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FORMAN, SANDRA HOPPER. Production Thesis: Ernest In Love. (1969) Directed by Dr. Herman Middleton. 212 Pages.

The purpose of this thesis was to compile a practical manuscript for directing a production of the musical Ernest In Love by Anne Crosswell and Lee Pockriss. This specific purpose was achieved by studying the script, producing the play, and evaluating the production after a series of public performances.

Part One includes the following: (1) brief biographies of the authors, (2) history of previous performances, (3) a synopsis of the script, (4) character descriptions and analyses, (5) a discussion of the function and mood of the sets, lights and costumes, and (6) justification for the director's choice of the script.

Part Two is the director's prompt book for the production of Ernest In Love which was performed on July 7, 8, and 9, 1969, on the main stage of the W. Raymond Taylor Speech and Drama Building at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. In addition to the production plates and photographs, this chapter includes notation on (1) blocking, (2) composition, (3) details of characterizations, (4) stage business, and (5) timing.

The final chapter of this thesis consists of the director's personal evaluation of the finished product. Specifically, this evaluation includes: (1) the initial interpretation of the script, Ernest In Love, as compared with the

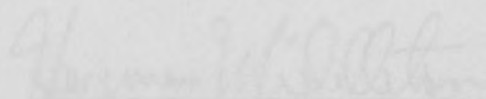
final product, (2) the actor-director relationship during both rehearsal and performance, and (3) the audience's reaction to the production.

by  
James Hopper Forman

A Thesis Submitted to  
The Faculty of the Graduate School of  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
of Master of Fine Arts

1971

Approved by

  
James Hopper Forman  
Thesis Advisor

APPROVAL SHEET

PRODUCTION THESIS: ERNEST IN LOVE

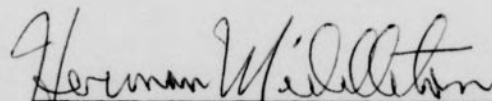
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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School of The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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Kathryn England

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July 11, 1969  
Date of Examination

## PREFACE

This practical manuscript for a production of Ernest In Love has grown out of fresh experiences in graduate school as a student of acting and directing. I am grateful to many individuals in addition to the instructors who have been an inspiration throughout my entire college career. Authoress Anne Crowell and composer Lee Pockriss have made personal suggestions which were most valuable. Dr. Herman Middleton, Dr. Thomas L. Tedford, Professor Kathryn England and Professor Virginia Moomaw have all enriched my thesis by contributing ideas and concrete illustrations. I also wish to thank pianist Wayne Lail for his endless efforts toward the success of the production and to Austin Saunders for providing the photographs included in this manuscript. But my most grateful appreciation is to my husband, Richard, who has, as always, been my constant critic and supporter.

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## INTRODUCTION

"It is a terrible thing for a man to find out suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth." This famous line is delivered by Jack Worthing at the conclusion of Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest, and is also the clincher of the accurate musical adaptation, Ernest In Love, written by Anne Crosswell and Lee Pockriss. The line sums up all of the biting wit and Victorian satire that makes both the original and the adaptation sparkle.

This thesis will present a practical manuscript for directing Ernest In Love. The thesis is broken down into three parts, each with a principal purpose.

The purpose of Part One is to abstract directorial considerations for the production. These considerations include (1) the authors, (2) previous performances, (3) a synopsis of the script, (4) brief character descriptions, and (5) production elements.

The purpose of Part Two is to demonstrate the directorial aspects of Ernest In Love by providing a thorough director's prompt book. The notations include (1) blocking or movement, (2) composition, (3) details of characterization, (4) stage business, and (5) timing.

The purpose of the third and final part is to present a critical evaluation of how well Ernest In Love succeeded in performance. This evaluation includes (1) the initial in-

terpretation as compared with the final product, (2) the actor-director relationships during rehearsal and performance, and (3) the audience's reaction to the production.



PART ONE

... Mrs. Croswell ...  
... Pierre Aumont. Her latest ven-  
... Dick Shawn, which Mrs. Croswell  
... Broadway in 1968. Cur-  
... "way-out" musicals.  
... was born in New York City and  
... New York City. In the  
... and conducting with Leo-  
... composition with  
... Music Festival. Before ar-  
... he composed the ballet  
... Three Wishes for Jamie (1952).  
... the music, ballets and

Mrs. Croswell, personal correspondence to Sandra Hopy-  
... 1969. (Typewritten.)

## PART ONE: ANALYSIS

### The Authors

Adapter and lyricist Anne Croswell was born in Tuscaloosa, Alabama and was graduated from Randolph-Macon Woman's College in Lynchburg, Virginia. In her early career she wrote both dramatic scripts and commercials for radio and television. In 1957, she adapted Huck Finn as a musical for CBS and at about the same time she composed the theme of the Washington Square series for NBC. She collaborated with Lee Pockriss on Tovarich which ran for a year on Broadway and starred Vivien Leigh and Jean Pierre Aumont. Her latest venture, I'm Solomon starring Dick Shawn, which Mrs. Croswell labeled a "disaster," was produced on Broadway in 1968. Currently she is working on two off-beat "way-out" musicals.<sup>1</sup>

Composer Lee Pockriss was born in New York City and was graduated from Brooklyn College in New York City. In the early 1940's he studied composition and conducting with Leonard Bernstein and in 1948-49 he studied composition with Aaron Copeland at the Tanglewood Music Festival. Before arranging the score for Ernest In Love, he composed the ballet music for Top Banana (1951) and Three Wishes for Jamie (1952). Mr. Pockriss composed and orchestrated the music, ballets and

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<sup>1</sup>Anne Croswell, personal correspondence to Sandra Hopper Forman, dated May 21, 1969. (Typewritten.)

songs for "The Milton Berle Show" (NBC, 1952-56) and "The Martha Raye Show" (NBC, 1953-57). Among the numerous awards bestowed upon him was the coveted National Association of Recording Arts and Sciences award for Catch a Falling Star in 1958.<sup>2</sup>

#### Previous Performances

Anne Crosswell and Lee Pockriss first produced an adaptation of Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest in 1957 on the venerable CBS show, "U. S. Steel Hour." The production, entitled "Who's Earnest?" featured Edward Mulhare as Algernon Moncrieff, David Atkinson as Jack Worthing, Dorothy Collins as Cecily Cardew, Louise Troy as Gwendolen Fairfax, Edith King as Lady Bracknell, Martyn Green as Dr. Chasuble and Nydia Westman as Miss Prism. From the successful special emerged the full-scale musical, Ernest In Love. This playful satire on the old-fashioned, mid-Victorian era opened at the Gramercy Arts Theatre, New York City, on May 4, 1960. Directed by Harold Stone, the Off-Broadway cast consisted of Louis Edmond as Algy, John Irving as Jack, Gerriane Raphael as Cecily, Leila Martin as Gwendolen and Sara Seegar as Lady Bracknell.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Walter Rigdon, ed., "Pockriss, Lee," The Biographical Encyclopedia & Who's Who of the American Theatre (New York: James H. Heineman, Incorporated, 1966), p. 745.

<sup>3</sup> Album cover, Ernest In Love Recording OL5530 (New York: Columbia Masterworks, 1960.)

In a recent correspondence from Anne Crosswell, she stated:

The reception of the show ["Who's Earnest?"] convinced me to develop it into a full-length production for Off-Broadway. It was revived four years later [1964] at the Equity Library Theatre in New York. It ran many months in French in Brussels and has been done in various parts of the country here. Negotiations are now underway <sup>4</sup> for a London production and then possibly a movie.

Overall, the reviews for the Off-Broadway production were favorable. Major critics agreed that Mrs. Crosswell and Mr. Pockriss retained the satirical charm and pleasure of the Oscar Wilde original in both the dialogue and the music. Typical examples of critical comments were as follows:

Adapter Crosswell was careful not to shatter the original's cutglass dialogue. . . .Lee Pockriss' music [is] engaging, deft, pleasantly hummable tunes that bob against one another like English strawberries floating in dry white wine. <sup>5</sup>

--Time Magazine.

Everything has been done in the most impeccable taste. . . .Lee Pockriss' music is deft and droll. Anne Crosswell's book and lyrics are clever. . . .[The] whole performance radiates sly good nature. <sup>6</sup>

--Brooks Atkinson, The New York Times.

The only unfavorable notice was turned in by the faceless voice of the New Yorker who found Ernest In Love "tasteless,

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<sup>4</sup>

Crosswell, personal correspondence to Sandra Hopper Forman.

<sup>5</sup>

"The Theatre: Ernest In Love," Time Magazine, June 6, 1960, p. 70.

<sup>6</sup>

Album cover, Ernest In Love.

witless, banal, insipid, repulsive, null . . ."7 Speaking for the majority, Richard Watts, Jr. of the New York Post noted: "[It's] charming . . . a fresh and likable musical show . . . excellently played."8

#### The Script

Ernest In Love, a musical in two acts, with a running time of approximately two hours, can best be discussed as it relates to the celebrated Oscar Wilde original. Besides containing a majority of the famous lines of The Importance of Being Earnest, Ernest In Love presents a libretto of cheerful gaiety and lyrics that graft smoothly onto the script. In point of fact, several of the songs incorporate the identical phrasing of the original, as in the contemptuously proud number by Lady Bracknell, "A Handbag Is Not a Proper Mother:"

I'd welcome to my bosom any bachelor  
Whose family was highly regarded,  
But I cannot let my daughter wed a satchel or  
A parcel that someone discarded.

Several characters have been added to the musical which do not appear in the original: Perkins, a valet for Jack; Alice and Effie, maids for both Gwendolen and Cecily; and various tradesmen who appear only in the opening scene. These additions broaden the play into musical scope and lend fullness and depth to both the plot and musical numbers. In

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<sup>7</sup>  
"The Theatre: Off-Broadway," New Yorker, May 21, 1960.  
p. 117.

<sup>8</sup>  
Album cover, Ernest In Love.



the aforementioned letter, Mrs. Croswell explained:

Inventing the maid in the country, taking Lane down to the country and the use of the tradesmen in the opening scene plus the butlers was done for several reasons; to open up the play a little, to allow the lower classes to comment on the upper with the gentleman's gentleman somewhere in between striving to be a carbon of the upper.<sup>9</sup>

Act One opens on a London street with the valets justifying to the tradesmen the reasons why their masters do not pay their bills. As they explain it, the aristocracy feel that they "must protect" the economy of England, and to do this, they must keep the merchants' ledgers intact -- through non-payment. The valet Perkins returns home in Scene Two to find his master, Jack Worthing, formulating a proposal of marriage to the Honorable Gwendolen Fairfax. Gwendolen, who is certainly prepared to accept the proposal, dominates Scene Three with her maid, Alice. They are concerning themselves with the same dilemma facing every mid-Victorian young lady at such an important time: what to wear. In Scene Four, Jack, who is known as Ernest in London, calls upon his friend, Algernon Moncrieff, who chides him for using an assumed name. However, Jack's reasons are clear. He has told his ward, Cecily, that he has a wicked younger brother in London, Ernest, who requires his attention. Then Jack uses the fictitious name when in London in order that his ward will not hear of his city escapades. This makes perfect sense to Algy, who has been doing

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<sup>9</sup>Croswell, personal correspondence to Sandra Hopper Forman.



the same thing with a Mr. Bunbury for years. Algernon's cousin, Gwendolen, and her mother, Lady Augusta Bracknell, arrive and Jack proceeds with his proposal. Lady Bracknell immediately opposes the match for obvious social reasons: Jack has no parents, having been found in a handbag at Victoria Station. As the ladies prepare to depart, Jack tells Gwendolen where to write to him in the country, and Algernon quietly copies the address.

At the country Manor House in Scene Five, Cecily is studying with her governess, Miss Prism. Algy appears, announcing that he is Jack's wicked younger brother Ernest. As nature would have it, Cecily and Algy find love at first sight. Love is in the country air as Miss Prism is also caught up in the charms of Dr. Chasuble, the resident cleric. At the end of Act One, Jack returns home to announce the sudden demise of his wicked brother, Ernest, and is aghast to find Algernon.

Act Two sees love in the country moving along at a steady pace. Algernon's valet, Lane, finds that Cecily's maid, Effie, is most agreeable to his advances, while their master and mistress' romance blossoms. Gwendolen arrives at the Manor House seeking Jack [Ernest] and is simply charmed with Cecily. The charm is short-lived, however, when both girls discover that they are engaged to "Ernest." The deceivers appear and the deception is at an end. The discovery that Cecily is engaged to "Algernon" and Gwendolen is engaged

to "Jack" causes the young ladies dismay and they form an alliance against both men. Just as the men have announced their intentions to be christened "Ernest," Lady Bracknell enters. She agrees to let Cecily marry her nephew, but Jack refuses the alliance unless Lady Bracknell agrees to his marriage with Gwendolen. The situation is at a standstill.

The final moments of the play bring Miss Prism and Dr. Chasuble on the scene. Lady Bracknell immediately recognizes Miss Prism and accuses her of misplacing a baby boy twenty-eight years ago. Miss Prism admits the error, and further reveals that the baby was misplaced in a handbag. Naturally, the handbag turns out to be Jack's "parents." Furthermore, Dr. Chasuble announces that Jack was actually born Ernest John Moncrieff. Jack is, therefore, Lady Bracknell's nephew, Algy's elder brother, and Gwendolen's "Ernest."

Despite the artificial world of the play, Ernest In Love incorporates elements of satire that exist in the original. Vincent F. Hopper describes several satirical properties of The Importance of Being Earnest:

The Bunburying bachelors constitute a playful satire on the Victorian double-standard. The Rev. Chasuble is a light thrust at the High Church movement within the Established Church and its pre-occupation with a restoration of primitive church practices [and] its reintroduction of vestments. . . . Lady Bracknell is a caricature of the Victorian grande dame in her plenipotentiary and peremptory manner.<sup>10</sup>

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Oscar Wilde, The Importance of Being Earnest, Theatre Classics (New York: Barron's Educational Series, Incorporated, 1959), pp. 41-42.

The plot of Ernest In Love and The Importance of Being Earnest is a parody of plots which rest upon the discovery of a long-lost nephew and brother. The coincidence of events are drawn together by the absent-minded Miss Prism who, twenty-eight years before had been the governess of the lost baby boy, and presently is unknowingly employed as his housekeeper. Further satire is found in the parody on love obstacles. An example is the necessity for Algernon and Jack to change their names to Ernest before they can be accepted as suitable marriage risks. Ironically, this and other such obstacles are just the catalyst the young lovers need to fortify their eternal devotion. Mistaken identity is employed, as in the case of Cecily and Gwendolen who both think they are engaged to the same "mythical" Ernest, and Jack's mistaking Miss Prism for his mother. Oddly enough, at the end of this endless string of plots there is a parody on the plot itself. Algernon is not provided with the name Ernest even though Cecily adheres to her original position that she can not marry anyone who is not called Ernest. Furthermore, no mention is made of the fact that Jack will be wed to his first cousin.

The music for Ernest In Love is light and crisp, reflecting the Wilde spirit. With the exception of two songs ("How Do You Find the Words?" and "A Wicked Man") only duet and ensemble numbers are employed. This approach lends a conversational quality to the songs which blends smoothly with the dialogue. Both "A Handbag Is Not a Proper Mother" and "My First Impression" have lyrics that correspond almost di-

rectly to Oscar Wilde's phrasing. When asked to make a critical evaluation of his music, composer Lee Pockriss had this to say:

Ultimately, no matter how couched in hi-falutin terms, all criticism and evaluation is simply the thoughts, feelings and decisions of the individual.<sup>11</sup>

This director feels the music for Ernest In Love has the necessary buoyancy and brilliance to compliment an already fluid script.

Regardless of the obvious dramatic faults previously sited, Ernest In Love emerges as a delightful dramatic farce of finely wrought triviality. In one way or another, practically all phases of Victorian life are satirized with good humor in the play. From the exalted institution of marriage and chasity to the Mother Church itself, Ernest In Love banters playfully. Its dialogue and mood are pure puritan. Its characters are silly, staid and stereotyped; straight out of the 1890's. When these gentlemen and gentlewomen speak their Oscarise vocabulary<sup>12</sup>, Ernest In Love becomes exactly what Wilde intended The Importance of Being Earnest to be: "A

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<sup>11</sup>Lee Pockriss, personal correspondence to Sandra Hopper Forman, dated April 13, 1969. (Typewritten.)

<sup>12</sup>Vincent F. Hopper states that "Wilde's personal manner was to deliver facetious, paradoxical, or trivial declarations in a spirit of formal, measured gravity -- being neither too pontifical or affectedly pompous, nor yet too archly or consciously cute and comic. The lines of the play must be delivered in that way." Wilde, The Importance of Being Earnest, Theatre Classics, p. 47.

clever little thing written by a butterfly for butterflies."<sup>13</sup>

#### Character Descriptions

Indigenous to the characters of Ernest In Love is the life-attitude expressed by Wilde in The Importance of Being Earnest:

Regardless of the crucial implications of their situation, they respond with studied self-possession, with bland detachment, or nonchalant brightness.<sup>14</sup>

For example, when Jack tells of his brother's death, Miss Prism remarks, "What a lesson for him. I trust he will profit by it." And Jack, upon learning that Lady Bracknell can tell him who his parents are, asks casually, "I hate to seem inquisitive, but would you kindly inform me who I am?"

Without exception, the characters invert conventional behavior. They react flippantly to the solemn and with mock-solemnity to the trivial. For example, Lady Bracknell is quite unmoved by Jack's story of losing his parents, but she is most enthusiastic about the fact that he smokes. As she puts it, "A man should always have an occupation of some kind."

Each character in Ernest In Love, from the coy maid, Effie, to dominating Lady Bracknell, is unabashedly clever, gaily flippant and audacious. They are, altogether, a delightful burlesque of the Victorian life. Individual charac-

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<sup>13</sup>

Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>14</sup>

Ibid., p. 44.



ter descriptions are below.

A. Jack Worthing

When the curtain rises on Act One, Scene Two, Jack Worthing is seen seated in a chair, legs crossed, with note tablet in hand. He is composing a proposition of marriage to the Honorable Gwendolen Fairfax. At this most passionate of moments, he will remain factual and calm. For, when Miss Gwendolen does agree to marry him, he states quite coolly, "Darling, you don't know how happy you've made me." Gwendolen speaks of Jack's "strong, upright nature," even as the audience sees him deceiving her in something as simple as his name. At the age of twenty-nine, his accumulative wealth is from investments, he smokes, and he speaks in a blase tone of mild boredom. He is the epitome of the mid-Victorian gentleman.

B. Algernon Moncrieff

Algernon Moncrieff is most certainly the cynical bachelor dandy of the Victorian era. At twenty-five, he is gay, debonair, and his simple philosophy of life is that "To be in society is merely a bore. But to be out of it is simply a tragedy." He enjoys the material items that are at the disposal of the aristocracy for (according to his friend, Jack) he is always overdressed and he is constantly eating.

C. Gwendolen Fairfax

Gwendolen Fairfax is a true daughter of Victorian England. In her early twenties, she is cool, distant and absent-minded. She approaches the fundamentals of life with mild



condescension. For example, when Jack expresses his desire to propose to her, she responds, ". . . to spare you any possible disappointment, Mr. Worthing, I think it only fair to tell you quite frankly that I am fully determined to accept you." At all times, she maintains her habitual tone of aristocratic and worldly superiority accompanied by a faint trace of boredom.

#### D. Cecily Cardew

Cecily Cardew is an excessively pretty, gentle young woman who resides at the country Manor House of her guardian, Jack Worthing. She is totally unspoiled and, as Jack describes her, "she is not a silly, romantic girl. She has a capital appetite, goes for long walks, and pays no attention at all to her studies." Like all Victorian ladies, she keeps an accurate diary. When Algy requests a look at it, she quite honestly replies, "Oh, no. You see, it is simply a very young girl's record of her own thoughts and impressions, and consequently meant for publication. When it appears in volume form I hope you will order a copy." Cecily is saucy, winsome and eighteen.

#### E. Lady Augusta Bracknell

Lady Bracknell is the Victorian grande dame incarnate. She assumes an air of unquestioned authority expressed in an oracular manner. She speaks in a firm, deep voice to which her age and position entitle her. She is a commanding, imposing dowager. Jack calls her "an absolute Gorgon." Never-

theless, she is an immovable force of society, propriety, and expedience; a mother first and last.

F. Miss Prism

Miss Prism, Cecily's governess and Mr. Worthing's housekeeper, is a pillar of propriety that manifests itself in a stiff but pert manner. Her name seems to be a telescoping of the words "prim" and "prissy" -- traits of the Victorian spinster. But she is nonetheless lively and unconventional. For example, she is more rejoiced at the recovery of her handbag which reminds her of "younger and happier days" than at the restoration of the child whose infancy she had abandoned. Satirizing the stereotyped character she represents, Miss Prism is not the least bit shy or retiring in her romantic pursuit of the Reverend Dr. Chasuble.

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G. Dr. Chasuble

Dr. Chasuble is definitely a playful thrust at the English High Church movement of the 1890's. He firmly declares his adherence to the dogma of the Primitive Church which strictly forbids marriage. Whereupon Miss Prism replies: "That is obviously the reason why the Primitive Church has not lasted up to the present day." With all of his dignity and restraint, Dr. Chasuble succumbs to the charm and fortitude of Miss Prism, leaves the Primitive Church and enters into the sanctuary of the primitive urge.

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A chasuble is a sleeveless outer vestment worn by the celebrant at Mass.

#### H. Valets Perkins and Lane

Both Perkins and Lane are representative of the typical gentleman's gentleman of the Victorian period. Each, however, has his own unique personality. Perkins, the elder of the two, is resigned to his station. Whether entering or leaving he moves with a stately gravity, a measured processional dignity. He possesses an air of grave formality. His counterpart, Lane, maintains the necessary formality when executing his duties as Algernon's manservant, but he is also a bit of a rake. When his duties are done, he is a natural young man -- witness his unrestrained advances towards Cecily's maid, Effie.

#### I. Maids Alice and Effie

Gwendolen's maid, Alice, is really an undefined character. All we know about her is that she appears to be young and extremely impressed by her mistress' worldliness. The role of Effie, on the other hand, is well defined and more interesting. She continuously expresses the advantages of being in the lower classes and apparently is sincere. She is gay, naughty and totally enjoys her dual roles of refined maid and bawdy flirt.

#### J. Subordinate Characters

The subordinate characters in Ernest In Love are two-dimensional and undeveloped. They are the tradesmen appearing only in Act One, Scene One. The Greengrocer, the Bootmaker, the Tabacconist, the Dancing Master and the Piano Teacher can be given individuality through the development of dialects and

physical appearances.

#### Production Elements

The main stage of Taylor Theatre is ideal for a production of Ernest In Love. The ninety-six foot apron is shaped in an arc which permits a natural division of the stage into three elements. This director will refer to these areas as extreme right, central and extreme left stage.

The basic set requirements for Ernest In Love should be relatively uncomplicated. Because of the artificiality and lightness in approach by the director, colorful backdrops, cut-out flats, and multi-level wagons will be employed. The opening scene will be played on the central stage area in front of an 1890's London street drop with each of the tradesmen utilizing hand properties that will indicate his profession. For example, a vegetable cart will be pushed by the Greengrocer. Both the second and third scenes will be played on the extreme right and left areas of the stage. Since Jack is formulating a proposal of marriage in Scene Two and Gwendolen is preparing to accept it in Scene Three, cut-out mirrors will be used allowing these two characters to face the audience throughout their songs.

The largest scenes (Algernon's flat and the Manor House garden) will be played on the central stage area. Both the flat and the garden will have delicate furniture of the Victorian period and much greenery. For Algernon's flat, spaciousness will be achieved through the use of baroque cut-

out flats set against black draperies. This same effect should be achieved in the Manor House garden by using multi-level wagons of stone walls and fountains set against an elaborately painted garden drop.

Act Two will open on the extreme right stage area revealing an intimate setting consisting of a love-seat, two Victorian pedestals and two large ferns. Scenes Two, Three and Four will be incorporated into one scene that will be played in the Manor House garden. This combination of settings should blend together and contribute to the light mood and crisp tempo.

The lighting for Ernest In Love should be sunshine bright from beginning to end with one exception. The romantic ballad "Lost," which is sung by Algernon and Cecily in Act Two, Scene Two, is dreamy and very personal. Therefore, the area lighting will be lowered and individual spotlights will follow each character throughout the song. Other than this isolated instance, all other songs will be done in full stage light in accordance with the airy mood of the show.

The costumes for Ernest In Love should be late 1890's England. The colors should be indicative of each character's personality and manner. The tradesmen, valets and maids will be clothed in the traditional apparel of their chosen occupations. Jack Worthing will wear a suit of conservative grey hounds tooth with Algernon contrasting in a slightly small liberal suit of brown and green check. Gwendolen Fairfax will



don a high-fashioned frock of blue to complement her cool, distant personality, with her mother, Lady Bracknell, in a superior gold and black gown set off by a burgundy feathered fan. Cecily Cardew will wear a delicate gown of white chiffon trimmed with blue and pink flowers. Both Miss Prism and Dr. Chasuble will wear the customary black habits of their stations.

#### Conclusion

The demands of Ernest In Love are many. Few other plays offer an opportunity for the director to work not only with music but with period comedy and dialect. To present a turn-of-the-century British satire to a 1969 American audience in an effective and pleasing manner is an exciting challenge.

When describing The Importance of Being Earnest, Vincent F. Hopper said:

The play as a whole is a blending of the high-comedy spirit of Congreve or Sheridan with the farcical spirit of the Marx Brothers.<sup>16</sup>

The goal of this director will be to achieve, with music, the same comic product in Ernest In Love.

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<sup>16</sup>

Wilde, The Importance of Being Earnest, Theatre Classics, p. 41.





PART TWO: PROMPT BOOK

Act One, Scene One

(AFTER THE OVERTURE, THE MUSIC CONTINUES AS THE CENTRAL STAGE CURTAIN RISES ON A TABLEAU IN FRONT OF THE 1890S STREET DROP. AT RC IS THE BOOTMAKER FACING ONE QUARTER L TO PERKINS FACING ONE QUARTER R. AT C THE HABERDASHER AND THE DANCING MASTER ARE FACING L IN A WALKING POSITION. DLC AT THE R OF THE GREENGROCER'S CART IS LANE FACING THREE QUARTERS L. THE GREENGROCER IS L OF THE CART FACING ONE QUARTER R. THE PIANO TEACHER AND THE TABACCONIST ARE ULC FACING R. THE ACTION AND DIALOGUE COMMENSE ON THE SIXTH BAR OF THE MUSIC WITH THE HABERDASHER AND THE DANCING MASTER XING OFF L, THE TABACCONIST AND THE PIANO TEACHER XING OFF R. PERKINS AND THE BOOTMAKER SEEM TO BE DISCUSSING A BILL. SEE FIGURE 1.)

PERKINS

Thank you, Mr. Grimes.

(BOOTMAKER EXITS R.)

LANE

(LOOKING URC.)

Why, Mr. Perkins.

PERKINS

(SEEING LANE AND XDLC TO HIM.)

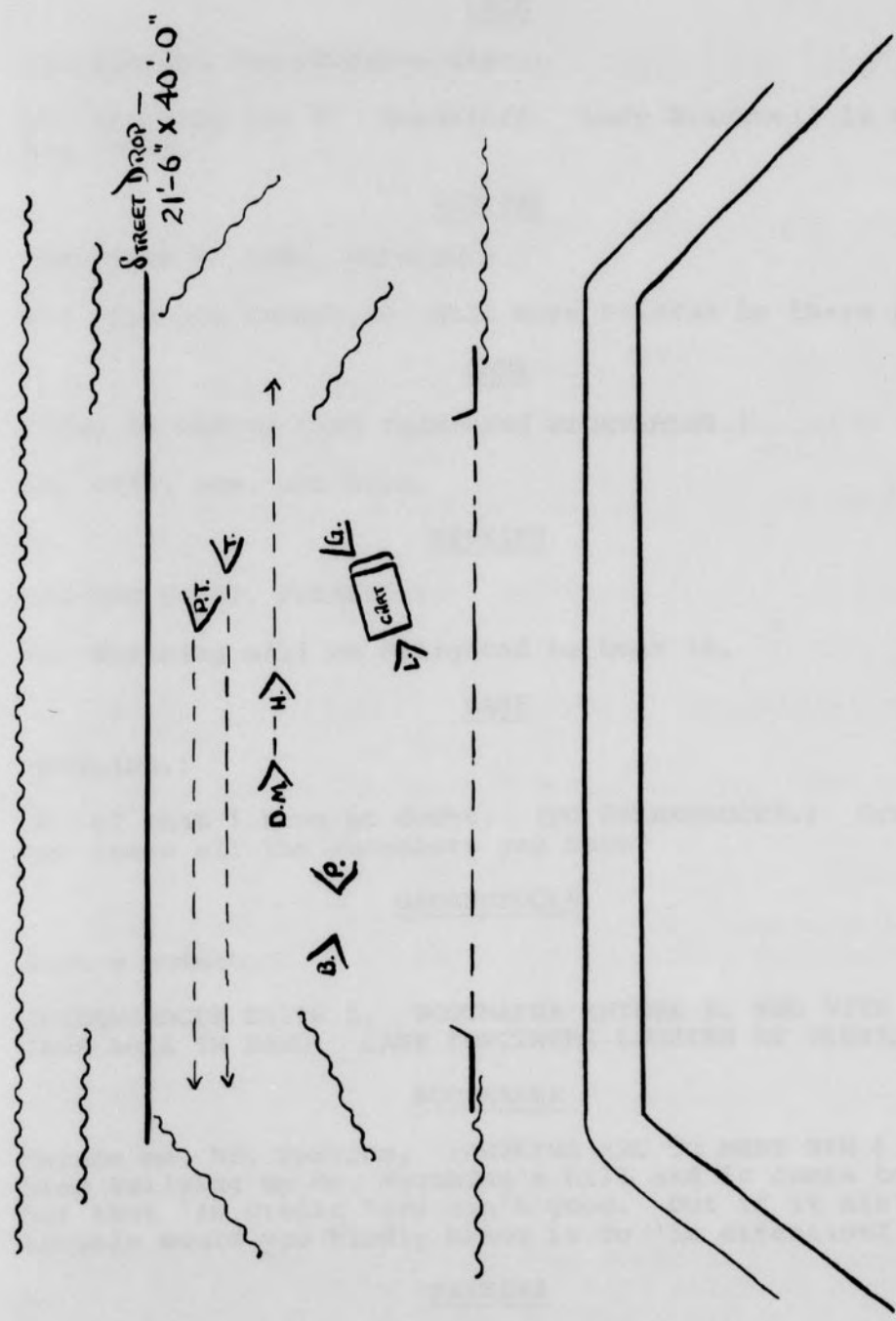
Mr. Lane, good afternoon.

LANE

What brings you here?

PERKINS

Oh, errands, errands. Mr. Worthing is up from the country for a few days. And what brings you here?



SCALE 1/8" = 1'-0"  
 ACT I, SCENE I ERNEST IN LOVE.

FIGURE 1

LANE

(INDICATING THE GROCER'S CART.)

Oh, shopping for Mr. Moncrieff. Lady Bracknell is coming to tea today.

PERKINS

(ONE STEP TO LANE, POINTEDLY.)

Ah! And her daughter? Will Miss Fairfax be there also?

LANE

(XING UP BEHIND CART EXAMINING VEGETABLES.)

Ah, well, yes, she will.

PERKINS

(FACING FRONT, PLEASED.)

Mr. Worthing will be delighted to hear it.

LANE

(SMILING.)

Oh, of that I have no doubt. (TO GREENGROCER.) Greengrocer, Are these all the cucumbers you have?

GREENGROCER

Just a moment.

(GREENGROCER EXITS L. BOOTMAKER ENTERS R. XRC WITH PENCIL AND CASH BOOK IN HAND. LANE CONTINUES LOOKING AT VEGETABLES.)

BOOTMAKER

Excuse me, Mr. Perkins. (PERKINS XRC TO MEET HIM.) But I've been tallying up Mr. Worthing's bill and it comes to 54 pounds. Not that 'is credit 'ere ain't good. But if it ain't too much trouble would you kindly bring it to 'is attention?

PERKINS

I'll mention it to him, Mr. Grimes.

(BOOTMAKER CONTINUES FIGURING SHOWING PERKINS THE LEDGER, THEN BOOTMAKER XS DR.)

GREENGROCER

(RETURNING L WITH TWO BEAUTIFUL CUCUMBERS AND A PAPER BAG.)

Will these do?

LANE

(TAKING THEM AND LOOKING THEM OVER, THEN PUTTING THEM IN THE BAG THE GREENGROCER HOLDS.)

They will do nicely, thank you.

GREENGROCER

(LANE REACHES FOR THE BAG AND THE GREENGROCER HOLDS THE BAG DL OUT OF HIS REACH.)

I say, is Mr. Moncrieff aware that he's a shade behind in his bill?

(PIANO TEACHER ENTERS UR XC, STOPS, SEES LANE, XDC TO LANE'S R.)

LANE

You may be sure I shall apprise him of the fact at my earliest opportunity.

(LANE TAKES THE BAG BRISKLY FROM GREENGROCER, THEN TURNS ONE QUARTER R FACING PIANO TEACHER.)

PIANO TEACHER

Mr. Lane, does Mr. Moncrieff know he still owes me over 30 pounds for piano lessons? (TO PERKINS.) He never did learn to play accurately.

LANE

(DEFENSIVELY.)

He may not play accurately. Anyone can play accurately. But he plays with wonderful expression.

(THE TABACCONIST AND THE HABERDASHER HAVE FOUND THEIR WAY THROUGHOUT THE PRECEDING SPEECH TO SPOTS WITHIN EARSHOT OF THE GROUP. THE TABACCONIST ENTERS R XS TO PERKINS' R, THE HABERDASHER ENTERS L XING TO PIANO TEACHER'S L.)



TABACCONIST

(TAPPING PERKINS ON THE SHOULDER, QUITE AGITATED.)

Mr. Perkins, Mr. Worthing still owes me over 70 pounds for tobacco.

PERKINS

(PATRONIZINGLY.)

I admit he is generous to a fault when it comes to cigars for all his friends. (TO GROUP L.) He doesn't care for them himself.

DANCING MASTER

(HAVING ENTERED UL DURING THE LAST SENTENCE, XC TO PERKINS' L.)

And Mr. Worthing owes me 65 pounds for dancing lessons.

TABACCONIST

(XDR TO BOOTMAKER'S L.)

Well, I say it's come to a pretty pass when gentlemen consider it the thing not to pay their debts.

(THE FOLLOWING FOUR SPEECHES ARE SIMULTANEOUSLY SPOKEN.)

GREENGROCER

(XULC WITH HABERDASHER.)

And nothing we can do about it.

BOOTMAKER

(CONCURRING WITH TABACCONIST.)

Get away with murder, they do.

PIANO TEACHER

(XC TO DANCING MASTER.)

You're absolutely right.

DANCING MASTER

I haven't seen a single penny for two years.

