

THE REFLECTIONS OF EMERSON'S SELF-RELIANCE IN THREE OF OSCAR  
WILDE'S COMEDIES

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## ABSTRACT

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Ralph Waldo Emerson was a prominent individualist who wrote several essays asserting the greatness of a self-suffusing individual. This thesis analyses three of Oscar Wilde's comedy plays, namely *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893) and *The Importance of Being Ernest* (1895), in the light of Emerson's concept of self-reliance which is tied to his concept of Individualism. Wilde portrays some degree of self-reliance and independence in various characters within these plays. Since self-reliance is at the core of Emerson's definition of individualism, Wilde's three comedy plays can be said to be harmonious with Emerson's individualism. There are reflections of Emerson's concept of self-reliance in the three selected plays, and components of Emerson's notion of individualism and self-reliance are elaborated on at an individual level. Self-actualization is the priority of individuals in Wilde's plays which, at the same time, remains compatible with his own theory of individualism.

**Keywords:** Individualism, Self-reliance, Conformism, Solitude, Originality

## ÖZ

### EMERSON'IN SELF-RELIANCE KAYRAMININ OSCAR WİLDE'İN ÜÇ KOMEDİ OYUNUNUNDAKİ YANSIMALARI

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Ralph Waldo Emerson, kendi kendine acı çeken bireyin büyüklüğünü öne süren birkaç makale yazan ünlü bir bireyseldir. Bu tezde Oscar Wilde'in komedi oyunlarından üçü, Bayan Windermere'in Fan'ı (1892), Önemsiz Bir Kadın (1893) ve Ernest Olmanın Önemi (1895), Emerson'un kendine özgü güven kavramı bireysellik ışığında analiz edilmiştir. Wilde, bu oyunlarda çeşitli karakterlerde bir dereceye kadar kendine güven ve bağımsızlık tasvir eder. Özgüven Emerson'un bireysellik tanımının özü olduğu için, Wilde'in üç komedi oyununun Emerson'un bireyciliği ile uyumlu olduğu söylenebilir. Seçilen üç oyunda Emerson'un özgüven kavramının yansımaları vardır ve Emerson'un bireysellik ve kendine güven kavramının bileşenleri bireysel düzeyde detaylandırılır. Kendi kendini gerçekleştirme, Wilde'nin oyunlarındaki bireylerin önceliğidir, aynı zamanda, bireyciliğin kendi teorisiyle uyumlu kalır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Bireycilik, Özgüven, Uyum, Yalnızlık, Özgünlük

To  
Clive and Sonia

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Ralph Waldo Emerson was a prominent individualist who wrote several essays asserting the greatness of a self-suffusing individual. This thesis analyses three of Oscar Wilde's comedy plays, namely *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), in the light of Emerson's concept of self-reliance which is tied to his concept of Individualism. Wilde portrays some degree of self-reliance and independence in various characters within these plays. Since self-reliance is at the core of Emerson's definition of individualism, Wilde's three comedy plays can be said to be harmonious with Emerson's individualism.

Like Emerson, Wilde had a high regard for freedom from bonds whether internal or external. The reason these two authors have been selected for analysis together is Wilde's familiarity with Emerson's thoughts and writings. Emerson's famous maxim in *Self-Reliance* "I would write on the lintels of the door-post, Whim." interests Wilde in such extent that he uses "whim" as a motto to show his disregard for consistency:

Vivian: Who wants to be consistent? The dullard and the doctrinaire, the tedious people who carry out their principles to the bitter end of action, to the *reductio ad absurdum* of practice. Not I. Like Emerson, I write over the door of my library the word "Whim." ("Decay" 5)

Analyzing the plays under Emerson's definition of individualism requires some basic factual information about the notion and theories of Individualism itself. As this notion is very complex in its nature, the introduction chapter is chiefly dedicated to the underlying facts about theories of individualism which provide the grounds for arguing Emerson's echoes in Wilde's plays.

The term "individualism" has been a controversial notion in the history of ideas and its usage has been so variable, making it hard to track its origin. Weber wrote that the term "embraces the utmost heterogeneity of meanings". (qtd. in Lukes 45) The philosophical doctrines of individualism centers on one's self-reliance, self-determination, self-authority, independence and self-actualization, which have origins in antiquity, but as societies changed in different dimensions, the term itself underwent variations and its meaning merged into the specific social, political and economic movements of its time. The noun "individual" comes to English from the medieval Latin "individuus" meaning something "indivisible, inseparable" (Hamilton, 7). Therefore, the term referred to an entity which could not be divided, "a single, atomic thing" (7).

Swart notes that an individualistic mentality in Western civilization emerged and evolved due to a number of ideas and events over time such as the birth and growth of Christianity, the rise of the bourgeoisie and capitalism, the Renaissance, Protestantism, the philosophy of the Enlightenment, and Romanticism. According to scholars, the term "individualism" was not always used in a positive sense and the majority of writers in the mid-nineteenth century believed "individualism" represented a serious problem for the political and social order until the early 1840s and 1850s when the unfavorable attitudes toward the concept of individualism began to give way to more favorable opinions.

According to Swart, the word was first coined to describe the disintegration of society, also referring to the atomization of society. Several political and social conservatives believed the French Revolution and the doctrine of the individual rights of man were the main cause of this disintegration. Influenced by theocrats, the anti-individualistic attitude of certain French writers brought about the usage of the term. Swart explains these "anti-individualists" were referred to as Saint-Simonians, since they were followers of Saint Simon, who according to Swart attributed "anarchy" and "egoism" to the Enlightenment and French Revolution. After his death, in 1825, his followers conceived the term "individualisme". The term first appeared in French dictionaries in 1836 and was defined by a French attorney general as:

a new word which has become perhaps necessary to characterize an evil which has hitherto been unknown; a rather strange term, which linguistic purists should leave to its own course, because it will pass away together with the accidental evil to which it owes its origin [...] (Maigron qtd. in Swart 79).

It is estimated that the first usage of the term in English emerged in translations of Michel Chevalier's *Lettres sur l'Amerique du Nord* in 1839. Chevalier was sent to North America under the patronage of then French Minister of Interior in 1834, spending two years in visiting nearly all parts of the Union. Chevalier uses the term “individualism” in his description of Yankee:

In contrast, the Yankee is reserved, concentrated and defiant. His humor is pensive and sober but uniform, his pose without grace, but modest and without false pride. His approach is cold, often lacking in kindness. His ideas are straight, but practical. [...] He is individualism incarnate; with him the spirit of locality and specialization is pushed to the final limit. (128)

Chevalier considered that the people of the United States being very much influenced with Protestantism, cared for “the principle of independence, of individualism, lastly of competition” (283). He observed that in North America an extreme form of subdivision was the force behind social progress, and he called that extremity as “individualism” and explained that condition as:

[...] Individuals are separated one from another, each isolated in his personality to reinforce it. Or if one is associated, one is not constituted except in restrained associations without any ties among them. (376)

Finally Chevalier uses the term implying its negative aspect while comparing the French society to that of North America. He notes that in France people value “unity and centralization”, whereas Americans being “little republics born under the principle of individualism” act more bravely. It is noteworthy to mention that the term “Individuality” had been used many years prior to the term “Individualism” by important figures such as John Locke, John Stuart Mill and Kant who had their distinct definitions of individual and defended the rights of individual.

According to Swart, in England, the usage of the term was not favorable and individualists such as Herbert Spencer, Thomas Carlyle and John Stuart Mill preferred to express their concepts using other terms and in mid-nineteenth century, Americans gave preference to the terms "self-reliance," "self-culture," "self- help," and "self-made man" rather than using "individualism" as it would still convey a sense of self-interest and egotism. Consequently, when Emerson wrote his 1841 essay "Self-Reliance", the title was in more widespread use than "individualism". Five years after writing his essay "Self-Reliance", Emerson gave a similarly favorable interpretation of the term when in his diary in 1846, he noted that "individualism [had] never been tried," implying that the current criticisms of "individualism" were not correct and just.

By the end of the eighteenth century, with the emergence of Romanticism, the importance of uniformity in norms and beliefs were diminished. Scholars believe that English Romanticism also inspired the American Transcendentalism. Both movements were originated out of discontent with society's industrialism and its reliance on vain principles and both were reactions against reliance on scientific discoveries which had flourished with new advancements in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century and therefore, both were reactions against Enlightenment and the "Age of Reason". Both movements positioned nature as a refuge from city life and the solitary man was encouraged to go deep into his own emotions and experience himself in his loneliness. Romanticism extolled originality and genius. The conflict between society and individual was emphasized and a cultivated solitude was preferred over connection to the vulgar and philistine world. Swart notes that the Romantics "considered subjectivity, individuality, multiformity, and diversity not only inevitable but even desirable" (83).

Emerson was one of the main figures of American Transcendentalism and his philosophy was that every individual owns a spiritual power which is part of a whole truth and looking into his inner-self, he will get his own personal ethical and moral guidance. Therefore, for Emerson an individual is the core of his universe, and as there is a universal truth, his truth is not opposing to the rest of the society. An individual is good in his nature because he is part of God. Both transcendentalism and Romanticism considered nature not only to

be a refuge from society but also an opportunity to reach to a higher and better understanding of the self. For both movements, one's most common emotions are prominent and one's intuition is right and holy.

Yet, scholars believe that Emerson's Transcendentalism was religious in its nature and therefore it differed from Romanticism, which was mostly an aesthetic, ethical and political movement. The refuge to nature from the commercialist and industrialist society which was present in Romanticism did not strongly emphasize on the spiritual divinity existing in everyone as the Transcendentalists believed it to be. Confirmed by Swart, the appreciation of diversity, originality and solitude as foundations of Romanticism, soon turned to their extremity and brought about the anxieties over "dubious values", "quest for eccentricity" and "isolation", which led to criticism of so called the "nihilistic" and "atomistic" tendencies of the Romantic ideal. The French writers criticized the socially irresponsible attitudes of Romantic authors such as Goethe and Byron and worried about the decadence of literature "into a world of dreams and fantasy." A mutual disinterest in philosophy of utilitarianism was being shaped in 1850s with the French writers Gautier, Balzac and Baudelaire, who were the shaping figures of Decadence movement which itself to great extent influenced the later movement in England, called Aestheticism. Oscar Wilde was one of the most prominent writers who supported Aestheticism and the autonomy of art.

It is noteworthy to mention that scholars believe after the civil war in America, the term "individualism" became part of American ideology not only as a result of the same mentioned historical background, but also because of its emphasis on national identity. Emerson's transcendentalist ideas invited Americans to rely on themselves and do not solely rely on European-born ideologies, in the same vein that an individual contains in himself "each and all". For Emerson, the atomization of societies is not hazardous since individualism elevates societies as well; "The union is only perfect when all the uniters are isolated. [...] The Union must be ideal in actual individualism" ("New England Reformers" 458).

Harold Bloom reflecting on Emerson's influence on the religion and intellectuality in American society notes:

yet Emerson bet the American house (as it were) on self-reliance, which is a doctrine of solitude. Whitman, as person and as poetic mask, like his lilacs, bloomed into a singularity that cared intensely both about the self and others, but Emersonian consciousness all too frequently can flower, Hamlet-like, into an individuality indifferent both to the self and to others. The United States since Emerson has been divided between what he called the "party of hope" and the "party of memory". Our intellectuals of the left and of the right both claim Emerson as ancestor. (Bloom 229)

According to Dilworth, Emerson, in his concept of self and self-awareness, was partially influenced by Hegel's concept of "Zeitgeist". Hegel's influential *The Phenomenology of Mind* appeared in 1806, nearly forty years prior to Emerson's *Self-Reliance*. His moral and political philosophy influenced a number of later nationalist theories, including both Nazism and Communism and, particularly, Marx. Yet his belief that "the real is rational and the rational is the real" (Dilworth qtd. in Tiffany 345), which served as the basis for his Absolute Idealism, was rejected by many later philosophers such as Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Goethe, Nietzsche as well as Emerson. In Hegel's concept of *Zeitgeist*, the individual creativity is folded into "the spirit of the times" as part of the larger unfolding of history, and thus history and nature became the autobiography of the spirit. This concept resonated in Emerson's philosophy of universal truth but differentiated in that Hegel rationalized the change as a dialectical process between opposing forces, while Emerson's philosophy as recorded in his ethics of self-reliance, was based on the more affirmative law of correspondences in nature. Hence, Emerson's logic promoted liberal democratic individualism, especially in terms of creative genius, essentially, rejecting Hegel's collective morality (Tiffany 345-6).

Transcendentalists took the theme of individualism to new levels by rejecting the authority of tradition. Emerson sought to embrace a universal spiritual and intellectual experience, while not denying religion entirely. He placed a high esteem on personal experience. In his essay, "Experience," he stated:

The great gifts are not got by analysis. Everything good is on the highway. The middle region of our being is the temperate zone. We may climb into the thin and cold realm of pure geometry and lifeless science, or sink into that of sensation. Between these extremes is the equator of life [...] the mid-world is best. (Experience 352)

Therefore, an individual's own experiences are of more value than any sciences or ideals and individualism is to be preferred over rationalism or idealism. Two main figures helped in shaping the notion of individualism and served as influences for Emerson; John Locke and John Stuart Mill.

Simmons notes that "the sacredness of individual persons follows for Locke from their being special beings made by God in His image" (Simmons 58). According to him, Locke emphasized on "God's ownership of and interest in humankind as a whole" which resulted in his belief in the significance of "the common good" and gave a "collectivist, communitarian" aspect to his thought. Locke emphasized "on the natural equality, freedom, and purposiveness of persons" which represented "the sanctity of each person's life and plans and to the individualist, libertarian aspects of his thought" (100).

According to Locke a legitimate government is the result of a social contract "where people in the state of nature conditionally transfer some of their rights to the government in order to better ensure the stable, comfortable enjoyment of their lives, liberty, and property." (Tuckness)

Therefore individuals perform within the limits of a social contract though they have their freedom within those boundaries. This idea was not supported by Mill. In his essay "Utilitarianism" he rejects the concept of a social contract:

A favorite contrivance has been the fiction of a contract, whereby at some unknown period all the members of society engaged to obey the laws, and consented to be punished for any disobedience to them; ... I need hardly remark, that even if the consent were not a mere fiction, this maxim is not superior in authority to the others which it is brought in to supersede. (192)

Mills another famous writing is “On Liberty”. In his introduction to Mill’s *On Liberty and other Essays*, Gray describes Mill’s concept of individualism as:

The argument of *On Liberty* is that, once a certain level of cultural development has been achieved, and barbarism left behind, individuality \_which is to say, that form of life in which persons realize their peculiar natures in autonomously chosen activities\_ is the single most important ingredient in human well-being. The object of *On Liberty* is to state a principle that demarcates a sphere of liberty within which, through experiments in living, people are uninterfered with in exhibiting their individuality. (Gray 15)

Therefore, rather than basing his conception of individualism on theological, metaphysics or contractual foundations, Mill, shed a psychological light on individualism and consequently believed that individuals were the arbiters of their own actions. This concept is shared by both Emerson and Wilde who, like Mill, considered a man the master of his own destiny.

Emerson’s individualism has the notion of self-reliance at its core. He emphasizes on a free form of individualism which inevitably resists forces that would draw the individual towards consistency and conformity. Yet, this complete reliance and trust on the self is only practical through an opposition and “aversion” to conformity and consistency. Emerson was committed to the sovereignty of the individual and believed that the individual must choose his own ideologies, beliefs, morality, religion and politics. The individual must think and act as his own authority and have commitment to his own vocations, while recognizing and tolerating the values and beliefs of others. Regarding the tensions between society and individual, in *Self-Reliance* Emerson outlines the habits of an independent and self-trusting individual in detail. In a discussion on Emerson’s *Self-Reliance*, George Kateb, a prominent critic of individualism, points to the widespread influence of the title itself:

Thanks to the essay, the very phrase “self-reliance” has become a common synonym for individualism. Yet the idea of self-reliance is everywhere present in Emerson’s thought, not only in the essay named “Self-Reliance”. (Emerson 171)

However, for Emerson self-reliance goes further than simple non-conformity and reliance on the self. The fundamental aspect of self-reliance is a proper engagement with truth; the truth, however, according to Emerson is multifaceted:

Truth is our element of life, yet if a man fasten his attention on a single aspect of truth, and apply himself to that alone for a long time, the truth becomes distorted and not itself, but falsehood. (“Intellect” 299)

As truth has different dimensions, Emerson believed that the individual should search his own truth and trust in his intuition, detaching himself from all personal and social restrictions in his journey through life. Emerson asserts that “the first property” of the mind, is that it “detaches” and in rejecting social conventions and one’s own past, an individual understands himself “now”:

This is the first property of the Intellect I am to point out; the mind detaches. A man is intellectual in proportion as he can make an object of every sensation, perception and intuition; so long as he has no engagement in any thought or feeling which can hinder him from looking at it as somewhat foreign. (“Natural History of Intellect” 34)

Walt Whitman noted that Emerson, in his attitude towards individuals, did “not see or take one side” but he saw “all sides” mentioning “His final influence is to make his students cease to worship anything—almost cease to believe in anything, outside of themselves” (Whitman 320).

Moreover, Emerson emphasizes that an individual is formed by and to some degree relies on his social and historical background. In his essay ‘culture’, he notes that an individual is in a status of constant tension with his society mentioning “I must have children, I must have events, I must have a social state and history, or my thinking and speaking want body or basis (“Culture” 732).

In ‘The American Scholar’ (1837), in denoting an ordinary “Man thinking” as a “scholar”, Emerson acknowledges that an individual’s past holds a great deal of significance on his mind, which must be appreciated since the individual can learn from his past experiences.

If this is achieved, the past becomes a teacher and the man is the past's student: "Is not, indeed, every man a student?" Indeed, according to Emerson, an individual can learn more from his own experiences than from reading literature, art, sciences and etc. In "The American Scholar", Emerson warns the individual not to underestimate their own judgments and not to replace them with the learning obtained from institutions. Emerson, does, however, accept that institutional education in one's life is "indispensable":

Of course, there is a portion of reading quite indispensable to a wise man. History and exact science he must learn by laborious reading. Colleges, in like manner, have their indispensable office, to teach elements. But they can only highly serve us, when they aim not to drill, but to create; when they gather from far every ray of various genius to their hospitable halls, and, by the concentrated fires, set the hearts of their youth on flame. Thought and knowledge are natures in which apparatus and pretension avail nothing. Gowns, and pecuniary foundations, though of towns of gold, can never countervail the least sentence or syllable of wit. ("The American scholar" 30)

The society does not allow the individual to create himself and achieve complete independence from society's influence, and, therefore, has an important role in shaping the individual. Kateb provides a clear reading of Emerson's theory of self-reliance and explains that a self-reliant individual may not be able to generate himself since his roots are dependent on his society. The individual can, however, alter himself through reconsideration noting that "one can work hard to avoid pretending to be what one isn't; one can change oneself for the better; one can take hold of oneself; one can aspire to be not the author but the editor of oneself and one's life; one can aspire to a measure or episode of authenticity" (*Human* 10).

Since, according to Kateb, an individual is "the editor of oneself", Emerson encourages a self-trusting individual not to hold an unfavorable attitude towards his society or the events of his age, but in accepting his position, trust himself and act as his genius commands him; "Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events" ("S-R" 146).

Kateb perceives Henry David Thoreau and Whitman as Emerson's "two greatest children". (*Inner* 78). Yet, according to David Rondel, William James was also among

this group as “Emerson’s godson” (Dieleman et al. 310). In his diary James noted his certainty that “an age will come . . . when Emerson’s philosophy will be in our bones” (McDermott qtd. in Bush 1). Like Emerson, James believed in the essential goodness of human nature and esteemed self-reliance as his definition of individualism. His philosophy of individualism is remarkably similar to that of Emerson, and, among those who have been influenced by Emerson’s writings; James’ may be the closest. Yet there are some differences between Emerson and James’ notions of individualism, the most elaborate one being, as Carpenter identifies, that James was a “scientific psychologist, and by desire only, a philosopher. Emerson was interested in an unscientific psychology and emphasized the soul as a metaphysical.” (Carpenter 461)

James claims that from birth a man has his own “precious birthright of individualism” and that the various religious, philanthropic, educational and other institutions within society merely pretend to protect this ‘birthright’ of individualism. In his essay “What Makes a Life Significant,” James states that one cannot follow the path taken by other people, acknowledging that an individual must be original and confront life on his own terms, and, as Emerson asserts, not “deal with it at second hand, through the perceptions of somebody else” (“Character” 367). For James, individualism must be manifested in every aspect of one’s life. Individuals vary in their habits, personalities, their past and their mindset and, consequently, the notable difference between each individual constitute a sign of their individualism, being the manifestation of their real self.

Both Emerson and James recognized conformity and docility as notable obstacles in attaining self-reliance and both agreed that a sense of individuality is something that needs to be worked upon since it is not the default aspect of an individual’s life. This factor, according to James, is one of the principal reasons why individuals are so strongly influenced by the age and society in which they live that they hardly differ from one another. In his book, *The Will to Believe*, James writes “An unlearned carpenter of my acquaintance once said in my hearing: ‘There is very little difference between one man and another; but what little there is, is very important.’ This distinction seems to me to go to the root of the matter.” (*Will* 257)

According to James, society's effect on the individual is inevitable. Society's influence on the individual is at the heart of the three plays under the study. Wilde satirizes the hypocrisy and manners of upper-class Victorian England society and that is the reason that Wilde's characters are largely perceived by critics as caricatures or puppets devoid of any great degree of complexity. There is much controversy among the critics about Wilde's writings. Leadman explains his positive view on Wilde and holds the idea that he was concerned with social problems. In his article written in 1906 he notes:

Witty repartees deliberately torn from their proper context in his plays were seriously construed as Wilde's own gospel. The words of few men have undergone such distortion and misinterpretation as have those of this genius. It is at last dawning on men's minds that his writings are not so much external ornament concealing a blank void, and that his wit is often wisdom, only occasionally nonsense. ...As a matter of fact, whether Wilde had any fixed aim or not, his work most certainly points—and points clearly—to a definite goal. ...What, pray, are many of Wilde's short stories, such as the 'Young King' and 'The Happy Prince,' but artistically embroidered pleas for social reform? (*Critical Heritage* 298)

Yet there are some critics who have received Wilde's writing largely entertaining. In his review of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Bernard Shaw considers the play as "really heartless" since it doesn't concern political and social concerns (*Critical Heritage* 221). Yet this study demonstrates that Wilde also portrays some degree of self-reliance and independence in several of the characters within these plays, such as Algernon, Ernest, Mrs. Erlynne, Lady Windermere, and Mrs. Arbuthnot. These characters possess some degree of harmony with Emerson's definition of self-reliance which will be discussed in detail in the next chapters.

