

The Importance Of Being Earnest: Theme Analysis

The major theme of this play is the satire of the upper classes. This is a particularly appropriate theme for Wilde to choose because of his experience among upper class people. Wilde's leisurely setting—the country, where almost no action takes place—is a perfect backdrop, because it insinuates that the wealthy do nothing with their time. He characterization is also clever. None of the upper class characters have any real depth, which suggests a one-dimensional nature. They are trivial, and shallow as well. An example of this can be found in the interaction between Gwendolen and Cecily, who immediately profess their admiration for one another and then, suddenly, turn on each other when they are at odds over “Ea rnest.” The only characters that can be seen working are Lane, Merriman, and Ms. Prism, who are not of the upper class. To further this theme, Wilde incorporates many mini-themes, such as the absurdity of social life, the triviality of the wealthy, the importance of money, and the lack of reverence for marriage.

The primary purpose of these themes is to provoke laughter from the audience. They can do so because they are testing the social values of their time. Wilde is able to satirize the upper classes by placing this play in an upper class social arena. Next he fills the characters language with epigrams, which make them seem ridiculous. Because they characters constantly contradict what basic values in their speech, or do not base their statements on any logic at all—they lose credibility as real-life, believable people. This works to Wilde's advantage because, despite what he may or may not think about the upper class, he wants his play to be funny and not overly offensive; they are, after all, the patrons of his show. Finally, Wilde makes the major issue of the play marriage. Marriage is an excellent way to poke fun at the aristocracy for two reasons. First, it is a traditionally sacred ceremony; second, he can highlight the importance of wealth and status among the upper classes, which often view marriage as a financial contract.

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TheBestNotes.com. 29 December 2011. 25 May 2008. web.