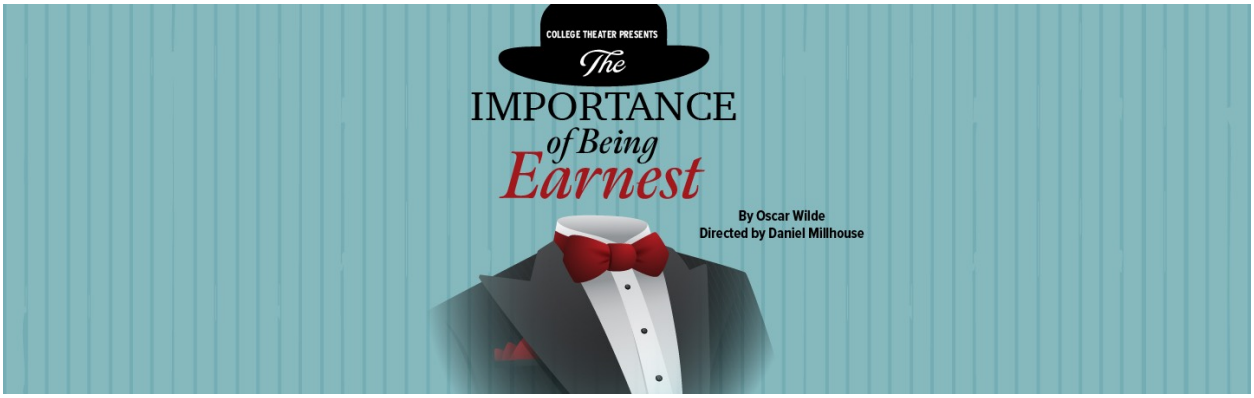
College of DuPage Theater Department

Presents

The Importance of Being Earnest

By Oscar Wilde



Directed by Daniel Millhouse

The College Theater Department sincerely thanks the library for research support for classes studying the script and production, as well as for the cast, director, and production team working on the project.

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Play/Production Information

Brief Synopsis

Dual identities, a domineering matriarch, and a mysterious handbag spark hilarious confusion in Oscar Wilde's delightful comedy of manners. Follow the antics of two wildly eligible bachelors attempting to escape the constraints of Victorian society in their pursuit of love, marriage, and happiness - though not necessarily in that order. Wilde's witty comic masterpiece is peppered with an array of deliciously eccentric characters and seasoned with his notoriously biting social commentary.

Time and Place

England. Around 1895.

Act I

The sitting-room in Algernon's flat in Half Moon Street, London. Teatime.

Act II

The Garden at the Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire, the next afternoon.

Act III

The morning-room at the Manor House, immediately following Act Two.

Characters

John Worthing, J.P. (Jack) - Of the Manor House
Algernon Moncrieff - His friend
Reverend Canon Chasuble, D.D. - Rector of Woolton
Merriman - Butler to Jack
Lane - Algy's manservant
Lady Bracknell - A woman of importance
Gwendoline Fairfax - Her daughter
Cecily Cardew - Jack's ward
Miss Prism - Cecily's tutor

Note: Contains adult themes and language

The Importance of Being Earnest Director's Note

Spring 2026

Welcome to the country… and to the wedding that may or may not happen!

When you entered the theatre tonight, you stepped into a celebration waiting to begin - flowers arranged, music in the air, and love hovering just on the horizon. All that remains is for everyone to determine who they truly are… and whether they happen to be named Ernest.

Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* sparkles with wit and elegance, but beneath its glittering surface lies something wonderfully human - the performance of identity. Long before curated feeds and carefully crafted profiles, Wilde understood that society itself is a stage. His characters chase ideal romances, guard their reputations, and polish their personas with hilarious determination, only to discover how delightfully fragile those performances can be.

In this production, we frame the play within the joyful anticipation of a wedding, the most theatrical of social rituals. Weddings are full of beauty, choreography, expectation… and just enough chaos to keep things interesting. They are elegant and absurd all at once, which makes them the perfect setting for Wilde's world, where style often outruns sincerity and love blossoms in imperfection.

At its heart, *Earnest* invites us to laugh at our pretenses, celebrate our imperfections, and embrace the joy of being just a little outrageous. Because perhaps the truest way to be "earnest" is to admit that life, and love, are both deeply sincere and wonderfully ridiculous.

