



Gerald Barry



Soloists • Birmingham Contemporary Music Group
Thomas Adès conductor

The Importance of Being Earnest

Opera in Three Acts

Libretto by Gerald Barry
based on the text by Oscar Wilde

Act I		25'16		
1	Auld Lang Syne	1'15	20	Merriman: 'Miss Fairfax'
2	Algernon: 'Did you hear what I was playing?'	4'36	21	Orchestral Interlude
3	Lane: 'Lady Bracknell and Miss Fairfax'	3'29	22	Gwendolen: 'I had no idea'
4	Lady Bracknell: 'Freude, schöner Götterfunken'	1'15	23	Jack: 'And this is what you call Bunburying!?'
5	Jack: 'Miss Fairfax, ever since I met you'	2'56	Act III	
6	Lady Bracknell: 'Mister Worthing!'	1'58	24	Orchestral Introduction
7	Lady Bracknell: 'I feel bound to tell you'	2'05	25	Gwendolen/Cecily: 'Your Christian names'
8	Lady Bracknell: 'Are your parents living?'	2'10	26	Merriman: 'Lady Bracknell'
9	Jack: 'What should I do?' (i)	1'24	27	Lady Bracknell: 'Mister Worthing, is Miss Cardew'
10	Jack: 'What should I do?' (ii)	1'26	28	Lady Bracknell: 'Pretty child!'
11	Jack: 'Will you stop!!'	2'42	29	Jack: 'I am Miss Cardew's guardian'
Act II		25'08	30	Lady Bracknell: 'Miss Prism!'
12	Garden at the Manor House	3'31	31	Lady Bracknell: 'Twenty-eight years ago'
13	Cecily: 'I wish Uncle Jack would allow'	0'19	32	Miss Prism: 'Lady Bracknell'
14	Miss Prism: 'Freude, schöner Götterfunken'	3'18	33	Jack: 'But where did you deposit the handbag?'
15	Algernon: 'You are my little cousin Cecily'	1'08	34	Chasuble: 'What do you think this means'
16	Miss Prism: 'Mister Worthing!'	2'44	35	Jack: 'Is this the handbag?'
17	Algernon: 'He's going to send me away'	1'08	36	Jack: 'Lady Bracknell, who am I?'
18	Algernon: 'Cecily, ever since I looked'	2'00	37	All: 'Explosion!'
19	Cecily: 'You must not laugh at me'	2'51		Total timing
				79'49

Barbara Hannigan *soprano* Cecily Cardew
Katalin Károlyi *mezzo-soprano* Gwendolen Fairfax
Hilary Summers *contralto* Miss Prism
Peter Tantsits *tenor* Jack Worthing
Joshua Bloom *baritone* Algernon Moncrieff
Alan Ewing *bass* Lady Bracknell
Benjamin Bevan *bass* Lane/Merriman
Joshua Hart *speaker* Dr Chasuble
Birmingham Contemporary Music Group
Thomas Adès *conductor*

Birmingham Contemporary Music Group

Alexandra Wood *violin* • **Peter Campbell-Kelly** *violin*
Christopher Yates *viola* • **Ulrich Heinen** *cello*
John Tattersdill *double bass*
Marie-Christine Zupancic *flute/piccolo*
Melinda Maxwell *oboe/cor anglais*
Joanna Patton *clarinet* • **Mark O'Brien** *bass clarinet*
Gretha Tuls *bassoon*
Margaret Cookhorn *bassoon/contrabassoon*
Nicholas Korth *horn* • **Beth Randell** *horn*
Jonathan Holland *trumpet* • **Alan Thomas** *trumpet*
Edward Jones *trombone* • **Graham Sibley** *tuba*
Julian Warburton *percussion* • **Simon Limbrick** *percussion*
Adam Morris *percussion* • **Malcolm Wilson** *piano/celesta*

Pre-recorded Choir

Benjamin Bevan • **Joshua Bloom**
Alan Ewing • **Hilary Summers** • **Peter Tantsits**
with
Matt Durkan • **Rob Jenkins**

Repetiteur: John Paul Gandy
 Opening off-stage performance of *Auld Lang Syne* played by Gerald Barry
 Crockery provided by Red Rob Catering Supplies, Birmingham

The Importance of Being Earnest

Synopsis by Christopher Cook

Act 1

Algernon Moncrieff is playing his own arrangement of *Auld Lang Syne* for solo piano off-stage while his manservant Lane lays out afternoon tea, including cucumber sandwiches and bread and butter, for his master's expected guests: his Aunt Augusta, Lady Bracknell and his cousin Gwendolen.

Lane announces Algernon's friend Ernest, who is also known as Jack Worthing – and who is utterly besotted with Gwendolen. Algernon has come across Ernest's cigarette case inscribed with the message 'From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack'. He declares that Ernest may not marry Gwendolen until he reveals the true identities of Jack and Cecily. Ernest explains that he is Ernest in town and Jack in the country, and that Cecily is his ward. As far as Cecily is concerned, Ernest is his ne'er-do-well younger brother who is always in some kind of trouble. So Jack is a Bunburyist, says Algernon, who also leads a double life by pretending to have an imaginary invalid friend called Bunbury who often requires his presence in the country.

Lady Bracknell and her daughter Gwendolen are announced. Lady Bracknell asks for cucumber sandwiches and declares her hatred of French music before bursting into her own setting of *Freude, schöner Götterfunken*.

With Lady Bracknell and Algernon safely out of the way, Jack proposes to Gwendolen and is accepted. How can she not love a man whose name is Ernest?

Having discovered her daughter has become engaged to Jack, Lady Bracknell quizzes her future son-in-law about his lineage. When she discovers that he knows nothing of his parents and that he was adopted, having been found in a handbag at Victoria Station, she refuses to countenance the match. Jack manages to give Gwendolen his address in the country, which is also noted by Algernon who scribbles it on his cuff. As his guests depart, he tells Lane to put out his country clothes as he will be visiting his friend Bunbury.

Act 2

In the country Cecily is studying German with her governess, Miss Prism. German grammar, she declares, makes her look

plain. Miss Prism, a composer and an ardent Germanophile breaks into her own setting of *Freude, schöner Götterfunken*.

Now Algernon, masquerading as her guardian's brother Ernest, arrives and quickly charms her. It is Cecily's dream to marry a man who is wicked and bad and called Ernest. Algernon quickly makes plans for Dr Chasuble, the rector, to rechristen him Ernest. Meanwhile, Jack arrives with the sad news that Ernest has passed away in Paris. But Ernest is here, says Cecily.

Never can the trains from London have been so busy. Hot on Algy's heels, Gwendolen arrives. As Cecily is giving her tea the two young women discover that they are both engaged to 'Ernest' and there is a violent storm over the tea cups. When Jack and Algy return they are exposed and Cecily and Gwendolen, united as sisters now, leave their two suitors to quarrel over Bunburying and a plate of muffins.

Act 3

Cecily and Gwendolen tell Jack and Algy that their Christian names are an insuperable bar to marriage. The men are agreed: Dr Chasuble will have to rechristen them both.

Lady Bracknell has also taken the train from London and on arriving in the country is

shocked to discover that her nephew appears to have become engaged to Cecily without her permission. But when she discovers that this is a young woman in possession of a fortune her doubts are banished. However, Jack – in his capacity as Cecily's guardian – refuses to give his consent to the marriage until Lady Bracknell permits him and Gwendolen to be united.

This social Gordian knot is unloosed when Miss Prism reappears. Twenty-eight years earlier, when working as a governess in the Bracknell household, she had inadvertently confused a three-volume novel that she had written with her young charge and left the boy in a bag at Victoria Station and put the novel in the perambulator she was wheeling. Discovering her error, she had fled.

Jack produces the handbag. He is Lady Bracknell's long-lost nephew and therefore Algernon's older brother. And his name? The same as that of his father General Moncrieff, says Lady Bracknell. A search of the army records solves the mystery. It is Ernest. Gwendolen is ecstatic. Now the two couples can be married and with them, Miss Prism and Dr Chasuble.

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Wilde Song by Paul Griffiths

Time – to mention one of Gerald Barry’s operatic characters, one who sings in his 1991 piece *The Triumph of Beauty* and *Deceit* and is rather unceremoniously dispatched there – encourages us to believe that what at first disturbs us as ‘unnatural’ will sooner or later be absorbed within the ever increasingly capacious realm of what we understand as normal. Perhaps Barry’s operas have not got there yet; they still seem edgy and strange, and perhaps they will for a while longer. But now that more than twenty years have passed since the first of them, *The Intelligence Park* (on NMC D122), was staged, and now that this singular example has been joined by four others, two of them full-length, the Barryesque is beginning to feel like one of multifarious opera’s possible modes.