Wilde believed that an individual's soul is worthy above everything else and being the core value of human life, no social convention or traditions of the past should be able to diminish its power and growth. Wilde valued art immensely but still believed that nothing should destroy one's soul. In his novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, he depicts the supremacy of man's soul over art. Yet art is immensely valuable for Wilde. Not only it is a means for human soul to be expressed but also it is the highest mode of self-expression and therefore art is the greatest manifestation of individualism. There can be little doubt

on Oscar Wilde's familiarity with the American literary tradition, Emerson's individualism and his most important essay *Self-Reliance*. Wilde's definition of individualism had some similarities and differences with that of Emerson. One of the most prominent similarities that both individualists share in their definitions of individualism is their conception of human soul; its value over everything else and its universality.

In the "Soul of Man Under Socialism" (1891), Wilde notes that "It is the differentiation to which all organisms grow" (327) and therefore the difference among individuals is the manifestation of growth and development. Yet these differences are the external ones that like masks people use to express themselves and through that self-expression reach a higher level of self-realization. The "differentiation" is only external as human nature is universal:

but we are all of us made out of the same stuff. In Falstaff there is something of Hamlet, in Hamlet there is not a little of Falstaff. The fat knight has his moods of melancholy, and the young prince his moments of coarse humour. Where we differ from each other is purely in accidentals: in dress, manner, tone of voice, religious opinions, personal appearance, tricks of habit and the like. The more one analyses people, the more all reasons for analysis disappear. Sooner or later one comes to that dreadful universal thing called human nature. ("Decay" 15)

Emerson wrote a whole essay on "that Unity, that Over-Soul" in which he explained the universality of human soul and its union with God; "We live in succession, in division. in parts, in particles. Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related" ("The Over-Soul" 262).

Thus, both Emerson and Wilde share the universality of human soul and see its growth in self-realization which results in self-expression and therefore as the internal state of mind has been externalized it finally encourages self-actualization. Both Emerson and Wilde invite individuals to accomplish self-actualization, and not only to know themselves but also to be themselves, mentioning that "Know Thyself" was written over the portal of the antique world. Over the portal of the new world, "Be Thyself" shall be written. And the

message of Christ to man was simply "Be thyself." That is the secret of Christ ("Soul" 288).

For both Wilde and Emerson art is a source of progress for human nature since it is all about creation and not imitation. Yet, three major differences on the notion of art, exists between Emerson and Wilde which presents their difference on the definition of individualism as well: firstly, the significance of art as a mode of self-expression; secondly the concept of uselessness attributed to art and thirdly the notion of beauty. Although both Emerson and Wilde see art as a form of self-expression, Emerson's appreciation of art simply roots it in its nature of personal creation:

Because the soul is progressive, it never quite repeats itself, but in every act attempts the production of a new and fairer whole. This appears in works both of the useful and fine arts, if we employ the popular distinction of works according to their aim either at use or beauty. Thus, in our fine arts, not imitation but creation is the aim. ("Art" 305)

Therefore, for Emerson, self-expression through art, being a creation and not imitation, portrays individual differences in a society and thus contributes to individualism. Emerson does not view art as sublime, while for Wilde, art is the highest method of self-expression: "Art is the most intense mode of individualism that the world has known". ("Soul" 300) Wilde describes individualism as "the ultimate realization of the artistic life" ("De Profundis" 13), as a personality's development towards absolute self-realization and perfection. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Lord Henry Wotton thinks that "A complex personality . . . was indeed, in its way, a real work of art, Life having its elaborate masterpieces, just as poetry has, or sculpture, or painting" (69). Consequently, an individual should "elaborate" himself as a work of art and therefore contrary to Emerson, for Wilde "Art is Individualism" ("Soul" 304).

Since Art is individualism, art suffices to exist, and teaching should not be required from works of art. This opinion about the function of art tied Wilde with the notion of Art for Art's sake, although he never adhered to such a doctrine. Wilde's cherishment in the uselessness of art is the second difference between him and Emerson's attitude towards art. Not only Emerson did not conceive art as the most intense mode of self-expression

which would advance one's individualism, but also, he did not emphasize on the rejection of usefulness in arts since separating beauty from usefulness is against "the laws of nature":

Art makes the same effort which a sensual prosperity makes; namely to detach the beautiful from the useful, to do up the work as unavoidable, and, hating it, pass on to enjoyment. These solaces and compensation. This division of beauty from use, the laws of nature do not permit. As soon as beauty is sought, not from religion and love but for pleasure, it degrades the seeker. High beauty is no longer attainable by him in canvas or in stone, in sound, or in lyrical construction. ("Art" 313-4)

Emerson wished for a reconciliation between the two notions of beauty and usefulness; that "beauty must come back to the useful arts, and the distinction between the fine and the useful arts be forgotten". He defined the useful art as "those that lie next to instinct, as agriculture, building, [...] by which man serves himself" as well as those "serviceable to political economy" ("Thought on Art" 1). According to Emerson "the first and last lesson of the useful arts is, that nature tyrannizes over our works."

Emerson believed that art is any act of personal production originating from human soul, which would aim either at use or beauty. For him art for beauty should still have some divine aim in it because "the universal soul is the alone creator of the useful and the beautiful; therefore to make anything useful or beautiful, the individual must be submitted to the universal mind" ("Art" 306). Since "Nature is the representative of the universal mind", Emerson asserts that "Art must be a complement to nature, strictly subsidiary."

Emerson provides the example of man's "handiwork", using the power of a wind mill as well as his muscles in order to accomplish his purpose and concludes that "In short, in all our operations we seek not to use our own, but to bring a quite infinite force to bear." hence, in useful art, there is a divine element.

He defines Music, eloquence, poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture as examples of Fine Arts, which are those whose end are beauty. He sees much in these arts which are "not spiritual" and emphasizes on their "material" basis. Bringing an example of the beauty of

a “polished statue of dazzling marble” over a “clay model” he concludes that these art owe their beauty rather to “Nature than to Art”. Emerson adds that “unpracticed eyes” and “unskillful ears” will admire any work of art with low quality and less originality, since they “do not ask a fine spiritual delight”.

He believed that the beauty in Fine Arts have an aim such as love or spirituality, noting a few instances such as music; “The effect of music belongs how much to the place, as the church, or the moonlight walk, or to the company, or, if on the stage, to what went before in the play, or to the expectation of what shall come after” and therefore, for Emerson, the artist’s work will “represent to future beholders the Unknown, the Inevitable, the Divine.” (“Art” 300) The artist should make a work which is to be admired by everyone as his work possesses universality and divinity:

The artist, who is to produce a work which is to be admired not by his friends or his townspeople, or his contemporaries, but by all men; and which is to be more beautiful to the eye in proportion to its culture, must disindividualize himself, and be a man of no party, and no manner, and no age, but one through whom the soul of all men circulates, as the common air through his lungs. He must work in the spirit in which we conceive a prophet to speak, or an angel of the Lord to act, that is not to speak his own words, or do his own works, or think his own thoughts, but he is to be an organ through which the universal mind acts. (“Thought on Art” 3)

The third difference in Emerson and Wilde’s concepts of art is Wilde’s glorification of art’s beauty. Not only Emerson did not advocate the separation of beauty and usefulness but also, he found the beauty of art to be inferior to the beauty of nature as nature’s beauty is “alive”. For him art “stands in the imagination as somewhat contrary to nature: “In nature, all is useful, all is beautiful. It is therefore beautiful because it is alive, living:- reproductive; it is therefore useful because it is symmetrical and fair.” (“Art” 314) Therefore, Emerson appreciated nature and claimed it closer to human soul than art. Since “the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul”, a self-reliant individual looks at nature to elevate his soul as both of them share “their cause”:

The genesis and maturation of a planet, its poise and orbit, the bended tree recovering itself from the strong wind, the vital resources of every animal and

vegetable, are demonstrations of the self-sufficing, and therefore self-relying soul. ("S-R" 159)

Contrary to Emerson, Wilde assumed one's soul is closer to art as a medium for self-expression rather than nature. In the 'Decay of Lying' (1889) through Vivian's speech, Wilde directly states his preference of art over nature:

[...] Art never expresses anything but itself. It has an independent life, just as Thought has, and develops purely on its own lines. It is not necessarily realistic in an age of realism, nor spiritual in an age of faith [...]. All bad art comes from returning to Life and Nature, and elevating them into ideals. ("Decay" 55)

Thus, not only did Wilde consider art superior to nature but he also, he did not presume nature to be an artistic inspiration. In the 'Decay of Lying', he acknowledges that instead of art taking its inspirations from nature, it "teaches Nature her proper place", since nature is "so imperfect". For Wilde, the infinitude does not belong to nature but to art by mentioning that "As for the infinite variety of Nature, that is a pure myth. It is not to be found in Nature herself. It resides in the imagination, or fancy, or cultivated blindness of the man who looks at her ("Decay" 4). Rather than appreciating nature, Wilde appreciates the state of being in harmony with it because "pleasure is Nature's test, her sign of approval. When man is happy, he is in harmony with himself and his environment". (*Dorian Gray* 67)

Wilde and Emerson held nearly contrasting attitudes toward the notions of art and nature, each respecting one over the other. Although both seek individualism, they find it through different mediums. Despite the fact that Emerson did not have a high regard for art and was not an advocate of artistic creations for mere sake of beauty, he refrained from seeking society's appraisal through hard and useful work. He stated that at times, society expects an individual to dedicate himself to "useful" works instead of self-cultivation and if one prefers to care for his soul over actions, he is required explanations. But Emerson mentions "I am explained without explaining". He disapproves of being committed to usefulness as it is like begging the approval of society. He encourages a self-reliant person to "possess" himself instead of begging mentioning "A man is a beggar who only lives to

the useful, and however he may serve as a pin or rivet in the social machine, cannot be said to have arrived at self-possession (“Culture” 732).

Similar to Emerson, in the “Soul of Man Under Socialism”, Wilde warns that societies “hate Individualism” and directs that an individual should resist the forces of society and stress a higher value on himself:

Man is complete in himself. When they go into the world, the world will disagree with them. That is inevitable. The world hates Individualism. But that is not to trouble them. They are to be calm and self-centered. [...] The things people say of a man do not alter a man. He is what he is. Public opinion is of no value whatsoever. (“Soul” 290)

Wilde’s chief concern is society’s rejection of useless art and its disregard for novelty and originality in Art. In his preface to *Dorian Gray*, he writes that “all art is quite useless”. Wilde was influenced by the teachings of Walter Pater and his book *The Renaissance* (1873), which he remembered to have read during his “first term at Oxford” and described it as “that book which has had such strange influence over my life”. (“De Profundis” 30) The famous last lines of Walter Pater’s conclusion to his book, was a defense on the notion of useless art demonstrating the ability to enjoy the beauty within works of art without seeking anything out of them:

Of this wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for art’s sake, has most; for art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments’ sake. (Pater 239)

Essentially, society’s demand for useful actions contradicted Wilde’s “useless” view of art and because art for him was “the most intense mode of Individualism that the world has known”, any useful action contradicted individualism according to Wilde. As he mentioned in one of his interviews “my people sit and chatter”, he preferred contemplation over action and presented his characters in his three comedy plays mostly talking rather than doing something useful for the society in order to show his disfavor with the insistence on the notion of usefulness. For him usefulness is society’s tyranny

over individual as it takes away their thought and asks them to act according to society's "healthy stability":

Society, which is the beginning and basis of morals, exists simply for the concentration of human energy, and in order to ensure its own continuance and healthy stability it demands, and no doubt rightly demands, of each of its citizens that he should contribute some form of productive labour to the common weal, and toil and travail that the day's work may be done. Society forgives the criminal; it never forgives the dreamer ("Critic" 175).

Therefore, according to Wilde, committing oneself to useful works is what society demands from its members. An individual, acknowledging the value of self-expression and self-cultivation through art should resist it. Wilde objected to man becoming "a slave of machinery". By means of creating self-reliant characters with an exaggerated and comic form of "uselessness" such as his witty dandies, not only he satirized the upper-class attitudes of Victorian England, but also shed more light on his attitude of usefulness and how individuals need to externalize their internal states of being no matter how useful they are for the society. One cannot reach to his maximum individualism if he is working for his society's needs. An individual's true need is to satisfy his soul through self-expression, which society disapproves of. Similar to Wilde, Emerson writes in "Self-Reliance":

"This one fact the world hates, that the soul becomes; for that forever degrades the past, turns all riches to poverty, all reputation to a shame, confounds the saint with the rogue, shoves Jesus and Judas equally aside" ("S-R" 158).

Emerson notes that society "whips" those who dedicate themselves to the development of their souls, because human soul degrades the past and "becomes" what it wants to become. By "the past" Emerson means the values that societies have practiced for centuries; accumulation of material things and ameliorating one's social status. For Emerson, society is "a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, so surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most respect is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion" ("S-R" 148).

Essentially both Wilde and Emerson agree that society does not value individualism and cares for the well-being of economy. Yet Emerson, contrary to Wilde, at some points encourages the notion of contributing to society through being useful; “in a virtuous act I add to the world” (“compensation” 186). He believes that “each of us has some talent” therefore each “can do somewhat useful, or graceful, or formidable, or amusing, or lucrative.” (“Character” 373) What Emerson rejects is being useful for the sake of doing “an apology to others and to ourselves”. He refuses doing a useful work as a punishment for not having gained “the mark of a good” in one’s life. Our works should be “a fair expression of our permanent energy”, away from comparing our lives to our companions’ lives, otherwise it would make our useful work a mark of an “equal life” and therefore an “apology”. That we do, as an apology to others and to ourselves for not reaching the mark of a good and equal life. But it does not satisfy us, [...] We do penance as we go. Our talent is a sort of expiation [...] (“Politics” 432)

Therefore, Emerson does not reject social contribution, nor does he assume it as a duty for individuals. According to his philosophy, society will naturally improve as soon as people start to think independently and “do [their] work” (“S-R” 23). Yet while doing one’s work, a man will also benefit through becoming “relieved and gay” if he puts “his heart into his work and done his best”. Richardson comments on this issue:

When a better society evolves, it will not, in Emerson’s view, come about through a suppression of the process of individuation but through a voluntary association of fulfilled individuals. (Richardson 322)

Finally, it is noteworthy to mention that both Wilde and Emerson, placed man at the core of his life and attributed him the full responsibility of his intellectual life and fortune. Emerson claims that a self-reliant man should insist on himself and his own talent. Whatever a man gains from imitation is only a half possession and those who insisting on their own talents, gained fame, did not have masters. Emerson notes that Shakespeare had no master and by studying great men’s lives and works, one cannot become great.

Insist on yourself; never imitate. Your own gift you can present every moment with the cumulative force of a whole life's cultivation; but of the adopted talent

of another, you have only an extemporaneous, half possession. [...] Where is the master who could have taught Shakespeare? [...] obey thy heart, and thou shalt reproduce the foreworld again. (“S-R” 166)

Depending and insisting on one’s self is important not only in one’s education, but also in his success. Emerson furthers to connect this self-insistence with fortune through mentioning that “The secret of fortune is joy in our hands. Welcome evermore to gods and men is the self-helping man. For him all doors are hung wide [...] “To the persevering mortal," said Zoroaster, “the blessed Immortals are swift.” (“S-R” 163)

Therefore, according to Emerson, one must put himself at the center of his education and fortune. He suggests people “gamble with” and wrongly lean on the wheels of fortune while one should only “deal with Cause and Effect, the chancellors of God”. For Emerson human will is the key for success. Wilde looks at the importance of insisting on ourselves holding the same point of view but mentioning it from another perspective; he puts man in full responsibility of his downfall and believes no one has the strength to do wrong to another man. Regarding his own personal life, when he was in prison, he wrote of his accountability on his own downfall, noting “I must say to myself that I ruined myself, and that nobody great or small can be ruined except by his own hand” (“De Profundis” 4). Apart from his personal life, he regards one’s will responsible for his life as “[...] nothing should be able to harm a man except himself. Nothing should be able to rob a man at all. What a man really has, is what is in him”. (“Soul” 285). This statement holds a very similar message to Emerson’s last sentence in his most well-read essay, mentioning “Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. [...]” (“S-R” 169).

“Self-Reliance” is Emerson’s most widely read essay and serves as a fundamental statement of his own Transcendentalist philosophy and American individualism in general. Emerson did more than anyone else to outline the philosophical imperative of “Self-Reliance” (Tiffany 235). His essay opens with the Latin quote, “Ne te quaesiveris extra”, which can be translated as “Do not seek outside yourself” and discusses the components of self-reliance in attitudes and habits of an ideal individual, concluding how an individual’s relation to himself and to his society ought to be.

Categorizing the essay in two main subject-matters, makes it possible to analyze three of Wilde's comedy plays under the light of Emerson's concept of individualism, as it is not originally divided thematically or written in an exactly particular order. Using the essay "Self-Reliance" as a context, this thesis will examine *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* on the grounds of a self-reliant individual's relation both to himself and to his society. In other words, this thesis is an analysis of individualism on both individual and social level, according to both Emerson's and Wilde's theories of individualism.

Chapter two argues Self-Reliance in an individual level through discussing Emerson's image of a self-reliant and self-trusting man and their reflection in three of Wilde's comedy plays and his philosophy. Chapter three attempts to shed more light on the social aspects of Self-Reliance according to Emerson, and its echoes in Wilde's philosophy and three of his comedy plays. The criticism of Victorian society is an inherent message in these three comedy plays but this thesis does not aim to focus on the grounds of such criticism and will instead scrutinize the echoes of Emersonian individualism in the plays as both authors held similar opinions with respect to an ideal individual and his relationship to society. Moreover, regarding Wilde's use of paradoxical language in these plays, this study focuses on the literal meaning of the dialogues and speeches within the plays since the purpose of the study is not an attempt to dissect and analyze Wilde's language. This thesis has been limited in utilizing Emerson's Self-Reliance as a context from which to analyze Wilde's plays.

## CHAPTER 2

### SELF-RELIANCE AND INDIVIDUAL

Emerson and Wilde held distinct definitions of individualism and had some major disagreements particularly on the notion of art and nature. Yet their belief in the sacredness and importance of the individual's self and the value they give to man's inner side brings them close. Resisting the forces of society is leading principle of their philosophies of individualism. As human soul and nature are universal, every individual should manifest his own uniqueness and perceive the "differentiation" among individuals in high regard as all individuals are united in their essence.

This chapter argues Self-Reliance in an individual level and sheds more light on Emerson's perceptions of an ideal individual and the echoes of his philosophy on three of Wilde's comedy plays. 'Self-Reliance' illustrates Emerson's ideal individual through explaining his relations with himself and with his society in detail. Almost half of the essay directs the constituents of individual's self-reliance in personal level. In these lines, Emerson, elaborates on the importance of original thinking, crediting spontaneity and instinct, independency from formal education and property, self-trust, remembering self-worth, the power of the youth, the force of individual's will, sacredness of man's soul and its connection to God.

What concerns both Emerson and Wilde, is the possibility of surrendering to one's social values, the teachings and education which one receives involuntarily. Both hold the opinion that one's ideas and thoughts should originate from "inside" and should not come from others as a "second hand" one. Wilde explains his idea as:

People [...] go through their lives in a sort of coarse comfort, like petted animals, without ever realising that they are probably thinking other people's thoughts,

living by other people's standards, wearing practically what one may call other people's second hand clothes, and never being themselves for a single moment ("Soul" 294).

In the same spirit, like Wilde, Emerson calls the adoption of other's people's thought as "second hand" noting that "In the new objects we recognize the old game, the habit of fronting the fact, and not dealing with it at second hand, through the perceptions of somebody else" ("Character" 367). Opposing to "second hand" adoption is an individual's own sense of creativity. The opening lines of 'Self-Reliance', builds the first essential element of individualism: Originality.

I read the other day some verses written by an eminent painter which were original and not conventional. The soul always hears an admonition in such lines, let the subject be what it may. The sentiment they instill is of more value than any thought they may contain. ("S-R" 145)

Originality, for Emerson, is the true "value" of an idea, "let the subject be what it may." He insists on the importance of thinking for oneself rather than meekly accepting other people's thoughts and ideas. Wilde refers to the significance of originality by mentioning that "The imagination is essentially creative and always seeks for a new form" ("Decay" 85).

A self-reliant person uses his imagination and thought in an unprecedented way which naturally results in creating original ideas. Wilde's characters are depicted as individuals who in various degrees and using different methods, seek to win their self-reliance and certain elements of originality can be observed in some of characters' actions. The very first lines of *The Importance of Being Earnest* present Algernon's originality in playing the piano. Playing "inaccurately" he puts his own thinking into it as a form of self-expression and plays "with wonderful expression":

Algernon: Did you hear what I was playing, Lane?

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

Algernon: I'm sorry for that, for your sake. I don't play accurately— anyone can play accurately—but I play with wonderful expression. As far as the piano is concerned, sentiment is my forte. I keep science for Life. (45)

In his book, *As We Were*, Benson mentions that in Victorian England drawing-room gatherings, the accepted norm was playing an amateur music following a good dinner.

A brilliant execution was not considered very important, for music was an "elegant" accomplishment: touch and expression were more highly esteemed, a little tremolo in the voice was most affecting, and these were also easier to acquire than execution. (Benson 20)

It may be suggested that Algernon deliberately experiments with his own "wonderful expression" as amateur music was common in those gatherings and there would be no higher expectations for a serious performance. Whether Algernon plays the piano as an amateur or deliberately makes it "inaccurate", he appreciates his own original attitude towards the art of playing the piano. Here, Algernon demonstrates Wilde's attitude towards the importance of originality in art; he keeps science and utility for daily life and in art seeks to enjoy his own unique approach. Wilde explains this in "'The Critic':

[The critic] will always be reminding us that great works of art are living things—are, in fact, the only things that live. [...] I am certain that, as civilisation progresses and we become more highly organised, the elect spirits of each age, the critical and cultured spirits, will grow less and less interested in actual life, and will seek to gain their impressions almost entirely from what Art has touched. ("Critic" 164-5)

Similar to Algernon's originality in his personal art, is Cecily's art of writing. Wilde pictures the domestic activities of some characters being done in original ways, to point out their self-trust. As Emerson notes "The magnetism which all original action exerts is explained when we inquire the reason of self-trust". Thus, the unprecedented actions in any scale are manifestations of an individual's trust in himself.

