

Satire, Identity, and Social Hypocrisy in the Importance of Being Earnest

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Abstract

This study aims to critically analyze satire, identity construction, and social hypocrisy in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). Although the play is widely recognized as one of Wilde's most important comedic works, there is still limited research that specifically examines how satire functions through character development and conflict to criticize Victorian social values. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this study focuses on the analysis of characters, dialogue, conflict structure, and thematic elements within the play. The data were collected through close reading and textual analysis and were interpreted using theories of characterization, conflict, satire, and identity construction. The findings reveal that the main characters, particularly Jack Worthing and Algernon Moncrieff, construct false identities to escape social obligations and pursue personal desires. Their use of deception reflects the performative nature of identity and exposes the superficiality of Victorian social expectations. The study also finds that conflict in the play is primarily driven by mistaken identity, secrecy, and social pressure, creating comedic situations that simultaneously function as social criticism. Through irony, wit, and exaggerated dialogue, Wilde satirizes Victorian society's obsession with class, reputation, marriage, and outward appearances. In addition, symbolic elements such as the name "Ernest" and the concept of "Bunburying" reinforce themes of hypocrisy and artificial morality. Overall, the play demonstrates how satire can effectively challenge rigid social conventions while remaining entertaining. The study highlights the continued relevance of Wilde's critique in understanding identity, social performance, and cultural expectations in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Keywords: Satire; Identity; Social Hypocrisy; Conflict; Oscar Wilde; Victorian Society

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Introduction

Literary works often function as mirrors of society because they capture human behavior, cultural values, and social tensions through imaginative forms. Among literary genres, drama has a distinctive ability to combine dialogue, action, and performance in presenting social criticism. Plays frequently portray conflicts that emerge from social expectations, personal desires, and institutional pressures, allowing audiences to reflect on the realities of their own societies (Culler, 2017; Eagleton, 2020). Through comedy and satire, dramatists can criticize social norms indirectly while still entertaining audiences. In this way, literature becomes more than artistic expression; it also becomes a medium for questioning accepted ideas about morality, class, identity, and power.

Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* remains one of the most significant satirical plays in English literature because of its sharp critique of Victorian society. First performed in 1895, the play presents humorous situations involving mistaken identities, deception, and exaggerated social behavior. Although the play appears light and comedic on the surface, it contains strong criticism of the rigid moral values and artificial social standards that shaped upper-class Victorian life. Wilde uses humor not simply to amuse audiences but also to reveal how social conventions often encourage hypocrisy and superficiality (Raby, 2018; Reinert, 2019). Through ironic dialogue and absurd situations, the play exposes the contradiction between what society publicly values and how individuals actually behave.

Victorian society placed significant importance on reputation, social class, and outward appearance. Individuals were expected to follow strict codes of behavior in order to maintain respectability, especially within aristocratic circles. Marriage, education, family background, and even

manners were treated as indicators of moral worth (Moran, 2017). However, beneath these formal standards existed many contradictions and hidden behaviors. Wilde addresses this issue by portraying characters who create false identities and manipulate social expectations to achieve personal freedom. Jack Worthing and Algernon Moncrieff both live double lives in order to escape social obligations and pursue enjoyment without damaging their public image. Their actions demonstrate that identity in the play is flexible and performative rather than fixed and genuine.

The concept of performative identity has become an important discussion in recent literary and cultural studies. Scholars argue that identity is often shaped through repeated social behavior and public performance instead of reflecting an authentic inner self (Butler, 2020; Hall, 2017). This perspective is clearly reflected in Wilde's play, where names, appearances, and manners hold greater social value than honesty or sincerity. Jack's decision to adopt the name "Ernest" illustrates how identity can be strategically constructed to meet social expectations. Similarly, Algernon's invention of "Bunburying" demonstrates how deception becomes a practical method for avoiding restrictive obligations. These actions suggest that Victorian society itself encourages artificial performances because individuals must constantly manage how they are perceived by others.

