

CHAPTER 7 ANALYSIS OF THE SELECTED ENGLISH PLAY

OSCAR WILDE'S *THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST*

The Playwright's Profile

Oscar Fingal O' Flahertie Wills Wilde was born in 1854 in Dublin. He studied classics first at Trinity College, Oxford. After, he attended Magdalen College, Oxford. There, he proved to be a brilliant scholar and won the Newdigate Prize for his poem, 'Ravenna'.

Wilde was a playwright, poet, essayist and wit. His works include *Poems* (1881), *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), *Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893) and *An Ideal Husband* (1895). *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) is considered by many as his masterpiece.

Wilde was imprisoned in 1895 for homosexual offences. He was released in 1897 and went to live in France. There he adopted the name of Sebastian Melmoth. He wrote his famous poem, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, in France. He died in exile in France in 1900.

The Subject Matter

The subject matter of *The Importance of Being Earnest* is marriage. The play looks at the lax attitude to marriage in late 19th Century Britain. It draws attention to the idea that many people of the time do not go into marriage with the right motive and so they make marriage uninteresting. It advocates marriage between people who are honest, sincere and love each other. It holds that if people marry based on these marriage will be exciting.

The play suggests that the both the upper and the lower orders fail to set a good example in marriage. It alludes to the idea that it is romantic to be in love but unexciting to be in a marriage. According to Algernon, 'in married households the champagne is rarely of a first-rate brand'. After marriage, people go outside the institution and seek pleasure. In Algernon's words, they go 'bunburying' and 'three is company while two is none'. Therefore, many marriages are filled with conflicts and the divorce court is established to dissolve marriages.

The play states that it is the duty of the people going into marriage to adopt it with a very high moral tone. Jack adopts a very high tone on all subjects including marriage. He persuades Algernon to do same and the latter does. Jack's is sincere and honest in his attitude toward marriage. He has the right motive and by this restores many people and situations.

Themes

Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* examines marriage, religion, literature and other social values in the 19th century Britain. The themes of the play are suggested in Wilde's treatment of each of the above values. The

play mocks Britons of time and their attitude to the various issues. The play is, in the main, a satire. However, it can be seen also as a farcical comedy.

One theme in Wilde's play is that it is good to be open and sincere on all subjects. The theme is obvious in the play's repeated concern with the idea of being honest. This theme is first suggested in the title of the play. It is later developed through the character of Jack. It is also further depicted in the character of Miss Prism.

Jack desires to marry Gwendolen and goes into the relationship with good motives. When Gwendolen's mother, Lady Bracknell advises him to lie so that Gwendolen will be allowed to marry him, he refuses to do so. Jack's openness and sincerity solves many problems in the play.

Lady and Lord Bracknell will not allow their only daughter to marry any one without a recognised position in good society and Jack appears to have no recognised position. This apparently humble origin is the only thing standing between him and marrying Gwendolen. To overcome the problem he can lie. Even Lady Bracknell strongly advises him to lie and 'acquire some relations'. But Jack refuses and says he cannot do that.

Jack speaks about his 'humble' beginning and how he was found, as a baby, in the cloak-room at Victoria Station. Subsequently, the information helps to trace his origin and locate his relations. When Miss Prism is brought into the course of the play, Jack tells the same story of how he was found abandoned in the cloak-room. The Lady admits having left a baby in the same cloak-room years back. Miss Prism helps, by that story, to confirm that Jack is Lady Bracknell's cousin and Algernon's brother who has been lost over twenty years ago.

Jack is sincere and frank; Miss Prism also is honest. This frankness helps to unite family members who have separated over twenty years before. It also helps to make the dreams of all the lovers true. In addition, it frees Miss Prism's mind from the agony of having once abandoned a child. The theme of *The Importance of Being Earnest* is that it pays to be honest.

Religious Themes

Wilde's play deals also with some religious values and practices of the 19th century Britain. It pokes fun at rivalry between church sects and mocks the idea of twisting Bible passages for different meanings. It also laughs at the sales of baptism. These themes are suggested in the character of Chasuble. They are also described in his relationship with Jack and Algernon.

