred and Oscar remained close friends.

"Your intimacy with this man Wilde must either cease or I will disown you and stop all money supplies," Queensbury threatened in 1893. He publicly scolded his son and even showed up at Wilde's house with a champion boxer to threaten the author. Wilde's response was, "I do not know what the Queensbury rules are, but the Wilde rules are to shoot on sight!"

Queensbury became so apoplectic he almost exploded! Here we have another example of Wilde’s wit!

BUT wit can be dangerous, he had made a very ruthless enemy....

Read on: the plot thickens. Imagine it as a boxing match!

“Ladies & gentlemen! In the green corner the seemingly invincible, loveable genius Oscar Wilde versus the challenger, in the red corner that

well known homophobe, wife-beater and bully, The Marquis of Queensbury!"

"Seconds out, Round One!" (Bell rings!)

Like a master chess player, Queensbury plotted his moves to destroy Oscar Wilde and Wilde walked right into the trap.

Wilde was at his zenith. *Dorian Gray* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* were both critical and popular successes, as was another play, *The Ideal Husband*. Master of the epigram and the *bon mot*, Wilde was the toast of London and a popular guest at parties. Seemingly uncaring that Queensbury was planning his downfall, he openly consorted with "renters" -- young male prostitutes -- and held court in some of London's finest establishments.

At the Albemarle Club where Wilde dined, Queensbury left his calling card complete with misspelling of the libellous word: "To Oscar Wilde, posing as a **somdomite**." Wilde felt he was left with no other choice but to defend his honor and sue for criminal libel. Queensbury had been stalking him, had threatened his livelihood and now insulted him publicly.

Friends urged him not to sue, to shrug off the insult and move on, perhaps traveling to America or the continent. But Wilde would have none of it. He brought criminal charges against Queensbury and demanded satisfaction.

The Marquis expected no less and was prepared. In the criminal court on Bow Street he made the statement that not only had he called Wilde a sodomite, he had done so for the good of the general public. This last statement was important, because now if Wilde lost, the government would have no choice but to pursue criminal charges for gross indecency. To do otherwise would show favoritism for the elite.

Wilde expected the trial to be little more than a chance to exhibit his witty repartee on the stand. After all, it was up to Queensbury to prove the truth of his statements, not for Wilde to disprove them. The courtroom might have been a place of combat, but it was the type of combat that Wilde, not Queensbury, could exploit.

Sir Edward Clark

Wilde approached one of England's most respectable barristers, Edward Clarke, and asked him to take the case for the prosecution. Clarke's reputation was one of immense respectability and correctness. He did not often take cases in which he suspected his client was guilty and he demanded honesty from those he represented. His previous experience with sodomy cases was in the divorce court, where he represented jilted wives.

"I can only take the case, sir," Clarke said, "if you assure me on your honour as an English gentleman that there is not and never has been any foundation for the charges that are made against you."

Wilde very firmly said Queensbury's charges were groundless and false and Clarke agreed to take the case.

The suit was doomed from the start, and Wilde's closest friends knew it. The general feeling among those who cared in London was that Wilde was gay and that Queensbury's allegations were true. It was also commonly believed that no jury would rule against Queensbury, for he could easily play the desperate father trying to save his son from Wilde.

But Lord Alfred was adamant that Wilde pursue the charges. Wilde's family, who believed the men when they said nothing untoward was going on between them, agreed to pay for the trial, taking away Oscar's last escape route.

6. VICTORIAN ENGLAND AND ART FOR ART'S SAKE

As the 19th century progressed, the exercise of artistic freedom became fundamental to progressive modernism. Artists began to seek freedom not just from the rules of academic art, but also from the demands of the public. Soon it was claimed that art should be produced not for the public's sake, but for **art's sake**.

The intention of the movement “Art for Art’s sake” was to educate the public, to keep alive in the face of conservative forces the Enlightenment ideals of freedom and equality through which the world would be made a better place.

The position taken by progressive modernism came to be referred to as the *avant-garde* (a military term meaning "advance-guard", those who go ahead, lead the way). In contrast to the conservative modernists who looked to the past and tradition, the avant-garde artist consciously rejected tradition.

<http://witcombe.sbc.edu/modernism/artsake.html>

“Art for Art's Sake” is basically a call for release from the tyranny of meaning and purpose. From a progressive modernist's point of view, it was a further exercise of freedom. It was also a ploy, another deliberate affront to bourgeois sensibility which demanded art with meaning or that had some purpose such as to instruct, or delight, or to moralize, and generally to reflect in some way their own purposeful and purpose-filled world. A

progressive modernist painter like James Abbott McNeill Whistler, for example, blithely stated that his art satisfied none of those things.

In his 1891 essay "The Soul of Man Under Socialism", Oscar Wilde wrote:

“A work of art is the unique result of a unique temperament. Its beauty comes from the fact that the author is what he is. It has nothing to do with the fact that other people want what they want. Indeed, the moment that an artist takes notice of what other people want, and tries to supply the demand, he ceases to be an artist, and becomes a dull or an amusing craftsman, an honest or dishonest tradesman. He has no further claim to be considered as an artist.”

<http://www.online-literature.com/wilde/>

Ever the aesthete, Wilde himself was profoundly affected by beauty and lived and dressed flamboyantly compared to the typical Victorian styles and morals of the time. He was often publicly caricatured and the target of much moral outrage in Europe and America.

His writings such as *Dorian Gray* with homo-erotic themes also brought much controversy for him but he was part of the ever-growing movement of 'decadents' who advocated pacifism, social reform, and libertarianism. While many vilified him, he was making his mark with style and wit and enjoyed much success with many of his plays.

Wilde was lauded by and acquainted with many influential figures of the day including fellow playwright George Bernard Shaw, American poets Walt Whitman and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and English author and social critic John Ruskin.

“All trials are trials for one's life, just as all sentences are sentences of death; and three times have I been tried. The first time I left the box to be arrested, the second time to be led back to the house of detention, the third time to pass into a prison for two years. Society, as we have constituted it, will have no place for me, has none to offer; but Nature, whose sweet rains fall on unjust and just alike, will have clefts in the rocks where I may hide, and secret valleys in whose silence I may weep undisturbed. She will hang the night with stars so that I may walk abroad in the darkness without stumbling, and send the wind over my footprints so that none may track me to my hurt: she will cleanse me in great waters, and with bitter herbs make me whole. --"De Profundis"

Dear Reader,

That sets the scene rather nicely I hope and whets your appetites for the play we'll be presenting for you. I now hand you over to Birgitte Holm whom I thank for giving the following educational material her care and attention.

See you in the theatre.

Best wishes,

Ian Burns

Artistic Director

That Theatre Company.

Educational material for Neil Bartlett's IN EXTREMIS
by Birgitte Holm

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A. Pre-reading

Focus: Article by Neil Bartlett: "Writing Wilde: In Extremis", September, 2000

Writing Wilde: In Extremis

Neil Bartlett

My text, commissioned by Corin Redgrave as a companion-piece to his solo rendition of Wilde's *De Profundis*, is spun from a single historical fact. According to a telegram sent the next morning to his dear friend Ada Leverson, on the night of March 24, 1895, just one week before the beginning of the trial that was to cost him his reputation, his liberty, his home, his family and quite soon his life, Oscar Wilde went to visit a society palm-reader called Mrs Robinson. She read his palm, and told him that the trial would be a great triumph.

The next day a gathering of his friends made a last ditch attempt to persuade him to flee London for the safety of France; he refused. The rest is a history we're still living through.

We can never know what actually happened that night. But the story is too good to let lie; it might possibly hold a vital clue to the fascinating, appalling story of Wilde's downfall. We want to know *why* this famous man, with his brilliant mind and no less astonishing address book, turned, on that night of all nights, to a palm-reader. And why, as his letter to Ada Leverson and his behaviour the next day indicate, did he believe her? It seems profoundly irrational. We must not, however, let hindsight blind us to the fact that Wilde was faced with an impossible situation. Was he to leave Lord Alfred Douglas, the man with whom he was so deeply, disastrously in love? Leave his two young sons, whom he adored? Wilde was right in *De Profundis* to speak of the madness, the near-insanity of what happened to him. What place was there for reason in the city which had so suddenly turned against him? In less than three months an unholy alliance of media

hostility, class prejudice and homophobic hatred had transformed Wilde from a darling celebrity into the worst kind of criminal pervert. A palmist might claim to decipher the madness as well as anyone.

But surely he knew, as he set out in a cab to meet her, that Mrs Robinson was a charlatan? She had after all read his palm once before, at a society party. She'd played the oldest trick in the book; predicting foreign travel (hardly an unlikely event given Douglas's penchant for making Wilde pay for frequent trips abroad). Perhaps that was her appeal; Wilde loved charlatans, if a charlatan is someone who makes lying not only a profession, but an art. His heroes and heroines are in this sense all liars; they make truth a performance. It is no accident that *De Profundis*, which of all his writings is the only one concerned to tell and prove the truth, is also his greatest *tour de force* performance, it's great outpouring of hate and love rehearsed for months in the solitude of Reading Gaol.

By way of explanation for his apparent passivity in the face of imminent disaster, Wilde is often said to have been deeply superstitious, to have believed that his destruction was somehow inevitable. Perhaps that's why he went to Mrs. Robinson that night. Certainly, his work is always haunted by the idea of Fate, of Doom. All of his heroes are marked by destiny; Earnest was destined to marry Gwendolen from the moment Miss Prism left her handbag in the cloakroom at Victoria Station; Dorian was doomed from the moment he voiced the wish that his picture might age while he might not. Bizarrely, Wilde's own fiction even seems sometimes to predict with fatalistic accuracy his own destiny; Lord Arthur Saville, in a short story written eight years before Wilde met Mrs Robinson, becomes a criminal precisely because of his superstitious belief in the predictions of a palmist who he meets at a party.

