

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Jason Zimmerman, MA

EASY VIRTUE (1928)

Alfred Hitchcock

OVERVIEW

Director Sir Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980) is perhaps the best-known British filmmaker and a household name. With over 50 films to his credit, Hitchcock helped to shape the modern understanding of the thriller genre. *Easy Virtue* was his eighth feature-length film and showcases his artistic interpretations in its creative fades, cuts, and edits. His most well-known films include *The Birds*, *Psycho*, *Vertigo*, and *Rear Window*, which have all earned accolades, including preservation by the US Film Registry. In 1960, Hitchcock was inducted into the Hollywood Walk of Fame with two stars for his work in both film and television. He was also the first recipient of the BAFTA Academy Fellowship Award.

Film This silent film was Hitchcock's final film with Gainsborough Pictures and shows their faith in the director. We can see in the film's first moments that Hitchcock was given more creative control than in previous Gainsborough films. Heavy symbolism, clever flashbacks, and possible homages to German films drive the movie when the story lags. Many actors and some of the sets from *Downhill* stayed on through *Easy Virtue*, perhaps to speed up production. The British Film Institute has disputed the Hitchcock cameo in this film: They say the man with the walking stick at the tennis court doesn't appear to be the director, but other experts recognize the gait and mannerisms which arise in some of Hitchcock's other cameos. Most scenes were shot at Islington studios or on location in Britain, but there was some on-site production in the French Riviera.

Background As with all of Hitchcock's previous stage play adaptations, Elliot Stannard was the principle script writer for *Easy Virtue*. He began adapting Noël Coward's popular play of the same name immediately after finishing work on *Downhill*. Reception varied greatly upon release. C.A. Lejeune wrote in the *Manchester Guardian*, "for all its cleverness, *Easy Virtue* is not a good film." Film scholar Charles Barr notes obvious similarities between *Easy Virtue* and *Downhill*: Notably, both films include a woman made into a social outcast who travels to France to escape and both have confrontations with a mother-in-law on the main staircase of a house. Another adaptation of the play was released in 2008, directed by Stephan Elliott.

CINEMATIC NARRATION

Although the story of *Easy Virtue* lacks creativity, Hitchcock brings his own with a barrage of artistic shots, cuts, and crossfades. Much of the camera placement, thematics, and editing style mark this film as an easily identifiable Hitchcock production. The way he uses the initial divorce trial as a frame story into the past makes one wish *Easy Virtue* was a court drama instead of a romance. Like many of Hitchcock's films from Gainsborough, this film has a distinct lack of intertitle cards. Though one of the 'Hitchcock 9' which were restored in 2012, only 69 minutes of the original reel were salvageable. This makes the story hard to follow as nearly 30 minutes of the film are missing in many copies. *Easy Virtue* has also been poorly distributed, only adding to accessibility woes.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Larita Filton Larita is the protagonist of *Easy Virtue*. She is a young divorcée with a troubled past. Her marriage to John Whittaker creates the main conflict of the film.

John Whittaker John is a wealthy young man who falls in love with Larita. He is popular and a sportsman. The two marry quickly, much to the distaste of John's mother.

Mrs. Whittaker John's mother and mistress of the Whittaker home. Mrs. Whittaker is uptight and serious, even with her two daughters. She has an almost obsessive hate of Larita.

Mr. Greene Mr. Greene is a barrister who first appears as the plaintiff's counsel during Larita's divorce hearing. We see him again in the second half of the film as he appears to be a friend of John and the Whittakers.

Sarah Sarah is a family friend of the Whittakers. Many in the family believe she was going to marry John before he married Larita.

Colonel Whittaker Master of the Whittaker household. Though he plays a minor role in the story, he is one of the few family members who likes Larita and supports her in private.

Aubrey Filton Larita's first husband and the principal cause of her woe. He is a drunken lout who beats her. When he is shot by a famous portrait painter's revolver, it causes the scandal that marks Larita as an adulteress.

