

...Earnest: the actors

John (Jack) Worthing <i>an apparently respectable young man of some social standing and appropriate financial resources. Madly in love with Gwendolen – ‘madly’ being the appropriate term, perhaps</i>	Florian Bänsch
Algernon (Algy) Moncrieff <i>an upper-class ‘man about town’ who believes life is his for the taking... just as long as no effort on his part is required to actually take it</i>	Henrik Schäfer
Lady Bracknell <i>an elderly dragon in human form, sadly unaware that her ‘fire’ is becoming more smoke than flame</i>	Franziska Ptok
the Hon. Gwendolen Fairfax, her daughter <i>a young lady used to getting what she wants from everyone, including Mama</i>	Anja Taudte
Cecily Cardew, Jack’s ward <i>a sweet, simple, innocent young woman – when she wants to be</i>	Katalina Kopka
Miss Prism, Cecily’s governess <i>one whom fate has dealt a poor hand, but whose luck may finally be turning</i>	Alexandra Kind
Rev. Canon Chasuble, DD, the Rector of Jack’s local parish <i>‘In the world, but not of it’ – not yet, at any rate. Who knows?</i>	Jens Hirschberg
Merriman, maidservant at Jack’s country residence in Shropshire	Marlena Melzian
Lane, manservant to Algy at his London residence	Michael Claridge

The time: the late 1930s

Act I: Algy’s London residence. Late afternoon.

Act II: The garden at the Manor House, Jack’s country residence. Afternoon the following day.

Act III: The Morning Room at the Manor House. A short time later on the same day.

There will be one interval of 15 minutes between Acts I & II, and another between Acts II & III.

The use of flash (*Blitzgeräte*) in the theatre is **strictly forbidden**: the flash (and especially any ‘pre-flash’ programme) is extremely distracting to audience and actors alike. If you would like a souvenir of friends’ performance, we will be making a video recording and can provide you with a copy on request.

Please switch **mobile phones** and **peeping watches off**: the actors and your neighbours will be greatly distracted by any bleeping and SMS-ing during the performance.

In the interests of other members of the audience and the cast, anyone using a mobile phone or flash will be requested to leave the theatre immediately.

If you wish to smoke in the interval, you can do so on the balcony at the back of the theatre.

Is your mobile phone switched off?

2

Handy schon ausgeschaltet?

...Earnest: the play

Earnest exists in two standard versions: one in three acts, the other consisting of four. The latter version bears the subtitle, “A Trivial Comedy for Serious People.” So is the play trivial or serious? Perhaps more pointedly, does it have a ‘message’?

It is perfectly possible to sit back and simply let the comedy of *Earnest* sweep one along, as most people down the years have done – one reason for its being a favourite of amateur dramatic groups. Yet anyone who has more than a passing familiarity with Wilde’s other works, both his play (including their adaptations) and his fiction and poetry, will be all too aware of the author’s seriousness behind the velvet glove of clever *bons mots*.

It is not our intention to saddle *Earnest* with heavy moral pronouncements. Nevertheless, it is had to avoid the sense that Wilde is targeting, among other things, the superficiality of relationships in upper-class society, coupled with a view of marriage as a formal façade behind which illicit relationships may flourish unabated. Indeed, it is possible to see the only really positive aspect of the play the way in which Miss Prism and Canon Chasuble, two lonely middle-class hearts desperately in love but too timid to confess their feelings for each other, finally find their way to each other: it remains decidedly unclear how things will develop between the two young couples after the action closes, while Lady Bracknell makes it all too clear how little say her husband has in their life.

This leads to the interesting question: what is true happiness, what true love? Are they merely brittle, superficial, transient emotions? Or can they be something far deeper – perhaps requiring real sacrifice? Both girls underline their conviction that they can only love a man if his name is Ernest; both men profess their willingness to undergo baptism in this name, if that is what it takes to ‘win’ their girl. Maybe the pun that is so central to the play’s title and being (‘Earnest’ = *Ernst*; ‘earnest’ = *ernst*), and so untranslatable, indicates all too clearly the direction of Wilde’s thinking: can one be truly earnest about one’s love for another person if the existence or non-existence of that love is to be decided purely on the basis of a name? This is underlined by Algy’s comment to Jack,

I have introduced you to every one as Ernest. You answer to the name of Ernest. You *look* as if your name was Ernest. You are the most earnest-looking person I ever saw in my life. It is perfectly absurd your saying that your name isn’t Ernest. It’s on your cards.

