

Using humor to survive tragedy

[Linguistics](#), [English](#)



Using Humor to Survive Tragedy " Through humor, you can soften some of the worst blows that life delivers." - Bill Cosby.

In Webster's dictionary, earnest is being serious in intention, effort, or purpose. It means being sincerely zealous. Oscar Wilde's play, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, A Trivial Comedy for Serious People, was first performed in 1895, in London. The protagonists in the farcical comedy lead double lives supported by fiction in order to escape the troubles brought about by their social obligations. The title of the play alludes a thesis on the worth of earnestness in everyday life. Conversely, Oscar Wilde presents a play that is ironic, and we are left with an opposite lesson from it. Not a single character in the play profits from propriety. The not so serious characters are the ones who benefit in the end; and it is because of their frivolous behavior all through the play. This indicates that there is little, if any, benefit to being modest.

In Bill Cosby's words, when one finds laughter, they can survive some of the worst moments in life. By using humor, one can stand up to the challenges that life brings, no matter tragic they may be. Situations in life are always changing; once one finds an intriguing way to survive a dark session, they will make it to the happy parts. In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Oscar puts the conventions in the Victorian times aside and presents us the absurdity of such an ardent attachment to seriousness. The play presents two young men, Algernon and Jack. Algernon is the symbol of un-earnestness, and Jack is his ward in jocularly and deceit.

Marriage is of utmost significance in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. This is because it is what drives the plot and is

the primary subject for philosophical debate and speculation. We are introduced to the nature of marriage for the first time when Algernon is talking to his butler, Lane. The subject of marriage stays on for the most part of the play as it develops. Jack and Algernon talk about the important things in marriage, and what matters in it. They talk of it as either a matter of “pleasure” or “business”. During Victorian times, there were conventions on marriage; with regard to its purpose and nature. These include such things as the social position of a person, the income the person had as well as the person’s character. Algernon and Jack are remarkably in the know of these assumptions, as well. Society expects them to follow these conventions, but they do not. They ridicule these customs, and, in situations where they cannot, they assume the identities of fictitious characters in order to escape the social responsibilities required of them by the society. The play is mainly a debate on the nature of marriage. Characters debate whether it is pleasant or not. Lane, Algernon’s butler, casually remarks that it is a pleasant state before going on to agree that his marriage was not all pleasant after all. Algernon dismisses Lane’s views on marriage. His own views on the matter are sarcastic. However, this is until he meets a woman of his own and falls in love.

Earnestness takes many forms. These are solemnity, boringness, complacency, pomposity, self-righteousness, a sense of duty, and smugness. All of these are what Oscar Wilde believes are the blocks of the Victorian culture. In the play, characters use the word serious when they actually mean “trivial” and trivial when they mean “serious”. For instance, Algernon thought it is trivial for people not to be serious about

meals. The word earnest comprises two different ideas; though the ideas are related. The first meaning, or idea, is that of false truth. The other idea is that of false morality. This earnestness of the Victorian culture and society is what drove Jack and Algernon to come up with fictitious alter egos so that they could escape the strictness of decency and propriety.

By rewarding Algernon and Jack, *The Importance of Being Earnest* is aiming to mean that it is necessary to be trivial and laugh at times. One can be saved of a jejune and grave life when they decide to live a life full of laughter and not seriousness all the time.

Work cited

Wilde, Oscar. *The Importance of Being Earnest*. London: LibriVox, 2005. Print