

The Importance of being Earnest Characters

Jack Worthing

A serious, respectable young man who leads a double life. He pretends to have a “wicked younger brother” named Ernest who is constantly in need of rescue, in order to escape the responsibilities of running his country estate and raising his young ward, Cecily. He then visits the fashionable London social scene under the name of “Ernest”. He is in love with Gwendolen, his friend Algernon’s cousin, but his hopes of marriage are threatened by the disapproval of Gwendoline’s mother, Lady Bracknell—and by his own double identity.

Algernon Moncrieff

A charming, fashionable young bachelor prone to witty banter and zingy one-liners, who lives mostly for his own amusement; he has invented a fictional invalid named “Bunbury” whose illness he can use as an excuse to get out of boring obligations (especially to his aunt, Lady Bracknell). When he discovers that his friend—whom he has known for years as “Ernest”—has another life in the country as Jack, he is elated to find a fellow “Bunburyist”, and becomes determined to uncover the whole truth about the mysterious Cecily.

Gwendolen Fairfax

Lady Bracknell’s daughter and Algernon’s cousin, an independent and sophisticated young woman. Gwendolen is the very picture of high society, always fashionably dressed and thoroughly confident in herself. She has high standards and sticks to them firmly, but does not always go along with Lady Bracknell’s views. She is in love with the man she knows as “Ernest” in spite of her mother’s disapproval. In fact, she is infatuated with the name “Ernest”, and is determined that she will only marry a man with that name.

Cecily Cardew

Jack’s ward, a witty and imaginative young woman, who has been brought up rather sheltered at her guardian’s country estate under the care of the fussy Miss Prism. She tends to ignore her school lessons in favor of working in the flower garden and writing in her diary. She is fascinated by stories of Jack’s “wicked brother Ernest”, and has decided that she can only love a man of that name. Though appearing naive, she proves more than a match for Algernon’s charm offensive when he shows up pretending to be “Ernest.”

Lady Bracknell

Algernon’s aunt and Gwendolen’s mother, a snobbish, domineering, opinionated woman, chiefly concerned with passing judgement on her neighbors—and securing a wealthy husband of the correct social standing for her daughter. She keeps a list of eligible men who measure up to her

strict standards, and Jack Worthing is not on it. Prone to long speeches and grandiose pronouncements, she embodies all that is hypocritical and ridiculous about the rigid social norms of her time.

Miss Prism

Cecily's governess, an absent-minded, somewhat puritanical woman who highly approves of Jack's sober, responsible behavior, contrasted with that of his supposed "wicked younger brother" Ernest. She once wrote a sentimental novel, but unfortunately misplaced the manuscript (what else she misplaced will be revealed.) She harbors a secret attraction to the local reverend, Dr. Chasuble.

Dr. Chasuble

The rector serving Jack's estate, a mild-mannered, pedantic, slightly awkward clergyman who preaches from a selection of interchangeable, pre-written sermons for every occasion—weddings, funerals, or christenings, as the case may be. Though sworn to celibacy, he secretly harbors romantic feelings for Miss Prism.

Lane

The dryly sardonic manservant at Algernon's London apartment, Algernon's confidante and co-conspirator in his "Bunburying" escapades in Act 1.

Merriman

The much put-upon butler at Jack's country estate who tries stoically to keep up with the demands of all the new arrivals to the house in Acts 2 and 3.

Lane and Merriman are often played by one actor doubling the roles. The portrait of social correctness, they both offer very little comment on the increasingly ridiculous proceedings, but observe all with bland politeness. Requires a good sense of comedic timing and nonverbal/facial reactions.

A general note:

The Importance of Being Earnest is a show that plays with themes of gender roles and expectations imposed by society. It also has historically often included elements of drag or gender-blind casting. As such, we encourage actors of all gender identities or presentations to audition for any role they feel drawn to!