What distinguishes it? High definition, yes. Sound in a state of tension, sound stretched, yes. Insistent pulse, certainly. But opera is always chiefly about voices, and it is Barry’s vocal style that most surprises, even disconcerts. Our operatic tradition – and not only that but the tradition of western classical music generally – encourages us to believe, contrary though this may be to anything like good sense, that people mean what they sing. Singing, this repertory by and large insists, is expression. When a singing character hits a high note, this character is intent on conveying an excitement that he – or, more likely, she – feels. More than that, our long-established culture has all kinds of codes within which characters can

proclaim their devotion, their grief, their desire for vengeance, or whatever. And those codes have proved surprisingly resilient, capable of surviving through four centuries of operatic development, from Monteverdi to much that is happening now. Barry, however, sets them aside. A high note from one of his characters may indeed convey a moment of intense feeling, but it may just as well be where the vocal line seems to want to go at that point. His characters do not behave appropriately and express what they feel; they are, rather, subject to violent and hectic forces whose sources are elsewhere, in the music.

Time, again, is crucial here, for these characters do not exist in the kind of progressive time that is usual in western music and especially in opera, time as a gradual unfolding. In terms of scenario, they may. Each of Barry’s operas follows a fairly straightforward narrative course, with events presented in due order. But there is no attempt to substantiate this in the music, which will always be set to a steady pulse, often fast, with a good deal of rotation and repetition in the melodic material. We might have the impression of people caught on a merrygoround, speedy and brilliantly painted, from which they yell out as the pass. Decisively articulating melodies that whirl, stop or jump, these people are in a continuous present, a world adrift from memory and devoid of obligations, a world that offers us in some senses the acme of opera as essentially amoral, the playground of

masquerade and desire – or, to mention two more Barry characters, *Deceit* and *Pleasure*.

To unmask masquerade and unclothe desire, however, is the act of a percipient and determined moralist – and one should regard Barry’s operas as moralities, too, not only in how they enlarge the scope of what can seem natural and push further the barriers of prejudice, but also in how they articulate the forces, represented by music, that compel people to do what they do. With the conventions of operatic vocalizing all unwrapped, Barry’s characters stand before us in a condition of nakedness that evokes not only shock and bewilderment but also pity. Being driven by the music’s relentless energy, these people find themselves pushed into positions – pushed, perhaps, also into revelations – they would prefer not to advance in public. The ground has gone from beneath their feet: the ground of rhythm and phrasing, of which the accompaniment in its intemperateness has taken command, and the ground of harmony, which may be the most crucial loss of all. Answering a question about this aspect of his music with regard to his second big opera, *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* (2005), Barry replied: ‘I would say every single bar in this opera can be related to a key centre.’ That does not mean, however, that his harmony is plain sailing, for he immediately felt bound to add: ‘Sometimes I had to agonize a lot to find out what the centre actually was.’ Poor hope for the characters, then, to understand the world in which they have to live.

Here is another aspect of Barry’s operatic morality, that the spectacle of characters caught in a world gone crazy may seem to us not only bizarrely unsettling but also unsettlingly familiar – and all the more so for the characters’ seeming unawareness of how very odd their world is. When the Hon. Gwendolen Fairfax delivers her line ‘It has a music of its own. It produces vibrations’, we might feel her to be referring to Barry’s score for *The Importance of Being Earnest*, but it is doubtful if she realizes this. The opera does indeed have a music of its own: often fast, strongly pulsed, the words pattered out on regular beats as if from semi-automata, the accompaniment for a wind-heavy ensemble that generally sounds raw, strained or brusque and yet is tightly controlled. It is a bitter music, a raging music, a rude music, at times a hilarious music, and it certainly produces vibrations. To the people in it, though, it is just where they are – where they have to be.

They are jolted from their origins even by the libretto. While keeping so many famous lines, Barry cuts the text boldly, not only for the practical purpose of reducing it to workable length but also in order to estrange it. As he has pointed out, just dropping the invariable ‘sir’ from a servant’s lines immediately alters the relationship. ‘Did you hear what I was playing?’, the libretto begins, as the play does, but now Lane replies to Algernon with a simple, abrupt ‘No’. What is going on? These people are out of step – out of step with the play, out of step with themselves.

Barry has other kinds of fun as he wields his scissors. One example with notable

repercussions comes in Miss Prism's examination of her long-lost handbag, where her line about a stain 'caused by the explosion of a temperance beverage' is stopped at 'explosion'. This brings back the shock-horror tritone in the orchestra that was heard when Bunbury was 'exploded', and the word 'explosion' is then repeated by the entire cast a further three times later in the act, when the Army Lists are being consulted, with the same debased musical gesture. As with much in the score, the effect is at once powerful and puzzling. This could be the explosion that brings to the surface the last and most vital link in the plot, or it could be a premonition on the characters' part of the explosion of their social world. Or perhaps they are at last becoming conscious, somehow, of what has happened to the perfectly fabricated dramatic construct in which they have been living their lives with so little trouble for well over a century.

Meanwhile, of course, that original play will be playing in our minds. A swirling introduction to the last act seems to wipe away a couple of pages of text to leave just Cecily's 'They have been eating muffins' angelically intoned on a high A, after which all the orchestral players join the two women in shouting: 'Your Christian names are still an insuperable barrier. That is all!' There are other occasions, too, where the orchestra or a chorus (also pre-recorded) takes part, and where tiny fragments signal the disappearance of lengthy passages. There are also places where Barry adds to the text, not just by reiterating a single word but by shoving

in a whole raft of Schiller. Both Lady Bracknell and Miss Prism, we are to understand, are composers, and one after another, in the first act and the second, they rattle off their settings of the 'Ode to Joy'.

Yet, for all the verbal echoes that are inevitably summoned, whether of Wilde or of Beethoven, it is, as always, the music that steers, through whatever swerves it wants, shaking the characters off the page and sending them hurtling. Barry's alert zigzags, crazed colours and musical-dramatic underminings spring from various sources: opera seria (especially Handel's), the mechanical Stravinsky of *Les Noces*, the extreme intervals of Webern's songs. A keen operatic zest has taken this wonderfully off-centre composer to diverse situations: the eighteenth century in his first two stage works, *The Intelligence Park* and *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit*, both to librettos written for him, by Vincent Deane and Meredith Oakes respectively, then to a play by Rainer Werner Fassbinder (*Petra von Kant*), and from there to a monodrama by Strindberg (*La Plus Forte*), followed now by the classic comedy of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. He does all these differently, his settings as diverse as the original pieces. But we are everywhere in the same world, where emotion is all over the place and unplaceable, alien even to the characters who feel themselves to be feeling it.

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Opera in Three Acts

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ACT I

1 MORNING-ROOM IN ALGERNON'S FLAT IN HALF-MOON STREET. THE ROOM IS LUXURIOUSLY AND ARTISTICALLY FURNISHED. THE SOUND OF AULD LANG SYNE IS HEARD IN THE ADJOINING ROOM. LANE IS ARRANGING AFTERNOON TEA ON THE TABLE, AND AFTER THE MUSIC HAS CEASED, ALGERNON ENTERS.

2 **Algernon:** Did you hear what I was playing?

Lane: No.

Algernon: I'm sorry. I don't play accurately. Sentiment is my forte, I keep science for Life.

Lane: Yes.

Algernon: Cucumber sandwiches cut for Lady Bracknell?

Lane: Yes.

HE HANDS THEM ON A SALVER. ALGERNON INSPECTS THEM, TAKES TWO, AND SITS DOWN ON THE SOFA. LANE GOES OUT.

ENTER LANE.

Lane: Mr. Ernest Worthing.

ENTER JACK. LANE GOES OUT

Algernon: Ernest? What brings you up to town?

Jack: Pleasure! Eating Algy?

Algernon: Slight refreshment at five o'clock.

Jack: Cups? Cucumber sandwiches? Who is coming?

Algernon: Aunt Augusta and Gwendolen.

Jack: I love Gwendolen. I want to marry her!

Algernon: If ever I marry, I'll try to forget it.

JACK PUTS OUT HIS HAND TO TAKE A SANDWICH.