*

I have invented very little. I have adopted Wilde's own technique of redeploying phrases, cadences and even whole speeches from one work in another. I have stolen from fiction - the fee of one hundred guineas, the names of the duchesses, the tear-stained walk through London at dawn are all from *Lord Arthur Saville's Crime*, for instance - and given new meanings to details lifted from letters and interviews. Like all good charlatans, I can claim to have stuck to the facts; Mrs Robinson did indeed provide advice to several M.P.s, and she did publish a photographically illustrated manual of

palm-reading (*The Graven Palm*, Edward Arnold, London, 1911); and she did live just round the corner from two friends of Wilde called Alfred and Charlie, a couple who he referred to as "married". He did wear lemon yellow gloves and a scarab ring, and a coat with a beaver collar; he did pay a well-publicized visit to a performance of *The Importance of Being Earnest* accompanied by both his wife and his lover. I have not invented Wilde's terror, or his love, or the details of his love-life. He already knew on March 24th that Queensberry's lawyers had obtained copies of his love-letters to Lord Alfred Douglas; but he didn't yet know that they had traced ten of the young men who he had paid to have sex with either Douglas or himself in the previous three years. And, yes, London was, that terrible spring, freezing; on the night that *The Importance of Being Earnest* opened, the Serpentine carried six inches of ice.

But as for this version of the story being "true" ...well; no truth can be separated from the circumstances of its telling. A hundred years after his death, we find other truths in Wilde's life and work than those found when he swore to tell the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth in the dock at the Old Bailey. We flatter ourselves that we read his story very differently to the jury who found him guilty, or to the newspaper editors who boosted their circulation on the back of lurid, moralizing editorials, or to all those who approved of or revelled in his humiliation. We've put up a statue, given him a plaque in Westminster Abbey, adopted him as an icon, claimed him as a pioneer, studied him to death, republished him endlessly and made him one the very few above-the-title box office guarantee names of our entertainment industry. But I do not think we have understood him yet, or what was done to him. I don't think we realize how much he is with us, rather than behind us.

Of all the details of this story, one image has stuck in my mind; Wilde and Mrs. Robinson sitting alone in her room, silent, unobserved in the middle of a London night noisy with speculation, rumour and libel, the smug applause of theatres, the vicious gossip of hotel dining rooms. What I wanted to do was the impossible thing that only theatre can do; to put us in that room.

*

With regards to staging; I am writing this introduction before the opening night of the first production, so I've no idea what the piece

will finally look like. As I indicate in the script, my intention was that it be put on stage without any token "period" clutter, and most especially without any realistic depiction of Mrs. Robinson's room. I had in mind a rather sombre, beautiful space, with the audience close around it, with just two mahogany chairs; a space where the actors would feel free to talk directly to the audience and also to move whenever and however they needed to. I would emphasize beautiful despite the suggestion of a resonant emptiness; this is Oscar Wilde, after all.

This piece is respectfully dedicated to the two great actors for whom I had the privilege of writing it, Sheila Hancock and Corin Redgrave.

Neil Bartlett
September 2000

Task: Read the article by Bartlett, "*Writing Wilde: In Extremis*". Divide the article into paragraphs and try to find out what the main topic in each section/paragraph is. Identify the topic sentence and describe how the rest of the paragraph relates to the topic sentence. Finally, give each paragraph a headline.

Task: Imagine you are a teacher. Your job is to formulate questions to your students. Your questions must take their point of departure in the article by Bartlett, "*Writing Wilde: In Extremis*". To be more precise your job is to formulate a question for each of the paragraphs you have divided the article into (c.f. see first task). Remember the paragraphs should provide the answers to your questions.

Task: Find one or two quotes in the article by Bartlett that you find interesting to discuss before reading the play. What does Bartlett for instance mean when he says, "*But I do not think we have understood him*"

yet, or what was done to him. I don't think we realise how much he is with us, rather than behind us", ("Writing Wilde: In Extremis")

Task: Translate into Danish the paragraph starting with: *"By way of explanation ... of a palmist who he meets at a party"*.

Task: Comment on the following quotation. How does Bartlett's statement about Oscar Wilde and his life fit your view of him? *"We have put up a statue, given him a plaque in Westminster Abbey, adopted him as an icon, claimed him as a pioneer, studied him to death, republished him endlessly and made him one of the very few above-the-title box office guarantee names of our entertainment industry. But I do not think we have understood him yet, or what was done to him. I do not think we realise how much he is with us, rather than behind us", (Writing Wilde: In Extremis).*

Focus: The Title of the Play

Task: Look up the term *"In Extremis"* what does it mean?

Task: Prediction: What do you think the play you are going to read is all about?

Focus: Words and phrases

Task: Glossary of dramatic terms. Translate the English words into Danish: curtain - downstage – exit – exposition - fade out – beat – fade - lights come up - off stage – parts -point of no return –props- resolution- rise- stage directions - stage right/left – upstage – subtext- dialogue- monologue ... add more yourselves.

Task: While reading the play, “*In Extremis*” make your own glossary (the following list of words may be your point of departure). Translate the words into Danish and find an English synonym(s).

Glossary:

p.14- sombre (oppressive, solemn, spartan, dismal)

p.18- verification (to establish the truth, the validity of something)

p.18- KC's (Kings Councillors (lawyer))

p.23- imperious mandate (urgent, demanding, wishes of the people)

p.24- adulterated (debased, altered, counterfeit)

p.25- folly (foolishness)

p.25- charlatan (a person claiming a false skill or knowledge)

p.26- imposter (a person who assumes a false character and pretends to be someone else)

p.26- palmistry (supposed divination from lines and other features in the palm of the hand)

p.27- foibles (now your turn to find synonyms ?)

p.27- prerequisites (find synonyms)

p.28- subterfuge (?)

p.28- ostentation (?)

p.28- cheiromantiscists (?)

p.29- juncture (?)

p.30- steadfastness (?)
p.31- divulging (?)
p.31- writer's callous (?)
p.32- profligate (?)
p.42- blasphemies (?)
p.45- metaphorically (?)
p.47- sordid (?)
p.51- pallid (?)

Focus: Oscar Wilde and the Biographical Approach

Task: Search the Internet for information about Oscar Wilde's life and works. For more information see also Ian Burns' material (p, 4,5). Next, write a mind-map with the name "Oscar Wilde" as your point of departure. The central idea/focus/issue of the mind-map (i.e Oscar Wilde) is placed in the middle of your paper with keywords spreading out like branches from a stem (stamme). With every new aspect you draw a new main line, and each main line may split up into several minor lines like twigs to a branch.

Task: Comment on and trace the relationship between Oscar Wilde and the poet Lord Alfred Douglas (known as "Bosie"). Search the net for information.

Task: Comment on and trace the development between Oscar Wilde and the Marquis of Queensbury (Douglas' father). Search the net for information. (See also Burns' material, p.12).

Focus: Pieces of the Past / Oscar Wilde's trial

Task: The play you are going to read is a play that focuses on the time shortly before Oscar Wilde's trial at the Old Bailey takes place. Search the net for information about Wilde and the trial. More information, see also Burns' material (p.12).

Task: Read the following excerpt from an article that appeared in the English newspaper "The News of the World".

London the 26th of May, 1895

The Wilde case is over, and at last the curtain has fallen on the most horrible scandal which has disturbed social life in London for many years. The crisis of "shame!" with which the sentence pronounced by Mr. Justice Wills was received, indicate that a certain section of the public in court regarded the verdict with disfavour, and that feeling will very possibly be shared by a section of the public outside. But it is well to remember that the jury are in position to form the best and honest opinion. They have heard all the evidence and seen the witnesses in the box, while outsiders have only newspaper reports (...) to guide them. Yet even those who have read the reports and have taken the trouble to understand what lies between the lines, cannot help but feel that Wilde and his associate have got off lightly. Society is well rid of these ghouls and their hideous practices. Wilde practically confessed his guilt at the outset, and the

unclean creatures with whom he chose to herd specifically owned that the charges were true. It is at a terrible cost that society has purged itself of these loathsome importers of exotic vice, but the gain is worth the price, and it is refreshing to feel that for once, at least, justice has been done.

Task: Match the words from the above excerpt, “*The News of the World*”, in the left column with the ones in the right column

<i>have got off lightly</i>	<i>beginning</i>
<i>is well rid of</i>	<i>to be part of a group of animals</i>
<i>ghouls</i>	<i>admitted</i>
<i>hideous</i>	<i>accusations</i>
<i>guilt</i>	<i>horrible</i>
<i>outset</i>	<i>hateful</i>
<i>to herd</i>	<i>responsibility</i>
<i>owned</i>	<i>is pleased to be free from</i>
<i>charges</i>	<i>have made the effort</i>
<i>loathsome</i>	<i>have received a light sentence</i>
<i>have taken the trouble</i>	<i>people who delight in revolting practices, like feeding on human flesh</i>

Task: Translate the excerpt from “*The News of the World*” into Danish.

Task: Talking about the excerpt from “*The News of the World*”:

Reading Comprehension:

- What is the position of the author of the article?*
- Was there unanimous condemnation of Wilde’s “crime” or were there dissenting voices?*
- What does the article suggest about the cherished notion of “respectability” in Victorian times?*

Focus: Time, Setting, Historical/ Social and Literary Background

Task: Comment on the time and setting of the play “*In Extremis*”
“*Setting is the time and place of the story. More precisely, it may be the geographical place, the environment in which the characters live, the historical period, the season of the year or the social conditions of the character*” (*Box of Communicating, Flensted, p.50*).

