

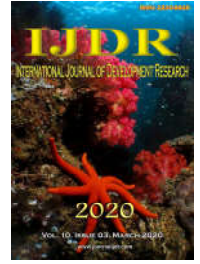


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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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AN ANALYSIS ON THE LOVE AND MARRIAGE VIEWS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

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ABSTRACT

This essay elaborates towards the representative works of Oscar Wilde's comedy: *The Importance of Being Earnest*, aiming at presenting the views of different people on the love and marriage, and attempts to state the change of different characters' views towards the marriage and the love. Through the whole reading, the dramatic feature and funny characters are highlighted, and the importance of the being earnest to the true love is revealed at the same time. In this drama, different people hold different views towards the love affairs, and people of different periods hold different views towards their own love affairs as well. This passage will take Gwendolen, Algernon and Jack for an example, through listing the concrete facts, to reveal the inner-heart world of the main characters. Furthermore, to show the author's ideal views towards the love, marriage and social value.

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INTRODUCTION

The Importance of Being Earnest is one of the famous masterpieces of the most outstanding comic representatives of the British aestheticism theory in the 19th century - Oscar Wilde (1854—1900). The play was first played in February 1895 and had caused a sensation at that time. The first play was composed of four acts, then cut into three acts. The show was printed onto the paper in 1899 for the first time, and then was considered as the highest level of modern British drama at that time, which was also regarded as one of the best works of the British comedy. The Gilbert, who worked as an actor once advised that: "the seriousness and the earnest are the two keys to the show's success." The show's dramatic structure, the carve of the characterization and the dramatic language all fully present the picture of the British upper-society life, which particularly reflect the Victorian times' various characters' views towards the love and marriage. This drama is mainly about a story of four young people. Algernon, an aristocratic young Londoner, pretends to have a friend named Bunbury who lives in the country and is frequently in ill health. Whenever Algernon wants to avoid an unwelcome social obligation, or just get away for the weekend, he makes an

ostensible visit to his "sick friend." In this way, he can feign piety and dedication, while having the perfect excuse to get out of town, avoiding his responsibilities. He calls this practice "Bunburying." Algernon's real-life best friend lives in the country but makes frequent visits to London. This friend's name is Ernest Worthing...or so Algernon thinks. But when Ernest leaves his silver cigarette case in Algernon's rooms, Algernon finds an inscription in it: "From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack". This forces Ernest to disclose that his own visits to the city are also examples of "Bunburying," much to Algernon's delight. In the country, "Ernest" goes by the name of Jack (which he understands to be his real name), and pretends that he has a wastrel brother named Ernest, who lives in London. When honest Jack comes to the city, he assumes the name, and behaviour, of the profligate Ernest. In the country, Jack assumes a more serious attitude for the benefit of his young ward, the 18-year old heiress Cecily. Jack himself wishes to marry Gwendolen, who is Algernon's cousin, but runs into a few problems. First, Gwendolen seems to love him only because she believes his name is Ernest, which she thinks is the most beautiful name in the world. Second, Gwendolen's mother is the terrifying Lady Bracknell. Lady Bracknell is horrified when she learns that Jack was adopted as a baby after being discovered in a

handbag at a railway station. In her opinion it is absolutely below the standards of her daughter to "marry into a cloakroom and form an alliance with a parcel", as she puts it. Meanwhile, Jack's description of Cecily has so appealed to Algernon that he resolves to meet her, in spite of Jack's firm opposition. Algernon decides to visit Jack's house in the country, in the guise of the mysterious brother "Ernest." Thus Algernon is able to meet Jack's ward, Cecily, who has for some time imagined herself in love with Ernest -- Jack's non-existent, scapegrace brother. As such, Cecily is soon swept off her feet by Algernon. In parallel, however, Jack, having decided to give up his Bunburying, has announced the tragic death of his brother Ernest to Cecily's governess Miss Prism, and Prism's secret admirer the Reverend Chasuble. Thus, by the time the two "brothers" meet, one is dressed in mourning for the other. New confusion is created by the arrival of Gwendolen, who has fled London. When she and Cecily meet for the first time, each indignantly insists that she is the one engaged to "Ernest". Once Lady Bracknell in turn arrives, in pursuit of her daughter, she and Jack reach stalemate as she still refuses to countenance his marriage to Gwendolen, while he, in retaliation, denies his consent to the marriage of Lady Bracknell's penniless nephew Algernon to his heiress ward Cecily.