PERKINS

(LARGE APPEASING GESTURE TO ALL AS HE TAKES ONE STEP C.)

My dear fellows. We understand your position, believe me, but you owe it to Mr. Moncrieff and Mr. Worthing to look at both sides of the coin.

BOOTMAKER

(X IN FRONT OF TABACCONIST TO PERKINS' R.)

We ain't seen neither side of a coin for quite some time.

(IN GENERAL CONSTERNATION, THE TRADESMEN CLOSE IN ON PERKINS, FORCING HIM URC. THE GREENGROCER XC TOWARDS PERKINS, FOLLOWED BY THE HABERDASHER. THE DANCING MASTER XRC BEHIND PERKINS, WITH THE PIANO TEACHER CLOSING IN UC. THE TABACCONIST X TO BOOTMAKER'S R. SEE FIGURE 2.)

LANE

(HAVING EASED DL OF CART DURING THE LAST SPEECH, LANE RAISES HIS R HAND.)

Now just a moment.

(ALL TURN FACING LANE DL.)

Consider gentlemen . . .

If the rich were to suddenly pay their bills  
There'd be cause for real distress.  
And you would suddenly find yourselves in a  
Stupefying, stultifying, terrifying (FACES FRONT, XING ARMS.)  
Bloody awful mess.

BOOTMAKER

(XING R OF CART.)

What are you talkin' about?

GREENGROCER

(X UP C OF CART.)

What do you mean, a mess?

LANE

Well . . .

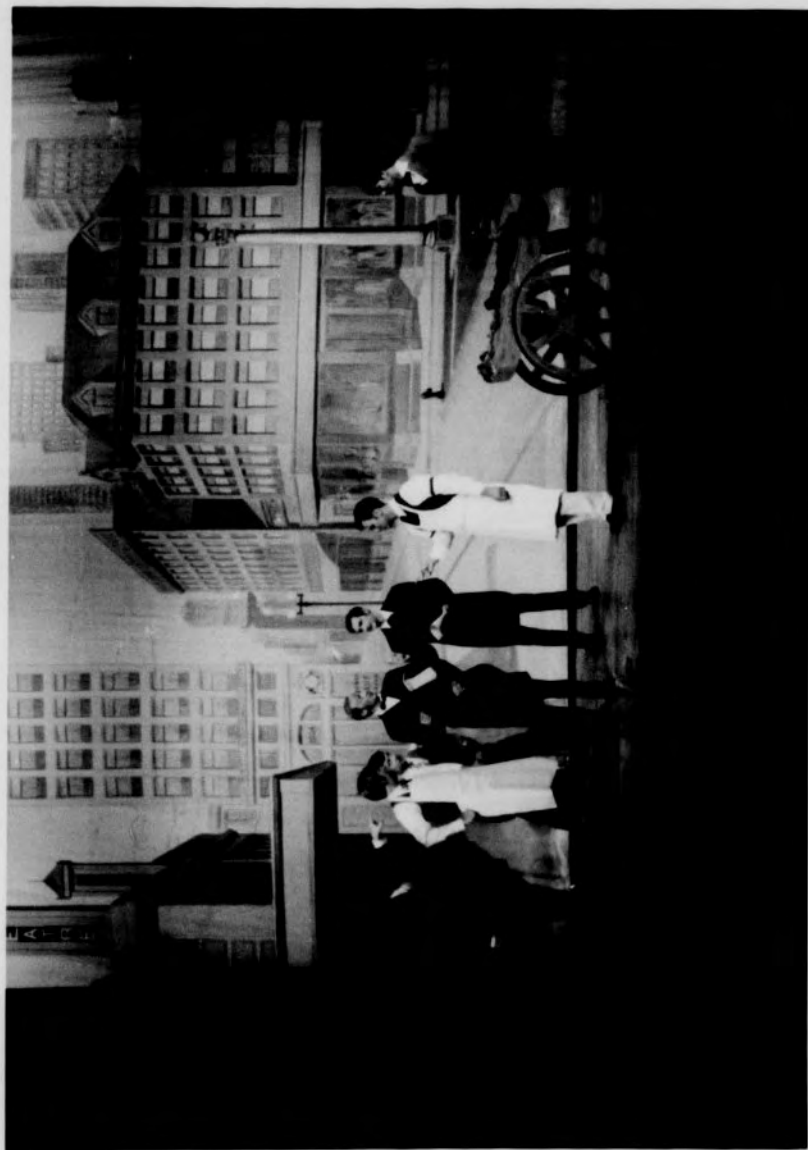


FIGURE 2

(XC TURNING BACK ONE QUARTER L TO BOOTMAKER.)

Your accounts would be in a jumble  
Your ledgers all in a hash  
For the debts of the aristocracy  
Go back for years.

(GREENGROCER XDL, BOOTMAKER FALLS UPSTAGE OF CART. LANE CONTINUES SINGING TO GROUP AROUND PERKINS AT R.)

Our economy would crumble  
And the Bank of England crash  
If the upper class were not  
Always in arrears.

(XDR.)

The son inherits the father's debt  
In families patrician,  
And 'though this system puts you in  
A tickle-ish position,

(STILTED FRONT.)

It nevertheless gives one a sense of  
British tradition. (PLACING L HAND ON CHEST, PATRIOTICALLY.)  
Gives one a noble sense  
Of British tradition.

(TURNING TO TRADESMEN C.)

So you see, gentlemen, you should be singing the praises of  
the aristocracy.

(LARGE GESTURE OF TOASTING WITH IMAGINARY GLASS.)

Come raise your cup to the upper classes  
Whom we revere.

PERKINS

(XDLC.)

They stand for all  
We hold so dear.

LANE AND PERKINS

(TOASTING EACH OTHER WITH IMAGINARY GLASSES.)

Come raise your cup for the rules to which  
They seldom adhere.

LANE

(FACING FRONT, SHRUGGING HIS SHOULDERS.)

But they've a right to break them  
 Since it's they who make them  
 So come raise a cup of cheer.

BOOTMAKER

(XDC FACING AUDIENCE.)

I 'ate to seem demanding  
 It leaves me close to tears  
 But I've waited for their cheques to come

(BLOWS DUST FROM OPEN ACCOUNT BOOK.)

For thirteen years.

PIANO TEACHER

(XDC TO BOOTMAKER'S R.)

They leave their bills outstanding  
 And it may afford them laughs  
 But I am left and quite bereft  
 With a pile of autographs. (PANTOMIMING LARGE STACK OF PAPER.)

TRADESMEN

(DURING THIS VERSE, DANCING MASTER XL TO GREENGROCER'S R, BOOT-  
 MAKER XR TO TABACCONIST'S L, PIANO TEACHER UC TO HABERDASHER'S  
 R.)

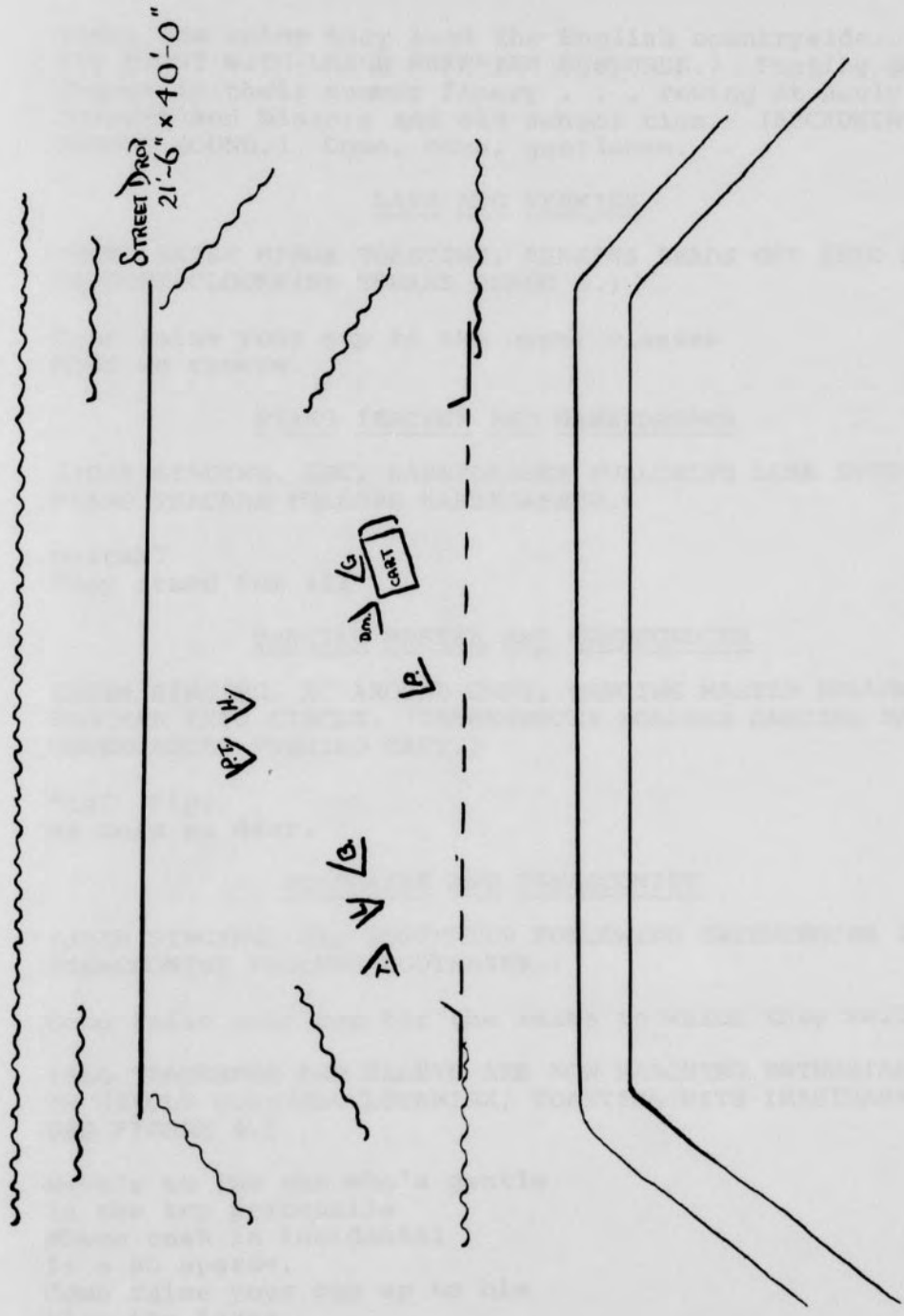
They call themselves the wealthy class  
 Oh, what a definition.  
 That they have any means at all  
 Is purely supposition.  
 To remain the idle unemployed  
 Is their supreme ambition.  
 And we say hang! (FACE FRONT WITH FISTS IN THE AIR.)  
 British tradition.

LANE

(QUICKLY XING UP TO TABACCONIST'S R.)

Gentlemen, gentlemen. Why, we couldn't manage without the  
 aristocracy. (XING BETWEEN TABACCONIST AND BOOTMAKER, SPEAK-  
 ING TO BOOTMAKER. SEE FIGURE 3.) Think of them from a purely  
 ornamental standpoint. (SPEAKING BACK TO TABACCONIST.) Con-





SCALE 1/8" = 1'-0"  
ACT I, SCENE I

ERNEST IN LOVE.

FIGURE 3

sider the color they lend the English countryside. (XC FACING FRONT WITH LARGE SWEEPING GESTURES.) Punting on the Thames in their summer finery . . . rowing at Henly in their boaters and blazers and old school ties. (BECKONING THEM TO GATHER ROUND.) Come, come, gentlemen.

LANE AND PERKINS

(BOTH RAISE HANDS TOASTING, PERKINS LEADS OFF INTO A CIRCLE COUNTER-CLOCKWISE TOWARD STAGE L.)

Come raise your cup to the upper classes  
Whom we revere.

PIANO TEACHER AND HABERDASHER

(JOIN SINGING, XDC, HABERDASHER FOLLOWING LANE INTO CIRCLE. PIANO TEACHER FOLLOWS HABERDASHER.)

Hurrah!  
They stand for all

DANCING MASTER AND GREENGROCER

(JOIN SINGING, XC AROUND CART, DANCING MASTER FOLLOWING PIANO TEACHER INTO CIRCLE. GREENGROCER FOLLOWS DANCING MASTER, GREENCROCER PUSHING CART.)

Pip! Pip!  
We hold so dear.

BOOTMAKER AND TABACCONIST

(JOIN SINGING, XL, BOOTMAKER FOLLOWING GREENCROCER INTO CIRCLE. TABACCONIST FOLLOWS BOOTMAKER.)

Come raise your cup for the rules to which they seldom adhere

(ALL TRADESMEN AND VALETS ARE NOW MARCHING ENTHUSIASTICALLY IN CIRCLE COUNTER-CLOCKWISE, TOASTING WITH IMAGINARY GLASSES. SEE FIGURE 4.)

Here's to the man who's gentle  
In the top percentile  
Where cash is incidental  
It's so sparse.  
Come raise your cup up to him  
Play the farse.

(TABACCONIST HAVING GONE COMPLETELY AROUND THE CIRCLE, NOW DC, STEPS OUT OF CIRCLE FACING FRONT TO AUDIENCE, AND WITH A VERY GRAPHIC GESTURE, SHOUTS:)

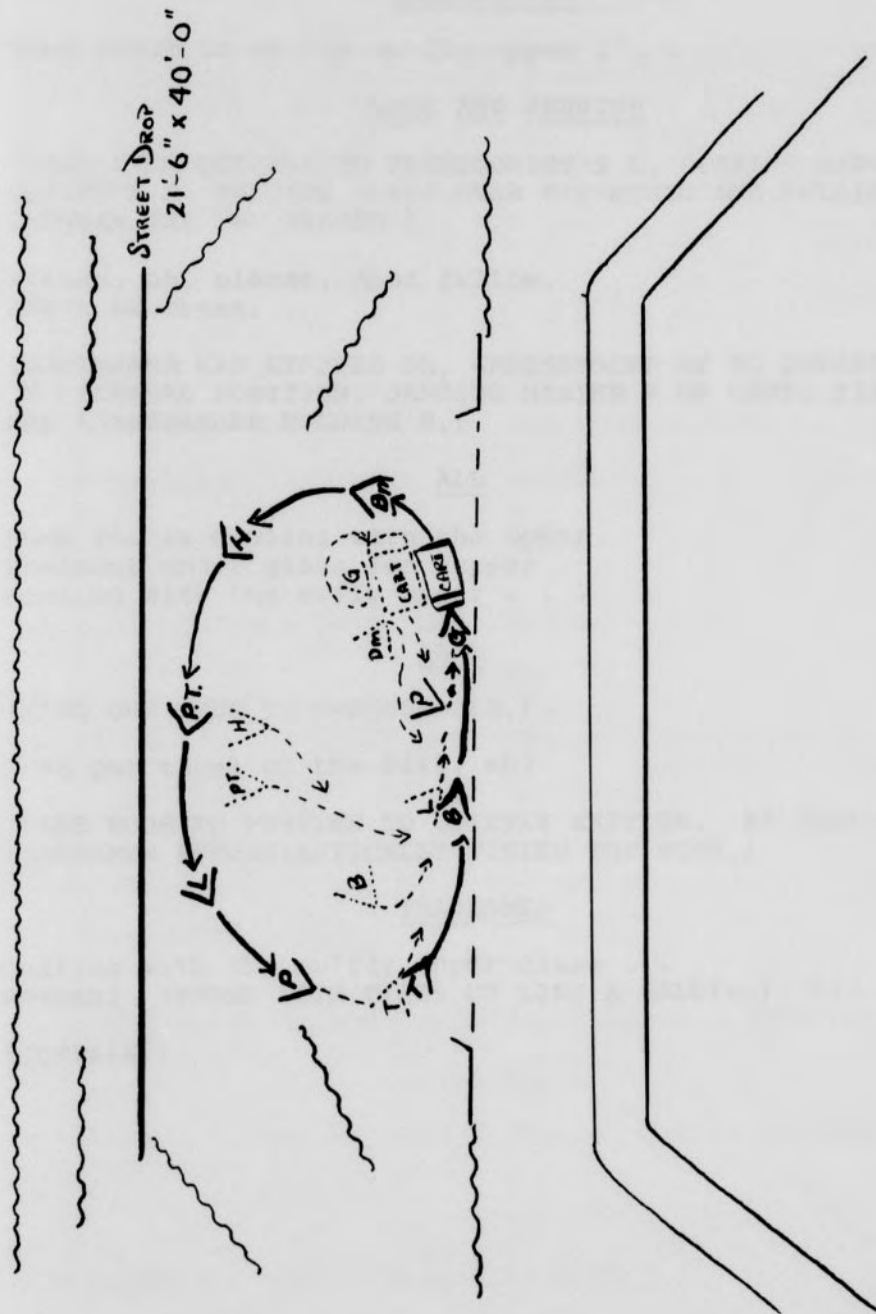


FIGURE 4

TABACCONIST

Then shove it up 'is aw-fly upper . . .

LANE AND PERKINS

(LANE XING QUICKLY TO TABACCONIST'S L, PERKINS XING TO TABACCONIST'S R, PUTTING HANDS OVER HIS MOUTH AND PULLING HIM BACK BETWEEN THE TWO VALETS.)

Please, oh, please, dear fellow,  
Don't be crass.

(BOOTMAKER HAS STOPPED DL, GREENGROCER AT UL CORNER OF CART IN ORIGINAL POSITION, DANCING MASTER R OF CART, PIANO TEACHER AND HABERDASHER HOLDING R.)

ALL

When you're dealing with the upper  
Pheasant under glass for supper  
Dealing with the awfly upper . . .

LANE

(XING ONE STEP TO GREENGROCER.)

Just put these on the bill, eh?

(LANE NODS TO PERKINS TO QUIETLY EXIT UR. AS THEY EXIT, THE TRADESMEN ENTHUSIASTICALLY FINISH THE SONG.)

TRADESMEN

Dealing with the aw'fly upper class . . .  
Hurrah! (FRONT WITH FISTS UP LIKE A SALUTE.)

(CURTAIN.)

## Act One, Scene Two

(THE CURTAIN RISES ON THE EXTREME RIGHT AREA OF THE STAGE REVEALING JACK WORTHING'S FLAT AT THE ALBANY. JACK IS IN HIS SMOKING JACKET, SEATED IN A LARGE CHAIR C, LEGS CROSSED, WITH A TABLET FOR WRITING IN HIS HAND. HE IS WRITING. THERE IS A SMALL TABLE TO THE L OF THE CHAIR AND A LARGE LAVENDER CUT-OUT MIRROR DR WHICH WILL ALLOW HIM TO FACE THE AUDIENCE AS HE LOOKS INTO IT.)

JACK

(AS HE WRITES.)

"My dear Miss Fairfax . . . I should like to be allowed the pleasure of calling upon you and your mother . . ."

(HE FROWNS AND SCRATCHES OUT SOMETHING. HE CONTINUES READING.)

"The pleasure of calling upon you . . . at five o'clock tomorrow afternoon . . ."

(PERKINS ENTERS L WITH MR. WORTHING'S BOOTS.)

PERKINS

Excuse me, sir, I have your boots, if you would care to examine them.

JACK

(LOOKING UP.)

Ah, very good, Perkins.

(PERKINS HANDS THE BOOTS TO JACK, THEN FACES FRONT. JACK EXAMINES THE BOOTS PERFUNCTORILY THEN PUTS THEM ON THE FLOOR.)

PERKINS

If you will pardon my mentioning it, your bootmaker was a bit agitated about your bill.

JACK

(FINISHING THE LETTER AND FOLDING IT.)

Perkins, it is only by not paying one's bills that one can hope to live in the memory of the commercial classes. All real gentlemen are in debt. One must have some pre-occupation these days. (FRONT.) If I hadn't my debts, I shouldn't have anything to think about.



PERKINS

Oh, incidentally, sir. Miss Fairfax and Lady Bracknell are having tea today at Mr. Moncrieff's flat. I thought you'd like to know.

(PERKINS AUTOMATICALLY EXTENDS HIS R HAND ANTICIPATING JACK'S CRUMPLING THE LETTER HE HAS BEEN WRITING.)

JACK

Splendid!

(JACK CRUMPLES THE LETTER AND HANDS IT TO PERKINS WHO PLACES IT ON THE TABLE. JACK RISES, XDR TO MIRROR AND ADMIRES HIMSELF.)

Perkins, if I did not rely so heavily on your services, I should recommend you to Scotland Yard.

(PERKINS PICKS UP A CLOTHES BRUSH FROM THE TABLE, X UPSTAGE OF CHAIR AND REMOVES JACK'S JACKET, XDR BEHIND JACK WHO IS NOW REMOVING HIS SMOKING JACKET.)

PERKINS

Thank you, sir, but I prefer it here. I also passed by Miss Fairfax's home and mentioned to her maid that you might also be at Mr. Moncrieff's this afternoon. I hope that was all right, sir.

(PERKINS HELPS JACK ON WITH HIS SUIT JACKET, THEN BRUSHES OFF HIS COAT.)

JACK

Perfectly all right, Perkins. As a matter of fact, I think I shall propose to Miss Fairfax today. Mr. Moncrieff's flat would be an eminently suitable setting.

PERKINS

(BACKING C WITH A SLIGHT BOW.)

Yes, sir. Might I be permitted to offer my felicitations?

JACK

(TURNING TO PERKINS.)

Certainly, Perkins, thank you. That will be all.

(PERKINS XL PICKING UP CRUMPLED LETTER AS HE PREPARES TO EXIT.)

JACK

Oh, Perkins?

PERKINS

(PERKINS STOPS, TURNS ONE QUARTER R, TAKES ONE STEP BACK TO JACK.)

Yes, sir?

JACK

(XRC.)

I'm afraid I have had very little experience in how to propose. None, in fact. Does one go on one's knees?

PERKINS

(TAKING ONE STEP TO JACK.)

Beg pardon, sir?

JACK

(XC.)

Does one generally kneel when one is proposing?

PERKINS

(TURNING FRONT, GRAVELY.)

I'm afraid I don't know, sir. I have had very little experience in proposing myself. I have only been married once. That was in consequence of a misunderstanding between myself and a young woman.

JACK

(THOUGHTFULLY.)

I see. Well, thank you, Perkins. That will do.

PERKINS

Very good, sir.

(PERKINS BOWS SLIGHTLY, EXITS L. JACK LX AFTER HIM TO SEE THAT HE HAS LEFT. JACK TAKES A HANDKERCHIEF FROM HIS COAT POCKET, WIPES A SPOT ON THE FLOOR, THEN KNEELS ON R KNEE. HE CROSSES HIS HANDS.)

JACK

Miss Fairfax . . .

(HE DOESN'T LIKE THAT POSITION. HE RISES, XC, POSES.)

Gwendolen . . .

(HE DOESN'T LIKE THAT POSITION EITHER. XR TO MIRROR AND SPEAKS VERY ROMANTICALLY TO HIMSELF.)

Ever since I met . . . ever since I met . . . damn!

(MUSIC IN AS JACK XC.)

How do you find the words for a proposal?  
 How do you know precisely what to say?  
 There ought to be certain schools  
 Establishing certain rules (INDICATING LIST ON HIS HAND.)  
 For what to say on this important day.

I mean really, (XR TO MIRROR, PLEADING TO HIMSELF.)  
 How do you say "I cannot live without you?"  
 When both of you know that if you must, you can.  
 And isn't it rather strange  
 Proposing to such an angel  
 When you are just a mortal sort of man. (POINTING TO HIMSELF  
 IN THE MIRROR.)

I've not told her that I love her. (BRINGING HANDS OVER HEART.)  
 I've not brought myself to dare.  
 Still and all I must have shown her (QUESTIONINGLY.)  
 Just how much I really care.

But, how do you . . . (XC.)

How do you find . . . (XLC.)

How do you find the words for a proposal?  
 How do you tell her all you're dreaming of?  
 The wonderful things you'll share  
 The marvelous things you'll dare (GESTURE OF TAKING HER IN AN  
 EMBRACE.)  
 The wonders and the marvels found in love.

How do you find the proper touch (GESTURE L.)  
 How do you tell her just how much (GESTURE R.)  
 Oh, how much you are in love? (HANDS OVER HEART.)

(X UP TO CHAIR AND SIT. JACK CHANGES FROM SLIPPERS TO BOOTS  
 DURING THE FOLLOWING VERSE.)

First you say "How do you do?"  
Then you say "And how are you?"  
You know she is fine and she's looking divine  
But formalities must be got through.

Next you're expected to say  
"My, what a marvelous day"  
It is part of the game and you'd do just the same  
If the sky were a hideous gray.

Then you are left on your own (HE SLOWLY RISES, XDC.)  
And there you both stand all alone  
But how can you speak  
With your knees growing weak (HE WAVERS, WEAK IN THE KNEES.)  
When you're drunk on the scent of cologne?

Oh, how do you find the words for a proposal?  
Will you get inspiration from above? (INDICATING THE HEAVENS.)  
Oh, what do you say and do?  
Oh, how do you muddle through? (GESTURE OF TRYING TO GET  
THROUGH MUD.)  
And how do you hide the simple fact that you're (XR TO MIRROR.)  
Terribly shy and insecure (POINTING AND CHASTISING HIMSELF.)  
Terribly nervous and unsure,  
But so much  
So much in love. (DREAMILY LOOKING AT HIMSELF IN MIRROR.)

Perkins!

(AS JACK CALLS PERKINS, HE STRAIGHTENS UP AND ASSUMES HIS  
USUAL AIR OF SOPHISTICATION. PERKINS ENTERS L, X TO JACK,  
TURNS FRONT, AND HANDS JACK HIS GLOVES ONE AT A TIME AND THEN  
HIS POCKET SCARF. JACK THEN NODS TO PERKINS AS HE XL AND EXITS.  
PERKINS BOWS AND FOLLOWS HIM OUT L.)

(CURTAIN.)

## Act One, Scene Three

(THE CURTAIN RISES ON THE EXTREME LEFT AREA OF THE STAGE REVEALING GWENDLOEN FAIRFAX'S DRESSING ROOM. HATS OF ALL SIZES AND SHAPES ARE SEEN ON TWO HAT TREES, ONE L AND ONE RC. GWENDOLEN IS SEATED AT HER DRESSING TABLE WHICH HAS A CUT-OUT MIRROR ALLOWING HER TO FACE THE AUDIENCE AS SHE TRIES ON THE HATS. HER MAID, ALICE, IS HELPING HER. AT THE CURTAIN RISE, ALICE IS ARRANGING THE HATS ON THE HAT TREE DL. MUSIC IN.)

GWENDOLEN

(EXASPERATED.)

Oh, if only I had known yesterday the he would be in town. I could have got a hat especially for the occasion. Alice, are you absolutely sure Mr. Worthing will be there today?

ALICE

(TURNING TO GWENDOLEN.)

That's what Mr. Perkins said, Miss Gwendolen.

GWENDOLEN

(TAKING A FINAL LOOK AT HERSELF IN THE MIRROR.)

Well, this definitely will not do.

(SHE TEARS OFF THE HAT AND HANDS IT BACK TO ALICE WITH AN IMPERIOUS GESTURE. ALICE TAKES IT AND BRINGS ANOTHER HAT TO GWENDOLEN.)

ALICE

Was it love at first sight with you and Mr. Worthing, miss?

GWENDOLEN

No, it was not love at first sight, but love at the end of the season, which is so much more satisfactory.

ALICE

I see.

GWENDOLEN

(STUDYING HERSELF.)

Alice?



ALICE

Yes, Miss?

GWENDOLEN

Alice, what do you suppose is the first thing a man notices about a woman?

ALICE

(AFTER LOOKING INNOCENTLY ABOUT THE ROOM.)

The hat?

GWENDOLEN

Precisely.

(AS SHE SINGS, SHE ARRANGES THE HAT IN SEVERAL DIFFERENT WAYS, ALWAYS POSING AFTER EACH ARRANGEMENT.)

The hat! The hat! The proper hat is absolutely vital. To win the heart of someone with the proper wealth or title. A hat can overwhelm a man and frighten him away. A fetching hat can fetch a man and make him want to stay.

(ALICE TAKES ANOTHER HAT FROM THE TREE L, HANDS IT TO GWENDOLEN. SHE RISES. SHE STEPS BACK FROM THE DRESSING TABLE STILL ADMIRING HERSELF IN THE MIRROR.)

The hat! The hat! Can make the shyest gentleman feel daring. He sees the hat and it matters not what else the lady's wearing. (GRACEFUL GESTURE INDICATING HER CLOTHING.) Godiva's famous ride through town (XR IN FRONT OF HAT TREE.) Fell absolutely flat. But people would have looked at her If she had worn a hat. (INDICATING HER HAT.)

(SHE TAKES OFF THE HAT. GLANCING AROUND THE ROOM.)

There isn't a single hat here in which I should care to become engaged.

ALICE

(TAKING ANOTHER HAT FROM TREE L, X TO GWENDOLEN'S L, ACCEPTING HAT GWENDOLEN IS HOLDING.)

It's a marvel to me, Miss Gwendolen, how you can be so sure Mr. Worthing will propose this very afternoon. Are you quite sure?

GWENDOLEN

(X IN FRONT OF ALICE BACK TO MIRROR TO TRY THE HAT.)

Oh, yes. For one thing, bachelors are not fashionable any-more. Besides, he very nearly proposed last time we met. Unfortunately, Mama has a way of entering a room that I have often had to speak to her about.

(TAKING A FINAL LOOK.)

This certainly won't do. It makes me look like an absolute Gorgon.

ALICE

(TAKING HAT FROM TREE R, X TO GWENDOLEN'S R.)

What about this one, Miss?

GWENDOLEN

(TAKING IT RATHER THOUGHTFULLY.)

Oh, this one is quite sweet. But I wonder . . .

(PUTTING ON THE HAT.)

Is this the hat to instigate the offer of a marriage?  
Is this a hat that I can wear with proper grace and carriage?

(SHE XDL IN A STATELY MANNER.)

Perhaps he'll think it's frivolous  
And think that I am, too.  
But on the other hand it does set off my eyes of blue.

(DURING THE FOLLOWING VERSE GWENDOLEN SINGS TO THE AUDIENCE.  
ALICE SLOWLY MOVES BEHIND THE DRESSING TABLE, PICKS UP THE HAT  
GWENDOLEN HAD ON AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SCENE AND TRIES IT ON  
WITH MUCH PRIMPING.)

Is this the hat to make a man feel terribly romantic?  
Or best of all, is it just the hat to drive a fellow frantic?  
The hat is quite as vital as  
The gentleman's cravat  
To make quite sure we tie that knot  
I must have just . . .

(GWENDOLEN TURNS AND CATCHES ALICE WEARING THE HAT.)

Alice! Bring that here!

(ALICE, A LITTLE FRIGHTENED, BRINGS THE HAT. GWENDOLEN TAKES IT ABRUPTLY, XC TO MIRROR, PUTS THE HAT ON BRISKLY. IT IS CHARMING.)

ALICE

(IN AWE.)

Why, it's made for you, Miss Gwendolen.

GWENDOLEN

(ADMIRING HERSELF IN THE MIRROR.)

It is, isn't it?

(THEY LAUGH.)

GWENDOLEN AND ALICE

The hat! The hat! The proper hat is absolutely vital.  
To win the heart of someone with the proper wealth or title.

(GWENDOLEN XRC.)

A hat can overwhelm a man and frighten him away.  
A fetching hat can fetch a man and make him want to stay  
And stay . . . and stay, and stay, and stay.

The hat! The hat! Can make the shyest gentleman feel daring.

(GWENDOLEN EXTENDS HER L HAND TO ALICE, BECKONING HER TO XR.  
ALICE X TO GWENDOLEN'S L AND TAKES HER HAND.)

He sees the hat and it matters not what else the lady's wearing.

(DURING THE FOLLOWING TWO LINES, GWENDOLEN LEADS OFF AROUND THE HAT TREE R, ALICE FOLLOWS, WITH GWENDOLEN ENDING SEATED AT THE MIRROR WITH ALICE AT HER R.)

Godiva's famous ride through town  
Fell absolutely flat.  
But people would have noticed her  
If she had worn a . . .

ALICE

Charming and alarming and a most disarming . . .

GWENDOLEN AND ALICE

Hat!

(GWENDOLEN ENDS POSED IN THE MIRROR, ALICE INDICATING THE HAT WITH BOTH HANDS.)

(CURTAIN.)

## Act One, Scene Four

(THE CENTRAL STAGE CURTAIN RISES ON ALGERNON'S FLAT IN HALF-MOON STREET. AT THE FAR R IS A LARGE FERN ON A PEDESTAL BEHIND A CHAIR THAT FACES IN C. URC IS AN OVAL TABLE SET WITH A VASE OF ROSES, AN ASH TRAY, SEVERAL BOOKS OF POETRY AND A PLATE OF BREAD AND BUTTER SANDWICHES. UC IS A SMALL VICTORIAN SOFA. DLC IS A SMALL TABLE FLANKED BY TWO CHAIRS. ULC ON THE PLATFORM IS ANOTHER LARGE FERN ON A PEDESTAL. WHEN THE CURTAIN RISES, ALGERNON IS SEEN RC WITH A BOOK OF POETRY, LANE IS ENTERING FROM C WITH A LARGE TRAY WITH TEA THINGS AND A PLATE OF CUCUMBER SANDWICHES.)

ALGY

Lane, have you got the cucumber sandwiches cut for Lady Bracknell?

LANE

(HAVING ENTERED AT C, HE STOPS AND XS TO ALGERNON'S L.)

Oh, yes, sir.

(ALGERNON HELPS HIMSELF TO ONE.)

ALGY

Mmm. Very tasty. Is it not appalling, Lane, that in order to remain in the best society one has to feed people, amuse people or shock people?

LANE

(XL TO TABLE, PLACING TRAY ON IT AND STRAIGHTENING THE THINGS.)

Yes, sir. Quite appalling.

ALGY

(TAKING ONE STEP TOWARD C.)

To be in society is merely a bore. But to be out of it is simply a tragedy. At least that is what Aunt Augusta has been telling me for nearly twenty-five years.

LANE

Quite so, sir.

(THE DOORBELL RINGS.)

Excuse me, sir.



(LANE EXITS UC AND OFF R. ALGY XL UPSTAGE OF TABLE, INSPECTS SANDWICHES, THEN TAKES ANOTHER TO EAT. LANE RETURNS FOLLOWED BY MR. JACK WORTHING.)

Mr. Ernest Worthing, sir.

(JACK AND LANE HOLD AT EDGE OF PLATFORM C, LANE SLIGHTLY UP-STAGE L OF JACK. JACK HANDS HIS GLOVES ONE AT A TIME TO LANE WHO ACCEPTS THEM WITH FORMALITY.)

ALGY

(XING TO JACK'S L.)

How are you, my dear Ernest? What brings you up to town?

JACK

(RATHER BORED.)

Oh, pleasure, Algy, pleasure. What else should bring one anywhere? Eating as usual, I see.

ALGY

(STIFFLY.)

I believe it is customary in good society to take some slight refreshment at five o'clock. (NUDGING JACK WITH HIS R ELBOW.) Where have you been since last Thursday?

