

Penny gay defines comedy as a genre essay sample

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The comedy of the Importance of Being Earnest uses spoken language to convey comical actions rather than physical actions. The Importance of Being Ernest is a drama because of its origins as a play, but also a contextual comedy as the characters follow the general format of falling in love with each other and ending with the idea of marriage. However, the play is also very satirical, making light of the aristocratic classes, exaggerating the upper-class morals and the frivolity of the characters. The satire that is portrayed in the play is very obvious, however today requires to match with the context of the times, Wilde's satire is centered in the aristocratic lives of the Victorian social system, this is first recognised when Algernon first introduced, immediately posed as a hypocrite, eating cucumber sandwiches that he told Jack not to eat, Algernon is also narcissistic, when at the piano he states that "I don't play accurately - any one can play accurately - but I play with wonderful expression." This shows how The Importance of Being Earnest supports Penny Gay's view by instantly portraying the character as a self-centered aristocrat, by this point in the play there has been one stage direction, showing that Wilde was more interested in what the character said rather than how the character acted, this can be further seen when Algernon says to Lane "I don't know that I am much interested in your family life, Lane."

Further showing Algernon's self centered attitudes, however this is quickly changed when he meets Cecily, calling her "the visible personification of absolute perfection." Showing the hypocritical nature of the characters. Wilde uses this as a way of creating comedy by showing the corrupt morals of Algernon and in fact Cecily, who will only marry a man named Ernest. The

satire is more comedic in comparison to most comedies that involved shrouding the narcissism of the main character, such as in Wilde's *The Picture Of Dorian Gray* where the Dorian, obsessed with youth and beauty becomes an immoral and ugly person because of his effort to remain youthful, whereas in *The Importance Of Being Earnest* is used more to mock the aristocrats with more comedy than drama. The play mocks the Victorian age, especially idealist views of love and marriage, mocking these ideas with eccentric claims of love and marriage, even with Algernon going to great lengths to be "christened at a quarter to six under the name of Ernest." This is followed by Jack commenting on Algernon being christened before, to which Algernon comments "Yes, but I have not been christened for years." This also shows how Wilde uses wit within the satirical situations to create a comical scene.

Wit is often used within the play, as the main character Jack and his alter-ego Ernest are both known for their wit, an example of this is when Lady Bracknell asks about Jack's discovery as a baby, to which she exclaims "A handbag?" and Jack replies with a simple "The Brighton line". This shows how Wilde gives the character a sense of nihilism, something that is seen within Ernest but not within Jack, who is considered a more romantic character. The mention of the line itself is witty as there was only two train lines, this line was the line to Worthing, where Jack's surname originated from, the other line, the East Kent line, lead to poverty ridden areas, showing Jack's chance of either being rich or poor. Jack says to Algernon in act 1 "My

dear Algy, you talk exactly as if you were a dentist. It is very vulgar to talk like a dentist when one isn't a dentist. It produces a false impression..."

This shows how Wilde portrays the characters to be very condescending of each others ways; this shows how words are more important than actions because the characters are shown to be cautious of their actions so as to keep to the aristocratic "Queens English", however both men speak very loosely while with each other, with Algernon replying with "Well, that is exactly what dentists always do.", whilst it is not written in the stage directions that the characters say this in a particular manner, it is implied that this is a sarcastic comment against dentists. The wordplay that Oscar Wilde uses within the play is a great way to view how he uses spoken comedy more than physical; Wilde incorporated wordplay into his main characters name, where Ernestness was defined as "serious people are serious because they do not see trivial comedies" such a view is portrayed only by the highest of society in the play, such as Algernon and Lady Bracknell.

Jack's name comes from the town at the end of the old Brighton line, Worthing. Bunbury is an inside joke from Wilde from when he met a young boy at Banbury, which led to a further meeting at Sunbury, this led to him adding the character, however Bunburying meant to take on a double life in Victorian slang, again using wordplay in his main characters names, the character of Ernest John is shown to be both the main characters fathers, and it is even shown in his name, Jack is a nickname for John and Algernon had taken the name Ernest.

To conclude, the only signs of physical comedy seen in this play are used to compliment either the satire or wit used by the main characters, Wilde could not portray his contempt at the social classes beginning to outlive themselves despite best efforts, they just ended up as gentry being hypocritical over a few cucumber sandwiches. However spoken comedy is used intensively, one such moment is formed when Jack and Algernon find out that they are in fact brothers separated at birth, it is therefore the case that Algernon will be marrying his cousin, this is not resolved and it is shown that the two main characters are in fact almost the exact same as their father " a man of peace, except in his domestic life". Use of wordplay to give name to the act that both men were committing and the satire that is showing the stereotypes of the Victorian era upper-class.

Algernon and Jack both ignore the idea of marriage, which was considered a very serious event and was expected of all gentlemen, both men also ignore the ideals of baptism in order to get married, this is very ironic because Jack states early on that " when one is in town one amuses onself." Showing his lack of desire for a marriage or even a relationship. However a few minutes later he says " I am in love with Gwendolen, I have come up to town to expressly to propose to her" with Algernon stating " how utterly unromantic you are" this would have been acted out with both sitting down, with little to no movement, the play is meant to be witty and not use physical comedy to emphasise the comedy. That is why most of the scenes take place indoors and with the majority of the cast sitting down as to prevent any slapstick movements being used. The Importance of Being Ernest is a play which

defines comedy as a spoken form and so disagrees with Penny Gay's analysis of the genre.