Cecily's diary is an odd one and her motivation for keeping one is genuine. Her reason to keep a diary is "in order to enter the wonderful secrets of" her life because if she does not write them down, she "should probably forget all about them." When she is told that memory "is the diary that we all carry about with us", she expresses the need to free herself of the mistakes memory makes since she does not believe that memory truly records the real events of life: "Yes, but it usually chronicles the things that have never

happened and couldn't possibly have happened." Cecily writes an exceptional diary which is a combination of real events and those that have not happened yet. She is self-reliant in her intellectual life and lets her imagination be free to produce an unusual fictional diary.

Through Cecily's diary writing, Wilde depicts how simple and common activities can also be done in a less conventional way. Although the act of diary writing was common in late Victorian England and Cecily's diary is "meant for publication", bringing novelty to it is appreciable according to Emerson's point of view. He points out that "Original power is usually accompanied with assimilating power," and for him a creative assimilation is as worthy and valuable as a creative novelty: "or in proportion to the spontaneous power should be the assimilating power." ("Culture" 723)

Originality in individual's actions leads to differences. The beauty of originality and difference among individuals, for Emerson has "charm":

Every individual nature has its own beauty. One is struck in every company, at every fireside, with the riches of nature, when he hears so many new tones, all musical, sees in each person original manners, which have a proper and peculiar charm, and reads new expressions of face. ("Domestic Life" 122)

In remembering the past, rather than relying on her memory, Cecily wants to rely on her own conscious act of diary writing. She wants to remember the real past events as well as events that had never happened. For her, these unreal events are deliberately chosen by herself and not by her memory's mistakes. They might remind her of her previous desires, fears, previous perceptions or simply the events that could have happened at some point. For instance, engaging to a person called Ernest "would hardly have been a really serious engagement if it hadn't been broken off at least once." Breaking up "at least once" as recorded in her diary, not only satisfies the conditions of a "serious" relationship in her real life but also it becomes part of what she does not wish to forget in future. Cecily's "unique" diary involves a form of logic as well:

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

Cecily: I don't think I could break it off now that I have actually met you. Now that I have seen you I can't change it. (105)

This line of reasoning within her diary is not usually utilized by a writer of either fiction or diary; that the course of imaginary events is controlled by the course of real events and these two interact with each other. Both Cecily's attitude towards memory and her style of writing are unique and novel, the quality which is acknowledged by Emerson in the same spirit:

Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. [...] Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs? ("Nature" 3)

Another genuine aspect within Cecily's diary is her accurate and meticulous recording to the extent that Algernon's coughing puts her in trouble while she is entering the precise words of his marriage proposal in her diary: "Besides, I don't know how to spell a cough." Demanding Algernon to repeat his words so that she can write them down, makes her diary itself a recorded notebook of a conscious recording, making it artificial and unusual type. Cecily's attitude towards fiction is original and creative and although her diary is partly fictional, she prefers it to the fictions of "the three-volume novel which "Mudie sends" to her and Miss Prism, because the latter is based on memory:

I believe that Memory is responsible for nearly all the three-volume novels that Mudie sends us. (83)

She favors a fiction based on one's own choice of imaginary events added to some precise events of life but not based on memory. At the same time, her criticism of the three-volume fiction is due to the conventionality of its format. In his article, *The End of the Three-Volume Novel System*, Richard Menke notes:

By the time Wilde wrote *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), he could treat the format not only as a joke but also now as a reminder of the foibles of the past. [...] Just as Wilde was beginning work on *Earnest* in the summer of 1894, the curtain was falling for the three-volume novel. In fact, inspiration for the switched-baby-and novel plot must have struck him just as the fate of the form was being widely discussed. (Menke 1)

Regarding the unoriginality of a typical Victorian novel, Wilde himself comments: “Anybody can write a three-volume novel. It merely requires a complete ignorance of both life and literature” (“Critic” 358). As writing is a form of art and self-expression, Miss Prism’s art, on the other hand, is not original. She imitates other works of art both in using the “triple decker” genre and in the method she ended her fiction years ago.

Miss Prism: Do not speak slightingly of the three-volume novel, Cecily. I wrote one myself in earlier days.

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

Miss Prism: The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means (83)

Essentially, Cecily’s diary emphasizes her self-reliance as it is original for two reasons. Firstly, her particular reason for keeping one, which is her reluctance to depend on memory in remembering past and secondly, the type of diary she is keeping which is semi fictional and hence a unique type. She avoids being like everyone else and tends to act and think originally. Her originality creates the grounds for dreaming about getting engaged to someone who is distinctive as well; uncle Jack’s brother. Before Algernon’s entrance Cecily feels “rather frightened” that he may not be an original and distinctive person quoting that “ I feel rather frightened. I am so afraid he will look just like everyone else. (86)

Commenting on a self-reliant individual’s natural tendency towards originality Emerson instructs how it may be obtained: As “every mind is different”, a man assimilates the necessary “elements” but does not remain in that level and forms his own mind. Individual experience is worthier than the knowledge gained from past because “the divine creates”:

Every mind is different; and the more it is unfolded, the more pronounced is that difference. He must draw the elements into him for food, and, if they be granite and silex, will prefer them cooked by sun and rain, by time and art, to his hand. But, however received, these elements pass into the substance of his constitution, will be assimilated, and tend always to form, not a partisan, but a possessor of truth. To all that can be said of the preponderance of the Past, the single word

Genius is a sufficient reply. The divine resides in the new. The divine never quotes, but is, and creates. (“Quotation and Originality” 191)

In *Self-Reliance*, Emerson introduces Moses, Plato, and Milton as examples of intellectual innovators and independent thinkers who challenged social norms and traditions in creating their own path through independent thinking and personal authority mentioning “Familiar as the voice of the mind is to each, the highest merit we ascribe to Moses, Plato, and Milton is, that they set at naught books and traditions, and spoke not what men but what they thought”. (“S-R” 145)

Recalling these great names, Emerson points out that these people never followed anyone and looked inside themselves. One cannot become like Shakespeare by blindly reading him and imitating him. An individual should seek truth by looking into his own heart rather than relying on what may be found in the great minds. Emerson diminishes the importance of formal education and indicates that it might actually serve as an obstacle in the search for knowledge and truth. He criticizes the manner books are read and studied as it involves “mendicant and sycophantic” worship of ideas and people from the past. The source of knowledge should break away from “imitation” or “envy” and the foundations of education should be self-discovery and self-expression.

In a similar vein to Emerson, although in a far more light-hearted manner, several scenes in Wilde’s comedies serve as criticism of late 19th century Victorian education. In “The Soul of Man Under Socialism” he mentions the wrong attitude towards art, existing among the educated people identical to the uneducated:

If a man approaches a work of art with any desire to exercise authority over it and the artist, he approaches it in such a spirit that he cannot receive any artistic impression from it at all. The work of art is to dominate the spectator: the spectator is not to dominate the work of art. [...] This is, of course, quite obvious in the case of the vulgar theatre-going public of English men and women. But it is equally true of what are called educated people. For an educated person's ideas of Art are drawn naturally from what Art has been, whereas the new work of art is beautiful by being what Art has never been. (“Soul” 317)

In his, book *Victorian England Portrait of An Age (1936)*, Young notes that the old Victorian Society was influenced by German culture. Wilde portrays this fact through Cecily's obligation to study German grammar as her guardian "lays stress on" it:

Miss Prism: Your German grammar is on the table. Pray, open it at page fifteen...  
Cecily: But I don't like German. It isn't at all a becoming language. I know perfectly well that I look quite plain after my German lesson (82)

As a younger member of society, Cecily's disfavor of German is contrasted with Lady Bracknell's view of German as "a thoroughly respectable language". This reflects the disagreement in education system since the emphasis was on disciplinary subjects which were not fully applicable to modern life.

Young indicates the poor quality of English education by mentioning that "Germany was abreast of the time, England was falling behind":

But while in art, and now in literature, we were becoming a suburb of Paris, in other ways we were falling into an unexpected dependence on Germany, a dependence resulting in part from the sincere respect of the educated classes, in part from the equally sincere alarm of the business classes. [...] There, across the North Sea, not in the armies only, but in the factories, schools, and universities of Germany, Late Victorian England instinctively apprehended its rival or its successor. Germany was abreast of the time, England was falling behind. (Young 164)

Therefore, the problem with Victorian education was that it did not keep up with the progressive changes of the times and since education did not provide noticeable results, it was not taken very seriously. This was true especially during the "Late Victorian England instinctively" because certain changes in people's beliefs and daily habits were substituting the previous ones. Yet "the education system was entirely impractical" (Young 59-60).

According to Wilde, education has failed to make a fundamental progress for the educated people. For him the true progress is to obtain a knowledge which results in developing

better ideas and elevating the level of understanding of the nature of art. In *The Critic* he writes about the supremacy of adventure and experience over education:

Don't degrade me into the position of giving you useful information. Education is an admirable thing, but it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught. Through the parted curtains of the window I see the moon like a clipped piece of silver. Like gilded bees the stars cluster round her. The sky is a hard hollow sapphire. Let us go out into the night. Thought is wonderful, but adventure is more wonderful still. ("Critic" 115)

In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, through Lady Bracknell's speech, Wilde satirizes the ineffective nature of contemporary British education, preferring "natural ignorance" over what the modern education provides. Upon hearing that Jack knows 'nothing', Lady Bracknell declares:

I am pleased to hear it. I do not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance. Ignorance is like a delicate exotic fruit; touch it and the bloom is gone. The whole theory of modern education is radically unsound. Fortunately in England, at any rate, education produces no effect whatsoever. If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes, and probably lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square. (67)

According to Lady Bracknell, the modern education system fails to impart useful knowledge because it does not interfere with ignorance. If education was more effective in England, it may threaten the status quo; since education, in its current state, provides no practical knowledge to students, it is ineffective. Mentioning the ineffective nature of education and its potential negative outcomes, Wilde degrades its value, thereby corresponding to Emerson's stance in refusing to rely on education as a method for self-cultivation:

A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which ashes across his mind from within, more than the lustre of the firmament of bards and sages. ("S-R" 145)

Through Algernon's character, Wilde shows that the well-educated class of society entitle themselves to some degree of consumerism or snobbery. Algernon's appetite in eating and his insistence on spending the evening out with Jack demonstrates him to be rather a

consumerist person which is most vividly presented in his particular attention to his dressing and appearance:

[...] You can put up my dress clothes, my smoking jacket, and all the Bunbury suits. (80)

At his arrival to the Manor House, Algernon's luggage consists of "Three portmanteaus, a dressing-case, two hat-boxes, and a large luncheon-basket." When criticized by Jack for his habit of overdressing, Algernon, being an "Oxonian", wittily defends himself from Jack's comment by responding that he compensates for his overdressing in "being always immensely over-educated." his response arguably justifies his other consumerist habits, such as his unusual craving for cucumber sandwiches, his references to dining at Willis's which was a fashionable restaurant in King Street, near the St James's Theatre at the time Wilde wrote the play, the consumption of champagne, his list of different amusements at the end of act one and his greedy manner in eating the muffins. Through Algernon's character, Wilde depicted the wrong attitude and unprofitable outcomes of upper class education and the arrogance that too much relying on that education system could cause. Consequently, this education must be false in its essence and hence an ineffective one. According to Emerson, this ineffective form of education has failed to bring about any changes and therefore, the great man living centuries ago without formal education similar to Emerson's time, was as enlightened as those great men of his time:

No greater men are now than ever were. A singular equality may be observed between the great men of the first and of the last ages; nor can all the science, art, religion, and philosophy of the nineteenth century avail to educate greater men than Plutarch's heroes three or four and twenty centuries ago. ("S-R" 167)

Thus Emerson sees the great self-reliant men in Plutarch's books, as being those who, being self-reliant and non-conformist, did not need the knowledge acquired from previous centuries. Parallel to Emerson's idea that the philosophy of the nineteenth century has not helped education, Wilde writes in *The Decay of Lying* that "we are beginning" to take unfavorable attitudes towards education, of which one is the urge for more and more education and gaining it above what is really needed:

But I am afraid that we are beginning to be overeducated; at least everybody who is incapable of learning has taken to teaching—that is really what our enthusiasm for education has come to. (“Decay” 5)

In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Gwendolen Fairfax explains her act of looking at Cecily through her glasses –while, in fact she is “examining Cecily carefully through a Lorgnette”- by relating this unusual action to education. She states that her mother “whose views on education are remarkably strict” has brought her up to be “extremely short-sighted; it is part of her system”. The short-sightedness refers to both a visual impairment and lacking foresight. Although, using her lorgnettes, Gwendolen applies the former meaning to “shortsightedness”, Wilde implies that her education, according to herself, has made her narrow-minded as well. The result of education can turn opposite to what is expected from it to bring to pupils.

In the fourth act, Lady Bracknell enquires about a person who is “remotely connected with education” and yet is displeasing: “Is this Miss Prism a female of repellent aspect, remotely connected with education?” Chasuble confirms that this person is “the most cultivated of ladies” and also very much respected. Through this dialogue, Wilde implies that a very well-educated person can still be “repellent” and although education cannot make people more agreeable, it will give them “the very picture of respectability”. Education being an “intellectual pleasure” according to Miss Prism, does not have anything to do with “utilitarian occupation”, as the latter is “rather Moulton’s duty than” Cecily’s.

Therefore, education’s outcome is not essentially practical and util. This issue is another problem with education system. Wilde criticizes the uselessness of subjects being taught. The training young women received was said to have been totally unrelated to anything that they may encounter in later life. Wilde illustrates this fact by bringing the name of a few subjects such as the chapter on the “Fall of the Rupee”. Moreover, Lady Bracknell’s speech on how she has lied to Lord Bracknell during Gwendolen’s absence from the city to the country house to meet her lover, is another hint for the obscurity of upper-class education and the subjects being studied:

Lady Bracknell: [...] her unhappy father is, I am glad to say, under the impression that she is attending a more than usually lengthy lecture by the University Extension Scheme on the Influence of a permanent income on Thought. (127)

Although attending a university extension course may indicate that Gwendolen is more thoroughly informed than many young women of her class, the course title “the Influence of a permanent income on Thought” is one of the many absurd themes in this play. The social class to which people like Gwendolen would belong, would not concern themselves with permanent income and therefore learning about “the Influence of a permanent income on Thought” seems of no use and practice. Yet, these subject matters do not induce Gwendolen or Cecily to spend their times on studying them, and both are much more serious about keeping a diary. They attempt to keep some original aspect to their intellectual lives and prefer adding a level of originality to the traditional education they are exposed to. This originality is described by Emerson as being truly “one’s self”.

And what is Originality? It is being, being one’s self, and reporting accurately what we see and are. Genius is in the first instance, sensibility, the capacity of receiving just impressions from the external world, and the power of coordinating these after the laws of thought. It implies Will, or original force, for their right distribution and expression. (“Quotation and Originality” 191)

Following the importance of self-reliance and Emerson’s idea of looking inside instead of relying solely on education, in *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, there is no positive perception towards education as well. In act three Cecil Graham disapproves of the middle-class education by stating that “The world is perfectly packed with good women. To know them is a middle-class education.” In the same act, Dumby wishes “to be allowed a little time” to himself, in order to “forget all he has learned” instead of educating himself.

Dumby: [...] I should like to be allowed a little time to myself now and then.  
Lord Augustus: [Looking round.] Time to educate yourself, I suppose.  
Dumby: No, time to forget all I have learned. That is much more important, dear Tuppy. (34)

Dumby feels forgetting his education is “much more important” which corresponds to Emerson’s statement that “The great genius returns to essential man”. To be great, one

must first look inside himself rather than relying solely on education. Wilde notes a similar view:

Like all poetical natures he (Christ) loved ignorant people. He knew that in the soul of one who is ignorant there is always room for a great idea. But he could not stand stupid people especially those who are made stupid by education: people who are full of opinions not one, of which they even understand, a peculiarly modern type [...] (“De Profundis” 21)

Wilde appreciates ignorance over a dull education and puts it in Lady Bracknell’s words as “natural ignorance” which shouldn’t be touched by “modern education”. He criticizes that some people have become “stupid” particularly due to a wrong education. Parallel to him, Emerson declines an education which does not encourage individuals to think and analyze independently, fostering their inner genius:

There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion; [...] The power which resides in him is new in nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried. (“S-R” 146)

Since the education system did not have a positive role in an individual’s intellectual life, Wilde points at it in several dialogues within his plays. In *A Woman of No Importance* Lady Hunstanton asks if Lord Illingworth considers a great distinction between the uneducated and the educated people’s understandings of politics:

Lady Hunstanton: [...] I am sure, Lord Illingworth, you don’t think that uneducated people should be allowed to have votes?  
Lord Illingworth: I think they are the only people who should. (10)

Lord Illingworth’s response comes across Wilde’s belief that obtaining high levels of education does not wholly provide the essential good judgment and understanding required to make decisions about government issues. In his conversation with Gerald, Lord Illingworth tells him of the importance of not relying on one’s education:

My dear Gerald, examinations are of no value whatsoever. If a man is a gentleman, he knows quite enough, and if he is not a gentleman, whatever he knows is bad for him. (40)

Moreover, another sign of Wilde's disapproval of the education system is represented through Lord Illingworth's belief that instead of examinations, Gerald should study "the Peerage" because "It is the one book a young man about town should know thoroughly". For women, the outcome of education is the same as the plays imply. Obtaining higher education has not helped them obtain a happier life. Women with high education hardly get "surprised" or be happy by anything except for "a remarkably rare" and "out of date" event. In fact, their education has not elevated their life quality and practically a "happy marriage" is what they are after.

Lady Caroline: Oh, women have become so highly educated, Jane, that nothing should surprise us nowadays, except happy marriages. They apparently are getting remarkably rare.

Mrs. Allonby: Oh, they're quite out of date. (23)

Regarding self-cultivation, Emerson indicates it is wrong to assume that through travel one can improve his culture and education. He believes that "the superstition of travelling" is due to the lack of self-culture and the urge to travel is a symptom of failure in one's education. Self-cultivation comes from looking inside oneself and this makes traveling unnecessary. Emerson does not state that traveling limits one's thinking, but he believes going abroad "with the hope of finding somewhat greater than" what one knows, is wrong and impractical and if a man travels to get what one does not carry inside him, he simply gets more distant from what his soul requires. All that an individual requires, originates from his own will and genuine actions. One should first be "domesticated" and never assume traveling leads to achieving distinguished cultivation.

But the rage of travelling is a symptom of a deeper unsoundness affecting the whole intellectual action. The intellect is vagabond, and our system of education fosters restlessness. ("S-R" 165)

Although Emerson and Wilde both consider some advantages for traveling and learning from other nations, none of them credits it as the proper method of self-improvement. Emerson states:

I have no churlish objection to the circumnavigation of the globe, for the purposes of art, of study, and benevolence, so that the man is first domesticated, or does not go abroad with the hope of finding somewhat greater than he knows. (“S-R” 165)

Wilde states only through “contact with the art of foreign nations” the art of a country can obtain “that individual and separate life”. Yet Wilde perceives traveling as a means to improve the interpretation of art only because it makes the interpreter learn how to “intensify his own personality”. By traveling an individual gets a step away from repetition and imitation. By means of comparing art of other nations, he is advanced to “intensify” his own deepest intellect in a genuine way, which makes the interpretation of art more satisfying:

Gilbert: [...] For, just as it is only by contact with the art of foreign nations that the art of a country gains that individual and separate life that we call nationality, so, by curious inversion, it is only by intensifying his own personality that the critic can interpret the personality and work of others, and the more strongly this personality enters into the interpretation the more real the interpretation becomes, the more satisfying, the more convincing, and the more true. (“Soul” 162)

Wilde considers art the ultimate mode of self-expression, therefore the “contact with the art of other nations”, which leads to a “more satisfying” interpretation of art, contributes to individual’s “mode of self-expression”. Thus, traveling can be seen as a medium for returning to one’s self and gain individualism. In his comedy plays Wilde does not treat traveling to foreign nations as a final decision for his characters. In *A Woman of No Importance*, Gerald finally decides not to work with Lord Illingworth and therefore gives up his plans of travelling with him to “see the world”. Wilde presents other character’s reactions to his decision to show how travelling is perceived as an extraordinary chance by many people, which is in Emerson’s words, a “superstition”. Lady Hunstanton insists that Gerald must travel and “stay by all the right people”. In her character, Wilde presents the view of majority of the society; that Gerald’s life would make huge progress if he travels alongside Lord Illingworth and it is “unwise” of him not to do so.

In the last act, although Gerald reveals his intention to stay with his mother and clearly expresses that Lord Illingworth's views of life and his are different, lady Hunstanton and Mrs. Allonby are not convinced and recommend him to go.

Lady Hunstanton: But, my dear Gerald, at your age you shouldn't have any views of life. They are quite out of place. You must be guided by others in this matter. Lord Illingworth has made you the most flattering offer, and travelling with him you would see the world - as much of it, at least, as one should look at - under the best auspices possible, and stay with all the right people, which is so important at this solemn moment in your career. (56)

Based on Lady Hunstanton, Gerald should not even hold "any views of life" before seeing the world. This claim is precisely opposite to which Emerson perceives as a self-reliant individual who for the purpose of advancement should be "first domesticated". Gerald calls lord Illingworth "infamous" (62) and having been informed about both the identity and wickedness of the man who would show the world to him, he progresses from ignorance to knowledge. Not only does he realize his own identity, but also, he realizes that what he needs cannot be obtained from outside and relying on someone like Lord Illingworth who cannot be called a "chance" anymore. Gerald moves away from the "superstition of travelling". Not only Lord Illingworth is Gerald's own irresponsible father whose refusal to marry his mother has "ruined" her life, but also, he is the man who "insulted" Hester, by trying to kiss her. Hence Gerald loses his respect for him and "despises" him. The new insight and revelation makes him reconsider his previous values and teaches him greatly as if he has "seen the world":

Gerald: I don't want to see the world: I've seen enough of it. (57)

Through this response Wilde approves that if one becomes capable of reconsidering his values, and understands what is right for him, he has already seen enough of the world. Wilde also depicts how this attitude might be received by one's society. In the fourth act, As Mrs. Allonby is leaving Mrs. Arbuthnot's house, she asks Gerald to bring "something nice" from his travels, showing her certainty in Gerald's wisdom and future decision to go working and traveling with Lord Illingworth. Emerson rejects the idea that traveling can help a man improve himself.