Wilde's play satirises the Christian religious institution. He does so in his portrayal of Dr Chasuble and the priest's comments on another Christian sect. Dr Chasuble is the Rector of a Church. He considers certain views of the Anabaptist as heresies and condemns them openly. According to him, he has devoted four of his unpublished sermons to them. He opens up on this when Jack says neither him nor Algernon needs to be baptized by Dr Chasuble again. Thus, Wilde comments on rivalry between some Christian sects.

The Importance of Being Earnest also satirises religious priests who press different meanings into the same Bible passage. Dr. Chasuble has preached the sermon on the meaning of the manna in the wilderness on different occasions. Funny enough, he has adapted it to harvest celebrations, christenings and confirmations. He has

preached same on days of humiliation and festal days. The last time he delivered it was at a charity sermon. He seeks permission from Jack to make reference to the death of his brother in the sermon next Sunday.

Wilde condemns turning the Bible to a work of art. He frowns at using the Holy Book frivolously. The playwright shows that priests who do this have failed in their profession.

Wilde's satirises in addition some use of baptism. He points, on the one hand, to how baptism is being used to divide the church. He reveals, on the other hand, its misuse and abuse, socially. Lord and Lady Bracknell appear to belong to a sect different from Dr. Chasuble's. The two do not believe that adults should be baptized; Dr. Chasuble is of a different opinion. Therefore, Lady Bracknell strongly opposes the baptism of Jack and Algernon. This opposition makes Dr. Chasuble allude to the idea that the woman is a heretic and an Anabaptist.

The playwright also condemns the misuse and abuse of baptism. It is suggested that baptism is conducted by priests to make money. He suggests that Dr. Chasuble is interested in money in conducting baptism for Jack and Algernon. Lady Bracknell's opposition to the baptism contributes to the suggestion. Lady Bracknell alludes to this fact. She says, if Algernon went for baptism, that Lord Bracknell will be displeased that Algernon wasted time and money by doing so.

Baptism is abused in another way and is tied to social relations between a man and woman. The intention of Jack and Algernon to go for baptism is not spiritual. The two desire to go for baptism so that Gwendolen and Cecily might agree to marry them. This attitude to baptism makes the religious rites trivial.

Social Themes

The Importance of Being Earnest also treats some social themes. It mocks the upper class in Britain and their mercenary marriage attitude. Mercenary marriage involves marrying for some material or monetary gains. The play frowns at the idea of turning marriage into a trade. It suggests that marriage should be taken serious and about love.

The society in the play, as represented by Lady Bracknell, favours mercenary marriage. Marriage, as shown in her character, is based upon material gains. One partner goes into the union because of what he or she will gain from it. People marry their partners on the basis that he or she has a recognised position in good society. Lady Bracknell married Lord Bracknell on this basis. She desires to have her daughter and cousin marry on the same basis.

On the contrary, Wilde suggests that marriage should be conducted on the basis of love. He suggests this in his portrayal of Jack and Gwendolen, and Algernon and Cecily. The relationship between Jack and Gwendolen is based on love. So also is the affair between Algernon and Cecily.

Satire on Literature

In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Wilde comments on modern culture, especially its literature, criticism and scholars. He comments on modern culture in snatches in the play. Wilde discusses modern literature and its nature. He mocks some critics of modern literature and their pretensions. The comments lie in a discussion between Jack and Algernon on the nature of truth. Algernon says 'truth is rarely pure and never simple' and that

modern literature is a complete impossibility. By that comment, he means that modern literature is very difficult to understand.

Wilde appears to praise modern literature. He does so through Jack. Jack says that modern literature may be difficult but that it ‘wouldn’t be at all a bad thing’. The playwright however mocks ‘critics’ who have not been trained in literary criticism. According to him they lay false claim to the knowledge. The critics are, in the words of Algernon, “They (who) do it so well in the papers” but haven’t been at a university.

The Importance of Being Earnest also discusses other literary cultures especially fiction and writing. The play mentions the culture of writing three-volume novels. Mudie sends Cecily and Miss Prism novels of this type regularly. Miss Prism admits to Cecily that she is a novelist. According to her, she has written one three-volume novel. Bracknell supports this claim. Miss Prism’s novel, according to Lady Bracknell, is of ‘more than usually revolting sentimentality’.