Algernon: Don't touch the cucumber sandwiches. They are for Aunt Augusta. TAKES ONE AND EATS IT.

Jack: YOU are eating.

Algernon: TAKES PLATE FROM BELOW. Have some bread and butter. The bread and butter is for Gwendolen. Gwendolen is devoted to bread and butter.

Jack ADVANCING TO TABLE AND HELPING HIMSELF. Very good bread and butter.

Algernon: Do not eat all. You cannot marry Gwendolen.

Jack: Why?

Algernon: Who is Cecily?

RINGS BELL. ENTER LANE.

Algernon: Bring me that cigarette case.

Lane: Yes.

LANE HANDS HIM THE CIGARETTE CASE AND GOES OUT

Algernon OPENS CASE AND EXAMINES IT.
A present from Cecily.

Jack: Cecily is my aunt.

Algernon READING
'From little Cecily with her fondest love.' 'Little Cecily' your aunt??

Jack MOVING TO SOFA AND KNEELING UPON IT.
Some aunts are tall, some aunts are not tall.

Algernon FOLLOWS ERNEST ROUND THE ROOM.
Yes. But why does your aunt call you her uncle?
'From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack.' Besides, your name isn't Jack at all; it is Ernest.

Jack: It isn't Ernest; it's Jack.

Algernon: You have always told me it was Ernest. I have introduced you to every one as Ernest. You answer to the name of Ernest. You look as if your name was Ernest. You are the most earnest-looking person I ever saw in my life. It is perfectly absurd your saying that your name isn't Ernest. It's on your cards. Here is one of them.
'Mr. Ernest Worthing, B. 4, The Albany.' I'll keep this as a proof that your name is Ernest if ever you attempt to deny it to me, or to Gwendolen, or to anyone else.
PUTS THE CARD IN HIS POCKET.

Jack: My name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country.

Algernon: You are a secret Bunburyist!

Jack: Bunburyist? What do you mean by Bunburyist?

Algernon: Why are you Ernest in town and Jack in the country?

Choir: Who is Cecily?!

Jack: Cecily is Mr. Thomas Cardew's grand-daughter. I am her guardian. She lives at my place in the country under the charge of her admirable governess, Miss Prism.

Algernon: Why are you Ernest in town and Jack in the country?

Jack: As Cecily's guardian I adopt a high moral tone, not good for health or happiness. In order to escape to town I pretend to have a younger brother called Ernest. That is the whole truth pure and simple.

Choir: The truth is rarely pure and never simple. Modern life would be very tedious if it were either, and modern literature a complete impossibility!

Algernon: You are a Bunburyist. I was quite right in saying you were a Bunburyist. You are one of the most advanced Bunburyists I know.

Jack: What?

Algernon: Now that I know you to be a Bunburyist I naturally want to talk to you about Bunburying. I want to tell you the rules.

Jack: I'm not a Bunburyist. If Gwendolen accepts me, I will kill my brother.

Choir: A man who marries without knowing Bunbury has a very tedious time of it.

THE SOUND OF AN ELECTRIC BELL IS HEARD.

Algernon: Aunt Augusta!

ENTER LANE

3 **Lane:** Lady Bracknell and Miss Fairfax.

ALGERNON GOES FORWARD TO MEET THEM. ENTER LADY BRACKNELL AND GWENDOLEN.

Lady Bracknell: Good afternoon, dear Algernon.

SEES JACK AND BOWS TO HIM WITH ICY COLDNESS.

Algernon: I'm feeling very well, Aunt Augusta.

Algernon To GWENDOLEN
You are smart!

Gwendolen: I am always smart! Mr. Worthing?

Jack: You're perfect, Miss Fairfax.

Gwendolen: Oh! I hope I am not that. It would leave no room for developments, and I intend to develop in many directions.

GWENDOLEN AND JACK SIT DOWN TOGETHER IN THE CORNER.

Lady Bracknell: I'll have a cup of tea, and one of those cucumber sandwiches.

Algernon PICKING UP EMPTY PLATE IN HORROR
Lane! Why are there no cucumber sandwiches?

Lane: There were no cucumbers in the market. I went down twice.

Algernon: No cucumbers!

Lane: No.

Algernon: I am greatly distressed, Aunt Augusta, about there being no cucumbers.

Lady Bracknell: It really makes no matter, Algernon. I had some crumpets with Lady Harbury, who seems to be living entirely for pleasure now.

ALGERNON CROSSES AND HANDS TEA.

Lady Bracknell: Thank you.

Algernon: I am afraid, Aunt Augusta, I cannot dine with you tonight. My friend Bunbury is very ill again.

EXCHANGES GLANCES WITH JACK

Lady Bracknell: Mr Bunbury seems to suffer from curiously bad health.

Algernon: Yes; poor Bunbury is a dreadful invalid.

Lady Bracknell: Mr Bunbury must decide whether to live or die. Health is the primary duty of life. Ask Mr Bunbury not to be ill on Saturday, for I rely on you to arrange my music for me. It is my last reception.

Algernon: I'll speak to Bunbury, Aunt Augusta, if he is still conscious.

Lady Bracknell RISING, AND FOLLOWING ALGERNON
French songs I cannot possibly allow. German sounds a thoroughly respectable language, and indeed, I believe is so. Gwendolen, you will accompany me.

Gwendolen: Certainly, mamma.

4 LADY BRACKNELL SINGS HER OWN SETTING OF 'FREUDE, SCHÖNER, GÖTTERFUNKEN', AFTER WHICH SHE AND ALGERNON GO INTO THE MUSIC-ROOM. GWENDOLEN REMAINS BEHIND.

5 **Jack** NERVOUSLY
Miss Fairfax, ever since I met you I have admired you more than any girl... I have ever met since... I met you.

Gwendolen: Yes. My ideal has always been to love some one of the name of Ernest. There is something in that name that inspires absolute confidence. The moment Algernon first mentioned to me that he had a friend called Ernest, I knew I was destined to love you.

Jack: You really love me, Gwendolen?

Gwendolen: Passionately!

Jack: Darling!

Gwendolen: My own Ernest!

Jack: But you don't really mean to say that you couldn't love me if my name wasn't Ernest?

Gwendolen: But your name is Ernest.

Jack: Yes, I know it is. But supposing it was something else? Do you mean to say you couldn't love me then? Darling, I don't much care about the name of Ernest... I don't think the name suits me at all.

Gwendolen: It suits you perfectly. It is a divine name. It has a music of its own. It produces vibrations.

Jack: But there are lots of other much nicer names. I think Jack, for instance, a charming name.

Gwendolen: Jack?... No, there is very little music in the name Jack, if any at all, indeed. It does not thrill. It produces absolutely no vibrations... I have known several Jacks. The only really safe name is Ernest.

Jack: Gwendolen, I must get christened at once – I mean we must get married at once. There is no time to be lost.

Gwendolen: Married, Mr. Worthing?

Jack ASTOUNDED
Well... surely. You know that I love you, Miss Fairfax.

Gwendolen: I adore you. But you haven't proposed yet.

Jack: Well... may I propose now?

Gwendolen: Yes, and Mr. Worthing, I am fully determined to accept you.

Jack: Gwendolen!

Gwendolen: Yes, Mr. Worthing?

Jack: You know what I have got to say to you.

Gwendolen: Yes, but you don't say it.

Jack KNEELS
Gwendolen, will you marry me?

Gwendolen: Of course I will, darling. I am afraid you have had very little experience in how to propose.

Jack: My own one, I have never loved anyone in the world but you.

Gwendolen: Yes, but men often propose for practice. I know my brother Gerald does. What wonderfully blue eyes you have, Ernest! They are quite, quite, blue. I hope you will always look at me just like that, especially when there are other people present.

ENTER LADY BRACKNELL

6 **Lady Bracknell:** Mr. Worthing! Rise, sir!

Gwendolen: Mamma!
HE TRIES TO RISE; SHE RESTRAINS HIM.
Mr. Worthing has not quite finished yet.

Lady Bracknell: Finished what?

Gwendolen: I am engaged to Mr. Worthing, mamma.

THEY RISE TOGETHER.

Lady Bracknell: Pardon me, you are not engaged to anyone. When you become engaged to someone, I will inform you of the fact. And now I have a few questions to put to you, Mr. Worthing. You, Gwendolen, will wait for me below in the carriage.

Gwendolen REPROACHFULLY
Mamma!

Lady Bracknell: In the carriage, Gwendolen!

