

The importance of being earnest, oscar wilde honest relationships in the play



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The Importance of Being Earnest The age in which Oscar Wilde lived i. e. The Victorian age, is quite possibly unique since it was marked and founded with the notion of hypocrisy. Society hid its true nature from itself and behaved in a manner where things were brushed under the carpet and even ignored altogether if they did not agree with the notion of how society viewed itself. For example, women were to be shown high respect but they were not made a real part of society since many professions and positions remained closed to them. The British culture itself had become restrained and repressed due the presence of hypocrisy to the point that humor took the shape of satire. Honesty was lacking in the social system and as Oscar Wildes The Importance of Being Earnest shows us, the lack of honesty even extended to the portrayed relationships between individuals which is evident in reworked versions of the play today (Feingold. 2004).

Wilde attained popularity and notoriety because of his works and the manner in which he lived his life. However, his plays contained a lot more than simple comedy since they can also be viewed as social commentary (Ellmann, 1988). The biting tone presented in The Importance of Being Earnest only highlights the idea that while individuals seek to be honest and even present themselves as being honest and upright, the honesty exists in name only and not in spirit (Chafe, 2008). Perhaps that is exactly what society demanded of the characters that is they should appear to be earnest and honest while doing nothing which actually showed that were exactly so in reality.

The Importance of Being Earnest gives us a satirical look at how characters can create elaborate deceptions to try and fool others. The deception even extends to how the characters relate to each other within the power

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structures defined by society where the man is supposed to be dominant and the woman is supposed to be subservient. However, dominant women can overturn the relationships and the social hierarchy as done by Lady Bracknell (Costa, 2008). While the rules are meant to be obeyed, they can be bent and altered by individuals in the same manner that the entire society is doing on a larger scale (Hawkins, 2006). For example, Jack is interviewed by Lady Bracknell but this interview was a role that had traditionally been reserved for the father in the Victorian age which is noted by Styan and Gentleman (1975, Pg. 44) as being “ an extreme contrast well suited to the quality of farcical comedy found in this play”.

Even Jack himself wishes to present the image of being honest and upright but is only his image which is good while in reality he is completely dishonest. The young ladies, i. e. Gwendolen and Cecily are able to control their own fortunes with regard to marriage by playing games, twisting words and being dishonest in how they relate to each other and their guardians. On the other hand, the men in the play are portrayed as being weak, and their roles remain passive despite them needing to show that they can be honest (Hawkins, 2006). Such reveals and lack of honesty in relationships only highlights the satire of the play where characters such as Gwendolen want to show themselves as having original ideas and wish to improve themselves as individuals. However, all she really wanted was to get married to man named Earnest.

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