The Importance Of Being Earnest: Maintain Beliefs Of The Victorian Age

Through satire and wit, Oscar Wilde ridicules the English upper class by using two men, Algernon and Jack, who are both leading double lives. During this Victorian Age, Wilde plays ostentatiously with absurd situations and characters whose lack of insight causes them to respond to these situations in inappropriate ways (You use the word situation twice in this sentence. Instead saying “these situations” you should further describe them). The play repeatedly mocks Victorian traditions and social customs, especially marriage. Wilde introduces his play best with its very own title, which is a mocking paradox. 'Yes, but you must be serious about it. I hate people who are not serious about meals. It is so shallow of them' (Wilde I.7). Wilde’s intention was for this play to be a trivial comedy for serious people. The English playwright managed both to mock the society while providing commentary and offering reform. The beauty of this work is seen when the fictional characters execute their roles by creating a fictitious persona to escape burdensome social obligations. Wilde’s witticism reflects its importance in regards to life and death. In addition, the inversion of marriage and gender roles displays the significance of wealth and status in England. (I cannot identify a your thesis statement. In this paragraph, you introduce too many ideas. I would suggest that you stick to one main idea here. You can allude to other themes to support the main idea later in the essay).

Lady Bracknell’s jokes about death reflect how convenient such tragedy can turn out to be. When death is mentioned, it is always in positive light. "I never saw a woman so altered; she looks quite twenty years younger" (Wilde I.8). Lady Bracknell tells her friends she looks younger and better since the death of her husband. As humans, we are used to fearing death and see it in a terrible way, however, death is extremely mocked in this case when it is used to compliment another person. When her husband died, the widow dyed her hair and changed not only her appearance but her outlook on life. In this case, the widow has changed for the better after a terribly tragic death. At the beginning of the play, Lady Bracknell arrives late to tea with Algernon because she has been visiting the friend whose husband recently passed away. Additionally, Jack and Algernon speak multiple times about how to kill Jack’s imaginary brother due to the fact that this fictional character had become an extreme disadvantage to both of them. Furthermore, they realize that inventing this counterfeit was an extreme error and it only brings them sorrow. Ultimately, when Jack realizes that Earnest is a liability, he decides to kill his alter-ego once and for all. Algernon, as a good brother, helps Jack kill his alter-ego by telling everybody who thought they knew Ernest that he died of a chill. When Jack announces Ernest’s demise, Miss Prism, Cecily’s governess, says, “What a lesson for him! I trust he will profit by it” (Wilde II. 97). Miss Prism, as an extremely strict religious person with high standards, had an offhand attitude about death; an attitude that was also reflected in the modus operandi of society in general. In these examples, death is given a contrasting perspective than normal. One can say that death is appalling or, better yet, catastrophic. Wilde, nonetheless, uses irony and shrewdness to portray death as a blessing rather than a curse.

From the very beginning of time, marriage exists to unite the love of a man and a woman who are committed to taking care of each other until death. When we see marriage the way Oscar Wilde viewed it, we are surprised to see that when it comes to marital bonds, we are essentially free after our partner dies. Lady Bracknell was finally free after her husband’s death. She

eventually could begin to live her life as it was intended to, free from the constraints of marriage. “People who live entirely for pleasure usually are” (Wilde II.113). Here, Miss. Prism responds to Chausable after he asks Jack, “Your brother was, I believe, unmarried, was he not? (Wilde II. 113). When one partner dies, the remaining survivor begins to live a better life. Marriage is simply a political status, life is truly enjoyed without a partner. Chausable continues to argue with Miss Prism by saying, “Believe me, I do not deserve so neologistic a phrase. The precept, as well as the practice of the Primitive Church, was distinctly against matrimony” (Wilde II.81-87). He thinks that marriage is useless and to be unmarried is equal or better. The argument Miss Prism provides is that bachelors permanently become temptations for women if they stay single. Thus, it is their duty to stop leading women astray. Miss Prism continues by stating, 'young women are green'(Wilde II. 81-87). She suggests that women should wait to marry until they are mature enough to value their husbands. On the other hand, Algernon Moncrief epitomizes the Victorian dandy; the declared bachelor who lives above his means. This is the way Chausable believes one should live, the same way Wilde lived his. Algernon calls himself a Bunburyist, which is a person who avoids responsibility and is extremely dishonest. Algernon is also a dandy, a man who pays excessive attention to his appearance and is utterly egocentric. The dandies in Wilde's works represented the playwright himself and his own opinions. Algernon takes the first step into creating an alternate reality that would enable him to come and go as he pleases in plain view of others. The dandy views life as a work of art and implies it through his character. He is exceedingly extravagant in all his ways and everything that he does.