(ALGY XL BACK TO TABLE, TAKING ANOTHER SANDWICH.)

JACK

(HAVING FINISHED TAKING OFF GLOVES, LANE EXITS AND JACK STEPS DOWN ON TO FLOOR LEVEL.)

In the country.

ALGY

What on earth do you do there?

JACK

(AIRILY XING ONE STEP DC.)

When one is in town one amuses oneself. When one is in the country one amuses the neighbors.

ALGY

(TAKES ANOTHER SANDWICH, XR TO PUT BOOK ON TABLE URC.)

Got nice neighbors in your part of Shropshire?

JACK

Perfectly horrid! Never speak to one of them.

ALGY

How immensely you must amuse them. (XRC.) By the way, Shropshire is your county, is it not?

JACK

(XL TO R OF TABLE, STARING AT THE SANDWICHES.)

Eh? Shropshire? Yes, of course. Hello! Why all these cups? Why cucumber sandwiches? Why such reckless extravagance in one so young? (TAKING ONE STEP TO ALGY.) Who is coming to tea?

ALGY

(NONCHALANTLY.)

Only Aunt Augusta and Gwendolen.

JACK

How perfectly delightful!

ALGY

(XC.)

Yes, but I am afraid, that Aunt Augusta won't quite approve of your being here.

JACK

May I ask why?

ALGY

My dear fellow, the way you flirt with Gwendolen is perfectly disgraceful. It is almost as bad as the way Gwendolen flirts with you.

JACK

(STARING WITH INTENSE ABSORPTION AT THE SANDWICHES, ALMOST HEEDLESS OF HIS WORDS.)

I am in love with Gwendolen. I have come up to town expressly to propose to her.

ALGY

I thought you had come up for pleasure? (SITS ON SOFA UC.)  
I call that business.

JACK

(TURNING TO ALGY.)

How utterly unromantic you are, Algy.

ALGY

I really don't see anything romantic in proposing. It is very romantic to be in love. But there is nothing romantic about a definite proposal. (SITTING UP STRAIGHT.) Why, one may be accepted. One usually is, I believe. Then the excitement is all over. (SITTING BACK.) No. The essence of romance is uncertainty. If I ever get married, I'll certainly try to forget the fact. (JACK STARTS TO REACH FOR A CUCUMBER SANDWICH. ALGY QUICKLY SITS UP.) Please, don't touch the cucumber sandwiches. They are ordered 'specially for Aunt Augusta.

JACK

(OFFENDED.)

Well, you have been eating them all the time.

ALGY

(RISING SLOWLY.)

That is quite a different matter. She is my aunt. (XURC TO TABLE, PICKS UP PLATE, XC TO MEET JACK.) Have some bread and butter. The bread and butter is for Gwendolen. (FRONT.) Gwendolen is devoted to bread and butter.

JACK

(HELPING HIMSELF TO ONE SMALL SANDWICH.)

And very good bread and butter it is, too.

ALGY

Well, you need not eat as if you were going to eat it all. You behave as if you were married to her already. You are not married to her already, and I don't think you ever will be.

(ALGY X BACK TO TABLE URC REPLACING PLATE.)

JACK

(FOLLOWING ALGY ONE STEP.)

Why on earth do you say that?

ALGY

(TURNING BACK TO JACK.)

Well, in the first place girls never marry the men they flirt with.

JACK

(XUC, SITS ON L END OF SOFA.)

Oh, that is nonsense.

ALGY

And in the second place, I don't give my consent.

JACK

(HALF LAUGHING.)

Your consent?

ALGY

My dear fellow, Gwendolen is my first cousin. And before I allow you to marry her, you will have to clear up the whole question of Cecily.

JACK

(NERVOUSLY.)

Cecily! What on earth do you mean? I don't know anyone of the name of Cecily.

ALGY

(ALGY TAKES A CIGARETTE CASE FROM HIS POCKET.)

Then how do you account for this cigarette case you left last time you dined here? (OPENING IT AND READING.) "From little Cecily with her fondest love . . ."

JACK

(RISING SLOWLY.)

Algy, it is a very ungentlemanly thing to read a private cigarette case.

(JACK REACHES FOR IT. DURING THE NEXT FEW SPEECHES, JACK FOLLOWS ALGY AROUND THE ROOM TRYING TO GRAB HIS CIGARETTE CASE. EVERYTIME, ALGY NIMBLY PULLS IT OUT OF JACK'S REACH.)

ALGY

(XDR BEHIND CHAIR.)

Oh, it is absurd to have a hard and fast rule about what one should read and what one shouldn't. More than half of modern culture depends on what one shouldn't read.

JACK

(XDR BEHIND CHAIR AFTER ALGY.)

Will you give me back my cigarette case?

ALGY

(XUC IN FRONT OF LEFT END OF SOFA.)

But this isn't your cigarette case. This cigarette case is a present from someone of the name of Cecily, and you said that you didn't know anyone of that name.

JACK

Well, if you must know, Cecily happens to be my aunt.

(ON THE WORD "AUNT," JACK LUNGES FOR THE CIGARETTE CASE WITH HIS R HAND. ALGY PULLS THE CASE OUT OF HIS REACH BY HOLDING IT IN HIS L HAND. THEY ARE FACE TO FACE.)

ALGY

Your aunt?



JACK

(XDRC, CASUALLY.)

Yes. Charming old lady she is, too. Lives at Tunbridge Wells.<sup>17</sup>  
(QUICKLY XING UC AFTER ALGY.) Just give it back to me, Algy.

ALGY

(RETREATING TO BACK OF SOFA.)

But why does your aunt call herself little Cecily?

JACK

(MEASURING HIS WORDS AND STEPS XING TO L END OF SOFA, TURNING TO LOOK AT ALGY.)

My dear fellow, some aunts are tall, some aunts are not tall. That is a matter that surely an aunt may be allowed to decide for herself. (JACK LUNGES ACROSS SOFA, FALLING ON ALL FOURS AT THE R END. ALGY XC ESCAPING HIS GRASP.) For heaven's sake, give me back my cigarette case.

ALGY

Yes, but why does your aunt call you her uncle? "From little Cecily, with her fondest love, to her dear Uncle Jack."  
(X TO JACK'S L, AS JACK SITS ON SOFA.) There is no objection, I admit, to an aunt being a small aunt. But why an aunt, no matter what her size, should call her own nephew her uncle, I can't quite make out. (XLC.) Besides your name isn't Jack; it is Ernest.

JACK

(STANDING AND BRUSHING HIMSELF OFF.)

It isn't Ernest; it's Jack.

ALGY

(LOOKING SOMEWHAT STUNNED, ALGY XS SLOWLY TO JACK'S L. JACK NOW HAS ASSUMED A STATELY POSE. ALGY'S FOLLOWING SPEECH PRO-

---

17

A spa town in Kent, favored by retired elderly people.

GRESSES SLOWLY AND QUIETLY TO A RAPID, LOUD INDIGNATION AT THE END.)

You have always told me it was Ernest. I have introduced you to everyone as Ernest. You answer to the name of Ernest. You look as if your name was Ernest. (TURNING TO LOOK AT HIM.) 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. (TAKING CARD FROM HIS POCKET.) Her is one of them. "Mr. Ernest Worthing, B-4, The Albany." (XL UP BEHIND TABLE.) I'll keep this as proof your name is Ernest if you ever attempt to deny it to me, or to Gwendolen, or to anyone else.

(ALGY PUTS THE CARD BACK IN HIS POCKET AND PUNCTUATES THE END OF HIS SPEECH BY POPPING A CUCUMBER SANDWICH INTO MOUTH.)

JACK

(TAKING ONE STEP D, WITH IMPATIENT SEVERITY.)

Well, my name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country, and the cigarette case was given to me in the country.

ALGY

AHA! Aha! (XDL AROUND TABLE.) I have always suspected you of being a confirmed and secret Bunburyist; I am quite sure of it now.

JACK

(TURNING L TO HIM.)

Bunburyist? What on earth is a Bunburyist?

ALGY

(TAKING ANOTHER SANDWICH.)

I'll tell you as soon as you inform me why you are Ernest in town and Jack in the country.

JACK

(XING ONE STEP TO ALGY, EXTENDING HIS L HAND.)

Produce my cigarette case first.

(ALGY XS TO JACK AND HANDS HIM THE CIGARETTE CASE.)

ALGY

Here it is. Now produce your explanation, (PLACING HIS R HAND ON JACK'S L SHOULDER.) and pray make it improbable.

(AS ALGY XUC AND SITS AT THE L END OF THE SOFA, JACK XDRC, FACING FRONT.)

JACK

My dear fellow, there is nothing improbable about my explanation at all. (JACK BEGINS ORATING.) Old Mr. Thomas Cardew, who adopted me when I was a little boy, made me in his will guardian to his grand-daughter, Miss Cecily Cardew. Cecily, who addresses me as her uncle from motives of respect that you could not possibly appreciate, lives at my place in the country under the charge of her admirable governess, Miss Prism.

ALGY

(NONCHANLANTLY.)

Where is that place in the country, by the way?

JACK

(XR TO CHAIR.)

That is nothing to you, dear boy. You are not going to be invited. I may tell you candidly that the place is not in Shropshire. (SITS.)

ALGY

I suspected that, my dear fellow. I have Bunbured all over Shropshire on two separate occasions. (MOVING FROM L END OF SOFA TO R END, ANXIOUSLY.) Now, go on. Why are you Ernest in town and Jack in the country?

JACK

When one is a guardian, one has to adopt a very high moral tone. And as a high moral tone can hardly be said to conduce very much to either one's health or one's happiness, in order to get up to town I have always pretended to have a younger brother of the name of Ernest, who lives at the Albany and gets into the most dreadful scrapes. I have to come up to town to rescue him. Now that, my dear Algy, is the whole truth pure and simple.

(JACK TAKES A CIGARETTE OUT OF HIS CASE AND LIGHTS IT.)

ALGY

The truth is rarely pure and never simple. (RISING.) What you really are is a Bunburyist. In fact, you are one of the most advanced Bunburyists I know.

JACK

What on earth do you mean?

ALGY

(XR TO JACK PLACING R HAND ON JACK'S L SHOULDER.)

You have invented a very useful younger brother called Ernest in order that you may be able to come up to town as often as you like, right? (JACK AGREES. ALGY XRC.) I have invented an invaluable permanent invalid friend called Bunbury whom I pretend to visit that I may be able to go down into the country whenever I choose.

(MUSIC IN AS ALGY XC.)

Bunbury, with his extraordinary bad health, is absolutely indispensable.

Bunburying is known  
To loosen the moral tone  
A marvelous friend to own  
Is Mister Bunbury.

When cities have lost their charm  
An invalid friend's alarm  
Calls me to a Shropshire farm (PRANCES BACK R TO JACK.)  
To Mister Bunbury.

Where the girls are sweet and country-bred  
And slightly overfed (GRAPHIC GESTURE.)  
But easily misled.  
Still, it's wise to have a nom de plume (GESTURE OF WRITING ON HAND.)  
So when you've done  
You can't be chased  
And can't be traced  
For what you may have done to whom. (FEW STRUTTING STEPS C, GESTURE OF PATTING A LADY'S POSTERIOR.)

Bunburying's a lark  
Especially after dark (RATHER SINISTERLY.)  
Why, even the shyest clerk must have his Bunbury.

An alias one should take  
 If one is to play the rake (GESTURE OF CLOAK IN HAND.)  
 And never get caught in making one mistake.

So one can have an escapade  
 With dairy maids and marmalade (XC.)  
 A fellow must have a fake like Mr. Bunbury. (TURNING BACK TO JACK.)

(MUSIC CONTINUES UNDER DIALOGUE.)

JACK

(RISING, XRC.)

Yes, I begin to understand. I'm afraid, however, I find your Mr. Bunbury rather distasteful and your behavior (MIMICING ALGY'S GRAPHIC GESTURE.) completely immoral.

ALGY

(X TO JACK'S L.)

Oh, come Jack, it is precisely this modern mania for morality that forces everyone to pose as a paragon of purity, incorruptibility, and all the other seven deadly virtues. Scandals used to lend charm to a man. Now they crush him. (GESTURE OF CRUSHING SOMETHING IN HIS R HAND AS HE XC.) So Bunbury is a social necessity.

In an age when sex is not discussed

JACK

(RAISING L HAND IN OBJECTION.)

Except upon the stage.

ALGY

A Bunbury is a must.  
 It's the rage

JACK

(RESIGNED.)

Besides it's rather fun.

ALGY

(XRC TO JACK, TOTALLY AGREEING.)

For books are banned,



And nothing's read  
 And nothing's said  
 TO TABLE TO GET A BREAD AND BUTTER SAND-  
 think I'll kill him in any case. Cecily  
 a little too much interested in him. It might be a good  
 idea if you did the  
JACK AND ALGY Mr. Bunbury.

(ARMS AROUND EACH OTHER.)

But nearly everything is done.

Fellows can have a lark (DANCING ARM IN ARM TO LC.)  
 A dallying in the park (DANCING ARM IN ARM BACK UC.)  
 A girl is an easy mark  
 With Mr. Bunbury (DANCING ARM IN ARM DC.)

ALGY

(TURNING IN TO JACK.)

Whenever I need him most  
 My invalid friend and host  
 Is glad to pretend  
 He's giving up the ghost.

JACK

(BOWING.)

So you can have an escapade  
 With dairy maids and marmalade

ALGY

(BOWING.)

And you can have an episode  
 With London ladies a la mode

JACK AND ALGY

(ARMS AROUND ONE ANOTHER, TOASTING WITH IMAGINARY GLASSES.)

We offer a hearty toast to Mr. Bunbury.

(MUSIC OUT.)

JACK

(SLOW X TO CHAIR R.)

Well, you can do as you choose with Bunbury, but I am going  
 to get rid of Ernest. If Gwendolen accepts me, I shall kill  
 Lady Bracknell and Miss Fairfax.

my brother. (XURC TO TABLE TO GET A BREAD AND BUTTER SANDWICH.) Indeed, I think I'll kill him in any case. Cecily is a little too much interested in him. It might be a good idea if you did the same with your Mr. Bunbury.

ALGY

(XUL BEHIND TABLE, TAKING ANOTHER CUCUMBER SANDWICH.)

Nothing will induce me to part with Bunbury, and if you ever get married, which still seems to me extremely problematic, you will be very glad to know Bunbury.

JACK

(XR TO CHAIR, SITS.)

That is nonsense. If I marry a charming girl like Gwendolen I certainly won't want to know Bunbury.

ALGY

(XDLC BETWEEN TABLE AND FAR L CHAIR.)

Then your wife will. You don't seem to realize that in married life three is company and two is none.

JACK

(SENTENTIALLY.)

For heaven's sake, don't try to be cynical. It's perfectly easy to be cynical.

ALGY

It isn't easy to be anything nowadays. (FRONT.) There's such a lot of beastly competition about. (HE EATS ANOTHER SANDWICH AS THE DOOR BELL RINGS TWICE. WITH A QUIET SHUDDER OF EXQUISITE SENSIBILITY, ALGY TURNS BACK TO JACK.) Ah! That must be Aunt Augusta. Only relatives, or creditors, ever ring in that Wagnerian manner.

(ALGY XULC BEHIND TABLE WIPING THE CRUMBS OFF HIS MOUTH. JACK RISES AS LANE ENTERS C FOLLOWED BY LADY BRACKNELL, THEN GWENDOLEN.)

LANE

(HOLDING SLIGHTLY L OF C ON PLATFORM C.)

Lady Bracknell and Miss Fairfax!

LADY BRACKNELL (SITTING ON THE SOFA.)

(SWEEPING IN, XING IN AN ARC FROM UC TO DC TO RC FACING JACK.)

Good afternoon, Algernon. I hope you are behaving very well.

ALGY (SITTING AT THE OTHER PLACE IN

I'm feeling very well, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL

That's not quite the same thing. In fact, the two things rarely go together.

(LADY BRACKNELL NOW SEES JACK AND BOWS SLIGHTLY TO HIM WITH ICY COLDNESS.)

ALGY

(X ONE STEP TO GWENDOLEN, TAKING HER HAND. SHE HAS ENTERED AND HELD UC AT THE L OF THE SOFA.)

Dear me, you are smart!

GWENDOLEN

(XDL TO SIT IN CHAIR AT L OF TABLE.)

I am always smart. (OVER HER SHOULDER TO JACK.) Am I not, Mr. Worthing?

JACK

(ANXIOUSLY, ONE STEP IN C.)

Oh, you're quite perfect, Miss Fairfax.

GWENDOLEN

I hope I am not that. It would leave no room for developments, and I intend to develop in many directions. (SHE FACES FRONT.)

LADY BRACKNELL

(SPEAKING OVER.) (SPEAKING TO AUNT AUGUSTA. JACK SITS IN CHAIR)

I'm sorry if we are a little late, Algernon, but I was obliged to call on dear Lady Harbury. I hadn't been there since her poor husband's death. I never saw a woman so altered; she looks quite twenty years younger. (XUC TO SOFA.) And now I'll have a cup of tea, and one of those nice cucumber sandwiches you

promised me. (SHE SITS, ARRANGING HERSELF ON THE SOFA.)

ALGY

Certainly, Aunt Augusta.

(ALGY XLC TO BEHIND TABLE AND LOOKS AT THE EMPTY PLATE IN HORROR. SEE FIGURE 5.)

Good heavens! Lane! Why are there no cucumber sandwiches? I ordered them 'specially.

LANE

(LOOKS QUICKLY AT THE EMPTY PLATE UNBELIEVINGLY. REGAINING HIS COMPOSURE, HE RESPONDS GRAVELY.)

There were no cucumbers in the market this morning, sir. I went down twice.

ALGY

(XUC TO LANE, LOOKING BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN LANE AND AUNT AUGUSTA WITH EACH "NO.")

No . . . no . . . no . . . no cucumbers?

LANE

(STRAIGHT FRONT.)

No, sir. Not even for ready money.

ALGY

That will do, Lane. Thank you.

LANE

Thank you, sir.

(LANE EXITS UC AND OFF R.)

ALGY

(XC TO L OF SOFA SPEAKING TO AUNT AUGUSTA. JACK SITS IN CHAIR DR.)

I am greatly distressed, Aunt Augusta, about there being no cucumbers, not even for ready money.

(ALGY XULC BEHIND TABLE TO FIX TEA FOR LADY BRACKNELL.)

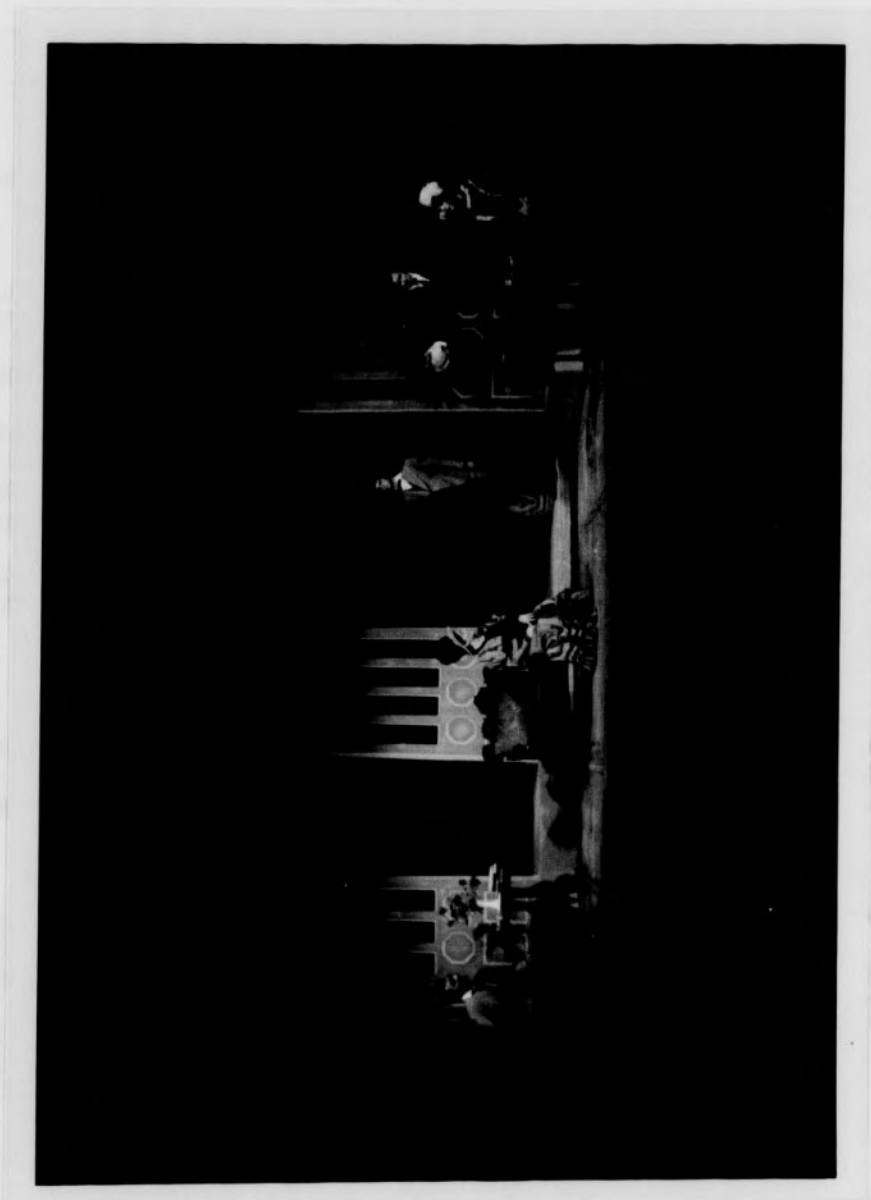


FIGURE 5



LADY BRACKNELL

No matter, Algernon. I had some crumpets with Lady Harbury, who seems to me to be living entirely for pleasure now.

ALGY

I hear her hair has turned quite gold from grief.

LADY BRACKNELL

It certainly has changed its colour. From what cause, I, of course, cannot say.

(ALGY X TO SOFA, HANDS CUP OF TEA TO LADY BRACKNELL.)

Thank you. I've quite a treat for you tonight, Algernon. (ALGY XS BACK TO TEA TABLE, PICKS UP CUP AND SAUCER FOR GWENDOLEN.) I am going to send you down to dinner with Mary Farquar.

(ALGY WINCES, ALMOST DROPPING CUP AND SAUCER. HE HANDS TEA TO GWENDOLEN AND XS BACK TO LADY BRACKNELL'S L.)

ALGY

I'm afraid, Aunt Augusta, I shall have to give up the pleasure of dining with you tonight. I have just had a telegram to say that my poor friend Bunbury is very ill again. (HE EXCHANGES GLANCES WITH JACK.) They seem to think I should be with him.

LADY BRACKNELL

Well, I must say, I think it is high time that Mr. Bunbury made up his mind whether he was going to live or die. (IN A TONE OF INDIGNANT IMPATIENCE.) This shilly-shallying with the question is absurd. I should be much obliged if you would ask Mr. Bunbury, from me, to be kind enough not to have a relapse on Saturday, for I rely on you to arrange my music for me.

ALGY

(TAKING LADY BRACKNELL'S TEA THINGS.)

I'll speak to Bunbury, Aunt Augusta, (LOOKING AT JACK.) if he's still conscious, and I think I can promise you he'll be all right by Saturday. (X TO TABLE, PLACES CUP ON TRAY, XC AND EXTENDS ARM TO LADY BRACKNELL.) Now, if you will kindly accompany me into the music room, I'll run over the programme I've drawn out for you.

LADY BRACKNELL

(RISING, X ONE STEP D. JACK AND GWENDOLEN RISE ALSO.)

Thank you, Algernon. It is very thoughtful of you. Gwendolen, you will accompany me.

GWENDOLEN

Certainly, Mamma.

LADY BRACKNELL

(XUC IN ARC AROUND ALGERNON TO PLATFORM, TURNS TO FACE ALGERNON. ALGERNON STILL HAS HIS ARM EXTENDED WHICH LADY BRACKNELL HAS IGNORED.)

I'm sure the programme will be delightful after a few expurgations. French songs I cannot possibly allow.

(SHE EXTENDS HER L HAND AS IF TO TAKE ALGY'S ARM. ALGY QUICKLY XUC TO HER. SHE CONTINUES SPEECH AS THEY EXIT UC AND OFF L.)

People always seem to think that they are improper, and either looked shocked, which is vulgar, or laugh, which is worse. But German sounds a thoroughly respectable language, and indeed, I believe is so.

JACK

(GWENDOLEN HAVING REMAINED BEHIND FACES FRONT AS JACK TAKES A FEW NERVOUS STEPS TO RC.)

Charming day it has been, Miss Fairfax.

GWENDOLEN

(IN HER HABITUAL TONE OF ARISTOCRATIC SUPERIORITY.)

Pray don't talk to me about the weather, Mr. Worthing. Whenever people talk to me about the weather, I always feel quite certain that they mean something else.

JACK

(ONE MORE NERVOUS STEP C.)

I do mean something else.

GWENDOLEN

I thought so. In fact, I am never wrong.

JACK

(QUICKLY XLC.)

I would like to be allowed to take advantage of Lady Bracknell's temporary absence.

GWENDOLEN

I would certainly advise you to do so.

JACK

(NERVOUSLY, BUT WITH AN EXAGGERATED IMPULSIVENESS NOT ENTIRELY GENUINE.)

Miss Fairfax, ever since I met you I have admired you more than any girl . . . I have ever met . . . since . . . I met you.

GWENDOLEN

(WITH THE OFFICIAL SELF-COMPOSURE OF ONE MAKING AN IMPORTANT PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT.)

Yes, I am aware of the fact. And for me you have always had an irresistible fascination. The moment Algernon first mentioned to me that he had a friend called Ernest, I knew I was destined to love you.

(SHE EXTENDS HER R HAND TO BE KISSED. JACK TAKES IT ENTHUSIASTICALLY.)

JACK

You really love me, Gwendolen?

GWENDOLEN

(WITH COOL, DISTANT ABSENTMINDEDNESS.)

Passionately.

JACK

(FACTUAL AND CALM.)

Darling. You don't know how happy you've made me. When can

we be married?

GWENDOLEN (IN RATHER IMPATIENTLY.)

(ABRUPTLY REMOVING HER HAND FROM HIS, XDRC.)

Married, Mr. Worthing?

JACK

(ASTOUNDED, XC AFTER HER.)

Well, surely, you know that I love you, and you led me to believe, Miss Fairfax, that you were not absolutely indifferent to me.

GWENDOLEN

(TURNING TO HIM.)

I adore you. But you haven't proposed to me yet. Nothing at all has been said about marriage. The subject has not even been touched on.

JACK

Well, may I propose to you now?

GWENDOLEN

I think it would be an admirable opportunity. And to spare you any possible disappointment, Mr. Worthing, I think it only fair to tell you quite frankly that I am fully determined to accept you.

JACK

(XRC STARTING TO EMBRACE HER.)

Gwendolen!

GWENDOLEN

(QUICKLY EXTENDING HER L ARM TO STOP HIM. FACING FRONT.)

Yes, Mr. Worthing. What have you got to say to me?

JACK

You know what I have got to say to you.

GWENDOLEN

(DROPPING HER HAND, TURNING TO HIM RATHER IMPATIENTLY.)

Yes, but you don't say it.

(SHE WAITS. JACK TURNS AWAY FROM HER TAKING ONE STEP C.)

Do you wish to tell me that I am charming?

JACK

No.

GWENDOLEN

(HELPFULLY, X ONE STEP TO HIM.)

Delightful?

JACK

(TAKING ONE MORE STEP C.)

No.

GWENDOLEN

(ALMOST ANGRILY AND A LITTLE HURT, XUC TO SOFA, SITS AT R  
END.)

Well, Mr. Worthing!

JACK

(THOUGHTFULLY.)

Well . . .

(MUSIC IN.)

I wouldn't say you're charming  
Delightful or disarming.

I'd find a way

To simply say

Perfection! (GWENDOLEN REACTS FAVORABLY TO THIS WORD.)

I wouldn't say beguiling (JACK XUC BESIDE L END OF SOFA TO HER.)  
Describes the way you're smiling.

I'd find a phrase

That best conveys

Perfection.



(ON THE FOLLOWING VERSE, JACK X SLOWLY BEHIND SOFA TO URC  
SIDE. GWENDOLEN IS BEING VERY SHY.)

The Mona Lisa may thrill me.  
The Venus may chill me.  
But they grow pale  
When you  
Come into view. (XD TO GWENDOLEN'S LEVEL R OF SOFA.)

How could I ever hope to capture (TAKES GWENDOLEN'S HANDS,  
RAISING HER OFF THE SOFA.)  
A synonym for rapture  
For words are quite  
Inopportune  
When one is reaching  
For the moon.

I'd simply say I worship  
Perfection.

(JACK KNEELS ON HIS R KNEE, STILL HOLDING HER HANDS.)

Gwendolen, will you marry me?

GWENDOLEN

(PULLING JACK BACK UP INTO A STANDING POSITION.)

Of course I will, darling. How long you have been about it.  
Oh, what wonderfully brown eyes you have, Ernest. They are  
quite, quite brown. I hope you will always look at me just  
like this, especially when there are other people present.

GWENDOLEN AND JACK

(DREAMILY, XDC.)

How could we ever hope to capture  
A synonym for rapture?  
For words are quite  
Inopportune  
When one is reaching  
For the moon.

We'd simply say we worship (TURNING TO EACH OTHER.)  
Perfection.

(MUSIC OUT.)

GWENDOLEN

(JACK STARTS TO EMBRACE HER. SHE QUICKLY ESCAPES AND XR IN FRONT OF HIM.)

My own Ernest. Darling, you must not laugh at me, but my ideal has always been to love someone of the name of Ernest. There is something in that name that inspires absolute confidence.

JACK

(XRC.)

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

GWENDOLEN

(TURNING TO HIM.)

But your name is Ernest.

JACK

Yes, I know it is. But supposing it was something else? Personally, darling, I don't care for the name of Ernest. I don't think it suits me at all.

GWENDOLEN

(X AND SITS IN CHAIR R.)

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

JACK

(RATHER NERVOUS, XC.)

Well, really Gwendolen, I must say that I think there are much nicer names. (TURNING BACK TO HER.) I think Jack, for instance, a charming name.

GWENDOLEN

(DISTASTEFULLY.)

Jack? No, there is very little music in the name Jack. It does not thrill. It produces no vibrations. I have known several Jacks, and they all, without exception, were more than usually

plain. No, the only really safe name is Ernest.

JACK

(TO HIMSELF, FRONT.)

I must get christened at once.

GWENDOLEN

I beg your pardon?

JACK

(XR TO HER.)

I said we must get married at once, darling.

(HE LEANS DOWN TO KISS HER ON THE L CHEEK TO STOP ANY FURTHER CONVERSATION.)

LADY BRACKNELL

(ENTERS FROM UL, COMING IN C, THUNDERING OUT OF ZION.)

Mr. Worthing, rise, sir, from this semi-recumbent posture. It is most indecorous.

GWENDOLEN

Mamma!

(JACK TRIES TO RISE BUT GWENDOLEN RESTRAINS HIM.)

I must beg you to retire. This is no place for you. Besides, Mr. Worthing has not quite finished yet.

LADY BRACKNELL

(XDC.)

Finished what, may I ask?

GWENDOLEN

(RISING XC TO LADY BRACKNELL, JACK COUNTERS R.)

I am engaged to Mr. Worthing, Mamma.

LADY BRACKNELL

Pardon me, you are not engaged to anyone. When you do become

engaged, I, or your father, should his health permit him, will inform you of the fact. (FRONT.) An engagement should come on a young girl as a surprise, pleasant or unpleasant, as the case may be. (BACK TO GWENDOLEN.) It is hardly a matter that she could be allowed to arrange for herself. (LOOKING AT JACK.) And now I have a few questions to put to you, Mr. Worthing. Gwendolen, you will wait for me in the carriage.

GWENDOLEN

Mamma!

LADY BRACKNELL

(DIRECTLY TO GWENDOLEN WITH GREAT FINALITY.)

In the carriage, Gwendolen!

GWENDOLEN

Yes, Mamma.

(GWENDOLEN EXITS UC AND OFF R IN TEARS, LOOKING BACK AT JACK WHO RESPONDS SYMPATHETICALLY.)

LADY BRACKNELL

(TAKES OUT A NOTEBOOK AND PENCIL AS SHE XS UP AND SITS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SOFA. JACK NERVOUSLY TAKES A CIGARETTE FROM HIS CASE. SHE SPEAKS TO HIM WITH A HIGH YET BUSINESS-LIKE SEVERITY OF A BISHOP EXAMINING A CANDIDATE FOR ORDERS.)

I feel bound to point out that you are not down on my list of eligible young men. However, I am quite ready to enter your name, should your answers be what a really affectionate mother requires.

(JACK STARTS TO LIGHT HIS CIGARETTE.)

Do you smoke?

JACK

(HE HESITATES.)

Well, yes, I must admit I smoke.

(JACK LIGHTS HIS CIGARETTE.)

LADY BRACKNELL

(WITH A TOUCH OF ENTHUSIASM RARE WITH HER.)

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.

(SHE INDICATES FOR HIM TO SIT IN THE CHAIR R.)

How old are you?

JACK

(SITTING.)

Twenty-nine.

LADY BRACKNELL

(CONTINUOUSLY JOTTING DOWN NOTES AS SHE TALKS.)

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 everything or nothing. (LOOKING DIRECTLY AT JACK.) Which do you know?

JACK

(AFTER SOME HESITATION.)

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. What is your income?

JACK

Between seven and eight thousand pounds a year.

LADY BRACKNELL

That is satisfactory. In land or investments?



JACK

(RELAXING SLIGHTLY.)

In investments, chiefly. I do have a country house, with some land, of course, attached to it, about fifteen acres, I believe.

LADY BRACKNELL

(QUITE INTERESTED.)

A country house? How many bedrooms? (CATCHING HERSELF.) Well, that point can be cleared up afterwards. You have a town house, I hope? A girl with a simple unspoiled nature like Gwendolen could hardly be expected to reside in the country.

JACK

Well, I own a house in Belgrave Square, but it is let by the year. Of course, I can get it back whenever I like.

LADY BRACKNELL

What number in Belgrave Square?

JACK

One hundred and forty-nine.

LADY BRACKNELL

(CLOSING HER NOTEBOOK, RISING SLOWLY.)

The unfashionable side. I thought there was something. (XLC TOWARD CHAIR AT R OF TABLE.) However, that could easily be altered.

JACK

(IN A TONE OF ARTLESS, INQUIRING INNOCENCE.)

Do you mean the fashion, or the side?

LADY BRACKNELL

(TURNING BACK TO HIM, STERNLY.)

Both if necessary, I presume. (REOPENING HER NOTEBOOK.) Now to minor matters. Are your parents living?

JACK

(RISING.)

I have lost both my parents.

LADY BRACKNELL

(SITS IN CHAIR AT R OF TABLE, CONFOUNDEDLY.)

Both? To lose one parent, Mr. Worthing, can be regarded as a misfortune; but to lose both. That seems like carelessness. Who was your father?

