

11/03/2021

## COMEDIES AND THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST-Oscar Wilde

It was published in 1895 but before this comedy Oscar Wilde wrote other successful comedies such as *Lady Windermere's Fan*, 1892, *A Woman of no Importance*, 1893, and *An Ideal Husband*, 1895. All these comedies revived the atmosphere of the comedy of manners. They contain witty epigrams, they give a vivid picture of the contemporary upper classes. They are sentimental and melodramatic.

*The Importance of Being Earnest* is more brilliant and unconventional, the theatrical elements are better balanced. Sentimentalism and melodrama are replaced by frivolous situations. The characters are sketched, the language is sparkling and it is rich in paradoxes and nonsense. No moral judgment ever intrudes, we only have a gentle satire on the Victorian upper classes.

Considering the title of the comedy, it contains a pun. Earnest means honest, but it is pronounced as the proper name Ernest.

All the characters present themselves as polite and sincere but actually they are manipulative and calculating.

This comedy is centred on two main characters, Jack Worthing and Algernon Moncrief, they both live double lives.

Jack lives in the country but he often goes to London to visit his fictitious brother Ernest.

Algernon lives in London but he often goes to the country to visit a fictitious old friend, the Bunbury.

On one of his visits to London, Jack falls in love with a girl, Gwendolen.

Algernon during a visit in the country, falls in love with Cecily, Jack's ward (a person who is looked after by a person which is not her parent) and she thinks that Algernon is actually Jack's brother Ernest. At a certain point of the story both Gwendolen and Cecily believe they are engaged to Ernest, there are many comic complications but in the end it transpires that Jack as a baby was left in a handbag in the station, Algernon is his brother and also Jack's name is indeed Ernest. In the end he can assume his name Ernest and he becomes earnest.

The two couples are reconciled and they can finally start a new life in a state of earnestness.

This comedy can be read in different levels:

- As a farse which plays on mistaken identities and misunderstandings
- Parody of romantic love, it mocks the idea of love at first sight, the two women seem to be more in love with the name Ernest rather than with the boy they are in love with. The structure of social relations is reduced to a question of names.
- At a deeper level this comedy is a social satire on the Victorian moral values placed on appearances, apparently the comedy is a hard less amusing work but at a deeper level Wilde actually dealt with serious themes such as identity, marriage, social status, property and baptism. In the end the two men want to be baptised as Ernest, they want to turn their back on their old lives and they want to start a new life.

#### LETTURA PAG 137- THE INTERVIEW

Gwendolen's mother is testing him through a series of personal questions to test Jack.

The first part deals with Lady Bracknell's most important topics, smoking and money, the second section deals with Lady Bracknell's least important topic, family.

In yellow we have the topics of conversation, they talk about education, age, smoking, income, possession and family, in pink we have the social cliches connected to the fact that the characters belong to the upper classes, green refers to the woman's point of view on Jack's origins, words underlined in blue contains Lady Bracknell's remarks which reveals that she is bossy and frivolous and arrogant. Light blue contains the paradoxes used by Lady Bracknell, in green we have Jack's concern for upper class' values, the red dots refers to what Jack has to do if he wants to marry Gwendolen.

Line 39/40: we have a comic effect which is created by the confusion of the common meaning of the verb "to lose" and its idiomatic sense in the expression of "to lose one's parents"= orphan.

The stage direction gives informations about the tone of voices

The language is sophisticated and artificial, perfect for the characters of the upper classes.

Marriage as a tool to achieve social status.