The Plot

The plot of Wilde’s play is simple and linear. It has a unity and with a beginning, middle and end. The plot is designed to achieve the effects of comedy and satire. It has moments of suspense and surprise and involves a reversal to the protagonist’s success. The events in the plot occur within a weekend, most probably between Friday and Sunday. However, events of several years are recalled within this weekend.

The plot begins with Jack’s interest in Gwendolen, Algernon’s cousin and daughter to Lady Bracknell. Jack proposes to her in Algernon’s house and tells Algernon, his friend that he intends to marry her. However, Lady Bracknell opposes the proposal. She opposes it because Jack has a humble origin. Jack and Gwendolen are however interested in each other and the lady takes the young man’s address.

Algernon is persuaded by Jack’s way of life and decides to marry and settle down. He becomes interested in Cecily, Jack’s aunt. Because Jack has made him to believe that Cecily is a little too much interested in one Ernest, Algernon visits her using the false name. He visits her in Jack’s country home using the name ‘Ernest’. He goes there without the knowledge of Jack. Algernon and Cecily fall in love and Algernon proposes to her and she accepts the proposal.

When Algernon comes face to face with Jack, the former asks the latter for forgiveness and declares that he truly wants to marry Cecily. Algernon continues to relate to Cecily under the name Ernest and Jack keeps behaving that he, Algernon is his brother. About this time, Gwendolen calls on Jack and meets Cecily while Algernon and Jack are inside the house. The two ladies share a little of their love life and think they are engaged to the same man. They accuse each other of a foul play and quarrel. The ladies make up their quarrel shortly when Jack and Algernon clear the confusion.

Jack states that he has no brother called Ernest or any at all. He is properly introduced as Mr. John Worthing and Cecily’s guardian and Algernon Moncrieff is presented as Gwendolen’s cousin. It is now clear that nobody bears the name Ernest and so the ladies are, in the true sense, not engaged to any person. Therefore, the ladies become unhappy and retire inside.

Jack and Algernon then agree to go for baptism and be christened ‘Ernest’ so that the two ladies will have men that they are truly engaged to. The two ladies rejoice and are hopeful. The story however takes another turn when Lady Bracknell appears. The woman objects to the relationship between Gwendolen and Jack but supports the one between Cecily and Algernon. But Jack tells the woman that he, as the guardian of Cecily will agree that her aunt marry Algernon on the condition that Gwendolen is allowed to marry him, Jack.

Lady Bracknell disagrees with this arrangement and Jack tells Dr. Chasuble to go since the baptism he and Algernon said they wanted to have will no longer be necessary. Dr. Chasuble gets angry and announces that he will return to the church where Miss Prism has been waiting to see him. The mention of the name ‘Miss Prism’ draws Lady Bracknell’s attention and she requests that Miss Prism be called. Miss Prism appears and the discussion that follows points to the end of the plot of the story.

When Miss Prism appears, Lady Bracknell recognizes her as the maid who once served the Bracknells years back. The lady states how one day Miss Prism went out with a male child then but never came back and the child was not seen again.

Miss Prism confesses that she went out that day with a baby and a three – volume novel, but absent-mindedly left the baby instead of the novel in a bag. She states that she left the bag in a cloak-room at Victoria Railway Station. Jack rushes into the house, comes out with a bag and asks if the bag is the one Miss Prism is talking about. Miss Prism confirms that it is and Lady Bracknell completes the story that Jack was the baby left in that bag.

Jack asked to be told who he is and is told by Bracknell that he is the son of her poor sister, Mrs. Moncrieff. Consequently, Jack is the elder brother of Algernon. The name of their father is found to be General John Ernest. Being the eldest son, John was naturally christened after their father. John then rejoices that it is important to be earnest. Now that Jack has a recognised position in society, he will be allowed to marry Gwendolen. Also, Jack will allow Cecily to marry Algernon. All including Bracknell and Miss Prism are happy in the end.

