PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 4: Read the following passage from Act II of *The Importance of Being Earnest* and write a well organized essay in which you analyze Wilde’s use of irony to challenge traditional ideas of sex and gender. Be sure to indicate which aspects of conventional gender identities Wilde confronts. Do not merely summarize the plot.

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| **1**  **5**  **10**  **15**  **20**  **25**  **30**  **35**  **40**  **45**  **50** | **Cecily**. [Advancing to meet her.] Pray let me introduce myself to you. My name is Cecily Cardew.  **Gwendolen**. Cecily Cardew? [Moving to her and shaking hands.] What a very sweet name! Something tells me that we are going to be great friends. I like you already more than I can say. My first impressions of people are never wrong.  **Cecily**. How nice of you to like me so much after we have known each other such a comparatively short time. Pray sit down.  **Gwendolen**. [Still standing up.] I may call you Cecily, may I not?  **Cecily**. With pleasure!  **Gwendolen**. And you will always call me Gwendolen, won’t you?  **Cecily**. If you wish.  **Gwendolen**. Then that is all quite settled, is it not?  **Cecily**. I hope so. [A pause. They both sit down together.]  **Gwendolen**. Perhaps this might be a favourable opportunity for my mentioning who I am. My father is Lord Bracknell. You have never heard of papa, I suppose?  **Cecily**. I don’t think so.  **Gwendolen**. Outside the family circle, papa, I am glad to say, is entirely unknown. I think that is quite as it should be. The home seems to me to be the proper sphere for the man. And certainly once a man begins to neglect his domestic duties he becomes painfully effeminate, does he not? And I don’t like that. It makes men so very attractive. Cecily, mamma, whose views on education are remarkably strict, has brought me up to be extremely short-sighted; it is part of her system; so do you mind my looking at you through my glasses?  **Cecily**. Oh! not at all, Gwendolen. I am very fond of being looked at.  **Gwendolen**. [After examining **Cecily** carefully through a lorgnette.] You are here on a short visit, I suppose.  **Cecily**. Oh no! I live here.  **Gwendolen**. [Severely.] Really? Your mother, no doubt, or some female relative of advanced years, resides here also?  **Cecily**. Oh no! I have no mother, nor, in fact, any relations.  **Gwendolen**. Indeed?  **Cecily**. My dear guardian, with the assistance of Miss Prism, has the arduous task of looking after me.  **Gwendolen**. Your guardian?  **Cecily**. Yes, I am Mr. Worthing’s ward.  **Gwendolen**. Oh! It is strange he never mentioned to me that he had a ward. How secretive of him! He grows more interesting hourly. I am not sure, however, that the news inspires me with feelings of unmixed delight. [Rising and going to her.] I am very fond of you, Cecily; I have liked you ever since I met you! But I am bound to state that now that I know that you are Mr. Worthing’s ward, I cannot help  expressing a wish you were—well, just a little older than you seem to be—and not quite so very alluring in appearance. In fact, if I may speak candidly—  **Cecily**. Pray do! I think that whenever one has anything unpleasant to say, one should always be quite candid.  **Gwendolen**. Well, to speak with perfect candour, Cecily, I wish that you were fully forty-two, and more than usually plain for your age. Ernest has a strong upright nature. He is the very soul of truth and honour. Disloyalty would be as impossible to him as deception. But even men of the noblest possible moral character are extremely susceptible to the influence of the physical charms of others. Modern, no less than Ancient History, supplies us with many most painful examples of what I refer to. If it were not so, indeed, History would be quite unreadable. |