JACK

(XURC TO TABLE, PICKING UP ASH TRAY, PUTTING OUT CIGARETTE.)

I am afraid I really don't know. The fact is, Lady Bracknell, I said I had lost my parents. It would be nearer the truth to say that my parents seem to have lost me. (XD TO LADY BRACKNELL'S LEVEL.) I was . . . well, I was found.

LADY BRACKNELL

Found?

JACK

(XC, FRONT, ORATING AGAIN.)

The late Mr. Thomas Cardew, an old gentleman of a very charitable disposition, 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. (TO LADY BRACKNELL.) Worthing is a place in Sussex. It is a seaside resort.

LADY BRACKNELL

(GRAVELY.)

Where did the charitable gentleman with the first-class ticket for this seaside resort find you?

JACK

In a handbag.

LADY BRACKNELL

(SHOCKED.)

In a handbag?

JACK

(XLC TO LADY BRACKNELL'S R, VERY SERIOUSLY.)

Yes, Lady Bracknell. I was in a handbag . . . a somewhat large, black leather handbag, with handles on it . . . an ordinary handbag, in fact.

LADY BRACKNELL

(CALMLY.)

In what locality did this Mr. Cardew come across this ordinary handbag?

JACK

In the cloakroom at Victoria Station. It was given to him in mistake for his own.

LADY BRACKNELL

(ALMOST NUMB.)

The cloakroom at Victoria Station.

JACK

(WITH DELIBERATELY OPPRESSIVE HONESTY.)

Yes. The Brighton Line.

LADY BRACKNELL

(MOVED TO PERORATIVE SENOROUSNESS.)

The line is immaterial. (RISING, X IN FRONT OF JACK TO C.)  
Mr. Worthing, I confess I feel somewhat bewildered by what you have told me. To be born, or at any rate, bred, in a handbag, whether it had handles or not, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life.

(MUSIC IN.)

Your rather doubtful origin . . . a terminus (XDC.)  
Is shocking,  
Appalling,  
It's horrid!  
And a cloakroom I am told is rather verminous  
Concealing  
Adventures

Quite torrid!  
 Now wickedness can be ignored  
 It's merely a transgression  
 But no one ever overlooks  
 A social indiscretion.

(XRC.)

Oh, a handbag, a handbag is not a proper mother  
 Not a proper mother  
 Not a proper mother.

JACK

(XD TO HER L.)

Would you kindly advise me in one way or another?

LADY BRACKNELL

(TURNING TO HIM.)

I suggest you find another mother soon.

(FRONT.)

And a cloakroom, a cloakroom is not a proper father  
 Not a proper father  
 Not a proper father.

JACK

Would you kindly advise me? I hate to be a bother.

LADY BRACKNELL

I suggest you find a father rather soon. (TURNING DR.)

JACK

(X AROUND BEHIND LADY BRACKNELL TO HER R, FACING HER.)

Lady Bracknell, won't you kindly reconsider?

LADY BRACKNELL

(FRONT.)

Never. No, never!

JACK

But you know your daughter wants to marry.

LADY BRACKNELL

(TURNING BACK TO JACK.)

Mr. Worthing, she can't marry. I forbid her.

JACK

(TAKEN ABACK.)

Never?

LADY BRACKNELL

No, never. Not to you.

(XC SINGING FRONT.)

For a handbag, a handbag is not a proper mother  
Not a proper mother  
Not a proper mother.

JACK

(X TO HER R.)

But this passion within me I simply cannot smother.

LADY BRACKNELL

(DIRECTLY TO HIM.)

Then you better find another mother  
Find another mother  
Better find another mother soon.

(SHE SWEEPS IN AN ARC FROM C TO DL.)

I'd welcome to my bosom any bachelor  
Whose family was highly regarded  
But I cannot let my daughter wed a satchel . . . or  
A parcel that someone discarded.

Your background in a railway stop (TO JACK.)  
Shows a disregard for propriety  
And could hardly be regarded as  
The basis for a recognized position in society.

(FRONT.)

For a handbag, a handbag is not a proper mother  
Not a proper mother  
Not a proper mother.

JACK

(XLC.)

Would it help if I told you I have a younger brother?

LADY BRACKNELL

(TO JACK.)

I fear younger brothers rarely are a boon.

(FRONT.)

And a cloakroom, a cloakroom is not a proper father  
Not a proper father  
Not a proper father.

JACK

(XDL TO LADY BRACKNELL'S R.)

Is it mother or father? Now which is it you'd rather?

LADY BRACKNELL

(AS IF TO DISMISS HIM, XC.)

Sir, to quibble over sex is picayune.

JACK

(XC AFTER HER.)

Lady Bracknell, aren't you being rather frigid?

LADY BRACKNELL

(INDIGNATELY TO HIM.)

Frigid? Not I, sir.

JACK

You could surely bend your rules a little.



LADY BRACKNELL

Where my daughter is concerned I must be rigid  
I am a mother (FRONT.)  
First and last.

(ON THIS FINAL VERSE LADY BRACKNELL BACKS JACK FROM C INTO  
FAR L CHAIR.)

And I tell you a handbag is not a proper mother  
Not a proper mother  
Not a proper mother.

JACK

(TRYING TO FIGHT BACK.)

But this passion within me I simply cannot smother.

LADY BRACKNELL

Then you better find another mother  
Or a proper father  
Or at any rate a parent rather soon!

(JACK COLLAPSES IN THE CHAIR L AS LADY BRACKNELL SWEEPS UC  
TO PLATFORM WHERE SHE TURNS BACK TO HIM DEFIANTLY.)

Good day, Mr. Worthing!

(MUSIC OUT AS SHE EXITS UR IN MAJESTIC INDIGNATION. ALGY  
ENTERS CHEERILY UL XC HUMMING THE WEDDING MARCH.)

JACK

(LOOKING PERFECTLY FURIOUS.)

For goodness sake, don't hum that ghastly tune.

ALGY

(X BEHIND CHAIR R OF TABLE.)

Didn't it go off all right, old boy? You don't mean to say  
Gwendolen refused you?

JACK

Oh, Gwendolen is as right as a trivet. As far as she is con-  
cerned, we are engaged. Her mother, however, is an absolute  
Gorgon! (RISING, ANXIOUSLY.) Algy, you don't think that there

is any chance of Gwendolen becoming like her mother in about a hundred and fifty years, do you?

ALGY

(XDLC TO JACK'S LEVEL.)

All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's his. By the way, did you tell Gwendolen the truth about your being Ernest in town and Jack in the country?

JACK

(XC, IN A VERY PATRONIZING MANNER.)

Before the end of the week I shall have got rid of Ernest.

ALGY

(TURNING TO HIM.)

How do you propose to do that?

JACK

(XURC TO TABLE.)

My poor brother Ernest will be carried off suddenly in Paris by a severe chill.

ALGY

(TAKING ONE STEP IN.)

But I thought you said Miss Cardew was a little too interested in your brother Ernest. Won't she feel his loss?

JACK

(PICKING UP A BREAD AND BUTTER SANDWICH AND TURNING BACK TO ALGY.)

Oh, Cecily is not a silly, romantic girl, I am glad to say. She has a capital appetite, goes for long walks, and pays no attention at all to her studies.

ALGY

(ALGY TURNS HIS BACK AS JACK GOES TO MEET GWENDOLEN C.)  
I would rather like to see Cecily.

My own darling!

JACK

(NIBBLING ON THE SANDWICH.)

I will take very good care you never do. She is excessively pretty, and she is only just eighteen.

ALGY

(XC.)

Have you told Gwendolen you have an excessively pretty ward who is only just eighteen?

JACK

(XDRC TO ALGY'S LEVEL.)

Cecily and Gwendolen are certain to be extremely great friends. Half an hour after they have met, they will be calling each other sister.

ALGY

Women only do that when they have called each other a lot of other things first.

(LANE ENTERS UR XC TO PLATFORM.)

LANE

Miss Fairfax.

(GWENDOLEN ENTERS UR X C OVER PLATFORM TO FLOOR LEVEL. LANE EXITS UR.)

ALGY

(BACKING LC.)

Gwendolen, upon my word!

GWENDOLEN

Algy, kindly turn your back. I have something very particular to say to Mr. Worthing.

(ALGY TURNS HIS BACK AS JACK XS TO MEET GWENDOLEN C.)

JACK

My own darling!

GWENDOLEN

(TAKING BOTH OF JACK'S HANDS IN HERS, WITH SUBDUED OPERATIC GRANDEUR OF STYLE.)

Ernest, we may never be married. From the expression on Mamma's face I fear we never shall. But although she may prevent us from becoming man and wife, and I may marry someone else, (FRONT.) and marry often, (BACK TO JACK.) nothing that she can possibly do can alter my eternal devotion to you.

JACK

(WITH A LOOK OF MOCK ADMIRATION AND ROMANTIC NOSTALGIA.)

Dear Gwendolen.

GWENDOLEN

Your town address I have. What is your address in the country?

JACK

The Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire.

(ALGY, WHO HAS BEEN LISTENING CAREFULLY, SMILES TO HIMSELF AND COPIES THE ADDRESS ON HIS SHIRT CUFF. SEE FIGURE 6. THEN HE TURNS AROUND FACING THE COUPLE.)

GWENDOLEN

I will communicate with you daily.

JACK

My own one.

GWENDOLEN

Algy, you may turn around now.

ALGY

Thanks, I've turned round already.

JACK

You will let me see you to your carriage?

GWENDOLEN

Certainly.



FIGURE 6

(JACK TAKES GWENDOLEN'S ARM AND THEY EXIT C AND OFF UR.  
MUSIC IN. ALGY CHUCKLING TO HIMSELF, XURC TO TABLE, PICKS  
UP BREAD AND BUTTER SANDWICH.)

ALGY

Lane!

(LANE ENTERS FROM UL THROUGH C CARRYING THREE VALISES. HE  
PLACES THEM ON THE FLOOR LEVEL C. HE ALSO CARRIES ALGY'S  
DERBY.)

What's that?

LANE

The Bunbury things, sir. We are going Bunburying, are we  
not, sir?

ALGY

(XC TO LANE.)

As a matter of fact, we are.

(LANE HANDS ALGY HIS DERBY WHICH ALGY POPS ONTO HIS HEAD.  
ALGY BEGINS STRAIGHTENING HIS TIE.)

You may leave a message with the doorman that should he  
have to contact us our address will be (READING FROM HIS  
SHIRT CUFF.) care of "Worthing, the Manor House, Woolton,  
Hertfordshire."

LANE

Very good, sir.

(LANE PICKS UP THE VALISES, TURNS TO LEAVE. ALGY PULLS  
LANE BACK DOWNSTAGE BY THE COAT COLLAR AND XS OUT IN FRONT  
OF HIM. LANE FOLLOWS HIM AS THEY BOTH EXIT UR.)

(CURTAIN.)

Cecily! Mr. Worthing has many troubles in his life. Idle  
amusement and triviality would be out of place in his  
existence. You must remember his constant anxiety about that  
unfortunate young man, his brother, the son.



## Act One, Scene Five

(THE CURTAIN RISES ON THE GARDEN OF THE MANOR HOUSE IN HERTFORDSHIRE. MISS PRISM IS SEATED IN A LARGE ROCKING CHAIR RC, KNITTING. CECILY IS ON THE PLATFORM ULC WATERING FLOWERS. AT LC IS AN OVAL TABLE COVERED WITH BOOKS. TO THE L OF THE TABLE IS A LARGE CHAIR. IT IS NOON.)

MISS PRISM

(KNITTING AND ROCKING.)

Cecily, surely such a utilitarian occupation as the watering of flowers is rather Moulton's duty than yours? Especially at a moment when intellectual pleasures await you. (POINTING TO THE TABLE WITH A KNITTING NEEDLE.) Your German grammar is on the table. Pray open it to page fifteen.

CECILY

(X AROUND STONE WALL L TO WATER FLOWERS.)

But I don't like German. It isn't at all a becoming language. I know perfectly well that I look quite plain after my German lesson.

MISS PRISM

Child, you know how anxious your guardian is that you should improve yourself in every way. He laid particular stress on your German as he was leaving for town yesterday. (FRONT.) Indeed, he always lays stress on your German when he is leaving for town. (SHE CONTINUES KNITTING.)

CECILY

(XLC BESIDE FOUNTAIN, PLACING WATERING CAN ON FOUNTAIN LEDGE.)

Dear Uncle Jack is so dreadfully serious.

MISS PRISM

(REPRIMANDINGLY.)

Cecily! Mr. Worthing has many troubles in his life. Idle merriment and triviality would be out of place in his conversation. You must remember his constant anxiety about that unfortunate young man, his brother.

CECILY

(XD TO R SIDE OF TABLE, PICKING UP DIARY AND PEN.)

I wish Uncle Jack would allow that unfortunate young man, his brother, to come down here sometimes. We might have a good influence over him, Miss Prism. I am sure you certainly would. You know German, and geology, and things of that kind influence a man very much.

(CECILY BEGINS TO WRITE IN HER DIARY.)

MISS PRISM

(SHAKING HER HEAD.)

I do not think that even I could produce any effect on a character that, according to his own brother's admission, is irretrievably weak and vacillating. Indeed, I am not sure that I would desire to reclaim him. I am not in favor of this modern mania for turning bad people into good people at a moment's notice. (TURNING FRONT AND RAISING L HAND WITH KNITTING NEEDLE IN IT.) As a man sows so let him reap! (BACK TO CECILY.) You must put away your diary, Cecily. I really don't see why you should keep a diary at all.

CECILY

(TURNING TO MISS PRISM R.)

I keep a diary in order to enter the wonderful secrets of my life. It is my answer to the three-volume novel. Indeed, it is vastly more exciting than most three-volume novels.

MISS PRISM

(STARTS FOLDING HER KNITTING TO PUT INTO HER KNITTING BAG.)

Do not speak slightingly of the three-volume novel, Cecily. I wrote one myself in earlier days.

CECILY

(XC, EXCITED.)

Did you really, Miss Prism? How wonderfully clever you are. I hope it did not end happily. I don't like novels that end happily. (FRONT.) They depress me so much.

MISS PRISM

(RISING.)

MISS PRISM

The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means.

CECILY

I suppose so. But it seems very unfair. And was your novel ever published?

MISS PRISM

(XLC TO TABLE, PLACE KNITTING DOWN, PICK UP BOOK, TURN BACK TO CECILY.)

Alas! No! The manuscript unfortunately was abandoned. I use the word in the sense of lost or mislaid. (HANDS BOOK TO CECILY.) To your work, child. These speculations are profitless.

(EFFIE, A MAID, ENTERS R XRC.)

EFFIE

(TO CECILY.)

The Reverend Dr. Chasuble, Miss.

(MISS PRISM STARTS TO PRIMP. EFFIE EXITS R AS DR. CHASUBLE ENTERS DR. MISS PRISM ADVANCES DRC TO HIM.)

DR. CHASUBLE

And how are we this afternoon?

MISS PRISM

Dr. Chasuble. This indeed is a pleasure.

DR. CHASUBLE

Miss Prism, you are, I trust, well?

CECILY

(XL IN FRONT OF TABLE TO CHAIR.)

Miss Prism has just been complaining of a slight headache. I think it would do her so much good to have a short stroll with

you in the park, Dr. Chasuble.

MISS PRISM

(SEVERLY.)

Cecily, I have not mentioned anything about a headache.

CECILY

(QUICKLY TURNING BACK TO HER, INNOCENTLY.)

No, dear Miss Prism, I know that, but I felt instinctively that you had a headache. (SITS.) Indeed, I was thinking about that, and not about my German lesson when the Rector came in.

DR. CHASUBLE

(XLC TO RIGHT END OF TABLE.)

Cecily, I trust you are not inattentive. Your guardian, Mr. Worthing, I suppose, had not returned from town yet?

MISS PRISM

(X ONE STEP C TO DR. CHASUBLE.)

We do not expect him till Monday afternoon.

DR. CHASUBLE

(TURNING TO MISS PRISM.)

Ah, yes, he usually likes to spend his Sunday in London. He is not one of those whose sole aim is enjoyment, as, by all accounts, that unfortunate young man, his brother, seems to be. But I must not disturb Egeria and her pupil any longer.

MISS PRISM

(SLIGHTLY BLUSHING.)

Egeria? My name is Laetitia,<sup>18</sup> Doctor.

---

<sup>18</sup>Latin for "happiness."

DR. CHASUBLE

(BOWING.)

A Classical allusion drawn from the pagan authors. I shall see you both no doubt at Evensong.<sup>19</sup>

MISS PRISM

(XLC TO DR. CHASUBLE.)

I think, dear Doctor, I will have a stroll with you. I find I have a headache after all and a walk might do it good.

DR. CHASUBLE

(EXTENDING HIS R ARM WHICH SHE TAKES.)

With pleasure, Miss Prism, with pleasure. We might go as far as the schools and back. (INDICATING UL.)

MISS PRISM

(AFTER A SLIGHT HESITATION.)

That would be delightful. (XU BEHIND TABLE, PAUSING MOMENTARILY.) Cecily, you will read your Political Economy in my absence. The chapter on the fall of the Rupee<sup>20</sup> you may omit. It is somewhat too sensational.

(MISS PRISM AND DR. CHASUBLE EXIT UL. CECILY STANDS, PICKS UP THE BOOKS AND BLAMS THEM DOWN ON THE TABLE ONE BY ONE.)

CECILY

Horrid Political Economy! Horrid Geography! Horrid, horrid German!

(EFFIE ENTERS R, XC, WITH A CARD ON A TRAY.)

EFFIE

Mr. Ernest Worthing has just arrived from the station. He brought his luggage with him.

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<sup>19</sup> Evening service of the Anglican Church.

<sup>20</sup> The standard monetary unit of British India.



(XC, TAKES CARD AND READS.)

"Mr. Ernest Worthing, B-4, The Albany." Uncle Jack's wicked younger brother. (THRILLED.) Ask Mr. Ernest Worthing to come out here.

(EFFIE STARTS TO EXIT R. CECILY STOPS HER.)

And Effie, I suppose you had better talk to the housekeeper about a room for him.

EFFIE

(WITH A SLIGHT CURTSY.)

Yes, Miss.

(EFFIE EXITS DR, CECILY XDLC WITH MUSIC IN.)

CECILY

I've never met any really wicked person before. I feel rather frightened. I'm so afraid he will look just like everyone else.

I hope he looks so dev'lish that I  
Almost faint away.  
I hope that he will kiss me without  
Asking if he may.  
I hope he measure ten feet tall (LIFTS BOTH HANDS HIGH.)  
With shoulders I can't span (BRINGS HANDS DOWN, INDICATING VERY  
BROAD SHOULDERS.)  
But most of all I hope he is a  
Truly wicked man.

(XDC.)

I've never known a wicked man  
And yet he's in my every dream  
My every dream, my every plan  
Is just to meet a wicked man. (ARMS AROUND SELF.)

I hope he talks about absolutely nothing. It is the only subject I know anything about. And, oh, I do hope he likes to travel.

I hope he owns a Roman villa and  
A French chateau.  
And has a yearly income of a  
Million pounds or so. (CASUALLY.)



And yet he should live simply, yes.  
As only rich men can.  
But most of all I hope he is a  
Truly wicked man.

(XRC.)

I've never known a wicked man.  
And yet he's in my every dream  
My every dream, my every plan  
Is just to meet wicked man. (ARMS AROUND SELF.)

I hope he's been in the most awful scrapes and that he insists  
on telling of them at dinner parties. Miss Prism says a man  
who can dominate a London dinner table can dominate the world.

(XDR.)

I hope he's most experienced and  
That his past has been  
So absolutely lurid it would (WITH DELIGHT.)  
Turn a Don Juan green.

For each blue-blooded English girl (STANDS QUITE ERECT.)  
Since England first began  
Has lived her whole life just to meet a  
Truly wicked man. (ARMS AROUND SELF WHIRLING C.)

I've never known a wicked man  
And yet he's in my every dream  
My every dream, my every plan  
Is just to meet a wicked man.

A lovely dream (TURN RIGHT.)  
A lovely plan (TURN LEFT.)  
A lovely scheme  
I'd love to know  
A wicked man.

(ON THE FINAL TWO BARS OF THE SONG, CECILY TURNS UC TO FOUNTAIN AND SITS ON LEDGE AT CONCLUSION OF SONG. MUSIC OUT. EFFIE ENTERS DR FOLLOWED BY ALGY WHO IS FOLLOWED BY LAND CARRYING THE VALISES. LANE HOLDS DR, ALGY XRC, EFFIE X AROUND BEHIND THE ROCKING CHAIR RC.)

ALGY

(AFTER STUDYING CECILY FOR A MOMENT, HE SPEAKS. SHE IS LOOKING L.)

Lane, you may attend to the luggage.

LANE

(LOOKING EFFIE OVER, SMILES.)

Very good, sir.

EFFIE

I'll show you to the room.

(EFFIE X IN FRONT OF LANE AND EXITS DR. LANE, SMILING, FOLLOWS HER.)

ALGY

(XUC TO FOUNTAIN TO CECILY'S R. TAKING OFF HIS HAT, HE BOWS SLIGHTLY.)

You are my little cousin, Cecily.

CECILY

(EXAMINING HIM GRAVELY, SHE RISES, TAKING A STEP D.)

I am not little. In fact, I am more than usually tall for my age.

(ALGY IS SOMEWHAT TAKEN ABACK. SENSING HIS ASTONISHMENT, SHE TAKES ONE LITTLE STEP TO HIM.)

But I am your cousin Cecily. And you are my wicked cousin Ernest.

ALGY

(RELIEVED.)

Oh, I am not really wicked at all, Cousin Cecily.

CECILY

(IN SOLEMN MORAL DISAPPROVAL.)

If you are not, then you have certainly been deceiving us all in a very inexcusable manner.

ALGY

(LOOKING AT HER IN AMAZEMENT, TAKES ONE STEP TO HER.)

Oh! Of course, I have been rather reckless.

CECILY

I am glad to hear it.

ALGY

(GLIMPSING THE RIGHT APPROACH, HE TURNS FRONT.)

In fact, I have been very bad in my own small way.

CECILY

I don't think you should be so proud of it, though I am sure it must have been very pleasant.

ALGY

(WITH GREAT GRAVITY, TURNING BACK TO HER.)

I thought you might reform me, Cousin Cecily.

CECILY

(XLC TO R END OF TABLE.)

I'm afraid I've not time this afternoon.

ALGY

Well, would you mind my reforming myself this afternoon?

CECILY

(TURNING BACK TO HIM, SMILING.)

That is rather Quixotic of you. But I think you should try.

ALGY

I will. (BEATING SELF ON CHEST, AS IF INHALING FRESH AIR.)  
I feel better already.

CECILY

You are looking a little worse.

ALGY

(ONE STEP TO HER.)

That is because I am hungry.

CECILY

(XDRC.)

How thoughtless of me. I should have remembered that when one is going to lead an entirely new life, one requires regular and wholesome meals. (INDICATING OFF R.) Won't you come into the house?

ALGY

(POINTING TO THE FLOWER-COVERED WALL RC.)

Thank you. Might I have a button-hole first? I never have any appetite unless I have a button-hole first.

CECILY

(XU TO PLATFORM RC.)

A Mare'chal Niel?<sup>21</sup>

ALGY

(XRC.)

I'd sooner have a pink rose.

CECILY

(PICKING A PINK ROSE.)

Why?

ALGY

(XR QUICKLY TO STONE WALL, LOOKING UP AT HER, ROMANTICALLY.)

Because you are like a pink rose, Cousin Cecily.

CECILY

(FACTUALLY.)

I don't think it can be right for you to talk to me like that. Miss Prism never says such things to me.

---

<sup>21</sup>A fragrant, large, golden yellow rose.

ALGY

Then Miss Prism is a short-sighted old lady.

(CECILY LEANS OVER TO PUT THE ROSE IN ALGY'S BUTTONHOLE.)

You are the prettiest girl I ever saw.

CECILY

(XC OFF PLATFORM BEHIND ALGY, AS IF MERELY GIVING INFORMATION.)

Miss Prism says that all good looks are a snare.

ALGY

(XC TO CECILY'S R.)

They are a smare that every sensible man would like to be caught in.

CECILY

(LIGHTLY, XLC TO TABLE TO PICK UP BOOK.)

Oh. I don't think I would care to catch a sensible man.  
(FRONT.) I shouldn't know what to talk to him about.

MISS PRISM

(OFF STAGE L, WITH TENDER SOLICITUDE.)

But, Doctor, everyone needs companionship.

CECILY

(LOOKING OFF L, CECILY SEES MISS PRISM AND DR. CHASUBLE RE-  
TURNING.)

Oh! Here comes Miss Prism and I haven't even looked at my  
Political Economy. Come, Ernest!

(CECILY XRC IN FRONT OF ALGY AND TAKES HIS HAND. SHE PULLS,  
BUT HE IS TAKEN BY SURPRISE AS HE IS LOOKING OFF L AND DOESN'T  
BUDGE.)

Quickly!

(SHE PULLS HARDER AND HE GOES OFF WITH HER R. MUSIC IN AS  
MISS PRISM AND DR. CHASUBLE ENTER LC XING BEHIND TABLE TO C.)

DR. CHASUBLE

(WITH A SCHOLAR'S SHUDDER.)

I am a celibate,<sup>22</sup> Madam,<sup>23</sup> The precept as well as the practice of the Primitive Church<sup>23</sup> was distinctly against matrimony.

MISS PRISM

(SENTENTIALLY.)

That is obviously the reason why the Primitive Church has not lasted up to the present day. (LOOKING BACK AT THE DESERTED TABLE.) Oh, dear, I see Cecily has left her studies. I am afraid she is not an enthusiastic pupil.

DR. CHASUBLE

That is strange. Were I fortunate enough to be your pupil, I should hang upon your very lips.

(MISS PRISM STARTS, MOVES A FEW FEET L AWAY FROM HIM. DR. CHASUBLE CATCHES HIMSELF.)

I spoke metaphorically. My metaphor was drawn from the bees.

MISS PRISM

(REASSURED.)

I quite understand. (XLC.) Dear Doctor, I fear you are too much alone. (FRONT.) You really should get married. (X BACK TO DR. CHASUBLE, BACKING HIM RC ALMOST INTO ROCKING CHAIR.) You do not seem to realize that by persistently remaining single, a man converts himself into a permanent public temptation. Men should be careful; this very celibacy leads weaker vessels astray. (CATCHES HERSELF, TURNS FRONT.) Metaphorically speaking, I mean.

DR. CHASUBLE

(VAGUELY WITH SLOW WONDERMENT.)

But is a man not equally attractive when married?

---

<sup>22</sup>Originally a vow of chastity required of all clerical candidates for the priesthood; abolished in the Church of England at the time of Henry VIII; at the time of Dr. Chasuble, such a practice was entirely voluntary and personal.

<sup>23</sup>A somewhat indefinite term much in favor with the High Church revivalists of the Victorian era.



MISS PRISM

(CRISPLY, XULC TO PLATFORM.)

No married man is ever attractive (PAUSE.) except to his wife.

DR. CHASUBLE

(X ONE STEP C, IN GENTLE SADNESS.)

And often, I am told, not even to her.

MISS PRISM

(WITH AGGRESSIVE PRIDE.)

That depends upon the experience of the woman. Maturity can be depended upon. (PICKING A FLOWER AND HOLDING IT HIGH.) It is the flower in full bloom (PAUSE.) botanically speaking, that is. You understand my metaphor?

DR. CHASUBLE

Oh, quite.

MISS PRISM

Maturity can be attractive  
 Its ripeness is readily seen (SINGING TO FLOWER.)  
 Though young women may be more active  
 You will find they are terribly green (DIRECTLY TO DR. CHASUBLE.)  
 Incurably green  
 Unendurably green. (MATTER-OF-FACTLY.)

DR. CHASUBLE

(X TWO STEPS D.)

I must say, I never heard it put quite that way.

MISS PRISM

(XDC TO CHASUBLE'S L.)

I merely mean  
 Metaphorically speaking young girls are green (INDICATING THE FLOWER.)

DR. CHASUBLE

You merely mean (TURNING TO HER.)

Horticulturally speaking they're green.

MISS PRISM

Yes, Doctor.

DR. CHASUBLE

Your metaphor was drawn from fruit, no doubt?

MISS PRISM

Precisely. I was thinking of (PAUSE. HOLDS IMAGINARY FRUIT UP IN FRONT OF HIM.) the apple. (CHASUBLE REACTS STIFFLY. PRISM SMILES AND TURNS D.) I marvel, dear Doctor, at your power to resist all forms of temptation.

DR. CHASUBLE

(FRONT.)

Ah. But as a rector, I must.

I value my high reputation.  
Amont women it's spotlessly clean.  
To the ladies of my congregation  
I'm a pillar on which they may lean.

(PRISM STARTS TO LEAN ON HIM, BUT HE CHECKS HER.)

It's only routine  
On the clerical scene.

MISS PRISM

(STRAIGHTENING HER HAIR.)

Forgive me, Doctor. I misunderstood your meaning for a moment.

DR. CHASUBLE

I merely mean  
Metaphorically speaking on me they lean.

MISS PRISM

You merely mean  
Architecturally speaking they lean.

DR. CHASUBLE

Precisely. (XDRC IN FRONT OF HER.) My metaphor was drawn from the Tower of Pisa.

MISS PRISM

(X QUICKLY D TO CHASUBLE'S R WITH LARGE GESTURE OF SOMETHING FALLING.)

Ah! But in time even the sturdiest monument will topple.

Your attitude toward staying single  
Is unnatural and too pristine  
If the bee (POINTING TO HIM.)  
And the rosebud (POINTING TO HERSELF.)  
Don't mingle  
Then the blush of the rose goes unseen (INDICATING ROSE.)  
And a blush should be seen. (DEFINANTLY.)

DR. CHASUBLE

(MEAKLY.)

Yes, I see what you mean.

MISS PRISM

At last. I've made myself clear.

DR. CHASUBLE AND MISS PRISM

I merely - - merely mean,	You merely mean,
That full many a flower will blush unseen.	
I merely - - merely mean,	You merely mean,

DR. CHASUBLE

(SMALL MINUTE STEP AS SHE TAKES HIS HAND AND TURNS UNDER L.)  
Metaphorically speaking,

MISS PRISM

(TURNING BACK UNDER HIS ARM TO THE R.)  
Biologically speaking,

Let the bee (POINTING TO HIM.)

DR. CHASUBLE

And the flower (POINTING TO HER.)

DR. CHASUBLE AND MISS PRISM

Convene!

(THEY JOIN HANDS AND COME INTO CLOSE PROFILE POSITIONS C. MUSIC OUT. THEY REMAIN IN THIS POSITION, SEEMINGLY CONVERSING. JACK ENTERS RC SLOWLY. HE DOES NOT SEE THEM. HE PRACTICES WOEFUL GESTURES. HE IS DRESSED IN THE DEEPEST MOURNING, WITH LONG BLACK HANDKERCHIEF. HE IS PRACTICING WAVING DRAMATICALLY ABOUT. HIS REHEARSAL BRINGS HIM RIGHT UP THE BACK OF MISS PRISM. THEY BACK INTO EACH OTHER.)

JACK

(STARTLED.)

Oh! I beg your pardon.

(MISS PRISM AND DR. CHASUBLE BREAK APART, MISS PRISM BACKING C, DR. CHASUBLE BACKING LC.)

MISS PRISM

Mr. Worthing!

DR. CHASUBLE

(IN GENTLE INQUIRY.)

Mr. Worthing?

MISS PRISM

(NERVOUSLY.)

This is indeed a surprise. We did not look for you till Monday afternoon.

JACK

(XC TO MISS PRISM, SHAKING HER HAND IN A TRAGIC MANNER.)

I have returned sooner than I expected.

DR. CHASUBLE

(WITH ABSTRACTED SOLICITUDE.)

Dear Mr. Worthing. I trust this garb of woe does not betoken some terrible calamity?

JACK

(XRC, WITH RESIGNATION.)

My brother.

MISS PRISM

(RIGHTEOUSLY.)

More shameful debts and extravagance?

DR. CHASUBLE

(ONLY WITH THE VAGUEST PROFESSIONAL INTEREST.)

Still leading his life of pleasure?

JACK

(SHAKING HIS HEAD SADLY AS HE TAKES ANOTHER STEP DOWNSTAGE, ATTEMPTING TO COVER WITH THE HANDKERCHIEF A SIMULATED CONVULSIVE MOVEMENT OF THE THROAT AND TREMOR OF THE LOWER LIP AND CHIN.)

Dead!

DR. CHASUBLE

(TAKING ONE STEP TOWARD JACK.)

Your brother Ernest dead?

JACK

(TAKING ONE MORE STEP R, AGAIN AS IF BARELY MASTERING A SUD- DEN TIDAL WAVE OF GRIEF.)

Quite dead. A severe chill.

MISS PRISM

(CRISPLY AND WITH STERN SATISFACTION, XL IN FRONT OF CHASUBLE AND TABLE TO CHAIR L, SIT.)

What a lesson for him. I trust he will profit by it.

DR. CHASUBLE

(RAISING HIS L HAND TO HER.)

Charity, dear Miss Prism, charity. None of us is perfect. I myself am peculiarly susceptible to draughts. (XRC TO JACK.) Will the interment take place here?

JACK

No. He seems to have expressed a desire to be buried in Paris.

DR. CHASUBLE

In Paris! (SHAKING HIS HEAD.) I fear that hardly points to a very serious state of mind at the last. You would no doubt wish me to make some slight allusion to this tragic domestic affliction in next Sunday's service?

(JACK PRESSES DR. CHASUBLE'S HAND CONVULSIVELY.)

JACK

(SORROWFULLY.)

Ah. That reminds me . . . speaking of services . . . I suppose you know how to christen all right?

(DR. CHASUBLE LOOKS RATHER ASTOUNDED.)

I mean you are, of course, continually christening, aren't you?

MISS PRISM

(BREAKING IN AS THEY BOTH TURN TO LOOK AT HER.)

It is, I regret to say, one of the Rector's most constant duties. I have often spoken to the lower classes on the subject. But they don't seem to know what thrift is.

DR. CHASUBLE

(TURNING BACK TO JACK.)

Is there any particular infant in whom you are interested, Mr.



Worthing? (APPROACHING THE SUBJECT WITH DELICATE RETICENCE.)  
Your brother was, I believe, unmarried?

MISS PRISM

(BREAKING IN AGAIN, COYILY.)

People who live entirely for pleasure usually are.

JACK

(XC LOOKING AT MISS PRISM THEN TURNING BACK TO DR. CHASUBLE.)

No, the fact is, I would like to be christened myself, this afternoon.

DR. CHASUBLE

But surely you have been christened already?

JACK

I don't remember anything about it. You don't think I'm too old, do you?

DR. CHASUBLE

(STEPPING BACK R TO TAKE A GOOD LOOK AT JACK.)

A bit tall, perhaps. Would five o'clock suit you?

JACK

Perfectly.

(CECILY RUNS ON FROM DR BY DR. CHASUBLE TO JACK, TAKING HIS HANDS.)