SYNOPSIS

Loosely based on a stage play of the same name, *Easy Virtue* is a romantic drama that begins in a courtroom. Larita's divorce hearing starts well, her story garnering sympathy when a young painter's jealous confession and his assault on her husband turn the case. The court finds Larita guilty of adultery and annuls her marriage to Aubrey. Publicly shamed and hounded by reporters, Larita finds solace in the French Riviera. There she meets a young man named John, and the two fall madly in love. They marry and return to Britain. Although John's father is welcoming, his mother dislikes Larita and swears that she has seen the young woman's face before. Eventually, Larita's portrait and court photos published in a magazine lead to the family discovering her infamy. Fearing a scandal, Mrs. Whittaker attempts to intimidate Larita into staying in her room during an upcoming dinner party. Larita makes a grand entrance, only to announce her divorce from John. The film ends as it began in divorce court. This time, however, when Larita leaves the courthouse, she faces the reporters and their cameras fearlessly.

PLOT

FIRST MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

The portrait- In a seamless transition, we are shown a flashback. The decanter in Mr. Greene's hand becomes Aubrey Filton, greedily pouring himself drink after drink as his beautiful bride, Larita, poses for a portrait. We fade back to the courtroom where Mr. Filton's outburst interrupts court proceedings. We see him clearly shout, "She's lying!" The camera travels back to Larita, who explains that it was three days before she could sit for the portrait again.

Three days later- In another flashback, we see Larita dress for her portrait sitting, aided by a maid. She enters the studio and smiles at the painter, Claude, who helps her to find the correct pose. When helping her to pose her arms, he notices a bruise and questions her. Larita says that her husband bruised her wrists after drinking. Claude swears that Aubrey will never have another drop of alcohol in his studio. The camera pans towards the decanter, and we find ourselves in the courtroom once more. Mr. Greene asks if Larita is claiming her husband is a habitual drunkard. She confirms the accusation.

"Do you suggest that your husband is an habitual drunkard?"

"Are all these details necessary?"- After some deliberation in the court, the judge asks, "are all these details necessary?" Mr. Greene makes a statement and the judge asks him to continue. We are shown a montage of Mr. Greene and Larita's profiles as they speak back and forth. Time passes in the court, symbolized by the judge's monocle swinging like the pendulum of a clock. Eventually, a letter is mentioned that Claude sent to Larita. Mr. Greene reads the letter aloud.



"Why suffer that foul brute?"- We are shown the letter Mr. Greene reads to the court: "Why suffer that foul brute when you know I'd give everything I own in the world to make you happy?" It is signed 'Claude.' In another seamless flashback, we see Larita discussing the letter with Claude who makes his amorous intent known. He leans in close and grasps at her, pushing his face close to hers as she retreats. At that moment, Aubrey enters the studio to see his wife in another man's arms. Framed like *Nosferatu's* Count Orlok, Aubrey laughs aggressively as he descends the short stairway. He aims his rage at Claude who retreats towards a side table from which he pulls a revolver. He shoots, but Aubrey rages on, flogging the artist with his cane before falling to the ground, wounded. Claude, Larita, and the maid are horrified, and the police are summoned. Back in the courtroom, it is revealed that Claude changed his will to leave all of his wealth to Larita.



