

Lord bracknell (the importance of being earnest) essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Gwendolen's father, Lord Bracknell, never appears in the play, yet Lady Bracknell mentions him often. What picture of his life and marriage do we get from the things she and Gwendolen say about him?

In 'The Importance of Being Earnest', Lady Bracknell's offstage marriage is one of the play's running gags, and Lord Bracknell is an instrument for Oscar Wilde to joke about marriage and the roles of the sexes. In the following essay, we shall examine Lord Bracknell's personal life and marriage based on what we learn from his wife's and daughter's vague, off-hand references to his social life.

Lord Bracknell seems to be the victim of a kind of abstract domestic abuse — ignored, unconsidered, hidden away, and relegated to the status of an invalid child. When Lady Bracknell tells Algernon that his absence from the dinner party will require her husband to 'dine upstairs' and 'he is accustomed to that', the audience learns that Lord Bracknell seems to lead the life of a recluse and to have taken refuge from his domineering wife and daughter in a chronic invalidism.

When Gwendolen and Cecily first meet in Act 2, Gwendolen introduces herself to Cecily, but Gwendolen does not actually tell Cecily about her own identity but instead her father's, saying 'this might be a favorable opportunity for my mentioning who I am. My father is Lord Bracknell'. This tells the audience that family connections asserts one's rank and though Lord Bracknell never seems to be present at social functions, the audience learns that men do matter when it comes to social standing and

respectability, and can be extended to the marriageability of their daughters as well.

Gwendolen tells Cecily that 'outside the family circle' he is 'entirely unknown' and thinks 'that is quite as it should be'. The image of the offstage Lord Bracknell, faint though it is, seems in keeping with the play's depiction of gender roles, which posit a reversal of the Victorian expectations of the two sexes: women are competent whereas men are passive creatures, to be warehoused.

When Lady Bracknell reenters the scene in Act 3, she is 'glad' to tell Jack that Gwendolen's 'unhappy father' is 'under the impression that she is attending a more than usually lengthy lecture by the University Extension Scheme on the Influence of a Permanent Income on Thought'. As Lady Bracknell uses unnecessary flowery language and complicates things, the audience finds this impression Lord Bracknell is under ridiculous, and determines that he is gullible and ineffectual. Lady Bracknell manipulates her husband as well, as she considers it 'wrong' to 'undeceive him' and says she has 'never undeceived him on any question', conveying to the audience that women have a huge impact on men and can hide many things from the weak and powerless men.

Later on Lady Bracknell speaks of her own marriage. When she 'married Lord Bracknell' she 'had no fortune of any kind' but has 'never dreamed for a moment of allowing' her lack of a dowry to stand in her way because she does not 'approve of mercenary marriages'. Lady Bracknell claims the credit for herself and does not acknowledge Lord Bracknell's willingness to marry a

woman with ' no fortune of any kind'. This reinforces the idea that women take leading roles in a marriage and men, represented by Lord Bracknell are subservient on the contrary.

In summary, Wilde presents to the audience the character and life of Lord Bracknell through depicting women's attitude to families and the contrasting roles of men and women in the conservative Victorian society.