CECILY

Uncle Jack! Oh, I am pleased to see you back. (WITH SUBLIMELY OFF-BEAT BLUNTNESS.) But what horrid clothes you have on.

MISS PRISM

(IN SHARP REPROOF.)

Cecily!

DR. CHASUBLE

(WITH GENTLE MOURNFULNESS.)

My child. My child.

(CECILY BENDS SLIGHTLY AT THE KNEES AS JACK KISSES HER BROW IN A MELANCHOLY MANNER.)

CECILY

Do look happy, Uncle Jack. I have a surprise for you. Who do you think is here? Your brother!

JACK

(BLANKLY.)

Who?

CECILY

(BUBBLING WITH EXCITEMENT.)

Your brother Ernest. He is in the house.

JACK

(XUC TO FOUNTAIN, BETWEEN ANNOYANCE AND BEWILDERMENT.)

Nonsense, I haven't got a brother.

CECILY

(XUC AFTER JACK, WITH SWEET AND GENTLE PERSUASIVENESS.)

Oh, don't say that. However badly he may have behaved to you in the past, he is still your brother. I'll tell him to come out.

(CECILY EXITS QUICKLY RC. DR. CHASUBLE XS AFTER HER BEHIND ROCKING CHAIR, LOOKING OFF R.)

DR. CHASUBLE

(DUBIOUSLY BUT AUTOMATICALLY SAYING THE CORRECT THING.)

These are very joyful tidings.

MISS PRISM

(RISING, XDL, BLUNTLY.)

After we had all been resigned to his loss, his sudden return

seems to me peculiarly distressing.

JACK

(SITTING ON LEDGE OF FOUNTAIN AS IF IN A DAZE.)

My brother in the house? I don't know what it all means. I think it is perfectly absurd.

(CECILY AND ALGY ENTER HAND IN HAND DR.)

Good heavens!

(JACK RISES QUICKLY, MOTIONING ALGY AWAY.)

DR. CHASUBLE

A miraculous recovery, indeed.

ALGY

(XU TO JACK'S R WITH HAND OUTSTRETCHED IN GRAVE SINCERITY.)

Brother John, I have come to tell you that I am very sorry for all the trouble I have given you, and that I intend to lead a better life in the future.

(JACK GLARES AT HIM NOT TAKING HIS HAND.)

CECILY

(XR QUICKLY BETWEEN THE MEN, FACING JACK.)

Uncle Jack, you are not going to refuse your own brother's hand?

JACK

(TURNING FRONT, CROSSING HIS ARMS, ICILY.)

Nothing will induce me to take his hand. I think his coming here disgraceful. He knows perfectly well why.

CECILY

(X ONE STEP DOWN TO JACK'S LEVEL, IN A WHEEDLING TONE.)

Uncle Jack, do be nice. There is some good in everyone. Ernest has just been telling me about his poor invalid friend, Mr. Bunbury, (JACK BEGINS A SLOW BURN AS ALGY LOOKS EXCEEDINGLY

UNCOMFORTABLE.) whom he goes to visit so often. Surely there must be much good in one who is kind to an invalid, and leaves the pleasures of London to sit by a bed of pain.

JACK

(EXPLOSIVELY PULLING CECILY AROUND TO HIS L AWAY FROM ALGY.)

Bunbury! Well, I won't have him talk to you about Bunbury or anything else. It is enough to drive one perfectly frantic.

ALGY

(TEMPERATELY TO DR. CHASUBLE.)

I must say I expected a somewhat more enthusiastic welcome, (TO JACK.) especially considering it is the first time I have come here.

CECILY

(FACING FRONT, SEVERELY.)

Uncle Jack, if you don't shake hands with Ernest, I will never forgive you.

JACK

(TAKEN ABACK.)

Never forgive me?

CECILY

(IN A CHILDISH CHANT.)

Never, never, never.

JACK

Well, this is the last time I shall ever do it.

(TURNS, XC TO ALGY, SHAKING HANDS METHODICALLY AND GLARING.)

How do you do?

ALGY

(POLITELY.)

How do you do?

DR. CHASUBLE

(XDRC AROUND ROCKER, WITH RELAXED DREAMINESS AND GENTLE PROFESSIONAL APPROVAL.)

It is pleasant, is it not, to see so perfect a reunion. (XC.)  
I think we might leave the two brothers alone.

MISS PRISM

(XU TO CECILY'S L.)

Cecily, you will come with us.

CECILY

(BRIMMING OVER WITH BENIGN SATISFACTION AT HAVING ACCOMPLISHED THE RECONCILIATION.)

Certainly, Miss Prism. (AS SHE BEGINS XL.) My little task of reconciliation is over.

(CECILY EXITS L, FOLLOWED BY MISS PRISM AND DR. CHASUBLE.)

JACK

(HAVING FOLLOWED THEIR EXITS, HE TURNS VEHEMENTLY ON ALGY.)

Algy, you young scoundrel, you have got to leave this place at once. I don't allow any Bunburying here.

(LANE ENTERS DR.)

LANE

(TO ALGY.)

Excuse me, sir. I have put your things in the room next to Mr. Worthings, sir.

JACK

(XDRC.)

What things?

LANE

The luggage, sir. Three protmanteaus, a dressing case, two hat boxes and a large luncheon basket.

ALGY

(LEANING ON STONE WALL URC, APOLOGETICALLY AND WITH INFURIA-  
ING COMPLACENCY.)

I am afraid I can't stay more than a week this time.

JACK

(XR, PEREMPTORILY TO LANE.)

You had better bring Mr. Moncrieff's luggage downstairs a-  
gain, Lane. He has been suddenly called back to town.

ALGY

Just wait in the house, Lane.

LANE

Very good, sir.

(LANE EXITS R. ALGY XD TO JACK'S R PLACING HIS R ARM AROUND  
JACK'S SHOULDERS.)

ALGY

(EASILY.)

What a fearful liar you are, Jack. I have not been called  
back to town at all.

JACK

(LOOKING AT ALGY WITH CONCLUSIVELY COLD PRECISION.)

Your duty as a gentleman calls you back.

ALGY

(SMILING IN HAPPY REMINISCENCE.)

My duty as a gentleman has never interfered with my pleasure  
in the smallest degree. (XC, THROWING KISSES OFF L.) What's  
more, Cecily is a darling.

JACK

(XC AFTER HIM.)

You are not to talk of Miss Cardew like that. I don't like it.



ALGY

(TURNING TO JACK, SCRUTINIZING HIM CAREFULLY.)

Well, I don't like your clothes. (XLC TO BEHIND STONE WALL, PICKING FLOWER.) It is perfectly ridiculous to be in deep mourning for a man who is staying a whole week with you as a guest.

JACK

(XULC AFTER HIM.)

You are not staying with me for a whole week as a guest or anything else. You are leaving by the four-o-five train.

ALGY

(XUC BEHIND UPSTAGE STONE WALL PICKING ANOTHER FLOWER C.)

If you insist on my leaving I shall wire Gwendolen to come down here instantly. Then we shall see how she feels about your being Ernest in town and Jack in the country.

JACK

(X AFTER HIM.)

If you wire Gwendolen I shall expose you and your Mr. Bunbury to my ward.

ALGY

(LOOKING AT JACK RATHER THOUGHTFULLY, THEN TURNING AND XLC TO PICK ANOTHER FLOWER.)

Well, I certainly won't leave so long as you are in mourning. It would be most unfriendly.

JACK

(XRC, LEANING ON UPSTAGE STONE WALL LOOKING DOWN TO ALGY.)

Well, will you go if I change my clothes?

ALGY

(LOOKING AT JACK.)

Yes, if you are not too long. (XDC.) I never saw anybody take so long to dress, and with so little result.

JACK

(INSULTED, XRC AROUND WALL.)

It is better than being always over-dressed, as you are.

ALGY

(FRONT.)

If I am occasionally a little over-dressed, I make up for it by being always immensely over-educated.

JACK

(MEASURING HIS STEPS AND HIS WORDS AS HE XDC TO ALGY'S R.)

Your vanity is ridiculous, your conduct an outrage and your presense in my garden utterly absurd. You are leaving on the four-o-five train. (XDRC, TURNING BACK TO ALGY, SPELLING OUT WITH HIS HANDS.) The four-o-five.

(JACK EXITS R, MUSIC IN AS ALGY XLC.)

ALGY

What fun to play the wicked man (INDICATING HORNS.)  
 What fun to be a lady's dream.  
 A lady's dream, a lady's plan.  
 Is just to know a wicked man. (TWIRLING AN IMAGINARY MUSTACHE.)

(XC CALLING OFFSTAGE R.)

Lane!

LANE

(ENTERING DR.)

Yes, sir?

ALGY

(TAKING ONE STEP TOWARD LANE WITH LARGE GESTURE.)

You may go unpack my things.

LANE

Thank you, sir.

(LANE EXITS DR DELIGHTED.)

ALGY

Oh, what a dream!

Oh, what a plan!

Oh, what a scheme!

What fun to play (PULLS OUT LARGE ORANGE HANDKERCHIEF FROM POCKET.)

The wicked man! (EXITS R WITH "SHUFFLE-OFF-TO-BUFFALO" STEP.)

(CURTAIN.)

## Act Two, Scene One

(AFTER THE ENTR'ACTE MUSIC, THE CURTAIN RISES ON THE EXTREME RIGHT SIDE OF THE STAGE REVEALING EFFIE AND LANE SEATED ON A VICTORIAN LOVE SEAT. THEY ARE IN A LENGTHY BUT NOT IMPROPER EMBRACE. LANE IS SEATED ON THE LEFT SIDE OF THE SOFA WITH HIS ARMS AROUND EFFIE'S WAIST. SHE IS SEATED ON THE RIGHT WITH HER ARMS AROUND LANE'S NECK. THEY ARE CHEEK TO CHEEK. AS THE CURTAIN REACHES THE TOP OF THE PROSCENIUM, THEY BREAK.)

EFFIE

(LEANING BACK INTO HIM ARMS.)

Oh, Horace!

LANE

(DREAMILY.)

Yes, Effie?

EFFIE

I hope you'll be coming down here often. My Miss Cecily seems to have taken quite a fancy to your Mr. Ernest.

LANE

(STILL IN A FOG.)

Mr. Ernest?

(REMEMBERING THAT ALGY IS POSING AS ERNEST.)

Oh, yes. And he likewise.

EFFIE

(SNUGGLING.)

But I'd wager they haven't even got round to holding hands.

LANE

Well, they've all those formalities to go through. You know the upper classes . . . rules, regulations . . .

(MUSIC IN.)

EFFIE

(SITTING UP AND TURNING TO LANE.)

Manners, morals . . .

LANE

Money, titles, names. You can't make love with all those things in the way.

Oh, you can't make love

In a high stiff collar (SITTING FORMALLY ON THE EDGE OF THE SOFA, INDICATING A STIFF COLLAR WITH HIS LEFT HAND.)

With a cup of tea upon your knee. (PANTOMIMES SAUCER WITH R HAND, CUP WITH L HAND, THEN X R LEG OVER L KNEE.)

EFFIE

(TAKING LANE'S R ARM AND PUTTING IT AROUND HER SHOULDERS, SNUGGLING.)

But in a soft wool jersey  
With a pint of bitter  
Love comes easily.

LANE

(STRAIGHTENING UP, TURNING EFFIE TO FACE R WITH HIS HANDS ON HER WAIST.)

Oh, you can't make love in a skin-tight corset  
When your stays are pinching you to death. (HE PULLS IN PANTOMIMING THE CORSET, EFFIE BREATHES IN QUICKLY.)

EFFIE

But if you leave your figure (RISING, XR OF SOFA.)  
Just as nature left it  
The man will hold his breath. (GESTURING TO LANE.)

LANE

(PANTOMIMING OPENING A BOOK.)

The aristocrat reads her Shelley and Keats  
To cultivate the bard in her.

EFFIE

But down amongst the carrots and beets (BENDING OVER AT THE

WAIST AND GESTURING OFF R.)  
I cultivate the gardener.

LANE AND EFFIE

(LANE RISES, TAKES EFFIE'S HAND.)

Oh, you can't make love in the master's study  
With a row of portraits on the wall (BOTH LEAN OVER AT THE  
WAIST AND LOOK FROM EXTREME L TO EXTREME R.)  
But in the kitchen pantry (GESTURING L.)  
Where there's no one looking  
You can give your all.

(TURNING TO EACH OTHER, HOLDING BOTH HANDS.)

EFFIE

And when you give your all  
They all if well

LANE

You're sweetly giving  
Something you would never sell.

LANE AND EFFIE

And generosity rings a bell (INTO EACH OTHER'S ARMS.)  
When you are making love.

(THERE IS A MUSICAL INTERLUDE DURING WHICH LANE TURNS EFFIE  
UNDER HIS L ARM, SEATING HER ON THE R END OF THE SOFA AS HE  
XS AROUND L END OF SOFA, POSING MAJESTICALLY BEHIND THE L  
END OF THE SOFA.)

LANE AND EFFIE

When it's after dinner in the upper classes  
Ladies chat (EFFIE SITS UP PRIMLY.)  
While the men are having Port. (LANE PANTOMIMES HOLDING A  
GLASS.)  
But in the servant's quarter (LANE CRAWLS OVER THE BACK OF  
THE SOFA.)  
There's a very diff'rent (LANE SETTLES DOWN ON THE L OF HER  
AS SHE LOOKS R SHYLY.)  
After-dinner sport. (LANE PUTS HIS R ARM AROUND EFFIE.)

(LANE AND EFFIE SIT ON THE EDGE OF THE SOFA AND PANTOMIME



RIDING HORSES.)

When you ride to hounds  
With his lordship beside you  
There is just so far that you can go.

EFFIE

(RISING, XR, POINTING R.)

But down behind the stable  
With the groom in halter  
Yoicks! And tally-ho! (EFFIE RAISES SHIRT SLIGHTLY, KICKING  
R FOOT OUT.)

LANE

(RISING, X TO EFFIE, PUTTING ARMS AROUND HER WAIST. EFFIE  
HAS HER BACK TO LANE.)

If you kiss a man in a lady-like way  
You just can't put your soul in it.

EFFIE

(WITH LANE'S ARMS STILL AROUND HER WAIST, SHE BENDS OVER,  
BRINGING HER L HAND UP TO HER FACE, SECRETIVELY SINGING TO  
THE AUDIENCE.)

I guess a girl must be born in the hay  
To know just how to roll in it.

LANE AND EFFIE

(LANE STEPS BACK TAKING EFFIE'S HAND AND TURNING HER UNDER  
HIS L ARM MOVING HER FROM R TO L.)

Oh, you can't make love on a horsehair sofa  
Love is not (ON THE BEATS OF THE MUSIC, LANE SEATS EFFIE, THEN  
HE SITS.)

A parlour game.

But in the room adjacent (LANE POINTS OFF R.)

There's a big four-poster

With a sturdy chippendale frame. (LANE CROSSES HIS ARMS AND  
LOOKS AT EFFIE. SHE TURNS AWAY SHYLY.)

So if you think you've found your turtle dove (LANE PUTS HIS  
L ARM AROUND HER.)

And if you've got the time to make a study of (THEY LEAN  
BACK.)

The satin canopy up above (LOOKING UP.)

Oh, can't you . . .

Can't you make love.

LANE

(RISING.)

In a soft wool jersey  
With a pint of bitter.

EFFIE

(RISING, XR IN FRONT OF LANE.)

If you leave your figure  
Just as nature left it.

LANE

(XL, GESTURING OFF L.)

In the kitchen pantry  
Where there's no one looking.

EFFIE

(LEANING OVER AND GESTURING OFF R.)

Down behind the stable  
With the groom in halter.

LANE AND EFFIE

(LANE SITS ON THE L END OF THE SOFA, EFFIE X AND SITS ON HIS  
LAP FACING R.)

Can't you . . .  
Can't you make love.

(THEY EMBRACE. MUSIC OUT.)

(CURTAIN.)

## Act Two, Scene Two

(THE CURTAIN RISES ON THE CENTRAL STAGE AREA REVEALING THE MANOR HOUSE GARDEN. CECILY IS SEEN ON THE UL SECTION OF THE PLATFORM WATERING THE FLOWERS. ALGY IS DR LOOKING UP TO HER.)

ALGY

Cecily!

CECILY

(LOOKING UP.)

Ernest!

(XL AROUND END OF PLATFORM TO FOUNTAIN AT C. SHE PLACES THE WATERING CAN ON THE FOUNTAIN LEDGE L AND STEPS DOWN TO THE MAIN STAGE LEVEL.)

Uncle Jack told me you have been called back to town.

ALGY

(XUC TO CECILY'S R.)

Oh, I'm not leaving just yet. (WITH OFFICIAL FORMALITY.)  
But in the event I do have to go, I hope, Cecily, that I shall not offend you if I state quite frankly, here and now, that you seem to be in every way the visible personification of absolute perfection.

CECILY

(WITH EQUAL FORMAL GRACE.)

I think your frankness does you great credit, Ernest. If you will allow me, I will copy your remarks into my diary.

(CECILY XLC TO TABLE, PICKS UP DIARY AND BEGINS TO WRITE.)

ALGY

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

(AS ALGY XLC TOWARD CECILY, SHE RETREATS A FEW STEPS L BEHIND THE TABLE PUTTING HER HAND OVER HER OPENED DIARY.)

CECILY

Oh, no! You see, it is simply a very young girl's record of her own thoughts and impressions, and consequently meant for publication. When it appears in volume form I hope you will order a copy. (XL AROUND TABLE TO CHAIR. SITS.) But pray, Ernest, don't stop. I delight in taking down from dictation. I have reached "absolute perfection." You can go on. I am quite ready for more.

ALGY

(SOMEWHAT TAKEN ABACK, XDR OF TABLE TO CECILY'S LEVEL.)

Oh! Must you write it down?

CECILY

(FACTUALLY.)

Of course.

ALGY

(LOOKING FRONT, TRYING TO COMPOSE HIMSELF.)

Well . . . ahem . . . Cecily . . . ahem . . .

CECILY

(IN A DELICATE MOCKERY OF THE STIFF MANNER OF MISS PRISM.)

Oh, don't cough, Ernest. I don't know how to spell a cough. Whatever is the matter with you?

ALGY

(LOOKING AT HER.)

Truthfully, I don't know.

(MUSIC IN AS ALGY XC. CECILY WRITES DOWN EVERY WORD.)

All my life I've been so glib  
Full of dazzling repartee  
Full of sparkling synonyms  
That is, until today.

(ALGY TURNS L TO LOOK AT CECILY.)

For when I dare to think of you

All my metaphors get mixed.  
 When I dare to look at you  
 I stand here silently transfixed.

(TURNS FRONT.)

Lost  
 In your spell.  
 I'm lost  
 As any fool can tell.  
 How I need you beside me.  
 How I need you to gently guide me.

(XULC TO JUST BEHIND R END OF TABLE.)

Lost  
 When you smile.  
 You smile  
 And time stands still awhile.

(ALGY BEGINS X TO BEHIND CECILY. SHE HAS STOPPED WRITING  
 AND IS LISTENING TO HIM.)

For I behold  
 A work of art.  
 I long to speak  
 But how to start  
 When I've just lost my heart.

(ALGY STARTS TO TOUCH HER SHOULDERS. CECILY GENTLY RISES,  
 XS A FEW STEPS C, READING FROM HER DIARY.)

CECILY

Lost  
 In my spell  
 He's lost  
 As even I can tell.

(SLOW XRC, ALGY EASES LC.)

How he needs me beside him.  
 How he needs me to gently guide him.

Lost (XU ON FIRST LEVEL OF PLATFORM AT THE R OF THE FOUNTAIN.)

ALGY

I'm lost (XU ON FIRST LEVEL OF PLATFORM AT THE L OF THE FOUNTAIN.)

CECILY

When I smile

ALGY

In your lovely smile

CECILY

I smile (XRC ON SECOND LEVEL OF PLATFORM.)

ALGY

You smile (XLC ON SECOND LEVEL OF PLATFORM.)

CECILY

And time stands still awhile

ALGY

And time stands still awhile and now

CECILY

For he beholds (XURC ON THIRD LEVEL OF PLATFORM, FACING  
ALGY.)

ALGY

I'm so in love (XULC ON THIRD LEVEL OF PLATFORM, FACING  
HER.)

CECILY

A work of art (X ON FOURTH LEVEL OF PLATFORM ONE STEP C.)

ALGY

I long to speak (X ON FOURTH LEVEL OF PLATFORM ONE STEP C.)

CECILY

He longs to speak (ONE STEP C.)

ALGY

But how to start (ONE STEP C.)



CECILY

But how to start

ALGY

But how to start

CECILY

When he's just lost (XC, ARMS OUT-STRETCHED TO ALGY.)

ALGY

When I've just lost (XC, MEETING CECILY.)

ALGY AND CECILY

My heart

His heart.

(AS THEY EMBRACE, ALGY DELICATELY REMOVES CECILY'S DIARY WITH HIS L HAND, HIDING IT BEHIND HIS BACK.)

(MUSIC OUT.)

ALGY

(TAKING ONE STEP BACK FROM HER.)

Cecily, I am hopelessly in love with you.

CECILY

(FRONT WITH A SLIGHT FROWN.)

Hopelessly doesn't seem to make much sense, does it?

ALGY

(TAKING HER HAND IMPULSIVELY.)

Cecily! Cecily, you will marry me, won't you?

CECILY

Oh course, silly. Why, we have been engaged for the last three months.

ALGY

(RELEASING HER HAND IN WONDER.)

But how did we become engaged?

CECILY

(XLC ON FRONT OF ALGY, TAKING HIS L HAND TO LEAD HIM DOWN TO THE SECOND LEVEL OF THE PLATFORM.)

Well, ever since Uncle Jack confessed that he had a wicked younger brother, you have formed the chief topic of conversation between myself and Miss Prism. And, of course, a man who is talked about is always very attractive. I dare say it was foolish of me, but I fell in love with you, Ernest.

ALGY

Darling!

(ALGY IMPULSIVELY STARTS TO EMBRACE HER. CECILY QUICKLY RAISES HER L HAND IN FRONT OF ALGY'S FACE TO SHOW HIM THE RING ON HER FINGER.)

CECILY

Here is the little ring I bought and promised you I would always wear.

ALGY

(TAKING HER HAND.)

Did I give you this? It's very pretty, isn't it?

CECILY

Yes, you've wonderfully good taste, Ernest. It's the excuse I've always given for your leading such a bad life. (X ON STAGE LEVEL IN CURVE TO DLC BEHIND THE TABLE.) And this is the box in which I keep all your dear letters.

(CECILY PICKS UP A SMALL BOX TIED WITH A RIBBON AND HOLDS IT QUITE LOVINGLY.)

ALGY

(XD TO STAGE LEVEL AT THE R OF THE TABLE.)

My letters? But my own sweet Cecily, I have never written you any letters.

CECILY

(IN GENTLE REPROOF.)

You need hardly remind me of that, Ernest. I remember only too well that I was forced to write your letters for you.

ALGY

(X TO HER R.)

Oh, do let me read them, Cecily.

CECILY

(QUICKLY RETREATING DL OF THE TABLE.)

Oh, I couldn't possibly. They would make you far too conceited. The three you wrote me after I had broken off our engagement are so beautiful, and so badly spelled, that even now I can hardly read them without crying a little. (ON THE VERGE OF TEARS.)

ALGY

But why was our engagement broken off?

CECILY

(QUITE MATTER-OF-FACTLY, XUC TO FOUNTAIN, SITTING ON LEDGE SLIGHTLY TO THE R OF C.)

It would hardly have been a really serious engagement if it hadn't been broken off at least once. But I forgave you before the week was out.

ALGY

(XC TO HER, KNEELING, TAKING HER L HAND, KISSING IT ENTHUSIASTICALLY.)

What a perfect angel you are, Cecily!

CECILY

(FRONT, WITH THE CALM DETACHMENT OF ONE READING WORDS FROM AN OCULIST'S CHART.)

You dear romantic boy!

ALGY

(BESEECHINGLY.)

Cecily, you'll never break off our engagement again, will you?

CECILY

(WITH HER USUAL FORTHRIGHTNESS AS ALGY CONTINUES KISSING HER HAND AND LOWER ARM.)

I don't think I could now that I have actually met you. Besides there is the question of your name.

ALGY

(ABRUPTLY STOPPING THE KISSING, LOOKS UP AT HER.)

My . . . my name?

CECILY

You must not laugh at me, darling, but it has always been a girlish dream of mine to love someone whose name was Ernest.

(ALGY RISES, NERVOUSLY.)

There is something in that name that seems to inspire absolute confidence.

ALGY

(BACKING ONE STEP AWAY FROM HER L OF C.)

But, my dear child, do you mean to say you could not love me if I had some other name?

CECILY

(LOOKING DIRECTLY AT HIM.)

But what name?

ALGY

(WITH FORCED CASUALNESS, TURNING FRONT.)

Oh, any name you like. (BACK TO HER QUICKLY.) Algernon, for instance.

CECILY

But I don't like the name of Algernon.

ALGY

(X TO CECILY, PUTTING ARM AROUND HER, GIVING HER A GENTLE SQUEEZE, THEN XLC.)

Well, my own dear sweet loving little darling, I really can't see why you should object to the name of Algernon. I think it's a rather aristocratic name. Half the chaps who get into bankruptcy court are called Algernon. (TURNING TO HER IN COMPLETE EARNESTNESS.) Cecily, if my name was Algy, couldn't you love me?

CECILY

(RISING, FACING FRONT.)

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.

ALGY

(XC TO CECILY'S L.)

Ahem! Cecily! Your rector here is, I suppose, thoroughly experience in the practice of all the ceremonials of the church.

CECILY

(TURNING TO ALGY IN GREAT ANTICIPATION.)

Oh, yes!

ALGY

I must see him at once on a most important christening.

(DURING THE FOLLOWING SPEECH, ALGY STARTS TO EXIT L, THEN COMES BACK TO KISS CECILY'S HAND. THIS SEQUENCE OF ACTION TAKES PLACE SEVERAL TIMES AS HE TRIES TO LEAVE.)

I mean on most important business! Wait for me here! I'll be right back . . . in no time!

(ALGY FINALLY MANAGES TO EXIT L. CECILY XLC TO R END OF THE TABLE, PICKS UP HER DIARY AND BEGINS TO WRITE CALMLY.)

CECILY

What an impetuous boy he is. I must enter his proposal in my diary.

(AS CECILY WRITES, EFFIE ENTERS R XC.)

EFFIE

A Miss Fairfax has arrived to see Mr. Worthing. On very important business, she says.

CECILY

(CONTINUING TO WRITE.)

Isn't Mr. Worthing in his library?

EFFIE

No, Miss. Mr. Worthing went over in the direction of the Rectory some time ago.

CECILY

(CLOSING HER DIARY AND TURNING TO EFFIE.)

Pray ask the lady to come out here. Mr. Worthing is sure to be back soon. And you can bring tea, Effie.

EFFIE

Yes, Miss.

(WITH A SLIGHT CURTSY, EFFIE EXITS R.)

CECILY

(XC, MUSING.)

Miss Fairfax! I suppose one of the many good elderly women who are associated with Uncle Jack in some of his philanthropic work in London. I don't like women who are interested in philanthropic work. I think it is so forward of them.

(EFFIE ENTERS R.)

EFFIE

Miss Fairfax.



(EFFIE EXITS R AS GWENDOLEN ENTERS R HOLDING DRC.)

CECILY

(XD TO MEET HER WITH EXTENDED HAND.)

Pray let me introduce myself to you. My name is Cecily Cardew.

GWENDOLEN

(EYEING HER CRITICALLY BEFORE UTTERING HER NAME WITH PATRONIZING CONDESCENSION.)

Cecily Cardew. (SHE SHAKES CECILY'S HAND.) What a very sweet name. I may call you Cecily, may I not?

CECILY

With pleasure.

GWENDOLEN

(AS IF HUMORING A CHILD.)

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

CECILY

(NONCOMMITTALLY.)

If you wish.

GWENDOLEN

(RELEASING HER HAND, SPEAKING WITH THE FORCED ENTHUSIASM OF AN ADULT REACHING FOR THE CHILD'S CONFIDENCE.)

Then that is all quite settled, is it not?

CECILY

I hope so.

GWENDOLEN

(AFTER A SLIGHT PAUSE, GWENDOLEN XL TO TABLE PLACING HER DIARY DOWN.)

Cecily, I must confess that Mamma, whose views on education

are remarkably strict, has brought me up to be extremely short-sighted; it is part of her system; so do you mind my looking at you through my glasses?

(GWENDOLEN TURNS TO CECILY, RAISING HER LORGNETTE TO HER EYES.)

CECILY

(SMILING.)

Oh, not at all, Gwendolen. I am very fond of being looked at.

GWENDOLEN

(AFTER EXAMINING CECILY CAREFULLY FOR A MOMENT.)

So am I. (XC TO CECILY.) Something tells me that we are going to be great friends. I like you already more than I can say. My very first impressions of people are never wrong.

(MUSIC IN.)

CECILY

(SWEETLY.)

No?

GWENDOLEN

(SWEETLY.)

No!

(XDLC.)

My very first impression is always right,  
And I confess your sweet expression won me on sight.  
You see, from Liverpool to Gloucester, I'm quite a threat.

(LIFTING HER LORGNETTE, LOOKING AT CECILY.)

For I can spot the worst imposter through my lorgnette.

(XDL.)

A lady can always tell another.  
Breeding invariably shows.  
The earmarks, according to my mother,  
Are the tilt of a teacup (GESTURE OF TEACUP AND SAUCER.)  
A neatly smothered hiccup. (GESTURE OF COVERING A HICCUP.)

(GWENDOLEN XC TO CECILY'S L.)

Yes, my very first impression is most correct.  
 And since no sign of indiscretion do I detect (EYEING HER.)  
 You may be my friend, dear,  
 And you may call me Gwen, dear.  
 For my very first impression shows great insight,  
 It's bright,  
 What's more, it's right.

CECILY

(XDRC, TEASING GWENDOLEN WHO DOES NOT KNOW SHE IS BEING  
 TEASED.)

Oh, I've been well-tutored by my guardian.  
 I'd know a lady anywhere.  
 She's far more Victorian than Edwardian,  
 For her manner is stilted (BECOMES STIFF.)  
 Her nose is slightly tilted. (LIFTS NOSE IN THE AIR, POINT-  
 ING TO IT.)

(GWENDOLEN XDC.)

GWENDOLEN AND CECILY

Yes, my very first impression is most correct.  
 And since no sign of indiscretion do I detect.

GWENDOLEN

(XR TO CECILY'S L.)

You may be my friend, dear,  
 And you may call me Gwen, dear.

GWENDOLEN AND CECILY

For my very first impression is quite air-tight,  
 It's bright,  
 What's more . . .

(THEY GIGGLE.)

It's right.

(MUSIC OUT.)

GWENDOLEN

(XING UC TO FOUNTAIN, IDLY LOOKING AROUND.)

You are here on a short visit, I suppose?

CECILY

Oh, no. I live here.

GWENDOLEN

(SEVERELY TURNING DOWNSTAGE, SITTING ON THE L SIDE OF THE FOUNTAIN LEDGE.)

Really! Your mother, no doubt, or some female relative of advanced years, resides here also?

CECILY

(XLC TO TABLE.)

No. My dear guardian has the arduous task of looking after me.

(AFTER PLACING DIARY ON TABLE, CECILY TURNS TP TO GWENDOLEN.)

I am Mr. Worthing's ward.

GWENDOLEN

(RAISING HER EYEBROWS.)

He never mentioned that he had a ward. How secretive of him. He grows more interesting hourly. I am not sure, however, that the news inspires me with feelings of unmixed delight.

(RISING, XD TO CECILY'S R.)

I am very fond of you, Cecily. I have liked you ever since I met you. But now that I know you are Mr. Worthing's ward, I cannot help expressing a wish you were . . . well, just a little older and not quite so alluring. In fact, if I may speak candidly . . .

CECILY

(SIMPLY BUT NOT ARTLESSLY.)

Pray do. I think that whenever one has anything unpleasant

to say one should always be quite candid.

GWENDOLEN

(TURNING FULL FRONT, WEIGHING HER WORDS.)

Well, to speak with perfect candour, Cecily, I wish that you were fully forty-two and more than usually plain for your age. Ernest has a strong, upright nature. Disloyalty would be as impossible to him as deception. However, . . .

CECILY

(MOVING IN SLIGHTLY TO GWENDOLEN.)

I beg your pardon, Gwendolen . . . Gwen . . . did you say Ernest?

GWENDOLEN

Yes.

CECILY

Oh, but it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing who is my guardian. It is his elder brother.

GWENDOLEN

(LOOKING STRAIGHT AT CECILY.)

Ernest never mentioned that he had a brother.

CECILY

I am sorry to say they have not been on good terms for a long time.

GWENDOLEN

(RELIEVED, XRC TO ROCKING CHAIR.)

Ah! That accounts for it. Cecily, you have lifted a load from my mind. It would have been terrible if any cloud had come across a friendship like ours. (SITTING.) Of course, you are quite, quite sure that it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing who is your guardian?

CECILY

Quite sure.

(CECILY PICKS UP HER DIARY FROM THE TABLE, TURNING FULL FRONT, CLUTCHING IT TO HER BOSOM, WISTFULLY.)

In fact, I am going to be his!

GWENDOLEN

(INQUIRINGLY.)

I beg your pardon?

CECILY

(RATHER SHY AND CONFIDINGLY, XR TO GWENDOLEN'S L.)

Dearest Gwendolen, there is no reason why I should make a secret of it to you. Mr. Ernest Worthing and I are engaged to be married.

GWENDOLEN

(QUITE POLITELY.)

My darling Cecily, I think there must be some slight error. Mr. Ernest Worthing is engaged to me.

CECILY

(BACKING ONE STEP C, VERY POLITELY.)

I am afraid you must be under some misconception. Ernest proposed to me exactly ten minutes ago.

(CECILY SHOWS HER DIARY. GWENDOLEN EXAMINES IT CAREFULLY THROUGH HER LORGNETTE.)

GWENDOLEN

It is certainly curious, for he asked me to be his wife yesterday afternoon at five-thirty.

(RISES, XLC BRISKLY, PICKS UP DIARY OFF THE TABLE, OPENS IT AND HANDS IT TO CECILY AT C.)

If you would care to verify the incident, pray do so. I never travel without my diary. (FRONT.) One should always have something sensational to read on the train. (RETRIEVING HER DIARY FROM CECILY.) I am so sorry, dear Cecily, but I am afraid I have the prior claim.



CECILY

(XRC, SPEAKING WITH KINDLY SOLICITUDE, BUT SERVED AT SOMEWHAT LESS THAN ROOM TEMPERATURE.)

Dear Gwendolen, I feel bound to point out that since Ernest proposed to you he clearly has changed his mind.

GWENDOLEN

(MOVING ONE STEP TOWARD CECILY, MEDITATIVELY.)

If the poor fellow has been entrapped into any foolish promise I shall consider it my duty to rescue him at once.