Nowadays, we marry for love and desire for another person. However, has it always been this way? During the Victorian Era, things were a little distinct. Before, people married due to their convenience and benefits. The inversion of marriage and divorce satirically reflects the beliefs during the Victorian Era. The idea of marriage can be easily divided into three broad ways. How marriage relates to love, how it is viewed upon the upper class, and how people choose their mates. Firstly, marriage relates to love in a quite peculiar way. Not everybody marries for love. "I thought you had come up for pleasure. . . I call that business" (Wilde I.36-38). Algernon seems to think that proposal and marriage are items of 'business,' and not 'pleasure.' He thinks of marriage as a social obligation he must fulfil in order to maintain a respectable name. Jack, on the other hand, has a much more positive view of marriage (possibly because he’s already met the love of his life); he seems to regard marriage as romantic. This is the way we live today and how marriage first intended to be. Moreover, Algernon states that “divorces are made in heaven” (Wilde II.297). Which is the direct opposite of the belief that marriages are made in heaven. This statement by Algernon paradoxes the traditional view of the perfect marriage where the husband and wife are praised for showing their affections in public. All of Algernon’s witty statements are inversions of the popular morality believed at that time. Wilde is using him to mock the social customs. When Jack and Algernon realized that the women they love would only love them back if their names were Ernest because it inspires absolute confidence, they decided to be christened. They do not decide to do so on the grounds of faith but on their absolute need to change their names to Ernest to make their girls happy. All of Algernon’s witty statements are inversions of the popular morality believed at that time. Algernon is used to satirize the moral beliefs and at last, offer reform in some kind of way.

Gender roles have been set from the start of the creation of this world. Usually, they are fulfilled and executed by the designated role and whenever inverted, it is categorized as strange or wrong. The inversion of gender roles satirically reflects the beliefs during the Victorian Era. In the play, it is observed that Lady Bracknell ridicules the role of the typical husband when she

expresses further, 'I do not propose to undeceive him. Indeed I have never undeceived him on any question. I would consider it wrong' (Wilde III.278). This statement by her negates the contemporary idea of male dominance and the rejection of the notion that in a married life honesty and fidelity are only a woman's moral duty and the husband is supposed to be free of all such rules. Contrary to the set up of Victorian society, Lady Bracknell emerges as a powerful figure who defies and challenges the typical system. In the world of the Importance of Being Earnest, Wilde presents another male, Lord Bracknell, who also serves as a contrast to the much-hyped image of the ideal dominating male. His complete absence throughout the play ridicules the Victorian code. Gwendolen, his daughter, seems to be familiar with this situation in her household house when she says; 'Outside the family circle, papa, I am glad to say is entirely unknown. The home seems to me to be the proper sphere for a man. And certainly once a man begins to neglect his domestic duties; he becomes painfully effeminate, does he not' (Wilde II. 266). Her response is a reaction to the society which is extremely fond of male domination. This is the sort of worldview which essentially inverts the gender roles.

Oscar Wilde brings into conflict the high minded but increasingly difficult to maintain beliefs of the Victorian age, with a sense of modern reality. Though Wilde’s witticism, the importance of life and death is seen. additionally, the inversion of marriage and gender roles display their significance in England. On the other hand, the inverse paradox may be described as the fulcrum around which the two arms of a scissor operate. It holds the two arms of the scissor, one arm being the burden of the insufferable social altruism that collapses upon itself through sheer unsustainable weight. The other arm of the scissor is the emergence of the long-suppressed human urges expressing a revolt against enforcement of the rigorous code. The inverse pattern in the play acting as the fulcrum puts these two forces in the harness, thereby ravaging and ultimately destroying all that the Victorian code stood by.