

The Importance of Being Earnest (2002)

A superb cast brings Oscar Wilde's classic comedy of manners to life in the third big-screen adaptation of this hilarious look at fun, games, and dubious ethics among the British upper crust. Algernon Moncrieff (Rupert Everett) is a slightly shady, but charming gentlemen from a wealthy family who has a bad habit of throwing his money away. Algernon has a close friend named Jack Worthing (Colin Firth), a self-made man who acts as a ward to his cousin, a beautiful young lady named Cecily (Reese Witherspoon). Algernon has created an alter ego to help him get out of tight spots brought on by his financial improprieties, and when he learns that Jack has created a false identity of his own -- Earnest, a brother living in London whose exploits have earned him no small amount of notoriety -- Algernon arrives for a weekend visit in the country posing as the mysterious Earnest. Having heard of Earnest's misadventures many times over the years, Cecily had developed something of an infatuation with the lovable rogue, and Algernon's impersonation of him works no small degree of magic on Cecily. Meanwhile, Algernon's cousin, Gwendolyn (Frances O'Connor), arrives for the weekend, and is startled to discover Jack is also there -- except that she knows him as bad-boy Earnest. So just who is in love with who? How will Lady Bracknell (Judi Dench) handle the matter of her daughter Gwendolyn's suitors? And what's the truth about Jack's mysterious heritage? The Importance of Being Earnest was director Oliver Parker's second film adaptation of an Oscar Wilde comedy; he previously helmed An Ideal Husband, which also starred Rupert Everett. Everett and Colin Firth also co-starred in the 1984 drama Another Country.

Cast

| | |
|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Algernon 'Algy' Moncrieff | Rupert Everett |
| John 'Jack' Worthing | Colin Firth |
| Gwendolen Fairfax | Frances O'Connor |
| Lady Augusta Bracknell | Judi Dench |
| Cecily Cardew | Reese Witherspoon |
| Dr. Frederick Chasuble | Tom Wilkinson |
| Miss Laetitia Prism | Anna Massey |
| Lane, Algy's Butler | Edward Fox |

Notes on difficult vocabulary

Jack: Yes, Lady Bracknell, I was in a hand bag. A somewhat large... black... leather handbag with handles... to it.

[*pause*]

Lady Bracknell: An ordinary handbag.

Lady Bracknell: And where did this Mr. James... or, Thomas Cardew come across this ordinary handbag?

Jack: The cloak room at Victoria Station. It was given to him in mistake for his own...

Lady Bracknell: [*Shocked*] The cloak room at Victoria Station?

Jack: Yes. The Brighton line.

Lady Bracknell: The line is immaterial.

[*begins tearing up notes*]

Lady Bracknell: Mr. Worthing. I must confess that I feel somewhat bewildered by what you have just told me. To be born, or at any rate bred in a handbag, whether it have handles or not, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life which reminds one of the worst excesses of the French revolution, and I presume you know what that unfortunate movement led to?

The line is immaterial = la linea non ha nessuna importanza/rilevanza; **or at any rate bred in a handbag** = o comunque allevato/cresciuto in una borsa; **contempo** = disprezzo; **decency** = (qui) senso della decenza/senso morale

Algy: Do you mean you couldn't love me if I had a different name?

Cecily: But what name?

Algy: Well... Algy, for instance.

Cecily: I might respect you, Earnest, I might admire your character, but I feel that I could never give you my undivided attention.

undivided attention = attenzione esclusiva

Lady Bracknell: You seem to be displaying signs of triviality.

Jack: On the contrary, Aunt Augusta. I've now realized for the first time in my life the vital importance of being Ernest.

the vital importance of being Ernest = (gioco di parole tra il nome Ernest e l'aggettivo earnest, sincero, onesto): l'importanza fondamentale di essere Onesto

[*in the end credits*]

Jack: Algy, you're always talking nonsense.

Algy: It's better than listening to it.

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Lady Bracknell: To lose one parent, Mr. Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune. To lose both looks like carelessness.

misfortune = sfortuna, disgrazia; **looks like carelessness** = sembra un'imperdonabile leggerezza

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

The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily = I buoni sono finiti bene e i cattivi sono finiti male;

That is what fiction means = questo è quello che si intende per "finzione"/"romanzo"

Jack: How you can sit there eating muffins when we're in this terrible trouble, I can't make out! It seems to me to be perfectly heartless...

Algy: I can hardly eat muffins in an agitated manner. The butter would probably get on my cuffs.

I can't make out = non riesco proprio a capire/spiegarmelo

[*Jack tells Lady Bracknell his address in London*]

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

[*she reaches for the bell, but reconsiders and pulls back*]

Lady Bracknell: However, that could easily be altered.

Jack: Do you mean the fashion, or the side?

Lady Bracknell: Well, both, if necessary, I presume!

The unfashionable side = la zona/la parte della strada che non è di moda; **Do you mean the fashion, or the side?** = Intende la moda o la zona?

Lady Bracknell: Well, I must say, Algy, that I think it is high time that Mr. Bunbury made up his mind whether he was going to live or die. This shilly-shallying with the question is absurd!
make up one's mind = decidersi; shilly-shallying = tergiversare

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

to tamper = manipolare, manomettere, (qui): guastare, intaccare; **Grosvenor Square** = strada dell'esclusivo quartiere londinese di Mayfair usata in questo caso per simboleggiare una zona in cui risiedono le classi agiate

Lady Bracknell: Do you smoke?

Jack: Well, Lady Bracknell, I am bound to say, yes, I do smoke.

Lady Bracknell: That is well. A man should always have an occupation.

I am bound to say, yes, I do smoke = (qui) devo ammettere che sì, in effetti fumo.

Lady Bracknell: [*walking in on his kneeling proposal*] Mr. Worthing, sir, rise from this semi-recumbent posture, it is most indecorous!

semirecumbent = semidisteso

Lady Bracknell: The General was essentially a man of peace, except in his domestic life.

The General was essentially a man of peace, except in his domestic life. = Il generale era fondamentalmente un uomo di pace, tranne nella vita domestica/familiare.

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