GWENDOLEN GOES TO THE DOOR. SHE AND JACK BLOW KISSES TO EACH OTHER BEHIND LADY BRACKNELL'S BACK. LADY BRACKNELL LOOKS VAGUELY ABOUT AS IF SHE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT THE NOISE WAS. FINALLY SHE TURNS ROUND.

Lady Bracknell: Gwendolen, the carriage!

Gwendolen: Mamma.

GOES OUT, LOOKING BACK AT JACK

Lady Bracknell SITTING DOWN
You can take a seat, Mr. Worthing.
LOOKS IN HER POCKET FOR NOTE-BOOK AND PENCIL.

Jack: Thank you, Lady Bracknell, I prefer standing.

7 **Lady Bracknell** PENCIL AND NOTE-BOOK IN HAND
I feel bound to tell you that you are not down on my list of eligible young men, although I have the same list as the dear Duchess of Bolton has. We work together, in fact. Do you smoke?

Jack: Well, yes, I must admit I smoke.

Lady Bracknell: I am glad to hear it. A man should always have an occupation of some kind. There are far too many idle men in London as it is. How old are you?

Jack: Twenty-nine.

Lady Bracknell: A very good age to be married at. I have always been of the opinion that a man who desires to get married should know either everything or nothing. Which do you know?

Jack PANICKED
I know nothing, Lady Bracknell.

Lady Bracknell: I am pleased to hear it. I do not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance. Ignorance is like a delicate exotic fruit; touch it and the bloom is gone. The whole theory of modern education is radically unsound. Fortunately in England, at any rate, education produces no effect whatsoever. If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes, and probably lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square. You have a town house, I hope?

Jack: Well, I own a house in Belgrave Square.

Lady Bracknell: What number in Belgrave Square?

Jack: 149.

Lady Bracknell: The unfashionable side! I thought there was something.

8 Are your parents living?

Jack: I have lost both my parents.

Lady Bracknell: Both? That looks like carelessness. Who was your father?

Jack: I am afraid I really don't know. The fact is, Lady Bracknell, I don't actually know who I am by birth. I was... well, I was found.

Lady Bracknell: Found!

Jack: The late Mr. Thomas Cardew found me, and gave me the name of Worthing, because he happened to have a first-class ticket for Worthing in his pocket at the time. Worthing is a place in Sussex. It is a seaside resort.

Lady Bracknell: Where did he find you?

Jack GRAVELY
In a hand-bag.

Lady Bracknell: A hand-bag?

Jack: Yes, a hand-bag, Lady Bracknell. A large black leather hand-bag, with handles – an ordinary hand-bag in fact.

Lady Bracknell: In what locality did this Mr. Thomas Cardew find this ordinary hand-bag?

Jack: The cloak-room at Victoria Station.

Lady Bracknell: The cloak-room at Victoria Station?

Jack: Yes. The Brighton line.

Lady Bracknell: The line is immaterial. Mr. Worthing, I confess I feel somewhat bewildered by what you have just told me. To be born, or at any rate bred, in a hand-bag, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life that reminds one of the worst excesses of the French Revolution.

9 **Jack:** What should I do? I would do anything for Gwendolen's happiness.

Lady Bracknell: I would strongly advise you, Mr. Worthing, to try and acquire some relations as soon as possible, and to make a definite effort to produce at any rate one parent, of either sex, before the season is quite over.

Jack: How can I do that? I can produce the hand-bag! I really think that should satisfy you, Lady Bracknell.

Lady Bracknell: Me, sir! What has it to do with me? You can hardly imagine that I and Lord Bracknell would dream of allowing our only daughter to marry into a cloak-room, and form an alliance with a parcel? Good morning, Mr. Worthing!

Jack: Good morning!

10 **Jack** [*reprise*]
What should I do? I would do anything for Gwendolen's happiness.

Lady Bracknell [*reprise*]
I would strongly advise you, Mr. Worthing...

LADY BRACKNELL SWEEPS OUT IN MAJESTIC INDIGNATION.

ALGERNON, FROM THE OTHER ROOM, STRIKES UP THE WEDDING MARCH. JACK LOOKS FURIOUS, AND GOES TO THE DOOR.

11 Will you stop!!

THE MUSIC STOPS AND ALGERNON ENTERS CHEERILY.

Might Gwendolen become like her mother?

Algernon: All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's his.

Jack: Is that clever?

Algernon: It is perfectly phrased. Did you tell Gwendolen about your being Ernest in town, and Jack in the country?

Jack PATRONISING
No. I'll say Ernest died in Paris of apoplexy.

Algernon AMAZED
Paris!

ENTER LANE

Lane: Miss Fairfax.

ENTER GWENDOLEN. LANE GOES OUT.

Algernon: Gwendolen!

Gwendolen: Algy!

Jack: Darling!

Gwendolen: Ernest! We may never be married. Although mamma may prevent us from becoming man and wife, and I may marry someone else, and marry often, nothing can alter my eternal devotion to you.

Jack: Dear Gwendolen!

Gwendolen: Your Christian name has an irresistible fascination. The simplicity of your character makes you exquisitely incomprehensible to me.

Jack: My own one!

Gwendolen: How long do you remain in town?

Jack: Till Monday.

Gwendolen: Good!

Jack: My own darling!
To LANE, WHO NOW ENTERS.

I will see Miss Fairfax out.

Lane: Yes.

JACK AND GWENDOLEN GO OFF. LANE PRESENTS SEVERAL LETTERS ON A SALVER TO ALGERNON. IT IS TO BE SURMISED THAT THEY ARE BILLS, AS ALGERNON, AFTER LOOKING AT THE ENVELOPES, TEARS THEM UP.

Algernon: A glass of sherry.

Lane: Yes.

Algernon: Tomorrow, I'm going Bunburying.

Lane: Yes.

Algernon: I shall probably not be back till Monday. You can put out all the Bunbury suits...

Lane: Yes.

ACT II

12 GARDEN AT THE MANOR HOUSE. A FLIGHT OF GREY STONE STEPS LEADS UP TO THE HOUSE. THE GARDEN, AN OLD-FASHIONED ONE, FULL OF ROSES. TIME OF YEAR, JULY. BASKET CHAIRS, AND A TABLE COVERED WITH BOOKS, ARE SET UNDER A LARGE YEW-TREE.

MISS PRISM DISCOVERED SEATED AT THE TABLE. CECILY IS AT THE BACK WATERING FLOWERS.

Miss Prism CALLING
Cecily, Cecily! Your German grammar is on...

Cecily COMING OVER VERY SLOWLY
But I don't like German. I look quite plain after my German lesson.

Miss Prism: Your guardian laid particular stress on your German, as he was leaving for town. Indeed, he always lays stress on your German when he is leaving for town.

Cecily: Uncle Jack is so serious! He cannot be quite well.

Miss Prism DRAWING HERSELF UP
Cecily! You must remember his constant anxiety about that young man his brother.

13 **Cecily:** I wish Uncle Jack would allow that unfortunate young man to come down here. You know German and geology Miss Prism, and things of that kind influence a man very much.

14 MISS PRISM SINGS HER OWN SETTING OF 'FREUDE, SCHÖNER, GÖTTERFUNKEN' WHILE CECILY WRITES IN HER DIARY.

Miss Prism: Put away your diary, Cecily. Memory is the diary that we all carry about with us.

Cecily: Memory is responsible for all three-volume novels.

Miss Prism: Do not speak slightly of the three-volume novel, Cecily. I wrote one myself in earlier days.

Cecily: I hope it did not end happily? I don't like novels that end happily.

Miss Prism: The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what fiction means.

Cecily: Was it published?

Miss Prism: Ah no! The manuscript was lost. Cecily, you will read your Political Economy in my absence. The chapter on the Fall of the Rupee you may omit. It is somewhat too sensational. GOES DOWN THE GARDEN.

Cecily: PICKS UP BOOKS AND THROWS THEM BACK ON TABLE
Political Economy! Geography! German!

ENTER MERRIMAN WITH A CARD ON A SALVER

Merriman: Mr. Ernest Worthing.

Cecily: Mr. Ernest Worthing. Uncle Jack's brother!

MERRIMAN GOES OFF

Cecily: I have never met a wicked person. I feel frightened. I am so afraid he will look like everyone else.

ENTER ALGERNON

15 **Algernon:** You are my little cousin Cecily.