Task: Give a historical and social outline of the Victorian Age. More information see also Burns’ material (p. 12,16). The following list of words may help you:

the industrial revolution – a new urbanised society – the golden age – the triumph of fiction - growth in the middle class – improved education- circulating libraries - Queen Victoria- the role of parliament – the economy – foreign policy – reform – improvement in living and working conditions – people’s charter – the trade union – problems in Ireland (famine) – new scientific discovery – an age of stark contrasts and paradoxes – Victorian morality...

Task: Below is a list of main events (Britain 1837-1901). Use each heading as a key-word to write further on about “Queen Victoria”, “The Great Exhibition” etc ... Search the net for help.

List of events:

1837: Queen Victoria (write on)

1838: The People's Charter (write on)

1840: Postal service introduced (write on)

1845: Famine in Ireland (write on)

1851: The Great Exhibition ...

1869: Trades Union Congress set up ...

1870: Working day limited to ten hours/ Compulsory education up to thirteen years of age....

1876: Queen Victoria crowned Empress of India ...

1880-1900: New colonies in Asia and Africa

1893: Independent Labour party founded/ Gladstone's second Home Rule Bill defeated ..

Task: The Victorian Age is often identified with “*the rise of the novel*”. And indeed, the popularity of the Victorian novel was enormous at that time. Search the Internet and trace the most outstanding writers of this period. Make a list of these writers. Next, write a speech about one of these writers.

Present your speech in class.

Task: Burns writes in his material: “*Wilde remains a fascinating character. One who lived life to the full, experiencing both the joy and tragedy of society's vacillating judgements. With the distance of over a century it is easier to judge Wilde for his unique contributions to literature rather than through the eyes of Victorian standards*”. Comment on and discuss the quote.

Focus: Oscar Wilde and the Movement of Aestheticism

Task: The crisis, faith and morality which characterized the latter half of the Victorian period gave rise in the 1880s and 1890s to an artistic movement known as “*Aestheticism*”. Look up the term “*aestheticism*” in a dictionary. Next, search the Internet and find out the purpose of this movement. See also, Burns’ material about “Art-for art’s sake”, (p.16)

Task: Oscar Wilde says himself about the “Aesthetic Movement”, “... *it was almost an invention, and not quite a myth. It was, essentially, the quest for beauty and the cult of art of art’s sake, but the public regarded it with suspicion because of what they saw as our posturing and affectation, so it was much caricatured in the press. We were protesting against the ugliness and materialism of the age. It wasn’t really a movement in the sense that Romanticism was, or Impressionism. It was more of a label attached, sometimes not entirely to their liking, to certain writers or artists, starting with the Pre-Raphaelites and brought to an end, if indeed it lasted as long, by my scandal in 1895. But my association with it in 1881 was all I’d been waiting for, because it got me a lucrative lecture tour of America*”, (“*Coffee with Oscar Wilde*”, Merlin Holland, page 49). Discuss, this statement with special focus on the underlined keywords.

Task: On his death bed in Paris Wilde was upset with the wall-paper in his room. He said, “*either the wall-paper goes or I do*”! Explain how Wilde’s whole life-style/way of living can be said to represent the Aesthetic movement or this “*Art-for-Art’s sake*” movement.

Task: Comment on and discuss the following quote said by Wilde: “*A work of art is the unique result of a unique temperament. Its beauty comes from the fact that the author is what he is. It has nothing to do with the fact that other people want what they want. Indeed, the moment an artist takes notice of what other people want, and tries to supply the demand, he ceases to be an artist, and becomes a dull or amusing craftsman, an honest or dishonest tradesman. He has no further claim to be considered an artist*”, (1891, His essay, “*The Soul of Man Under Socialism*”)

Task: On page 47 *In Extremis* Wilde says: “*Mrs. Robinson up until now I have contrived to an extraordinary degree to shield myself from the sordid perils of actual existence. I have lived a delicate and luxurious life. For the last two and a half years especially every detail of that life has been marvellous, lavish, dazzling, the height of style. My mirrors have all been flattering ones, in the East End no less than in the West. I have been admired extravagantly. My very dress has made me an exemplar to the less fortunate. I have been the crown prince of joy, a Pierrot who knows not how to cry. I am, no less, than my work is, specifically designed to create laughter out of the absurdity and cruelty of this our life*”. Comment on the quote. Next, apply it to your knowledge of the Aesthetic movement.

Focus: Themes (issues) often dealt with in Wilde's work

Task: Discuss in class what do you think "*In Extremis*" is a play about? Comment on and account for your choice.

Task: Discuss why Bartlett chose to title his play "*In Extremis*"? Do we get a direct reference to the title in the play?

Task: Divide the below mentioned themes dealt with in the play "*In Extremis*" into major and minor themes (if possible). Reflect on and account for your choice (give references to the text).

The play, "In Extremis" deals with:

- *A man at the height of his fame asking a complete stranger about a potentially life-changing decision*
- *A commitment to a cause*
- *Acceptance of his own fate*
- *Love*
- *Sanctuary, escape from the "real-world"*
- *Criminality and punishment*
- *Defiance of the law*
- *Protection of the law*
- *Immorality*
- *Liars and charlatans*
- *Madness*
- *Bravado*
- *Superstition*
- *Gossip*
- *Truth*
- *Expectation*
- *Success*

- *Failure*
- *Self-destruction*
- *Delusion*
- *Racism*
- *Addiction*
- *Prejudice*
- *Homophobia*
- *Hate*
- *Loneliness*
- *Vindictiveness*
- *Fear ...*
- *The Law*
- *Hypocrisy*
- *(Add more yourself.)*

Task: Burns writes in his material that “*Wilde was not an overtly political commentator but through his plays there is an underlying critique of social norms that are illuminated for their absurdities*”. Try and apply this quote to the play “*In Extremis*”. Remember to state references.

B. Reading Comprehension (plot, structure etc.)

Focus: In Extremis: Section 1, p. 15-19

Reading Comprehension:

- *What did the palm-reader do after Wilde left her?*
- *Why did she do so?*
- *What is her conclusion to the reading/the meeting?*
- *Consider the character of Mrs. Robinson (the palm-reader). What is your first impression of her?*
- *What is Wilde's mental state of mind (according to the palm-reader) when he leaves her?*
- *What is the palm-reader's impression of Wilde? (state references)*
- *Comment on the content of the letter the palm-reader writes (p. 16)*
- *Summarize in your own words what you remember from this section.*
- *Find an interesting quotation in section 1 and comment on it.*

Focus: In Extremis: Section 2, p.19, “Dear Mr. Wilde...” – p. 23

Reading Comprehension:

- *Comment on the meeting between the palm-reader and Mr. Wilde*
- *What is the palm-reader’s first impression of Wilde? (state references)*
- *Is Wilde nervous because of the reading? Why?/why not?*
- *How does the palm-reader try and make Wilde relax a little? Does she succeed? Why?/Why not?*
- *How would you define the tone (e.g calm, angry, polite, menacing, hysterical, persuasive, controlled ...etc)of the palm-reader’s voice in this section (give references to the text)*
- *Summarize in your own words what you remember from this section.*
- *Find one interesting quotation in this section and comment on it*
- *How does section 2 stand out (compared to the first section)?*

Focus: Section 3, p. 23, “Why are you here?”- p. 26

Reading Comprehension:

- *Why has Wilde come to see the palm-reader?*
- *Why does Wilde feel the need to warn the palm-reader?*
- *What is the palm-reader’s reaction to the warning?*
- *Do you believe the palm-reader when she says: “He sat there, smoking, and I had absolutely no idea what he was thinking. Usually, I can tell, or guess – it’s half the art ... but with him, I had no idea”, (p.25)*
- *At a certain point the palm-reader says to herself: “I knew what he wanted, though. The same as they all wanted; the impossible”, (p.25). What does she mean by that?*
- *Summarize in your own words what you remember from this section.*
- *Find one interesting quotation in the section and comment on it*

Focus: Section 4, p. 26, “would you take off your other glove”-p. 28

Reading Comprehension:

- *What do we learn about the art of palmistry?*
- *Discuss. What does the palm-reader mean when she says: “Remember also that people reveal themselves precisely in their disguises”, (p.28)*
- *About Wilde the palm-reader says: “He chose the cleverest disguise; ostentation”. What does she mean by that?*
- *Do you think the palm-reader likes what she is doing for a living? Why?/Why not?*
- *Comment on the following statement: “In regard to a man’s character, only the past is certain; the future is at best only probable”, (p. 27)*
- *Comment on the following statement: “The palm-reader must also at all times be aware of the variety of expectations”, (p.27)*
- *Summarize in your own words what you remember from this section.*
- *Find one interesting quotation in the section and comment on it*

Focus: Section 5, p. 28, “What did you see?” – p. 37

Reading Comprehension:

- *What is the palm-reader’s first reaction to Wilde’s hand?*
- *Give an outline of what the first hand- reading tells the palm-reader about Wilde*
- *Wilde is especially interested in hearing about his future. Why is that?*
- *What is Wilde’s impression of the palm-reader? (give references)*
- *At a certain point Wilde seems to question why he came to see the palm-reader? Why is that?*

- On page 31, the palm-reader says: “Funny; I don’t even need to see your hand. I can tell just by looking at you ... You are not always sincere with those you love”, (p.31). If the palm-reader does not need to see his hand from whom/where has she got her knowledge about Wilde not being sincere with the ones he love?
- How would you characterize Wilde’s mental state of mind at the end of the first reading? (p.36)
- Summarize in your own words what you remember from this section.
- Find one interesting quotation in the section and comment on it.