CECILY

(MOVING ONE STEP BACK TOWARD GWENDOLEN, THOUGHTFULLY AND SADLY.)

Whatever unfortunate entanglement my dear boy may have got into, I will never reproach him with if after we are married.

GWENDOLEN

(XC, WITH HAUGHTY ANGER MASKED IN COOL CONTEMPT.)

Do you allude to me, Miss Cardew, as an entanglement?

CECILY

(XC FACING GWENDOLEN, WITH MOUNTING IRRITATION SPICED WITH PROVOKING POLITENESS.)

Do you suggest, Miss Fairfax, that I entrapped Ernest into an engagement? How dare you! This is no time for wearing the shallow mask of manners. (FRONT.) When I see a spade I call it a spade!

GWENDOLEN

(TURNING FULL FRONT ALSO, SATIRICALLY SPEAKING IN A VOICE AS FROM DISTANT OLYMPUS.)

I am glad to say that I have never a spade.

(EFFIE ENTERS DR WITH TEA. THE PRESENCE OF THE SERVANT EXERCISES A RESTRAINING INFLUENCE ON BOTH GIRLS. EFFIE XUL BEHIND TABLE, PLACING THE TEA TRAY ON THE TABLE.)

EFFIE

Shall I lay tea here as usual, miss?

CECILY

(STERNLY, IN A CALM VOICE.)

Yes, as usual.

(LARGE GESTURE INDICATING CHAIR L.)

May I offer you some tea, Miss Fairfax?

GWENDOLEN

(XL BELOW TABLE TO CHAIR, WITH ELABORATE POLITENESS.)

Thank you. (SITS.) Detestable girl, but I require tea!

CECILY

(X TO R END OF TABLE, SWEETLY.)

Sugar?

GWENDOLEN

(SUPERCILIOUSLY.)

No, thank you. Sugar is not fashionable any more.

(CECILY LOOKS ANGRILY AT GWENDOLEN, THEN DROPS FOUR LUMPS OF SUGAR INTO THE CUP.)

CECILY

(SEVERELY.)

Muffins or bread and butter?

GWENDOLEN

(IN A BORED MANNER.)

Bread and butter, please. Muffins are rarely seen at the best houses nowadays.

(CECILY ANGRILY PUTS A MUFFIN ON GWENDOLEN'S PLATE. SHE PICKS UP THE PLATE AND CUP AND SAUCER AND HANDS THEM TO EFFIE.)

CECILY

(TO EFFIE.)

Hand that to Miss Fairfax.

(EFFIE PUTS THE PLATE AND THE CUP AND SAUCER DOWN ON THE TABLE IN FRONT OF GWENDOLEN WHO IS FACING FRONT. CECILY CROSSES HER ARMS AND FACES ONE QUARTER R OBVIOUSLY QUITE PLEASED WITH HERSELF. GWENDOLEN PICKS UP THE CUP AND SAUCER AND TASTES HER TEA, MAKES A GRIMACE. SEE FIGURE 7. SHE REACHES FOR THE BREAD AND BUTTER, SEES THAT IT IS A MUFFIN, AND FORCIBLY PUTS DOWN HER PLATE. SHE RISES IN INDIGNATION.)

GWENDOLEN

(WITH A POLITELY RESTRAINED NOTE OF CRISIS IN HER VOICE.)

You have filled my yea with lumps of sugar. And 'though I distinctly asked for bread and butter, you have given me (PAUSE, BARELY ABLE TO UTTER THE WORD.) muffins! (SPOKEN THROUGH GRITTED TEETH.) I am known for the sweetness of my nature, but I warn you that you may go too far.

(AS JACK ENTERS DR, EFFIE QUICKLY EXITS UR.)

JACK

(XC.)

Gwendolen, darling! What a marvelous surprise!

(GWENDOLEN XC TO MEET JACK. HE STARTS TO KISS HER BUT SHE HOLDS HIM OFF.)

GWENDOLEN

A moment! May I ask if you are engaged to this young lady? (POINTING TO CECILY.)

JACK

(LAUGHINGLY.)

To dear little Cecily? Of course not!



FIGURE 7

GWENDOLEN

Thank you. You may.

(GWENDOLEN OFFERS HER R CHEEK. JACK KISSES IT AND PUTS HIS ARM AROUND HER WAIST.)

CECILY

(VERY SWEETLY, X DOWN TO GWENDOLEN'S L.)

I knew there must be some misunderstanding, Miss Fairfax. The gentleman whose arm is around your waist is my dear guardian, Mr. John Worthing.

(JACK SMILES MEEKLY AS GWENDOLEN LOOKS CONFOUNDEDLY AT CECILY.)

GWENDOLEN

I beg your pardon?

CECILY

(DELIGHTED.)

This is Uncle Jack.

GWENDOLEN

(RECOILING FROM HIS EMBRACE, MOVING SLIGHTLY L.)

Jack! Oh!

(ALGY ENTERS DR. SEE FIGURE 8.)

CECILY

(XDRC TO MEET ALGY.)

Here is Ernest!

ALGY

(OBLIVIOUS TO ANYONE ELSE BUT CECILY.)

My own love!

(HE STARTS TO KISS HER BUT SHE HOLDS HIM BACK.)

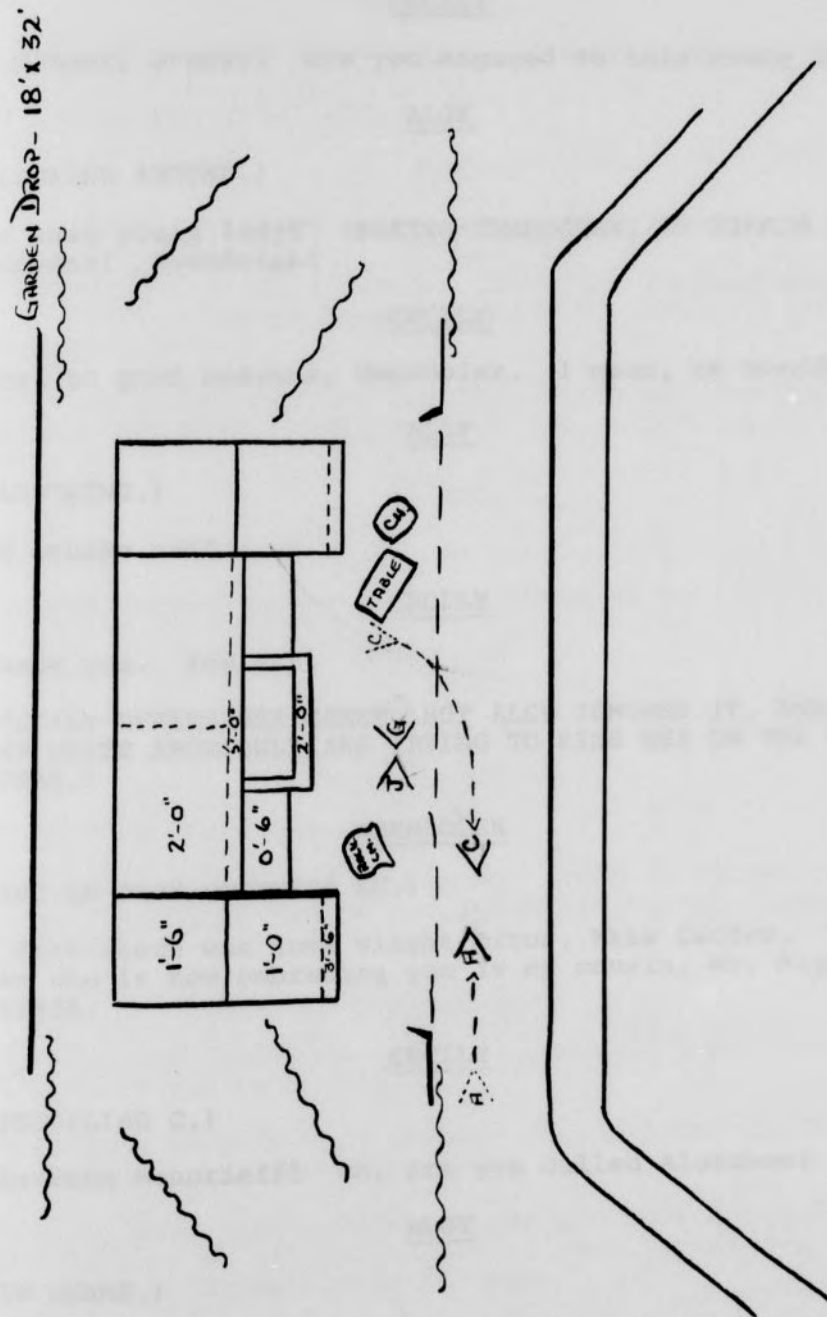


FIGURE 8

SCALE - 1/8" = 1'-0"  
 ACT I, Sc. v; ACT II, Sc. ii-iv  
 ERNEST IN LOVE.



CECILY

A moment, Ernest! Are you engaged to this young lady?

ALGY

(LOOKING AROUND.)

To what young lady? (SEEING GWENDOLEN, IN HORROR.) Good heavens! Gwendolen!

CECILY

Yes, to good heavens, Gwendolen. I mean, to Gwendolen.

ALGY

(LAUGHING.)

Of course not!

CECILY

Thank you. You may.

(CECILY OFFERS HER CHEEK, BUT ALGY IGNORES IT, EMBRACING HER QUITE AMOROUSLY AND TRYING TO KISS HER ON THE MOUTH INSTEAD.)

GWENDOLEN

(XDC AS JACK COUNTERS LC.)

I felt there was some slight error, Miss Cardew. The gentleman who is now embracing you is my cousin, Mr. Algernon Moncrieff.

CECILY

(RECOILING C.)

Algernon Moncrieff! Oh, are you called Algernon?

ALGY

(IN SHAME.)

I cannot deny it.

GWENDOLEN

(STILL IN A VOICE OF DISBELIEF, SHE TURNS UP TO JACK.)

Is your name really Jack?

JACK

(PROUDLY TURNING ONE QUARTER L, WITH NAPOLEONIC GESTURE.)

I could deny it if I liked. (FRONT.) I could deny anything if I liked. But my name certainly is Jack. It has been Jack for years.

(THE TWO GIRLS MOVE TOWARDS EACH OTHER AND PUT THEIR ARMS AROUND EACH OTHERS WAISTS AS IF FOR PROTECTION.)

CECILY

(TO GWENDOLEN.)

A gross deception has been practiced on both of us.

GWENDOLEN

My poor wounded Cecily!

CECILY

My sweet wronged Gwendolen!

(THEY EMBRACE AND THE MEN GROAN. JACK XS AROUND THE TABLE TO ULC. ALGY XS AROUND ROCKING CHAIR TO URC, LEANING ON STONE WALL.)

GWENDOLEN

Mr. Worthing, there is just one question I would like to be allowed to put to you.

(THE GIRLS RELEASE EACH OTHER. CECILY BACKS SLIGHTLY R AS GWENDOLEN XLC ENDING ONE QUARTER L.)

Where is your brother Ernest? We are both engaged to be married to him, so it is a matter of some importance to us where your brother Ernest is at present.

(SLOWLY AND HESITATINGLY, JACK XC BETWEEN THE GIRLS WHO TURN THREE-QUARTERS UP TO HIM AS HE SPEAKS THEIR NAMES.)

JACK

Gwendolen! Cecily! It is very painful for me to be forced to speak the truth. It is the first time in my life that I have ever been reduced to such a position. However, I must admit quite frankly that I have no brother Ernest. I have no brother at all!

GWENDOLEN AND CECILY

(GREATLY SURPRISED, LEANING IN SLIGHTLY TOWARD JACK.)

No brother at all?

JACK

(CHEERILY.)

None! I never had a brother in my life and I certainly have not the smallest intention of ever having one in the future.

GWENDOLEN

(RUEFULLY TURNING TO CECILY.)

I am afraid it's quite clear, Cecily, that neither of us is engaged to be married to anyone.

CECILY

(TURNING FRONT, SLOWLY.)

It is not a very pleasant position for a young girl to suddenly find herself in. Is it?

GWENDOLEN

(XRC TO CECILY, TAKING HER ARM.)

Come. You will call me sister, won't you?

CECILY

(SLOWLY AND SERIOUSLY.)

Certainly.

(THEY EXIT DR, ARM IN ARM. JACK XU TO ALGY'S L, COLDLY.)

JACK

This guastly state of things is what you call Bunburying,  
I suppose?

ALGY

(WHO OBVIOUSLY ENJOYED THE WHOLE SCENE, X BELOW JACK AND  
THE TABLE TO DL, SITTING IN CHAIR L. SPEAKING ENTHUSIAS-  
TICALLY. SEE FIGURE 9.)

Yes, and a perfectly wonderful Bunbury it is too! The  
most wonderful Bunbury I have ever had in my life!

(MUSIC IN.)

(ALGY TAKES AND BITES INTO A MUFFIN.)

(IN THIS SCENE ALGY AND JACK BEHAVE WITH A CAREFULLY DIS-  
CIPLINED GREEDINESS IN WHICH ALGY CONSUMES FOOD AS RAPIDLY  
AS PERFECT DECORUM WILL ALLOW: THEIR BEARING TOWARDS EACH  
OTHER IS STIFFLY RESERVED AND FINELY EDGED WITH A POINTED  
AND POISONOUS POLITENESS.)

JACK

(X TO R OF TABLE.)

How you can calmly sit there eating muffins  
I can't make out.

ALGY

It's simple. I'm hungry.

JACK

Can't you see we're in a real dilemma?  
You selfish lout!

ALGY

But eating consoles me.

(RISES, X UPSTAGE OF TABLE OFFERING JACK A CUP OF TEA AND  
A MUFFIN.)

You can like it or lump it.  
But a bit of crumpet  
And a spot of tea

GARDEN DROP - 18' X 32'

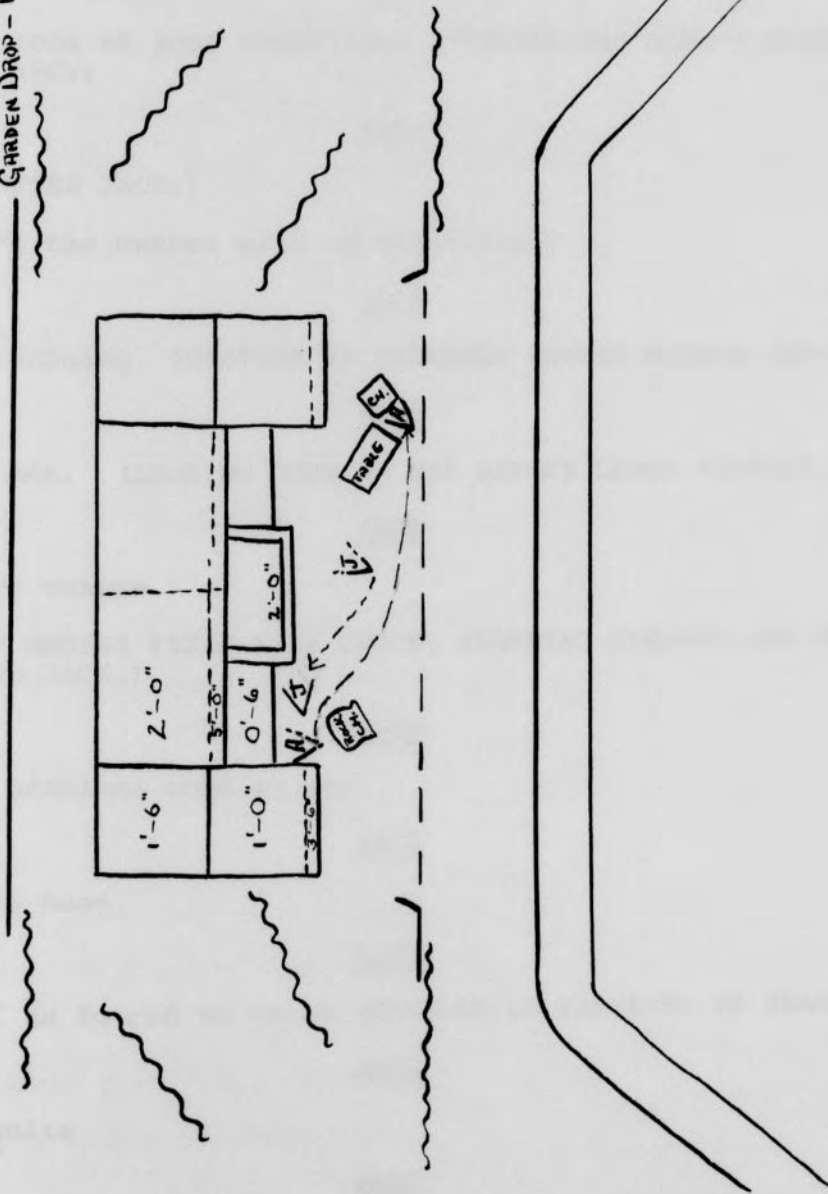


FIGURE 9

SCALE -  $\frac{1}{8}'' = 1'-0''$   
 ACT I, Sec. v; ACT II, Sec. ii-iv  
 ERNEST IN LOWE.

Will free your tensions.

JACK

And make you stout.

Just look at your waist-line. (INDICATING ALGY'S MIDDLE,  
THEN XRC.)

ALGY

(XC AFTER JACK.)

What's the matter with my waist-line?

JACK

It's bulging. (GESTURE OF EXTREMELY ROTUND MIDDLE AREA.)

ALGY

It's not. (LOOKING DOWN AT HIS RATHER LARGE STOMACH.)

JACK

You're coarse.

(ALGY BEGINS PIXIE-LIKE DANCE, SNAPPING FINGERS AND MOVING  
AROUND JACK.)

ALGY

When problems come my way,

JACK

You're mean.

ALGY

And I am forced to think (GESTURE OF POINTING TO HEAD.)

JACK

And quite

ALGY

I turn down everything (PUTTING BOTH HANDS OUT IN FRONT OF  
HIM.)



JACK

Obscene.

ALGY

Except for food and drink.

(X UPSTAGE BEHIND TABLE.)

A cake (TAKES ONE AND EATS IT QUICKLY.)

JACK

(X UP TO ALGY'S R.)

Whatever shall we do?

ALGY

(OBLIVIOUS TO JACK.)

A sweet (TAKES ANOTHER BITE.)

JACK

(TRYING TO GET ALGY'S ATTENTION.)

We've got to think this through.

ALGY

(IN PERFECT ECSTASY.)

I love

JACK

I wish you'd get a clue.

ALGY

(X AROUND TO CHAIR L, SIT.)

To eat. (TAKES ANOTHER BITE.)

JACK

But you just eat.

ALGY

It helps.

JACK

(FRONT.)

I wish you'd go.

ALGY

I'd rather stay. (TAKES ANOTHER BITE.)

JACK

(XDC.)

It's all very well for you to sit there eating but . . .

Will Gwendolen forgive me?  
That's the question.

ALGY

(SIMULTANEOUSLY.)

Why don't you go and ask her  
Just that question?

JACK

(XR TO ROCKING CHAIR.)

That is the question.  
I hope you get a case of indigestion.

ALGY

(SIMULTANEOUSLY.)

Oh, nothing interferes with my digestion.

JACK

Sever indigestion.

(XC, PLEADING WITH ALGY.)

Algernon, I have already told you to go. (XING BACK TO THE

ROCKING CHAIR.) I don't want you here. (TURNING TO FACE ALGY L.) Why don't you go?

ALGY

(WITH CUP AND SAUCER IN HAND.)

I haven't quite finished my tea yet. (PLACING THE CUP AND SAUCER ON THE TABLE.) Besides, there is still one muffin left.

(ALGY QUICKLY POPS THE MUFFIN INTO HIS MOUTH AND SITS BACK IN THE CHAIR ENJOYING EVERY MORSEL. JACK COLLAPSES IN THE ROCKING CHAIR R.)

(MUSIC OUT.)

(GWENDOLEN AND CECILY ENTER R UPSTAGE OF THE ROCKING CHAIR, XING TO C WITH CECILY L AND GWENDOLEN R OF C. SEE FIGURE 10.)

GWENDOLEN

(AS SHE CLEARS HER THROAT, BOTH MEN START AND QUICKLY RISE TO FACE THE GIRLS. GWENDOLEN TAKES ONE STEP DOWNSTAGE AND SPEAKS SOLEMNLY.)

Mr. Worthing, I have something very particular to ask you. Much depends on your reply.

CECILY

(TAKING ONE STEP DOWNSTAGE.)

Mr. Moncrieff, kindly answer me the following question. Why did you pretend to be my guardian's brother?

(ALGY LOOKS QUICKLY TO JACK WHO GESTURES ENCOURAGINGLY TO HIM.)

ALGY

(TAKING ONE STEP TOWARD CECILY.)

In order that I might have an opportunity of meeting you.

CECILY

(AS AN ASIDE TO GWENDOLEN.)

That certainly seems a satisfactory explanation, does it not?



GWENDOLEN

(TARTLY.)

Yes, dear, if you can believe him.

CECILY

I don't. But that does not affect the wonderful beauty of his answer.

GWENDOLEN

True. In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity, is the vital thing. (TURNING TO JACK.) Mr. Worthing, what explanation can you offer me for pretending to have a brother?

(JACK LOOKS TO ALGY WHO GIVE HIM AN ENGOURAGING GESTURE.)

JACK

(TAKING ONE STEP TOWARD GWENDOLEN, SPEAKING ARDENTLY.)

That I might have an opportunity of coming up to town to see you as often as possible.

GWENDOLEN

(TURNING IN TO CECILY.)

Their explanations appear to be quite satisfactory, especially Mr. Worthing's. That seems to me to have the stamp of truth upon it. Do you think we should forgive them?

CECILY

(HASTILY.)

Yes!

(THEN RECONSIDERING, SHE TURNS BACK TO GWENDOLEN QUICKLY.)

I mean no!

GWENDOLEN

True! I had forgotten. There are principles at stake that one cannot surrender. Which of us should tell them?

CECILY

(INSPIRED.)

Could we not both speak at the same time?

GWENDOLEN

An excellent idea! I nearly always speak at the same time as other people. Will you take the time from me?

CECILY

Certainly.

(GWENDOLEN BEATS TIME WITH HER R HAND AS THE TWO GIRLS XDC THREE STEPS.)

(MUSIC IN.)

GWENDOLEN AND CECILY

Your Christian names are still an insuperable barrier. That is all!

JACK AND ALGY

(JACK XS TO GWENDOLEN'S R AND ALGY XS TO CECILY'S L.)

Our Christian names? Is that all? But we are going to be christened this afternoon.

GWENDOLEN

(TURNING TO JACK, GRASPING HIS HAND.)

For my sake you are prepared to do this terrible thing?

JACK

(FRONT, SOLEMNLY.)

I am.

CECILY

(TURNING TO ALGY IN LOVING INNOCENCE.)

To please me you are ready to face this fearful ordeal?



ALGY

(FRONT, HEROICALLY.)

I am!

GWENDOLEN

(TURNING TO CECILY, SIGHING IN AWE AND WONDER.)

How absurd to talk of the equality of the sexes! Where questions of self-sacrifice are concerned men are infinitely beyond us.

JACK AND ALGY

(SHAKING HANDS BEHIND THE GIRLS QUICKLY, SPEAKING WITH SIMPLE MODESTY.)

We are!

(JACK AND GWENDOLEN MOVE IN A PAVANE FASHION DRC. CECILY AND ALGY MOVE IN A PAVANE FASHION DLC.)

GWENDOLEN

(LOVINGLY TO JACK.)

I had doubts but I surely will crush them.  
For I know now that you are sincere.

CECILY

(LOVINGLY TO ALGY.)

I had fears but aside I will brush them,  
Now that your good intentions are clear.

GWENDOLEN

I was much overcome as I listened  
To your promise of changing your name.

CECILY

It takes courage and strength to be christened.

(FULL FRONT.)

For it's cold, and it's damp, so they claim.

GWENDOLEN AND CECILY

(BOTH GIRLS FACE FULL FRONT. THE GENTLEMEN MOVE SLIGHTLY DOWNSTAGE OF THE GIRLS INTO A THREE-QUARTER POSITION, JACK DR, ALGY DL.)

So we stand here before you surrendered  
And beside you as long as we live.  
In return for the trust you've engendered,  
Our eternal devotion we'll give.

(SUNG IN A ROUND.)

Yes, I pledge my devotion eternally,  
Fall and winter and summer and vernally.  
And if your love should falter  
Even that would not alter,

(DURING THE FOLLOWING THREE LINES OF THE SONG, JACK AND GWENDOLEN LEAD OFF XING ULC, JACK SEATING GWENDOLEN ON THE FOUNTAIN LEDGE JUST TO THE L OF C AND PLACING HIMSELF ON HER L STANDING FULL FRONT. ALGY AND CECILY FOLLOW TWO BEATS LATER SING URC, CECILY SITTING ON THE FOUNTAIN LEDGE JUST TO THE R OF C WITH ALGY STANDING TO HER R, FULL FRONT. SEE FIGURE 11.)

My eternal devotion to you, my dear.  
My eternal devotion to you.  
My eternal devotion to you.

(ALL FOUR CHARACTERS ASSUME A FAMILY PORTRAIT Demeanor.)

JACK AND ALGY

(SUNG IN A ROUND.)

Yes, I pledge my devotion eternally  
Fall and winter and summer and vernally.  
And if your love should falter  
Even that would not alter  
My eternal devotion to you, my dear.  
My eternal devotion to you.  
My eternal devotion to you.

GWENDOLEN AND CECILY

(SUNG SIMULTANEOUSLY WITH THE GENTLEMEN'S VERSE.)

My lasting devotion  
I pledge to my love.  
I pledge to my love.



FIGURE 11

My deepest emotion.  
I pledge to my  
My eternal devotion to you.

(AS THE SONG ENDS, ALGY AND JACK LEAN OVER AND KISS CECILY AND GWENDOLEN ON THE CHEEK.)

(MUSIC OUT.)

(EFFIE ENTERS R, COUGHS DISCREETLY.)

EFFIE

Lady Bracknell.

JACK

(STARTLED.)

Good heavens!

(LADY BRACKNELL SWEEPS IN DR XING RC. EFFIE EXITS UPSTAGE OF LADY BRACKNELL AS SHE ENTERS.)

LADY BRACKNELL

(WITH THE UTMOST SEVERITY.)

Gwendolen! What does this mean?

GWENDOLEN

(RISING, WITH RESPECTFUL RESOLUTENESS, TAKING JACK'S HAND.)

Merely that I am engaged to be married to Mr. Worthing.

LADY BRACKNELL

(SWEEPING L ENTIRELY UNAFFECTED BY THE REVELATION AND CONTINUING WITH AN AIR OF AUTHORITY EXPRESSED IN AN ORACULAR MANNER. SHE XS IN AN ARC MOVING FROM R TO L DOWNSTAGE, THEN XS UP TO BEHIND THE CHAIR L FACING C PROFILE.)

Come here!

(LADY BRACKNELL INDICATES THE CHAIR WITH HER FEATHERED FAN.)

Sit down! Sit down immediately!

(GWENDOLEN XL TO CHAIR AND SITS, POUTING. JACK FOLLOWS HER TO

A POSITION DC. LADY BRACKNELL XLC TO IN FRONT OF THE TABLE.)

Apprised, sir, of my daughter's sudden flight by her trusty maid whose confidence I secured by means of a small coin, I followed her at once by luggage train. You will clearly understand that all communication between yourself and my daughter must cease immediately from this moment. On this point, as indeed on all points, I am firm.

JACK

(BRAVELY.)

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

LADY BRACKNELL

(CASUALLY.)

You are nothing of the kind, sir.

(LADY BRACKNELL SWEEPS TO RC IN FRONT OF JACK WHO COUNTERS BY XING ULC TO BEHIND TABLE LOOKING FORLORNLY AT GWENDOLEN.)

And now, as regards Algernon. Algernon!

ALGY

(MEEKLY TAKING ONE STEP DOWNSTAGE.)

Yes, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL

Is this the house in which your invalid friend Mr. Burbury resides?

ALGY

(STAMMERING, REACHES BACK AND TAKES CECILY'S HAND, THEN XDC.)

Oh, no! Bunbury doesn't live here. Bunbury is somewhere else at present.

(ALGY LOOKS FIRST TO CECILY THEN TO LADY BRACKNELL THEN BACK TO CECILY.)

In fact, Bunbury is dead!

(THERE IS A GENERAL REACTION OF SURPRISE REGISTERING THROUGH-

OUT THE OTHER CHARACTERS ON STAGE.)

LADY BRACKNELL

(IN DEPRECATORY SURPRISE AS IF ANYONE COULD DARE TAKE SO DECISIVE A STEP WITHOUT CONSULTING HER.)

Dead! His death must have been extremely sudden. What did he die of?

ALGY

(PLACATINGLY.)

Bunbury? Oh, he was quite exploded. I mean he was found out. I mean the doctors found out that Bunbury could not live . . . (PAUSE.) so Bunbury died.

LADY BRACKNELL

(WITH GREAT DEFINITENESS.)

He seems to have had great confidence in the opinion of his physicians.

(XING AROUND BEHIND ROCKING CHAIR, FACING THE COUPLES. INDICATING CECILY WITH HER FAN.)

Mr. Worthing, who is that young person whose hand my nephew is now holding in what seems to me a peculiarly unnecessary manner?

JACK

(STIFFLY.)

That lady is Miss Cecily Cardew, my ward.

(LADY BRACKNELL NODS COLDLY TO CECILY, WHO CURTSIES.)

ALGY

(TURNING IN TO CECILY TAKING BOTH OF HER HANDS IN HIS.)

I am engaged to Cecily, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL

(WITH A SHIVER, TAKES ONE STEP DOWNSTAGE.)

I do not know whether there is anything peculiarly exciting in the air in this particular part of Hertfordshire, but the num-



ber of engagements that go on seems to me considerably above the proper average that statistics have laid down for our guidance.

(LADY BRACKNELL XS AROUND AND SITS IN ROCKING CHAIR, TAKING OUT HER PEN AND PAPER. ALGY AND CECILY XUC TO FOUNTAIN AND SIT, ALGY ON CECILY'S R. SEE FIGURE 12.)

I think some preliminary enquiry on my part would not be out of place.

(WITH HER MOST ANNIHILATING GLARE.)

Mr. Worthing, is Miss Cardew at all connected with any of the larger railway stations in London?

JACK

(LOOKING PERFECTLY FURIOUS BUT RESTRAINING HIMSELF, XC, SPEAKING IN A CLEAR COLD VOICE.)

Miss Cardew is the granddaughter of the late Mr. Thomas Cardew. (ALMOST IN A CHANT.) I have in my possession, you will be pleased to hear, (FRONT.) certificates of her birth, baptism, whooping cough, registration, vaccination, and the measles; (TO LADY BRACKNELL.) both the German and the English variety.

LADY BRACKNELL

(PUTTING DOWN HER PEN AND PAPER.)

Ah! A life crowded with incident, I see; though perhaps somewhat too exciting for a young girl. (RISING.) Gwendolen! The time approaches for our departure. As a matter of form, Mr. Worthing, I had better ask you if Miss Cardew has any little fortune?

JACK

(WITH MALICIOUS CASUALNESS.)

Oh, about a hundred and thirty thousand pounds. That is all. Good day, Lady Bracknell.

(JACK CROSSES HIS ARMS AND SMUGGLY XS TO THE R OF THE TABLE.)

LADY BRACKNELL

(SLO LY SITTING DOWN.)

A hundred and thrity thousand pounds! (TURNING TO CECILY.)

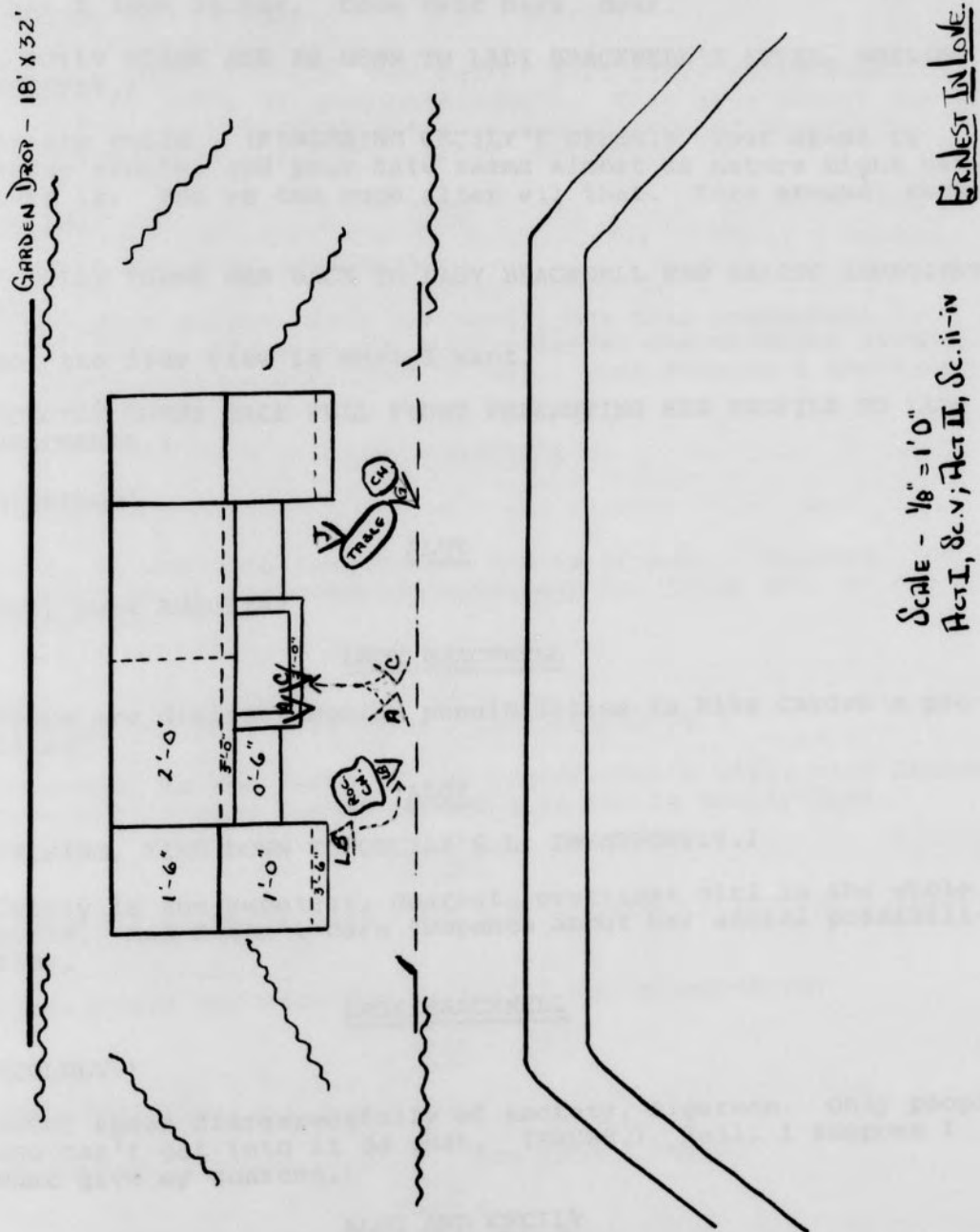


FIGURE 12

Miss Cardew seems to me a most attractive young lady now that I look at her. Come over here, dear.