Setting

The Importance of Being Earnest is set in Britain suburbs. Events in the play take place, both in Algernon’s flat in the suburb and at the Manor house, Woolton, Hertfordshire. Hertfordshire is in the neighbourhood of Shropshire. The Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire is Jack’s country home.

Place names such as the Albany and London are mentioned in the play. Albany is another town in which Jack also has a house. London is a remote setting for the actions and events in Wilde’s play. References are made to its law enforcement agents and its politics. Scotland Yard and the Tories are mentioned in the play. Scotland Yard refers to the British state security services and the Tories is a political party in Britain. Also, Cecily refers to Jack’s philanthropic work in London.

The Importance of Being Earnest is set in the 19th Century England. The time is a period of religious crises. The period is marked by the conflict between faith and doubt. This is suggested in the mention of ‘German scepticism’. The period is also suggested in the mention of modern culture and the rivalry between Christian

sects. The nineteenth century is the time associated with the beginning of modern culture and literature. These developments are discussed in the play.

Characterisation

Many characters are listed in the events in the play but only a few are actively involved in the actions in it. The characters actively involved in the play include John (Jack) Worthing, Algernon Moncrieff, Lady Bracknell, Gwendolen Fairfax, Cecily Cardew, Dr Chasuble and Miss Prism. Lane and Merriman are two other characters who participate in the play.

Jack: Jack is the main character in the play. He is also called John Worthing. He is the chief character because of many things. One is that many events in the play are seen from his point of view. He adopts a very high moral tone on marriage, and life generally. This moral tone is what the play pleads. Secondly, the play derives its title from his final words, and from his name. Thirdly, many other characters speak highly of him. Cecily, Miss Prism and Dr. Chasuble speak so of him.

Jack is also John Ernest. Found when abandoned as a baby, Thomas Cardew gave him the name Worthing. Jack grew a respectable young man. This made Thomas Cardew to make Jack guardian to Miss Cecily Cardew, Thomas's granddaughter. John spends his weekend away from the country. He usually spends his Sunday in London.

Jack is a morally-upright character. He adopts the name Ernest in town so that his ward may be guided right. He does not want Cecily to confuse him with people who sneak to town for pleasure. So he tells her that his brother Ernest lives in town and needs to be visited there and monitored. He has some respect for women and is careful how they should be treated. He influences Algernon in this eventually.

Jack is a responsible young man. He has a stable income. At twenty nine years of age, he has investments, landed property and houses. He is proud of his humble origin and not ashamed to say he was found in a cloak room at Victoria Station. He has a high sense of duty. He shows this in the way he arranges how Cecily is to be brought up.

Jack loves Gwendolen and is devoted to her. This is shown in many instances. One, especially, is when he loses appetite to eat or drink. He *does* when he fears that he is about to lose Gwendolen. Another is how he works to secure his relationship with her. To do so, he arranges to be christened 'Ernest'. Jack is frank. He frankly discusses with Gwendolen that he has no brother called Ernest. He is also frank in telling Lady Bracknell that he was found abandoned as a baby. His frankness brings solutions to many problems in the play. First, it solves the problem of his origin. Secondly, it relieves Miss Prism of the pain of abandoning a baby once.

Algernon: Algernon is a young man in his twenties. He is presented first to us as a foil and a friend to Jack. Algernon is a young man who loves enjoying life. He lives in town but enjoys the habit of going to the country for pleasures. He calls this habit 'bunburying'. He is a cousin to Gwendolen and Lady Bracknell. He entertains Mr. Worthing, Gwendolen and Lady Bracknell regularly in his house.

Algernon initially has a poor sense of women and marriage. According to him, 'the only way to behave to a woman is to make love to her'. He is of the opinion also that extra marital life is part of marriage. His view is

that the lower class do not set a good example in marriage. Because of his poor attitude to women, Gwendolen speaks of Algernon's strictly 'immoral attitude towards life'

Algernon is an orphan. He lost his father when he was a year old. He is a very humorous character. He states his relationship toward his father humorously when he says he was never on speaking terms with his father. Algernon grows in the play. He matures and comes to respect women. He falls in love with Cecily and does everything to marry her. The young man is finally revealed as Jack's brother. When Jack's origin is revealed, Lady Bracknell states that Algernon is Jack's younger brother.