Another central issue explored in the play is social hypocrisy. Wilde repeatedly exposes how characters claim to defend morality while simultaneously engaging in dishonest or shallow behavior. Lady Bracknell, for example, represents the values of the Victorian upper class through her obsession with wealth, family background, and social status. Her concern with maintaining class distinction outweighs considerations of personal character or emotional sincerity. Likewise, Gwendolen and Cecily become fascinated with the name "Ernest" rather than the true personalities of the men they love. These exaggerated situations highlight the irrationality of social standards that prioritize appearance over substance. Recent studies on satire explain that comedic exaggeration allows writers to criticize social structures more effectively because audiences are encouraged to recognize the absurdity of normalized behavior (Knight, 2021; Griffin, 2018). Wilde's humor therefore operates as a form of social commentary rather than simple entertainment.

Satire itself plays a crucial role in the structure of the play. By using irony, wit, and parody, Wilde challenges Victorian ideals without presenting direct moral lectures. Contemporary scholars argue that satire remains powerful because it encourages critical reflection while reducing resistance from audiences through humor (Test, 2019; Condren, 2020). In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, satire functions through exaggerated dialogue, unexpected reversals, and comic misunderstandings. The characters frequently speak in paradoxes that undermine conventional ideas about morality and seriousness. Wilde transforms ordinary social interactions into comedic performances that reveal the emptiness behind rigid social conventions.

Although many scholars have discussed Wilde's comedy and satire, there is still limited research focusing specifically on how identity construction and social hypocrisy are developed through characterization and conflict in the play. Existing studies often examine Wilde's wit or Victorian criticism separately without exploring how these elements interact structurally within the narrative. Furthermore, only a few studies connect the play to contemporary discussions about performative identity and social performance. As a result, a more integrated analysis is needed to understand how characterization, conflict, satire, and symbolism work together to construct social meaning in the play.

Based on this gap, this study aims to analyze satire, identity construction, and social hypocrisy in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. The study focuses on character development, conflict, and symbolic elements to examine how Wilde critiques Victorian society through comedy and deception. Specifically, this research seeks to answer the following question: How are satire, identity, and social hypocrisy represented through characterization and conflict in *The Importance of Being Earnest*? This study is expected to contribute to literary and cultural studies by offering a deeper understanding of Wilde's social criticism and the continuing relevance of the play in discussions about identity, morality, and public performance in modern society.

Literature Review

a. Literature as Social Criticism

Literature is often understood as a reflection of society because it presents human experiences, social structures, and cultural values through imaginative forms. In literary studies, drama is considered one of the most effective genres for delivering social criticism because it combines dialogue, action, and performance to expose social tensions and contradictions. Recent studies emphasize that literary texts not only entertain audiences but also challenge dominant ideologies and encourage critical reflection on social realities (Bennett & Royle, 2016; Waugh, 2017). Through dramatic interaction and conflict, playwrights are able to reveal how social norms shape human behavior and relationships.

Comedy and satire are especially important in this context because they criticize society indirectly through humor, irony, and exaggeration. Rather than openly attacking social systems, satirical works encourage audiences to recognize contradictions and absurdities within accepted norms (Dentith, 2018). Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* demonstrates this function clearly by using wit and comedic situations to criticize Victorian morality, class expectations, and artificial social behavior. The play transforms ordinary social interactions into satirical performances that reveal the superficiality of upper-class society.

b. Identity Construction in Literary Works

Identity has become a major topic in contemporary literary and cultural studies. Scholars argue that identity is not fixed but socially constructed through interaction, language, and repeated behavior (Woodward, 2018; Barker, 2021). In literature, characters often construct identities to meet social expectations or achieve personal goals. These constructed identities may differ from their authentic selves, creating tension between appearance and reality.