Focus: Section 6: p. 37, “Shall we proceed?” – p. 46

Reading Comprehension:

- Compare the first session of the reading with the second. How can the first part of the reading be said to differ from the second part of the reading?
- Why do you think Wilde at a certain point says to himself: “But she saw nothing. She knew nothing; she understood nothing”?, (p.39)
- Why is it (according to Wilde) that the palm-reader does not seem to know/understand?
- What do we get to know about Wilde’s love-life?
- The palm-reader’s impression of Wilde as a man in control of himself and life suddenly seems to change. Why is that?
- On page 47, Wilde tells us about his existential dilemma. Comment on and describe this dilemma (i.e. his past and present mental state of being)
- On page 42 Wilde talks about the issue of success. Outline his main points.
- Wilde tells us on page 43 he is a man who does not blame himself for anything, why not?
- Summarize in your own words what you remember from this section.
- Find one interesting quotation in the section and comment on it.

Focus: Section 7, p. 46, “I will pay you a hundred pounds”- p. 51

Reading Comprehension:

- *Why does Wilde suddenly want to pay the palm-reader a hundred pounds?*
- *How does the palm-reader react when Wilde offers her more money?*
- *Why is the palm-reader thinking about the characters in Wilde’s plays?*
- *Wilde says he “longs for certainty”, (p.48). Why is that?*
- *What happened on February the 28th at eleven o’clock?*
- *Comment on the following quotation said by Wilde to the palm-reader: “A modern life, Mrs. Robinson, is what I have always wanted. It is the cost of such a life that I need to know”, (p.49)*
- *What does the palm-reader realizes at the end of the second session? Do you believe her? Why?/why not?*
- *How does she choose to cope with this sudden insight?*
- *Discuss. Could she have chosen to act in another way- why?/why not?*
- *Comment on Wilde’s monologue starting on page 47*
- *Find evidence in this section that Wilde seems to be deeply in love with Lord Alfred Douglas*
- *Summarize in your own words what you remember from this section.*
- *Find one interesting quotation in the section and comment on it.*

Focus: Section 8, p. 51, “As I walked home” – p. 52

Reading Comprehension:

- *Discuss. Why does the palm-reader not say, “I’m sorry”, (p.49)?*
- *What impression do you get of Wilde in the last part of the reading?*
- *Who is the “you”, (p.51) Wilde is thinking about when walking home?*
- *How does Wilde feel about his visit at the palm-reader?*
- *Comment on and discuss Wilde’s mental state of mind when walking home from the reading.*
- *Find two adjectives that best describe Wilde’s mood at the end of the play*
- *Comment on the circular ending of the play (state reference to section 1)*
- *Comment on and discuss the palm-reader’s last line: “Well, was I lying”, (p.52).*
- *Consider the future of Oscar Wilde. Take your point of departure in his final lines “It was too late to sleep, and I thought about you”, (p.51).*
- *Consider the impact of the reading on Oscar Wilde*
- *Summarize in your own words what you remember from this section.*
- *Find one interesting quotation in the section and comment on it.*

Focus: Character analysis, relationship, development

Task: Consider the characters in “*In Extremis*”:

- their relationship to the plot: Do they play a major or minor part in the events of the development of the plot
- the degree to which they develop: Are they dynamic characters (characters who change) – or are they static characters (characters who do not change)

Task: Give a characterization of Oscar Wilde.

Here is a list of words which may help you:

*An iconic figure – witty – humour – sexuality – imprisonment – scandal-
intrigue – social criticism – linguistic skills – homosexuality – gay-
flamboyant- invincible - handsome- charismatic- courageous – prison -
love affair – adoration - unique – individualist - artist.*

Task: Give a characterization of the palm-reader. List of words that may help you: *charlatan, fraud, genuine, psychic, psychologist, actress, melodramatic, performer, ambitious, greedy, survivor, kindred-spirit, dreamer, charismatic, intelligent, exploitative, sensual, motherly, unreliable, ...*

Task: What is understood by a “round” or a “flat” character? Are the characters in the play “round” or “flat” characters? State references to substantiate your point of view.

Task: Compare and contrast the characters of Oscar Wilde and the palm-reader. Are they similar or are they direct opposites? Please, refer to the text in your answer.

Task. Comment on and characterize the relationship between the palm-reader and Wilde. The following references may help you:

- *Your insight into my character is all I expected it to be, Mrs. Robinson, (p.34)*
- *What I want are details, details are the only things that interest. What is going to happen to me? (p.36)*
- *I said, Mr. Wilde, allow me a quotation. Though it is yet an inexact one palmistry is a science. Patient and systematic observation will decipher the most obscure destiny (p.37)*
- *But what makes a man of your reputation come to call on me, (p.24)*

Task: Trace the development of the relationship between the palm-reader and Wilde. Any change in the development (a turning point)? Any progression? What does the palm-reader think of Wilde at the beginning/middle/end of the play?

Task: Trace the individual development of the palm-reader. How is she left at the end of the play? Does she grow as a person in the course of the play? Or do significant changes in her personality take place? Why/why not, account for your analysis.

Task: Trace the individual development of Wilde. Does he change or develop during the play. How would you characterize his mental state of being at the beginning/middle/ end of the play?

Task: Discuss: Are the characters to be trusted? Why/why not? State references in support of your argumentation.

Task: Discuss: Is the author to be trusted when he, in the preface to his play states, he has “*invented very little*”? Why/why not?

Focus: Compositional Analysis

Task: Comment on the plot/action of the play. What is “*In Extremis*” all about? Try and summarize the action in a few lines.

Task: Comment on the way the play jumps forth and back in time. Try and draw a line of the time span. Consider the way the story begins (who speaks? *There were only two people in the room that evening; and both of us are now dead. .. if you want to know what he said. I’m the only one who can tell you, p.15*) – the actual reading (“*that evening in that room*”) – the end (who speaks? “*Now that both of us are dead, a hundred years dead, nobody can ever say for certain what happened in that room on Mortimer Street..., p.52*”).

Task: Often a dramatic play can be divided into (*an exposition – a conflict – a turning point – a climax – a resolution*). Please consider: If we find any exposition in “*In Extremis*”? If so, how does this show? Is there is a conflict? If yes, do you consider the main conflict to be of a personal nature – a psychological nature or maybe something else? . Next, please explain if there is a point of no return? If, yes, when does it take place? Finally, please consider if there is any climax? If any, please, give page references. And, please consider if there is any resolution? If yes, how would you explain the ending of the play?

Task: It can often be discussed when a climax occur in a play. Discuss: When does the climax or turning point occur in “*In Extremis*”? State reference and account for your choice.

Focus: Bartlett’s Style and Language

Task: It is characteristic of Bartlett’s play “*In Extremis*” that we, as readers, and audience are very often inside the minds of the characters. Find examples of this in the text. Next, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this narrative technique.

Task: Comment on the language and style of the long monologue starting on p.26 with the words: “*Palmistry is perhaps the most ancient of all the arts of divination, having beensurprisingly warm*” (p.28).

Task: Describe and characterize the style and language in the following excerpt: “*Your name rose to my lips. Dear boy, dearest, my darling, my own golden-haired darling, you have been the whole beauty of life to me, and shall be again. You are everything to me. There have been moments when I thought it would be wiser to leave you – Ah! Moments of weakness and madness! I can see you now, laughing. I can see you on the bed with Charlie and the boys, laughing. I can see you in the morning, with the sun behind you, making you all a glory of gilt an ivory. O my love, from your hair to your feet you are perfection to me. I love you, I love you, my heart is a rose! Love me always, always ... always*”, (p.50, “*In Extremis*”)

Task: Dialogue often has two main functions in drama. It contributes to the telling of the story and it reveals /creates character(s). Dialogue is, therefore, an essential storytelling device in drama. Consider the role of

descriptive passages and of dialogue, monologue in “*In Extremis*”. How would you characterize the dialogue in the play? Find evidence in the text that dialogue reveals character(s). Finally, discuss the effect of the choice of descriptive passages, monologue, etc.

Task: Point out (find) an essential dialogue in “*In Extremis*” e.g. between Wilde and the palm-reader. Consider what elements in this dialogue contribute to building up pathos (i.e. passions, deep feelings, tenderness, pity, sympathetic sorrow etc.) from the reader.

Task: “Style” refers to the way a writer says what he wants to say. It is usually analysed in terms of diction. The term “diction” refers to the choice of words in a literary work. A writer’s work may be described, for example, as abstract or concrete, colloquial/informal or formal, technical or common, literal or figurative etc. Discuss in pairs. How would you characterize the language and style in “*In Extremis*”?

Task: Characterize the style and language in the following excerpt: “*As I walked home, my eyes were full of tears, for I knew I was safe. What route I took I hardly knew. I have a dim memory of wandering through a labyrinth of sordid streets, and it was dawn when I finally found myself in Piccadilly Circus. As I walked home to Chelsea I met some market workers on their way to Covent Garden. There was something in the dawn that seemed to me inexpressibly pathetic, and I thought of all the days that break in beauty, and that set in storm. They were laughing ... what a strange London they see. How unreal. How like a strange dream. A London free from the sin of night and the smoke of day, a pallid, ghost-like city. I wondered what they thought of it, and what they knew of its splendour and its shame, of its fiery-coloured joys, and its horrible hunger, of all it makes and mars from morn to eve. I envied them all that they did not know By the time I reached Tite Street the sky was a faint blue, and*

the birds were beginning to twitter in the gardens. It was too late to sleep, and ... ”, (p.51)

Task: Find the adjectives in the passage above starting with “*As I walked home ... ”, (p.51)*. Next, find the verbs in the past tense. Finally, find all the prepositions.

