

Sarah Dodd
&
Amelia Ouerson

1. Characters

a. *Jack Worthington*

- i. An orphan found in a handbag at Queen Victoria Station
- ii. Creator of the character Ernest
- iii. Best friend to Algernon
- iv. Guardian of Cecily
- v. Wealthy and hates responsibility
- vi. In love with Gwendolen

b. *Algernon Moncrieff*

- i. Best friend of Jack and parallel character
- ii. Creator of Bunbury
- iii. Younger than Jack
- iv. Loves Cecily
- v. Gwendolen's cousin and Bracknell's nephew
- vi. Also wealthy and hates responsibility

c. *Rev. Chasuble*

- i. Stuffy clergyman
- ii. Plan to Christen Algernon and Jack both under the name Ernest
- iii. Miss Prism is his love interest and his parallel character is Merriman
- iv. Jack's butler
- v. Complete parallel for Lane

d. *Lane*

- i. Algernon's butler
- ii. A symbol of the under classes as the upper class sees them

e. *Gwendolen Fairfax*

- i. Jack's girlfriend
- ii. Rich and respectable upper class woman, has the perfect social graces and 'teaches' others
- iii. Wants to marry an Earnest man
- iv. A petty and ridiculous woman, has a love/hate relationship with Cecily
- v. Under her mother's thumb

f. *Cecily Cardew*

- i. Jack's charge
- ii. Algernon's accidental love interest
- iii. Stupid but pretty, a country girl
- iv. Under the care of Miss Prism, but entirely ignores her studies
- v. Writes in her diary, as it might get published one day
- vi. Gwendolen's parallel

g. *Miss Prism*

- i. A teacher and aspiring writer
- ii. In love with a priest (Rev. C)
- iii. Educated, well read, everything a woman shouldn't be
- iv. Unmarried, absent minded, awkward

h. *Lady Bracknell*

- i. Matriarch, nothing gets into London society without her notice
- ii. Symbol of the world of high society
- iii. Adheres to the strict and contradictory rules of high society
- iv. Gwendolen's mother, Algernon's aunt

2. Major plot points

- a. "Ernest" reveals that his name is actually Jack to his friend Algernon. Ernest is a made up character Jack plays when he is having fun in London. When Jack is home - being himself and taking care of Cecily, Ernest is Jack's pretend little brother. Cecily is in love with the idea of Ernest. He uses the character to blame messes on, and he escapes his drab life in the country when he goes to "clean up after Ernest." Algernon confesses that he also has a imaginary friend who gets all of the blame: Bunbury.
- b. We learn Jack "Ernest" and Gwendolen are in love. When Gwendolen and Lady Bracknell (her mother) visit Algernon's estate, Jack and Algernon make a plan. While Algernon distracts the mother, "Ernest" proposes to Gwendolen. In return for his services, Jack invites Algernon to dinner so that Algernon won't have to spend an evening with Lady Bracknell.
- c. Bracknell catches them just after Gwendolen accepts "Ernest's" proposal, and Bracknell interrogates "Ernest" and asks why she should allow her daughter to marry him. "Ernest" is fine in all areas, but he is an orphan and that is unacceptable for Bracknell's standards.

- d. Algernon and Jack want to get rid of “Ernest” and decide that “Ernest” should die from a Chill in Paris.
- e. Algernon comes to Jack’s estate and meets Cecily pretending to be “Ernest.” (Both Cecily and Gwendolen are obsessed with the name Ernest) They flirt like crazy. Then Jack tells Miss Prism and Dr. Chasuble that Ernest has passed away. Then Cecily and Algernon (“Ernest”) come in. Jack is angry with Algernon and sends him out of the estate.
- f. Cecily entertains her. When each lady learns that the other is supposedly engaged to Ernest Worthing, they immediately start fighting. Luckily, both Jack and Algernon show up in time to clear up any doubt. Their true identities are revealed, as well as the fact that there is *no* “Ernest.”
- g. The women bond over being tricked and turn their backs on the men. The men argue with each other and fight over muffins while deciding what to do.
- h. They tell the women that they only made up “Ernest” so that they could spend more time with them. The women forgive them.
- i. Lady Bracknell enters and is judgemental of Cecily and Algernon until she learns that Cecily is wealthy. She gives Algernon her blessing to become engaged with Cecily, but Jack refuses to let Cecily marry Algernon unless Bracknell allows Gwendolen to marry him. Bracknell is not pleased with this.
- j. Mr. Chasuble and Miss Prism enter to tell Algernon and Jack that the baptisms have been arranged, Mrs. Bracknell discovers that Miss Prism is an old maid of hers. Miss Prism lost a child of Mrs. Bracknell when she accidently placed the

child in a hand bag, and put it on a train at Victoria's station instead of her novel-
that was going to be sent to the publishers. Jack runs upstairs and finds the
handbag that he was found in. They discover that Jack is Mrs. Bracknell's nephew,
that Algeron is his younger brother, and that his name is actually Ernest. All of
them can now get married.

3. Vocab

a. *Comedy of manners*

- i. A comedy that satirises behavior in a particular social group, especially of upper classes

b. *High comedy*

- i. Comedy employing sophisticated wit, often satirizing the upper classes

c. *Farce*

- i. a comic dramatic work using buffoonery and horseplay and typically including crude characterization and ludicrously improbable situations.

d. *Epigrams*

- i. a pithy saying or remark expressing an idea in a clever and amusing way.
- ii. Examples of epigrams
 1. The truth is rarely pure and never simple. Modern life would be very tedious if it were either, and modern literature an impossibility.
 2. The modern sympathy with invalids is morbid. Illness of any kind is hardly a thing to be encouraged in others.

3. The amount of women who flirt with their own husbands is scandalous. It is simply washing one's clean linen in public.
4. Flowers are as common in the country as people are in London.
5. One must be serious about something if one wants to have any amusement in life.

4. Background of Wilde

a. *Theater at the time*

- i. Who was seeing theater? Rich people. Who was Wilde mocking? Rich people. It became a form of self-deprecating humor, laughing at themselves.

b. *Oscar Wilde, a History*

- i. The 'center of the aesthetic movement' in London, focused on vanity and appearance
- ii. Dandy- devoted to style, neatness, and fashion in dress and appearance
- iii. Homosexual, found out and arrested, a 'fall from grace'
- iv. "One of the most quotable writers in the English language"
- v. Rich and ridiculous, very much a member of the class he was mocking.
This is what made his work so spot on and funny.

5. Themes

- a. Lies and Deceit
- b. Marriage
- c. Respect and Reputation

- d. Society and Class
- e. Gender
- f. Romance and love
- g. Foolishness and Folly

6. Background of the time

a. *Ideals for men*

- i. Gentleman, gentle and morally strong
- ii. Strong and firm in his treatment of people
- iii. Not naive, intelligent
- iv. Must be able to handle social situations with exactness and ease
- v. Dress wonderfully!

b. *Ideals for women*

- i. Ladylike behavior
- ii. Do not think too hard, or at all
- iii. All women's tasks are frivolous and extraneous, ie sewing, dinner parties, overseeing the household
- iv. You must be 'well bred' (-read; wealthy) and marry someone well bred
- v. Uniqueness is hailed in dress and demeanor in order to attract a partner
(beginnings of the flapper)

All around, these ideals for both sexes are impossible and rooted in comically large personalities, much of which shines through in IBE