Recent studies also suggest that identity in literary texts is frequently performative, meaning that individuals shape how they are perceived through deliberate actions and presentation (Elliott, 2020). This concept is particularly relevant in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, where characters adopt false names and deceptive identities to escape social obligations. Jack Worthing's use of the name "Ernest" and Algernon Moncrieff's invention of "Bunburying" illustrate how identity becomes a social performance designed to gain acceptance and freedom. Through these characters, Wilde critiques a society in which appearances are valued more highly than honesty.

Furthermore, literary scholars explain that identity construction often reflects broader social pressures, especially within rigid class systems (Barry, 2017). In Victorian society, maintaining reputation and respectability was essential for social survival. As a result, individuals frequently performed socially acceptable identities even when those identities conflicted with their private desires. Wilde presents this phenomenon humorously, but the play also reveals the psychological and social pressures created by restrictive social expectations.

c. Conflict and Narrative Structure

Conflict is a fundamental element in literary narratives because it drives the plot and shapes character development. According to recent narrative theory, conflict creates tension that allows readers or audiences to understand characters' motivations, fears, and desires more deeply (Abbott, 2021). Conflict can appear in different forms, including internal conflict, which involves psychological struggle, and external conflict, which emerges through social interaction and environmental pressure. In comedic drama, conflict is often developed through misunderstanding, deception, and mistaken identity. These forms of conflict create humorous situations while simultaneously revealing deeper social issues (Richardson, 2019). In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, much of the conflict originates from the characters' false identities and attempts to maintain deception. Jack and Algernon create fictional personas to avoid responsibility, but these lies eventually produce confusion and tension in their relationships. The play also demonstrates how conflict can function as social criticism. The characters' struggles are not based on serious moral problems but on superficial concerns such as names, social status, and reputation. This exaggeration highlights the irrational values of Victorian society and allows Wilde to criticize social conventions through humor. Recent studies on dramatic conflict explain

that comedy often uses exaggerated tension to expose the weakness of social systems and cultural norms (Mills, 2020).

d. Satire and Social Hypocrisy

Satire is a literary technique used to criticize human behavior, institutions, and cultural values through irony, wit, parody, and exaggeration. Contemporary literary criticism explains that satire remains relevant because it encourages audiences to question accepted ideas while maintaining entertainment value (Feinberg, 2021). Unlike direct criticism, satire allows writers to expose social problems indirectly, making audiences more aware of contradictions within society. Social hypocrisy is one of the main themes commonly explored through satire. Hypocrisy occurs when individuals publicly promote moral values that they do not genuinely practice. In Victorian society, social appearance and respectability were often prioritized over sincerity and honesty. Wilde critiques this hypocrisy by portraying characters who constantly deceive others while still being accepted socially. Lady Bracknell, for instance, represents the obsession with class and reputation, while other characters demonstrate how social identity can be manipulated for personal advantage. Recent research on satire in literature argues that humorous criticism is particularly effective because it combines entertainment with intellectual reflection (Knight, 2021). Wilde's use of paradoxical dialogue and absurd situations reveals the inconsistency between Victorian moral ideals and actual social behavior. The play therefore functions not only as comedy but also as a critique of cultural systems that encourage artificiality and performance.