(CECILY RISES AND XS DOWN TO LADY BRACKNELL'S LEVEL, SMILING SWEETLY.)

Pretty child. (FINGERING CECILY'S DRESS.) Your dress is sadly simple, and your hair seems almost as nature might have left it. But we can soon alter all that. Turn around, sweet child.

(CECILY TURNS HER BACK TO LADY BRACKNELL WHO REACTS IMPATIENTLY.)

No, the side view is what I want.

(CECILY TURNS BACK FULL FRONT PRESENTING HER PROFILE TO LADY BRACKNELL.)

Algernon!

ALGY

Yes, Aunt Augusta?

LADY BRACKNELL

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

ALGY

(RISING, XING DOWN TO CECILY'S L, IMPETUOUSLY.)

Cecily is the sweetest, dearest, prettiest girl in the whole world. And I don't care twopence about her social possibilities.

LADY BRACKNELL

(COLDLY.)

Never speak disrespectfully of society, Algernon. Only people who can't get into it do that. (PAUSE.) Well, I suppose I must give my consent.

ALGY AND CECILY

(HUMBLY.)

Oh, thank you, Aunt Augusta.

(THEY EMBRACE AND XURC TO FIRST LEVEL BESIDE FOUNTAIN.)

LADY BRACKNELL

(NOTING THE EMBRACE.)

The marriage, I think, had better take place quite soon. I am not in favor of long engagements. They give people the opportunity of finding out each other's character before marriage which I think is never advisable.

JACK

(TAKING ONE STEP DOWNSTAGE.)

I beg your pardon, Lady Bracknell, but this engagement is quite out of the question. Miss Cardew cannot marry without my consent until she comes of age. That consent I absolutely decline to give.

LADY BRACKNELL

(RATHER BORED.)

Well, it won't be long before she is of age, I imagine. So I don't think her guardian's consent is, after all, of any importance.

JACK

(TAKING ONE MORE STEP TOWARD LADY BRACKNELL.)

According to the terms of her grandfather's will, Miss Cardew does not legally become of age till she is thirty-five.

CECILY

(SUDDENLY BREAKING AWAY FROM ALGY'S EMBRACE, BACKING SLIGHTLY C.)

Algy, could you wait for me till I was thirty-five?

ALGY

(PASSIONATELY.)

Oh course, I could, Cecily. You know I could.

CECILY

Yes, I felt it instinctively, but I couldn't wait all that time.

(CECILY XR ON THE SECOND LEVEL OF THE PLATFORM.) I hate waiting even five minutes for anybody. (FRONT.) It always makes me rather cross.

LADY BRACKNELL

(BRIGHTLY.)

My dear Mr. Worthing, as Miss Cardew states positively that she cannot wait till she is thirty-five, (FRONT.) a remark which I am bound to say seems to show a somewhat impatient nature, (TO JACK.) I beg you to reconsider your decision.

JACK

(XC.)

But my dear Lady Bracknell, the matter is entirely in your own hands. I will gladly allow your nephew to form an alliance with my ward the moment you consent to my marriage with Gwendolen.

LADY BRACKNELL

(RISING AND DRAWING HERSELF UP.)

That is quite out of the question.

(MUSIC IN.)

I've told you, a handbag (XDRC.)  
Is not a proper mother.

ALL

Not a proper mother.  
Not a proper mother.

LADY BRACKNELL

So this passion within you  
You'll simply have to smother  
Or you'd better find another mother soon.

ALL

Could you kindly advise him (GWENDOLEN RISES, ALONG WITH ALGY AND CECILY POINTING TO JACK, WHO GESTURES INQUIRINGLY.)  
We hate to be a bother.

LADY BRACKNELL

I suggest he find a father rather soon.

CECILY AND ALGY

(X DOWNSTAGE ON EITHER SIDE OF LADY BRACKNELL, CECILY ON THE R, ALGY ON THE L.)

Lady Bracknell, he's so earnest and deserving.

GWENDOLEN

(XDRC TO POSITION BETWEEN LADY BRACKNELL AND ALGY, PLEADING.)

Mother, oh, Mother,  
Can't you see it's he I want to marry?

LADY BRACKNELL

(SWEEPING DL OUT OF THEIR CLUTCHES.)

My dear children, my decision is unswerving.

ALL

(DURING THE FOLLOWING TWO LINES, CECILY BACKS R AND SLIGHTLY UPSTAGE, GWENDOLEN MOVES DL, ALGY MOVES URC BUT SLIGHTLY TOWARDS C SO AS NOT TO BE BLOCKED BY CECILY, WITH JACK HOLDING C. SEE FIGURE 13.)

And her decision  
Seems to be (THEY SIMULTANEOUSLY RAISE AND STOMP THEIR L FOOT.)

That a handbag, a handbag  
Is not a proper mater  
Not a proper mater  
Not a proper mater.

LADY BRACKNELL

For the sins of the mater are bound to come out later  
So you'd better find another mater

ALL

Or a proper pater  
Or produce a parent by this afternoon.

(ON THE FINAL BEAT OF THE MUSIC, CECILY, GWENDOLEN, ALGY AND JACK TURN FULL FRONT AND LIFT BOTH ARMS IN A BEWILDERING SHRUG OF THE SHOULDERS.)



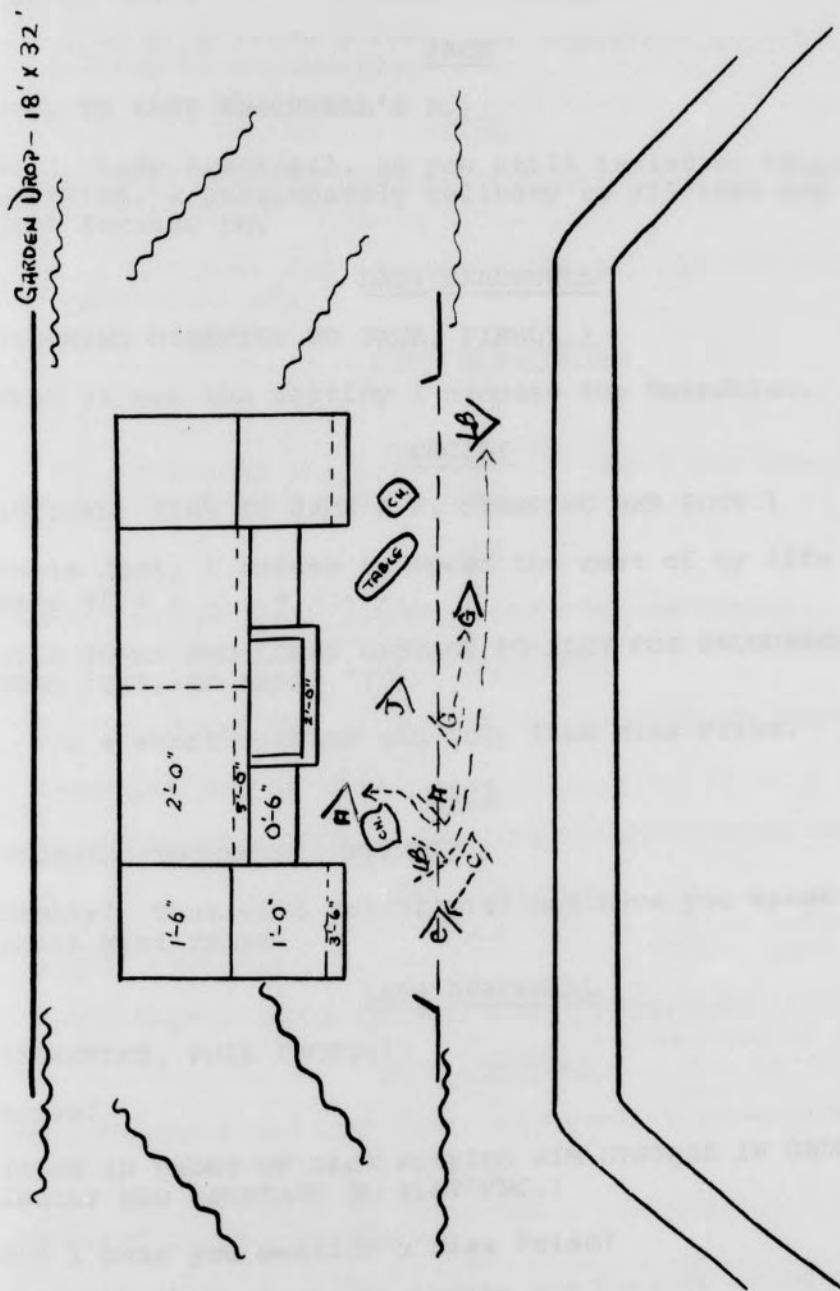


FIGURE 13

SCALE - 1/8" = 1' 0"  
 ACT I, Sec. v; ACT II, Sec. ii-iv.

ERNEST IN LOVE.

(MUSIC OUT.)

JACK

(XDL TO LADY BRACKNELL'S R.)

Well, Lady Bracknell, as you still insist on taking that position, a passionately celibacy is all that any of us can look forward to.

LADY BRACKNELL

(TURNING DIRECTLY TO JACK, FIRMLY.)

That is not the destiny I propose for Gwendolen.

CECILY

(QUICKLY XING TO JACK'S R, STAMPING HER FOOT.)

Uncle Jack, I refuse to spend the rest of my life in the company of a . . . a . . .

(SHE TURNS AND LOOKS UPSTAGE TO ALGY FOR ENCOURAGEMENT. ALGY NODS "YES, GO AHEAD.")

. . . a short-sighted old lady like Miss Prism.

JACK

(TURNING TO CECILY, STERNLY.)

Cecily! That will do! I will not have you speak that way about Miss Prism.

LADY BRACKNELL

(STARTLED, FULL FRONT.)

Prism!

(XING IN FRONT OF JACK PUSHING HIM UPSTAGE IN ORDER TO GET TO CECILY WHO RETREATS TO ALGY URC.)

Did I hear you mention a Miss Prism?

CECILY

Yes, do you know her?

LADY BRACKNELL

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

JACK

(XING BACK DOWN TO LADY BRACKNELL'S LEVEL ON HER L, SOMEWHAT INDIGNANTLY.)

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

LADY BRACKNELL

(TO JACK.)

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

JACK

Miss Prism is Miss Cardew's esteemed governess.

LADY BRACKNELL

(XUC TO CECILY WHO IS HOLDING ON TO ALGY FOR PROTECTION.)

I must see her at once!

(DR. CHASUBLE ENTERS DL WEARING HIS CEREMONIAL ROBES.)

DR. CHASUBLE

(XLC TO JACK.)

Everything is ready for the christenings!

LADY BRACKNELL

The christenings? Is that not somewhat premature?

JACK

(TURNING TO DR. CHASUBLE.)

I don't think that, as things are now, it would be of much practical value to either of us, Dr. Chasuble.

DR. CHASUBLE

(OFFENDED.)

Practical value! Well, as your present mood seems to be one peculiarly secular, I will retire at once.

(DR. CHASUBLE STARTS TO EXIT L. MISS PRISM ENTERS DL, XING IN FRONT OF DR. CHASUBLE TOWARD JACK.)

MISS PRISM

(JOYOUSLY.)

Everything is prepared for the glorious . . .

LADY BRACKNELL

(XDC INTO MISS PRISM'S VISION, SEVERELY.)

Prism!

(UPON SEEING LADY BRACKNELL, MISS PRISM TRIES TO ESCAPE BY PULLING THE INNOCENT DR. CHASUBLE AROUND DOWNSTAGE IN FRONT OF HER.)

Come here, Prism!

(MISS PRISM BOWS HER HEAD AND SLOWLY XC TO FACE LADY BRACKNELL.)

Prism! Where is that baby?

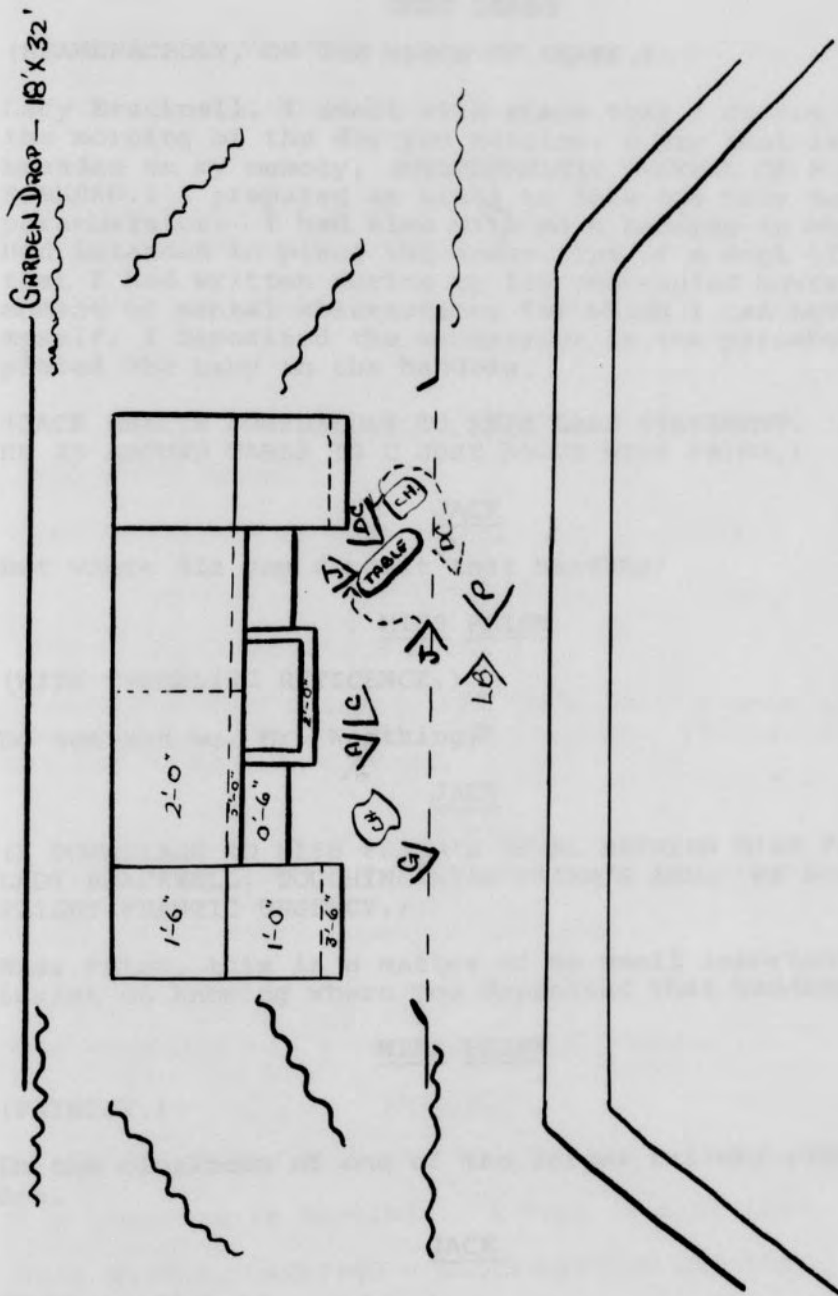
(GENERAL CONSTERNATION WITH ALGY AND CECILY LOOKING TO GWENDOLEN, JACK MOVING UPSTAGE TO POSITION BEHIND TABLE MEETING DR. CHASUBLE WHO XS L AROUND CHAIR. SEE FIGURE 14.)

Twenty-eight years ago you left Lord Bracknell's house in charge of a perambulator containing one baby of the male sex. You never returned. A few weeks later the perambulator was discovered 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! (PAUSE.) Prism, where is that baby?

(EVERYONE LOOKS EXPECTANTLY TO MISS PRISM, WHO, AFTER A SHORT PAUSE, TAKES A STEP TO LADY BRACKNELL.)



SCALE - 1/8" = 1'-0"  
 PLOT I, S.C. V; PLOT II, S.C. II-IV.

ERNEST IN LONE.

FIGURE 14

MISS PRISM

(SHAMEFACEDLY, ON THE VERGE OF TEARS.)

Lady Bracknell, I admit with shame that I do not know. On the morning of the day you mention, a day that is forever branded on my memory, (MELODRAMATIC GESTURE OF R HAND TO FORHEAD.) I prepared as usual to take the baby out in its perambulator. I had also with me a handbag 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 can never forgive myself, I deposited the manuscript in the perambulator, and placed the baby in the handbag.

(JACK REACTS CONFUSEDLY TO THIS LAST STATEMENT. EXCITEDLY HE XS AROUND TABLE TO C JUST ABOVE MISS PRISM.)

JACK

But where did you deposit that handbag?

MISS PRISM

(WITH TREMBLING RETICENCE.)

Do not ask me, Mr. Worthing?

JACK

(X DOWNSTAGE TO MISS PRISM'S LEVEL BETWEEN MISS PRISM AND LADY BRACKNELL, TOUCHING MISS PRISM'S ARM. HE SPEAKS WITH SLIGHT FRANTIC URGENCY.)

Miss Prism, this is a matter of no small importance to me. I insist on knowing where you deposited that handbag.

MISS PRISM

(FAINTLY.)

In the cloakroom of one of the larger railway stations in London.

JACK

(PEREMPTORILY.)

Which railway station?



MISS PRISM

(CRUSHED, XL TO CHAIR, SINKING INTO IT.)

Victoria. The Brighton line.

JACK

(HIS EYES DANCING WITH ILLUMINATION, CURVED X BELOW LADY BRACKNELL AND ABOVE GWENDOLEN.)

You must all excuse me for a moment.

(EXIT R.)

DR. CHASUBLE

(XLC ABOVE TABLE.)

What do you think this means, Lady Bracknell?

LADY BRACKNELL

(XUC TO DR. CHASUBLE'S LEVEL.)

I dare not even suspect, Dr. Chasuble. I need hardly tell you that in families of high position, strange coincidences are not supposed to occur.

CECILY

(TAKING ALGY'S HAND AND MOVING SLIGHTLY DOWN AND R.)

Uncle Jack seemed strangely agitated.

ALGY

Your guardian has a very emotional nature.

GWENDOLEN

(X AROUND ROCKER R TO URC LOOKING OFF R AFTER JACK.)

This suspense is terrible. I hope it will last.

(JACK ENTERS, CARRYING A BLACK LEATHER HANDBAG. HE XL TO MISS PRISM.)

JACK

Is this the handbag, Miss Prism? Examine it carefully before

you speak. The happiness of more than one life depends on your answer.

(JACK HANDS MISS PRISM THE HANDBAG AS HE MOVES INTO A THREE-QUARTER POSITION BELOW HER ON THE L.)

MISS PRISM

(CALMLY.)

It seems to be mine. (PAUSE.) Yes, here is the stain on the lining caused by the explosion of a temperance beverage (CATCHING HERSELF.) in younger and happier days. And here are my initials. The bag is undoubtedly mine. (BREAKING INTO AN EXPRESSION OF ECSTATIC BEATITUDE.) 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, FRONT.)

Miss Prism, more is restored to you than this handbag. I was the baby you placed in it.

MISS PRISM

(AMAZED.)

You?

JACK

(KNEELING AND EMBRACING HER. SEE FIGURE 15.)

Yes . . . Mother!

MISS PRISM

(CLUTCHING THE HANDBAG AS IF FOR PROTECTION.)

Mr. Worthing! I am unmarried!

JACK

(LOOKING UP.)

Unmarried?

(A VERY LONG PAUSE, THEN WITH THE SUDDEN SHRILLNESS OF A



FIGURE 15

CRUSADER FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS.)

Mother, I forgive you!

(HE TRIES AGAIN TO EMBRACE HER.)

MISS PRISM

(RECOILING AND STILL MORE INDIGNANT.)

Mr. Worthing! (POINTING TO LADY BRACKNELL.) There is the lady who can tell you who you really are.

(DR. CHASUBLE TURNS TO LOOK AT LADY BRACKNELL. AS HE DOES SO HE BACKS L. ALGY AND CECILY ALSO MOVE SEVERAL STEPS TO DRC STARING AT HER. GWENDOLEN MOVES INTO C ABOVE THE ROCKING CHAIR AS IF TO QUESTION HER MOTHER.)

JACK

(AFTER A PAUSE, RISING, XLC, IN AN ABRUPTLY CHANGED TONE OF QUIET, ROUTINE CURIOSITY.)

Lady Bracknell, I hate to seem inquisitive, but would you kindly inform me who I am?

LADY BRACKNELL

(AFTER A SHORT PAUSE, TAKES ONE STEP DOWNSTAGE C.)

You are the son of my poor sister, Mrs. Moncrieff, and consequently Algernon's elder brother.

JACK

(IN GREAT EXCITEMENT.)

I knew I had a brother! I always said I had a brother! (TURNING TO FACE PROFILE R.) Cecily, how could you have ever doubted that I had a brother?

(XRC, SEIZING ALGY BY THE HAND, PULLING HIM UPSTAGE TO THE R OF THE TABLE.)

Dr. Chasuble, my unfortunate brother. (XDLC.) Miss Prism, my unfortunate brother. (XURC.) Gwendolen, my unfortunate brother. (XDC.) Algy, you young scoundrel, you will have to treat me with more respect in the future. You have never behaved to me like a brother in all your life.

ALGY

(STILL A BIT DUMB-FOUNDED.)

Well, not till today, old boy, I admit.

GWENDOLEN

(XDRC BETWEEN CECILY AND JACK FACING JACK WHO IS TO THE RIGHT OF ALGY.)

My own! But what own are you? What is your Christian name, now that you have become someone else?

JACK

(TAKING HER HANDS.)

Good heavens! I had quite forgotten that point. Your decision on the subject of my name is irrevocable, I suppose?

GWENDOLEN

(RELEASING JACK'S HANDS AND MOVING RC CLOSE TO CECILY.)

I never change (PAUSE.) except in my affection.

CECILY

(ADMIRINGLY.)

What a noble nature you have, Gwendolen.

JACK

(JACK AND ALGY COUNTER X EACH OTHER AS JACK BECKONS LADY BRACKNELL TO COME DOWNSTAGE.)

Aunt Augusta, at the time when Miss Prism left me in the hand-bag, had I been christened?

LADY BRACKNELL

(XING DOWN TO HIS LEVEL.)

Every luxury that money could buy, including christening, had been lavished on you by your fond and doting parents.

JACK

Then what name was I given?

LADY BRACKNELL

(XLC.)

Being the eldest son you were naturally christened after the General.

JACK

(SLIGHTLY IRRITATED.)

Yes, but what was his name?

LADY BRACKNELL

(MEDITATIVELY, XL ENDING TO THE L OF MISS PRISM.)

I cannot at the present moment seem to recall what the General's Christian name was, although (TO JACK.) I have no doubt he had one.

JACK

(TURNING TO ALGY, BESEECHINGLY.)

Algy! Can't you recollect what our father's name was?

ALGY

My dear boy, we were never even on speaking terms. He died before I was a year old.

DR. CHASUBLE

(XING R AROUND TABLE COMING DOWN BETWEEN JACK AND MISS PRISM. ALGY COUNTERS BY MOVING UPSTAGE SEVERAL STEPS. SEE FIGURE 16. DR. CHASUBLE SPEAKS RATHER TENTATIVELY.)

Lady Bracknell, that wouldn't by any chance be the General Moncrieff who was responsible for putting down the insurrection in West Punjab in 1860?

LADY BRACKNELL

(QUITE SURPRISED.)

He was constantly involved in uprisings. Especially in his domestic life.





JACK

(EXCITEDLY.)

Dr. Chasuble! Did you know him!

DR. CHASUBLE

Quite well, I held the post of chaplainship under General Mondrieff many years ago.

MISS PRISM

(SHOCKED.)

You? A man of peace?

DR. CHASUBLE

(TURNING TO HER.)

That too, Miss Prism, was in younger and happier days.

JACK

(DESPERATELY.)

Dr. Chasuble, you don't by any chance happen to remember his first name, do you?

DR. CHASUBLE

Certainly!

(STANDING AT ATTENTION, SPEAKING VERY RAPIDLY, ALL IN ONE BREATH.)

Lieutenant General Ernest John Moncrieff, Earl of Sussex, and adjutant to Field Marshall Markby, Chief of the Imperial General Staff in Her Majesty's Royal Army.

(AT THE END OF THE SPEECH, DR. CHASUBLE COUGHS AND BREATHS QUITE HEAVILY, BACKING A FEW STEPS.)

JACK

(THOUGHTFULLY.)

Ernest John. (TURNING TO GWENDOLEN, QUIETLY.) I always told you, Gwendolen, my name was Ernest, didn't I?

GWENDOLEN

(WITH DEEP EMOTION.)

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

LADY JACK

(TAKING HER HANDS.)

Gwendolen, it is a terrible thing for a man to find out suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth. Can you forgive me?

GWENDOLEN

I can. For I feel that you are sure to change.

JACK

(ROMANTICALLY, THEY BEGIN XRC.)

My own one!

LADY BRACKNELL

(FRONT.)

Yes, I remember now that the General was called Ernest. I knew I had some particular reason for disliking the name.

DR. CHASUBLE

(OVERCOME BY THE WHOLE SCENE, UNABLE TO CONTAIN HIMSELF, QUICKLY XL TO MISS PRISM RAISING HER OUT OF THE CHAIR, TAKING BOTH HER HANDS.)

Laetitia!

MISS PRISM

(ENTHUSIASTICALLY.)

Frederick. At last!

ALGY

(MOVING UC, ARMS OUTSTRETCHED TO CECILY.)

Cecily. At last!

(CECILY XS QUICKLY TO ALGY UC. THEY EMBRACE.)

GWENDOLEN

Ernest. At last!

LADY BRACKNELL

(XC IN HER USUAL TONE OF COMPLETE AUTHORITY.)

Gwendolen, we have already missed five, if not six trains. To miss any more might expose us to comment on the platform. Come, Gwendolen!

(LADY BRACKNELL SWEEPS OUT R ABOVE GWENDOLEN AND JACK AND BELOW THE ROCKING CHAIR.)

GWENDOLEN

(SMILING FRONT.)

Certainly, Mama.

(MUSIC IN.)

(ON THE FIRST SEVERAL MEASURES OF MUSIC BEFORE THE SINGING BEGINS, JACK TURNS GWENDOLEN UNDER HIS ARM FROM R TO L. ALGY TURNS CECILY UNDER HIS ARM FROM R TO L. DR. CHASUBLE AND MISS PRISM CLASPS BOTH HANDS AND TURN EACH OTHER AROUND THREE TIMES MOVING THEMSELVES DL. ALL SIX ARE FACING FULL FRONT WITH EACH INDIVIDUAL COUPLE HOLDING HANDS. SEE FIGURE 17.)

ALL

The skies are blue  
The grass is ever so much greener  
Not a cloud (ALL RAISE FREE HAND INDICATING CLOUDS, GRACE-  
FULLY DROPPING HANDS BY THE WORD "ABOVE" IN THE NEXT PHRASE.)  
In the heavens above.

And as for you (COUPLES TURN PROFILE TO EACH OTHER HOLDING  
BOTH HANDS.)  
There's sparkle in your whole demeanor,  
All because  
You are (FRONT.) Ernest In Love.

(DURING THE FOLLOWING VERSE, THE GIRLS MOVE FROM L TO R INTO  
THE GENTLEMEN'S ARMS.)

GARDEN DROP - 18' X 32'

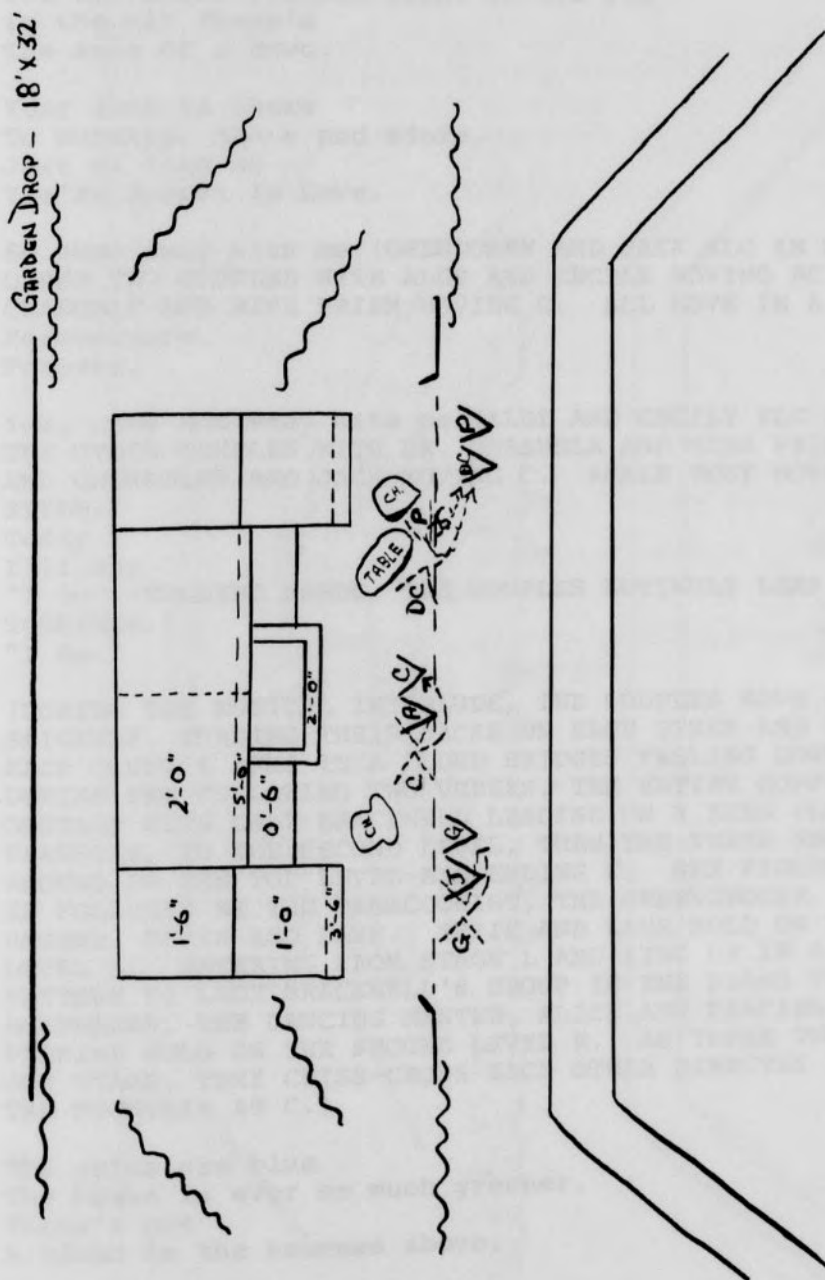


FIGURE 17

Scale - 1/8" = 1'-0"  
 Plan I, Sec. v; Plan II, Sec. ii-iv  
 ERNEST INLOVE.

And where you go  
 You'll find a rainbow right before you  
 In the air there's  
 The song of a dove.

Your love is there  
 To worship, honor and adore,  
 Just as long as  
 You're Ernest In Love.

So come away with me (GWENDOLEN AND JACK XLC IN FRONT OF THE OTHER TWO COUPLES WITH ALGY AND CECILY MOVING RC AND DR. CHASUBLE AND MISS PRISM MOVING C. ALL MOVE IN A TANGO STYLE.)  
 Forevermore.  
 Forever.

Yes, come and stay with me (ALGY AND CECILY XLC IN FRONT OF THE OTHER COUPLES WITH DR. CHASUBLE AND MISS PRISM MOVING RC AND GWENDOLEN AND JACK MOVING C. AGAIN THEY MOVE IN A TANGO STYLE.)

Today  
 I'll say  
 "I do" (HOLDING HANDS, THE COUPLES LOVINGLY LEAN THEIR HEADS TOGETHER.)  
 "I do."

(DURING THE MUSICAL INTERLUDE, THE COUPLES MOVE DOWNSTAGE SLIGHTLY, TURNING THEIR BACKS ON EACH OTHER AND TURNING UNDER EACH OTHER'S ARMS IN A "LOND BRIDGES FALLING DOWN" GESTURE. DURING THE FOLLOWING TWO VERSES, THE ENTIRE COMPANY ENTERS ONSTAGE WITH LADY BRACKNELL LEADING ON R XING ULC ON THE PLATFORM, TO THE SECOND LEVEL, THEN THE THIRD AND FINALLY AROUND TO THE TOP LEVEL AND ENDING C. SEE FIGURE 18. SHE IS FOLLOWED BY THE TABACCONIST, THE GREENGROCER, THE HABER-DASHER, EFFIE AND LANE. EFFIE AND LANE HOLD ON THE SECOND LEVEL L. ENTERING FROM STAGE L AND XING UR IN A MIRROR PATTERN TO LADY BRACKNELL'S GROUP IS THE PIANO TEACHER, THE BOOTMAKER, THE DANCING MASTER, ALICE AND PERKINS. ALICE AND PERKINS HOLD ON THE SECOND LEVEL R. AS THESE TWO GROUPS COME ONE STAGE, THEY CRISS-CROSS EACH OTHER DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF THE FOUNTAIN AT C.)

The skies are blue  
 The brass is ever so much greener.  
 There's not  
 A cloud in the heavens above.

And as for you, my dear,  
 There's sparkle in your whole demeanor,





All because  
You are Ernest In Love.

(DURING THE FINAL TWO VERSES, DR. CHASUBLE AND MISS PRISM LEAD OFF XING UL TO STAND FACING FRONT, SHORTLY FOLLOWED BY ALGY AND CECILY XING UR TO STAND FACING FRONT. BOTH COUPLES ARE ON THE FIRST LEVEL NEXT TO THE FOUNTAIN. FINALLY, JACK AND GWENDOLEN TURN AND XUC TO A POSITION DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF THE FOUNTAIN. THEY FACE FRONT. SEE FIGURE 19.)

No matter where you go  
You'll find a rainbow right before you  
And in the air  
There's the song of a dove.

Because your love is there  
To worship, honor and adore you  
Just as long  
As you're Ernest (DR. CHASUBLE AND MISS PRISM BOUNCE INTO PROFILE POSITIONS WITH THEIR ARMS ON EACH OTHER'S SHOULDERS.)

Ernest (ALGY AND CECILY BOUNCE INTO PROFILE POSITIONS WITH THEIR ARMS ON EACH OTHER'S SHOULDERS.)

Ernest (JACK AND GWENDOLEN BOUNCE INTO PROFILE POSITIONS WITH THEIR ARMS ON EACH OTHER'S SHOULDERS.)