Thank you for being our guests. The celebration is about to begin!



Publicity Photo for College of DuPage's College Theater's Spring 2026 Production of *The Importance of Being Earnest*
Costume Design by Kim Morris
Pictured (from Left to Right): Nathaniel Rodriguez as Algernon Moncrieff and Nicholas Washington as John Worthing (Jack)

About the Author: Oscar Wilde

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) was an Irish playwright, novelist, poet, and one of the most celebrated wits of the Victorian era. Known for his dazzling epigrams and sharp social satire, Wilde used comedy not only to entertain but to expose the hypocrisy, rigidity, and performance embedded in polite society.

Wilde was born in Dublin to highly intellectual parents. His father was a respected surgeon and folklorist, and his mother was a poet and political activist. He studied at Trinity College in Dublin and later at Oxford, where he became deeply influenced by the Aesthetic Movement - a philosophy that championed "art for art's sake." Aestheticism valued beauty, style, and artistic expression above moral instruction, an idea that would shape both Wilde's writing and his public persona.

Wilde did not simply write about elegance and performance - he embodied them. With his flamboyant dress, brilliant conversation, and carefully cultivated image, he became a public figure as much as a playwright. He toured America lecturing on art and design and quickly established himself as one of the most recognizable literary personalities of his time.

His early literary success included the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), a dark exploration of vanity, corruption, and hidden sin. However, it was in the theatre that Wilde found his greatest triumph. His comedies - including *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *An Ideal Husband*, and *The Importance of Being Earnest* - sparkle with wit while dissecting class, gender roles, marriage, and social expectation.

Premiering in 1895, *The Importance of Being Earnest* is often considered Wilde's masterpiece. Beneath its playful farce about mistaken identity and romantic obsession lies a sophisticated satire of Victorian society. The characters perform versions of themselves, protect their reputations at all costs, and treat trivial matters as life-altering crises - a pattern that feels remarkably familiar in today's world of curated identities and social performance.

Tragically, the same year *Earnest* premiered, Wilde's life collapsed in scandal. He was tried and convicted for "gross indecency" due to his relationships with men, which were illegal at the time. Sentenced to two years of hard labor, Wilde's imprisonment devastated his health and reputation. After his release, he lived in exile in France and died in 1900 at the age of 46.

Today, Wilde is recognized not only as a master of comic structure and language but also as an important figure in LGBTQ+ history. His life and work reveal the cost of living in a society that demands conformity while secretly thriving on contradiction.

Wilde understood that identity is often performed, that society values appearance over authenticity, and that love is both sincere and absurd. His writing remains timeless because it reminds us that beneath our carefully constructed façades, we are all longing to be known - and perhaps, to be truly "Earnest."



Photo: Napoleon Sarony

Articles for your Consideration

Wilde, Wit, and the Weapon of Language

Oscar Wilde's greatest theatrical tool is not plot or spectacle. It is language.

In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, words are not simply a way for characters to communicate. They are tools of power, protection, seduction, and control. Wilde understood that in Victorian society, where reputation and manners governed every interaction, language was everything. What you said - and how cleverly you said it - shaped how the world saw you.

Wilde turned that pressure into comedy.

He is famous for his epigrams - short, polished statements that flip expectations: "The truth is rarely pure and never simple." "In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity is the vital thing." These lines are funny because they twist logic. They sound wise, yet they quietly mock seriousness.

In the play, characters use wit like armor. Instead of revealing vulnerability, they deflect with clever remarks. Jack and Algernon treat conversation like a sport. Their intelligence becomes part of their social performance. If everything can be turned into a joke, nothing has to feel too serious.

Language in *Earnest* does not just describe reality - it creates it.

Jack invents the identity of "Ernest." Algernon invents "Bunbury." Cecily invents an entire romance in her diary before it ever happens. Even love is shaped by language: Gwendoline and Cecily fall in love with the name "Ernest" before they truly know the man. Wilde shows how easily words detach from truth. A name can represent sincerity. A diary can invent a relationship. A reputation can be carefully constructed.

Lady Bracknell demonstrates how language reinforces authority. Her formal, precise way of speaking makes marriage sound like a business arrangement. Through her, Wilde exposes how social rules depend on polished speech to maintain power.