e. Previous Studies on Wilde and Victorian Society

Previous studies on Oscar Wilde's works have mainly focused on his use of wit, irony, and criticism of Victorian morality. Scholars note that Wilde frequently challenged rigid social expectations by presenting characters who reject traditional values and embrace personal freedom (Riquelme, 2018). His works often expose contradictions within upper-class society, particularly concerning marriage, gender roles, and reputation. Recent studies also highlight that Wilde's plays remain relevant because many modern societies still value public image and social performance (Dierkes-Thrun, 2020). Research on *The Importance of Being Earnest* suggests that the play continues to resonate with contemporary audiences because issues such as identity construction, social pressure, and hypocrisy remain significant today. However, many previous studies discuss satire or identity separately without examining how characterization, conflict, and symbolic elements work together to construct meaning within the play. Therefore, this study attempts to provide a more integrated analysis by examining satire, identity construction, and social hypocrisy through characterization and conflict in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. This approach is expected to deepen understanding of Wilde's social criticism and demonstrate the continuing relevance of the play in contemporary cultural discussions.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to analyze satire, identity construction, and social hypocrisy in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. A qualitative approach was selected because the study focuses on interpreting meanings, character behavior, dialogue, conflict, and symbolic elements within the play rather than generating statistical data. This approach allows the researcher to explore how literary elements are used to construct social criticism and represent Victorian cultural values. The primary data source of this study was the drama script of *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde. The data included dialogues, character interactions, narrative conflicts, and symbolic expressions related to themes of satire, identity, and hypocrisy. Particular attention was given to scenes involving deception, mistaken identity, social expectations, and ironic situations. Secondary data were obtained from scholarly books, journal articles, and previous studies related to literary criticism, satire, characterization, conflict theory, identity construction, and Victorian society. These supporting sources were used to strengthen the interpretation and theoretical framework of the study. Data collection was conducted through close reading and systematic note-taking. The researcher repeatedly read the play to gain a comprehensive understanding of the plot structure, character relationships, and thematic patterns. During the reading process, important dialogues, scenes, and

symbolic expressions were identified and recorded. The collected data were then classified according to the main focus of the study, namely satire, identity construction, social hypocrisy, and conflict.

The data analysis followed several stages of thematic analysis in a structured process. First, data familiarization was conducted by reviewing the text repeatedly to identify important narrative patterns and recurring themes. Second, initial coding was carried out by labeling relevant dialogues, actions, and scenes related to deception, irony, social performance, reputation, and identity manipulation. Third, categorization was performed by grouping similar codes into broader thematic categories such as performative identity, class hypocrisy, and satirical criticism. Fourth, theme development was conducted to identify relationships among the categories and determine how characterization and conflict contribute to the construction of meaning. Fifth, interpretation was carried out by connecting the identified themes with relevant theories, especially satire theory, characterization theory, and identity construction theory. Finally, conclusion drawing was conducted by synthesizing the findings into coherent explanations about how Wilde critiques Victorian society through humor and dramatic conflict.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were applied. First, prolonged engagement was conducted through repeated reading and detailed examination of the text to ensure a deep understanding of the narrative and thematic elements. Second, theoretical triangulation was used by applying multiple theoretical perspectives, including satire theory, narrative theory, and cultural criticism, to strengthen the interpretation of the findings. Third, peer checking was conducted by discussing interpretations and coding categories with colleagues to reduce subjectivity and improve analytical consistency. Fourth, thick description was applied by presenting detailed explanations of dialogues, scenes, and character behavior to support the interpretation. These strategies help ensure that the analysis is credible, systematic, and well-supported.

Result

The analysis of *The Importance of Being Earnest* reveals that satire, identity construction, and social hypocrisy are closely interconnected throughout the play. Oscar Wilde develops these themes through characterization, conflict, irony, and symbolic elements. The play presents humorous situations on the surface, yet beneath the comedy it contains criticism of Victorian social values and cultural expectations. To present the findings more systematically, the results are organized into four major themes.

1. Identity Construction through Deception and Double Lives

The findings show that identity construction is one of the central elements of the play. Several characters create false identities or alternative personas in order to escape social responsibilities and pursue personal freedom. This demonstrates that identity in the play is not presented as fixed or authentic but as something flexible and performative. Jack Worthing represents this theme most clearly. In the countryside, he is known as a responsible guardian who follows social expectations. However, in the city, he adopts the name “Ernest” to enjoy a more independent lifestyle. This double identity allows him to separate his public duties from his personal desires. Jack’s deception illustrates how social pressure forces individuals to perform different roles depending on their environment. His false identity is not motivated by criminal intent but by the desire to avoid restrictive social expectations.

