

Discuss the importance of the Christening episode at the end of Act 2. How important is this episode to the themes and concerns of the play as a whole.

The christening episode at the end of act 2 is important to the themes of the play as both men compete over their love for both Cecily and Gwendolen. It also raises a number of concerns in the play about the characters Jack and Algernon (Algy) and how they have become shallow to get christened to the name of Earnest to impress the women.

The fragmentary identities of both Algy and Jack make the christening scene important. Both men are known as different people, Algy as Bunbury and Jack as Earnest. The different identities are used to give the men two different lives in the country and the city. We also find out that Jack hasn't been christened and wants to be christened as he sees it as no big deal. They both have dual identities.

However Jack is seen as a degenerate in society as he has no mother or father. When Lady Bracknell questions Jack in Act 1 she doesn't see him as a "recognized position in society". The English are concerned with blood lines and mixing with working class would not be seen as allowed. Lady Bracknell will let Jack marry Gwendolen if he finds relations that are in high society or he finds his parents to make him accepted by her.

Lady Bracknell is classed as a male figure in the play. Women are usually fragile, soft and emotional; however Lady Bracknell holds the masculine characteristics of tough, hard and powerful. This is shown as Jack goes to Lady Bracknell instead of Lord Bracknell to ask for their daughter's hand in marriage. Lady Bracknell is like this as before this time women were seen as an undermined class and their views were not accepted. They were possessions of the male figure. She wants to prove that she is capable of being a strong human like a man. The strong views held by Lady Bracknell make Jack want to be christened Earnest as to fit into the high class society.

Algy and Jack in the play are more feminine characters than the women. As Wilde was a keen supporter of the Aesthetic movement he includes this love of art and literature into the characters. Algy is an Epicurean character who believes in 'eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die'. The language used by them at the start of Act 3 is in unison with each other. Gwendolen goes 'darling' to a Jack so you expect Cecily to do the same to Algy, but instead he says darling to her.

For Wilde being Irish it has an effect on the ideas within the play. The Irish were criticised for being lacking in innocent and artistry. The Irish also had to power or control. So Wilde reversed these views and made out that the English had no power, which is seen in Algy and Jack. Jack was also devalued by Lady Bracknell for agreeing to the Liberals' view on the Home Rule. Jack was a Liberal, whereas Lady Bracknell was a Conservative who was against it. Aristocrats were seen as not taking an interest in politics and society, so this was also not seen as being a pure blood.

The play also criticises the aristocrats of English Values. He doesn't mock the working classes only the Aristocrats. Wilde believed the only way to become English was to live in England, so went to study at Oxford University in order to become a Englishman. This was to disprove that you can become an Aristocrat even if you don't have the blood lines or relations. The Irish were also seen as a feminine race, so in the play Wilde gives the feminine characteristics to the male characters to show that the English are just as feminine as the Irish, if not more.

The English Aristocrats were known as being lazy and only cared about themselves. The food is a major part of their so called religion. Religion was not important to the upper class. Dr Chasuable was a reverent, but was not religious and didn't promote the belief of religion. He was allowing Jack and Earnest to be christened in between funerals, which shows his lose morals. He would rather promote social networking as he was incompetent with religion. He had no idea what religion was, or how it was understood.

Algy in Act 1 is only concerned about himself and cucumber sandwiches. When Lady Bracknell wants a cucumber sandwich Algy is not happy when there wasn't any at her disposal, as he sees it as a compulsory religion. Also in the christening scene muffins play an important role as it was a side track to talk about instead of religion, they see muffins as more important.

Overall the christening scene tells us more about the characters views on religion as this is affected by how Wilde sees the English people as just the same as the Irish. Algy and Jack also show how un-important it is to get christened. To them it is seen as not an important event, it is only to impress the women, whereas in the 21st century it is the women who try and impress the men. This show the women are move controlling than the men. At last women are seen as powerful!