The impasse is broken, however, by the reappearance of Miss Prism, there comes a tragic change. As she and Lady Bracknell recognize each other with horror, it is revealed that, when working many years previously as a nursemaid for Lady Bracknell's sister, Prism had inadvertently lost a baby boy in a handbag. When Jack produces the identical handbag, it becomes clear that he is Lady Bracknell's nephew and Algernon's older brother. Only one thing now stands in the way of the young couples' happiness, in view of Gwendolen's continued insistence that she can only love a man named Ernest - what is Jack's real first name? Lady Bracknell informs him that he was named after his father, a general, but cannot remember the general's name. Jack looks eagerly in a military reference book and declares that the name is in fact Ernest after all, and he has all along been telling the truth inadvertently. As the happy couples embrace in turn (including also Prism and Chasuble), Lady Bracknell complains to Ernest, "My nephew, you seem to be displaying signs of triviality." "On the contrary, Aunt Augusta," Ernest replies, "I have now realized for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest." (Wilde, 1990, 77)

From immature to mature, Cecily and Gwendolen's view of love: In the Victorian society, the most generally mentioned important behaviors are the following three: earnest, morality and idealism. The young, beautiful Cecily and Gwendolen's attitude to the love is: the love and marriage should follow an ideal form, even if not seeing the people before, they can make up their minds to fall in love with someone who has a special name. Just as when Gwendolen met Jack for the first time: "... I was told, my ideal is to fall in love with a man named Ernest, which really inspired me with absolute confidence". (Wilde, 1990, 25). "I first knew that my brother has a friend named Ernest, I knew I was destined to fall in love with him." After hearing this, Jack felt a little guilty, and he pretended to say that this name was not suitable for him. Gwendolen said: "This name is completely suitable for you, and this is a holy name which has its own music rhythm and can also produce resonance, "Jack attempted to ask Gwendolen about her feeling towards the name--Jack a name. Gwendolen still

insisted that:" Ernest is the only name with real security, "(Wilde, 1990, 36)From which we can see that Gwendolen is very obsessed with this name. When another heroine Cecily met Algernon (who pretended to be Jack's fictional brother Ernest), she showed her expression in such way:" From the first time, my dear uncle Jack introduced to us that he had a very nasty brother, you are absolutely becoming the main course become miss Leeds and I.....I dare say I am quite stupid, but I am quite sure that I have already fallen in love with you, "Then she describes how she is engaged into the name Ernest on valentine's day, and how she buys the ring in the name of his name.....When I see that you write three letters to me in the name of the Ernest for the termination of the engagement, I still want to cry again."Cecily went on to say:" My dear, please don't laugh at me, falling in love with someone whose name is Ernest has always been my girl's dream all the time. As the name Ernest equipped me with absolute confidence, and to those women who have not married with the man named Ernest, I really feel great sympathy to them."(Wilde, 1990, 46). "She is indulged with this name, and she even has the fantasy to be engaged with Ernest, to terminate the engagement with Ernest, and although she feels great pain for such illusion, when encountering with the true "Ernest", she still falls in love with him because of the name. It really makes a person feel astonished and sad. Gwendolen and Cecily's madness towards the name Ernest is likely due to the social affection. However, the reflection they take towards the love really shows how funny and childish the idea is. Though their original thinking is immature, when they found they had been cheated, they really felt very angry (Guerin, 1999, 220). But the true love wins all, eventually they forgive the Jack and Algernon. The couple finally get on well with each other, and they respectively live a happy life together. In the drama, Gwendolen and Cecily can't get rid of the trends of society at that time, at first, they are controlled by the funny childish love view, however, with the story goes, they gradually get rid of all these effect. In the end, they choose the one they love based on their feelings rather than on the person's name, which fully shows the new characteristics of the new woman in the new era. In this transition process, the author create the independent and self-love new female images of women,