Algy is the expert of the *bon mot* in the play. Nonetheless, what he says here points to the central paradox, that of appearances over reality. That Lady Bracknell despises Jack for his admittedly very unusual origins and similarly rejects Cecily as a bride for Algy on similar grounds yet is willing to totally change her mind in an instant on hearing of Cecily’s wealth simply emphasizes the shallow nature of an upper class for whom Wilde was writing.

How do our society’s moral values – indeed, our own moral values – compare? Perhaps this “trivial comedy” has something to say to us (supposedly) “serious people”, after all... We may laugh; it is to be hoped that we also reflect.

...Earnest: the production team

Light & lighting-concept design..... Julia Arroja da Silva
Sound.....Nicolas Graf
Backstage boss.....Anne Guese
Poster design & artwork.....Alexandra Kind
The Handbag.....Créations Katharina Lehmann
Foules webmaster.....Nicolas Graf

Costumes, props & everything else..... *The Foules*

Directed by Michael Claridge

greatly assisted and advised by Julia Arroja da Silva

Who – what – are *The Parlement of Foules*?

A flock of students of English-Speaking Cultures (BA) and Transnational Literature (MA) at Bremen University, this is their fourteenth year of activities; *The Importance of Being Earnest* is their twentieth production. The name (*das Vogelparlament*) comes from a dream-poem by Geoffrey Chaucer, centring on a conference of birds – or fowls – to choose their mates on St.Valentine's Day. Thus, many have considered it to have been written in celebration of a marriage, perhaps of the young King Richard II to Anne of Bohemia in 1382. At the end of the poem, the debate is unresolved, and the birds agree to assemble a year later to decide. (Anyone interested in following up a German link should consult the traditional folksong entitled *Die Vogelhochzeit*.)

Our “Parlement of Foules” assembles twice a year, in summer and late autumn. Contact Michael Claridge at claridge@uni-bremen.de; work on the next production begins in December 2012 (**performance dates:** June 2013 here in the Schnürschuh Theaterhaus), and on the next autumn one in July 2013. We look forward to seeing you here in the Schnürschuhtheater again, observing our 'debate'.

If you would like details of future productions, please email the above address to be added to the mailing list of the Bremen English Drama Network, which informs lovers of English-language drama (not only in schools) about relevant activities, workshops, performances, guest lectures and so on in and around Bremen. This is sponsored by S-E-T Studienreisen.

Bremen University's Faculty of Languages and Literatures (*Fachbereich 10*) offers an MA degree in “Transnational Literatures: Literature, Theatre, Film”, with the option of focusing primarily on theatre. This includes work on a production in French or English (acting, assistant direction, publicity etc.). We believe Bremen is the only German university offering such a qualification within the modern-foreign-languages area. The English-Speaking Cultures BA course includes a hands-on class concerning bringing Shakespeare's plays to life in the classroom and the opportunity to participate in *Foules* productions; summer 2013 is expected to bring a repeat of our one-week excursion to ‘Shakespeare’s London and Shakespeare’s Globe’, with two days of workshops and performances at Shakespeare’s Globe, impro work on acting, speaking and exploring Shakespeare’s work (and dancing in it!), two days walking Shakespeare’s London, and more... It is hoped that we can repeat this every two years.

Catch the <i>Foules</i> in the Internet (www.fb10.uni-bremen.de/foules/) and in Facebook (www.facebook.com/foules/)!
--

The *Foules* would like to express their gratitude to the following:

Our very good friends at the **Schnürschuhtheater**, especially **Anja Hinrichs**

Dr. Jana Nittel for faithful support both organisational and moral

Dr. Ian Watson, Valeria Scholes and Annette Jahnke for great publicity services

Dr. Janet Sutherland for holding the fort, flying the flag, fighting the fight, and being a true and trusted support and friend in ever-darker times.

© **Another disoppilating production 2012**

Is your mobile phone switched off?

4

Handy schon ausgeschaltet?