He who travels to be amused, or to get somewhat which he does not carry, travels away from himself, and grows old even in youth among old things. (“S-R” 165)

Therefore, according to Emerson, seeing ancient artifacts, ruins and sites, by means of traveling, will not help a man achieve his individual self-trust and self-cultivation. Parallel to this Wilde treats traveling unnecessary in certain conditions. In *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, Duchess of Berwick holds the idea that moving to other places can help women in getting back their husbands. “These wicked women get our husbands away from us, but they always come back.” When one’s husband is suspected to have been involved in a relationship with another woman, the Duchess’s solution is traveling; referring to her own experience, she passes to Lady Windermere the solution she has received from others: “Just take him abroad, and he’ll come back to you all right.” Contrary to Duchess’s belief, Emerson considers:

Travelling is a fool's paradise. Our first journeys discover to us the indifference of places [...] My giant goes with me wherever I go. (“S-R” 165)

According to Emerson, the Duchess’s solution cannot be effective since Lord Windermere’s “giant” would accompany him everywhere. The Duchess is so certain about her theory of obtaining change through changing one’s place that she insists on her proposal once again before leaving, telling Lady Windermere how she herself had traveled in hope of obtaining those things which she was without:

[...] and (I) advise you to take Windermere away at once to Homburg or to Aix, where he'll have something to amuse him, and where you can watch him all day long. I assure you, my dear, that on several occasions after I was first married, I had to pretend to be very ill, and was obliged to drink the most unpleasant mineral waters, merely to get Berwick out of town. [...] (9)

Through the Duchess’ speech, Wilde pictures those members of society who are living with lies inside their family lives. The idea of traveling is supported by a person who personally does not have an honest family life. The Duchess’ referring to her daughter, Agatha, to go further away and “go out on the terrace and look at the sunset” and Agatha’s constant response being “Yes, mamma” are the indications of Agatha’s submissiveness

to her parents, her conformity and lack of self-reliance. Wilde puts the idea of traveling for reaching a goal in mind and words of such family and thus represents the dullness of traveling itself. Opposite to Duchess' suggestion, the motivation for traveling to Selby at the end of the play, is not for gaining back the husband or the wife that either Lady Windermere or Lord Windermere does not have. They plan to go there to rest and have peace of mind:

Lady Windermere: [...] Let us go to Selby. In the Rose Garden at Selby the roses are white and red. (45)

Mrs. Erlynne, who "Looks like an edition de luxe of a wicked French novel" finally decides to go back to the place she used to live stating that the "English climate doesn't suit" her. In her final decision Wilde follows Emerson's belief that traveling for the purpose of getting amused will not end as it is expected and a person who travels for that end "travels away from himself". Although Mrs. Erlynne, finally gets her reputation back by making a clever story and manages to receive a marriage proposal from Lord Augustus, she experienced something new in her travel to England which was not desired:

As for me, if suffering be an expiation, then at this moment I have expiated all my faults, whatever they have been; for to-night you have made a heart in one who had it not, made it and broken it. [...] (29)

She risked her reputation, which was the fruit of staying in London for a few months, to save her daughter, by impersonating a woman that had come to Lord Darlington's house holding Lady Windermere's fan. This sacrifice is out of character with Mrs. Erlynne's habits. Wilde depicts her moving to London as a wearing experience which makes her ask for only one condition to marry Lord Augustus; that they would live out of the place she had traveled to. Mrs. Erlynne is represented as a courageous woman who was able to "stand dishonor":

you are a mere girl, you would be lost. You haven't got the kind of brains that enables a woman to get back. You have neither the wit nor the courage. You couldn't stand dishonour! (29)

Through this speech, Wilde emphasizes that not everyone in his time had the courage to be upright and not conform to society's expectation. Yet Wilde's characters want to push the bonds and possibly maintain their self-reliance and dare to speak their thought. Through Cecily and Gwendolen, Wilde depicts the possible ways people can maintain their individualism and show some courage, in a manner corresponding to Emerson's notification; that one should not quote someone else as a result of distrust on his own thoughts, instincts and experiences:

Man is timid and apologetic; he is no longer upright; he dares not say 'I think,' 'I am,' but quotes some saint or sage. He is ashamed before the blade of grass or the blowing rose. These roses under my window make no reference to former roses or to better ones; they are for what they are; ("S-R" 157)

In the *Importance of Being Earnest*, without prior notification, Gwendolen on two separate occasions affirms her engagement to Jack; In the first act stating, "I am engaged to Mr. Worthing, mama" (66) and in the third act mentioning "I am engaged to be married to Mr. Worthing, mama" (127). These affirmations to her forceful and authoritative mother are bold and correspond with Emerson's analogy of roses making "no reference to former roses or to better ones" for their existence. Gwendolen is not "apologetic" and stands "upright". Her reliance on herself is opposite to her conservative mother who follows the conventions and customs of society and being a relative of Algernon, has not "got the remotest knowledge of how to live".

Although Gwendolen resembles her mother in her assertiveness such as her insistence on marrying a man in name of "Ernest", her desire to achieve her right as an individual, makes a gap between her and Lady Bracknell's character, which she implies earlier by mentioning that "Whatever influence I ever had over mamma, I lost at the age of three" (78). Yet her conventional mother will not have the power to change Gwendolen's inner-self, such as her "eternal devotion" to Jack.

But although she may prevent us from becoming man and wife, [...] nothing that she can possibly do can alter my eternal devotion to you. (78)

Gwendolen's self-reliant and individualistic nature is important for Jack who is self-reliant himself. We can assume that Jack's concern about Gwendolen becoming like her mother roots in the idea that Gwendolen might one day follow the values of society and lose her individual self-reliant nature.

Jack: Upon my word, if I thought that, I'd shoot myself—(A pause) You don't think there is any chance of Gwendolen becoming like her mother in about a hundred and fifty years, do you Algy?  
Algernon: All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. [...] (74)

Algernon's answer implies that if Gwendolen loses her self-reliance and independent character and become a conservative person like her mother, it would be her tragedy, because it would be the loss of her selfhood and her soul.

On the other hand, Miss Prism is pictured differently from Cecily and Gwendolen. She is not as "upright" as them and she suppresses her desires. She goes strolling with Chausable only after Cecily suggests that she needs such activity. This need is expressed as if she wants to get relieved of a headache:

Miss Prism: I think, dear Doctor, I will have a stroll with you. I find I have a headache after all, and a walk might do it good. (85)

Miss Prism also lacks courage at some points. As soon as she catches the sight of Lady Bracknell, she "grows pale and quails. She looks anxiously round as if desirous to escape". Her gestures in the scene imply her embarrassment:

Lady Bracknell: (In a severe, judicial voice): Prism! (miss prism bows her head in shame) Come here, Prism! (miss prism approaches in a humble manner) Prism! (139)

Yet Miss Prism, similar to the rest of characters, tries to express herself at some points. Gwendolen, Cecily and Miss Prism all have their own written works which are their personal and private thoughts. Writing is an act of a personal creation. They express themselves through their writings and Wilde makes clear that every character in his plays is making an effort to express himself/ herself, which is itself a fruit of an individual's trust in himself. The concept of self-trust is a fundamental aspect of self-reliance and many

scholars have portrayed it as an inseparable component of individualism. Emerson defines individualism as a profound and unshakeable trust in one's own intuitions:

“To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men,—that is genius.” (“S-R”145).

Thus, Emerson defines genius as having confidence in one's thoughts and illustrates how one can trust himself; one should “learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which ashes across his mind from within” but according to him, unfortunately “he dismisses without notice his thought, because it is his”. Consequently, the moments of hesitation are the grounds on which a self-reliant individual should observe himself and trust the voice which comes from within him. In these plays, Wilde lays moments of hesitations in his characters' lives picturing the importance of crediting one's thoughts and not to underestimate them because they are only “his”.

In the second act of *A Woman of No Importance*, Mrs. Arbuthnot goes through a journey of trusting her mind. At first, she reveals the reason for protesting against Gerald's plan to start working with Lord Illingworth; It is because “Gerald cannot separate his future from her past”. While Lord Illingworth degrades Gerald's life for being “An underpaid clerk in a small Provincial Bank in a third-rate English town”, she still trusts herself replying “I will not allow him to go.” But she is left alone in her opinion. Except for Hester, who cannot speak out her idea likewise her, no one in society would support Mrs. Arbuthnot's thought as no one shares the information that she has. She alone, must decide whether to stop Gerald by revealing Lord Illingworth's identity, although he is Lord Illingworth's “own flesh and blood”. But the fear of her son's judgment makes her hesitate. She, as Emerson calls it, “dismisses without notice” her thought, because it is hers. She prefers to implore Lord Illingworth instead of revealing his identity and her past to Gerald. Referring to him by George, she uses his first name which emphasizes the personal plea, and frames the speech:

George, don't take my son away from me. I have had twenty years of sorrow, and I have only had one thing to love me, only one thing to love (37).

In the third act she is still unable to “detect and watch that gleam of light” which is to let her son know what she knows; that Lord Illingworth “is a bad man”.

Mrs. Arbuthnot: Let him leave me if he chooses, but not with him -not with him!  
I couldn't bear it. [Walks up and down.] (49)

Yet in the final lines of the third act, as soon as she reveals Lord Illingworth's identity to her son, she is not badly judged by him. On the contrary, Gerald nurtures an unfavorable attitude towards Lord Illingworth throughout the play. Through Gerald's understanding, Wilde implies that Mrs. Arbuthnot may have trusted herself through the evening party, before she was finally obliged to do so. Similar to Mrs. Arbuthnot is Hester's reaction in the first act, when Gerald asks her why she has not “congratulated” him. Her response “Are you very pleased about it?”, vaguely displays her disapproval. She does not have positive view towards Lord Illingworth. According to Hester, working alongside Lord Illingworth should not make “things that were out of the reach of hope before” for Gerald to become “within hope's reach”, because Gerald should have seen those things already in reach of hope since “life is a hope.” With this response she expresses her thoughts indirectly. Like Mrs. Arbuthnot she is on a progress in trusting herself and acknowledging them as true. She gradually becomes more comfortable in her conversation with Gerald's mother while the two are alone.

Hester: Do you like him going away with Lord Illingworth? Of course there is position, no doubt, and money, but position and money are not everything, are they? (50)

Mrs. Arbuthnot tries to convince Gerald, telling him the story of a woman whose life was ruined by Lord Illingworth. But when she is told that “a girl with any nice feelings” would never go away from home with a man to whom she is not married, she “withdraws” all her “objections” and puts Gerald “at liberty” to work with Lord Illingworth. Just as Gerald is appreciating his mother's kind agreement, Hester's voice is heard, crying for help as Lord Illingworth attempts to kiss her. This is the moment that Lord Illingworth's true personality is revealed. Mrs. Arbuthnot dares to reveal her true thought only then. What she had not spoken out, gets exposed only then. This scene matches with Emerson's belief

that we underestimate our thoughts until “to-morrow a stranger will say with masterly good sense precisely what we have thought and felt all the time, and we shall be forced to take with shame our own opinion from another.” (“S-R” 146) Hester’s cry for help is the moment for Mrs. Arbuthnot “to take with shame” what she had known in her heart and what she could have revealed earlier; that “What this man has been, he is now, and will be always.”

Mrs. Arbuthnot did not trust herself enough to let her son know that Lord Illingworth gives the liberty to himself to insult “the purest thing on God’s earth”, a thing as pure as his own mother up to the point that he is unveiled doing so. This is what Emerson believes to be the importance of trusting ourselves and “to abide by our spontaneous impression with good-humored inflexibility.” (“S-R” 146) According to Emerson trusting one’s spontaneous perception and being inflexible at certain situations, is the act of a self-reliant individual. Wilde presents moments of inflexibility and resolution in his characters who, trusting themselves put emphasis only on their own thoughts. Lady Windermere’s inflexibility in accepting Mrs. Erlynne at her Birthday party, is particularly emphasized in the first act.

Lord Windermere: [...] you will bring shame and sorrow on us both. Remember that! Ah, Margaret! Only trust me! A wife should trust her husband!  
Lady Windermere: London is full of women who trust their husbands. One can always recognize them. They look so thoroughly unhappy. I am not going to be one of them. [Moves up.] (17)

Despite her inflexibility in accepting Mrs. Erlynne to her party, as Emerson describes an adult’s life, Lady Windermere is “jailed by her consciousness”. Being the host of the party, she is a “committed person” and cannot prevent the entrance of an unwanted guest. Despite her comment to her husband that “If that woman crosses” her threshold, she “shall strike her across the face” with her fan, she merely drops it. Emerson declares as we enter into society we are forced to become flexible:

But the man is, as it were, clapped into jail by his consciousness. As soon as he has once acted or spoken with éclat, he is a committed person, watched by the

sympathy or the hatred of hundreds, whose affections must now enter into his account. ("S-R" 147)

In *A Woman of No Importance*, Mrs. Arbuthnot's firmness in rejecting to marry Illingworth is an indication of her individualism and self-reliance. She opposes to the idea of marrying Lord Illingworth and rigidly insists on her decision. Both Hester and Mrs. Arbuthnot are represented as two women who achieve a higher degree of self-trust which later transforms into actualization in their "inflexibility" towards accepting the idea of Mrs. Arbuthnot marrying Lord Illingworth. When Gerald calls it Mrs. Arbuthnot's "duty" to marry Lord Illingworth, Hester "running forwards and embracing Mrs. Arbuthnot" asks her to "leave him" and go with her to America. She encourages Mrs. Arbuthnot in her decision and in her self-trust. Hester invites Gerald to look inside himself as well and does not impose her opinions on him. Gerald asks her three times what she suggests him to do and in response she only invites him to look inside himself instead of looking for a response from outside:

Gerald: But what should I do?

Hester: Ask your own heart, not mine. (62)

Gerald is expected to consult his own heart and insist on himself. Carrying Emerson's belief in the importance of insisting on ourselves, Wilde writes in "De Profundis":

I see quite clearly what I must do. And when I use such a phrase as that I need not tell you that I am not alluding to any external sanction or command. I admit none. I am far more of an individualist than I ever was. Nothing seems to me of the smallest value except what one gets out of oneself. My nature is seeking a fresh mode of self-realisation. That is all I'm concerned with [...] the external things of life seem to me now of no importance at all. ("De Profundis" 5)

Hence, one should hear the voice within himself, trust it and express it. But in the process of self-expression, Emerson encourages us to express ourselves fully, not partially:

We but half express ourselves, and are ashamed of that divine idea which each of us represents. It may be safely trusted as proportionate and of good issues, so it be faithfully imparted, but God will not have his work made manifest by cowards. ("S-R" 146)

According to Emerson one should express oneself entirely through their art and work. Complete self-expression in one's art, for Wilde, is the full expression of the self. Thus, for both Emerson and Wilde, a "half" expression of oneself is cowardly. Wilde suggests that relying on others' judgments is cowardly; a characteristic that goes against an upright individual's actions. Lady Windermere loathes to perceive herself as a coward. Convinced about the correctness of the rumors regarding her husband's disloyalty, she is ready to react and show her objection. She wishes to confront her fears and though being hesitant all the while, she does not deceive herself and loathes being coward.

Lord Darlington: [To Lady Windermere.] How pale you are!  
Lady Windermere: Cowards are always pale! (18)

Lady Windermere's rejection to stay with her husband out of cowardice is part of her self-trust and self-worth. She refuses to be like some women in London who have been too coward to object to their husband's disloyalty and have satisfied themselves by trusting them although they "look so thoroughly unhappy". As Emerson notes "Let a man then know his worth", Lady Windermere does not accept to degrade herself by remaining in her married life. Through her character Wilde represents a person with self-esteem, who struggles to be courageous. Her decision to escape to Lord Darlington's house is unspoiled by selfish needs and may be seen as childlike. Mentioning "I am of age today", Lady Windermere's escape happens on her twenty first birthday while she is in her youth. Wilde depicts how the youth possess a manner of thinking parallel to that which Emerson comments upon in children; Emerson credits youth as possessing a powerful form of self-reliance and invites the readers not to underestimate them. Self-reliance and self-trust exist in "behavior of children" and therefore it is a basic and fundamental intuition:

What pretty oracles nature yields us on this text, in the face and behaviour of children, babes, and even brutes! That divided and rebel mind that distrust of a sentiment because our arithmetic has computed the strength and means opposed to our purpose, these have not. Their mind being whole, their eye is as yet unconquered. ("S-R" 147)

Wilde notes almost a similar view. What one may find as good or bad in his youth, is right as his instinct cannot be wrong, although he may not be able to justify his intuition:

Ultimately, in its due course, this taste is to become critical and self-conscious, but at first it is to exist purely as a cultivated instinct, and he who has received this true culture of the inner man will with clear and certain vision perceive the omissions and faults in art or nature, and with a taste that cannot err, while he praises, and finds his pleasure in what is good, and receives it into his soul, and so becomes good and noble, he will rightly blame and hate the bad, now in the days of his youth, even before he is able to know the reason why. (“Critic” 201)

Gerald is an example of a young man whose “eye is as yet unconquered”. He trusts himself according to his intuition and believes in his own success in his new job and mentioning his self-trust he reflects the portrayal of a confident young individual as it is described by Emerson; “It is indeed, Lady Caroline. I trust I shall be able to show myself worthy of it.” (5)

Although prior to observing Hester’s distressed position, Gerald placed high value on Lord Illingworth, his immediate reaction is to defend Hester against Illingworth’s insult. Gerald becomes stern and does not consider society’s judgment or the consequences of his attempt to physically assault Lord Illingworth.

Gerald: [He is quite beside himself with rage and indignation.] Lord Illingworth, you have insulted the purest thing on God’s earth, [...]. As there is a God in Heaven, I will kill you! (54)

Gerald’s reaction is “independent, irresponsible”, partially similar to what Emerson attributes to a young child who “tries and sentences” people “on their merits, in the swift, summary way of boys, as good, bad, interesting, silly, eloquent, troublesome.” Emerson alerts his readers not to underestimate the youth:

So God has armed youth and puberty and manhood no less with its own piquancy and charm, and made it enviable and gracious and its claims not to be put by, if it will stand by itself. . . . Do not think the youth has no force, because he cannot speak to you and me. Hark! in the next room his voice is sufficiently clear and emphatic. It seems he knows how to speak to his contemporaries. Bashful or bold, then, he will know how to make us seniors very unnecessary. (“S-R” 147)

In referring to the state of being “childlike”, Emerson explains that as one grows up in society, one becomes conditioned to act unoriginally, while the younger members hesitate

less in taking actions and do not possess the cautious attitudes of adults, as they do not seek reputation or approval from society. Thus, Emerson's Self-Reliance portrays "adult self-consciousness as a fall from childlike self-integration" (Buell 294).

The same self-consciousness makes an adult consider society and set a too high estimation on it, which later becomes an opponent to his own independent thinking. Emerson notes two obstacles exist for an individual's independent thinking: society's disapproval or scorn, and the individual's own sense of consistency. He notes:

I hope in these days we have heard the last of conformity and consistency. Let the words be gazetted and ridiculous henceforward. ("S-R" 153)

The urge to remain consistent with the past actions and beliefs restrains the full expression of an individual's nature. Emerson calls consistency a "terror" that scares us from self-trust. He uses the metaphor of a corpse as the beholder of memory and invites us not to drag it with ourselves; "But why should you keep your head over your shoulder?" One must accept himself even if his action or thought contradicts what he used to do or think yesterday. Becoming mature involves the evolution of ideas and if necessary one should escape from his own old ideas by admitting that they were defective. He also draws an analogy between this escape and the biblical figure of Joseph, inviting us to escape our former incorrect ideas in the same hasty way that Joseph fled from a seducer by leaving his coat in her hands.

In one's inconsistency, Emerson continues, society will misunderstand him. But as many great men have been misunderstood, one should not bother oneself about it. Emerson believes that only "little minds" have the fear of unknown which is like "hobgoblin", and that fear makes them continue being what they have always been unwisely; "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds" ("S-R" 152). He points out that a real inconsistency does not exist since "There will be an agreement in whatever variety of actions [...] For of one will, the actions will be harmonious, however unlike they seem" ("S-R" 152). It is only our defective perceptions that makes us think a man is contradictory to his past. Emerson compares the progress of an individual's thought to a ship sailing

against the wind. In order to advance, the ship should move in a “zigzag line of a hundred tacks”, which eventually leads to a recognizable pattern and towards a particular end. In the same spirit, an individual's apparently contradictory acts or decisions show consistency if all his actions and thoughts are examined in its entirety and not in small sections, because “no man can violate his nature.” Like Emerson, Wilde portrays inconsistency as a virtue:

We are never more true to ourselves than when we are inconsistent. The aesthetic critic, constant only to the principle of beauty in all things, will ever be looking for fresh impressions, [...] What other people call one's past has, no doubt, everything to do with them, but has absolutely nothing to do with oneself. The man who regards his past is a man who deserves to have no future to look forward to. [...] (“Critic” 191)

Wilde brings inconsistency to his characters in order to portray their trust in themselves. In *Lady Windermere's Fan* act one, Lady Windermere states to Lord Darlington that “the world is forgetting, the difference that there is between what is right and what is wrong. [...]” (4) She believes people can be divided into two groups of good and bad. There is “no compromise” for that and she would “allow of none”. But when she sees Mrs. Erlynne's “self-sacrifice”, Lady Windermere has a permanent change of mind in her judgment of others. She “leaves” her “theory” as Emerson refers to it and “flees” from her past attitudes. Lady Windermere has a “great soul” and as Emerson notes in *Self-Reliance*, “With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do”:

Lady Windermere: I don't think now that people can be divided into the good and the bad as though they were two separate races or creations. What are called good women may have terrible things in them, mad moods of recklessness, assertion, jealousy, sin. Bad women, as they are termed, may have in them sorrow, repentance, pity, sacrifice. (37)

Moreover, Lord Windermere who tried to help Mrs. Erlynne to “have a chance of a happier, a surer life than she has had”, upon seeing her in Lord Darlington's house, changes his mind about her and calls her “dangerous”:

Lord Windermere: [...] if you knew where Mrs. Erlynne went last night, after she left this house, you would not sit in the same room with her. (38)

Yet after a short conversation with Lord Augustus, upon hearing a fictional story that Mrs. Erlynne told to Lord Augustus, whether Lord Windermere believes the story or not, in his final statement about Mrs. Erlynne, he calls her “a clever woman”. Thus, Wilde gives to his characters the freedom to change their minds as the course of events change in order to support the idea of inconsistency. Similarly, Hester, in *A Woman of No Importance*, changes her view about “God’s law”. In act three she tells Mrs. Arbuthnot that “the sins of the parents should be visited on the children. It is a just law. It is God’s law.” (50) But in the following act, she realizes this law cannot be “just” and clearly announces the change she has gone through mentioning “I was wrong. God’s law is only Love” (63).

