

## Background

The poem "Funeral Blues" was first published in 1938 but it is significant to note that in W.H. Auden's *Collected Poetry* (1945), this poem is found at poem 30 in a section entitled "Song and Other Musical Pieces", making it explicit that the poem is also a musical piece. It has become famous in France as it was read in the film *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994) starring John Hannah (Mathew) paying tribute to his partner Gareth (Simon Callow) at his funeral.



**W.H. AUDEN** (1907-1973) was a British poet and critic. He was renowned for his ability to write in various verse forms and for his wit. He moved to the United States in 1939 where he became an American citizen in 1946. He has influenced a great number of writers.

## NOW, YOU CAN READ AND ENJOY THE TEXT

### "Funeral Blues" (1938) by W.H. Auden

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,  
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,  
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum  
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

5 Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead  
Scribbling on the sky the message 'He is Dead'.  
Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,  
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

10 He was my North, my South, my East and West,  
My working week and my Sunday rest,  
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;  
I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now; put out every one,  
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun,  
15 Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;  
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

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## VOCABULARY

to bark: *aboyer*  
drum: *tambour*  
coffin: *cercueil*

mourners: *amis du défunt,*  
*cortège funèbre*  
bows: *nœuds*

doves: *colombes*  
gloves: *gants*  
rest: *repos*



**Oscar WILDE**  
(1854-1900)

wrote plays  
(*The Importance of Being Earnest*, *An Ideal Husband*, 1895),  
poems, and a novel (*The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) – all influenced by aestheticism and criticizing the conventional values and hypocrisy of Victorian society.

*This scene takes place in Algernon's London flat very soon after the beginning of the play. Lane is the manservant.*

ALGERNON: Why is it that at a bachelor's establishment the servants invariably drink the champagne? I ask merely for information.

LANE: I attribute it to the superior quality of the wine, sir. I have often observed that in married households the champagne is rarely of a first-rate brand.

5 ALGERNON: Good heavens! Is marriage so demoralising as that?

LANE: I believe it IS a very pleasant state, sir. I have had very little experience of it myself up to the present. I have only been married once. That was in consequence of a misunderstanding between myself and a young person.

ALGERNON: (*Languidly.*) I don't know that I am much interested in your family life, Lane.

LANE: No, sir; it is not a very interesting subject. I never think of it myself.

ALGERNON: Very natural, I am sure. That will do, Lane, thank you.

LANE: Thank you, sir. (*Lane goes out.*)

ALGERNON: Lane's views on marriage seem somewhat lax<sup>2</sup>. Really, if the lower orders don't set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them? They seem, as a class, to have absolutely no sense of moral responsibility.

(*Enter Lane.*)

LANE: Mr Ernest Worthing.

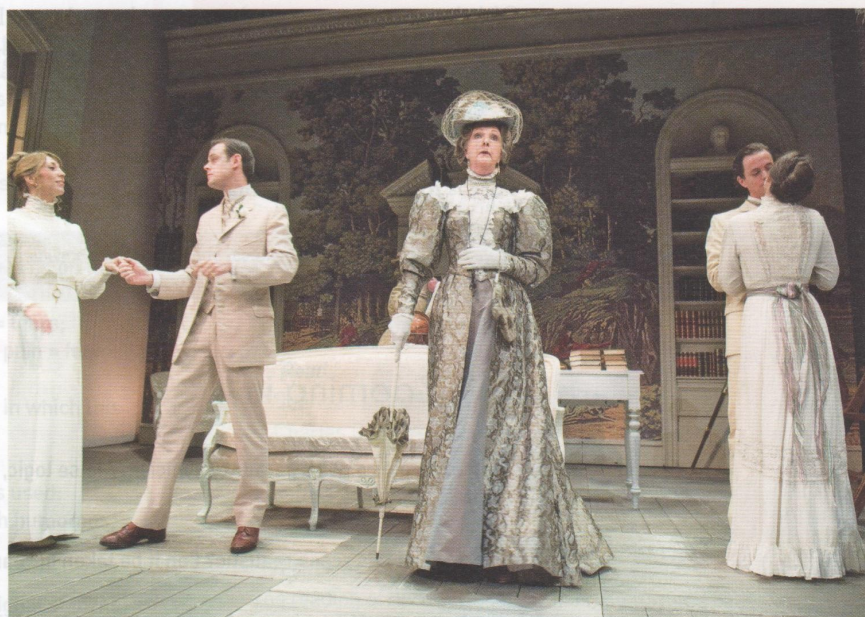
(*Enter Jack.*) (*Lane goes out.*)

20 ALGERNON: How are you, my dear Ernest? What brings you up to town?

JACK: Oh, pleasure, pleasure! What else should bring one anywhere? Eating as usual, I see, Algy!

ALGERNON: (*Stiffly.*) I believe it is customary in good society to take some slight refreshment at five o'clock. Where have you been since last Thursday?

25 JACK: (*Sitting down on the sofa.*) In the country.



*The Importance of Being Earnest*, directed by Peter GILL, London, 2008

ALGERNON: What on earth do you do there?

JACK: (*Pulling off his gloves.*) When one is in town one amuses oneself. When one is in the country one amuses other people. It is excessively boring.

ALGERNON: And who are the people you amuse?

30 JACK: (*Airily.*) Oh, neighbours, neighbours.

ALGERNON: Got nice neighbours in your part of Shropshire?

JACK: Perfectly horrid! Never speak to one of them.

ALGERNON: How immensely you must amuse them! (*Goes over and takes sandwich.*) By the way, Shropshire is your county, is it not?

35 JACK: Eh? Shropshire? Yes, of course. Hallo! Why all these cups? Why cucumber sandwiches? Why such reckless<sup>3</sup> extravagance in one so young? Who is coming to tea?

ALGERNON: Oh! merely Aunt Augusta and Gwendolen.

JACK: How perfectly delightful!

40 ALGERNON: Yes, that is all very well; but I am afraid Aunt Augusta won't quite approve of your being here.

JACK: May I ask why?

ALGERNON: My dear fellow, the way you flirt with Gwendolen is perfectly disgraceful. It is almost as bad as the way Gwendolen flirts with you.

45 JACK: I am in love with Gwendolen. I have come up to town expressly to propose<sup>4</sup> to her.

ALGERNON: I thought you had come up for pleasure?... I call that business.

JACK: How utterly unromantic you are!

50 ALGERNON: I really don't see anything romantic in proposing. It is very romantic to be in love. But there is nothing romantic about a definite proposal. Why, one may be accepted. One usually is, I believe. Then the excitement is all over. The very essence of romance is uncertainty. If ever I get married, I'll certainly try to forget the fact.

55 JACK: I have no doubt about that, dear Algy. The Divorce Court was specially invented for people whose memories are so curiously constituted.

ALGERNON: Oh! there is no use speculating on that subject. Divorces are made in Heaven—(*Jack puts out his hand to take a sandwich. Algernon at once interferes.*) Please don't touch the cucumber sandwiches. They are ordered specially for Aunt Augusta. (*Takes one and eats it.*)

60 JACK: Well, you have been eating them all the time.

ALGERNON: That is quite a different matter. She is my aunt.

1. a bachelor: un célibataire 2. lax: relâché 3. reckless: imprudent, irresponsable  
4. to propose: demander en mariage

### Zooming in

- 1 Find examples of wit / paradox / cynicism / false logic, creating a comic effect.
- 2 Can you call this scene realistic? Can it be taken in "earnest"?
- 3 What aspects of Victorian society are criticized here? (Think in terms of marriage, hypocrisy, appearances and social class.)