

# The Importance of Being Earnest” by Oscar Wilde: Critical Analysis Essay

For some people, maintaining a good public appearance is more important than being honest with oneself and others. The play “The Importance of Being Earnest” was written by Oscar Wilde. The author intends to demonstrate the consequences of being two-faced. The main character, Jack Worthing, leads a double life because he pretends to be Earnest when escaping to London and indulging in behavior that Jack himself disapproves of. The theme of morality and earnestness is the core element of this play.

Wilde depicts a Victorian society where upholding oneself to a high moral standard was a must. However, the author mocks this idea by showing that people find ways to overcome the restrictions that these moral standards place on them. For instance, Jack tells people that he has a younger brother, Earnest, who behaves immorally. Notably, Jack thinks that once he is married, he will no longer need an excuse in the form of Earnest. This detail may be a reference to viewing marriage as something that transforms an individual and makes them happy, although, in reality, marriage requires commitment and work. Hence, Wilde also uses the depiction of marriage as a way to show that societal standards and what society promotes are also not earnest because they create unrealistic expectations for marriage.

The author’s use of the name Earnest is another way of conveying the issue of moral standards and behavior. The word itself should characterize a person who is sincere and truthful. However, Wilde creates a moral paradox because Jack, as Earnest, does things that others would judge. But Jack is not the only person who uses excuses to behave the way they want to without violating societal standards. His friend, Algernon, says, “a man who marries without knowing Bunbury has a very tedious time of it” (Wilde 10). Bunbury is an imaginary friend whom Algernon uses as an excuse to avoid meetings that he does not want to attend.

Morality is an important topic that Wilde discloses through the lens of deception. The double life that Jack lives appears to be commonplace for the era. The presence of Bunbury suggests that appearance is more important than sincerity in the society that Wilde depicts. Moreover,

Gwendolen highlights the importance of a correct marriage proposal, and her brother practices it. For the aristocratic society, it is vital to ensure that a person maintains a good appearance, even though they may lead a double life.

The consequences of the conflict between earnestness and double life are shown in Act II. The two women, Gwendolen and Cecily, are fighting during a tea ceremony because both believe they are engaged to a man named Earnest. They talk about two men, each of whom called himself Earnest to hide their true identity. Although this play has a happy ending, both Jack and Algernon could have lost their fiances due to their lack of earnestness.

Overall, in this play, Wilde emphasizes the need, to be honest and sincere. The name of this play leads one to think about the feature of earnestness. The main character is not sincere or serious because he uses any excuse to behave the way he wants to and blames everything on his younger brother. Other characters, apart from Jack, convey the issue of morality and earnestness as well, for example, his best friend Algernon uses an excuse of a dying friend named Bunbury to get out of social occasions he does not want to be a part of.

### **Work Cited**

Wilde, Oscar. *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Dover Publications, 1990.