The Importance of Being Earnest: Act III Study Questions

1. What contradictions can be found in the conversation between Cecily and Gwendolen as they observe Jack and Algernon eating muffins in the garden? What is the primary purpose of these contradictions?

2. How does Wilde continue a bit of humor he began in the previous act concerning Gwendolen and Cecily’s friendship? What might Wilde be poking fun at?

3. What artistic viewpoint does Gwendolen’s statement that “in matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity is the vital thing” reflect?

4. What is Lady Bracknell worried about when she learns that Algernon is engaged to Cecily?

5. How does hyperbole contribute to the humor in the discussion of Algernon’s engagement to Cecily?

6. On what grounds does Lady Bracknell recognize “distinct social possibilities” in Cecily’s profile?

7. Why is Lady Bracknell’s claim that she does not “approve of mercenary marriages” ironic?

8. How does Jack’s refusal to consent to Cecily’s marriage with Algernon poke fun at Victorian propriety?

9. Why is Dr. Chasuble insulted when Lady Bracknell asks him what “position” Miss Prism occupies in his household?

10. What is humorous about Jack’s calling Miss Prism “mother” when he hears about her losing the handbag?

11. What common humorous convention does Wilde employ in Jack’s discovery that he is Algernon’s elder brother?

12. How did Miss Prism “lose” Jack? Aside from the absurdity of losing a baby, where is the humor in this story?

13. What is significant about the fact that no one apparently remembers Algernon and Jack’s father’s first name?

14. What is ironic about Gwendolen’s statement that Jack has “become someone else”?