At the same time, Wilde makes trivial things seem serious and serious things seem trivial. Cucumber sandwiches become urgent. A misplaced handbag becomes a crisis. Moral hypocrisy, however, is treated lightly. By exaggerating what society values, Wilde reveals how fragile those values really are.

More than a century later, Wilde's play still feels modern. We continue to curate our identities through language - on social media, in public spaces, in carefully chosen words. Like Wilde's characters, we perform versions of ourselves.

In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, language builds façades, creates romance, and hides insecurity. But it also reveals truth - if we listen closely.

Wilde reminds us that words matter. They shape identity. They shape relationships. And when used with elegance and mischief, they can quietly challenge the world around us.

Sparkle and Wit

BY PATRICIA TURTLER AIKINS

Source: Aikins, Patricia Truxler. “Sparkle and Wit.” Utah Shakespeare Festival, www.bard.org/study-guides/sparkle-and-wit/.

“It’s perfectly phrased and quite as true as any observation in civilized life ought to be.” (Algernon to Jack, on the nature of wit)

While it may be claiming a great deal to say that there is little in all of English drama to rival the sparkle and wit of Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*, it is certainly not claiming too much. Lovers of language, comedy of manners, satire, parody, and even burlesque will find much here to admire. But so will probers of complex social issues; for beneath the surface of this immensely entertaining play runs a serious thread of intense social criticism, so much so that what many have called this play’s critical weakness - the lack of any serious, respectable, thoughtful character - is, in fact, its great critical achievement. Here Wilde has delineated for us the ultimate consequences of a decorous but decadent society - empty-headed, useless, silly human beings.

The achievement of the play is simply this: that on the surface, we are positively delighted, indeed enchanted, with the complex humor that is the result of a gross incongruity between the way people behave and what exactly it is that they are “behaving” about. Thus, we delight in Algernon’s incredible capacity to render, flippantly and unwittingly, profoundly truthful observations about human nature. But, at the same time, as we laugh uproariously at the apparently harmless nature of these people’s lack of self-consciousness, we are struck by the serious consequences for a society that puts form over function, for a society where what matters most is not what you value but how you value it, not what you mean but how you mean it.

As amusing as the play is on the surface, its comic energy springs ultimately from the realities that are being mocked. Thus Algernon, who can speak perfectly, speaks perfect nonsense. Cecily, who is too addled to be anything but naive, declares that it would be a “truly awful thing for a man to be only pretending to be wicked.” Gwendolen, who is clearly not the pattern of all patience, declares that she “will wait forever as long as it doesn’t take too long.” And Jack, who behaves impeccably, behaves with impeccable silliness about “the supreme importance of being Earnest.” The play itself is constructed over an abyss of disquietude and apprehension. While deception is everywhere, all men Bunbury, all women lie about their age, the deception is of no more significance than a name. Passion competes with ambition and innocence with idiocy; and even deception itself is deceived by its accidental accuracy.

The Importance of Being Earnest, then, is a rollicking good play about some pretty serious problems. After all, in a world where there is no discrepancy between appearance and reality because there is no reality, where there is nothing beneath the surface because there is only surface, Wilde offers a different answer to that great Shakespearean dilemma of what’s in a name. While, for Shakespeare, “a rose by any other name would smell as sweet,” for Wilde, a Jack by any other name is Earnest, but only accidentally.

Dual Identity & The Performed Self

At the heart of *The Importance of Being Earnest* lies a powerful question: Who are we when no one is watching?

Oscar Wilde builds his comedy around double lives. Jack Worthing invents a reckless brother named “Ernest” so he can escape responsibility in the country and behave freely in the city. Algernon Moncrieff creates an imaginary invalid friend, “Bunbury,” whose frequent illnesses conveniently excuse him from social obligations. These inventions are absurd and funny - but they are also revealing.

Victorian society demanded strict rules of behavior. Reputation was everything. Appearances had to be maintained at all costs. In such an environment, creating a second self becomes tempting. Jack feels trapped by duty. Algernon feels confined by expectation. Their alternate identities allow them to explore parts of themselves that society restricts.

Wilde suggests that identity is not fixed - it is shaped by context and performance.

The play repeatedly blurs the line between pretending and revealing. Is Jack more authentic as the responsible country gentleman, or as the charming bachelor Ernest? Is Algernon dishonest, or simply honest about his desire for pleasure? Even Cecily participates in self-invention, creating a fictional romance in her diary before it happens in reality. Through writing, she performs the love story she wishes to live.