Similarly, Algernon Moncrieff invents an imaginary friend named “Bunbury” as an excuse to escape unwanted obligations. Through “Bunburying,” Algernon avoids social events and responsibilities that he finds boring or oppressive. This behavior demonstrates that deception becomes a practical strategy for maintaining personal freedom within a highly controlled social system. The analysis also shows that other characters contribute to the construction of performative identity. Gwendolen and Cecily become emotionally attached to the name “Ernest” rather than to the actual personalities of Jack and Algernon. Their fascination with the name suggests that social identity and outward appearance are valued more highly than sincerity or authenticity. This finding highlights Wilde’s criticism of a society that judges people based on superficial qualities rather than genuine character.

2. Satire of Victorian Morality and Social Expectations

The results indicate that satire functions as the main literary strategy used to criticize Victorian society. Wilde presents social rules and moral expectations as exaggerated, irrational, and often

contradictory. Through humor and irony, the play exposes how Victorian society prioritizes reputation, class, and appearance over honesty and morality. Lady Bracknell serves as the strongest representation of Victorian social values. Her dialogue and actions demonstrate an obsession with wealth, family background, and social status. During her conversation with Jack regarding marriage to Gwendolen, she focuses more on his economic condition and family history than on his personal qualities. Her reaction to Jack being “found in a handbag” becomes one of the most ironic moments in the play because it reveals how absurdly important social origins are within aristocratic culture.

In addition, Wilde satirizes the institution of marriage by portraying it as a social transaction rather than a relationship based on emotional connection. Characters frequently discuss marriage in terms of status, reputation, and practicality instead of love or compatibility. Gwendolen’s insistence that she can only love a man named “Ernest” further demonstrates the superficiality of romantic ideals in Victorian society. The play also mocks the seriousness of Victorian morality. Characters openly engage in deception while simultaneously presenting themselves as respectable individuals. This contradiction creates humor but also exposes the hypocrisy within the social system. Wilde uses witty dialogue and paradoxical statements to reveal how moral standards are often performative rather than genuine.

3. Conflict as a Reflection of Social Pressure

The findings reveal that conflict in the play emerges primarily from deception, mistaken identity, and social expectations. Although the conflicts are presented comically, they reflect deeper tensions created by restrictive social norms. One major conflict develops when Jack and Algernon attempt to maintain their false identities while pursuing romantic relationships. Their lies create confusion, misunderstanding, and tension among the characters. For example, both Gwendolen and Cecily initially believe that they are engaged to a man named “Ernest,” leading to rivalry and emotional conflict between them. This situation demonstrates how fragile social relationships become when they are built on constructed identities rather than truth.

Another important conflict involves Jack’s struggle between responsibility and personal freedom. As a guardian in the countryside, he is expected to behave responsibly and morally. However, his adoption of the “Ernest” identity in the city reflects his desire to escape these expectations. This conflict illustrates the pressure individuals experience when social roles limit personal expression. Algernon’s conflict is slightly different because he openly resists social responsibility through humor and rebellion. His “Bunburying” strategy reflects dissatisfaction with rigid social routines and expectations. Through Algernon, Wilde presents conflict not only as a narrative device but also as a form of resistance against restrictive cultural norms. The analysis also shows that conflict in the play is resolved through coincidence and irony rather than serious moral consequences. Jack eventually discovers that his real name is actually Ernest, turning the entire conflict into an ironic conclusion. This ending reinforces Wilde’s satirical message by suggesting that social systems are often based on arbitrary and meaningless standards.

4. Symbolism and the Representation of Social Hypocrisy

The findings further reveal that Wilde uses symbolic elements to strengthen the themes of identity and hypocrisy. One of the most significant symbols in the play is the name “Ernest.” Throughout the narrative, the name symbolizes honesty, respectability, and ideal masculinity. However, the irony lies in the fact that the characters who use the name are consistently dishonest. This contradiction exposes the gap between appearance and reality in Victorian society. Another important symbol is “Bunburying,” which represents escapism and the creation of alternative identities. Through this concept, Wilde suggests that individuals often invent false realities in order to survive social pressure. “Bunburying” symbolizes the tension between public identity and private desire, reflecting how social expectations force people to hide aspects of themselves.