Hester and Lady Windermere are two characters that openly announce their inconsistencies. As Wilde writes in the Critic as Artist, a self-reliant individual frees his soul to express himself as he changes and “will not consent to be the slave of his own opinions”, otherwise as Emerson notes “he may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall”. Emerson offers a more straightforward explanation:

Speak what you think now in hard words, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing you said to-day. `Ah, so you shall be sure to be misunderstood.' Is it so bad, then, to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood. (“S-R” 152)

Emerson brings the name of great men who, due to their inconsistencies, have been badly received by society. These men’s inconsistencies have been a result of their constant progresses, therefore, according to Emerson, a man who advances in his life will “be sure to be misunderstood”. Wilde follows the same idea by considering all changes and developments as beautiful and those that will lead to “true unity”. Expressing it through Gilbert’s conversation to Ernest, he notes:

Gilbert: [...] He will realise himself in many forms, and by a thousand different ways, and will ever be curious of new sensations and fresh points of view. Through constant change, and through constant change alone, he will find his true unity. He will not consent to be the slave of his own opinions. For what is mind but motion in the intellectual sphere? The essence of thought, as the essence of life, is growth. You must not be frightened by words, Ernest. What people call

insincerity is simply a method by which we can multiply our personalities.  
("Critic" 197)

Inconsistency is presented throughout Wilde's plays since the characters speak and express their ideas in paradoxes, leaving room for inconsistency. Other than paradoxes, further instances of inconsistency exist within the plays; in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Lady Bracknell does not show any interest in Cecily until she is informed about her financial background, and then immediately changes her position:

Lady Bracknell: A moment, Mr Worthing. A hundred and thirty thousand pounds! And in the Funds! Miss Cardew seems to me a most attractive young lady, now that I look at her. (131)

Lady Bracknell does not shy away from instantly altering her position. In the same play, Algernon indicates that if he were one day to be married he would "certainly try to forget the fact." During his conversation with Lane Algernon considers marriage "demoralizing", and in a conversation with Jack he refers to the act of proposing as a "business". Yet upon meeting Cecily he becomes affectionate and tries to win her heart and wishes to be married.

Although through Gwendolen's wish to "love someone of the name Ernest", Wilde satirises the ideals and sentiments of the late Victorian upper-class, along with Cecily's, Gwendolen's conversation may be analyzed from a more literal level. Gwendolen and Cecily insist on the importance of loving someone with the name Ernest. Both openly state their intentions to Algernon and Jack until the truth is finally revealed. Cecily warns Gwendolen that "A gross deception has been practiced on both of" them. Upon retiring into the house, as soon as Algernon and Jack enter, they are "the first to speak" and quickly forgive them. Although in this stage of the play, Gwendolen and Cecily appear to have accepted the fact that their desire to marry someone with the name Ernest will be unfulfilled, they maintain what Emerson calls "a foolish consistency" as they satisfy themselves in marrying someone whose "Christian name" is Ernest.

Gwendolen and Cecily (Speaking together): Your Christian names are still an insuperable barrier. That is all!

Jack and Algernon (Speaking together): Our Christian names! Is that all? But we are going to be christened this afternoon. (126)

By the end Gwendolen, coincidentally, fulfills her desire to marry an Ernest. Cecily does not. Wilde does not indicate any signs of discontent in Cecily by the time the play ends. Therefore, Cecily does not follow her previous theory and shows inconsistency in her decision to marry Algernon, knowing that Algernon is not an 'Ernest'. Gwendolen, though getting engaged to a real Ernest at last, appreciates the concept of "change". When Jack asks her for the last time if her "decision" about his name has changed, she replies she never changes, except in her affections, implying her ability to change according to her preferences and emphasizing her approval of inconsistency. She forgives Jack for telling her the truth, although unintentionally, simply because she feels that he is "sure to change". These two comments of Gwendolen indicate her positive attitude towards change and inconsistency.

Wilde and Emerson both advocate the concept of changing and alteration in an individual's life, as Gilbert says, "the essence of life is growth" and growth will bring change. Wilde compares a statue to those people who fail to change according to the "affects" of time:

The statue is concentrated to one moment of perfection. The image stained upon the canvas possesses no spiritual element of growth or change. If they know nothing of death, it is because they know little of life, for the secrets of life and death belong to those, and those only, whom the sequence of time affects [...] ("Critic" 140)

Wilde believed that as the conditions change, "human nature will change." and that "the only thing that one really knows about human nature is that it changes". The only predictable quality is "change". These inconsistencies make the artist advance and elevates an individual's self-expression. For Wilde, it is only through these constant changes that a man "will find his true unity". ("Critic" 197) Therefore after all the inconsistencies of human nature, there is a unity according to Wilde. Similarly, Emerson believed that "no man can violate his nature". He confirms at last these consistencies will not change a man's soul and character. Because "A character is like an acrostic or

Alexandrian stanza; read it forward, backward, or across, it still spells the same thing” and therefore, “one tendency unites” all of those seemingly different actions of a man. Thus, if one self-reliant individual, records his “honest thoughts” through what Wilde would consider “the use of a fresh medium of expression”, according to Emerson that would “be found symmetrical”, though one does not “mean it”, and does not “see it” that way.

[...] Character teaches above our wills. Men imagine that they communicate their virtue or vice only by overt actions, and do not see that virtue or vice emit a breath every moment. (“S-R” 152)

Therefore, both Emerson and Wilde, believe that one must refuse the unnecessary consistency, and in all his inconsistencies and changes, there will be a unity. It is worth noting that Wilde himself practised the inconsistency he taught. Peter Raby argues that despite “all the contradictions there is a strange consistency about Wilde's story.” He believes Wilde himself had been consistent in only one thing; his thirst “for sensation and experience”. During his time in Reading Prison Wilde reflected on the conflicting patterns and the desire he had in his youth “to eat of the fruit of all the trees in the garden of the world” (“De Profundis” 12), he believed in the necessity of experience for an individual’s progress. Experience brings change for a man and this makes it impossible for him to remain consistent. Wilde himself mentions his deliberate choice of being in “depths” to experience new feelings.

[...] Tired of being on the heights I deliberately went to the depths for new sensations. (“De Profundis” 4)

Wilde reaffirms Emerson’s emphasis on the necessity of an individual freeing himself from his own bonds of previous thoughts and actions and his own past and therefore degrading consistency depicting that through Vivian’s speech “ who wants to be consistent?” (“Decay” 5)

Practicing one’s vocations, inconsistencies, original action or unconventional thinking, finding the truth at home rather than looking for travelling to foreign lands and trusting oneself are all dimensions of Emerson’s individualism on an individual level that are

found in the characters of the plays under study. As some given examples depict, these habits of a self-reliant person which are rooted within himself rather than his relationship to society, help recognizing that Emerson's concept of individualism are to some degree reflected in Wilde's comedy plays.

The characters contribution to "self-awareness" and "self-actualization", though pictured in less serious matters and through less probable course of actions, portrays Wilde's appreciation of self-expression. The importance of individual self-expression is everywhere from the title of his play *The Importance of Being Earnest*, to portraying Lane, a minor character in the play with a low status in society, as a man who gives himself the liberty of consuming champagne and as an individual who sharing his experience with Algernon, comments on his own self-awareness upon the failure of his marriage by mentioning "That (marriage) was in consequence of a misunderstanding between myself and a young person" (46).

The final line *The Importance of Being Earnest* is Wilde's individualistic message. Ernest acknowledges his realization of "the vital Importance of Being Earnest" for the first time in his life. Through his last sentence, Wilde signifies "the vital importance of being" oneself as Ernest discovers that he has always been an Ernest. Therefore, being Ernest signifies being an individual who takes the pleasure of his solitude and non-conformity to social conventions.

## CHAPTER 3

### SELF-RELIANCE IN SOCIAL LEVEL

The individual is undoubtedly the basic unit of a society; neither the individual nor society can exist without each other. Many theories and philosophers throughout centuries have attempted to offer solutions for a better life in either society or for the individual or both, and yet the question remains which component holds priority over the other. As Emerson says our thoughts “reach down to that depth where society itself originates and disappears; where the question is, Which is first, man or men ? where the individual is lost in his source” (“Society and Solitude” 742).

This Chapter looks at Emerson’s writings in “Self-Reliance” with a focus on the self-reliant individual’s relation to his society and its reflections in Wilde’s three comedy plays. The essay analyses the elements of self-reliance and individualism both on personal and societal level.

Emerson believes that self-reliant individuals will ultimately benefit society in several different ways. Self-reliance can become the foundation of a society made up of individuals who, in avoiding “consistency” and by seeking authentic meaning in their lives create a better society. Emerson emphasizes that self-trust means not imitating others and seeking the greatness within oneself. According to Emerson, people should accept their position in the world and attempt to self-improvement without imitating others, because “imitation is suicide”:

[...] imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion.  
 (“S-R” 146)

Great people have always been original and have refused to follow what society has dictated to them. Emerson's statement in *Self-Reliance* that "all history resolves itself very easily into the biography of a few stout & earnest persons" ("S-R" 154), is restated in two other works, his essay "History" and again in "Uses of Great Men", both essays cover the lives of influential figures such as Plato and Shakespeare. One's character is always unique and individual, but it can easily be "misunderstood." The notion of self-reliance goes beyond the development of the individual and establishes a criticism of the institutions of society and society itself, since society prevents self-trust of individuals.

Religious, political and charity institutions are part of these restricting societies, whose philosophies compete for our minds and require conformity to their rules, rituals and traditions. Emerson urges the individual to stand alone and trust himself. He makes an example of the minister of the church who is restricted and bound to the "communities of opinion" and, consequently, fails to be an original and independently thinking individual. Wilde holds a notably similar idea concerning the relationship between the individual and society and rejects imitation in any aspect of life. Wilde claims that "all imitation in morals and in life is wrong" ("Soul" 293), believing that imitation "can be made the sincerest form of insult" ("Decay" 43).

Emerson and Wilde both, in many ways, acted in their personal lives according to their theories. In his 1832 writing, "The Lord's Supper", Emerson outlined his religious thoughts and reasons for leaving the ministry several years earlier, and in his "Divinity School Address" and calls for each individual "to go alone; to refuse the good models, even those which are sacred in the imagination of men and dare to love God without mediator or veil" ("An Address" 81). For Emerson, the true religion cannot be those prevalent in society since these religions and their denominations are seeking something great outside an individual, while the individual should really be seeking "an original relation to the universe." ("Nature" 3). Goodness and morality cannot be obtained from "large societies and dead institutions" ("S-R" 148), but should come from within.

Therefore, self-reliance brings a social change, since as the individual advances, societies advance too. Emerson rejected commitment to any single cause such as antislavery, women's rights, education and labor reform. Rather, Emerson believed in a universal progress which may be obtained through self-trust in all members of society and in appreciating the worth and dignity of ourselves rather than focusing on the world's existing injustices. In *Self-Reliance*, Emerson perceives society to be an obstacle to an individual's advancement and wishes the word "conformity" to be "gazetted and ridiculed". A Man must obey his own heart in order to succeed; "[...] obey thy heart, and thou shalt reproduce the foreworld again" ("S-R" 166).

Obedying one's heart may lead to disobeying others and rejecting their expectations. Wilde holds a similar notion to that of Emerson and considers society to be an obstacle for individualism and self-trust, referring to disobedience as an "original virtue":

Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history, is man's original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and through rebellion. ("Soul" 279)

Both Emerson and Wilde, emphasize the nonconformity of a self-reliant individual because it is opposed by society and a self-trusting man needs to remain steadfast against society's scorn. In Victorian England, society rejected individuals that would not behave in accordance with contemporary expectations. *The Manners and Tone of Good Society: or, Solecisms to be Avoided, by A Member of the Aristocracy* was first published in about 1876. Readers are advised on:

What is done, and what is not done, in good society, and also how what is done in good society should be done. It is precisely this knowledge that gives its possessor the consciousness of feeling thoroughly at ease in whatever sphere he may happen to move, and causes him to be considered 'well-bred' by all with whom he may come in contact. A "solecism" may be perhaps in itself but a trifling matter, but in the eyes of society at large it assumes proportions of a magnified aspect, and reflects most disadvantageously upon the one by whom it is committed; the direct inference being, that to commit a "solecism" argues the offender to be unused to society, and consequently not on an equal footing with it. This society resents, and it is not slow in making its disapproval felt by its demeanour towards the intruder (ix).

Essentially, Wilde depicts that the consequences of social disobedience in late Victorian England were, as McCormack calls “a policy of exclusion”. In *Wit in Earnest*, McCormack notes that society at that time was ruled by the “tyranny of niceness and order” and whatever “threatened—or seemed to threaten—its uneasy security” would be rejected. Nonconformity would lead to ostracism. This exclusion is touched upon by both Mrs. Erlynne and Mrs. Arbuthnot in *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *A Woman of No Importance*. In *Lady Windermere's Fan* Mrs. Erlynne attempts to save her daughter from falling “into the pit” and suffering exclusion:

You don't know what it is to fall into the pit, to be despised, mocked, abandoned, sneered at—to be an outcast! to find the door shut against one, to have to creep in by hideous byways, afraid every moment lest the mask should be stripped from one's face [...] (29)

Exclusion from society for a ‘fallen woman’ will never cease to continue according to Mrs. Erlynne:

You don't know what it is. One pays for one's sin, and then one pays again, and all one's life one pays. (29)

Jackson, noting on the Victorian England manners, mentions that “The man who marries a woman whose reputation is not secure faces a life of social ostracism, possibly exile. Although his male friends will not openly shun him, they are not likely to allow his wife to meet their wives or daughters—the very presence of a bad woman was offensive to the good.” (Jackson, 13) Consequently, in *Lady Windermere's Fan*, it becomes necessary for Mrs. Erlynne to put on the mask of a good woman in order to enter society. Upon deciding whether to marry her or not, Lord Augustus must make sure that the woman he will marry has a secured reputation. Otherwise, as Jackson indicates, he will risk his own state of social life.

Do you think she will ever get into this demmed thing called Society? Would you introduce her to your wife? (16)

Therefore, individuals who behave according to their “original virtue”, are either ostracized by society or are in permanent fear of ostracism or receiving the cold shoulder. Mrs. Erlynne’s final decision to leave England demonstrates not only her need for solitude, but also her deliberate act of putting an end to the fear of ostracism by English society, as she does not want to conform to social values. Therefore, by explaining to Lady Windermere that “The English climate does not suit” her, she nearly means that she, herself, does not suit “the English climate”, because “London is too full of fogs and--and serious people”. Mrs. Erlynne’s words here hold another meaning, the “fogs” referring to the social conventions that restrict its society members’ ability for self-expression, and “serious people” meaning those who either blindly or willingly follow the rules, or the hypocritical members. These people are not self-trusting and original thinking individuals, or in Emerson words, they lack self-reliance, the most prominent notion that an individual should care for throughout his life. Wilde utilizes the word “serious” to criticize the issues that these people concern themselves with. Mrs. Erlynne does not know whether these members of society make the conventions and the culture of conformity or they have become so as a result of living in such a society:

Mrs. Erlynne: London is too full of fogs and--and serious people, Lord Windermere. Whether the fogs produce the serious people or whether the serious people produce the fogs, I don't know [...] (39)

Since fog can be used as a symbol of confusion and the inability to see, being “too full of fogs” suggests the state of ignorance and chaos with which Mrs. Erlynne feels uncomfortable in. Her feeling towards English society corresponds to Emerson’s description of society:

society is “a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, so surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most respect is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion.” (“S-R” 9)

Of a similar nature to Mrs. Erlynne is the portrayal of Mrs. Arbuthnot as a nonconformist woman. Mrs. Arbuthnot refuses the values of her society and family by running away with a man she loved. Twenty years later, she “refused to marry the father of her own

child". Mrs. Arbuthnot takes refuge in attending church since she cannot return to society, whose punishment for self-trusting individuals is exclusion:

I spent too much of my time in going to Church, and in Church duties. But where else could I turn? God's house is the only house where sinners are made welcome.  
(61)

Although both Mrs. Erlynne and Mrs. Arbuthnot are depicted partially excluded from society or in constant fear of exclusion, Wilde does not portray them as victims. Not only he does not portray the image of fallen women as victims, but also through Lord Illingworth, Wilde represents the same punishment for men. This punishment is a private exclusion imposed on him not by society, but by "one's own mistress and one's own" illegitimate son. Lord Illingworth is excluded from the play's happy ending, although he was ready to make sacrifices. His exclusion though is not a social ostracism, but an exclusion from society of a person he was "extremely fond of"; the connection with Gerald which he finally failed to achieve. Both Mrs. Erlynne and Mrs. Arbuthnot do not sacrifice their individualism and freedom for their maternal responsibilities. Rather, they demonstrate that women possess an identity beyond the boundaries of confined motherhood and, thereby, question the Victorian concepts concerning women and motherhood.

In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Jack's imaginary alter-ego, Ernest, is rejected by Miss Prism who has not yet met him. Upon hearing the news of his sudden death, Miss Prism informs the moaning Jack that Ernest's death has been the outcome of his repeated misbehaviors: "As a man sows, so shall he reap" (92). Miss Prism's biblical reference is indicative of society's attitude and reaction towards those who deviate from the rules. Through the death of both Ernest and Bunbury, Ernest being a fluid self and Bunbury an imaginary friend who enables Algernon to have fluidity of self, Wilde symbolically implies the necessity of sacrifice in a society like that of Victorian England. Likewise, Lady Bracknell's interrogational questions concerning Jack's engagement to Gwendolen and her "pencil and note-book in hand", which she evidently keeps wherever she goes, is

her measuring tool used to check the extent of her future son-in-law's admissibility into society by which Wilde satirizes society's "policy of exclusion".

Emerson invites individuals to turn their attention towards the great men in history who have been "misunderstood" and who did not let society's misunderstanding obstruct their individualism. He invites an excluded individual not to fear his exclusion but rather appreciate and take refuge in solitude. Emerson believes this solitude to be holy as it makes a man achieve a greater degree of closeness with himself. The ostracized individual is not in a solitary life because he is with himself and with the Divine. For Emerson loneliness has another definition and solitary life in its negative sense, means to be inside a society but having to act based on other people's desires or living with a mask of superficiality:

But how insular and pathetically solitary are all the people we know! Nor dare they tell what they think of each other when they meet in the street. We have a fine right, to be sure, to taunt men of the world with superficial and treacherous courtesies! ("Society and Solitude" 742)

Emerson believes that one's false courtesies and the lack of courage to truly communicate his thoughts in the company of others, makes him deeply "solitary" despite being physically present in society. Likewise, Wilde shows how his characters in the plays might not "dare tell what they think of each other" and through their polite speeches, he satirizes the polite conversations of the Victorian drawing-room and the "superficiality" and "treacherous courtesies" of the English upper-class. In *Lady Windermere's fan*, Dumby, is what Emerson would describe as a "pathetically solitary" who confirms women's statements as he enters to the society and pays superficial respect solely to women. His opposition to Mr. Cowper-Cowper is the moment that "he dares telling what he thinks of" and shows how he really would disagree with other guests, were they all men rather than ladies. It would make it easier for one to be himself in his manners and courtesies if he or she would be addressing the same sex. Dumby's behaviour adds to the humour of the play:

Dumby: Good evening, Lady Stutfield. I suppose this will be the last ball of the season?

Lady Stutfield: I suppose so, Mr. Dumby. It's been a delightful season, hasn't it?

Dumby: Quite delightful! Good evening, Duchess. I suppose this will be the last ball of the season?

Duchess of Berwick: I suppose so, Mr. Dumby. It has been a very dull season, hasn't it?

Dumby: Dreadfully dull! Dreadfully dull!

Mr. Cowper-Cowper: Good evening, Mr. Dumby. I suppose this will be the last ball of the season?

Dumby: Oh, I think not. There'll probably be two more. [Wanders back to Lady Plymade.] (15)

Contrary to Dumby's courtesies, in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Gwendolen as a member of English upper-class criticizes the bonds of polite conversation she has been obliged to tolerate in society. In doing so she implies her desire for Jack to speak his mind instead of utilizing the weather as a means to establish conversation during the brief absence of Lady Bracknell:

Jack: Charming day it has been, Miss Fairfax.

Gwendolen: Pray don't talk to me about the weather, Mr. Worthing. Whenever people talk to me about the weather, I always feel quite certain that they mean something else. (62)

This passage implies the dishonesty in conversation. In the same act, Algernon and Lane lie about the lack of cucumber. Other examples of superficial courtesies exists in the text. Gwendolen and Jack who "blow kisses to each other behind lady Bracknell's back", signifying the necessity of taking actions in a manner not to be disrespecting to others, in this case to Lady Bracknell. One such superficial respectful act takes place at the tea table during the conversation between Gwendolen and Cecily in Act Two.

Upon meeting Cecily for the first time, Gwendolen shows a very unnatural and insincere politeness in order to make a quick friendship, stating "My first impressions of people are never wrong" (108). Through the superficiality of her statement, in Emerson words, Gwendolen may be, as Emerson mentions, "concealing how he can the thinness of his skin and his incapacity for strict association" ("Society and Solitude" 741). Her superficiality is revealed in the same act when she is later hostile towards Cecily announcing that: "This is no time for wearing the shallow mask of manners" (112). In

these two scenes, Gwendolen openly confirms the superficiality of conversation and courtesies of her upper-class society, through which Wilde pictures an existing problem in his society.