Names themselves become symbols of identity. Gwendoline and Cecily insist they can only love a man named Ernest. The name represents sincerity and moral steadiness. Ironically, the men who claim it are not sincere at all. Wilde exposes how easily society confuses labels with truth. A name can create the illusion of character.

The theme of dual identity also reflects Wilde’s own experience. As a public figure in Victorian England, Wilde performed wit, elegance, and confidence while privately navigating a society that condemned his identity. The tension between public persona and private self was not just theatrical invention - it was reality.

Yet Wilde treats dual identity not as tragedy, but as human nature. We all shift depending on our audience. We present different versions of ourselves at work, at home, or among friends. Identity becomes a kind of social choreography.

In this production, framed within the anticipation of a wedding, that choreography feels even more visible. Weddings are rituals of performance - polished appearances and carefully spoken vows. Beneath the elegance, however, lies vulnerability.

By the end of the play, truth emerges through comedy rather than punishment. Wilde reminds us that while society may demand performance, love ultimately requires honesty.

Dual identity, then, is not simply deception. It reflects our desire to belong - and our longing to be free.

Marriage as Ritual & Social Performance

In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, marriage is not simply a romantic destination - it is a social event, a transaction, and a carefully staged performance.



Publicity Photo for College of DuPage's College Theater's Spring 2026 Production of *The Importance of Being Earnest*
Costume Design by Kim Morris
Pictured (from Left to Right): Nicholas Washington as John Worthing (Jack), Nathaniel Rodriguez as Algernon Moncrieff, and Paula Wisniewski as Lady Bracknell

Throughout the play, characters speak of engagement and matrimony with striking urgency. Proposals happen quickly. Feelings shift dramatically. Yet beneath the speed and silliness lies a sharp satire of Victorian values. For many of Wilde's characters, marriage is less about love and more about suitability, status, and presentation.

Lady Bracknell embodies this perspective most clearly. When she interrogates Jack about his income, property, and lineage, she treats marriage like a business arrangement. Love is secondary. What matters is background, wealth, and social standing. Her rigid expectations reflect a society in which marriage functioned as a tool for maintaining class structure and public reputation. Wilde exposes the theatricality of this system.

Engagements are announced like performances. Suitors must deliver the right lines. Even names matter more than character. Gwendoline insists she can only love a man named Ernest because the name inspires "absolute confidence." Cecily echoes the same belief. The idea of marriage becomes tied to the appearance of sincerity rather than the reality of it.

In this way, marriage in the play operates as ritual - a ceremony governed by tradition, expectation, and spectacle. Like any ritual, it relies on choreography. There are rules for who may propose, how one should respond, and what constitutes respectability. Characters move through these rituals with exaggerated seriousness, heightening the comedy while revealing the fragility beneath the surface.

Yet Wilde does not dismiss marriage entirely. Beneath the satire lies genuine desire. Cecily dreams of romance. Gwendoline longs for devotion. Even Jack and Algernon, for all their deception, ultimately seek connection. The tension in the play comes from the clash between authentic emotion and social performance.

This theme resonates strongly today. Weddings remain highly theatrical events. They are carefully curated experiences - from décor to vows to photographs. Social media often amplifies this performance, turning private commitment into public spectacle. The pressure to present the "perfect" relationship echoes Wilde's Victorian world of polished appearances.

In this production, the wedding aesthetic frames the action. The set suggests a celebration waiting to begin. Flowers, music, and décor surround the characters, reminding us that marriage hovers just ahead. The environment itself becomes part of the satire - elegant, symmetrical, and slightly unfinished.

Wilde ultimately suggests that while society may treat marriage as performance, love requires something deeper. Ritual can create beauty. Ceremony can create meaning. But sincerity must exist beneath the staging. Marriage, like identity, may begin as performance. Its success, however, depends on truth.

The Comedy of Propriety vs. Desire

One of the central engines of comedy in *The Importance of Being Earnest* is the tension between propriety and desire - between what society demands and what individuals actually want.

Victorian society prized decorum, restraint, and moral respectability. Appearances mattered. One's reputation had to be carefully guarded. Conversations followed rules. Courtship followed rules. Even leisure followed rules. To behave improperly risked social ruin. Wilde delights in placing human desire directly inside that rigid structure.

