

Earnest: comedy and upper classes assignment

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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Discuss Wilde's use of comedy in *The Importance of being Earnest*. One technique that Wilde uses to comic effect is allowing bits of information to be revealed and withheld. In the scene where Algernon asks " why does she call herself little Cecily? " and then " But why does your aunt call you her uncle? " suggests that Algernon actually knows the truth, but he's actually trying to get Jack to confess it himself. Not only does it suggests that Algernon knows the truth, it also suggests that he knows that Jack is lying, and therefore persuading him to fall into his trap as he's etting bits of information out.

Audiences find this comical scene because their expectations are fulfilled: Jack falls into the trap. Moreover, when Ms. Prism gets her bag back, she starts to talk about all of the little details about it without noticing the expectancy of her surroundings. When she said " Here is the stain on the lining caused by the explosion of a temperance beverage," and then said " And here, on the lock, are my initials" illustrates the slowness of Ms. Prism and how she's slowly working things out.

How she remembers every single detail and keeps on going lowly also emphasizes clearly that, the baby incident has completely gone out of her mind, and that all her concentration is now going towards the bag. Since the baby is the most important thing that everyone is talking about, but she has forgotten it, creates comedy through the contrasting behaviors. Her slowness also contradicts with others who are in a state of anticipation to know the answer as to whether the bag is hers or not, which is also funny.

Similarly, Wilde plays around with language creating a funny atmosphere. Algernon repeats the word " Ernest" many times throughout his speech as

he was trying to trap Jack. This qualifies that Wilde is using repetitive words to introduce a sense of comedy. Another example is the pun used in the title of the play, "Earnest" being full of honesty and the Christian name "Ernest". Wilde incorporates the two meanings together, giving the idea that someone called "Ernest" is "Earnest".

However, the play is actually the opposite and actually irony, which the audiences find funny. Wilde also repeats funny words like "Bunbury" and "Bunburyist" many times in a short speech which then makes the dialogue itself comical. Wilde makes frequent use of absurdity to amuse his audience. Aunts are said to be "allowed to decide for themselves" indicating that aunts are able to choose their own size, but the reality is that they can't, which therefore is just absurd. It also means that it is ridiculous and has no true meaning which then makes it even funnier.

When Algernon says "I think I can promise you he'll be all right by Saturday" suggests that what Algernon is stating is making no sense. Likewise, someone who is really ill cannot be guaranteed to be well by Saturday; once again it is the absurdity by which the characters say it with certainty, increasing the sense of humor. Wilde also utilizes hyperbolic languages to create drama and comedy. For instance, saying that christenings are "terrible". This is amusing because the negative exaggerated word is a contradiction with being Christian, which isn't something horrible.

Later on, the christening was said to be "fearful" which then makes it even more exaggerated. Here, the use of a hyperbole suggests that Wilde is trying to make the play comical by overemphasizing, which also links back to the

idea of absurdity. This is all because being Christian is conventionally seen as a good way of life, but Wilde is making it seem really bad by mocking. Additionally, when Gwendolen says " My poor wounded Cecily! " too which Cecily replies " My sweet wronged Gwendolen".

There is Juxtaposition from the earlier part where the two were insurgent of each other. He further satirizes the upper classes to convey a comedy with a serious point. When Lady Bracknell was interviewing Jack and said that " I am pleased to hear it after asking whether Jack knows everything or nothing. On one side this could be found as Wilde building up the ignorance and vacuity of the British upper classes, because even though Jack's answer is wrong it's actually right for Lady Bracknell. It can also explain that Wilde is making a serious political point.

Likewise, education in England " produces no effect whatsoever" meaning that this joke creates a sense of comedy through saying that if the lower classes knew anything they would overthrow the upper classes and may lead to rebellion. Humor is further created through contradictions in the dialogue. When Gwendolen and Cecily knew that there were no " Ernest" and says that they will not be the " first to speak" is a comical scene because they do speak anyway, as if their sayings did not mean anything so they undermine themselves and therefore look ridiculous.

Another example is when Algernon was angry and said " why are there no cucumber sandwiches? " when the truth is that he ate them all. This illustrates that what he's saying is contradicting to his actions and therefore makes it funny. Cecily also does not want anyone to see her diary, however,

she says that it is “meant for publication” qualifying that what she is saying is opposing her own sayings, and therefore creates humor. Furthermore, an atmosphere full of irony is created by Wilde. Algernon says “you are the most earnest-looking person” emphasizes that there is a sense of irony occurring.

This is because the person who Algernon was talking to is Jack, who was actually lying and trying to hide something away which contradicts with the word “earnest”. This is then found to be funny because Algernon already knows the truth, which then links back to him influencing Jack to fall into his trap. Likewise, another atmosphere which was filled with a sense of competition also makes the play exchange a comedic effect. When both Gwendolen and Cecily were having their fight about Ernest and they both said “Mr Ernest Worthing and I are engaged to be married”.

Their speeches were filled with absolute confidence but the truth is that there is no Ernest, which is funny. They were having their polite verbal argument whilst having tea setting a high-class position for both and therefore are not willing to be a loser, or else they will feel themselves in embarrassment. This behavior contradicts very well with the feeling of wanting to shout and physically harm each other, making the scene even funnier. In addition, Wilde’s use of dramatic stage directions also makes the play appear even more comical.

When Algernon was “retreating to back of sofa” suggests that this stage direction is a physical act which adds more humor into the scene. Another example is when Jack was “moving to sofa and kneeling upon it” This also

illustrates that not only the physical comedies have an effect on making the play more funny, but it has also shown that Wilde uses techniques other than words to make it sound like there are movements and would have a stronger effect by enabling the audiences to visualize it.

These actions are also associated with cartoon characters, meaning that the audience's schemas have an effect on making the play funny as well. When Cecily "cuts a very large slice of cake" and "puts four lumps of sugar into the cup" illustrates a scene where Cecily's trivial rebellious entertains us by doing the opposite as to what Gwendolen had asked for. This also reverses the audience's expectation to offer a surprising and humorous twist.

It is found to be funnier when the stage direction allows the reader to be able to visualize the whole scene. In conclusion, Wilde has actually used a combination of techniques to make the play sound like a comedy. This involves using stage directions, playing with the English language and allowing Algernon to release bits of information to Jack. Which all of these techniques has intertwined together, creating a sense of absurdity and humorous moments.