Emerson, bearing the same attitude towards the hypocrisies and artificial courtesies, suggests that a self-reliant individual adheres to a society of his own choice and dares to avoid it if it does not suit him. In one's choice of society, one must be free and should not be expected to give any reason "why I seek or why I exclude company". When one's genius calls him, one must be at liberty to "shun father and mother and wife and brother." One should be able to "Say to them, O father, O mother, O wife, O brother, O friend, I have lived with you after appearances hitherto. Henceforward I am the truth's. Be it known unto you that henceforward I obey no law less than the eternal law". ("S-R" 160)

For Emerson, refusing to conform to society consists of refusing to obey one's relations as well. When it comes to one's individualism and self-trust, he may shun even his parents.

I shall endeavour to nourish my parents, to support my family, to be the chaste husband of one wife, but these relations I must fill after a new and unprecedented way. I appeal from your customs. I must be myself. I cannot break myself any longer for you, or you. ("S-R" 160)

Wilde credits the significance of individual freedom over respecting family in a similar way, and supports his argument through the figure of Jesus Christ:

Jesus knew this. He rejected the claims of family life, although they existed in his day and community in a very marked form. 'Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?' he said, when he was told that they wished to speak to him. When one of his followers asked leave to go and bury his father, 'Let the dead bury the dead,' was his terrible answer. He would allow no claim whatsoever to be made on personality. ("Soul" 292)

Emerson, however, believes in doing one's duties. His argument against conforming to one's family's wishes is somewhat different to Wilde. One may do his duty but in his own way which is an "unprecedented way", then, although the result of his actions might look

like others, he has not conformed to his community because he has done it in his own way.

Therefore, as a man is true to himself, he fulfills his duties, and if being himself, his society of friends and family do not love him for what he is, he still “will not hide” his “tastes or aversions” because he will “trust that what is deep is holy”. Emerson directly mentions his attitude towards difference, distinctness and diversity among members of society and the way one should choose his own companions while respectfully denying other people who cannot accept him as he is.

If you are noble, I will love you; if you are not, I will not hurt you and myself by hypocritical attentions. If you are true, but not in the same truth with me, cleave to your companions; I will seek my own. I do this not selfishly, but humbly and truly. (“S-R” 160)

In his other essay “Society and Solitude”, Emerson indicates that if any company of people is put together with the freedom to make conversation, “a rapid self-distribution takes place”. They go “into sets and pairs.” He uses the analogy of oil and water to demonstrate the way each person finds his own companion.

It would be more true to say they separate as oil from water, as children from old people, without love or hatred in the matter, each seeking his like; and any interference with the affinities would produce constraint and suffocation. (“Society and Solitude” 745)

Wilde maintains similar opinion to that of Emerson and portrays his characters having the desire to choose their own companions in order to indicate their sense of independency and individualism. In *A Woman of No Importance*, Sir John, pursuing the traditional “English country house-party pastime of flirtation” (Raby, Footnote), seats himself next to Lady Stutfield which upsets his wife, Lady Carolin. Though being controlled by his wife in several occasions, Sir John’s character is depicted as a man who tries to make small decisions on his own and choose his company as he wants:

Lady Caroline: I think not, John. You had better sit beside me. [Sir John rises and goes across.] (8)

The arrival of Mrs. Arbuthnot demands that the grouping of women changes, aligning Hester and Mrs. Arbuthnot. These two characters, who both love Gerald and later discuss his future together, hold similar prejudices, notably their dislike of Lord Illingworth. In her first conversation with Mrs. Arbuthnot, Hester indicates her desire to be friends with her.

Mrs. Arbuthnot, I wish you would let us be friends. [...] When you came into the Drawing-room this evening, somehow you brought with you a sense of what is good and pure in life. (49)

The conversation between Hester and Mrs. Arbuthnot gets deeper later in the play although it is the first day they are meeting each other. Emerson writes “All conversation is a magnetic experiment” (“Society and Solitude” 745). The similarity in character’s personalities makes them freely choose their companions in Lady Hunstanton’s party. In the fourth act, although Mrs. Arbuthnot had joined Lady Hunstanton’s party the night before, she refuses to meet Mrs. Allonby and Lady Hunstanton, excusing herself by claiming to have a headache, which is simply her polite rejection to come to the meeting and therefore, her personal selection of her companions. Mrs. Arbuthnot tries to avoid society and in the beginning of the play it is mentioned that it is difficult “to get her to go anywhere”. Although Gerald notes that Mrs. Arbuthnot “is always going to church.”, and according to herself she could not turn to anywhere else, as “God’s house is the only house where sinners are made welcome”, Mrs. Arbuthnot does not seek artificial friendship in her life. As Emerson writes she does “not hurt” others and herself “by hypocritical attentions.”

Wilde’s plays include many pairings. The pairing of Lord Augustus with Mrs. Erlynne in *Lady Windermere’s Fan* and the marriage of the three couples at the end of *The Importance of being Earnest*, all portray Wilde’s attitude towards an individual’s struggle in carefully picking his companions and the right and necessity of having a choice of one’s own, while excluding the rest. In pairing the characters and picturing their voluntary separation from certain others, Wilde reflects Emerson’s statement; “Leave them to seek their own mates, and they will be as merry as sparrows” (“Society and Solitude” 745).

In detaching oneself from society's expectation and refusing to conform to the rules, an individual should select his own society and be courageous if others misunderstand him. But there are certain institutions that are after an individual's thought and against his self-reliance such as the charity organizations and religious institutions. Morality and religion are among of the means through which society can restrict or limit one's individualism. Both Emerson and Wilde, invite individuals not to blindly conform to rules set by a society. Wilde takes sin as an "intensified assertion of individualism" because sinning contradicts a society's collective rules and definitions of morality. In "Critic", Wilde writes:

What is termed Sin is an essential element of progress. Without it the world would stagnate, or grow old, or become colourless. By its curiosity Sin increases the experience of the race. Through its intensified assertion of individualism, it saves us from monotony of type. In its rejection of the current notions about morality, it is one with the higher ethics. ("Critic" 134)

Wilde also relates individualism to art; "Art is the most intense mode of individualism that the world has known" ("Soul" 300). Therefore, by merging his two opinions about individualism- its relation to art and its discordance with morality- it may be said that sin correlates with art for Wilde. By adhering to morality, an individual fails in being himself and puts limitations on exercising his individual attitudes. Morality limits the individual practices and may harm his artistic creation. Therefore Wilde, credits the act of sinning. Emerson reflects the same position in his essay Circles; he notes "The only sin is limitation" and for Emerson experience without limitation cannot be thought as sin:

I am not careful to justify myself [...] I have my own head and obey my whims, let me remind the reader that I am only an experimenter. Do not set the least value on what I do or the least discredit on what I do not, as if I pretended to settle anything as true or false. I unsettle all things. No facts are to me sacred; none are profane; I simply experiment. an endless seeker with no Past at my back. ("Circles" 288)

An individual should value his original experiences and keep in mind those acts may be perceived as sins by other members of society. In his essay "Experience", Emerson defines sin as what people take as their own lawful right but if they see it done by others, they would consider it as sin. Therefore, sin is another person's experience:

We believe in ourselves as we do not believe in others. We permit all things to ourselves, and that which we call sin in others is experience for us. [...]. The act looks very differently on the inside and on the outside [...] (“Experience” 360)

According to Emerson, the same society has learned to forgive everything except for the sin of an individual who holds a different opinion from theirs; “In fact the only sin which we never forgive in each other is difference of opinion” because “We know beforehand that yonder man must think as we do” (“Clubs” 221). Although a society might perceive and judge an individual’s actions and experiments, Emerson points out every person’s natural and deep appreciation of the concept of self-reliance and therefore the victory of the concept of individualism over the fear of sinning:

We are such lovers of self-reliance that we excuse in a man many sins if he will show us a complete satisfaction in his position, which asks no leave to be of mine or any man's good opinion. (“Manners” 389)

Essentially, Emerson does not hold the rational Christian view of sin, and thinks of it as one’s distinct experiences that self-trusting individuals go through in society and then being different to other members’ experiences, they might be recognized as sinners. In his essay *Spiritual Laws*, Emerson renounces theological notion of sin and evil, stating that all an individual needs to have in his life is “self-knowledge”:

Our young people are diseased with the theological problems of original sin, origin of evil, predestination and the like. [...] A simple mind will not know these enemies. It is quite another thing that he should be able to give account of his faith and expound to another the theory of his self-union and freedom. This requires rare gifts. Yet without this self-knowledge there may be a sylvan strength and integrity in that which he is. "A few strong instincts, and a few plain rules" suffice us. (“*Spiritual Laws*” 191)

For Emerson prayer is another concept he rejects with religion because it “looks abroad” and therefore it is contrary to self-reliance. Prayer can be selfishness, if it is considered “as a means to effect a private end is meanness and theft” (S-R, 163). It may become a means of separation from God “and not unity in nature and consciousness.” Being “one with God,” an individual does not need to “beg.” Emerson comments that only one’s “discontent” and “regrets,” lead him to prayer and that is the “want” and lack of self-

reliance, noting that “As men’s prayers are a disease of the will, so are their creeds a disease of the intellect” (“S-R” 163).

Regarding sacredness, Emerson uses the metaphor of self-absolution and prefers it over asking the priests of a Roman catholic church to grant absolution for one’s sins, mentioning that “Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. Absolve you to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage of the world” (“S-R” 148). In much the same way as Emerson, Wilde believes a man learns far better from his mistakes than looking outside of himself through religious institutions:

No, Ernest, no. We cannot go back to the saint. There is far more to be learned from the sinner. (“Critic” 177)

In “The Over-Soul” (1841) Emerson explains how self-reliance may be compatible with religion and emphasizes the notion of the soul and its universality as it is inherent to all mankind. According to the thinker the universal soul is “within” every individual and that one can identify it without meditation since it is the “inner source” of divinity. Emerson proposed it is only through independent thinking and looking inward that an individual can come to identify that universal soul:

It is of no use to preach to me from without. I can do that too easily myself. Jesus speaks always from within, and in a degree that transcends all others. In that is the miracle. I believe beforehand that it ought so to be. All men stand continually in the expectation of the appearance of such a teacher. But if a man do not speak from within the veil, where the word is one with that it tells of, let him lowly confess it. (“Over-Soul” 273)

Emerson calls people to practise their religion without depending on churches, the Bible and clergymen. In Divinity School Address he mentions:

Let me admonish you, first of all, to go alone; to refuse the good models, even those most sacred in the imagination of men, and dare to love God without mediator or veil (“An Address” 81)

Wilde held a similar view about the eminence of human soul and its compatibility with the roots and teachings of religion:

What Jesus meant, was this. He said to man, 'You have a wonderful personality. Develop it. Be yourself. ("Soul" 288)

Therefore, both Wilde and Emerson value individualism over religion and note that human soul can direct him towards God. For Wilde, imitating society is wrong even if it is for the sake of morality. Similar to Emerson, he states that one's religion should come from within:

And so he who would lead a Christlike life is he who is perfectly and absolutely himself. [...] It does not matter what he is, as long as he realises the perfection of the soul that is within him. All imitation in morals and in life is wrong. ("Soul" 292)

Wilde depicts the Victorian society of England as a religious society in his plays because his society was essentially a religious one. In his book *The Literature of England*, Anderson states the religious spirit of the Victorian society:

The Victorian Age was, on the whole, a Puritan Age; social conventions were rather clearly marked out, and any overstepping of the lines was promptly condemned and punished by ostracism. Like most periods of social strait-jacketing, it was a self-righteous, smug, almost priggish age. And it was, quite inevitably, a didactic age replete with sermons and lectures dutifully delivered by those called upon to preach and teach and more or less dutifully listened to by those eager to conform. (Anderson 427)

In *Lady Windermere's Fan*, the significance of religious background is depicted through the obviously contrasting comments of Lord Darlington and Lady Windermere's Puritan ideas:

Lord Darlington: I think life too complex a thing to be settled by these hard and fast rules.

Lady Windermere: If we had 'these hard and fast rules' we should find life much more simple. (6)

Although Lady Windermere wishes to find life "simple" through religion and divides people to good or bad, by the end of the play, she realizes her mistake and changes her mind. In act four she asks her husband not to divide people to good or bad in the same way that Lord Darlington proposed to her the day before:

Lady Windermere: Arthur, Arthur, don't talk so bitterly about any woman. I don't think now that people can be divided into the good and the bad as though they were two separate races or creations. What are called good women may have terrible things in them, mad moods of recklessness, assertion, jealousy, sin.[...]  
(37)

Hester Worsley is the other Puritan character. In *A Woman of No Importance*, she is portrayed as a puritan believing in very “hard and fast rules” such as considering God’s punishment a just one for women who have transgressed the law of God: “Let all women who have sinned be punished.” (18) Hester states this comment exactly upon the entrance of a sinned woman, Mrs. Arbuthnot and her religious thought “starts” Mrs. Arbuthnot. Although portrayed as a puritan, Wilde depicts Hester as a flexible and independent thinker as well. She defends women in the Victorian society and rejects the double standards of society towards the two sexes:

Don't have one law for men and another for women. You are unjust to women in England. (18)

The same Puritan Hester is portrayed as a “fin-de-siècle” young girl, who is not only upright and confident in openly expressing her interest in Gerald in presence of other people, but also encourages Mrs. Arbuthnot not to “marry the father of her own son.” Through her character and Lady Windermere’s, Wilde depicts two Puritan women who are still independent thinkers and self-reliant individuals. Their sense of individualism lets them reconsider their religious beliefs and change their views fundamentally. Hester’s comment on “God’s law” being “only love”, is Wilde’s elaboration of individual choice and religious reconsideration. Hester’s redefinition of “God’s law” confirming Wilde’s attitude about what is “good and bad”, is very close to Emerson’s opinion: “No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature. Good and bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my constitution, the only wrong what is against it.” (“S-R” 148)

Wilde represents one of the most striking moral points of his plays through Jack’s speech in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. On the assumption that Miss Prism is his “unmarried” mother, Jack attempting to embrace her, mentions:

Unmarried! I do not deny that is a serious blow. But after all, who has the right to cast a stone against one who has suffered? Cannot repentance wipe out an act of folly? Why should there be one law for men, and another for women? Mother, I forgive you. (143)

Jack alludes to the Sermon on the Mount (John 8:4-15) , in which Jesus is asked to allow a crowd to punish a woman who has committed the sin of adultery by stoning her to death. Jesus replies “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” Jack alludes to a biblical story while he is talking to a woman who herself frequently alludes to the same religion and book but without “charity”. Several times Miss Prism refers to St Paul, stating “As a man sows, so let him reap” (83 and Galations 6:7). She uses this reference even as a condolence to Jack for his brother’s sudden death. Through Jack’s conversation with the religious Ms Prism, Wilde affirms that a true religion belongs to an independent thinking individual whose soul is the source of his religion, rather than a person who simply follows the collective morality of his society, who seeks religion outside himself.

The final union between Chausable and Miss Prism, signifies both a symbolic union of religion and learning, and an equal measurement of education and religion, evaluating them on a same level as both systems demand independent thinking and ask the individuals to look “outside” themselves. Conventionality is opposed to originality. In *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, Mrs. Erlynne’s courage to go to Lord Darlington’s house is an original daring act. Her meeting with Lady Windermere at Lord Darlington’s house enlightens Lady Windermere about the dangers of becoming a fallen woman and this helps Lady Windermere better understand herself in that she is not the type of woman who can survive the kind of life style which Mrs. Erlynne lives. These meetings for Emerson are holy as they bring one closer to oneself:

any act or meeting which tends to awaken a pure thought, a flow of love, an original design of virtue, I call a worthy, a true commemoration. (“The Lord’s Supper” 116)

It is worth noting that Emerson and Wilde did not reject God and Jesus, indicating their belief in a version of Christianity, rather than hearing God through “the phraseology of I know not what David, or Jeremiah, or Paul” (“S-R” 157), Emerson associates the concept of being religious to the state of being innocent:

The soul gives itself, alone, original and pure, to the Lonely, Original and Pure, who, on that condition,- gladly inhabits, leads and speaks through it. Then is It glad, young and nimble: It is not wise, but it sees through all things. It is not called religious, but it is innocent. (“The Over-Soul” 277)

Therefore, the human soul inhibits the characteristics which exist in God, one of which is the notion of solitude. Emerson presents this concept as sacred and religious. Solitude is not only holy but also, according to Emerson, it is another fundamental element of self-reliance. Solitude, privacy and an individual’s private existence within a public world, for Emerson helps an individual’s self-integrity and therefore, contributes immensely to one’s self-reliance. Many great philosophers and authors have addressed the need for solitude as a fundamental element of human growth and individualism. In his 1927 work *Proper Studies* Aldous Huxley argued that “The more powerful and original a mind, the more it will incline towards the religion of solitude.” Thoreau, in *Walden*, also recognized the significant need for solitude stating:

I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. To be in company, even with the best, is soon wearisome and dissipating. I love to be alone. I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude. (Thoreau 135)

Many works of literature have addressed the need to learn both solitude and acquiescence and have searched for a resolving synthesis between the two. Both physical solitude and the melancholic isolation have been appreciated as major themes in nearly all genres of literature and have classical origins such as the description of country life in the pastoral poetry of Virgil’s *Eclogues* and *Georgics*.

The seventeenth and eighteenth century English poets, such as Abraham Cowley, Thomas Warton and the Scottish doctor and poet, James Grainger celebrated solitude in their works in which the dominant note was the search for retirement in contrast to the chaos

and turmoil of the world beyond, which influenced later poets such as Coleridge and Wordsworth a great deal. Also in the eighteenth century, James Thomson, calls solitude in his 'Hymn on Solitude' as a "Companion of the wise". The theme of solitude was particularly portrayed with the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge as they took another step towards a poetry of greater psychological and philosophical questioning; solitude became a state and a component of mind, generated by and relating to the physical setting of retirement. Emerson was greatly influenced by these two contemporary poets and the notion of privacy is a fundamental aspect of individualism for him. He believed in the absolute necessity of solitude for individual growth and wrote about it in his essay *Self-Reliance* as well as dedicating a whole essay on that theme in his book *Society and Solitude*.

Emerson frequently referred to solitude in his other writings as well. In his approach to the subject, instead of leading an extreme solitary life, Emerson believed, one should make a balance between his private and social life. In "Historic Notes of Life and Letters in New England", Emerson noted of his own nineteenth century, "The age tends to solitude," expressing "every one for himself; driven to find all his resources, hopes, rewards, society and deity within himself". ("Historic Notes" 256).

Two major lines of thought can be found within the idea of solitude: the theme of retirement, meaning to retreat from the social setting and environment to somewhere else generally to the country; and the theme of isolation which is a philosophical state related to the individual identity and his relationship with the world. Therefore, the idea of solitude ranges from a concern with the physical environment to an examination of the processes of mind and its interaction with the world. Consequently, it can be either mental or physical.

In the plays under study, Wilde treats solitude positively and as an opportunity for the characters to gain more pleasure and comfort. His portrayals of solitude in these plays are similar to Emerson's attitudes on the theme. Emerson's essay "Society and Solitude" was published almost fifty years earlier than the publication of Wilde's first comedy play,

*Lady Windermere's Fan*. Like Emerson, Wilde connected individualism with solitude noting that "Individualism [...] knows that people are good when they are let alone. Man will develop Individualism out of himself" (Soul, 327).

In *Self-Reliance*, mentioning children's independent and original ways of behavior, Emerson notes that as one becomes an adult, it gets hard for him to "pass again into his neutrality". Yet the inner voices exist in an adult but only can be heard in solitude and as soon as we get into society they become inaudible: "These are the voices which we hear in solitude, but they grow faint and inaudible as we enter into the world" ("S-R" 148). Wilde mentions a similar idea; "Out of doors one becomes abstract and impersonal. One's individuality absolutely leaves one." ("Decay" 4)

According to Wilde to reacquire one's individuality one needs to occasionally avoid society. Wilde's idea parallels that of Emerson's, that an individual should be "independent of the human race" ("Society and Solitude" 741). Wilde portrays some of his characters trying to escape society and maintain a state of solitude. In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Algernon does not show any interest in his relatives and tries to avoid spending time with them. He makes up lies in order to escape his aunt's party because "once a week is quite enough to dine with one's own relations" (55). Upon his aunt's arrival, when "The sound of an electric bell is heard", Algernon notes that one's relatives ring one's bells as if one owes them money:

Ah! that must be Aunt Augusta. Only relatives, or creditors, ever ring in that Wagnerian manner. (57)

Wilde refers to the German composer, Richard Wagner and compares a relative's announcement of arrival to his dramatic, passionate and loud operatic music in order to show that both can take away the calm and relaxing mood of his solitude. Emerson notes the intruding nature of one's relatives and acquaintances which Wilde believes makes an individual "impersonal":

At times the whole world seems to be in conspiracy to importune you with emphatic trifles. Friend, client, child, sickness, fear, want, charity, all knock at

once at thy closet door, and say, 'Come out unto us.' But keep thy state; come not into their confusion. ("S-R" 160)

Here Emerson's advice is to keep one's solitary state despite all intrusions and try not to go, as Wilde notes, "out of doors". Wilde provides the idea of Bunburying to depict individual's desperate need for isolation and being away from the "confusion" of his society. Jack's response "oh, pleasure, pleasure" to Algernon's question for what brings him to the city, is the pleasure of both being away from duty and the pleasure of physical retirement to a place other one's own society. Both Ernest and Algernon escape their own societies to another place by making a fictional character who at certain times needs them, calling the action as Bunburying between themselves.

Among scholars, criticism it is generally accepted that the idea of Bunburying is the attempt to escape the conventions of society in Victorian England. Wilde portrays the "Bunburyist" as a man who enjoying himself, lives in a world of irresponsibility, free from the enslavement of hypocritical conventions. Therefore, Bunburyism marks one of the extreme points in the swing of the pendulum opposite to Victorianism. Inventing a fictitious character who provides the means for "Bunburying" not only can function as a persona, who serves as a pretext for escaping the conventions of a society but also can be a shelter to achieve solitude. Emerson regarded the "proud" solitude as opposite to the "vulgar" society, and coupled it with man's nature:

But the necessity of solitude is deeper than we have said, and is organic. [...] Dear heart! take it sadly home to thee, there is no co-operation. [...] It is fine for us to talk; we sit and muse and are serene and complete; but the moment we meet with anybody, each becomes a fraction. ("Society and Solitude" 742)

Although Jack mentions that being in one's own society means having a guardian's duty of maintaining "a very high moral tone on all subjects" (54), he is not a wholly irresponsible person. Both Jack and Algernon are ready to adhere to the rules which their lovers set upon them. They both want to get baptized in order to take on the name of "Ernest" and consequently satisfy the requirements of getting married. That indicates Bunburying has not been only for the purpose of escaping their responsibilities and it can

also serve as a chance for physical solitude. For Algernon “nothing will induce” him to “part with Bunbury”. Therefore, he indicates that he will need times of solitude even after he gets married and believes that Jack, in his “extremely problematic” marriage, will feel the necessity of it too. Responding that upon marrying Gwendolen he “certainly won’t want to know Bunbury” (56), Jack expresses that he will lose the need for solitude as soon as he gets married. Yet Algernon believes that even after marriage one needs to have some physical retirement and if Jack stops Bunburying and always remains within the physical reach, his wife, being an individual who needs solitude, will retire to somewhere solitary, away from him.