Jack longs to escape the weight of responsibility placed upon him as guardian and gentleman. Algernon resists the expectations of polite society, preferring pleasure, indulgence, and spontaneity. Cecily fantasizes about romance long before it exists. Gwendoline insists upon loving "Ernest," even if the man himself is secondary to the ideal she has constructed.

Each character wants something that stretches, bends, or quietly undermines the rules. The comedy emerges because they pursue these desires while still trying to appear perfectly respectable. Jack invents a brother rather than openly admitting his wish for freedom. Algernon creates "Bunbury" to avoid awkward dinners instead of declining them honestly. Cecily writes her own engagement narrative rather than waiting for reality to unfold.

No one wishes to abandon propriety completely. Instead, they attempt to satisfy desire without disrupting appearances. The result is farce.

Wilde heightens this tension through language. Characters speak in impeccably structured sentences about the most trivial matters. Emotional revelations are delivered with elegant restraint. Even outrage is expressed politely. The contrast between the intensity of desire and the calm surface of manners creates comedic friction.

Lady Bracknell represents propriety at its most rigid. She views marriage as an institution that must preserve order and hierarchy. Yet even she is ultimately drawn into absurdity when confronted with the truth about Jack's origins. Wilde gently mocks the illusion that social rules are unshakable.

Beneath the humor lies a deeper observation: desire cannot be permanently suppressed by etiquette. It finds creative routes. It invents alter egos. It writes diary entries. It reinterprets names. Wilde suggests that the more tightly society controls behavior, the more inventively individuals will resist.

This tension remains familiar today. Modern life still demands curated presentations - professionalism, politeness, image management. At the same time, individuals crave authenticity, romance, pleasure, and freedom. We often negotiate between what is expected and what is felt.

In this production, framed within the anticipation of a wedding, that negotiation feels heightened. Weddings are environments of perfect manners and elevated emotion. They are rituals of propriety fueled by intense personal desire.

Wilde's comedy reminds us that human longing rarely fits neatly inside social boxes. The more earnestly society insists on rules, the more delightfully ridiculous those rules can become.

In the clash between propriety and desire, Wilde finds not tragedy - but laughter.

Wilde's Queer Subtext and Modern Relevance

While *The Importance of Being Earnest* is often celebrated for its wit and farce, it also carries a deeper layer of meaning shaped by Oscar Wilde's own life. Beneath the sparkling dialogue and absurd misunderstandings lies a subtle exploration of secrecy, identity, and the tension between public performance and private truth.

Wilde lived in a society that criminalized same-sex relationships. As a queer man in Victorian England, he navigated a world that demanded strict conformity while quietly policing difference. Publicly, Wilde was a celebrated playwright, lecturer, and cultural icon. Privately, he lived in ways that ultimately led to his prosecution and imprisonment.

This context matters when we consider the theme of double lives in *Earnest*.

Jack and Algernon both invent alternate identities in order to move more freely through society. They construct excuses to escape expectation. They compartmentalize their lives. While the play presents these deceptions comically, the idea of maintaining a divided self would have resonated deeply with Wilde's own experience.

The language of the play also reflects coded communication. In Wilde's time, queer identity often had to be expressed indirectly - through suggestion, style, humor, and subtext rather than open declaration. His exaggerated devotion to aesthetic beauty, his celebration of clever language, and his satire of rigid morality can all be read as subtle critiques of a society obsessed with control and conformity.

At the same time, Earnest does not present identity as purely tragic. Wilde approaches it with playfulness. He suggests that identity can be fluid, constructed, even joyfully invented. The act of naming oneself - or renaming oneself - becomes an act of agency. While the play resolves within the conventions of marriage, its deeper message questions whether social labels truly define who we are.

Today, Wilde's work resonates powerfully in conversations about authenticity and selfhood. Modern audiences are increasingly aware of how identity can be shaped by expectation, performance, and cultural pressure. Social media encourages curated selves. Public image often competes with private truth. The tension between who we are and who we are expected to be remains familiar.

Wilde's legacy has also evolved. Once condemned, he is now recognized as an important figure in LGBTQ+ history. His life story reminds us of the cost of societal intolerance, while his art demonstrates the power of wit as resistance.

In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the humor may sparkle on the surface, but underneath lies a question that still matters: What does it mean to live honestly in a world that demands performance?