Cecily: I am not little.
ALGERNON IS TAKEN ABACK
You are my wicked cousin Ernest.

Algernon: I am not wicked. You mustn't think that I am wicked.

Cecily: I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time. That would be hypocrisy.

Algernon LOOKS AT HER IN AMAZEMENT
Oh! I've been rather reckless.

Cecily: I am glad to hear it.

Algernon: I've been very bad.

Cecily: It must have been very pleasant. PAUSES
Uncle Jack is sending you to Australia.

Algernon: Australia! I'd sooner die.

Cecily: You have to choose between this world, the next world, and Australia.

Algernon: I am hungry.

THEY PASS INTO THE HOUSE. MISS PRISM AND DR CHASUBLE ENTER.

16 ENTER JACK SLOWLY FROM THE BACK OF THE GARDEN. HE IS DRESSED IN THE DEEPEST MOURNING, WITH CRÊPE HATBAND AND BLACK GLOVES. THE PERFORMERS SHOUT THROUGH A GALE.

Miss Prism: Mr. Worthing!

Chasuble: Mr. Worthing?

Jack TRAGICALLY
My brother.

Chasuble: Still leading his life of pleasure?

Jack SHAKING HIS HEAD
Dead!

Chasuble: Your brother Ernest dead?

Jack: Dead. He died in Paris.

Chasuble: He will be buried here?

Jack: No. In Paris.

Chasuble: Paris! SHAKES HIS HEAD, ASTONISHED

Jack: Dr Chasuble, I would like to be christened this afternoon. Would half-past five do?

Chasuble: Admirably.

ENTER CECILY FROM THE HOUSE

Cecily: Uncle Jack!
CECILY GOES FORWARD TO JACK; HE KISSES HER IN A MELANCHOLY MANNER.
Your brother is in the dining-room!

Jack: Who?

Cecily: Your brother Ernest.

Jack: Nonsense! I haven't got a brother.

Cecily: Oh, don't say that.
RUNS BACK INTO THE HOUSE. MISS PRISM AND DR CHASUBLE ARE ASTONISHED.

ENTER ALGERNON AND CECILY HAND IN HAND. THEY COME SLOWLY UP TO JACK. JACK MOTIONS ALGERNON AWAY.

Algernon: Brother John, I am very sorry. I intend to lead a better life in the future.
JACK GLARES AT HIM AND DOES NOT TAKE HIS HAND.

Cecily: Uncle Jack, take your brother Earnest's hand!

Jack: No.

Cecily: Ernest has been telling me about his poor friend Mr. Bunbury and his bed of pain.

Jack: Bunbury!

Cecily: Yes, Bunbury.

Jack: Bunbury! I won't have him talk to you about Bunbury!

Algernon: Brother John's coldness is peculiarly painful to me.

THEY ALL GO OFF EXCEPT JACK AND ALGERNON.

Jack: I don't allow Bunburying here.

Algernon: Cecily is a darling.

Jack: You are not to talk of her like that. I don't like it.

Algernon: Well, I don't like your clothes.

Jack: This Bunburying has not been a great success for you.

GOES INTO THE HOUSE.

Algernon: It has been a great success. I'm in love with Cecily, and that is everything.

ENTER CECILY AT THE BACK OF THE GARDEN. SHE PICKS UP THE CAN AND BEGINS TO WATER THE FLOWERS.

17 **Algernon:** He's going to send me away.

Cecily: It is always painful to part from people whom one has known for a very brief space of time.

Algernon: Thank you.

ENTER MERRIMAN

Merriman: The dog-cart is at the door.

ALGERNON LOOKS APPEALINGLY AT CECILY.

Cecily: It can wait, Merriman for... five minutes.

Merriman: Yes.

EXIT MERRIMAN

Algernon: Cecily, you are the visible personification of absolute perfection.

Cecily: Ernest, I will copy your remarks into my diary.

GOES OVER TO TABLE AND BEGINS WRITING IN DIARY.

Algernon: Do you really keep a diary? I'd give anything to look at it. May I?

Cecily: Oh no. PUTS HER HAND OVER IT
It is meant for publication. I have reached 'absolute perfection'. You can go on. I am ready for more.

ALGERNON, SOMEWHAT TAKEN ABACK, COUGHS

Cecily: Oh, don't cough, Ernest. When one is dictating one should speak fluently and not cough.

WRITES AS ALGERNON SPEAKS.

18 **Algernon** WITH BURNING PASSION
Cecily, ever since I looked upon your wonderful and incomparable beauty, I have dared to love you wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly.

Cecily: I don't think that you should tell me that you love me wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly. Hopelessly doesn't seem to make much sense, does it?

Algernon: Cecily!

ENTER MERRIMAN

Merriman: The dog-cart is waiting.

Algernon: Tell it to come round next week, at the same hour.

Merriman LOOKS AT CECILY, WHO MAKES NO SIGN
Yes.

MERRIMAN RETIRES

Algernon: I love you, Cecily. You will marry me, won't you?

Cecily: Of course. Why, we've been engaged for the last three months.

Algernon: The last three months?!

Cecily: Yes.

Algernon: But how?

Cecily: Ever since Uncle Jack confessed to us that he had a younger brother who was very wicked and bad, I fell in love with you, Ernest.

Algernon CROSSING TO HER AND KNEELING
Darling!
HE KISSES HER, SHE PUTS HER FINGERS THROUGH HIS HAIR

Cecily: I hope your hair curls naturally, does it?

Algernon: Yes, darling, with a little help from others.

Cecily: I am so glad.

19 You must not laugh at me, darling, but it had always been a girlish dream of mine to love someone whose name was Ernest.
ALGERNON RISES, CECILY ALSO.
There is something in that name that seems to inspire absolute confidence. I pity any poor married woman whose husband is not called Ernest.

Algernon: Do you mean to say you could not love me if I had some other name?

Cecily: But what name?

Algernon: Oh, any name you like – for instance – Algernon.

Cecily: But I don't like the name of Algernon.

Algernon: Well, my own dear, sweet, loving little darling, I really can't see why you should object to the name of Algernon. Cecily... MOVING TO HER

...if my name was Algy, couldn't you love me?

Cecily: I might respect you, Ernest, I might admire your character, but I fear that I should not be able to give you my undivided attention.

Algernon: I must see Dr Chasuble on a most important christening.
KISSES HER AND RUSHES DOWN THE GARDEN.

Cecily: I like his hair so much.

ENTER MERRIMAN

20 **Merriman:** Miss Fairfax.

ENTER GWENDOLEN. EXIT MERRIMAN

Cecily ADVANCING TO MEET HER, TAKES MEGAPHONE AND SPEAKS THROUGH IT
My name is Cecily Cardew.

Gwendolen TAKES HER OWN MEGAPHONE AND SPEAKS THROUGH IT.
Cecily Cardew?
MOVING TO HER AND SHAKING HANDS.
What a very sweet name! I may call you Cecily, may I not?

Cecily: With pleasure!

Gwendolen: And you will always call me Gwendolen, won't you?

Cecily: If you wish.

Gwendolen: Then that is all quite settled, is it not?

Cecily: I hope so.
A PAUSE. THEY BOTH SIT DOWN TOGETHER.

Gwendolen: My father is Lord Bracknell. You have never heard of papa, I suppose.

Cecily: I don't think so.

Gwendolen: The home seems to me to be the proper sphere for the man. And certainly once a man begins to neglect his domestic duties he

becomes painfully effeminate, does he not? And I don't like that. It makes men so very attractive.
AFTER EXAMINING CECILY CAREFULLY THROUGH A LORGNETTE.

You are here on a short visit, I suppose.

Cecily: Oh no! I live here.

Gwendolen SEVERELY
Really?

Cecily: My dear guardian, with the assistance of Miss Prism, has the arduous task of looking after me.

Gwendolen: Your guardian?

Cecily: Yes, I am Mr. Worthing's ward.

Gwendolen: Oh! How secretive of him!
RISING AND GOING TO HER.
I have liked you ever since I met you! But now that I know you are Mr. Worthing's ward, I wish you were forty-two, and plain. Ernest is extremely susceptible to the physical charms of others.

Cecily: Ernest?

Gwendolen: Yes.

Cecily: Oh, but it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing who is my guardian. It is his elder brother. Dearest Gwendolen, Mr. Ernest Worthing and I are engaged to be married.

Gwendolen STUNG
Mister Worthing is engaged to me.