Jack: If I marry a charming girl like Gwendolen [...] I certainly won’t want to know Bunbury.

Algernon: Then your wife will. You don’t seem to realize, that in married life three is company and two is none. (56)

Algernon takes the fictitious Bunbury as a third person makes up part of his “company”. Therefore, solitude is taken as company and without it two married people will be “none”. A similar conception of solitude as a companion appears in many works of literature such as the well-known Poet Laureate of England from 1785 to 1790, Thomas Warton. In his 'Ode to Solitude; At an Inn' he writes:

Oft upon the twilight plain,  
Circled with thy shadowy train,  
While the dove at distance coo’d,  
Have I met thee, Solitude!  
Then was loneliness to me  
Best and true society.

Algernon’s emphasis on the importance of solitude after marriage is confirmed by Gwendolen. she implies a married woman’s need for solitude. Since marrying an Ernest is her ideal, she pities "any woman who is married to a man called John" and considers an unfavourable consequence for that, which is not having "a single moment's solitude":

I pity any woman who is married to a man called John. She would probably never be allowed to know the entrancing pleasure of a single moment’s solitude. (64)

In his essay "Society and Solitude" Emerson supports the same notion by arguing that solitude is an individual's natural need. He comments upon solitude and nature's work in protecting this solitude by referring to Swedenborg's thoughts:

[...] even Swedenborg whose theory of the universe is based on affection, and who reprobates to weariness the danger and vice of pure intellect, is constrained to make an extraordinary exception: "There are also angels who do not live consociated, but separate, house and house; these dwell in the midst of heaven, because they are the best of angels." ("Society and Solitude" 741)

The convenience of solitude is portrayed through the ending of *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *A Woman of No Importance*, as their happy endings include a kind of physical retirement from society. *Lady Windermere's Fan* finishes with Lord Windermere and Lady Windermere's retiring to Selby since Lord Windermere thinks his wife will "be all right" if they "go away to the country". Lord Windermere mentions that by staying at their home they will not feel any better; "There is no use staying on". And a few lines later, Lady Windermere feels the same need for a calm place to retire, "Let us go to Selby. In the Rose Garden at Selby the roses are white and red" (45).

The recurring reference to retirement contrasts with the turmoil they have gone through the night before and the natural need for solitude is pictured opposite to the superficialities of the social life. A similarly happy ending occurs in *A Woman of No Importance*. Hester invites Mrs. Arbuthnot to leave England and go with her to somewhere that they shall "find green valleys and fresh waters" (62). Mrs. Arbuthnot, after resisting the idea, finally decides to leave with Hester and Gerald to America; "and if you let me, near you always" (64). She decides to retire to a place where she has never been before, a place where she refuses to notify Lord Illingworth its location, mentioning "[...] we are safe from you, and we are going away" (66).

Mrs. Arbuthnot is depicted as a woman who prefers solitude to society. The first impression given to her character in act one is through Lady Hunstanton as she mentions "Your dear mother will be delighted. I really must try and induce her to come up here to-

night. Do you think she would, Gerald? I know how difficult it is to get her to go anywhere.” (5)

Mrs. Arbuthnot’s act of distancing herself from society together with entering to the party from “terrace behind in a cloak with a lace veil over her head”, portrays her as an individual who prefers seclusion. The first time that Mrs. Arbuthnot's name appears in the play is when her letter is read, stating that she will come to Lady Hunstanton’s party for a shorter span of time as to which she has been invited for. She enters the society “straight in”, without her name being “announced”. Her first sentences imply her preference of being away from social gatherings; “Oh, I came straight in from the terrace, Lady Hunstanton, just as I was. You didn't tell me you had a party” (28).

Lady Hunstanton’s letter of invitation had not informed Mrs. Arbuthnot that she was holding a party at her home, because she had decided to “try and induce her” to appear, due to Mrs. Arbuthnot’s habit of avoiding societal invitations. Her habit of retirement from society is in line with Emerson’s high regard of solitude:

We dress our garden, eat our dinners, discuss the household with our wives, and these things make no impression, are forgotten next week; but, in the solitude to which every man is always returning, he has a sanity and revelations which in his passage into new worlds he will carry with him. (“Experience” 364)

It is worth noting that both Jack and Algernon fall in love and decide to get married not in their own society but while they are physically away from home, as they are Bunburying, enjoying their solitary moments. Through this plot, Wilde associates the concept of love with the peace of mind gained in one’s solitude. Thus, Bunburying can be interpreted as finding both a very different mode of self-expression and handling the need for solitude. Consequently, to “kill” Bunbury means to deliberately put an end to physical retirement away from society. As Jack and Algernon will have new societies upon getting married, they will not enjoy the same sort of solitude they used to experience while they were single “men-about-town”. In “Society and Solitude”, Emerson notes that everyone needs society, “or he will feel a certain bareness and poverty, as of a displaced and unfurnished member. He is to be dressed in arts and institutions, as well as in body

garments” (743). Through killing Bunbury, Wilde approves Emerson’s idea that both solitude and society are necessary, and one should be able to keep his solitude while he is among other people. In “Society and Solitude”, Emerson concludes:

Nature delights to put us between extreme antagonisms, and our safety is in the skill with which we keep the diagonal line. Solitude is impracticable, and society fatal. We must keep our head in the one and our hands in the other. (745)

The notion of solitude and society are paradoxical, Emerson believes our solitude should not be only a “mechanical” isolation, as we require solitude to nourish our “better consciousness,” which we can then bring with us into the “street” and to the “palaces.” Emerson emphasizes that solitude is ideally found within the confines and structure of society, affirming that “the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude” (“S-R” 150). Therefore, a self-reliant individual is not a wholly detached and unapproachable person, but he is an individual who remains true and attentive to his thoughts and inspirations in all the circumstances:

a sound mind will derive its principles from insight, with ever a purer ascent to the sufficient and absolute right, and will accept society as the natural element in which they are to be applied. (“Society and Solitude” 746)

Meditating on the relation between a self-reliant individual and the “spirit of society”, Emerson warns that “society never advances”, comparing it to the waves of an ocean; Although the waves move forward, the water that creates it, does not actually move forward. Thus, although societies function as if they are progressing in their technology, sciences, constitutions and governments, Emerson notes they are not really advancing. An individual should not rely on the progresses of his societies, since when he thinks he is benefiting from them, he is losing another thing at the same time, “for everything that is given, something is taken” (“S-R” 166). Thus, according to Emerson society brings changes but individuals should rely on their inner progresses and changes, because not every change can be positive and that is why he confirms “change is not amelioration” (“S-R” 166).

Wilde, in the same vein, portrays the deficiencies of societies which individuals are suffering from, though they might belong to the high class of society. Their high status and wealth may not solve their problems as the solution lies “within”. He implies this problem by humorously mentioning the existence of a “Society for the Prevention of Discontent among the Upper Order”.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

This thesis analyzed three of Wilde's comedy plays in the light of Emerson's concept of self-reliance which is tied to his notion of individualism. The plays under the study, being *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) have been the subject of much study and criticism over the years. The plays reflect Victorian values and individual's struggles against the tone and morals of society, the transgressions and submissions, the inconsistencies and solutions for a better self-expression. Through the happy endings, Wilde brings a form of reconciliation between the individual and society.

There are reflections of Emerson's concept of self-reliance in the three selected plays, and Emerson's notion of self-reliance as the core of his definition of individualism is harmonious with the actions and speeches of various characters within the plays. Individuals struggle to come to terms with themselves and express themselves through their originality, trust themselves, leave their own earlier theories aside if necessary and even become inflexible at times. Components of Emerson's notion of individualism and self-reliance are elaborated on at an individual and social levels. Self-actualization is the priority of individuals in Wilde's plays which, at the same time, remains compatible with his own theory of individualism.

Fifty years prior to the publication of the 'Soul of Man Under Socialism', Emerson claimed that "the world hates one fact that the soul becomes". Both Emerson and Wilde, agree that individualism is suppressed by society and if a man fails to stick to the "useful" work in order to commit himself to the cultivation of his soul, society "whips" him. For

this “aversion”, the society being “a joint-stock company” refers to the actions of the non-conformist individual as “selfish”:

“A man is called selfish if he lives in the manner that seems to him most suitable for the full realisation of his own personality”. (“Soul” 322)

The criticism of Victorian society is an integral part of these three comedy plays though, it has not been the main focus of this study. Rather, this thesis examines the reflections of Emerson’s philosophy of individualism, chiefly represented in *Self-Reliance*, in three of Wilde’s comedy plays. It is worth mentioning that these Emersonian echoes might be unintentionally brought into the plays by Wilde, as the two scholars shared similarities in their definitions of individualism.

An individual’s relation to his society has significance as he cannot wholly distance himself from society and needs to be among people since “A man must be clothed with society, or we shall feel a certain bareness and poverty [...]” (“Society and Solitude” 743) Like Emerson, Wilde refused individual’s reliance on property because it contradicts relying on the inner power of an individual. Moreover, the charity organizations were criticized by both scholars, a theme that is not explained in this thesis. Both Emerson and Wilde, did not recognize the necessity of charity and philanthropic organizations for various reasons, such as the charity organization’s lack of real contribution to the dignity of individuals and the hypocrisy and pretentious behavior of those who supported these organizations. What Wilde, in his three comedy plays, does not depict as a disadvantage of societies, is Emerson’s opinion about the negative effects of “civilization” on individual’s “aboriginal strength”. Emerson laments that man has lost some of his “skill” as a result of the emergence of more advanced technology.

Emerson invites the readers not to rely on “Fortune” or “Chance” or wait for the happiness to come; “you think good days are preparing for you. Do not believe it” (“S-R” 169). For Emerson, happiness only comes from within and fortune relies on one’s will and actions. Similarly, Wilde’s characters take the responsibilities for their happiness. A “good woman” such as Lady Windermere, believing in her role as the ultimate power which can

open the doors of either misery or happiness, takes the command of her life. She does not merely accept what life seems to have given her as her fate and through anxieties of decision making, she is portrayed as an individual struggling to find the best solution for her life, without considering others. All she does to the world outside herself, regarding her unwilling familiarity with Mrs. Erlynne, whom her husband, she imagines, has an affair with, is leaving a letter to her husband. This is compatible with Emerson's last sentence in *Self-Reliance* that "nothing can bring you peace but yourself" ("S-R" 169)

This study does not focus on the criticism of Victorian society. The other limitation in this thesis is the analyses on Wilde's use of language. Since the language of the characters and their dialogues in all the three comedy plays are comprehensively paradoxical, the language, producing a plurality of meanings, can be taken in both literal level and the deeper level. This study has analyzed the language of the plays largely on the literal level, since the aim of the study is a focus on Emerson's individualism and its reflections on the plays and is not set out to analyze the language. It is my opinion that taking the characters' language and dialogues beyond the literal meaning mostly serves to move the study beyond its intended focus.

This study has also been limited to using chiefly one of Emerson's essays, *Self-Reliance*, as a subtext. Further studies can be extended by utilizing Emerson's other essays particularly regarding the notion of nature and art, which are the two major themes on which the two scholars oppose each other. Emerson's essay on art and his appreciation of beauty in a more moderate way than Wilde, can be analyzed corresponding to the theme of art and beauty in Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Both Emerson and Wilde esteemed contemplation over action, as a "man thinking" can make his life happy and cultivate himself, no less than others. Yet, in reading Emerson's other essays, it becomes evident that he has less intense disregard to the notion of usefulness than Wilde. His belief in the practicality of an ideal individual is explained by Kateb as part of the concept of "Democratic Individualism" which can be analyzed and contrasted with Wilde's dandies in his comedy plays.

Emerson influenced generations of Americans such as Thoreau and Whitman, and, notably, in Europe, Nietzsche. According to Kateb, “Nietzsche was Emerson's best reader” (qtd. in Levine 225). Nietzsche held particular high regard for the essays “History” and “Self-Reliance”, and, in his journals stated that he had never “felt so much at home in a book.” Emerson’s glorification of man and his notion of the “great man” and “Over-Soul” may have contributed to the shaping of Nietzsche’s theory of the “Übermensch”. As Buell mentions “James and Nietzsche read, reread, marked, and annotated their copies of Emerson’s books; and in their emphases of thought and turns of expression both sometimes sound so Emersonian as to tempt one to think of them both what Nietzsche once declared, that Emerson felt like a kindred spirit” (Buell 218). Oscar Wilde and Emerson were both individualists whose writings reflected their high regards of individualism and their rejection of groups, communities and societies.

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## APPENDICES

### A. TURKISH SUMMARY/ TÜRKÇE ÖZET

#### EMERSON'IN SELF-RELIANCE'IN YANSIMALARI OSCAR WILDE'İN ÜÇ KOMEDİ OYUNLARI

Bu tez Wilde'nin komedi oyunlarından üçünü Emerson'un bireyciliğe dair kavramına bağlı özgüven kavramı ışığında analiz etmiştir. Çalışmanın kapsamındaki oyunlar, Lady Windermere'in Yelpazesi (1892), Önemsiz Bir Kadın (1893) ve Kibar Olmanın Önemi (1895) yıllar boyunca pek çok çalışma ve eleştirinin konusu olmuştur. Oyunlar, Victoria'nın değerlerini ve bireyin mücadelesini, toplumun sesi ve ahlaki, transgresyonları ve temsilleri, daha iyi bir kendini ifade etme konusundaki tutarsızlıkları ve çözümleri bağlamında yansıtır. Mutlu sonlar, Wilde in birey ve toplum arasında bir uzlaşma sağladığını gösterir.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, kendi kendine acı çeken bireyin büyüklüğünü öne süren birkaç makale yazan ünlü bir bireydi. Bu tezde Oscar Wilde'in komedi oyunlarından üçü, Bayan Windermere'in Fan'ı (1892), Önemi Olmayan Bir Kadın (1893) ve Kucaklaşmanın Önemi (1895), Emerson'un kendine özgü güven kavramı ışığında analiz edilmiştir. Bireycilik kavramı. Wilde, bu oyunlarda çeşitli karakterlerde bir dereceye kadar kendine güven ve bağımsızlık tasvir eder. Özgüvenin Emerson'un bireysellik tanımının özü olduğu için, Wilde'in üç komedi oyununun Emerson'un bireyciliği ile uyumlu olduğu söylenebilir. Emerson'un bireycilik tanımındaki oyunları incelemek, Bireycilik'in kendisi ile ilgili teori ve kuramlar hakkında bazı temel olgusal bilgileri gerektirir. Bu kavram doğası gereği çok karmaşık olduğu için, giriş bölümü esas olarak Emerson'un Wilde'in oyunlarındaki yansımalarını savunan gerekçeleri ortaya koyan bireycilik teorileri hakkındaki temel gerçeklere adanmıştır.

Emerson'un seçilmiş üç oyunda özgüven kavramının yansımaları vardır ve Emerson'un bireycilik tanımının özü olarak özgüven kavramı, oyunlardaki çeşitli karakterlerin eylemleri ve konuşmalarıyla uyumludur. Bireyler kendileriyle anlaşmaya ve kendi özgünlükleriyle kendilerini ifade etmeye, kendilerine güvenmeye, gerekli gördüklerinde kendi teorilerini bir kenara bırakmaya ve zaman zaman esnek olmaya bile zorlanırlar. Emerson'un bireysellik ve kendine güven kavramının bileşenleri bireysel ve toplumsal düzeylerde ayrıntılandırılır. Kendi kendini gerçekleştirme, Wilde'nin oyunlarındaki bireylerin önceliğidir, aynı zamanda kendi bireysel teorisiyle uyumlu kalır.

Emerson, “İnsanın Altında Olan Sosyalistlerin Ruhu” nun yayınlanmasından 50 yıl önce, “dünyanın ruhun ortaya çıktığı gerçeğinden nefret ettiğini” iddia etti. Hem Emerson hem de Wilde, bireyciliğin toplum tarafından bastırıldığına ve bir insanın ruhunun geliştirilmesi için “yararlı” işler yapmadığı surece toplum onu cezalandırır/ Bu “nefret” için, toplum “bir anonim şirket” olarak, konformist olmayan bireyin eylemlerini “bencil” olarak ifade eder.

Victoria toplumunun eleştirisi, bu üç komedi oyununun ayrılmaz bir parçası olsa da, bu çalışmanın ana odak noktası olmamıştır. Daha ziyade, bu tez Wilde'nin komedi oyunlarından üçünde Emerson'un Öz-Güvenlikte temsil edilen bireycilik felsefesinin yansımalarını incelemektedir. İki yazar da, bireyciliğin tanımlarında benzerlikler paylaştığından, bu Emersoncu yaklaşımın Wilde'nin oyunlarına da atfedilebileceğini belirtmek gerekir. Bireyin toplum ile olan ilişkisi, toplumdaki tamamen uzaklaşamayacağı ve. Bir insanın toplumla giyinmesi gerektiği, ya da belli bir sıkıntı ve yoksulluk hissedeceğimiz. Toplum ve Yalnızlık olması gerektiği için insanlar arasında olması gerektiği için önem taşımaktadır.

Wilde, Emerson gibi, bireyin mülküne güvenmesini reddeder, çünkü bu bireyin iç gücüne olan inancıyla çelişir. Dahası, hayır kurumları bu tezde açıklanmayan bir tema olan her iki bilim adamı tarafından da eleştirilmiştir. Hem Emerson hem de Wilde, hayır kurumlarının ve hayırsever kuruluşların, bireylerin onuruna ve bu örgütleri destekleyenlerin ikiyüzlülüğüne ve iddialı davranışlarına gerçek katkısı olmaması gibi

nedenlerden ötürü kabul etmez. Üç komedi oyunundaki Wilde'in, toplumların dezavantajı olarak göstermediği şey, Emerson'un “uygarlığın” bireylerin “aborijinal gücü” üzerindeki olumsuz etkileri hakkındaki düşüncesidir. Emerson, insanın daha ileri teknolojinin ortaya çıkması sonucu “yeteneğini” yitirdiğini düşünür.

Emerson okuyucuları “Talih” a güvenmemeye ya da mutluluğun gelmesini beklememeye davet eder; “İyi günler senin için hazırlanıyor sanıyorsun. İnanma. Emerson için, mutluluk sadece içten ve servetten gelir, birinin iradesi ve eylemlerine dayanır. Benzer şekilde, Wilde’in karakterleri thei’nin. Hem toplumda hem de birey ya da her ikisinde daha iyi bir yaşam için çözümler sunar ve yine de sorun, hangi bileşenin diğerine göre önceliği olduğudur. Emerson'un düşüncelerimizin “toplumun bizzat doğduğu ve ortadan kaybolduğu derinliğe kadar ulaştığını” söylediği gibi; soru nerede, hangisi önce, erkek mi erkek mi? Bireyin kaynağında kaybolduğu yer”.

Bu tez, Emerson'un kendi özgüvenine sahip bireyin kendi toplumu ile olan ilişkisine ve Wilde'nin üç komedi oyunundaki yansımalarına odaklanarak, Özgüven'e Öz-Güven'deki yazılarına bakar. Öz-Güven, öz-güven ve bireyciliğin unsurlarını hem kişisel hem de toplumsal düzeyde analiz eder.

Emerson, kendine güvenen bireylerin topluma çeşitli şekillerde fayda sağlayacağına inanmaktadır. Özgüven, “tutarlılık” dan kaçınarak ve yaşamlarında gerçek bir anlam arayışında olan, daha iyi bir toplum yaratan bireylerden oluşan bir toplumun temeli haline gelebilir. Emerson, özgüvenin başkalarını taklit etmediğini ve kendi içinde büyüklüğü aradığını ifade eder. Emerson'a göre, insanlar dünyadaki konumlarını kabul etmeli ve başkalarını taklit etmeden kendini geliştirmeye çalışmalıdır, çünkü “taklit intihar”.

Büyük insanlar her zaman orijinaldir ve toplumun kendilerine dikte ettiği şeyi izlemeyi reddeder. Emerson'un “Her bir tarihin, az sayıdaki azimli ve özverili kişinin biyografisine kolayca dönüştüğü” Öz-Güven'e ilişkin ifadesi, iki eserde, makalesinin tarihi ve tekrar “Büyük İnsanların Kullanımları” nda yeniden ifade edilmiştir. “Her iki deneme de Plato ve Shakespeare gibi etkili figürlerin hayatlarını kapsamaktadır. Kişinin karakteri her

zaman kendine özgü ve bireyseldir, fakat kolayca “yanlış anlaşılabilir” olabilir. Kendi kendine güven kavramı, bireyin gelişiminin ötesine geçer ve toplumun ve toplumun kurumlarının eleştirilmesini sağlar. Dini, siyasi ve hayır kurumları, felsefeleri akıllarımız için yarışan ve kurallarına, ritüellerine ve geleneklerine uygunluk gerektiren bu kısıtlayıcı toplumların bir parçasıdır. Emerson, bireyi ayakta durmaya ve kendine güvenmeye çağırır. Kilise bakanıyla sınırlı ve “fikir topluluklarına” bağlı bir örnek oluşturur ve sonuç olarak özgün ve bağımsız olarak düşünen bir birey olmayı başaramaz.

"Bireycilik" terimi, fikirlerin tarihinin tartışmalı bir mefhumudur ve kullanımı çok değişkendir ve kökenini takip etmeyi zorlaştırmaktadır. Weber, “anamların en yüksek heterojenliğini benimsiyor” terimini yazmıştır: Bireycilik felsefi doktrinleri, bireyin kendine güveni, kendi kaderini tayin etme, öz-otorite, bağımsızlık ve kendi kendini gerçekleştirme üzerine odaklanır; farklı boyutlarda, terimin kendisinin varyasyonları ve onun zamanının özgül sosyal, politik ve ekonomik hareketleri ile birleştiği anlamı “birey” kelimesi, “bölünmez, ayrılmaz” bir şey anlamına gelen ortaçağ Latince “bireyus” dan İngilizce'ye gelir. , terim bölünemeyen bir varlığa atıfta bulunur, “tek, atomik bir şey”.

