

# The Importance of Being Earnest

*O. Wilde*

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Practice makes perfect. Wilde produced a couple of plays, all amusing, but the last - The Importance of Being Earnest, is indeed the best. While the former plays rely to a very high degree on the charm of being period pieces, the present one, transcends its genesis. In it Wilde has brought his mannerism to its logical and absurd conclusions. The result is a modernist play in the tradition of Beckett and Ionescu. It is of course a comedy and a farce, and works as such, but also carries an implicit commentary on its very tradition.

It is genuinely funny in a way that the other plays are not. Those are somewhat artificial, while in this case artificiality is the whole point, and not merely a technical flaw. While the former plays depend much on the delivery of one-liners, many of which work best out of context (such as fox-hunting being the unmentionable in pursuit of the inedible), in this case the interchanges are more dynamic and rely on being connected. There is some dramatic tension and development, and with the lady Bracknell a formidable presence, whose interrogation complete with a note-book of the prospective suitor is a gem of comedy, also parts to be really savored and stand on their own feet. As I read along, I found myself involuntarily giggling, even laughing aloud, a spectacle of reaction none of the previous plays were able to provoke.

Of course the plot is absurd, and the characters mostly flat, with the exception of Lady Bracknell, but as already mentioned, Wilde manages to make that the whole point. Making a virtue of his own short-comings as a dramatist. But of course for that very reason if you want to enjoy his plays for nostalgic reasons, the others are to be preferred.

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