Task: Is there anything about Bartlett’s style or language which makes the play funny and witty? Why/why not?

Focus: A Question of Genre?

Task: Discuss the genre of the play “*In Extremis*”. Would you call it a tragedy, a tragic-comedy drama, a historical drama, a portrait drama, a documentary-drama or? Look up the definitions of the concepts in a dictionary and account for your choice. Find places in the text to substantiate your point of view.

Task: Discuss: In what way/ways do/does Neil Bartlett’s play “*In Extremis*” differ from other plays that you have read in class?

Task: Have you seen any of the plays you have read in class being performed by that-theatre-company at Krudttønden? Discuss: Do you think watching the play being performed on stage may help you to achieve a better understanding of e.g. the genre or the plot? Why/why not? What do

you think, a student of the English language, may gain from coming in and watching, for instance “In Extremis”, being staged?

Focus: What is Fact? – What is Fiction?

Task: Bartlett has with his play “*In Extremis*” more or less weaved together a fictitious story about Oscar Wilde and his life based on fact and fiction. Look up the word “inter-textuality” in a dictionary. Next, apply the word to the play “*In Extremis*”. Remember to give references.

Task: Comment on the following statement: “*I have invented very little. I have adopted Wilde’s own technique of redeploying phrases, cadences and even whole speeches from one work or another. I have stolen from fiction – the fee of one hundred guineas, the names of the Duchesses, the tear-stained walk through London at dawn are all from Lord Arthur Saville’s Crime, for instance – and I’ve given new meanings to details lifted from love letters and interviews*”, (Source, Neil Bartlett, introduction to the play *In Extremis*). Next, apply the statement to the play, “*In Extremis*”.

Task: Try and trace the places in the play where the author draws on his knowledge about Oscar Wilde’s life and works. (Remember to state page references). In other words find the places in the text, where the author of the play, mingles fact and fiction, so to speak. Next, draw a direct parallel between these places to the knowledge you have achieved about Oscar Wilde’s life and works.

Task: Discuss the author's position: Do you think Bartlett plays hide and seek with both the characters in the play and the readers? Does Bartlett in "*In Extremis*" turn the role of the reader and writer upside down? Is Bartlett to be trusted? Will we ever know the truth about what really happened the evening Wilde went to see a palm-reader ... are we supposed to know the truth? !

Task: Comment on the following quote: "*Truth in drama is forever elusive. You never quite find it but the search for it is compulsive. The search is clearly what drives the endeavour. The search is your task. More often than not you stumble upon the truth in the dark, colliding with it or just glimpsing an image or a shape which seems to correspond to the truth, often without realising that you have done so. But the real truth is that there isn't any such thing as one truth to be found in dramatic art. There are many. These truths challenge each other, recoil from each other, reflect each other, ignore each other, tease each other, are blind to each other. Sometimes, you feel you have the truth of a moment in your hand, then it slips through your fingers and is lost*", (Source: *Art, Truth & Politics* – Harold Pinter, Nobel lecture, 2005)

Task: Consider the plausibility of "*In Extremis*" – How close to the real life of Oscar Wilde does the story seem to be? What do you think of Bartlett's way of writing – find arguments for and against.

Focus: Language, Style, Words and Grammar

Task: Insert the missing relative pronouns in the following excerpt: “ *Men like that are disgusting, they disgust me. Husbands lie. Not that I knew – I didn’t know, no one did. If I had known, if I had known hand I was holding – well, I am sure I would have read different things in it. (p.38, “In Extremis”)* ”

Task: Comment on the use of “inversion” (verb before subject) in Bartlett’s play. (See e.g. on page 40, 41)

Task: Any repetition in the play? If yes, what is the effect on the figures of repetition? (See e.g. on page 41, 44, 47)

Task: Characterize the style of writing in the following excerpt: “*But she saw nothing. She knew nothing; she understood nothing. She never saw you wake up crying like a child for more hashish. She never saw us followed by lovely brown things from street to street, whole villages peopled by fauns*”, (p. 39, *In Extremis*)

Task: Turn the excerpt from the past tense into the present tense (verbs have been underlined). Next, find all the adjectives in the excerpt – underline them- and translate them into Danish: “As I walked home, my eyes were full of tears, for I knew I was safe. What route I took I hardly knew. I have a dim memory of wandering through a labyrinth of sordid streets, and it was dawn when I finally found myself in the Piccadilly Circus. As I walked home to Chelsea I met some market workers on their way to Covent Garden. There was something in the dawn that seemed to me inexpressibly pathetic, and I thought of all the days that break in beauty, and that set in storm. They were laughing ... what a strange London they see. How unreal. How like a strange dream. A London free from the sin of the night and the smoke of the day, a pallid, ghost-like city. I wondered what they thought of it, and what they knew of its splendour and its shame, of its fierce fiery-coloured joys, and its horrible hunger, of all it makes and mars from morn to eve. I envied them all that they did not know. ...But the time I reached Tite Street the sky was a faint blue, and the birds were beginning to twitter in the gardens. It was too late to sleep, and I thought about you”, (p.51, “In Extremis”)

Task: The following words are “gay – synonyms”. Try to arrange the words along the scale (least ... most) : *bender, poof, fairy, nance, pink, nancy, gay-blade, bent, mattress-muncher, , shirt-lifter, effeminate, camp, playing for the other side, homo, woofter.*

Task: Find examples of the many linkers used in the play. But before starting, discuss what is a so-called “linker”/ “a run-on”? Next, discuss the function of these linkers in the play “*In Extremis*”. (Remember to state page references)

Task: Choose the words you think describe Bartlett’s style of writing, and then discuss your choice with the rest of the class. Look up the words you do not know: *elegant – subjective- aggressive- funny- thoughtful- expressive- scientific – ironic- objective- imaginative – self-ironical-*

contrasting- informative – retrospective- provocative- complicated- argumentative- simple- colourful- poetic- metaphorical – political- entertaining – factual- ...

Task: Throughout the play “*In Extremis*” we are very often presented with the thoughts and feelings of the characters. Find, places in the text where we are “inside” the mind of the characters. Remember to state references. Next, explain the effects of this particular style of writing. Finally, discuss the kind of effect (impact) this technique has on us as readers?

Task: Find all the nouns in the following excerpt. Translate the nouns into Danish. Look up the nouns you do not know: “*In his books men seem constantly to be flinging themselves on sofas with cries of despair but when he came to see me I can only report that he sat down and stayed there. He sat well, though. Large man, as I said. The way he was dressed you’d have thought I was a photographer. A beaver collar on his greatcoat. His tie was gold, a dark gold, with a pearl pin. You might think it odd that I can remember all that, but I do. I notice. It’s part of my job*”, (*In Extremis*, p.19).

Task: In the following excerpt all the prepositions have been left out, please insert the prepositions:

*“Mr. Wilde, please listen very carefully what I am going to say.
I see no cancer, madness, death drowning or violent death accident
..... your hand.
You are too impulsive your enthusiasms.
You feel deeply the appeal the material
You have no fondness the outdoor life.
You have a desire obtain pleasure and amusement any cost or
hazard*

You are prone dreams
The world and you are very good terms
You have considerable powers attraction
You are sensitive ... insult”

Task: Taking about adjectives and adverbs. Choose the right word:

- a. He smoked incessant/ incessantly*
- b. When he lit his cigarette, his right hand, shaking – only ... slightly/slight*
- c. You are not the only woman who has not read thepainful/painfully accurate accounts of my social and professional life*
- d. I can hard/hardly talk to my wife*
- e. Indeed I regular/regularly provide employment for some of the most accomplished charlatans in London.*
- f. It may be briefly/brief summarised as follows -*
- g. Some like a fault/faulty edition read by inefficiently/inefficient light*
- h. Spread the palm full /fully, bending the fingers back ... firm/firmly if necessary.*
- i. Warm surprising/ surprisingly warm*
- h. The delightfully/delightful boy who sold it me assured me that it would bring me ... bad/badly luck always.*

C. Post-reading

Focus: Act-it-out

Task: Divide the class into groups of three or four: Ask each group to decide where in the play “*In Extremis*” it would be interesting or helpful to introduce sound effects etc. They should nominate one person to write director’s notes, with a list of the “effects” and the event/moment in the chosen pages.

Possible noise effects:

Sound effects and /or music: clap-stamp-hiss-whisper-squeak-scratch-knock on table-hammer the table with a fist-whistle etc.

Musical instruments: drums, whistles, bells etc.

Exclamations: OOOh!!, AAhh!!, Eh!!! Etc.

Speaking in chorus

In pairs: Ask students to practice telling the chosen pages aloud – making the noises for themselves at each point they have marked.

In class: After about 15.min, invite each group to perform their pages. Ask each group to listen and note down the effects they liked.

In class: Ask the class to choose the noises they thought were the most effective.

In class: Devise a class-version of the students’ notes, and set the story up with the whole class performing the noise effects.

Task: Tell students to dramatize an excerpt of “*In Extremis*”. Next, group students in three. Explain to the students that one of them is the theatrical director who has to cast the characters’ roles within his or her group. In class: Ask students to perform their excerpt from the play. In class: Discuss, the performance and make the director explain how he or she chose to present it in that way.