From macracholia to true love: Algernon and Jack's love views: In the play, Jack wanders in the London city with the excuse of having a brother named Ernest. While he arrives in the city, he is self-proclaimed as Ernest. Algernon pays regular visit for pleasure in the countryside, for the excuse of seeing a patient named Bundury. Later on, then, they are all pursuing their true love with the frank use of the name "Ernest", which means they have been living a double life, and they are both running after the crazy life. In the first act, Jack once said, "The man who is familiar with me would say I am doing nothing except eating and drinking," He even told Algernon that the only purpose for his coming to the city is for pleasure. When Algernon talks about the marriage, he said to himself: "I don't think the engagement has any romantic factor, as the only romance in being loved..... If I get married, I must try to forget I have already got married. A man who has been married should know Bundury, or he will be very boring."Jack, as he had fallen in love with Gwendolen, his idea has changed, and he replied: That is nonsense. If I marry a charming girl like Gwendolen, and she is the only girl I ever saw in my life that I would marry, I certainly won't want to know Bundury. "Upon my word, if I thought that, I'd shoot myself . . . [A pause.]You

don't think there is any chance of Gwendolen becoming like her mother in about a hundred and fifty years, do you, Algy?" After refused of the engagement by Mrs. Bracknell, Jack said: "All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's his. The only way to behave to a woman is to make love to her, if she is pretty, and to someone else, if she is plain." As Algernon cannot find a way to comfort and enlighten Jack, he proposed to the place where they could spend their pastime, the dialogue is as follows:

JACK: [Irritably.] Oh! It always is nearly seven.

ALGERNON: Well, I'm hungry.

JACK: I never knew you when you weren't...

ALGERNON: What shall we do after dinner? Go to a theatre?

JACK: Oh, no! I loathe listening.

ALGERNON: Well, let us go to the Club?

JACK: Oh, no! I hate talking.

ALGERNON: Well, we might trot round to the Empire at ten?

JACK: Oh, no! I can't bear looking at things. It is so silly.

ALGERNON: Well, what shall we do?

JACK: Nothing!

ALGERNON: It is awfully hard work doing nothing.

However, I don't mind hard work where there is no definite object of any kind. (Wilde, 1990, 38)

At this time, because Algernon has not met the one he really loves, what he said shows that he holds a cynical view of marriage, and he even deconstructs the traditional view of marriage, Jack used to be a playboy, and since act I we can see that they seek for pleasure and maintain the dissolute lifestyle. However, after Algernon pretended to be Jack's fictional brother and encountered with Cecily, he said (fast): "Cecily, since the first time I saw your wonderful appearance, I have totally fallen in love with you, madly, passionately, intently, in despair." (Wilde, 1990, 24) He expresses his affection without any reservation. It is quite tragic when Jack met Gwendolen and Algernon met Cecily, they both abandoned the previous lifestyle in order to obtain the heart of two beauties, and they even decided to rename as Ernest. Later, when Jack's identity comes to light, he found himself is the real Ernest, he could help crying "For the first time in my life, I realize that being Ernest is of great importance!", Jack and Algernon's previous cynic attitudes form a great contrast to their now serious manners, which show the author's sarcasm to the marriage views of the upper class' playboys, and further emphasizes the importance of being Ernest.

Hypocrisy and secular: Mrs Bracknell's love marriage:

When Mrs. Bracknell knows that Jack proposed to Gwendolen, she examined Jack from the head to the feet, which is the funniest and most wonderful part of the whole novel: "I feel bound to tell you that you are not down on my list of eligible young men, although I have the same list as the dear Duchess of Bolton has. We work together, in fact. However, I am quite ready to enter your name, should your answers be what a really affectionate mother requires. Do you smoke?" "... How much is your income?" "... A country house! How many bedrooms?" (Wilde, 1990, 58). Well, that point can be cleared up afterwards. You have a town house, I hope? A girl with a simple, unspoiled nature, like Gwendolen, could hardly be expected to reside in the country. "... Your parents are still alive?" But when she knows that Jack is adopted, she advised