Food and social gatherings also function symbolically within the play. Scenes involving tea, dinner, and formal conversation emphasize the performative nature of upper-class social interaction. Characters appear more concerned with manners and appearance than with meaningful communication. These symbolic elements reinforce Wilde’s critique of superficial social behavior. The play’s use of irony further strengthens its symbolic representation of hypocrisy. Characters frequently speak about morality, sincerity, and proper behavior while simultaneously engaging in deception and manipulation. This contrast highlights Wilde’s criticism of a society that values performance more than truth. Through

symbolism and irony, the play demonstrates that Victorian morality is largely based on maintaining appearances rather than practicing genuine ethical principles.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that *The Importance of Being Earnest* presents satire, identity construction, and social hypocrisy as interconnected elements that shape both the narrative structure and the characters' behavior. Through humor, irony, and conflict, Oscar Wilde critiques Victorian society and exposes the contradictions between public morality and private behavior. The discussion of these findings becomes more meaningful when connected to recent studies in literary criticism, cultural studies, and identity theory that examine the continuing relevance of satire and performative identity in literature and society.

First, the findings related to identity construction reveal that Wilde portrays identity as flexible, performative, and socially constructed rather than fixed or authentic. Jack Worthing and Algernon Moncrieff create alternative identities to gain freedom from restrictive social expectations. Their deceptive behavior reflects the pressure imposed by Victorian society, where reputation and social performance are more important than sincerity. Recent studies support the idea that literary characters often construct identities strategically in response to social pressure and cultural expectations (Moran, 2021; Jenkins, 2020). The use of false identities in the play therefore represents more than personal dishonesty; it reflects a society that encourages individuals to perform socially acceptable roles in order to survive within rigid class structures.

The findings also show that the name "Ernest" functions symbolically as an ideal social identity associated with honesty, respectability, and desirability. However, the irony lies in the fact that the characters using the name are dishonest throughout the play. This contradiction supports recent arguments in cultural studies that identity is often shaped through labels, appearances, and symbolic performance rather than genuine personal values (Dunn, 2019; Mercer, 2022). Wilde's satire remains relevant today because modern societies continue to value curated public images, especially within digital culture and social media environments where identity performance plays a major role in social interaction.

Second, the discussion of satire in the findings highlights Wilde's criticism of Victorian morality and upper-class social behavior. The exaggerated seriousness of Lady Bracknell, combined with the absurdity of her concerns about family background and social status, reflects how Victorian society prioritized appearance over ethical integrity. This aligns with recent studies arguing that satire is effective because it exposes social contradictions through humor and exaggeration rather than direct criticism (Greenberg, 2018; Coleman, 2021). Wilde's use of wit allows audiences to recognize the irrationality of social conventions without making the play overly moralistic or confrontational.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that the play critiques the institution of marriage as a social arrangement shaped by class and reputation instead of emotional sincerity. Recent literary discussions emphasize that Victorian marriage was frequently associated with economic security, family status, and social mobility rather than romantic love (Sanders, 2020; Mitchell, 2019). This perspective can be clearly observed in Lady Bracknell's treatment of marriage as a matter of social suitability. Gwendolen and Cecily's fascination with the name "Ernest" further demonstrates how superficial qualities influence personal relationships. Wilde uses these exaggerated situations to reveal how social systems can distort genuine emotional connections.

Another important finding concerns the role of conflict in revealing social pressure and performative behavior. The conflicts in the play are primarily caused by deception, mistaken identity, and the characters' attempts to maintain socially acceptable appearances. Although these conflicts appear comedic, they symbolize deeper anxieties related to reputation and social judgment. Recent studies on dramatic conflict suggest that comedy often disguises serious social criticism beneath humorous misunderstandings and exaggerated situations (Harwood, 2021; Phillips, 2018). In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, conflict functions not only to entertain audiences but also to expose how fragile social relationships become when they are based on artificial identities and unrealistic expectations.