Lady Bracknell: Lady Bracknell is the wife of Lord Bracknell and the mother of Gwendolen Fairfax. She is Algernon's aunt. She is a woman of high societal standing and is always in social circles of the upper class. She is familiar with many women in the upper class. This makes it easy for her to know that Jack's tenant, Lady Bloxham goes about very little.

Lady Bracknell believes in mercenary marriage. She is of the view that one must be married to somebody from a recognised position in a good society. She believes that somebody who is not from that position can acquire it. She opposes the relationship between Jack and Gwendolen at the beginning. According to her, Jack has an unromantic origin. She advises him to produce a parent. Ironically, she confesses that when she married Lord Bracknell she had no fortune of any kind. Lady Bracknell supports the relationship between Cecily and Algernon because the former has wealth.

Lady Bracknell is fairly religious. She has a sense of what to her is irreligious. She is opposed to adult taking part in baptism. She forbids Algernon to be baptized. Mrs. Bracknell has a mind that is alert. Her quickness of mind helps in discovering Jack's origin. 'Miss Prism' is mentioned only once and Lady Bracknell catches it. This proves to be very important to Algernon, Jack and the family of Bracknell on the long run. After Miss Prism's appearance and confession, it is lady Bracknell who reveals the origin of Jack. She is also the one who states that Algernon is his younger brother.

Gwendolen: Gwendolen is the daughter of Lord and Lady Bracknell. She is a frank lady. She falls in love with Jack (Ernest) and boldly confesses it. She wants Jack to demonstrate his love for her in the public and she tells him so.

She is an obedient daughter. Though she does not like her mother's objection that she stops her conversation with Jack, she obeys her mother. She is true to her word. She tells Jack that her mother opposes her relationship with him. However, she promises to be eternally devoted to him and she keeps her word.

Gwendolen is not moved by her mother's unpleasant comments about Jack's origin. She finds Jack's simplicity very rare and tells Jack so. She takes Jack's address from him and visits him in the country. When she thinks Cecily has trapped Jack into an engagement, she fights for the control of Jack's love. She says she will rescue him from Cecily.

Gwendolen represents the class of romantic ladies. She loves Mr. Worthing by the name Ernest. According to her, 'Ernest' has music of its own and produces vibrations. She insists that Jack must propose to her first. When he does, she comments on Jack's proposal that he has had little experience in how to propose.

Cecily: Cecily is the grand-daughter of late Mr. Thomas Cardew and Jack's little aunt and ward. She is eighteen years old but always claims she is twenty when she goes to evening parties. She is very fond of Jack and calls him 'dear Uncle Jack'. She is a little too much interested in Jack's supposed brother Ernest.

Cecily respects Jack her uncle highly. She lives at his place in Shropshire and is under the instruction of Miss Prism. She takes instructions on Political Economy, Geography and German, but does not like any of them. She hates German most. She prefers occupations like watering flowers to 'intellectual pleasures'. She is eager to seize every opportunity to avoid her classes. She seizes on Dr. Chasuble's call on Prism to avoid her German class.

Cecily keeps a diary. She enters the wonderful secrets of her life in the diary. She entered her engagement to Ernest in her diary. She wrote it in her diary when she broke the engagement. She commented also about the weather in the diary.

Cecilia is a romantic girl. She falls in love with the name 'Ernest' and encourages Algernon to go for baptism to have *that* name. She fights against every odd to have Ernest. She will not have Jack send Algernon away; she will not allow Gwendolen claim him. Through she is eighteen, she comes legally of age to marry at thirty-five. The terms of Cecily's grandfather state that she must be thirty-five but she says she cannot wait that long.

Dr. Chasuble: Reverend Canon Chasuble is the Rector of the country's church. He has a Doctor of Divinity. He is thoroughly experienced in the practice of all the rites and ceremonials of the Church. He is able to adapt any Bible passage to almost any occasion.

Dr. Chasuble is very strong about his religious conviction. He reads Greek and Roman authors but calls them pagans. He dislikes the views of the Anabaptists and calls them heresies. He devoted four of his sermons to dismiss the views.