Task: Timing, stress and pitch are important in all forms of drama. During rehearsals the director and actors will walk round with the script and work out issues such as stress, pace, pausing, volume and pitch. Your job is to work in pairs and choose 15-20 lines of the play “*In Extremis*” and make notes about the timing, stress and pitch. Next, try to perform the lines following the indications.

Task: Practice acting out the essential monologue (p.26) said by Mrs. Robinson (the palm-reader). Think of voice and intonation.

Task: Douglas has decided to visit Wilde in prison. They are only allowed to see each other for 15 min. What do they say to each other? Write (make up) their dialogue. Next, act it out in class.

Task: Act out the very intense “question-answer- dialogue” between Oscar Wilde and the palm-reader. Consider the tone of the dialogue. How should the characters speak their lines? What do the characters say, as opposed to what they intend, in other words find the subtext (the unsaid, the hidden intention of what the characters actually say). The dialogue starts on page 32 / 33:

“These are the hands of a very charming man”

- *“Charm, like wit, is a myth invented by handsome people to account for the peculiar social success of the ugly”*

“You have considerable powers of attraction”

- *“Fortunately it is only” etc.*

Task: Wilde approached one of England’s most respectable barristers, Edward Clarke, and asked him to take the case for the prosecution. Make up and write down a dialogue between the two of them. Next, act out the dialogue in class.

Task: Improvise a scene between the palm-reader and Wilde in “*In Extremis*”. Write down the scene. Next, practice acting out the scene in class. Think of intonation and voice.

Task: If you had the chance of talking to either the palm-reader or Oscar Wilde: Are there any lines in the play that you would like them to explain to you? Is there anything else you would like to ask them about?

Task: If you come in and watch the play “*In Extremis*” being performed it is possible for you to arrange an informal talk with the actors after the performance. If you had the chance to speak to the actors, what you would like to ask them about?

Task: Playing real –life characters on stage is not an easy task for the actors. How does Ian Burns prepare himself for this challenge? What will he be concentrating on when playing the legendary Oscar Wilde? (search Burns’ material for information).

Task: Practice reading the below excerpt from page 38 in “*In Extremis*”. First, in a neutral tone of voice. Next, in an angry tone of voice. And finally in a happy (humorous) tone of voice. Think about tone of voice, as well as speed (slow or fast) and volume (loud or soft). Next, choose an excerpt yourself and practice reading that one in the same way.

- *The Line of Travel. I see extensive travel in your future. But then you have always travelled*
- *Oh, I have*
- *Widely*
- *Marvellously. Rome, Naples, Paris, Venice ... Brighton*
- *America?*

- *America.*
- *Algiers.*
- *Algiers indeed. How clever of you to remember that Mrs. Robinson.*
- *Oh, I see it quite clearly –*
- *But she saw nothing. She knew nothing; she understood nothing. She
Never saw you wake up crying like a child for more hashish. She never
saw us followed by lovely brown things from street to street, whole
villages
peopled by fauns.*
- *It is a wonderful country is it not?*
- *Most wonderful. There is of course the problem of great poverty, but
when the beggars have profiles that is so easily solved*
- *I think I should find the heat most trying*
- *The most beautiful of them was said by our guide to be deceitful; and
Indeed, he was. One memorable night he upset both Lord Alfred and
myself quite awfully.*
- *And of course the great inconvenience. I think it must have been dreadful
not marvellous at all*
- *She saw nothing of our life these past two and a half years-*

Focus: Writing topics

Task: Write a comment for a blog in which you argue either for or against reading “*In Extremis*” in the class-room.

Task: Write a short paragraph in which you discuss the issue of homosexuality now and then (the Victorian Age) .Title: My opinion of homosexuality. Remember whenever you put forward a claim, an opinion, a viewpoint or an idea, you need to support it with arguments. State your main point in the first sentence and signpost your supporting arguments with appropriate linkers. Useful linkers: *first – in the first place – second- third- moreover – in addition – furthermore – what is more – on top of that – similarly – for example – on the contrary – nevertheless – on the one hand- on the other hand – of course- sure- to sum up – in short etc.*

Task: Write a 50-100 word passage in which you describe the concept of “The Aesthetic Movement”. (See e.g. Burns´material p.16)

Task: Pretend to be one of the persons in the text you have read writing a mail or SMS (text message) to another person in the text, e.g. Wilde writing to the palm-reader or the other way around. Your focus of interest has not been given – all up to you.

Task: Write your own review of “*In Extremis*” in no more than 200 words. Begin your review : “ *Neil Bartlett’s ‘In Extremis’ deals with the topic of*”

Task: In a short paragraph discuss why the press would want to write about a case like Oscar Wilde's.

Task: Write an assignment on one of the general features of the Victorian novel. Choose your focus among the following headings: - *reasons for the rise of the novel*; - *serialisation and its consequences for the authors*; - *the closeness between the Victorian novelist and his public*; - *most representative early Victorian novelists*; - *later Victorian novelists and Aestheticism*

Task: Imagine you are Oscar Wilde. You are in prison. Write a page in his diary. Your starting lines have been given:

“Wednesday, November the 15th 1895. Sitting here alone in my dark, dank, drab, uncomfortable and dirty prison cell. The food is inedible, the clothes uncomfortable and the toilet facilities unmentionably disgusting. I must write to the prison authorities to ask why these cannot be improved. It's one thing to be imprisoned but altogether inhuman to be treated like this. I do not know if I will be able to bear the degradation of my former self, but realize that if I am to survive I will have to find some positives amidst all the negatives. Perhaps this is all happened for a reason? If anyone asked me now at this precise moment whether I would change anything, I would have to think long and very hard before giving them an answer” ... (now, your turn, please write on)

Task: Try to put yourself in Oscar Wilde's shoes. Write a love-letter from prison to Lord Alfred Douglas. Your first line has been given: *“My Dear Bosie, I can hardly write that I wish you were here, because **here** is not a particularly pleasant place to pass the time....But I wish that I was there with you, indeed anywhere with you...(now your turn, please continue).*

Task: Write a speech on the subject of homosexuality. You must incorporate the following words in your speech: *erotic fantasy – attention – love- sexual satisfaction- passion- “the love that dare not speak its name” – prostitution – submission - celebration – honesty – fear – unhappy – happy, freedom.* Next, give the speech, think of intonation, facial expressions, mimic etc.

Task: Search the internet. Try and find poems written by homosexuals, what issues do these poems deal with. Next, write your own “gay-poem”.

Task: Write your immediate response to the following gay- poem (<http://gayfamilysupport.com/blog/a-gay-poem-to-make-you-think>), written by an unknown author. Next, give the poem a title. Finally, comment on the content and form of the poem.

*Do you know what it is to be an outsider
On the other side of the fence?
How alone you would feel, if excluded you were.
Does it make any sense?*

*Can you imagine the isolated soul
with on-one in sight to hear
the cries and the tears that your heart would shed,
and the constant, looming fear?*

*Can you see in your mind the life of a man
without anywhere to belong?
Because a society judged him unworthy,
because they think they´re right, and he´s wrong*

*Try and imagine the pain that you'd feel,
with sneers and hateful words, and spit at your heels.
What would it be like if the gates were locked;
You couldn't get in, and you couldn't get out?*

*Imagine the feeling that you're worthless,
some dirt that's been stepped in by someone's uncaring shoe.
Perhaps at that point it's too much for your heart,
and take your own life, to stop it hurting you.*

*Imagine this world, for maybe a minute
after that you can stop; you don't like it, sure
but there are people who go through this every day,
and they can't stop it, unless, they're no more.*

*So, when you hear of hate, bigots and death,
don't side with haters, cause that's how you've been bred.
Imagine how it is, or was for that guy,
the one that's hurt, or lying dead.*

*So imagine the feelings and memories too,
of people oppressed, hated, abused
Of people who lived outside that fence
and what they came to – does it make sense?*

Task: Write a letter where you either defend or approve of Wilde's flamboyant life-style. Think of how you build up your arguments. State your main points in the first sentence and signpost your supporting arguments with appropriate linkers.

Task: Write a summary of the play. Use as many words as possible from the below list of words: *famous, infamous, notorious, worried, frightened, nervous, façade, rich, generous, witty, ostentatious, beauty, poet, writer, biographer, gifted, talented, peace, rest, sanctuary, belief, challenging, unafraid, acceptance, prison, solitary confinement, sentence, hard-labour, barbaric, victory, historic, legendary, status.* ... Next, present your summary in class.

Task: Write a paragraph in which you argue for a wider reading of Oscar Wilde's plays in the classroom. Think of how you build up your arguments. State your main point in the first sentence and signpost your supporting arguments with appropriate linkers.

Task: Transform the story of Wilde into a journalistic account (i.e. into non-fiction). That is, rewrite the story of "*In Extremis*" as a newspaper article to be printed in the local newspaper. Before writing the article think of your focus – what you want to include, what you want to leave out etc.

Task: Turn "*In Extremis*" into a short story about love and hate. Your point of view is the 1.person. Starting with the lines: "*I know that in the eyes of some people what I'm doing is wrong, but if I'm to truly be myself I cannot prevent myself following this path. To say I fell in love with Douglas is stating a simple fact. I was initially attracted by his exceptional good looks, his confidence, his title and his poetry. It was a stormy relationship and not without its dangers...*" (now your turn to write on...)

Task: Write-on. Let us assume that Wilde won the trial, got divorced and entered a steady relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas... You are a literary journalist write an article about Wilde's life after he left prison. Title of your article has been given: "*My Happy Life with Douglas*".

