**An Ideal Husband Act 1 Theme and Style Notes**

* The setting notes comment on femininity/women through the description of “Lady Chiltern, a woman of grave Greek beauty” this links to classical, Victorian ideals. Lady Chiltern is at the top of the stairs so it shows her importance.
* Set notes introduce play as a ‘drawing room comedy’ alludes to the types of characters who will appear in the act. Setting represents high society – chandeliers, tapestry etc.
* ‘The Triumph of Love’ tapestry relates to classical art and sets up the overarching themes and conflicts in the play between the Chilterns.
* Line 4, Mrs Marchmont: “Horribly tedious parties [the Hartlocks] give.” Themes of reputation and Victorian ideals are shown as Mrs Marchmont does not want to be attending parties yet she does anyway because it is a social expectation. Line 8, Lady Basildon: “Ah! I hate being educated!” – Roles of women in Victorian society, not necessarily educated, focused on trivial matters. Conversation between the two women is light in accordance with this and the tone of the party they are at – sets the tone for the rest of the party.
* Line 29-30, Lord Caversham: “Has my good-for-nothing young son been here?” sets up men as opposites – conflict of traditional, political ideal of Caversham and contemporary, aesthetic dandy Goring.
* Line 52, Lord Goring has a reputation. Mabel: “I have been obliged to put Lord Goring into a class quite by himself”.
* ‘Mrs’ Cheveley rather than ‘Lady’ etc. shows lower-class status. Description of Cheveley: “Venetian red hair...rouge” Red = colour of scandal – foreshadowing.
* Each character’s description relates to a piece of Classical art, alluding to their traditional character “[Mabel] is really like a Tanagra Statuette.” In contrast Mrs Cheveley is described as “A work of art on the whole, but showing the influence of too many schools” this not only refers to Mrs Cheveley’s tumultuous past but also could refer to art schools. This implies she is a mix of many things (i.e. art styles) unlike the other characters who are only one traditional, classical style.
* Line 64, Lady Chiltern “I did not know she had married a second time” implies Mrs Cheveley’s scandalous leanings and a reputation. In response Mrs Cheveley is very light “Nowadays people marry as often as they can don’t they? It is most fashionable” the first clash of ideals between the two women. Mrs Cheveley is very light towards what Lady Chiltern sees as a serious topic – marriage.
* Women’s view of politics is shown in line 102 when Mrs Markby says “now that the House of Commons is trying to become useful, it does a great deal of harm.” This contradicts the actual purpose of the House.
* Line 135-136 Mrs Cheveley “My prizes came a little later on in life. I don’t think any of them were for good conduct. I forget!” this has a double meaning and lightens the tone.
* Line 139, Mrs Cheveley: “I don’t know that women are always rewarded for being charming. I think they are usually punished for it!” This contradicts the traditional ideals for women.
* Line 160 “Men can be analysed...women merely adored” shows the traditional fragile/ weaker image of women.
* Line 166, Sir Robert Chiltern: “Women represent the irrational.” Robert is sexist as most male characters are - a sign of the times. Women traditionally thought of as very emotional, controlled by their emotions, hence weaker than men who don’t allow their emotions to control them.
* Line 167: Mrs Cheveley: “Well-dressed women do.” Cheveley’s comment is a dig at Robert’s wife. Also foreshadows how Lady Chiltern does not understand Robert’s ambitions/motives for his actions.
* Line 172, Mrs Cheveley: “Questions are never indiscreet. Answers sometimes are.” Epigram.
* Line 175: Mrs Cheveley “Politics are my only pleasure.” A lot of interesting things can happen in the political world – alluding to Sir Robert’s scandalous past. Melodramatic speech.
* Line 177: Mrs Cheveley’s whole spiel is satirical. She is mocking the ‘rules’ of Victorian high society and reputation “Nowadays it is not fashionable to flirt until one is forty, or to be romantic till one is forty-five”
* Line 180: Mrs Cheveley “Philanthropy seems to have become simply the refuge of people who wish to annoy their fellow-creatures.” Epigram. Ironic as philanthropy should be about helping rather than hindering others.
* Line 183: Sir Robert, “A political life is a noble career!” Show that he believes his integrity in politics, that is able to give him power.
* Line 187: Mrs Cheveley believes politics is a “combination of all three (noble, clever game, great nuisance). Alluding to her knowledge that Sir Robert is wealthy and powerful, only because of a clever scheme. Soon, it will become a nuisance, as he has to hide his sinful past.
* Line 187 Symbol of the fan – Mrs Cheveley uses it to get in control so she can get him to follow her idea.
* Line 192: Mrs Cheveley “I don’t care about the London season! It is too matrimonial. People are either hunting for husbands or hiding from them.” Epigram. Again she mocks the society. However also ironic as she goes on to propose to Goring.
* Sir Robert does not want to agree to Mrs Cheveley’s terms to protect his reputation.