Swart, Batı medeniyetindeki bireyci bir zihniyetin, Hıristiyanlığın doğuşu ve büyümesi, burjuvazinin ve kapitalizmin yükselişi, Rönesans, Protestanlık, Aydınlanma felsefesi gibi zaman içinde birtakım fikirler ve olaylar nedeniyle ortaya çıktığını ve evrimleştiğini not eder. ve Romantizm. Bilim adamlarına göre, “bireycilik” terimi her zaman olumlu bir şekilde kullanılmamıştır ve 19. yüzyılın ortalarında yazarların çoğunluğu “bireycilik” in 1840'ların ve 1850'lerin başına kadar politik ve sosyal düzen için ciddi bir sorunu temsil ettiğine inanmaktadır. Bireycilik kavramına yönelik olumsuz tavırlar, daha olumlu görüşlere yol açmaya başladı.

Swart'a göre, söz, ilk olarak toplumun parçalanmasına, aynı zamanda toplumun atomlaşmasına atıfta bulunmak için ilk olarak ortaya çıktı. Birçok politik ve sosyal muhafazakârlar Fransız Devrimi'ne ve insanın bireysel haklarına dair doktrinlerin bu ayrışmanın ana sebebi olduğuna inanıyorlardı. Teokratlardan etkilenen bazı Fransız yazarların anti-bireyci tutumları, terimin kullanımını getirdi. Swart, bu “anti-bireyci” leri,

Aziz Simon'un takipçileri olduklarından beri, Aziz Simon'a atıfta bulunduğunu açıklar; Swart'a göre, “Anarşi” ve “egoizm” le Aydınlanma ve Fransız Devrimi'ne atfedilir. Ölümünden sonra, 1825'te, takipçileri "bireyselleşme" terimini tasarladılar. Bu terim ilk olarak 1836'da Fransızca sözlüklerde yer aldı ve bir Fransız avukatı tarafından "şimdiye kadar bilinmeyen bir kötülüğü karakterize etmek için gerekli olan yeni bir kelime" olarak tanımlandı: Dilbilimcilerin kendi başına bırakmaları gereken oldukça tuhaf bir terim. Tabii ki, kökenini kazandıkları kazara kötülükle birlikte ortadan kalkacağından [...]”.

On sekizinci yüzyılın sonunda, romantizmin ortaya çıkışıyla, norm ve inançlardaki tekdüzeliğin önemi azaldı. Bilim adamları İngiliz Romantizminin Amerikan Transendentalizmine de ilham verdiğini düşünüyorlar. Her iki hareket de toplumun sanayileşmesi ve varoluş ilkelerine olan bağlılığından kaynaklanıyordu ve her ikisi de 18. ve 19. yüzyılda yeni gelişmelerle ortaya çıkan bilimsel keşiflere duyulan tepkiden kaynaklanıyordu ve bu nedenle her ikisi de Aydınlanma ve “Yaş Akılına Karşı Tepkiler” idi. ”. Her iki hareket de doğayı şehir hayatından sığınak olarak konumlandırdı ve yalnız insan kendi duygularına derinden gitmeye ve yalnızlığıyla kendini hissetmeye teşvik edildi. Romantizm, özgünlük ve deha ekledi. Toplum ve birey arasındaki çatışma vurgulanmış ve kaba ve filistin dünyasına bağlanma konusunda ekilmiş bir yalnızlık tercih edilmiştir. Swart, Romantiklerin “öznelliği, bireyselliği, çok yönlülüğü ve çeşitliliği sadece kaçınılmaz değil, hatta arzu edilebilir” olarak nitelendirdiğini belirtiyor.

Emerson, Amerikan Transendentalizminin ana figürlerinden biriydi ve onun felsefesi, her bireyin bir hakikatin parçası olan ve içsel-benliğine bakan bir ruhani güce sahip olması, kendi kişisel ahlaki ve ahlaki rehberliğini elde etmesiydi. Bu nedenle, Emerson için bir birey evrenin özüdür ve evrensel bir gerçek olduğu için, gerçekleri toplumun geri kalanına karşı değildir. Bir birey doğasında iyidir, çünkü o Tanrı'nın bir parçasıdır. Hem transendentalizm hem de romantizm, doğayı yalnızca toplumdan bir sığınak olarak değil, aynı zamanda daha yüksek ve daha iyi bir benlik anlayışına ulaşmak için bir fırsat olarak gördü. Her iki hareket için de en yaygın duygular öne çıkıyor ve kişinin sezgisi doğru ve kutsaldır.

Ancak, bilim adamları Emerson'un Transandantalizminin doğasında dini olduğuna ve bu yüzden çoğunlukla estetik, etik ve politik bir hareket olan Romantizmden farklı olduğuna inanmaktadır. Romantizmin içinde yer alan ticarist ve sanayici toplumdaki doğaya sığınan, Transandantalistlerin inandığı gibi, herkesin içinde bulunduğu manevi kutsallığa güçlü bir şekilde vurgu yapmadı. Swart tarafından onaylanan, çeşitliliğin, özgünlüğün ve Yalnızlığın romantizmin temelleri olarak takdir edilmesi, kısa bir süre sonra uç noktalarına döndü ve sözde eleştiriye yol açan “şüpheli değerler”, “tuhaf değerler arayışı” ve “tecrit” üzerindeki kaygıları beraberinde getirdi. Romantik idealin “nihilist” ve “atomist” eğilimleri. Fransız yazarlar, Goethe ve Byron gibi romantik yazarların sosyal sorumsuz tutumlarını eleştirdiler ve edebiyatın “hayaller ve fantazi dünyasına” olan çöküşünden endişe ediyorlardı. Fransız yazarlar Gautier ile 1850'lerde faydacılık felsefesinde karşılıklı bir ilgisizlik şekillendi. Decadence hareketinin şekillendirici figürleri olan Balzac ve Baudelaire, İngiltere'deki daha sonraki hareketi büyük ölçüde etkilemiş olan Aestheticism olarak adlandırılmıştır. Oscar Wilde, Estetikçiliği ve sanatın özerkliğini destekleyen en önemli yazarlardan biriydi.

Alimler'in Amerika'daki iç savaştan sonra inandıkları, “bireycilik” kavramının, sadece söz konusu tarihsel arka planın bir sonucu olarak değil, aynı zamanda ulusal kimlik üzerindeki vurgularından dolayı, Amerikan ideolojisinin bir parçası haline geldiğinden bahsetmek de önemlidir. Emerson'un transandantalist fikirleri, Amerikalıları kendi kendilerine güvenmeye davet etti ve yalnızca bireyin kendi içinde “her biri” nin içerdiği aynı şekilde Avrupa doğumlu ideolojilere güvenmiyor. Emerson için toplumların atomlaşması, bireyciliğin toplumları da yükseltmesinden dolayı tehlikeli değildir; “Sendika sadece tüm birimler izole edildiğinde mükemmeldir. [...] Birliğin gerçek bireycilikte ideal olması gerekir ”.

Amerikan toplumunda Emerson'un din ve entelektüelliğe olan etkisine yansıyan Harold Bloom'a notlar:ama Emerson, Amerikan evine (olduğu gibi) kendi kendine güven konusunda bahse girer, ki bu bir yalnızlık öğretisidir. Whitman, leylaklar gibi kişi ve şiirsel maske olarak, hem kendilik hem de başkaları hakkında yoğun bakım veren bir tekillik içinde gelişti, ama Emersonian bilinci, çok sık Hamlet-gibi, hem kendiliğe hem

de diğlerleri. Emerson'dan bu yana ABD, “umut partisi” ve “hafıza partisi” olarak adlandırdığı şey arasında bölünmüştü. Solun ve sağın entelektüelleri her ikisi de Emerson'u ata olarak iddia ediyorlar.

Dilworth'a göre, Emerson, kendi kendini ve kendini tanıma kavramında, Hegel'in “Zeitgeist” kavramından kısmen etkilenmiştir. Hegel'in etkili zihin fenomeni, 1806'da, Emerson'un Özgüveninden yaklaşık kırk yıl önce ortaya çıktı. Onun ahlaki ve politik felsefesi, hem Nazizm hem de Komünizm ve özellikle Marx'ın da dahil olduğu daha sonraki ulusalcı teorileri etkiledi. Ancak, Mutlak İdealizm'in temeli olan “gerçekin rasyonel ve rasyonel gerçek olduğu” inancı, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Goethe, Nietzsche ve Emerson gibi daha sonraki filozoflar tarafından reddedildi. Hegel'in Zeitgeist kavramında, bireysel yaratıcılık, tarihin daha geniş açılımının bir parçası olarak “zamanın ruhu” na katlanır ve böylece tarih ve doğa, ruhun otobiyografisi haline gelir. Bu kavram, Emerson'un evrensel gerçek felsefesinde rezonansa girdi, fakat Hegel'in bu değişimi, muhalif güçler arasında diyalektik bir süreç olarak rasyonelleştirmesiyle farklılaşırken, Emerson'ın kendi kendine güven ahlakında kaydedilen felsefesi, doğada yazışmaların daha olumlu olan hukukuna dayanıyordu. Bu nedenle, Emerson'un mantığı, özellikle Hegel'in kolektif ahlakını reddeden, yaratıcı deha açısından, liberal demokratik bireyciliği destekledi.

Emerson'un bireyciliği özünde kendi kendine güven kavramına sahiptir. Bireyi, tutarlılığı ve uygunluğa doğru çekecek güçleri kaçınılmaz olarak direnen özgür bir bireyciliğe vurgu yapar. Yine de, bu tam bağımlılık ve benliğe olan güven, yalnızca bir muhalefet ve uygunluk ve tutarlılıktan “kaçınma” yoluyla uygulanabilir. Emerson, bireyin egemenliğine bağlıydı ve bireyin kendi ideolojilerini, inançlarını, ahlakını, dinini ve siyasetini seçmesi gerektiğine inanıyordu. Birey, başkalarının değerlerini ve inançlarını tanıyarak ve bunlara tolerans gösterirken kendi otoritesi olarak düşünmeli ve davranmalı ve kendi mesleklerine bağlılık göstermelidir. Toplum ve birey arasındaki gerilimlerle ilgili olarak, Özgüven Öz-güdümlü Emerson, bağımsız ve kendine güvenen bireyin alışkanlıklarını ayrıntılarıyla özetlemektedir.

Çünkü Emerson'un kendine güveni, basit uygunsuzluktan ve kendine güvenmekten daha ileri gider. Özgüvenin temel yönü, gerçekle doğru bir ilişkidir; Ancak, gerçek şu ki, Emerson'a göre çok yönlü. Gerçek yaşam öğemizdir, ancak bir kişi dikkatini gerçeğin tek bir yönüne bağlar ve kendini uzun süre yalnız başına bırakırsa, gerçek çarpıtılır ve kendi başına değil. Gerçek, farklı boyutlara sahip olduğu için, Emerson, bireyin kendi gerçekliğini araştırması ve sezgiye güvenmesi gerektiğine inanarak, yaşamı boyunca yolculuğundaki tüm kişisel ve sosyal kısıtlamalardan kendisini kopardı. Emerson, aklın “ilk özelliğinin”, “ayrılacağını” ve sosyal sözleşmeleri ve kendi geçmişini reddettiğini iddia eder; bir kişi kendini “şimdi” olarak anlar.

Bu, işaret ettiğim Aklın ilk özelliğidir; zihin ayrılır. Bir insan her duyum, algı ve sezginin bir nesnesini yapabildiği için orantısaldır; Bir yabancıya bakmadan onu engelleyebilecek herhangi bir düşünce ya da hisle ilişkisi olmadığı sürece. Walt Whitman, Emerson'un, bireylere karşı tavrında “bir tarafa bakmadığı veya bir tarafa bakmadığını” ancak “her tarafı” gördüğünü söyler: Onun son etkisi, öğrencilerinin herhangi bir şeye ibadet etmesini sağlamaktır — neredeyse her şeyin dışında, kendi kendilerine inanmaya son vermektir. Daha fazla, Emerson bireyin sosyal ve tarihsel geçmişine dayanarak ve bir dereceye kadar dayandığını vurgular. "Kültürü" adlı makalesinde, bireyin toplumda çocuk sahibi olmam gerektiğini, olaylarının olması gerektiğini, sosyal bir devlet ve tarihin ya da benim düşüncem ve konuşma bedenim olması gerektiğini söyleyerek sürekli bir gerilim durumunda olduğunu belirtir.

“Amerikan Akademisi” nde (1837), sıradan bir “İnsan düşüncesini” bir “alim” olarak nitelendirirken, Emerson, bireyin geçmişinin, aklına büyük bir önem atfetmiş olduğunu kabul eder; geçmiş deneyimleri. Eğer bu başarılırsa, geçmiş bir öğretmen olur ve insan geçmişin öğrencisi olur: “Gerçekten de, her insan bir öğrenci değil midir?” Gerçekten de, Emerson'a göre, bir birey kendi deneyimlerinden edebiyat okumaktan çok daha fazlasını öğrenebilir. sanat, bilim, vb. “Amerikan Bilgin” indeki Emerson, bireyi kendi yargılarını hafife almama konusunda uyarır ve bunları kurumlardan alınan öğrenme ile değiştirmemek için uyarır. Bununla birlikte, Emerson, bireyin hayatındaki kurumsal eğitimin “vazgeçilmez” olduğunu kabul eder. Elbette, bilge bir insana oldukça

vazgeçilmez bir okuma bölümü vardır. Tarih ve kesin bilim, zahmetli okuma ile öğrenmesi gerekir. Kolejler, benzer şekilde, öğelerini öğretmek için vazgeçilmez ofisi var. Ancak, sadece sondaj yapmamalarını istediklerinde, ancak yaratmak için bize çok hizmet edebilirler; çeşitli dahilerin her ışınını misafirperver salonlarına topladıkları zaman, ve yoğun ateşlerle, gençlerin kalplerini ateşe atarlar. Düşünce ve bilgi, aygıtın ve önyargının hiçbir şeyden yararlanamadığı doğaldır. Önlükler ve maddi vakıflar, altın şehirleri olsa da, asla en az cümle ya da hece hükmü olamaz. Wilde, birey ve toplum arasındaki ilişki ile ilgili olarak benzer bir düşünceye sahiptir ve hayatın her alanında taklitliği reddeder. Wilde, “ahlaki ve hayattaki tüm taklitlerin yanlış olduğunu” iddia ederek, taklitin “en içten bir hakaret şekli” olabileceğine inanır.

Emerson ve Wilde, her iki şekilde de, kişisel hayatlarında kendi teorilerine göre hareket etmişlerdir. 1832'de yazdığı “The Lord's Supper” yazısında Emerson, dini düşüncelerini ve birkaç yıl önce bakanlıktan ayrılma nedenlerini ve “İlahiyat Okulu Adresinde” ve her bireyin “yalnız başına gitmesini”; iyi modelleri reddetmek, hatta erkeklerin hayalinde kutsal olanları ve arabulucu ya da peçe olmadan Tanrı'yı sevmeye cesaret edenler ”. Emerson için, gerçek din, toplumda yaygın olanlar olamaz; çünkü bu dinler ve mezhepleri, bir bireyin dışında büyük bir şey peşinde koşarken, birey gerçekten “evrenle özgün bir ilişki” arayışında olmalıdır. İyilik ve ahlak, “büyük toplumlar ve ölü kurumlardan” elde edilemez, ancak içeriden gelmelidir.

Bu nedenle, özgüven ilerledikçe, toplumlar da ilerledikçe, özgüven bir toplumsal değişim getirir. Emerson, antislavery, kadın hakları, eğitim ve çalışma reformu gibi herhangi bir nedenin taahhüdünü reddetti. Bunun yerine, Emerson toplumun tüm üyelerinde kendine güvenerek ve dünyanın mevcut adaletsizliklerine odaklanmak yerine kendimizin değerinin ve onurunun takdir edilmesinde elde edilebilen evrensel bir ilerlemeye inanıyordu. Özgüvende, Emerson toplumu bireyin ilerleyişine engel olarak algılar ve “uygunluk” kelimesinin “gazlı ve alay konusu” olmasını ister. Bir insan kalbine itaat etmeyi başarabilmek için kendi yüreğine itaat etmeli ve sen de dünyayı yeniden üretmelisin.

Kişinin kalbine uymak, başkalarına karşı gelmek ve beklentilerini reddetmekle sonuçlanabilir. Wilde, Emerson'unkine benzer bir düşünceye sahiptir ve toplumu bir bireycilik ve kendine güven için bir engel olarak görmektedir ve itaatsizliğe “orijinal bir erdem” olarak atıfta bulunmaktadır: Tarih okumuş olanların gözünde itaatsizlik, erkeğin orijinal erdemidir. İtaatsizlik ve isyan yoluyla ilerlemenin yapılmadığı bir itaatsizliktir. Hem Emerson hem de Wilde, kendine güvenen bir bireyin uygunsuzluğuna vurgu yapıyor çünkü toplumun karşı çıkması ve kendine güvenen bir erkeğin toplumun en büyük tomurcuğuna karşı kararlı kalması gerekiyor. Victoria İngiltere'sinde toplum, çağdaş beklentilere uygun davranmayan bireyleri reddetti. İyi Toplumun Davranışları ve Zekası: ya da Önlenecek Solecisms, Aristokratlığın bir üyesi tarafından ilk olarak 1876'da yayınlandı. Okuyucular şu konularda tavsiyelerde bulunuyor: İyi bir toplumda ne yapıldığını, ne yapılmadığını ve nasıl yapıldığını İyi toplumda ne yapılmalı? Tam olarak bu bilgi sahibine, hareket edeceği herhangi bir alanda rahatlıkla hissetme bilincini verir ve ona, temas kurabildiği herkes tarafından “iyi yetiştirilmiş” olarak görülmesine neden olur. Bir “solecizm” belki de kendi içinde olabilir, ancak önemsiz bir konu olabilir, fakat toplumun gözünde büyük bir işlendiği kişi üzerinde dezavantajlı olarak; Doğrudan çıkarsama, bir “solecizm” i işleyen suçlunun topluma kullanılmamasını ve sonuçta eşit bir temelde olmadığını iddia eder. Bu toplum buna razı olur ve davetsiz misafirlere karşı tavrından duyduğu hoşnutsuzluğu gidermede yavaş değildir (ix).

Aslında Wilde, Victoria dönemi sonlarında İngiltere'deki sosyal itaatsizliğin sonuçlarının, McCormack'ın “bir dışlama politikası” dediği gibi olduğunu gösteriyor. McCormack, Dürüstlük'te, o zamandaki toplumun “hoşgörünün tedirginliği” ve “tehdit ettiği ya da tehdit ettiği görülüyordu - huzursuz güvenlik” tarafından reddedildiğine dikkat çekiyor. Uygunsuzluk, dışsallığa yol açacaktır. Bu dışlama, Bayan Windermere'nin Hayranında ve Önemsiz Bir Kadın'da hem Bayan Erlyne hem de Bayan Arbuthnot tarafından da belirtilmiştir. Bayan Windermere'nin hayranı Bayan Erlyne, kızını “çukura” düşmekten ve dışlanmadan acı çekmekten kurtarmaya çalışır: Çukura düşmenin ne olduğunu bilmezsin, küçümsemek, alay etmek, terk etmek, sinsice atılmak - bir çıkış olmak! kapıyı bire karşı kapatmak, çirkin byways tarafından sürünmek zorunda kalmak, her an korkarak maske yüzünden sıyrılmak zorundadır.

“Düşmüş bir kadın” için toplumdan dışlanma, asla Bayan Erlynn'e göre devam etmeyecektir: Ne olduğunu bilmiyorsunuz. Biri günahı için öder ve sonra biri tekrar öder ve hayatının bedeli öder. Bu çalışma ayrıca, Emerson'un makalelerinden biri olan Öz-Güven'in bir alt metni olarak kullanılmasıyla sınırlı kalmıştır. Emerson'un diğer makalelerini, özellikle iki bilimcinin birbirine karşı çıktığı iki ana tema olan doğa ve sanat nosyonuyla ilgili olarak daha fazla çalışma genişletilebilir. Emerson'un sanat üzerine yazdığı ve Wilde'den daha ılımlı bir şekilde güzelliğe olan takdiri, Wilde'ın The Dorian Gray adlı eserinde yer alan sanat ve güzellik temasına uygun olarak analiz edilebilir. Hem Emerson hem de Wilde, bir “insan düşüncesi” olarak, hayatını başkalarından daha az değil, kendini mutlu edip geliştirebileceği için, eylem üzerinde tefekkürü saygınlıştırdı. Yine de, Emerson'un diğer makalelerini okurken, Wilde'dan daha yararlı olma düşüncesine daha az önem verdiği açıktır. İdeal bireyin pratikliğine olan inancı, Kateb tarafından, komedi oyunlarında Wilde'ın dandileriyle analiz edilebilecek ve karşılaştırılabilecek “Demokratik Bireycilik” kavramının bir parçası olarak açıklanmaktadır.

Emerson, Thoreau ve Whitman gibi Amerikalıların ve özellikle de Avrupa, Nietzsche gibi nesillerdir. Kateb'e göre, “Nietzsche, Emerson'un en iyi okuyucusuydu”. Nietzsche, “Tarih” ve “Kendine Güven” denemeleriyle ilgili yüksek saygılı bir duruş sergiledi ve dergilerinde, “bir kitapta evde hiç bu kadar çok şey hissetmediğini” belirtti. Emerson'ın insanoğlunun yüceltilmesi ve “harika” nosyonu Adam ve “Aşırı Ruh” Nietzsche'nin “Übermensch” teorisinin şekillenmesine katkıda bulunmuş olabilir. Buell'in bahsettiği gibi, James ve Nietzsche, Emerson'un kitaplarının kopyalarını okur, tekrar okur, işaretler ve açıklamalıdır; ve düşüncelerini ve ifade dönemlerini vurgularken, ikisi de bazen birisini, bir zamanlar Nietzsche'nin ilan ettiği şeyi, Emerson'un bir kibar ruh gibi hissettiklerini düşünmeye itecek kadar güvendiğini söylerler”. Oscar Wilde ve Emerson, yazıları bireyciliğini ve gruplarını, topluluklarını ve toplumlarını reddettiklerini yansıtan bireylerdi.

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