Wilde's answer is not heavy-handed or moralistic. Instead, it is elegant, ironic, and mischievous. He invites us to laugh at the rules - and to consider whether authenticity might be the most radical act of all.

Other Reviews

Going Wilde in the 21st Century

BY KERRY REID

Source: Reid, Kerry. “Going Wilde in the 21st Century.” Chicago Reader, 12 June 2024, chicagoreader.com/arts-culture/importance-of-being-earnest-strawdog-theatre/.

Strawdog’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* offers goofy delight.

If you’ve ever imagined how Oscar Wilde would fare in contemporary queer Chicago life, look no further than Strawdog Theatre’s sparkling and delightful adaptation of *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Dusty Brown and Elizabeth Swanson, directed by Swanson.
Brown and Swanson get around some of the stumbling blocks for Wilde in the 21st century with economy and grace. Johnard Washington’s Jack Worthing may not have to give his legal consent for Andi Muriel’s Cecily (to whom he has been a “guncle” for most of her sheltered life in Saugatuck) to marry Jack Seijo’s Algernon. But he *can* control her Vanguard trust fund. Kade Cox’s Gwendolen, admittedly, seems like the kind of club vixen who wouldn’t let anyone hold her back, but gay daddy Augustus Bracknell (Michael Reyes) still exerts influence, financial and otherwise.

Studded with references to pop culture (*RuPaul’s Drag Race* comes up as part of Bracknell’s marriage test for Jack) and Chicago gay hangouts (“He always wants to go to Big Chicks. What am I—45?”), the show at times feels like gay bingo. I mean that in the best possible way.
Brown and Swanson understand that the specificity here isn’t just about in-jokes (though they abound and are quite funny), but in creating a believable framework for the celebration of silliness-as-revolution that Wilde endorsed.

The ensemble (which also includes Matt Keeley’s coy manservant, Lynne Baker’s Mrs. Roper-esque Miss Prism, and Crystal Claros’s dotty Dr. Chasuble) digs into this update with relish and good-natured glee, and it all goes down like a fizzy champagne cocktail on a warm summer day.



Johnard Washington (left) and Kade Cox in *The Importance of Being Earnest* at Strawdog Theatre
Credit: Jenn Udoni

The Importance of Being Earnest Review - Ncuti Gatwa leads a Wilde Party of Irresistible Anarchic Charm

BY ARIFA AKBAR

Source: Akbar, Arifa. “The Importance of Being Earnest Review – NCUTI Gatwa Leads a Wilde Party of Irresistible Anarchic Charm.” The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 29 Nov. 2024, www.theguardian.com/culture/2024/nov/29/the-importance-of-being-earnest-review-national-theatre-lyttelton-ncuti-gatwa.

Lyttelton Theatre, London
Gatwa’s Algernon brings delightful mischief to a high-camp production pointing up the classic Victorian comedy’s subversive queerness



Handbags and gladrags… Sharon D Clarke (Lady Bracknell) and Ncuti Gatwa (Algernon) in *The Importance of Being Earnest* at the National Theatre. Photograph: Marc Brenner

Oscar Wilde’s final play premiered weeks before the court case that led to his imprisonment for homosexuality, and the subtext of homoerotic desire that runs through this comedy of manners from 1895 has been well mined before now.

But it is rarer to see Algernon whirling on to the stage in a hot pink gown, like Marilyn Monroe on acid, or Earnest camping it up with hand on hip. Or indeed, their love interests coming in for a same sex kiss.

Max Webster’s luscious period dress production fuels this story of Algernon (Ncuti Gatwa, flamboyance personified), Jack (Hugh Skinner, comically vulnerable) and their secret identities with queer doubleness. Algernon is a cross-dresser. Jack might swing both ways. Both show up conventional masculinity to be nothing more than a performance. Algernon’s guiding principle of “Bunburyism” (a sensible alter ego who offsets his amoral hedonism), has never sounded more like a sexual double entendre.

But there is an elegance to the nudge-wink references and it is a production with just the right amount of delightful mischief. It borrows its look from *Bridgerton*'s playbook and there are passing pop references (from musical strains of Snoop Dogg to a mention of the queer London club, Dalston Superstore) but despite its knowingness, there is a delicately judged balance between fidelity to Wilde's text and 21st-century playfulness.

