

**AGAINST SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN OSCAR WILDE'S  
*THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ERNEST* (1895):  
A MARXIST APPROACH**



**RESEARCH PAPER**

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## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

### A. Background of the Study

*The Importance of Being Ernest* is one of comedy play by Oscar Wilde. This play first opened at: London's St. James's Theatre on 14 February 1895. *The Importance of Being Ernest* was written by Oscar Wilde and first published in 1956 by Orchises Press. This play consists of 31 pages, 3 scenes, and 3 acts. Act I is in London and Acts II and III take place in the country Hertfordshire.

*The Importance of Being Ernest* was written by Oscar Wilde. He (baptized 16 October 1854 – died in Paris 30 November 1900) was an English poet and playwright. His surviving works, including some collaboration, consists of *The Canterville Ghost* (1887), *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888), *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* (1889), *A House of Pomegranates* (1891), *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime* (1891), and *Intentions* (essays, 1891). His plays include *Vera, or the Nihilists* (1880), *The Duchess of Padua* (1883), *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *A Florentine Tragedy* (*La Sainte Courtisane* 1893), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *Salomé* (1894), *An Ideal Husband* (1895), and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). His plays also have been translated into every major living language and are performed more often than those of any other playwright are.

The story of *The Important of Being Ernest* beginning with the friendship of two society bachelors in the 1890s, Jack Worthing and Algernon (Algy) Moncrieff. Jack Worthing, who lives in the country, pretends to have a younger brother, Ernest, whose escapades frequently call Jack to London. Algernon Moncrieff pretends to have an invalid friend, "Bunbury" whose call Algernon into the country whenever there is a distasteful social work. In order to play away from home the men have invented fictitious characters to explain their absence-from the country in Jack's case and town in Algy's. Jack meets Gwendolen Fairfax, daughter of Lady Bracknell, introducing himself as Ernest. Algy goes to the country, and come for to be fictitious Ernest, where he meets with Jack and Cecily Cardew. Jack was founding, left as a baby in a handbag at Victoria Station and adopted and named by a man, he is Thomas Cardew. Jack Worthing which hardly satisfies Lady Bracknell's requirements for marry with Gwendolen with some requisites. Lady Bracknell is someone from upper class, who want Gwendolen marry with man from upper class too. Besides that, Gwendolen and Cecily insist that they can only love someone called Ernest, which they are meet both men to arrange being christened Ernest. The mystery of Jack's true parent is revealed during a meeting between Cecily, Miss Prism and Lady Bracknell. Jack tries to search status identity with come back to village. But, he is known about her self from Miss Prims and Lady Bracknell that actually he is son from the old sister Lady Bracknell's who is dead.

After that, with the arrival of Lady Bracknell the question for Jack Worthing and get a consent. Lady Bracknell quite willing that Algernon will marry Cecily and

her fortune. Jack, however, as Cecily's guardian, refuses his consent unless Lady Bracknell permits his marriage to Gwendolen. The appearance of Miss Prism who is recognized by Lady Bracknell, results in the identification of Jack Worthing as Algernon's lost elder brother, Ernest, thus settling matters to everyone's satisfaction.

The public response is important to know how popular and interest the play is. Many people say that Wilde greatest with many works, poets, screenplay and dramas especially *The Importance of Being Ernest* are great and excellent. There are some arguments from readers about *The Importance of Being Ernest*. According to Scott, Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Ernest* is madcap comedy of manners whose clever plot serves up some of Wilde's funniest and most cutting wit. The second response of *The Importance of Being Ernest* comes from Aristogama. He said that Oscar Wilde is a genius. It is very funny and witty, lots of irony and cynical remarks. My eyes were teary because I laughed so hard when I was reading the book of drama. It is hilarious, by far the funniest book I ever read. Besides that, Ralph Waldo Emerson gave different argument about theme of this play. He said that truth is beautiful, without doubt; but so lies. This play demonstrates how a couple of lie can get happy ending.

Therefore, *The Importance of Being Ernest* gets appeals of readers, scholars, and theatre practitioners, lovers of the theatre and of the writings of Oscar Wilde. A Reconstructive Critical Edition of the Text of the First Production at St James's Theatre, London, 1895, Annotated and illustrated from contemporary sources, and edited, with introductory essays on the play and its text by Joseph Donohue with Ruth

Berggren. This fully annotated edition of the play, with 158 contemporary illustrations, informs the general reader and scholar alike of all those points that are now likely to be missed, while also giving an overall view of the contemporary cultural and political background. It won the 1995 Barnard Hewitt Award for Outstanding Research in Theatre History.

*The Importance of Being Ernest* is an interesting drama. There are some points of interesting that because *The Importance of Being Ernest* is interesting to be studied. The first reason can be seen from value of this drama. The play is sheer comedy, at moments it is just hilarious. There is a touch of realism too. The conversation that place is so natural and spontaneous. It is so close by real life that it could have happened anywhere.

The second points of interest in *The Importance of Being Ernest* are plot. Oscar Wilde used traditional plot in this play. By the using of it, so readers can catch and every message contained in this play easily. The morality message touches he readers' heart also be apart of the interesting aspects in this drama.