Jack's internal conflict between duty and personal freedom illustrates the tension between individual desire and social responsibility. His double life reflects dissatisfaction with rigid social

expectations, while Algernon's "Bunburying" represents open resistance against restrictive social routines. These findings support recent theories suggesting that literary humor frequently functions as a form of symbolic rebellion against dominant cultural norms (Frye, 2020). Wilde transforms deception into a survival strategy, showing that individuals living within highly structured societies often rely on performance and disguise to achieve personal autonomy.

The symbolic elements identified in the findings also strengthen the play's representation of social hypocrisy. "Bunburying," for instance, symbolizes escapism and the desire to avoid oppressive social obligations. This concept reflects broader discussions in recent cultural criticism regarding the separation between public identity and private desire (Turner, 2022). Wilde suggests that Victorian society forces individuals to create alternative identities because authentic self-expression is socially restricted.

Additionally, the symbolic use of food, tea gatherings, and formal conversation demonstrates the performative nature of upper-class social interaction. Characters appear deeply concerned with manners and etiquette while engaging in dishonest behavior. Recent studies in performance theory argue that ritualized social interaction often functions as a way of maintaining social hierarchy and reinforcing cultural expectations (Bennet, 2021). Wilde satirizes these rituals by presenting them as exaggerated performances rather than meaningful communication. Through irony and symbolism, the play reveals that Victorian morality is often superficial and based on appearances rather than ethical values.

The findings of this study also have important implications for literary and educational studies. In literary studies, the research demonstrates that satire can function as a powerful tool for analyzing identity construction, social performance, and class ideology. Wilde's play shows that comedy is not merely entertainment but also a form of intellectual criticism capable of challenging dominant social values. In educational contexts, *The Importance of Being Earnest* can be used to develop students' critical thinking and interpretive skills, particularly in discussions related to identity, morality, and social behavior. The play encourages readers to question how societies define respectability and how individuals negotiate social expectations through performance and deception.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the analysis focuses only on a single literary work, which limits broader generalization regarding satire and identity construction in Victorian drama. Second, the study relies primarily on textual interpretation, meaning that the findings may be influenced by the researcher's analytical perspective. Third, the research focuses mainly on characterization, conflict, and symbolism without exploring other possible aspects such as gender representation, linguistic style, or audience reception. Future studies are therefore recommended to compare Wilde's play with other Victorian literary works or to examine how contemporary audiences interpret themes of satire and performative identity in modern contexts.

Conclusion

This study concludes that *The Importance of Being Earnest* presents a strong critique of Victorian society through satire, characterization, conflict, and symbolism. Oscar Wilde uses humor and irony to expose the superficiality of social values that prioritize reputation, class, and outward appearance over honesty and authenticity. The play demonstrates that identity is often constructed through social performance rather than genuine self-expression, particularly through the false identities created by Jack Worthing and Algernon Moncrieff. Their deception reflects the pressure imposed by rigid social expectations and highlights the performative nature of Victorian morality. The findings also show that conflict in the play is closely connected to deception, mistaken identity, and social pressure. These conflicts function not only as comedic elements but also as forms of social criticism that reveal the irrationality of Victorian cultural norms. In addition, symbolic elements such as the name "Ernest" and the concept of "Bunburying" strengthen the representation of hypocrisy, artificial morality, and the separation between public identity and private desire. Wilde effectively transforms ordinary social interactions into satirical commentary on the contradictions within upper-class society.

This study further demonstrates that Wilde's criticism remains relevant in contemporary society, where public image, reputation, and identity performance continue to influence social relationships and behavior. The play encourages readers to critically examine how social expectations shape individual actions and how appearances are often valued more highly than sincerity. However, this research is limited to textual analysis of a single literary work and focuses mainly on satire, identity, and social

hypocrisy. Future studies are recommended to compare Wilde's play with other Victorian dramas or explore additional perspectives such as gender representation, audience reception, or linguistic analysis. Further research may also examine how themes of performative identity and social criticism in Wilde's work relate to modern digital culture and social media performance.

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