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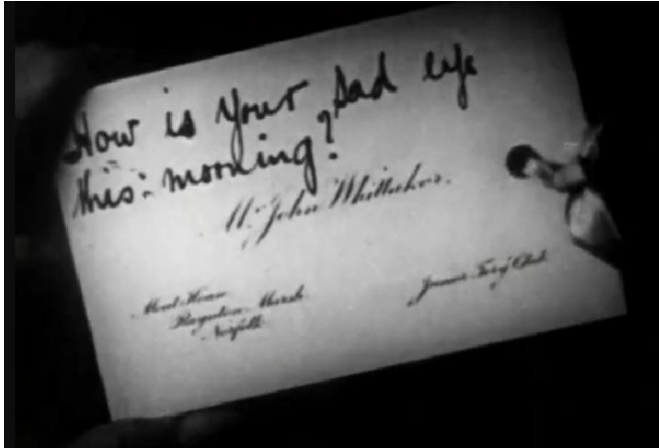
Divorce court- The film begins with a title card that describes 'easy virtue' as a reward for a slandered reputation. We then see a court record for the 'Probate, Divorce, and Admiralty Division.' On the list, Filton v. Filton is highlighted before the top of a judge's wig appears on screen. The judge looks up slowly and surveys the court. He uses his monocle to further observe the court, focusing on the Barrister, Mr. Greene, and the young woman on the stand, Mrs. Larita Filton. After some banter between the two, Mr. Greene brings forth evidence, a decanter. He asks Larita to repeat her statement, decanter in hand.



The verdict- We see the jury deliberate in a small chamber. They discuss Larita's guilt and seem to argue as the screen fades to black. A title card that reads "The Verdict" appears before the court reassembles. Next, we see Larita nervously fidgeting with her handbag and collar as she awaits judgment. After building some suspense, the judge finally pronounces Larita guilty of adultery and nullifies her marriage to Aubrey. The courtroom clears out, leaving Larita alone with the barristers who give their final advice before they all exit. Outside, a barrage of reporters and their cameras meets Larita, who covers her face and runs. We are told via a title card that she flees her infamy in the South of France.

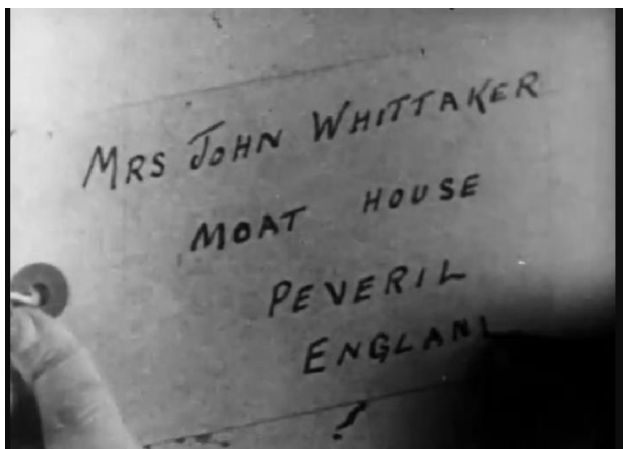
SECOND MARRIAGE

“Isn’t that the notorious Mrs. Filton?”- In a swanky hotel lobby, we watch Larita sign in under a false name at the front desk. Sometime later, we see her exit the hotel as a man at the front desk asks the clerk, “Isn’t that the notorious Mrs. Filton?” Next, we see a posh group of young men playing tennis. Their ball flies astray and strikes Larita. The young man who accidentally hit her rushes to her, apologizing and tending to her. The apology quickly turns into a conversation which makes the young man’s friends impatient. He dismisses them and leaves with Larita. They return to Larita’s hotel and share a drink on her balcony. The next day, we learn the young man’s name when Larita receives a bouquet from him: John Whittaker.



“No eyes for anything but you”- During a long romantic carriage ride, John admits his love for Larita. She rebuffs him, saying that he doesn’t know anything about her. He says that he doesn’t care, and he loves her for who she is. The couple embrace and leave the carriage for a stroll. They wed and return to England.

Mrs. John Whittaker- We are shown a package bearing the name “Mrs. John Whittaker,” denoting that we have returned to England. A short montage of servants packing and unpacking cars and trucks follows. Larita and John ride in the back of a car, smiling and smoking cigarettes as they approach the opulent manor. This is John’s family home, the Moat House. They enter the house where Larita is greeted happily by John’s father. John’s sister is fairly polite at first but quickly becomes distant and judgmental. Mrs. Whittaker descends the stairs. Her demeanor is matronly and dismissive. “I trust you won’t be bored by our simple family life,” she says to Larita.