Cecily VERY POLITELY, RISING
Ernest proposed to me exactly ten minutes ago.
SHOWS DIARY

Gwendolen EXAMINES DIARY THROUGH HER LORGNETTE CAREFULLY
He asked me to be his wife yesterday afternoon at 5.30.
PRODUCE DIARY OF HER OWN.
MEDITATIVELY If the poor fellow has been entrapped...

Cecily THOUGHTFULLY AND SADLY
Whatever unfortunate entanglement my dear boy may have got into...

Gwendolen: Do you allude to me, Miss Cardew, as an entanglement? You are presumptuous.

Cecily: Miss Fairfax, when I see a spade I call it a spade.

Gwendolen SATIRICALLY
I am glad to say that I have never seen a spade.

ENTER MERRIMAN, FOLLOWED BY THE FOOTMAN. HE CARRIES A SALVER, TABLE CLOTH, AND PLATE STAND. CECILY IS ABOUT TO RETORT. THE PRESENCE OF THE SERVANTS EXERCISES A RESTRAINING INFLUENCE, UNDER WHICH BOTH GIRLS CHAFE.

Merriman: Shall I lay tea here as usual?

Cecily STERNLY, IN A CALM VOICE
Yes, as usual.

21 ORCHESTRAL INTERLUDE. MERRIMAN BEGINS TO CLEAR TABLE AND LAY CLOTH. A LONG PAUSE. CECILY AND GWENDOLEN GLARE AT EACH OTHER AND PUT ASIDE MEGAPHONES.

22 **Gwendolen:** I had no idea there were any flowers in the country.

Cecily: May I offer you some tea, Miss Fairfax?

Gwendolen WITH ELABORATE POLITENESS
Thank you.
ASIDE Detestable girl! But I require tea!

Cecily SWEETLY
Sugar?

Gwendolen SUPERCILIOUSLY
No, thank you. Sugar is not fashionable any more. CECILY LOOKS ANGRILY AT HER, TAKES UP THE TONGS AND PUTS FOUR LUMPS OF SUGAR INTO THE CUP.

Cecily SEVERELY
Cake or bread and butter?

Gwendolen IN A BORED MANNER
Bread and butter, please. Cake is rarely seen at the best houses nowadays.

Cecily CUTS A VERY LARGE SLICE OF CAKE, AND PUTS IT ON THE TRAY
Hand that to Miss Fairfax.

MERRIMAN DOES SO, AND GOES OUT WITH FOOTMAN. GWENDOLEN DRINKS THE TEA AND MAKES A GRIMACE. PUTS DOWN CUP AT ONCE, REACHES OUT HER HAND TO THE BREAD AND BUTTER, LOOKS AT IT, AND FINDS IT IS CAKE. RISES IN INDIGNATION.

Gwendolen: You have filled my tea with lumps of sugar, and though I asked most distinctly for bread and butter, you have given me cake.

ENTER JACK

Gwendolen CATCHING SIGHT OF HIM.
Ernest! My own Ernest!

Jack: Gwendolen! Darling!
OFFERS TO KISS HER

Gwendolen DRAWS BACK
A moment! Are you engaged to be married to this young lady?
POINTS TO CECILY

Jack LAUGHING
To Cecily! Of course not!

Gwendolen: Thank you. You may!
OFFERS HER CHEEK

Cecily VERY SWEETLY
I knew there must be some misunderstanding, Miss Fairfax. This is my guardian, Uncle Jack.

Gwendolen RECEDING, SHOCKED
Jack! Oh!

ENTER ALGERNON

Cecily: Here is Ernest.

Algernon GOES STRAIGHT OVER TO CECILY WITHOUT NOTICING ANYONE ELSE
My own love!
OFFERS TO KISS HER

Cecily DRAWING BACK
A moment, Ernest! Are you engaged to be married to this young lady?

Algernon LOOKING AROUND
Gwendolen!
LAUGHING Of course not!

Cecily: Thank you.
PRESENTING HER CHEEK TO BE KISSED
You may.
ALGERNON KISSES HER

Gwendolen: Miss Cardew. The gentleman who is now embracing you is my cousin, Algernon.

Cecily BREAKING AWAY FROM ALGERNON
Algernon! Oh!
THE TWO GIRLS MOVE TOWARDS EACH OTHER AND PUT THEIR ARMS ROUND EACH OTHER'S WAISTS AS IF FOR PROTECTION.

Cecily: Are you called Algernon?

Algernon: Yes.

Cecily: Oh!

Gwendolen: Is your name really John?

Jack STANDING RATHER PROUDLY
Yes.

Cecily TO GWENDOLEN
We have been deceived.

Gwendolen: My poor wounded Cecily!

Cecily: My sweet wronged Gwendolen!

Gwendolen SLOWLY AND SERIOUSLY
You will call me sister, will you not?
THEY EMBRACE. JACK AND ALGERNON GROAN AND WALK UP AND DOWN.

Gwendolen: I am afraid it is quite clear, Cecily, that neither of us is engaged to be married to anyone. Let us go into the house. They will hardly venture to come after us there.

Cecily: No, men are so cowardly, aren't they?

THEY RETIRE INTO THE HOUSE WITH SCORNFUL LOOKS

Jack: And this is what you call Bunburying!?

Algernon: Yes, and a wonderful Bunbury it is. The most wonderful Bunbury I have ever had in my life.

Jack: Do not Bunbury here.

Algernon: Absurd. One can Bunbury anywhere. Every serious Bunburyist knows that.

Jack: Serious Bunburyist! I love Gwendolen.

Algernon: I adore Cecily.

Jack: You cannot marry Miss Cardew.

ALGERNON BEGINS TO EAT MUFFINS

Jack: How can you calmly eat muffins now?

Algernon: Well, I can't eat muffins in an agitated manner. The butter would get on my cuffs. One should always eat muffins quite calmly. It is the only way to eat them.

Jack: It's heartless eating muffins at all, under the circumstances.

Algernon: When I am in trouble, eating is the only thing that consoles me. When I am in great trouble, I refuse everything except food and drink. I am eating muffins now because I am unhappy. Besides, I am particularly fond of muffins.
RISING

Jack RISING
Well, that is no reason why you should eat them in that greedy way.
TAKES MUFFINS FROM ALGERNON

Algernon OFFERING TEA-CAKE
I wish you would have tea-cake instead. I don't like tea-cake.

Jack: I suppose a man may eat muffins in his garden.

Algernon: But you just said it was heartless to eat muffins.

Jack: I said it was heartless of you, under the circumstances. I wish you would go.

ALGERNON SEIZES THE MUFFIN DISH FROM JACK

Algernon: I am being christened at a quarter to six.

Jack: I am being christened at 5.30. We can't both be christened Ernest. It's absurd.
PICKING UP THE MUFFIN DISH

Algernon: Jack, you are eating muffins again! I wish you wouldn't. There are only two left.
TAKES THEM
I told you I was fond of muffins.

Jack: But I hate tea-cake. Algernon! I don't want you here. Why don't you go!

Algernon TRIUMPHANTLY
But there's still one muffin left.

JACK GROANS, AND SINKS INTO A CHAIR. ALGERNON CONTINUES EATING.

ACT III

[24] GWENDOLEN AND CECILY ARE AT THE WINDOW, LOOKING OUT INTO THE GARDEN.

Cecily: They have been eating muffins.

ENTER JACK FOLLOWED BY ALGERNON. THEY WHISTLE SOME DREADFUL POPULAR AIR FROM A BRITISH OPERA.

[25] **Gwendolen, Cecily and the Orchestral Players** SPEAKING TOGETHER
Your Christian names are still an insuperable barrier. That is all!

Jack and Algernon SPEAKING TOGETHER
Our Christian names! Is that all? But we are going to be christened this afternoon.

Gwendolen, Cecily, Orchestral Players
To JACK
For my sake you are prepared to do this terrible thing?

Jack: I am.

Cecily, Gwendolen, Orchestral Players
To ALGERNON
To please me you are ready to face this fearful ordeal?

Algernon: I am!

Gwendolen, Cecily, Orchestral Players
How absurd to talk of the equality of the sexes! Where questions of self-sacrifice are concerned, men are infinitely superior.

Jack: We are.
CLASPS HANDS WITH ALGERNON

Gwendolen, Cecily, Orchestral Players
They have moments of physical courage of which we women know absolutely nothing. Darling!

Algernon: Darling!

CECILY AND GWENDOLEN FALL INTO JACK AND ALGERNON'S ARMS. ENTER MERRIMAN

[26] **Merriman:** Lady Bracknell!