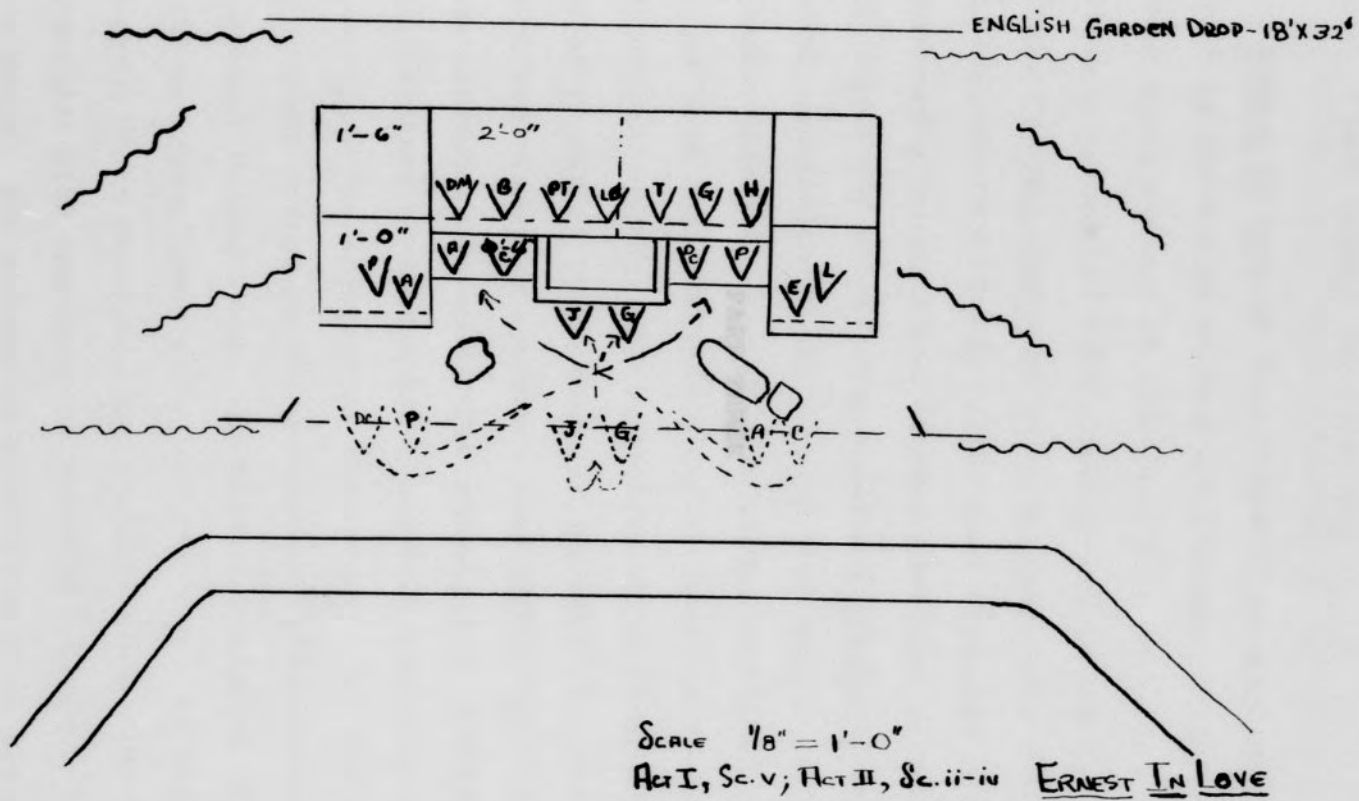
In Love!

(ON THE FINAL WORD, "LOVE," FROM STAGE R TO L, ALGY, CECILY, GWENDOLEN, JACK, MISS PRISM, AND DR. CHASUBLE ALL TURN JUST THEIR HEADS FRONT. THE OTHER CHARACTERS RAISE THEIR OFF-STAGE HAND ON THE FINAL WORD WITH THE EXCEPTION OF LADY BRACKNELL WHO REMAINS AS STATUESQUE AS EVER.)

(MUSIC OUT.)

(CURTAIN.)

FIGURE 19





### PART THREE: CRITICAL EVALUATION

Ernest In Love by Anne Crosswell and Lee Pockriss was selected as the Master of Fine Arts thesis production by this director for a variety of reasons. Nine years ago the director was closely associated with a production of the Oscar Wilde original, The Importance of Being Earnest. The play has remained a favorite of hers. Since that time, the majority of the director's concentrated studies have been in the areas of comedy, music and dance. The choice of Ernest In Love seemed a natural conclusion to the work of this Master of Fine Arts candidate. Next, because the production was scheduled for the summer of 1969, considerations had to be given to the availability of cast, production facilities and audience appeal. The script of Ernest In Love calls for six women and ten men, five of which are tradesmen appearing only in the opening scene. Sixteen characters is considered a small cast for musicals. The predominance of action takes place in two sets, one of which occupies the majority of the second act. The only necessary costume change is for Gwendolen Fairfax between Act One and Act Two. Consequently, the technical aspects of Ernest In Love can be accomplished with relative ease. Having lived in Greensboro, North Carolina, for over six years, the director felt familiar with the taste of both the college and community theatre goers. For mid-summer entertainment, a light musical with few technical problems seemed the ideal choice.

As stated in Part One, the challenges of directing an English period comedy for a 1969 American audience seemed worthwhile. It presented many problems relative to acting techniques, dialects and style in comedy.

The production was presented on the main stage in the W. Raymond Taylor Drama and Speech Building on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro for three performances on the evenings of July 7, 8, and 9, 1969. The performances were well attended by both the college and the city community.

The remainder of this third and final part will be concerned with a critical evaluation of how well the director feels Ernest In Love succeeded in performance. This evaluation will include (1) the initial interpretation as compared with the final product, (2) the actor-director relationships during rehearsal and performance, and (3) the audience's reaction to the production.

#### Interpretation, Style, and Mood

As stated in Part One, the over-all objective of Ernest In Love was to combine, with music, the high comedy spirit of Congreve with the farcical spirit of the Marx Brothers. This director's initial research was in the area of English high comedy, or "comedy of manners," which was at its height during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The epitome of satirizers during this period was found in the person of William Congreve. His plays were considered more



than an exercise in style and witty virtuosity. In the preface to Congreve's The Way of the World, editor John Harold Wilson observes:

Beneath the sparkle of simile and the sting of epigram lie tenderness and human understanding. Congreve's people play the game according to the rules of polite society, and banter and jest with light insouciance of true sophisticates, but remain always struggling human beings; . . .<sup>24</sup>

Juxtaposed to this human comedy of manners which deals with the foibles of a particular class of society was the comedy style of the Marx Brothers. During the 1930's, Zippo, Chico Groucho and silent Harpo Marx made such screen classics as Duck Soup, A Day at the Races, and A Night at the Opera. As is evident in these particular films, their farce depended less on character and carefully constructed, well-drawn plots than it did on highly exaggerated incongruities, broad jokes, and slap-stick. Uniting these two styles of comedy, then, was the challenge of Ernest In Love.

Oscar Wilde solved part of the problem in the original script by inverting conventional behavior but allowing his characters to remain ultra-sophisticates. This was suggestive of the Congreve quality of smiling, not laughing, at these truly human characters. Adapter Crosswell then inserted transitions in dialogue and additional comic characters which pro-

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<sup>24</sup>John Harold Wilson, ed., Six Restoration Plays (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959), p. 320.

duced a broader farcical quality necessary for the musical version.

The director felt that she achieved a uniformity of acting styles as far as the main characters were concerned. The fact that she had worked as an actress in several "comedy of manners" plays was certainly an asset in her direction of this play. There were instances, however, when bits of business and blocking did not seem to be completely valid. The most obvious example of this was in the staging of the song, "Come Raise Your Cup," in Act One, Scene One. The director tried several choreographic patterns for the end of the song, but the actors never quite seemed to be able to produce the desired effect. Whether this was an error on the part of the director to explain her goal or a lack of experience on the part of the actors, or both, is debatable. The final product of a simple circle moving in a counter-clockwise position was not as theatrically effective as it could have been, nor was it in the desired mood of the completed production. The director, however, feels that the over-all style and mood accomplished by the main characters in Ernest In Love more than compensated for the rather un-stylish beginning.

Ernest In Love established a crisp tempo in Scene One that was maintained throughout the entire performance. The actors delivered the Oscarise' dialogue with sharpness and clarity. The blocking and stage business were simple

and uncluttered allowing this dialogue to shine through. Only at the conclusion of the play did the tempo become somewhat erratic. Upon the final entrance of Dr. Chasuble, a series of events and explanations take place that the audience must not misunderstand. Each event must be emphasized even though they occur in rapid, often disjunctive succession. The Bunburying bachelors convey to Dr. Chasuble that there is no longer a necessity for them to be christened; the Reverend is incensed; Miss Prism enters; Lady Bracknell recognizes Miss Prism as the woman who misplaced a baby boy twenty-eight years before; Miss Prism confesses the error; she further states that the infant was placed in a handbag; Jack dashes frantically off-stage and returns with a black leather handbag; Miss Prism is its owner; Jack thinks that Miss Prism is his mother; Miss Prism is incensed; Lady Bracknell reveals that Jack is the son of her late sister, Mrs. Moncrieff; Jack is, therefore, Algernon's elder brother; Dr. Chasuble reveals that Jack was christened Ernest John Moncrieff; Gwendolen accepts Jack as her betrothed; Cecily accepts Algernon; Dr. Chasuble accepts Miss Prism. Fortunately, at the end of this string of almost "one-liners," composer Lee Pockriss provides a finale that is fast as well as light, bright, crisp and airy, in keeping with the dominant mood of the play.

At the first rehearsal, the roles were discussed in depth by the cast and the director. The cast read the entire

script aloud and stopped frequently to ask questions concerning interpretation, acting style, and mood. Suggestions were contributed by individuals for their own roles as well as others. This rehearsal was beneficial in two specific ways. One, the company arrived at a basic point of attack for the play which was mutually acceptable. And two, a rapport was established between the cast members which was to continue throughout the rehearsal period and the performances.

As far as individual characterizations were concerned, the director allowed the tradesmen in Act One, Scene One to create bits of business, dialects, and make-up that would be in keeping with their professions. She offered suggestions where incongruities appeared and tried to maintain a thread of consistency in the characterizations. The director feels that she was partially successful in this respect. Each tradesman, though lacking in characterization techniques, was amusing and individualistic enough to keep the scene interesting.

The development of the larger roles was scrutinized by the director. She felt that there was a danger in allowing too much latitude in character development for a period comedy. Therefore, her concentrated effort was directed toward maintaining consistent acting styles. The individual actors were encouraged to try new business until the final week of rehearsal. But the ultimate decision as to whether

the bit would remain in the production was left to the director. The actor playing the role of Algernon and the actress playing the role of Gwendolen most clearly demonstrated the director's concept of Ernest In Love relative to interpretation and style. This understanding was displayed in the initial reading rehearsal. The other cast members were requested to observe, not immitate, these two performers and strive for a more harmonious product. For the most part, this technique seemed to work effectively. The director did experience difficulty in working with the actress who played the role of Cecily. She was basically a rigid person to begin with and the role of the winsome Cecily went against her natural inclinations. She had not been exposed to enough practical stage experience to develop her own characterization in spite of herself. Therefore, the director tried to superimpose her style of movement and gesture onto the actress. The result was almost disastrous. The specifics of this and other problems encountered by this director regarding the actors will be discussed at length later.

The director was delighted with the technical aspects of the production. There was a close association between the director and the designer from the time of the script selection. Many hours were spent in discussing the style and mood of the production from all aspects. The de-



signer produced ground plans and elevations that were in accord with the director's thoughts. The finished product contributed significantly to a feeling of sophisticated comedy with its delicate design, rich color scheme highlighted with ferns and flowers, and the distinctive Victorian influence. The two major sets were multi-level which aided in composing interesting stage pictures. Generally, the sets were practical as well as appealing.

Only one major problem arose with the over-all design of the production. Because Ernest In Love was being produced in the summer, there was a shortage of student manpower for scenery and costume construction. Therefore, the director and the designer decided to order the costumes and the backdrops. The designer had planned to employ backdrops for three scenes: (1) the opening street scene, (2) the Manor House garden, and (3) the final Church garden scene. During the final week of rehearsal the backdrops arrived. The designer and the director agreed immediately that the drop provided for the Church garden scene absolutely would not do. The drop was faded and wrinkled and not at all what had been advertised. The decision not to use the drop necessitated the cutting of the script in order to allow the finale to be played in the Manor House garden. This brought about a major blocking change that was never satisfactory to either the director or the cast members.



The furniture used by the designer was authentically Victorian. Rented from an antique dealer, the pieces for Algernon's flat were in rich dark woods upholstered in red and gold velvets. The Manor House garden set used heavy brown wicker furniture high-lighted with brush strokes of green and white. The majority of hand properties were historically appropriate even though many had been constructed in the technical studio.

Generally the lighting for Ernest In Love was handled precisely in the manner decided upon the director and the designer. The stage was consistently sunshine bright varying only in Act Two, Scene Two for the tender ballad, "Lost." As had been anticipated, this particular song lent itself quite well to the theatrical practice of lowering the general area lighting and using individual spots for the singers. In Act One, Scene Two the lighting was too subdued. This was due to a lack of lighting instruments. Since the scene was short and only contained the characters of Jack Worthing and his manservant, Perkins, the director managed to confine the action as much as possible to the brighter areas. During the performances, the director observed that this scene began to look restricted in movement. Fortunately, the scene concluded before the audience became too aware of the problem.

The costumes for Ernest In Love were not at all what the director had anticipated. She had previously designed

costume plates projecting her personal ideas about design and color combinations. Unfortunately, the costumer ordered the costumes from a costume house with which the theatre staff and the director were unfamiliar. The costumes that were sent were neither what the director had desired nor what the actors had anticipated. Moreover, without exception the gowns and suits were either too small or too large. Emergency measures were taken in alterations, adding or subtracting pieces of fabric to achieve a relatively consistent looking group of costumes. The final appearance was not bad, but it certainly was not what the director had envisioned.

To summarize this section, although there were instances when the director felt that the blocking was ineffective and certain stylistic devices did not coincide with the initial interpretation, she was pleased with the end result.

#### Actor-Director Relationships

Prior to tryouts for Ernest In Love, the director enlisted the services of a pianist who was also a close associate. They discussed the style, tempo and general quality of the entire score. By studying the difficult music while listening to the Off-Broadway recording, the pianist managed to have the musical numbers in good order by tryout night. His total familiarity with the score from the beginning was instrumental in the smooth development of the production.

The rehearsal schedule for Ernest In Love was arranged prior to tryouts. The director and the pianist a-

greed to hold simultaneous blocking and music rehearsals. The basic lay-out of the script permitted this arrangement. For example, the tradesmen and valets in Act One, Scene One rehearsed their music with the pianist while Gwendolen and Alice were blocked by the director in Act One, Scene Three. The groups positions were then reversed. Also, because of the flexibility of their personal schedules, the director and the pianist agreed to make themselves available to the cast during the day for additional music rehearsals. This approach proved to be extremely beneficial, for the cast learned their songs quickly and felt at ease in their delivery during the detailing rehearsals. By performance the songs were second nature to the cast.

The problems of casting Ernest In Love literally solved themselves the evening of tryouts. The script calls for ten men and six women. Ten men and five women appeared. The director used everyone present and recruited an actress for the role of Gwendolen. Two days after casting, the actor who was to play Perkins had to withdraw because of illness, so the director had to recruit for this role also. A week and a half into rehearsal, an additional tradesman role, the Haberdasher, was created to accomodate a tenor which was badly needed in the opening and closing chorus. From this point, the cast was set.

Some of the cast members were neophytes in the theatre

having appeared only in minor speaking roles, walk-ons or not at all. They possessed little knowledge of basic stage techniques or theatre etiquette. Conversely, there were cast members of considerable experience in all areas of the theatre. For example, the actor playing the role of Algernon had been performing in both amateur and professional theatre for over fifteen years. This diverseness of experience among the cast made for a stimulating rehearsal period for the director.

From a purely physical point of view, everyone was individually suited for his role. As a group there were certain incongruities that could have spelled disaster. Lady Bracknell was somewhat short and squat while her daughter, Gwendolen, was tall and quite voluptuous. The actors portraying Jack and Algernon are supposed to be revealed as brothers. Jack was unusually short, of medium physique, and possessed a swarthy complexion while Algernon was tall, rotund and possessed a fair complexion. In order for the audience to accept their relationships, these disparities in physical appearance had to be dealt with through strong character delineation and similiar dialect development. The cast was completely aware of the visual differences from the first rehearsal and strove to solve the problems. During the performances the director observed that the physical contrasts not only aided, but high-lighted, the comic ends of the production.

In evaluating her direction, the director must first explain her approach. During the reading rehearsal and the blocking rehearsals, the director outlined for the cast the framework in which character development should take place. Then, as stated earlier, the actors were encouraged to develop bits of business, speech patterns, and physical characteristics that would coincide with the initial interpretation. The director hoped that this approach would allow a sufficient quantity of individual creativity within the boundaries of her over-all objective. At the same time, she felt that she would be able to maintain control. What she had not anticipated, however, was the inability of a few of her cast members to create. And further, these same performers were found to be almost incapable of comprehending certain directorial instructions without demonstration. Needless to say, these instances of detailed explanation and pin-pointed demonstration caused some of the rehearsals, particularly detailing rehearsals, to become laborious, not only for the director, but also for the more efficient members of the cast.

At this point, the director would like to state that her major realization in directing Ernest In Love was that directors should possess infinite patience. Actors tend to be acutely sensitive beings who require special handling particularly when they begin to feel self-conscious and insecure. There were certain cast members who had to be constantly encouraged, complimented, and generally, handled with



"kid gloves." On the other hand, there were cast members who required stern correction, frankness and total objectivity from the director. These two extremes and all the variations were often a frustrating combination. Learning to handle the needs of the actors was, at times, painful. More important, however, was the realization that actors are not automatons who must respond to the director's slightest command, but they are individuals with idiosyncracies which must be deciphered in the early rehearsal of a production. Only then can the director determine the specific needs of his actors and deal with these needs accordingly.

As stated earlier, the director encountered a major communications problem with the actress who played Cecily. Physically she was suited to the role and possessed a lovely lyrical voice. However, she seemed to have great difficulty in understanding and executing directions. After the initial blocking rehearsals, the director had expected the actors to begin concentrating on details. This particular actress had no security in her stage movements, therefore her attention span for detailing was quite short. Even into the finishing rehearsals, she had difficulty remembering basic blocking. Upon examining this actress' script, the director noted that she had not written down her directions accurately. For example, where the director had said, "cross down right center," the actress had written "XR." This was typical of



her failure to devote her full energy during the early rehearsals. Toward the end of the rehearsal period, she began forgetting lines and getting emotionally upset with the director when corrected. Her fellow actors informed the director that the actress was having personal difficulties which were interfering with her professional obligations to the production. These difficulties lasted throughout the performances resulting in a major line drop on both the opening and the second night. Fortunately, her fellow actors were conscious of the problem and were able to pick up the scenes.

Looking back at this particular problem, the director feels that part of the actress' insecurity could have been alleviated had the director taken a more personal interest in her. Preferring to deal on a relatively business-like level, this director had tried to maintain a degree of objectivity toward the production and the cast members. This approach was detrimental to this actress. Upon realizing this, the director should have adjusted her own attitude. She did not. Therefore, the communication gap continued to widen with the results indicated earlier.

From a technical point of view, the director had a small problem with the actor playing the role of Jack. His natural vocal quality was deep and resonant. His articulation was flawless. However, he tended to over-enunciate

his words with a resulting slow tempo in the beginning rehearsals which, if left untended, would have resulted in a major change in the over-all pacing of the show. This actor and the director discussed the problem. The decision was made for the actor to try sacrificing some of his natural preciseness for a faster tempo. This was a difficult task, but the actor worked diligently on the problem and achieved a satisfactory end result.

Other than the specific instances mentioned above, the cast worked harmoniously and efficiently. Lines were learned quickly, blocking and business executed correctly and over-all instructions taken objectively. This director feels that the company of Ernest In Love functioned as a complete unit throughout the run of the play.

#### Audience Reaction

Ernest In Love was presented on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, July 7, 8, and 9, 1969, following the fourth of July weekend. Consequently, the director had anticipated rather small, lethargic audiences. She was mistaken. Not only was the attendance high but the general spirit was one of receptiveness and genuine enthusiasm.

Ernest In Love began each evening promptly at 8:15 p.m. The hummable tunes of the overture gracefully performed by piano and flute seemed to relax the audience and prepare them for the bright, animated opening scene. On all three performance evenings, the overture conclusion was greeted with

spontaneous applause.

Jim McAllister, Greensboro Daily News entertainment editor, said the following of Ernest In Love:

What a refreshing summer interlude this show is for Greensboro. Its laughs are almost continuous; the songs . . . are pleasant and exceptionally well done; and the direction of Sandra Forman is imaginative and well conceived.<sup>25</sup>

Dorothy Benjamin, Greensboro Record staff writer, headlined her review "Ernest Is Antidote for Heat Doldrums." The general concensus of the audience seemed to be that Ernest In Love succeeded as an evening of light, bright entertainment.

#### Conclusion

Ernest In Love proved to be a satisfying thesis choice for this Master of Fine Arts candidate. Having made the decision to produce a stylized comedy with music, the director found many avenues of educational research and practical experimentation open to her.

The initial correspondences with authoress Anne Crosswell and composer Lee Pockriss were informative, and subsequent contact clarified certain interpretation problems. Both Crosswell and Pockriss seemed genuinely interested in the success of the production. This was a source of stimulation not only for the director but also for the

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<sup>25</sup>Jim McAllister, Greensboro Daily News, Section B, (July 8, 1969), p. 10.

cast and crew. *SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY*

Studying William Congreve's approach to "high comedy" and the Marx Brothers' approach to "low comedy" resulted in moments of exciting experimentation with the actors. The director felt that both the successes and failures of this particular effort was worthwhile. The cast seemed to grasp the two styles and play them as one. The audience responded enthusiastically to the combination.

Practically speaking, the director experienced tremendous pleasure in working with a creative company in a well-equipped theatrical environment. And the intellectual stimulation received from researching and compiling this manuscript made Ernest In Love an ideal selection.

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- Wilson, Oscar. *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Edited by Vincent F. Sopper, Theatre Classics. New York: Barron's Educational Series, Incorporated, 1959.
- Wilson, John Harold, ed. *Six Festive Plays*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1917.

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- Wilson, John Harold, ed. Six Restoration Plays. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959.

May 21, 1969

Mrs. Sandra H. Forman  
201 Greenwood Drive  
Wrentham, North Carolina

Dear Mrs. Forman:

I'm delighted you're going to do "Ernest in Love" and to make it the subject of your thesis.

I don't really know how I can help you regarding complications stylistically, historically, etc. I should think a study of the two would reveal the stylistic consistencies and/or anachronisms. (And there are a few.) I tried to keep it as close to Wilde's original as possible both in style and in spirit and tried to develop the characters a little more thoroughly emotional. **APPENDIX A** which is of course what you should do in a musical.

#### LETTERS

Inventing the maid in the country, taking Lane down to the country and the use of the tradesmen in the opening scene plus the butlers was done for several reasons: to open up the play a little, to allow the lower classes to interact with the upper with the gentleman's gentleman somewhere in between striving to be a carbon of the upper. The tradesmen, the vicar, changed the sets in silhouette in a very stylized manner, never getting out of character, a device the audience very much enjoyed.

It might interest you to know that it was first done on the U.S. Steel Hour in 1957 starring Edward Mulhare as Alan, David Atkinson as Jack, Dorothy Collins as Cecily, Leslie Troy as Gwendolyn, Martyn Green as Dr. Chasuble, and Lydia Westman as Miss Prism and Edith King as Lady Bracknell. The reception to the show convinced me to develop it into a full-length production for Off-Broadway. It was revived two years later at the Equity Library Theater in New York. It has many months in French in Brussels and has been done in various parts of the country here. Negotiations are now underway for a London production and then possibly a movie.

You might also be interested to know that "The Importance of Being Earnest" was originally a four-act play which I had planned to use but found that it was not in public domain. The N.Y. Public Library published this in its entirety in two volumes, one of which is the original written in Wilde's own hand. I'm sure cutting it to three acts was as painful to him as cutting some of his lines to accommodate for songs was to me. *(The set costs \$20 if you want it.)*



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The critics however didn't notice the cuts, changes, or new dialogue (I either wrote or lifted from other of his plays in p.d.) and felt that the dialog was "intact" -- a backhanded compliment but one I was grateful for.

I'm sure you have the cast album on Columbia Records.

As author I got the idea of doing it while watching a straight version on the old "Matinee Theater" on TV. I felt it would make a musical and set out to find a composer whose music reflected some of the Wilde spirit. After seeing dozens of composers I found Lee Pockriss and we began on the work. Of all the shows I've written this was the easiest, the first, the most fun and I had almost total freedom plus a wonderful director.

The other things I've written include "Tovarich" starring Vivien Leigh and Jean Pierre Aumont which ran for about a year on Broadway and a recent disaster last year called "I'm Solomon" starring Dick Shawn. Plus a lot of pop songs and a TV musical of "Huck Finn."

I'm a native Virginian, <sup>Went to Randolph-Macon Women's College,</sup> lived in NYC for fifteen years before moving to the country. Currently I'm working on two off-beat way out musicals.

If there are any specific questions you'd like me to answer I'd be happy to. The very best wishes for a successful production. If there are any reviews I'd very much like to see them.

Cordially,

*Anne Crowell*

Anne Crowell  
Box 512  
Woodstock  
New York, 12498

*P.S. If there's such a thing as a carbon or thermofax of your thesis I'd love to see it. It might help me in the rewrite for London should that deal go through -*

Emily Music Corporation

205

160 West 73rd Street

New York 23, N. Y.

TR 7-6700

April 13, 1969

Mrs. Richard C. Forman  
901 Greenwood Drive  
Greensboro, North Carolina 27410

Dear Mrs. Forman:

I was very pleased to learn of your interest in "Ernest In Love" and wish you all success in your upcoming production.

Now to answer your questions.

You can find a biographical sketch on me in "Who's Who in the American Theater."

As to character and plot analysis, you would best direct questions to the bookwriter and lyricist, Miss Anne Crowell, 411 Glasco Turnpike, Woodstock, New York 12498. However, and this is also my answer to your request for a musical analysis, my best advice to you is to make your own analysis.

Ultimately, no matter how couched in hi-falutin terms, all criticism and evaluation is simply the thoughts, feelings and decisions of the individual. You are as well qualified as any to make these evaluations. You be the authority. You put your feelings and thoughts down. This would be a contribution. What can rehashing other people's opinions add to anything?

I have tried to be of help. I hope I have.

Good Luck and Best Wishes.

Sincerely,

Lee Pockriss

Lee Pockriss

Ernest in Love

## CAST

(in order of appearance)

Ferkins .....	Herbert L. Farnham
Lena .....	William C. Wagoner, III
Greengrocer .....	Walter Blower
Bootmaker .....	William Wilkins
Tobaccoist .....	Kenneth Jay Miller
Piano Teacher .....	Arthur R. Williams, Jr.
Dancing Master .....	Charles W. Pulp
Haberdasher .....	APPENDIX B Paul C. Leslie
Jack Worthing .....	THE CAST Lawrence M. Vanella
Gwendolen .....	Meredith Marcellus
Alice .....	Sharon Gray Mills
Algernon Moncrieff .....	Kenneth R. Callender
Lady Bracknell .....	Susan Kay Saari
Miss Prism .....	Sandra Edwards
Cecily Cardew .....	Sally Randall
Effie .....	Gladys Coddington
Dr. Chasuble .....	B. Michael Wood

Ernest In Love

## CAST

(in order of appearance)

Perkins .....Herbert L. Farnham  
 Lane .....William C. Wagoner, III  
 Greengrocer .....Walter Blower  
 Bootmaker .....William Wilkins  
 Tabacconist .....Kenneth Jay Miller  
 Piano Teacher .....Arthur R. Williams, Jr.  
 Dancing Master .....Charles W. Fulp  
 Haberdasher .....Paul C. Leslie  
 Jack Worthing .....Lawrence M. Vanella  
 Gwendolen .....Meredith Marcellus  
 Alice .....Sharon Gray Mills  
 Algernon Moncrieff .....Kenneth H. Callender  
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 Miss Prism .....Sandra Edwards  
 Cecily Cardew .....Sally Randall  
 Effie .....Gladys Coddington  
 Dr. Chasuble .....B. Michael Wood



Ernest In Love

## REHEARSAL SCHEDULE

No.	Day	Date	Objective	Time
1.	Wed.	June 4	Tryouts	7:30 p.m.
2.	Thurs.	June 5	Read and discuss	7:30 p.m.
3.	Fri.	June 6	Singing I-i Block I-iii	7:30 p.m.
4.	Sun.	June 8	Block I-i Block II-i Block I-iv, 15-23	2:30 p.m. 3:30 p.m. 7:30 p.m.
5.	Mon.	June 9	Block I-iv, 23-28	7:30 p.m.
6.	Tues.	June 10	Singing I-i-iv Block I-v, 39-46 Block I-ii	7:30 p.m. 9:00 p.m.
7.	Wed.	June 11	Block I-v, 46-56	7:30 p.m.
8.	Thurs.	June 12	Block II-ii, 4-20	7:30 p.m.
9.	Fri.	June 13	Detail I-v	7:30 p.m.
10.	Sun.	June 15	Detail I-i Detail I-ii Detail Part I	2:30 p.m. 3:30 p.m. 7:30 p.m.
11.	Mon.	June 16	Block II-iii, 21-30 Block II-iv, 34-40	7:30 p.m. 8:15 p.m.
12.	Tues.	June 17	Detail II-i Detail II-ii, 4-10	7:30 p.m. 8:15 p.m.
13.	Wed.	June 18	Block II-ii, 10-16 Detail II-ii, 17-20 Detail I-iv	7:30 p.m. 8:30 p.m. 9:15 p.m.
14.	Thurs.	June 19	Detail II-iii, 21-30 Detail I-v	7:30 p.m. 9:00 p.m.

## APPENDIX C

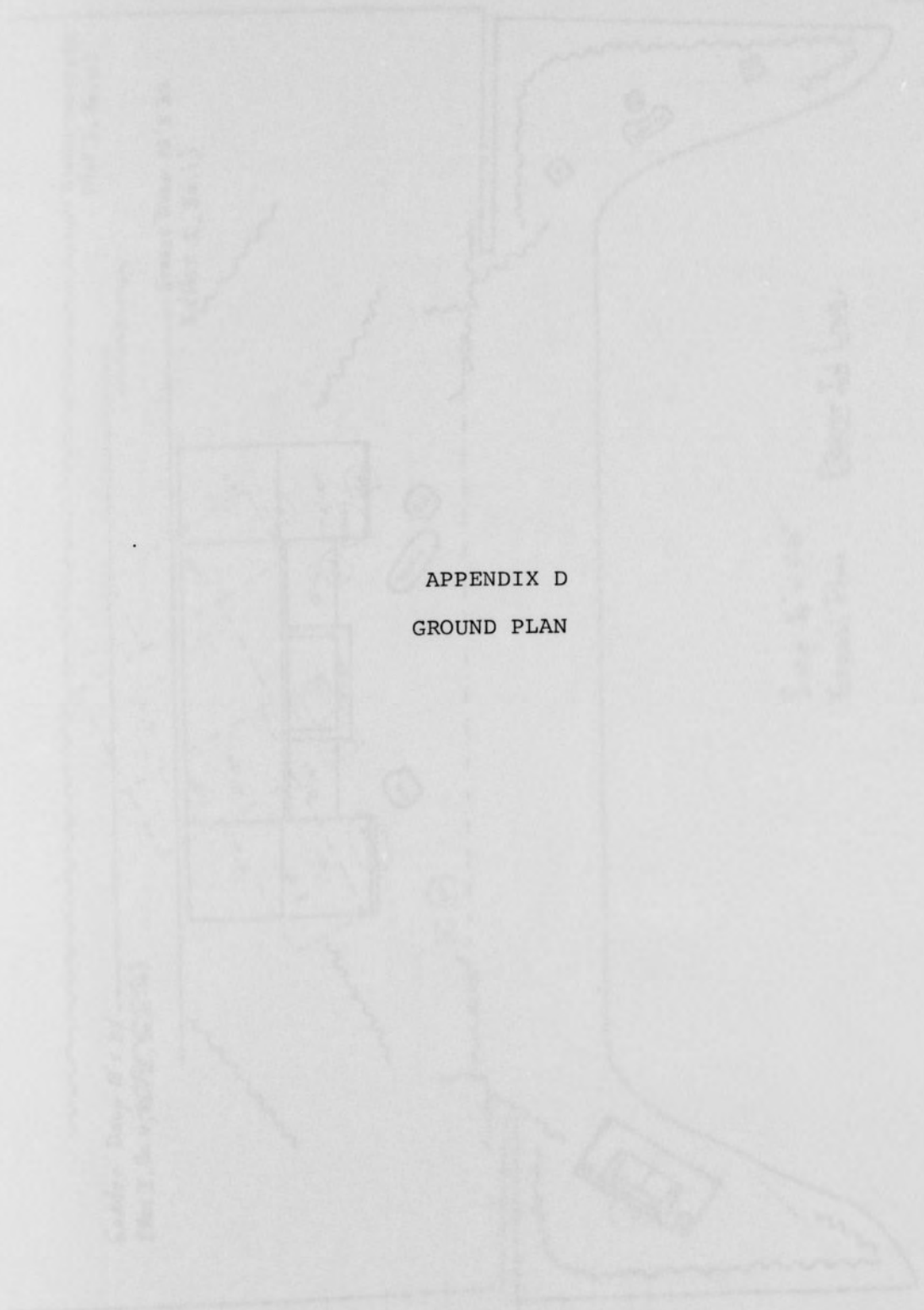
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Ernest In Love  
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15.	Fri.	June 20	Detail II-iv, 34-40 Block FINALE	7:30 p.m. 9:00 p.m.
16.	Sun.	June 22	Singing Part I, II Detail Part I	2:00 p.m. 7:30 p.m.
17.	Mon.	June 23	Detail Part II	7:30 p.m.
18.	Tues.	June 24	Detail Part II	7:30 p.m.
19.	Wed.	June 25	Detail Part I	7:30 p.m.
20.	Thurs.	June 26	Detail Part II	7:30 p.m.
21.	Fri.	June 27	Complete Run-through	7:30 p.m.
22.	Sun.	June 29	Music rehearsal as necessary	
23.	Mon.	June 30	Finish Part I	7:30 p.m.
24.	Tues.	July 1	Finish Part II	7:30 p.m.
25.	Wed.	July 2	Costume Parade Complete Run-through	7:30 p.m. 8:00 p.m.
26.	Thurs.	July 3	Technical rehearsal	7:30 p.m.
27.	Fri.	July 4	Technical rehearsal	7:30 p.m.
28.	Sat.	July 5	Complete Dress	7:00 p.m.
29.	Sun.	July 6	Complete Dress	7:00 p.m.
30.	Mon.	July 7	Performance	8:15 p.m.
31.	Tues.	July 8	Performance	8:15 p.m.
32.	Wed.	July 9	Performance	8:15 p.m.



APPENDIX D  
GROUND PLAN