The third point of interest in *The Importance of Being Ernest* is characters. Especially about Jack Worthing as a major character, he done have status social in his life, but his wants status for marry with Gwendolen. And the minor characters are Algernon Moncrieff and Chasuble. The major character in this play hold and an important role is seizing the idea of Oscar Wilde. Jack was born and adopted by Cardew's family. So, he does not know about her parents and status identity in family. In his life course, he saw many discrimination events about social

stratification. The writer tries to analysis of Jack Worthing in *The Important of Being Ernest* by Oscar Wilde.

The last point is about against social stratification orientation as the major case happened in this play. Social stratification orientation is an appears from the inside of someone to dominate and conquer such kind of social stratification e.g. wealth, self identity, and position owned by the others by doing anything to achieve what he or she wanted.

Based on those several reasons why *The Importance of Being Ernest* is interested to be studied i.e. containing education value, the story of the play is about discrimination between upper class and lower class, materialism, and social stratification which happens to someone's life. That is the basic reason why the researcher is interested in analyzing this play using Marxist Approach and takes the little for this study **Against Social Stratification in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Ernest*: A Marxist Approach.**

## **B. Literature Review**

The first previous research was done by Niniek Yuniarti Tanjung (2005); a student of Petra Christian University of Surabaya, her thesis entitled *The Social pressures and their impacts on the main characters in Oscar Wilde The Importance of Being Earnest: Psychoanalytic Approach*. In her research paper, she analyzes the personality perspective of the main character.

The second previous research was done by Alfiah Dwi Purwanti (Sebelas Maret Surakarta University, 2008) entitled *The Importance of Being Ernest: Wilde's Motive In Creating the Character Jack and Algy*. In her research finding showed that in *The Importance of Being Ernest*, Wilde's represented the two main characters as his own representation to revolt the old custom established in the aristocratic society. Based on indication above, Wilde's motive in creating the play is show the condition of Victorian Aristocratic Society's daily life, with all rigid manners. The play is basically a kind of criticism toward the application of the old custom, through the events or conflicts happening in the aristocratic society.

Meanwhile, the present researcher analyzes this play focusing on social stratification of Jack worthing in his life by using Marxist Approach entitled *Against Social Stratification in Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Ernest: A Marxist Approach*.

### **C. Problem Statement**

The major problem statement of the study is "how is social stratification reflected in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Ernest*?"

### **D. Objective of the Study**

Dealing with the problem statement above, the objectives of the study are:

1. To analyze the play based on its structural elements
2. To analyze the play based on Marxist Approach

## **E. Limitation of the Study**

To make this research practicable, the researcher limits the discussion of the study and analyzes the major characters of *The Importance of Being Ernest* play script from against stratification based on the Marxist approach.

## **F. Benefit of the Study**

The researcher really expects that this research has some benefits to the readers theoretically and practically.

### **1. Theoretical Benefit**

Hopefully, the result of this research will give some benefits to the world of literature, beside development; particularly the literary study on Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Ernest*.

### **2. Practical Benefit**

This study is expected to give deeper understanding to the present writer about the play especially from the aspect of Marxist perspective in analyzing Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Ernest*.

## **G. Research Method**

The research method is divided into five parts; they are type of research, object of the data, data and data source, method of data collection, method of analyzing the data.

## **1. Type of the Study**

This study uses qualitative research because the writer will 1) analyze the structural element the script of play, 2) analyze the problem of social Stratification in Oscar Wilde's play, which takes the sources data of library and other written texts.

## **2. Object of the Study**

The object of the study is How Problems of Against Social Stratification occurred in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Ernest*.

## **3. Type of Data and the Data Source**

Type of data source used in the research is text consisting of the word, phrases, and sentence. The data sources can be categorized into two sources of data. They are primary data and secondary data sources:

### **a. Primary Data Source**

The primary data source is the drama script of play itself; *The Importance of Being Ernest* by Oscar Wilde, particularly the dialogs, statement, and actions that reflects such the social stratification of the story and the characters that support the research.

### **b. Secondary Data Source**

The secondary data sources are taken from the internet, book and references, which are relevant with this study. In addition there are also some information such as comments, essay, Marxist criticism of *The Importance of Being Ernest* drama, the social background of English society in sixteenth century

and other sources supporting analysis, information about the author biography, and virtual reference which also related to the primary data.

#### **4. Technique of the Data Collection**

The method of data collection in this study is library research. It consists of some steps, as follow:

- a. Reading the script of play rapidly and tries and tries to imagine understanding the script of play.
- b. Identifying the data.
- c. Taking notes and underlining the important words, phrase of sentence, which are related to the study?
- d. Classifying the data into some categories.

#### **5. Technique of the Data Analysis**

The method of analyzing the data of the research is descriptive analysis, it's used to describe the element of the play make some understanding to story the play.

## **H. Research Paper Organization**

In this research, the researcher organizes the research into five chapters. Chapter I is introduction, which consists of background of the study, literary review, problem statement, objective of the study, limitation of the study, benefit of the study, research method and research paper organization. Chapter II is underlying theory, which presents of the notion of Marxist Approach, principles of Marxism, Marxist Theory and Literary Criticism, Structural of the Play and Theoretical Application. Chapter III is the social historical background of English society in the late nineteenth century. Chapter IV is structural analysis of the drama and discussion. Chapter V covers the Marxist perspective that reflected in *The Importance of Being Ernest*. And chapter VI is the last chapter. It consists of conclusion and suggestion.