Task: Write a blurb in English directed at a Danish audience. Your primary concern is how you would sell the play in Denmark. Write down three main points you would like to include in your blurb. Before writing find arguments for including the points.

Task: Imagine you are a famous journalist. Your next job is to prepare an interview with the palm-reader. Your job is to write down questions that you would like to ask her. Your final product is an article in a magazine about the supernatural called *The Occult Observer* or *Psychic Times*.

Task: Letter to the editor of "The Problem Page":

"Dear Sir/Madam, My problem is that I've fallen in love with a man. It is a love that I dare not speak about out loud as I myself am also a man. The fact is that I suffer daily indignity, ridicule and shame because of my newly discovered sexuality. Moreover I love my wife and 2 children very much and do not want to hurt their feelings if possible. The young man I'm in love with wants me to protect him from his father who is a bully and totally against our form of affection. In fact he wants to destroy me under the pretence of "protecting" his beloved son. I feel that I have to stand up for myself and for my love for this young man. What do you advise me to do? Yours truly, Mr. "X". Write an answer to Mr. "X"-

Task: You are a literary journalist. Write an article telling your readers why they should/should **not** read the play you have just read. Useful vocabulary: *To begin with ... secondly ... another reason is ... the main things is ... the most important aspect.. oddly/surprisingly/strangely enough ... as a rule ... on the whole ... the point is ... in my opinion ...*

from my point of view ... well, personally, ... what I am concerned with ... what I find particularly interesting ... the play conveys ... in the opening scenes .. what fascinates me ... I will/will not recommend this play to ...

Task: Write an essay about “*In Extremis*”. In your essay you must include the following points:

- a characterization of Oscar Wilde
- a characterization of the palm-reader
- the ending of the play
- the message of the play

Task: Write a biography of Neil Bartlett using at least three sources on the Internet (for more information see Burns’ material, p.3). The biography should include an outline of his life (birth), education, writing career (not just a list of titles) and an evaluation of the importance of his work (based on the opinion of others). The biography should be no longer than 350 words. It must include a list of your source material. Next, compare your biography with that of another student in your class. In what ways are your biographies similar? – and in what ways are they different?

Task: Rewrite “*In Extremis*” in a new genre – e.g. a poem, short story, fairy tale or any other genre. You may keep Bartlett’s title or give your version a new title. The most important thing is that you live up to the chosen genre conventions.

Task: Write a continuation of the play. What do you think will happen to Wilde after he leaves the palm-reader? Your title has been given “*In Extremis Part II*”.

Task: You have been asked to contribute to a collection of short articles about the Victorian Age. Find your angle and choose your focus. Write your contribution.

Task: In a short essay discuss your views on predestination.

Task: The relationship between Douglas and Wilde has been described as a love-hate relationship. Write a poem about love and hate in a relationship.

Task: Write an article called: “*Neil Bartlett: fact and fiction*”. Remember your target audience (interested people on the internet, readers of your school magazine, etc.)

Task: Give an account of Wilde’s life until his imprisonment.

Task: Write a short essay about how to “foster a deeper understanding” of the issue of homosexuality. In your essay you must suggest some answers.

Focus: Oral tasks

Task: Discuss, what lessons, if any, does Oscar Wilde have to teach us about life.

Task: Give a speech where you either defend or approve of Oscar Wilde's life-style. Think of how you build up your arguments. Present your speech in class.

Task: Tell your class-mates why they should/should not read the play *In Extremis* you have just read. *Useful vocabulary: to begin with – secondly- another reason is- the main things is- the most important aspect – oddly/surprisingly/strangely enough – as a rule – on the whole – the point is – in my opinion- from my point of view – well, personally – as I see it – what I am more concerned with is – what I find particularly the play conveys – in the opening scenes – what fascinates me about In Extremis is – I will/will not recommend this play to etc.*

Task: Discuss: What lessons, if any, does Oscar Wilde have to teach us about life? Account for your choice.

For example:

Should we be afraid of being a non-conformist?

Is it dangerous to be committed to a "cause?"

Is it "dangerous" or wrong to be true to ourselves and find any happiness we can, with discretion, if possible?

Should we be careful with whom we fall in love with?

Is it "dangerous" for us to pursue the path of pleasure?

Should we try and control our own self-destructive urges?

Ought we not to be so judgemental?

Should we live and let live?

Should we be careful in choosing your enemies?

Task: Give a speech as Oscar Wilde, presenting his case in court. Before you start, think of the content of your speech (introduction/welcome – main body – ending). Think also of what rhetorical tools you will use (repetitions, contrasts, quotations, rhetorical questions, rhetorical modes-ethos, pathos, logos etc.)

Task: Discuss objections for and against “*In Extremis*” in general. If possible, reach an agreement.

Task: Find three interesting sentences in “*In Extremis*”. Next, give (write) your immediate response to each sentence and argue for your choice. Compare, and if possible, reach an agreement.

Task: Point out/choose one quotation from the following quotations that seem to be the play’s most important one? In pairs, compare, and if possible, reach an agreement.

“I find myself in trouble of a very particular kind, and in need of advice”, (p.23)

“... but you see, I need someone to talk to. I can’t talk to Robbie, I’ve tried that, (p.24).

“but she saw nothing. She knew nothing; she understood nothing”, (p.39).

Task: Discuss the main function of the play “*In Extremis*”. Divide the class into groups. One group speak in favour of the main function: To entertain? Another group speak in favour of the function: “To give insight into the life of a famous person”? ... etc. Other groups: To indoctrinate? Or to? ...

Task: Pair –work. How were you left feeling at the end of the play? Tell your classmate, use as many adjectives from the list which best describe

your mood: *desperate – uplifted - heavy-hearted – hopeful – resigned – disheartened – desolate – dejected - light-hearted - depressed – accepting – confident – optimistic – numb – dazed - broken-hearted - melancholic – distressed – aggrieved – woeful – disillusioned -sad – enlightened.*

Task: Comment on the following quote: “...and if my destiny was to be disgrace and ruin, I was going to play the part in style. Chance might still have spared me, but I wasn’t counting on it. I had to experience the part of the tragic hero. Nemesis had caught me in her net – to struggle would have been foolish. Why is it that one runs to one’s ruin? Why has destruction such a fascination? Why, when one stands on a pinnacle must one throw oneself down?” (Source, “Coffee with Oscar Wilde” by Merlin Holland, p.99). Discuss in pairs and next in class: What does Wilde mean?

Task: Do you think Oscar Wilde was a “modern” man in an 19th century environment? Why? /why not? Discuss in pairs and next in class.

Task: What message does Bartlett wish to bring forward? Discuss and argue for/against the message of the play:

- a. *If you’re going to go down, go down in style?*
- b. *Fame equals focus?!*
- c. *If you get emotionally hurt, try not to be vindictive or cruel?*
- d. *Love conquers all?*
- e. *Life is about ups and downs and how we deal with them?*
- f. *At the end of the day we are alone?*
- g. *What will be will be?*

Focus: The Issue of Homosexuality in Bartlett's play "In Extremis"

Task: Why should we care about homosexuality in our society? Discuss whether you agree/disagree with the following statements:

- a. *Homosexuality is not a disease!*
- b. *We should not accept that "gay" men and women can get married and adopt children.*
- c. *Be tolerant: Love is love whatever form it takes!*
- d. *We should not accept "Gay-Parades" to take place in Copenhagen*
- e. *We should accept that "gay" men and women can get married and adopt children*
- f. *When faced with two men kissing each other, we feel uncomfortable*
- g. *Being a Christian myself, I think homosexuality ought to be punished by society. For me, it is an "un-Godly" act!*

Task: Write continuously about "homosexuality" for about 2-3 min, preferably without lifting your pen from the paper. Write in full sentences, but do not bother about grammar or spelling. Next discuss: What is love? Is it "an incurable illness and a divine monster"? Or is it the only thing which gives ultimate meaning to our lives?!

Task: Comment on the issue of homosexuality in the play "*In Extremis*". Remember to state references.

Task: Oscar Wilde was a married man, and father of two when he began seeing "Bosie", (Lord Alfred Douglas). Give a two-minute speech on

married life. Or give a two-minute speech on adultery. Use at least two words from the list below and make sure that your audience (class-mates) will remember them after your speech: *dull – boring – exciting - life-giving - dead-end full of routines - erotic fantasy – attention – love – young – children – work – cooking – sexual attraction & sexual satisfaction.*

Task: Having read about Oscar Wilde's life. Underline the words which you think describe Wilde's attitude to/feelings for Lord Alfred Douglas: *like - be in love with - be attracted to - quite like - be interested in - have a crush on - feel affection for – adore – worship - be fond of - be infatuated with – love - be attached to.*

Task: Arrange the following words in a -/+ scale: *be fond of – be infatuated with – love - be in love with - feel affection for - be attached to – adore – like - be attracted to.*

Task: Explain how and why the Marquis tried everything to pull his son from Wilde's clutches? (See Burns' material p.12)

Task: Comment on the issue of homosexuality as generally accepted by large parts of the world today. Use Burns' material as your point of departure (see Burns' material p. 10,12).

Task: Comment on and discuss the issue of homosexuality in the Victorian Age. Use e.g. Burns' material as your point of departure (see, Burns' material, p.12).

Task: Compare the issue of homosexuality then and now.

Task: Read the poem by Douglas and write down your immediate associations and responses. Next, analyse and interpret “*Two Loves*”. In this connection comment on the line(s) in the poem that most probably may be a reference to homosexuality.