that: "I would strongly advise you, Mr. Worthing, to try and acquire some relations as soon as possible, and to make a definite effort to produce at any rate one parent, of either sex, before the season is quite over." But Jack is not willing to do that, so Mrs Bracknell got angry and said: "... Me, sir! What has it to do with me? You can hardly imagine that I and Lord Bracknell would dream of allowing our only daughter - a girl brought up with the utmost care - to marry into a cloak-room, and form an alliance with a parcel? Good morning, Mr. Worthing". (Abram, 2001, 109) Mrs. Bracknell is a snobbish, cunning, sleek, arbitrary, shallow upper-class aristocratic lady, as her has made a list for his daughter Gwendolen to find a qualified and desirable son-in-law, among which the natural property problem of course attracts her most attention. In the whole process of questioning her future son-in-law, she deliberately asks him about his property income, his social status, his birth background in order to make sure the happiness of her daughter. From which, the readers can see clearly the views which she holds are marked with the visible secular point of view. However, the sophisticated and experienced old lady tried to hide her private ideas during the process of her question, and she sometimes deliberately asks Jack about the problems she concerns, sometimes she gives a series of cool funny comments on the answer he has given. When Jack informs her that he earns 178 thousand pounds a year, the madam is quite satisfied, but she still pretends to ask whether the source is from the property or from the property investment. After she knows the source is from investment, she is quite satisfied, but she still tells Jack about the "profound theory", which criticizes his behaviors of earning money through renting the house, and it furthermore shows how selfish and sarcastic she is. In the latter plot, Mrs. Bracknell's attitudes towards the engagement between Cecily and Algernon also show her hypocrisy and secular view of marriage. At first, she holds a denial attitude towards Cecily, but later on, after she learned that the Cecily has a legacy more than one hundred and thirty thousand, she turns into a completely different attitude. It is quite obvious as her words become warmer, and the language transfers from negative to positive, such as "... it seems to me you are the most attractive young lady", "... a beautiful child!" "... sweet child!" She urges Algernon to get married with Cecily as soon as quickly, and the strong contrast totally presents Mrs. Bracknell's secular, sleek, snobbish and ugly face.

Miss Pulitzer's love marriage--from despair to desire:

In the whole drama, the description of Mrs. Pulitzer's is not much, but her views of love and marriage still change slightly. At first, Mrs. Pulitzer's lifelong attitude of love and marriage is never to marry anyone anytime. However, when she first met the priest, she was great impressed by his humor, and she even decided to go for a walk with him. After walking with the priest, Mrs. Pulitzer thinks that the priest should get married, she said like this: "... by staying single, men always let himself have the public temptation", "The married men only appeal to his wife", "Women can rely on, the mature can trust, but the young women are too childish." (Guerin, 1999, 98-99). These words have hidden Mrs. Pulitzer's deeper thought, as she has shown certain good feelings towards the priest, but she feels hard to express it, so she chooses to persuade him to get married instead of just showing her heart directly. Maybe it is more appropriate for an old woman to behave like this, as Mrs. Pulitzer has kept single for many years, and she is quite old now, and she can't help been restraint, so she's chasing after the priest in such way. At the end of the play,

Mrs.Pulitzer warmly hugs the priest, which highlights the show's funny and humor.

Conclusion

No one can get rid of social thoughts at that time, but they can finally get happiness through their own breakthrough. The main characters' views towards the marriage have all changed, so the final outcome is quite satisfactory, and they enjoy the happiness of life together. However, this drama also shows the secular funny marriage view at that time, which also highlights the British upper society's moral-losing and disorderly condition in the 19th century. The satisfied ending also illustrates Oscar Wilde's passion for the divine love, for the marriage, for the family. However, even though he himself can't get away from trouble and difficulty in his lifestyle, he still hopes that "the ordinary people in the world can get true love and happiness". On the other hand, the before and after conflict of the play shows the tension of the play perfectly, which also highlights the importance of being Earnest to the love and marriage.

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