Dinner with Sarah- A gong is struck, and the family disperses to prepare for dinner guests. Before they part, Mrs. Whittaker tells John that Sarah, a long time friend, will dine with them. Larita is taken aback when she overhears John's sister mention that she always imagined John marrying Sarah. After several long scenes showing Larita preparing for the party, she descends the stairs and meets Sarah. The two smile happily as they shake hands, and Sarah wishes the newlyweds happiness in their marriage. The party moves into the dining room and a fancy dinner is eaten.

Mrs. Whittaker's suspicions- Afterward, Mrs. Whittaker focuses on Larita. She tells the young woman her face is familiar and asks if they might have some mutual acquaintances. Larita politely denies this, hoping the conversation will move away from her and her past. Mrs. Whittaker is displeased. After dinner, she asks John, "Who is this woman you have pitchforked into the family?" During the ensuing argument, she casts doubt on Larita's past, warning John that Larita must be concealing some secret from the family.



"Do you mind if I go up to bed?"- Larita sits in the parlor with Sarah, talking and drinking aperitifs. John and his mother enter the room. He sits between the two young women, smoking a cigar. Larita notices John's poor mood and Mrs. Whittaker's judging glances and becomes visibly nervous. When she downs her drink, John's sister insinuates that Larita is a lush. Fearing the judgment of her new family, she excuses herself, asking if she may go to bed. Larita retreats to her bedroom and sits on the bed, looking distraught.

The polo match- A title card explains that Mrs. Whittaker tries to make Larita's life hard at home but is polite and charming in public. Then we see Larita and her new family in a crowd of posh folks viewing a polo match. Larita spots a familiar face. Among the crowd; the Barrister Mr. Greene, her ex-husband's lawyer. Mrs. Whittaker notices her discomfort, especially when Mr. Greene and John strike up a conversation. She makes herself scarce, retreating to the family car. This backfires when John says farewell to Mr. Greene, who is parked beside them. Larita peeks out from the back. Mr. Greene seems to recognize Larita but says nothing.



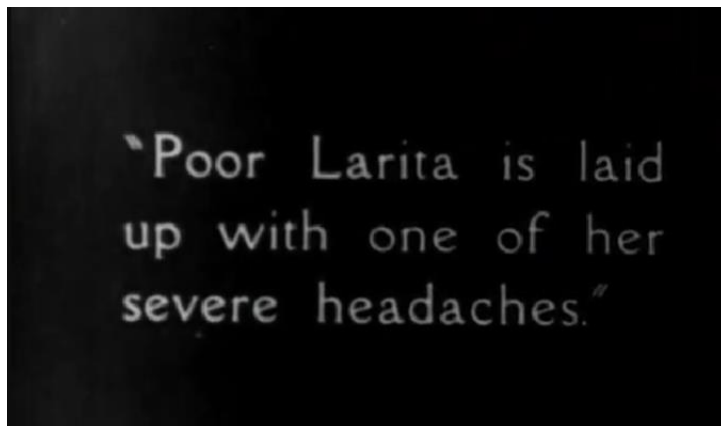
Larita's fear- We are shown an invitation to an upcoming party at The Moat House before Larita asks Mrs. Whittaker if she can help with the invitations. Snubbed by her judgmental mother-in-law, Larita goes outside. There she meets John, and they embrace. John runs off to greet some friends who have come to play tennis. Mr. Greene is among them. Larita clutches her throat nervously as the man approaches. The other tennis players walk off toward the court, but Larita and Mr. Greene hang back to talk. Afterward, Larita enters the house and puts on a display of fear, dramatically pelting a nearby camera with a book. After this, she awakes in bed, leaving the viewer unsure if what has just transpired is a dream. Larita begs John to take her back to France to escape his family's hatred. He denies her and becomes cold. Sarah tells him in the next scene that he is neglecting Larita. Then, John reveals that his mother's suspicions have tainted his relationship with Larita. Larita overhears the conversation and leaves, dejected.