Two Loves

by Lord Alfred Douglas

*I dreamed I stood upon a little hill,
And at my feet there lay a ground, that seemed
Like a waste garden, flowering at its will
With buds and blossoms. There were pools that dreamed
Black and unruffled; there were white lilies
A few, and crocuses, and violets
Purple or pale, snake-like fritillaries
Scarce seen for the rank grass, and through green nets
Blue eyes of shy peryenche winked in the sun.
And there were curious flowers, before unknown,
Flowers that were stained with moonlight, or with shades
Of Nature's willful moods; and here a one
That had drunk in the transitory tone
Of one brief moment in a sunset; blades
Of grass that in an hundred springs had been
Slowly but exquisitely nurtured by the stars,
And watered with the scented dew long cupped
In lilies, that for rays of sun had seen
Only God's glory, for never a sunrise mars
The luminous air of Heaven. Beyond, abrupt,
A grey stone wall. o'ergrown with velvet moss
Uprose; and gazing I stood long, all mazed
To see a place so strange, so sweet, so fair.
And as I stood and marvelled, lo! across*

*The garden came a youth; one hand he raised
To shield him from the sun, his wind-tossed hair
Was twined with flowers, and in his hand he bore
A purple bunch of bursting grapes, his eyes
Were clear as crystal, naked all was he,
White as the snow on pathless mountains frore,
Red were his lips as red wine-spilith that dyes
A marble floor, his brow chalcedony.
And he came near me, with his lips uncurled
And kind, and caught my hand and kissed my mouth,
And gave me grapes to eat, and said, 'Sweet friend,
Come I will show thee shadows of the world
And images of life. See from the South
Comes the pale pageant that hath never an end.'
And lo! within the garden of my dream
I saw two walking on a shining plain
Of golden light. The one did joyous seem
And fair and blooming, and a sweet refrain
Came from his lips; he sang of pretty maids
And joyous love of comely girl and boy,
His eyes were bright, and 'mid the dancing blades
Of golden grass his feet did trip for joy;
And in his hand he held an ivory lute
With strings of gold that were as maidens' hair,
And sang with voice as tuneful as a flute,
And round his neck three chains of roses were.
But he that was his comrade walked aside;
He was full sad and sweet, and his large eyes
Were strange with wondrous brightness, staring wide
With gazing; and he sighed with many sighs
That moved me, and his cheeks were wan and white
Like pallid lilies, and his lips were red
Like poppies, and his hands he clenched tight,
And yet again unclenched, and his head*

*Was wreathed with moon-flowers pale as lips of death.
A purple robe he wore, o'erwrought in gold
With the device of a great snake, whose breath
Was fiery flame: which when I did behold
I fell a-weeping, and I cried, 'Sweet youth,
Tell me why, sad and sighing, thou dost rove
These pleasant realms? I pray thee speak me sooth
What is thy name?' He said, 'My name is Love.'
Then straight the first did turn himself to me
And cried, 'He lieth, for his name is Shame,
But I am Love, and I was wont to be
Alone in this fair garden, till he came
Unasked by night; I am true Love, I fill
The hearts of boy and girl with mutual flame.'
Then sighing, said the other, 'Have thy will,
I am the love that dare not speak its name.'*

Focus: The issue of the Spiritual/Super-natural element in Bartlett's play "In Extremis"

Task: What comes to your mind when you hear the word, "palm-reader"? When brainstorming, write down everything concerning your subject without thinking about spelling, sequence or grammar.

Task: Find definition of a "palm-reader" in the dictionary. What does the word mean? Find synonyms.

Task: Why did Oscar Wilde see a palm-reader? What was he hoping to achieve by that? Discuss and comment on/account for your choice

Was he hoping for example that:

- a. She would tell him the truth about his destiny?*
- b. He would spend time with a fellow performer?*
- c. He could escape from the real world for a while?*

Task: What else could Oscar Wilde have done at this stage in the court case? Discuss and comment on/ account for your choice.

Could he have?...

- a. Thrown a lavish party?*
- b. Tried to have a meeting with Bosie?*
- c. A contract-killer assassinate Queensbury?*
- d. Left the country?*
- e. Pleaded temporary insanity?*

Task: Discuss the issue of the supernatural element in people's lives in 2009. Compare with the age in which Oscar Wilde lived.

Task: Comment on the monologue about "palmistry" in the play "In Extremis", p.26-28. Account for some of the statements put forth by the palm-reader. Do you find any of the statements convincing? Why/why not?

Task: Translate the following passage. Prepare to present your translation in class: *"But surely he knew, as he set out in a cab to meet her, that Mrs. Robinson was a charlatan? She had after all read his palm once before, at a society party ... Wilde loved charlatans, if a charlatan is someone who makes lying not only a profession, but an art... By way of explanation for his apparent passivity in the face of imminent disaster. Wilde is often said to have been deeply superstitious, to have believed that his destruction was somehow inevitable. Perhaps that's why he went to Mrs. Robinson that night", (Source: "Writing Wilde; In Extremis")*

Focus: Famous Witticisms

Task: Comment on and discuss popular witticisms (see Burns' material, p.8), by Oscar Wilde.

Task: Write a short paragraph that demonstrates the truth of one of these well-known witticisms (see Burns' material, p.8). You may for instance choose between the following ones:

- *"We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars"*
- *"All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's his".*
- *"I can resist everything except temptation"*

Focus: For further reading, Oscar Wilde, "The Importance of being Earnest"

Task: Overall questions to the play /Reading Comprehension:

- *comment on the setting*
- *comment on the plot*
- *characterize the characters – social status, attitudes, interests, etc.*
- *round or flat characters?*
- *do any of the characters change or develop? If not, what conclusions do you draw?*
- *do any of the characters take anything really seriously?*
- *how would you characterize the dialogue in the play?*
- *do the characters talk nonsense most of the time? If yes, why?*
- *what makes the play witty and funny?*
- *does the play deal with any important issues –or is it merely a very funny/witty play?*
- *why do you think Wilde wrote the play – merely to entertain or?*
- *is the play outdated or are there people like Jack and Algernon nowadays?*
- *what would today's equivalents be like*

Reading list

The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, 5th Edition (Glasgow: Harper Collings, 2003)

Coffee With Oscar Wilde, Merlin Holland
Oscar Wilde, Frank Harris,
(London: Robinson; New York: carroll & Graff, 1997)

The Wilde Album, Merlin Holland
(London, Fourth Estate, 1997: New York; Henry Holt, 1999)

The Complete letters of Oscar Wilde
Merlin Holland & Rupert Hart-Davis
(London: Fourth Estate. New York: Henry Holt, 2000)

The Life of Oscar Wilde
Hesketh Pearson,
London: Methuen

Oscar Wilde, The Critical Heritage
Karl Beckson
Routledge & Kegan, 1970

Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections. 2 vols.
E.H Mikhail
Macmillian, 1979

The Life of Oscar Wilde
Robert Harborough Sherad
T. Werner Laurie

Oscar Wilde's Wit and Wisdom: A Book of Quotations
Dover Thrift Editions
By Oscar Wilde
1998, Dover Pub.

Oscar Wilde
Richard Ellman

Oscar Wilde
Art and Morality
Stuart Mason, 1970

The Life and Confessions of Oscar Wilde
Frank Harris, 1914

My Friendship with Oscar Wilde
Lord Alfred Douglas, 1932

Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage
Ed. Karl Beckson, 1970

Trials of Oscar Wilde
H. Montgomery Hyde, 1975

Oscar Wilde; A Biography
H. Montgomery Hyde, 1975

Oscar Wilde: Art and Egotism
Rodney Shewan, 1977

Oscar Wilde
Richard Ellman, 1987

Oscar Wilde; The Works of a Conformist Rebel
Norbert Kohl 1989

Rediscovering Oscar Wilde
Ed. C. George Sandulescu, 1993

Oscar and Bosie
Trevor Fisher, 2002

“The Importance of Being Earnest”
Oscar Wilde (1895)

Useful links:

Information about the trial:

<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/wilde/wilde.htm>

Brief introduction to Oscar Wilde:

<http://www.oscholars.com/Oxford08/Intro/Introduction1.htm>

Universal reaction to Oscar Wilde:

<http://www.oscholars.com/Oxford08/Abstracts/Abstracts.htm>

English & Irish newspaper coverage of the trial:

<http://www.oscholars.com/TO/Appendix/Library/walshe.htm>

(the first gay Irishman?)

http://www.oscholars.com/TO/Appendix/Library/walshe.htm#_edn36

<http://www.neil-bartlett.com/>

Transcript of Wilde’s defence. “The love that dare not speak it’s name”:

<http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/364900.html>

More on this Link:

<http://www.wilde-online.info/oscar-wilde-biography.htm>

http://www.biographyonline.net/poets/oscar_wilde.html

Victorian England

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victorian_morality

http://www.crimelibrary.com/gangsters_outlaws/cops_others/oscar_wilde/4.html

The Remarkable Rocket – short story by Oscar Wilde

<http://www.eastoftheweb.com/short-stories/UBooks/RemRoc.shtml>

Related Links:

[Oscar Wilde Biography](#)

[Find quotes by Oscar Wilde](#)

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Articles on Oscar Wilde

[To each his or her own Wilde.\(The Faiths of Oscar Wilde\)\(Book review\)](#)

[Wilde, Oscar: Oscar Wilde. Les mots et les songes.\(Brief article\)\(Book review\)](#)

[Oscar Fingall O'Flahertie Wills Wilde](#)

[Wild about Wilde.\(Oscar Wilde in contemporary entertainment\)\(Cover Story\)](#)

[Why `Gay Icon' Oscar Wilde Would Have Opposed Gay Marriage.](#)

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