

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST Oscar Wilde

The Plot

The Importance of Being Earnest is one of most famous Wilde's play.

The story is about two young aristocratic men, Ernest and Algernon, who fall in love (che sono innamorati di) with two young women.

Ernest is now called (è ora chiamato) Jack, the name assigned him (assegnatogli) when he was adopted. He is the guardian (tutore) to his grand-daughter (nipotina), Miss Cecily, who lives in the country.

Jack has invented an alter ego (un suo doppio), a younger brother called Ernest who lives in the City. Even Algernon pretends to have a friend, called Bunbury, whose invalidity requires (la cui invalidità richiede) frequent attention, so ensuring (che gli assicura) his departure to the country.

The story develops around the two young men's attempts to marry Gwendolen and Cecily.

They have to overcome (superare) a lot of obstacles but in the end both men, who discover they are brothers, succeed in marrying their girls.

A new comedy of manners

The Wilde's theatre was a sort of new comedy of Manners (nuova commedia di costume), in which the problems of his age were reflected through his witty remarks (le sue battute di spirito).

The institution of marriage

The play presents an aristocratic society whose members are typical Victorian snobs; they are often arrogant, formal, and concerned with money.

The story is based on the problems of marriage. Wilde makes fun (prende in giro) of the institution of marriage which he saw as a practice surrounded by hypocrisy and absurdity. He shows that aristocracy doesn't see marriage as the result of love but rather as a tool for achieving social stature.

Irony and Imagination

The whole play is built on witty dialogues (dialoghi spiritosi), amusing puns (giochi di parole divertenti), misunderstandings (equivoci) and paradoxes.

The title is a pun in itself: the name Earnest (misspelling (errore ortografico) for Ernest) evokes the adjectives "earnest (vero), honest and sincere", while none of the characters is truthful.

The characters are used to criticise the Victorian prudery and exaggerated seriousness.

Irony is a dominant feature of the play.