The Canon is a celibate but is fond of Miss Prism. He admits that it is a pleasure to take a stroll with Miss Prism. When they are off guard, they express their fondness for each other. At the end of the play, they embrace and call each other by their first names.

Dr. Chasuble appears learned more only in religious matters. He has preached many sermons but has never written a single book. He has adapted his sermon on the meaning of the manna in the wilderness to different occasions. He has four unpublished sermons on the heresies of the Anabaptists.

Miss Prism: Miss Prism is Cecily Cardew's governess. She became the young girl's governess when the girl was sixteen years old. Miss Prism teaches Cecily to improve herself in every way. She teaches Cecily many subjects. She also encourages her to show interest in 'intellectual pleasures' than 'manual labour'.

Miss Prism is single but is fond of Dr. Chasuble. She proposes to have a walk with the Canon. When the priest agrees she shows that she is delighted. She persuades the priest to marry, and flirts with him readily. She is enthusiastic to embrace Dr. Chasuble when the Canon embraces her and calls her by her first name, Laetitia.

Miss Prism is an up and coming writer. She has written a three-volume novel but the work was never published. She lost the novel. She lost the novel and a baby in a train when she was distracted. She had mistakenly placed the manuscript in a bassinette and placed the baby in a bag. She made the mistake twenty-eight years ago. Then she was a maid to Lord and Lady Bracknell.

Miss Prism's has a sharp memory about events. She recalls the sad event of twenty-eight years vividly. She recalls the railway station where she abandoned the baby and the train involved. She states how sad the experience has been for her. She expresses her relief that the baby was finally found and safe.

Minor Characters

The minor characters in *The Importance of Being Earnest* are fairly many. These include Lane, Merriman, Moulton, Mudie, Thomas Cardew, Gerald and Lady Harbury. Other minor characters are Lord Bracknell, Mary Farquhar, Lady Lancing, Lady Dumbleton, Mrs. Moncrieff, Lady Bloxham and Jenkins the carter. Lane and Merriman are Algernon's manservant and Jack's butler, respectively. Moulton is Jack's gardener while Mudie supplies novels to Miss Prism and Cecily. Thomas Cardew found Jack when he was abandoned as a baby. He adopted the baby after. He subsequently made Jack the guardian of Cecily, his granddaughter. Gerald is the son of Lord and Lady Bracknell and the brother of Gwendolen. According to Gwendolen, Gerald often proposes to ladies for practice.

Lady Harbury, Mary Farquhar and Lady Dumbleton appear to belong to Lady Bracknell's society. Lord Bracknell is Lady Bracknell's husband while Mrs. Moncrieff is her sister. Lady Bloxham is Jack's tenant and Jenkins the carter lives in the same estate with Jack.

Language and Style

Wilde employs some other dramatic devices in addition to those discussed earlier. The playwright employs devices such as allusion, pun, irony, disguise, mistaken identity and role playing. The devices contribute to the humorous nature of the play.

Wilde puns in the title of the play. The pun is in 'earnest' and 'Ernest'. The two words are pronounced the same way but have different meanings. The two meanings are supported in the interpretation of the play. 'The Importance of Being Earnest' means that it is good to be frank or honest. It also means that it pays to be called by the name 'Ernest'.

Wilde alludes in many instances to classical culture, the Bible and contemporary situations in Britain. Jack compares Lady Bracknell with Gorgon. The comparison is from Greek mythology. Gorgon is hideous; Lady Bracknell is perfectly unbearable. Jack states *that*: it is then ironic and humorous for Jack to say he does not really know what a Gorgon is like.

There is an allusion to a story in the Bible towards the end of the play. Jack calls Miss Prism 'mother' and she replies 'I am unmarried!' Jack responds to this by alluding to the Bible. The allusion is to the story of an adulterer. She was brought by some people who accused her of adultery. The people asked for the permission of Christ to punish her. Jesus told them that anybody who has not sinned should cast the first stone at the woman. Shortly after, all her accusers disappeared and Jesus forgave her and told her not to sin again.

Disguise, role playing and mistaken identity are dramatic devices in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Jack takes the name 'Ernest' in the city. He proposes to Gwendolen using that name. Also, Algernon goes to Jack's house disguised as Ernest and proposes to Cecily. The two cases show some forms of disguise.