ENTER LADY BRACKNELL. THE COUPLES SEPARATE IN ALARM. EXIT MERRIMAN.

Lady Bracknell: Gwendolen! What?

Gwendolen: I am engaged to be married to Mr. Worthing, mamma.

Lady Bracknell Come here.

LADY BRACKNELL IS ABOUT TO ATTEND TO GWENDOLEN WHEN JACK INTERVENES

Jack: I am engaged to be married to Gwendolen, Lady Bracknell.

Lady Bracknell: Algernon!

Algernon: Yes, Aunt Augusta.

Lady Bracknell: Is it in this house Mr. Bunbury lives?

Algernon: Bunbury doesn't live here anymore. Bunbury is dead.

Lady Bracknell: Dead! When did Mr. Bunbury die? His death must have been extremely sudden.

Algernon: Oh! Poor Bunbury died this afternoon.

Lady Bracknell: What did he die of?

Algernon: Bunbury? Oh, he was exploded.

Lady Bracknell: Exploded! Was he the victim of a revolutionary outrage?

Algernon: Aunt Augusta, I mean he was found out! The doctors found out that Bunbury could not live, so Bunbury died.

Lady Bracknell POINTING AT CECILY
Mr. Worthing. Who?

Jack: That lady is Miss Cecily Cardew, my ward.

LADY BRACKNELL BOWS COLDLY TO CECILY

Algernon: I am engaged to be married to Cecily, Aunt Augusta.

Cecily: Mr. Moncrieff and I are engaged to be married, Lady Bracknell.

[27] **Lady Bracknell** WITH A SHIVER, CROSSING TO THE SOFA AND SITTING DOWN
Mr. Worthing, is Miss Cardew at all connected with any of the larger railway stations in London? I merely desire information. Until yesterday I had no idea that there were any families or persons whose origin was a terminus.

JACK LOOKS FURIOUS, BUT RESTRAINS HIMSELF

Jack IN A CLEAR, COLD VOICE
Miss Cardew is the grand-daughter of the late Mr. Thomas Cardew of 149 Belgrave Square, South West; Gervase Park, Dorking, Surrey; and the Sporrin, Fifeshire, N.B.

Lady Bracknell: Three addresses always inspire confidence. But what proof have I of their authenticity?

Jack: Miss Cardew's solicitors are Markby, Markby, and Markby.

Lady Bracknell: Markby, Markby, and Markby?

Jack VERY IRRITABLY
I have certificates of Miss Cardew's birth, baptism, whooping cough, vaccination, confirmation, and the measles; both the German and the English variety.

Lady Bracknell: Ah! A life crowded with incident. I am not in favour of premature experiences.
RISES, LOOKS AT HER WATCH
Gwendolen! The time approaches for our departure. We have not a moment to lose. Mr. Worthing, has Miss Cardew any little fortune?

Jack: Oh! about a hundred and thirty thousand pounds. That is all. Goodbye, Lady Bracknell. So pleased to have seen you.

Lady Bracknell SITTING DOWN AGAIN
A moment, Mr. Worthing. A hundred and thirty thousand pounds! Miss Cardew seems to me a most attractive young lady, now that I look at her. Few girls of the present day have any of the qualities that improve with time. We live, I regret to say, in an age of surfaces.
To CECILY
Come over here, dear.
CECILY GOES ACROSS

[28] Pretty child! your dress is sadly simple, and your hair seems almost as Nature might have left it. But a thoroughly experienced French maid produces a really marvellous result in a very brief space of time.

Lady Bracknell BENDS, WITH A PRACTISED SMILE, TO CECILY
Kindly turn round, sweet child.
CECILY TURNS COMPLETELY ROUND
No, the side view is what I want
CECILY PRESENTS HER PROFILE
Yes, quite as I expected. There are distinct social possibilities in your profile.

Die zwei Schwachen Punkte unseres Zeitalters sind sein Mangel an Prinzipien und sein Mangel an Profil. Das Kinn etwas höher, Kindchen. Stil beruht weitgehend auf der Art und Weise, wie das Kinn getragen wird. Zur Zeit wird es sehr hoch getragen. [*The two weak points in our age are its want of principle and its want of profile. The chin a little higher, child. Style largely depends on the way the chin is worn. They are worn very high, just at present.*]
Algernon!

Algernon: Yes, Aunt Augusta!

Lady Bracknell: There are distinct social possibilities in Miss Cardew's profile.

Algernon: Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

Lady Bracknell: Cecily, you may kiss me!

Cecily KISSES HER
Thank you, Lady Bracknell.

Lady Bracknell: You may also address me as Aunt Augusta for the future.

Cecily: Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

Lady Bracknell: The marriage, I think, had better take place quite soon.

Algernon: Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

Cecily: Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

[29] **Jack:** I am Miss Cardew's guardian, and she cannot marry without my consent.

Lady Bracknell: Upon what grounds?

Jack: His moral character. Untruthful!

ALGERNON AND CECILY LOOK AT HIM IN INDIGNANT AMAZEMENT.

Lady Bracknell: Untruthful! My nephew Algernon? Impossible! He is an Oxonian.

Jack: But my dear Lady Bracknell. The moment you consent to my marriage with Gwendolen, I will allow your nephew to marry my ward.

Lady Bracknell RISING AND DRAWING HERSELF UP
Impossible!

Jack: Then our future is one of passionate celibacy.

Lady Bracknell: That is not the destiny I propose for Gwendolen.

PULLS OUT HER WATCH
Come, dear, we have already missed five, if not six, trains. To miss any more might expose us to comment on the platform.

ENTER DR. CHASUBLE

Chasuble: Everything is quite ready for the christenings.

VOCAL/ORCHESTRAL OUTBURST

Chasuble: Am I to understand then that there are to be no christenings at all this afternoon?

VOCAL/ORCHESTRAL OUTBURST

As your present mood seems to be one peculiarly secular, I will return to the church at once. Indeed, I have just been informed that Miss Prism has been waiting for me.

[30] **Lady Bracknell** STARTING
Miss Prism! Did I hear you mention a Miss Prism?

Chasuble: Yes, Lady Bracknell.

Lady Bracknell: Is this Miss Prism a female of repellent aspect, remotely connected with education?

Chasuble INDIGNANTLY
She is the most cultivated of ladies, and the very picture of respectability.

Lady Bracknell: It is obviously the same person. May I ask what position she holds in your household?

Chasuble SEVERELY
I am a celibate, madam.

Lady Bracknell: I must see her at once. Let her be sent for.

Chasuble LOOKING OFF
She approaches.

ENTER MISS PRISM HURRIEDLY. CATCHES SIGHT OF LADY BRACKNELL, WHO HAS FIXED HER WITH A STONY GLARE. MISS PRISM GROWS PALE AND QUAILS. SHE LOOKS ANXIOUSLY ROUND AS IF DESIROUS TO ESCAPE.

Lady Bracknell SWEET AND CHILLING
Prism!

MISS PRISM BOWS HER HEAD IN SHAME
Come here, Prism!
MISS PRISM APPROACHES IN A HUMBLE MANNER
Prism! Where is that baby!?

GENERAL CONSTERNATION. THE CANON STARTS BACK IN HORROR. ALGERNON AND JACK PRETEND TO BE ANXIOUS TO SHIELD CECILY AND GWENDOLEN FROM HEARING THE DETAILS OF A TERRIBLE PUBLIC SCANDAL.

[31] **Lady Bracknell:** Twenty-eight years ago, Prism, you left Lord Bracknell's house, Number 104, Upper Grosvenor Street, in charge of a perambulator that contained a baby of the male sex. You never returned. A few weeks later, through the elaborate investigations of the Metropolitan police, the perambulator was discovered at midnight, standing by itself in a remote corner of Bayswater. It contained the manuscript of a three-volume novel of more than usually revolting sentimentality. MISS PRISM STARTS IN INVOLUNTARY INDIGNATION
But the baby was not there! Prism!
EVERYONE LOOKS AT MISS PRISM

Orchestral Players SHOUT
Where is that baby!?

[32] **Miss Prism:** Lady Bracknell, I admit with shame that I do not know. I only wish I did. The plain facts of the case are these. On the morning of the day you mention, a day that is for ever branded on my memory, I prepared as usual to take the baby out in its perambulator. I had also with me a somewhat old, but capacious hand-bag in which I had intended to place the manuscript of a work of fiction that I had written during my few unoccupied hours. In a moment of mental abstraction, for which I never can forgive myself, I deposited the manuscript in the basinette, and placed the baby in the hand-bag.

