

Importance of being earnest how does wilde create comedy in this scene essay samp...



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The Importance of Being Earnest is considered by many to be a comedy of manners, focusing on the love lives of aristocratic young people, and relying on the use of verbal wit, stock characters and humour over developing a deep plot and sense of character. In this scene, Gwendolen and Cecily have just gotten into a fight over their alleged fiancés mistaken identity. Through his use of hyperbolic language, dramatic stage directions, character role and theme, Wilde creates a comic scene.

Wilde use dramatic stage directions to create humour in this scene. For example: “ CECILY: (very sweetly)” and “ GWENDOLEN: (slowly and seriously)”. Given the context of the scene, these stage directions reverse the audience’s expectations to offer a surprising, yet humorous twist on what would otherwise happen. As Cecily replies “ sweetly” to Gwendolen, there seems to be an immediate and unexpected juxtaposition with her behaviour from moments before, when they are verbally sparring each other over their relationships to ‘ Ernest’. This sudden change in tone and attitude allows for the dramatic irony of Jack and Algernon not knowing about them fighting earlier, as they adopt a façade of liking each other. This façade is continued when Gwendolen replies “ slowly and seriously” and asks Cecily if she will call her a sister. Again, the juxtaposition between the two adversaries moments before, to ‘ sisters’ creates a dramatic and humorous twist in the plot of this scene.

Wilde utilises hyperbolic language to create drama and comedy in this scene. For instance, when Gwendolen says, “ My poor wounded Cecily!” to which Cecily replies “ My sweet wronged Gwendolen”. Like the use of stage directions, there is an immediate juxtaposition from the earlier spar that the

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two had with each other - the two had no definitive reason to suddenly describe each other as "wounded" and "sweet" after Gwendolen had voiced her distrust only moments beforehand. Additionally, the use of exclamatory language amplifies a layer of artificiality in their voices - adding to the façade that they adopt in order to stop fighting in front of Algernon and Jack.

Lastly, Wilde uses thematic issues to create comedy in this scene.

Throughout the play, the themes of identity and appearance vs. reality are circulated and are amplified in this scene. For example, Jack and Algernon use parallel phrasing when talking to Gwendolen and Cecily. They both say "What could have put such an idea into your pretty little head?". Not only does this reinforce the notion of a comedy of manners as it does not develop a deep plot, but establishes a setting for which verbal sparring and wit play over the expansion of a storyline. Jack and Algernon are forced to reveal the truth about themselves and drop the façade that they had spent most of the time up to that point building up, creating a comic instance, perhaps drawing some pathos from a shallow situation.

In conclusion, through his use of hyperbolic language, dramatic stage directions and thematic issues, Wilde creates comedy in this scene.

However, perhaps his use of character roles helps most to create this atmosphere: with everyone adopting a façade, and at almost the same time, everyone dropping them (or arguably creating another one) in order to please other characters, a humorous scene appears out the seemingly chaotic nature of the characters.