You can't help but think Wilde would be wild about this production for its all-round misbehaviour, even if it does feel like subversion lite. The same-sex gropes and innuendoes don't seem to belong to the characters but are simply there, frothily transgressive rather than sharply satirical. A music-hall red curtain and spotlight occasionally swish on, and you can't begrudge this for its lack of purpose because it is such good fun.

Most of its upper-class characters look like naughty children lacking self-restraint, from the awkward romance between Reverend Canon Chasuble (Richard Cant) and Miss Prism (Amanda Lawrence, quiveringly brilliant) to Algernon and Jack, who skip, hand in hand, or fight over muffins, like posh, overgrown schoolboys. The current *Doctor Who* Gatwa brings arch shades of his character in *Sex Education* to the part while Skinner excels in balancing emotional vulnerability with archness and physical humour.

Perhaps best of all, Sharon D Clarke's Lady Bracknell is an exquisitely dressed battle-axe of Caribbean heritage, with a head-wrap beneath her enormous yellow hat, and outfits like the best of *Bake Off*'s show-stoppers. She is all fired up on class snobberies and fears around socialism, the hypocrisies of the Victorian upper-classes firmly sent up through her.

Jack's ward, Cecily (Eliza Scanlen) carries the hint of a spoilt child, rather like a comic Estella from *Great Expectations* while his love interest, Gwendolen (Ronkẹ Adékoluẹjo), looks like a stick of rock in her tailored pink dress, and brings lovable mischief.

Rae Smith's set, with its over-bright country garden and white panelled town houses, is as handsomely confected as a wedding cake, but it is her costumes that are to die for, utterly dreamy in their mix of subversion and style, with frills for men and women and a blend of traditional Caribbean and Victorian attire.

The pace never becoming hectic, the physical comedy steers clear of farce and lines are crisply delivered without hamming up. Wilde's polished oxymorons and inverted wisdom (divorce is a pleasure, wives who flirt with husbands are distasteful etc) can sound relentlessly glib, but here they retain their satirical celebration of shallowness.

Not even a technical glitch in the preview performance I attended could spoil the fun. With its dazzle, joy and original anarchic spirit of pantomime, this is the most stylish festive show in town.



Lovable… Ronke Adékoluejo as Gwendolen.
Photograph: Marc Brenner

Analysis Tools

Things to Think About Prior to Performance

- What parts of your identity feel authentic? Which feel performed?
- Why do people invent alternate versions of themselves?
- What pressures shape how we present ourselves publicly?
- Why are weddings both joyful and stressful?
- Is love more romantic when uncertain?
- What does your name represent about you?

Things to Watch For in Performance

- Notice symmetry and stillness - when does precision heighten comedy?
- Watch how characters physically perform their identities.
- Observe color - who wears façade? Who reveals sincerity?
- Listen for Wilde's reversals - when does language flip expectation?
- What happens when perfect symmetry breaks?

Things to Think About After the Performance

- Who changed the most - Jack, Algernon, Gwendoline, or Cecily?
- Is deception always dishonest - or sometimes liberating?
- Did the wedding frame heighten the stakes?
- Which character felt most sincere?
- What does it mean to be truly "Earnest"?
- Can elegance and absurdity coexist in real life?

Other Analysis Tools

- What happens in the very last moments of the play? What is said, and how does that wrap up the characters' arcs and thematic elements?
- Consider the title, *The Importance of Being Earnest*. How does it encapsulate the essence of the characters, the setting, and the theme of the play? Why do you think Wilde chose this title to reflect the world of the play?

Additional Information

The running time for this production is approximately ninety minutes, without an intermission.

Please join us for a pre-show discussion Thursday, March 5 at 5:45pm in MAC 117, known as the lounge or “fishbowl”, preceding the preview performance. Note that the pre-show discussions will include the director and designers and will be a discussion on the approach to this production.

There will also be a post-show discussion following the Friday, March 13 performance. The post-show will be with the director, cast, and crew, and we will be fielding questions from the audience.

Please join us!



Publicity Photo for College of DuPage’s College Theater’s Spring 2026 Production of *The Importance of Being Earnest*
Costume Design by Kim Morris
Pictured (from Left to Right): Nicholas Washington as John Worthing (Jack), and Paula Wisniewski as Lady Bracknell, and Nathaniel Rodriguez as Algernon Moncrieff