

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

The PLAY as

FARCE

involving mistaken identities, misunderstandings, absurd business

ABSURD DRAMA

Jack and Algernon are, socially, remote from Beckett's Vladimir and Estragon, but some of their exchanges (e.g.: when speaking of the time and of their plans for the evening) seem an anticipation of the 'farcical absurdities' of Ionesco, Beckett or Pinter.

"Nothingness is repeatedly evoked in the verbal texture of the play in a way that prefigures techniques of the drama of the absurd" (David Parker).

SATIRE

absurd drama tend to find situations that symbolize the human condition.

The play clearly pokes fun at the indolent life of the privileged, at the structure of society based on class, at the Church (Dr. Chasuble).

The surface is the social world of the play; the symbol would be the comedy of the absurd, the existential comedy of identity, that lies beneath the surface.

PARODY

a parody of romance and romantic comedy; the play mocks a number of conventions, for example that of love at first sight, of the reunion of long-separated brothers, of the discovery of the long-lost heir, of the theme of the foundling and his benefactor.

Finally, Wilde parodies himself: it's a self-parody if we see it as a reduction to nonsense of his previous works (Dorian's secret and corrupt life → Jack's and Algernon's secret lives; the idea of a secret past – which we find in several of Wilde's previous characters → the story of Miss Prism, the baby, the three-volume novel-criticism of the Victorian novel tradition – and the handbag).