

**2006 AP<sup>®</sup> ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION**  
**FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS**

**Question 2**

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

The following passage is an excerpt from *Lady Windermere's Fan*, a play by Oscar Wilde, produced in 1892. Read the passage carefully. Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how the playwright reveals the values of the characters and the nature of their society.

Line DUCHESS OF BERWICK (*shaking hands*). Dear  
Margaret, I am so pleased to see you. You remember  
Agatha,<sup>1</sup> don't you? How do you do, Lord  
Darlington? I won't let you know my daughter, you  
5 are far too wicked.

LORD DARLINGTON. Don't say that, Duchess.  
As a wicked man I am a complete failure. Why, there  
are lots of people who say I have never really done  
anything wrong in the whole course of my life. Of  
10 course they only say it behind my back.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. Isn't he dreadful?  
Agatha, this is Lord Darlington. Mind you don't  
believe a word he says. No, no tea, thank you, dear.  
(*Sits on sofa.*) We have just had tea at Lady Markby's.  
15 Such bad tea, too. It was quite undrinkable. I wasn't at  
all surprised. Her own son-in-law supplies it. Agatha  
is looking forward so much to your ball tonight, dear  
Margaret.

LADY WINDERMERE (*seated*). Oh, you musn't  
20 think it is going to be a ball, Duchess. It is only a  
dance in honour of my birthday. A small and early.

LORD DARLINGTON (*standing*). Very small,  
very early, and very select, Duchess.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. Of course it's going  
25 to be select. But we know *that*, dear Margaret, about  
*your* house. It is really one of the few houses in  
London where I can take Agatha, and where I feel  
perfectly secure about dear Berwick. I don't know  
what society is coming to. The most dreadful people  
30 seem to go everywhere. They certainly come to my  
parties—the men get quite furious if one doesn't  
ask them. Really, some one should make a stand  
against it.

LADY WINDERMERE. I will, Duchess. I will  
35 have no one in my house about whom there is any  
scandal.

LORD DARLINGTON. Oh, don't say that, Lady  
Windermere. I should never be admitted. (*Sitting.*)

<sup>1</sup> the Duchess's daughter

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. Oh, men don't matter.  
40 With women it is different. We're good. Some of us  
are, at least. But we are positively getting elbowed  
into the corner. Our husbands would really forget our  
existence if we didn't nag at them from time to time,  
just to remind them that we have a perfect legal right  
45 to do so.

LORD DARLINGTON. It's a curious thing,  
Duchess, about the game of marriage—a game, by the  
way, that is going out of fashion—the wives hold all  
the honours<sup>2</sup> and invariably lose the odd trick.<sup>3</sup>

50 DUCHESS OF BERWICK. The odd trick? Is that  
the husband, Lord Darlington?

LORD DARLINGTON. It would be rather a good  
name for the modern husband.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. Dear Lord Darlington,  
55 how thoroughly depraved you are!

LADY WINDERMERE. Lord Darlington is trivial.

LORD DARLINGTON. Ah, don't say that, Lady  
Windermere.

LADY WINDERMERE. Why do you *talk* so  
60 trivially about life, then?

LORD DARLINGTON. Because I think that life  
is far too important a thing ever to talk seriously  
about it.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. What does he mean?  
65 Do, as a concession to my poor wits, Lord Darlington,  
just explain to me what you really mean.

LORD DARLINGTON. I think I had better not,  
Duchess. Nowadays to be intelligible is to be found  
out. Good-bye! (*Shakes hands with DUCHESS.*) And  
70 now—Lady Windermere, good-bye. I may come  
tonight, mayn't I? Do let me come.

LADY WINDERMERE. Yes, certainly. But you  
are not to say foolish, insincere things to people.

LORD DARLINGTON (*smiling*). Ah! you are  
75 beginning to reform me. It is a dangerous thing to  
reform any one, Lady Windermere. (*Bows and exit.*)

<sup>2</sup> high cards

<sup>3</sup> round of a card game