

## drama

## UT's 'Earnest' has flaws

Oscar Wilde was a renowned wit in London during the Decadent movement, and one of the leading proponents of "art for art's sake," along with Whistler and Beaudelaire.

Rising on the crest of the Aesthete wave, he came to the notice of the general public through the release of his novel, "The Picture of Dorian Gray," and his dandyism. He included among his contemporaries Aubrey Beardsley, Max Beerbohm, J.K. Huysmans, Arthur Symons, and, most significant, Lord Alfred "Bosie" Douglas.

Wilde's intimacy with this "Fair-haired boy" led to a trial, his subsequent imprisonment, and expulsion from London society.

Just prior to this tragedy, Wilde's play, "The Importance of Being Earnest," had enjoyed an enthusiastic reception by London audiences. Through the characters in his play, Wilde found immortalization of his own views.

From the lips of the two principal characters, John Worthing and Algernon Moncrieff, spout epigrams employed by Wilde himself in clubs and cafes of London and Paris. Almost devoid of independent expression among characters, the play is merely a vehicle for the philosophy of decadence.

It is upon this rather important point that the University Theater's production of "The Importance of Being Earnest" falters.

The blatant departure from the attitude reflected in the lines themselves is evidenced in a style of acting which occasionally borders upon slapstick. Lloyd Brass's portrayal of the character Algernon Moncrieff, though for the most part highly amusing, periodically deteriorated into childish mimicry and insipid scamperings.

Although, in the play, Algernon is distinguished from Worthing by his youth and flippant character, this distinction was made over-obvious by his acting.

The other prominent male character, John Worthing, was played exceedingly well by T. Blake Conley. The interaction between these two characters provided many amusing repartees.

The feminine counterparts, Gwendolen Fairfax as played by Katherine Swink and Cecily Cardew, by Marie Hahn, while for the most part fulfilling their roles, in some instances fell prey to pert wholesomeness, a quality that is, in actuality, conspicuously absent from decadent literature.

The other members of the cast were Jack Watson as Rev. Canon Chasuble, D.D., Richard Turnbow as the butler Merriman, and Jacqueline McClure as Lady Bracknell, with exceptional performances given by Diana Barber as Miss Prism, Robert Boyt as the butler Lane, and the members of the production workshop class on set construction.

Despite insensitive direction, as seen in the misinterpretation of the roles, and indeed the period, the performances are, for the most part, commendable, and the production is highly entertaining.

C. Margit Sperling  
Laura K. Smith

## poetry

I wish to admit my youth, my inexperience and "greenness" as a poet, scholar, reviewer, teacher, man . . . and in general relate myself to professor Nathanael Tarn as a student **should** to a teacher, with all confidence that he'd take my comments with tolerance and understanding should they ever chance to cross his eyes.

His fields of study and-or teaching have included Cuban voodoo, Asian religious cults, anthropology and literature, and of course they all sing in him and mirror each other. The work he read from last Friday night (in the cozy old EMU Browsing Room) is called *Lyrics for the Bride of God*. She is the shekinah. The word is for the "glory of the Lord" in the ancient Hebrew texts, but, if I understood Tarn correctly, it had mutated in definition through the centuries in Jewish tradition until it referred to a mystical female being who gathered together the sparks of the eternal in her people Israel and brought them back to God, her husband. The poem was divided into four sections of a circle, with (as I recall) "The Kitchen" in the North, "America" in the west, "Dante Aligheri" in the south, and something foreign to me in the east. Each section was full of its poems and growing, with no end in sight. Professor Tarn read selections from "The Kitchen" and "America" before I had to leave near the end.

The idea of it was fascinating. Shekinah, the glory of the Lord, a masculine presence, metamorphosing through time and man into the female Bride. Israel was always pictured as God's bride by the prophets, and the day of His glory was always imagined as that of her glorification, as is meet for a wedding day. Coupled with the sacred Hebraic marriage of lifelong monogamy ("bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh" . . . "and they shall be one flesh"), this spiritual metamorphosis through time and man takes on much more significance than a mere corruption of definition. The idea of Eve being a degeneration of Adam because she was derived from him is human ignorance of divine decree. The glory of the Lord is the glory of His people Israel, the glory of God is that of His Bride, and the "man" and the "woman" are one "flesh." Selah.

What's fascinating is the synthesis of East and West achieved. The concept of yin and yang is prevalent and popular among Westerners because of its universality, but, like so many concepts from the East, it lacks personality—to the Westerner. And it willingly sacrifices its Eastern personality for the sake of the Westerner's enjoyment of it as an abstract, and both parties lose, though the simple gain of pure exchange seems fit recompense. Professor Tarn has mated the Hebraic mysticism and the Eastern mysticisms of the same trinity: man, woman, and manwoman, in God. (Did you know that before the Fall Adam and Eve were simply "the Adam," an entity both male and female?) The result is richness, fullness and life (content) to the Western spirit, and body, personality, and force (form) to the Eastern. Yin and Yang are God and His people (Bride), the white light is Someone, love is a Person, both male and female, in the order each must be. Shekinah.

Michael Heffley

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