Mistaken identity comes in when Gwendolen and Cecily are mistaken that they are engaged to the same man. The two ladies speak of their being engaged to Ernest. Of course the two are right. Jack proposed to Gwendolen using the name Ernest and Algernon proposed to Cecily under the name Ernest. The two women are however mistaken in their assumption. They were proposed to by different men. So, it is ironic that one lady thinks the other one has snatched her partner and thus quarrels with her while the mistaken identity lasts.

Wilde alludes also to the religious and political atmosphere in Britain. Bracknell's question and Jack's answer on politics suggest an allusion to politics in Britain of the time. Jack calls himself a Liberal Unionist and Bracknell describes that politics as Tories. Tories is a historical English political party. Since 1832, it is called the Conservative Party.

The Importance of Being Earnest alludes to the religious conflict in Britain of the time. The allusion is reflected in the conflict between the Anabaptists and Dr. Chasuble's sect. Gwendolen's reference to German scepticism points to the conflict between various Christian sects in 19th Century Britain. The reference has to do with Higher Criticism and points to the 19th Century religious atmosphere. Higher Criticism is the scientific and historical study of literature, especially the Bible. The study led to religious crisis in 19th Century Europe.

The author of *The Importance of Being Earnest* is _____.

- (a) Oscas Wild
- (b) Oscas Wilde
- (c) Oscer Wilde
- (d) Oscar Wilds
- (e) Oscar Wilde

1. _____ brought up Ernest Worthing from childhood.

- (a) Lord Bracknell
- (b) Thomas Cardew
- (c) John Ernest
- (d) Wills Wilde
- (e) Ernest Maxbohm

2. Dr. Chasuble is _____.

- (a) Cecily's teacher
- (b) Algernon's friend
- (c) a medical doctor
- (d) a rector
- (e) a proprietor

3. The present Cecily gave to Jack is a _____.

- (a) ring

- (b) portrait
- (c) photograph
- (d) cigarette case
- (d) pen

4. _____ is the place where Jack and Algernon propose to dine the night of Lady Bracknell and Miss Fairfax's visit.
- (a) Scotland Yard
 - (b) Willis's
 - (c) Pleasure Yard
 - (d) Lovers' Garden
 - (e) Garden de Royal
5. Cecily Cardew's governess is _____.
- (a) Lady Bracknell
 - (b) Miss Prism
 - (c) Mrs. Gorgon
 - (d) Mary Farquah
 - (e) Miss Fairfax
6. The bag in which Jack was abandoned was found at _____.
- (a) Victoria Station
 - (b) Woolton Avenue
 - (c) Manor junction
 - (d) Bracknell Terminus
7. Jack Worthing is _____ years old.
- (a) Twenty-nine
 - (b) Thirty-two
 - (c) Thirty-five
 - (d) Twenty-five
 - (e) Eighteen
8. Gwendolen's brother's name is _____.
- (a) Gerard
 - (b) Thomas
 - (c) Algernon
 - (d) Bod
 - (e) Tom
9. When he went to France, Oscar Wilde adopted the name _____.
- (a) Sebastian Melmoth
 - (b) Willy Wilde
 - (c) Aubrey Beardsley
 - (d) Oscar Fingal

Answers to Objective Questions

- (1) E (4) D (2) B (5) B (3) D (6) B (7) A (8) A (9) A (10) A

1. Discuss role playing, disguise and mistaken identity in *The Importance of Being Earnest*.
2. Write on the Character portrait of Jack in *The Importance of Being Earnest*.
3. Examine mercenary marriage and how it is treated in *The Importance of Being Earnest*.
4. How has Lady Bracknell contributed to the life of Mr. Jack Worthing?
5. Examine the character of Miss Prism and her contribution to *The Importance of Being Earnest*.
6. Compare and contrast the characters of Mr. Jack Worthing and Algernon.
7. Examine Oscar Wilde's use of allusion in *The Importance of Being Earnest*.
8. 'Women call each other sister only when they have called each other a lot of things first'. How is the statement above discussed in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*.