TEI By Example

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5. Oscar Wilde: *The Importance of Being Earnest*

This example features a fragment (the front matter and first page) of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, a play in three acts. In this transcription, no further scenes are discerned within the acts.
THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY:

- John Worthing, J.P.
- Algernon Moncrieff
- Rev. Canon Chasuble, D.D.
- Merriman, Butler
- Lane, Manservant

THE SCENES OF THE PLAY:

- Act I. Algernon Moncrieff's Flat in Half-Moon Street, W.
- Act II. The Garden at the Manor House, Woolton.
- Act III. Drawing-room at the Manor House, Woolton.

TIME: The Present

The Importance of Being Earnest

FIRST ACT

Scene

Morning-room in Algernon's flat in Half-Moon Street. The room is luxuriously and artistically furnished. The sound of a piano is heard in the adjoining room. Lane is arranging afternoon tea on the table, and after the music has ceased, Algernon enters.
<sp>

<speaker>Algernon.</speaker>
<p>Did you hear what I was playing, Lane?</p>
</sp>

<sp>

<speaker>Lane.</speaker>
<p>I didn't think it polite to listen, sir.</p>
</sp>

<sp>

<speaker>Algernon.</speaker>
<p>I'm sorry for that, for your sake. I don't play accurately—anyone can play accurately—but I play with wonderful expression. As far as the piano is concerned sentiment is my <foreign xml:lang="fr">forte</foreign>. I keep science for Life.</p>
</sp>

<sp>

<speaker>Lane.</speaker>
<p>Yes, sir.</p>
</sp>

<sp>

<speaker>Algernon.</speaker>
<p>And, speaking of the science of Life, have you got the cucumber sandwiches cut for Lady Bracknell?</p>
</sp>

<sp>

<speaker>Lane.</speaker>
<p>Yes, sir.</p>
</sp>

<sp>

<speaker>Algernon.</speaker>
<p><stage>[<emph>Hands them on a salver.</emph>]</stage></p>
</sp>

<sp>

<speaker>Lane.</speaker>
<p><stage>[<emph>Inspects them, takes two, and sits down on the sofa.</emph>]</stage> Oh! … by the way, Lane, I see from your book that on Thursday night, when Lord Shoreman and Mr. Worthing were dining with me, eight bottles of champagne are entered as having been consumed.</p>
</sp>

<sp>

<speaker>Lane.</speaker>
<p>Yes, sir; eight bottles and a pint.</p>
</sp>

<sp>

<speaker>Algernon.</speaker>
<p>Why is it that at a bachelor's establishment the servants invariably drink the champagne? I ask merely for information.</p>
</sp>
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.

Algernon. Good Heavens! Is marriage so demoralizing 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. 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.

The actual text is preceded by a character list and a list of the scenes, both encoded as elements inside the part of the , with appropriate values for their @type attributes. The character list is encoded as a plain structure, containing plain elements for the characters (divided into sublists of male and female characters). Role descriptions are encoded with elements. Whereas the specialised elements could have been used, this is a perfectly legal (though less semantically rich) interpretation and application of the TEI elements. The scenes are listed in a element, which is a bit more controversial, as the TEI Guidelines make a clear distinction between the element (stage directions in or in between speeches) and element ("a description of the setting, time, locale, appearance, etc., of the
action of a play, typically found in the front matter of a printed performance text (not a stage direction") elements. Because it is wrapped inside a `<div>` structure, this is valid TEI, but the encoding could probably be improved to:

```xml
<front>
  <set>
    <head>THE SCENES OF THE PLAY:</head>
    <list type="simple">
      <item>Act I. Algernon Moncrieff's Flat in Half-Moon Street, W.</item>
      <item>Act II. The Garden at the Manor House, Woolton.</item>
      <item>Act III. Drawing-room at the Manor House, Woolton.</item>
    </list>
  </set>
  <set>TIME: <em>Present</em></set>
</front>
```

The play itself is encoded as a `<div>` level text division, in which each act is wrapped in a `<div>` element. Inside the speeches ( `<sp>`), the speakers are transcribed as `<speaker>`, and the speech as prose paragraphs ( `<p>`). Stage directions ( `<stage>` ) occur between and in the speeches. Note how at the beginning of the act, the `<view>` element is used inside a stage direction, to describe the visual aspects of the setting. This is probably a liberal interpretation of the semantics of this element, which is more geared to "the visual context of some part of a screen play", viz. the description of what's on a screen. The `<view>` element doesn't seem strictly necessary here: a `<stage type="setting">` would probably convey the same information.