[33] **Jack** WHO HAS BEEN LISTENING ATTENTIVELY
But where did you deposit the hand-bag?

Miss Prism: Do not ask me, Mr. Worthing.

Jack: Miss Prism, this is a matter of no small importance to me. I insist on knowing where you deposited the hand-bag that contained that infant.

Miss Prism: I left it in the cloak-room of one of the larger railway stations in London.

Jack: What railway station?

Miss Prism: Victoria!

Jack: I must retire to my room for a moment. Gwendolen, wait here for me.

Gwendolen: If you are not too long, I will wait here for you all my life.

[34] EXIT JACK IN GREAT EXCITEMENT. NOISES HEARD OVERHEAD AS IF SOMEONE WAS THROWING TRUNKS ABOUT. EVERYONE LOOKS UP.

Chasuble: What do you think this means, Lady Bracknell?

Lady Bracknell: I hardly dare suspect, Dr. Chasuble.

Chasuble: Your guardian has a very emotional nature.

Lady Bracknell: This noise is extremely unpleasant.

Chasuble LOOKING UP
It has stopped now.
THE NOISE IS REDOUBLED

Lady Bracknell: I wish he would arrive at some conclusion!

ENTER JACK WITH A HAND-BAG OF BLACK LEATHER IN HIS HAND

[35] **Jack** RUSHING OVER TO MISS PRISM
Is this the hand-bag, Miss Prism? Examine it carefully before you speak.

Miss Prism HUMS TO HERSELF WHILE EXAMINING THE HANDBAG

It seems to be mine. Yes, here is the injury it received through the upsetting of an omnibus in younger and happier days. Here is the stain on the lining caused by the explosion.

Lady Bracknell: Explosion!

Miss Prism: And here, on the lock, are my initials. I had forgotten that in an extravagant mood I had had them placed there. The bag is undoubtedly mine. I am delighted to have it so unexpectedly restored to me. It has been a great inconvenience being without it all these years.

Jack IN A PATHETIC VOICE
Miss Prism, I was the baby you placed in it.

Miss Prism AMAZED
You!?

Jack EMBRACING HER
Yes... mother!

Miss Prism RECOILING IN INDIGNANT ASTONISHMENT
Mr. Worthing! I am unmarried!

Jack: Unmarried! That is a serious blow. But cannot repentance wipe out an act of folly? Why should there be one law for men, and another for women? Mother, I forgive you.
TRIES TO EMBRACE HER AGAIN

Miss Prism STILL MORE INDIGNANT
Mr. Worthing, there is some error.
POINTING TO LADY BRACKNELL
There is the lady who can tell you who you really are.

36 **Jack** AFTER A PAUSE
Lady Bracknell, who am I?

Lady Bracknell: You are Algernon's elder brother.

Jack: Algy's elder brother! Then I have a brother after all. I knew I had a brother! I always said I had a brother! Cecily! How could you have ever doubted that I had a brother?
SEIZES HOLD OF ALGERNON
Dr. Chasuble, my unfortunate brother. Miss Prism, my unfortunate brother.
Gwendolen, my unfortunate brother. Algy, you have never behaved to me like a brother in all your life.

Algernon: I was out of practice.
SHAKES HANDS

Gwendolen To JACK
But what is your name?!

Jack: Your decision on my name!

Cecily: Gwendolen!

Jack: Aunt Augusta! When Miss Prism left me in the hand-bag, what was my name?

Lady Bracknell: You had your father's name.

Jack IMPATIENTLY
But what was my father's name?

Lady Bracknell MEDITATIVELY
The General was a man of peace, except in his domestic life. His name would appear in the Army Lists.

Jack: These delightful records should have been my constant study.
RUSHES TO BOOKCASE AND TEARS THE BOOKS OUT.
M. Generals...

37 **All:** Explosion!

Mallam, Maxbohm, Magley, Markby, Migsby, Mobbs, Moncrieff! Lieutenant 1840, Captain.

Explosion!

Jack: Lieutenant-Colonel, Colonel, General 1869, Christian name, Ernest!
PUTS BOOK QUIETLY DOWN.
I always told you, Gwendolen, my name was Ernest, didn't I? Well, it is Ernest after all. I mean it naturally is Ernest.

Gwendolen: Ernest! My own Ernest! I felt from the first that you could have no other name!

Jack: My own one!

Chasuble To MISS PRISM
Laetitia! EMBRACES HER

Miss Prism ENTHUSIASTICALLY
Frederick! At last!

Algernon: Cecily! EMBRACES HER

Cecily: At last!

Jack: Gwendolen! EMBRACES HER

Gwendolen: At last!

Lady Bracknell: My nephew, you seem to be displaying signs of triviality.

Jack: On the contrary, Aunt Augusta, I've now realised for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest.

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Gerald Barry

Gerald Barry was born in Ireland in 1952 and after attending University College Dublin went to Amsterdam and later Cologne to continue his studies. His time in Germany, where he studied with Stockhausen and Kagel, proved to be a liberating experience and he soon came to public attention in 1979 with radical ensemble works '_____' and Ø.

Barry has received a number of commissions from the BBC, including *Chevaux-de-frise* for the 1988 Proms, given its Russian premiere by the Mariinsky Orchestra in 2007; *The Conquest of Ireland*, given its German premiere by the Bavarian RSO in 1998; *Day* for the BBC Symphony Orchestra (2005); *The Eternal Recurrence*, a setting of Nietzsche for voice and orchestra (2000); and *Hard D* (1995) for the Orkest de Volharding.

Barry's first opera *The Intelligence Park* (recorded on NMC D122), was commissioned by the ICA and first performed at the 1990 Almeida Festival. A second opera, *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit*, written for Channel 4 Television, opened the 2002 Aldeburgh

Festival, followed by performances in London and the Berliner Festwochen conducted by Thomas Adès. A new staging took place in 2013 at the Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe. *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* was given in 2005 at English National Opera and in 2008 at Opera Basel. *La Plus Forte*, a one-act opera for soprano and orchestra on the Strindberg play, was commissioned by Radio France for the 2007 Festival Présences. Sung by Barbara Hannigan, it toured to Amsterdam, London, Dublin, Miami and Toronto.

Barry wrote *Wiener Blut*, *Dead March* and *Beethoven* for the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group. *God Save the Queen* for choir and ensemble was commissioned for the London Sinfonietta by London's Southbank Centre on the 50th anniversary of the Royal Festival Hall in 2001. More recent chamber works include *Le Vieux Sourd* (2008) for piano, commissioned by Betty Freeman, *Feldman's Six-Penny Editions* (2008-9) for the London Sinfonietta and Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, and *No people*.

(2013) for Ensemble 7Bridges. His Piano Concerto, written for Nicolas Hodges and co-commissioned by Musica Viva and City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra was premiered in Munich in November 2013 with further performances in the UK with the CBSO and in Finland with Avanti! Chamber Orchestra.

The Importance of Being Earnest (2010) was jointly commissioned by the LA Philharmonic and the Barbican in London, and received its world premiere staging at Opéra national de Lorraine, Nancy, in 2013. Two further productions were staged the same year at the Royal Opera House Linbury Theatre, and on tour with NI Opera. *Earnest* received a 2013 Royal Philharmonic Society Award for Large-Scale Composition. Barry's latest opera, *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*, will be premiered in 2016 at the Barbican London, followed by performances in Los Angeles and Amsterdam.

His music has been recorded on the NMC, Black Box, Marco Polo and BVHaast labels.

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Cover photo: L-R, Lady Bracknell (Alan Ewing), Gwendolen (Wendy Dawn Thompson) and Jack (Chad Shelton)

Back cover photo: Algernon (Phillip Addis), Jack (Chad Shelton) and Gwendolen (Wendy Dawn Thompson)

Reverse inlay photo: Top tier, L-R: Jack (Chad Shelton), Algernon (Phillip Addis); bottom tier, L-R: Lane (José Luis Barreto), Lady Bracknell (Alan Ewing), Gwendolen (Wendy Dawn Thompson), Cecily (Ida Falk Winland)

Photos © Opéra national de Lorraine from the production by Opéra national de Lorraine, Nancy, France in March 2013, directed by Sam Brown and designed by Annemarie Woods. www.opera-national-lorraine.fr

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