* Line 219 Stage directions about Goring’s entrance, he is obviously contemporary, this is emphasized by him not being likened to a piece of classic art.
* Line 221 Lord Goring is regarded as the “Idlest man in London”, however this is shown to not be true by the end of the play, it is simply a reputation.
* Line 236: Mrs Cheveley “That depends partly on the weather, partly on the cooking and partly on Sir Robert.” Makes a facade of a trivial visit by lumping Robert with everyday things.
* Line 252: Lord Goring “Quite dreadful! When I think of [my bad qualities] at night I go to sleep at once.” Contradicts traditional notion of bad things keeping you up at night.
* Line 255: Mabel “I delight in your bad qualities” She has much lower expectations of a husband than Lady Chiltern. Her expectations are realistic, not idealised.
* Line 288: Goring shows his dandyism when he corrects his father’s lecture on his partying “Only a quarter to four father.” In a serious yet satirical manner.
* Line 293: Goring pokes fun at the parties of high class society “I love taking about nothing, father. It is the only thing I know anything about.”
* Line 302: Lord Goring “I adore political parties. They are the only place left to us where people don’t talk politics.” Goring dislikes politics which is serious and boring and likes to live for pleasure.
* Line 305: Lady Basildon “I don’t know how the unfortunate men in the House stand these long debates.” Woman as a contrast to men, do not really have ambitions in politics. Also shows the roles of women being separated from political engagement, another point where Mrs Cheveley is an exception/differs to the high class traditional women e.g. Lady Chiltern.
* Line 311: Lord Goring “A man who allows himself to be convinced by an argument is a thoroughly unreasonable person.” In politics, people argue for themselves. Foreshadows Sir Robert’s compromise to Mrs Cheveley.
* Line 329: Mrs Marchmont to Lady Basildon “We have married perfect husbands and we are well punished for it.” They married the Victorian ideal but are not happy showing that they want interesting and imperfect not boring and “ideal”.
* Line 363: Mrs Marchmont “I like looking at geniuses and listening to beautiful people.” The inverse of what a person would normally do.
* Line 365: Mrs Marchmont and Lady Basildon talk of being morbid; this is not very feminine so is an interesting contrast to Victorian feminine ideals.
* Line 392 Mrs M and Lady B wanting to be taken to supper but when offered they refuse, shows the complexity of women and the feminine politics, also Victorian etiquette.
* Line 432 Melodramatic speech from Sir Robert about the swindle of the Canal Scheme.
* Line 505: Sir Robert Chiltern is seen as/ sees himself as ‘English Gentleman’ This is ironic as we know he has made his fortune through scandal. This goes against the Victorian ideals of old money, dignity, pride etc.
* Line 540: Mrs Cheveley speech about Sir Robert’s “morality”.
* Line 572: Mrs Cheveley “You know what your English newspapers are like.” Media and newspaper can greatly affect a person’s political life as they spread rumours and scandals.
* Line 622: Banter between the women talking of ideals, showing the influence of Victorian etiquette on femininity and behaviours.
* Line 654: Victorian idea of principles/honour-Lady Chiltern doesn’t believe that her husband could support Argentine scheme.
* Line 780: Sir Robert “Politics is a very complex business… Sooner or later in political life one has to compromise.” Politics have dirty sides, using dishonest methods to gain power etc. Then they have to try and cover it up through another dishonest act. “There are wheels within wheels.”
* Line 788: Lady Chiltern, “Circumstances should never alter principles” This shows her high opinion of Robert-honour. He is ‘apart from others’, ‘ideal’ even though readers know this is not true.
* Line 803: Lady Chiltern makes a speech to Robert about how he is more moral than other men so she worships him. “We woman worship when we love; and when we lose our worship we lose everything.” Shows that women love differently than men.
* Sir Robert lies to his wife in order to protect his reputation and their marriage.
* There aren’t epigrams in the confrontation between Lord and Lady Chiltern – Shows the serious mood.
* Line 805: Mrs Cheveley is seen as not ‘worthy’ of talking to Sir Rob. This is ironic as she is the only one who knows how ‘unworthy’ Sir Robert is of his fortune.
* Mrs Cheveley very feminine but in sassy, modern way as head strong and confident, not frail feminine like traditional Victorian women. Her reputation was shown through statements such has “she was sent away for being a thief.”
* Mabel Chiltern playful, childishly feminine, compared to a portrait again you get that hint at fragility like she is something to be cared for, precious, you don’t want to damage a special painting.
* Contrasting female figures, Mrs Cheveley and Lady Chiltern. Mrs C scheming and scandalous, vs. Lady C ignorant, naïve- an ‘ideal’ wife and Victorian women, epitomizing Victorian femininity. Mrs C however a more modern woman, mongrel of society so contrasts this ideal of Victorian women.
* Symbol of the French tapestry – irony when the tapestry is lit after the argument between the Chilterns at the end of Act One. At that point, love triumphs but it’s is in the expense of everything else as Sir Robert has to risk his career.