Recognized- Inside the Moat House, John's sister reads a magazine. She looks excited and stands up, approaching her mother. She shows Mrs. Whittaker a photo of John and Larita at the polo match. She continues reading and stumbles upon an article about the Filton divorce and a photo of Larita's infamous portrait. Mrs. Whittaker states that she knew she recognized Larita and leaves the room with the magazine. Mr. Whittaker sits in the parlor with Larita, comforting the distraught woman, when his wife and daughter enter and confront Larita with the magazine. "I knew this woman was concealing some vile secret," Mrs. Whittaker exclaims triumphantly. Mr. Whittaker defends Larita, saying, "Larita's past life is no affair of ours." Outside, John and Sarah stroll by and notice the commotion. "Something's happened, John," Sarah says, "but whatever it is, you must stand by Larita!" In the ensuing confrontation, John further distances himself from his wife, and his mother demands that Larita stay in her room during the upcoming dinner party.



The Dinner Party- Larita retreats from the confrontation in the parlor, followed by Mr. Whittaker. He tries to console her, telling her, "it will all come right, Larita — if my boy still loves you." Larita responds, "but he doesn't— It's only his family that he loves!" We see the party begin as diners take their seats around the table. Mrs. Whittaker speaks to her son and daughters, telling them the only way to avoid scandal is to act as if nothing has happened. She then confronts Sarah when she attempts to check on Larita upstairs, chiding her for acting as peacemaker between John and Larita. Sarah reveals that she feels sorry for both and wishes only the best. When party guests ask after Larita, Mrs. Whittaker lies about Larita having a severe headache.



Larita Crashes the Party- Upstairs, we see Larita putting on an elegant dress. Downstairs, someone says to Mrs. Whittaker, “what a pity your daughter-in-law is missing this lovely party.” Mrs. Whittaker’s polite smile transforms into a scowl as she sees Larita at the top of the stairs. The entire party watches her descend and Mrs. Whittaker approach. “So your headache’s better, my dear?” Mrs. Whittaker asks. “Headache?” Larita replies, “I haven’t had a headache.” The party resumes, and Larita exchanges pleasantries with a few people before she confronts Mr. Greene, asking if he set the Whittakers searching into her past. He denies this accusation, saying, “I swear I’ve not said a word – It was bound to come out – You can’t hide a thing like that.” They retreat to the parlor for some privacy, where Larita reveals that she isn’t happy in her marriage and hopes to make the divorce easy for John. Mr. Greene gives her some legal advice and they rejoin the party. At the end of the night, Larita gives Sarah news of the impending divorce, believing her to be a good match for John.



SECOND DIVORCE

Divorce Court- Mirroring the film’s beginning, the judge raises his head slowly and begins court proceedings. This trial is incredibly short and includes no defense. Larita sits on the balcony, dejected. The verdict is reached and her marriage to John is annulled. Outside, a gaggle of photographers and journalists gather by the steps as the ‘Infamous Mrs. Filton’ is announced. Larita descends the stairs and stands proudly, saying to the mob, “Shoot! There’s nothing left to kill.”



THEMES

SOCIETY (Class)

Class- *Easy Virtue* is a story about upper-class woes. The drama is intensely interpersonal, and the threats are to one's standing in society instead of some deeper, life-threatening issue. Larita and Aubrey's wealth puts their divorce hearing on the national stage. After this, class acts mainly as a backdrop until Larita and John arrive at the Moat House. There, Mrs. Whittaker wields her class position like a bludgeon against Larita. Mrs. Whittaker fears, at first, that Larita may be a gold digger seeking access to the family fortune. As the film continues, she is concerned that Larita may be covering up some scandal. Mrs. Whittaker is elated when she discovers that Larita is the infamous Mrs. Filton. She uses this knowledge to strike the final blow against Larita's relationship with John. Then, at the end of the film, Larita turns the tide against Mrs. Whittaker by causing a stir at her high-society party and calling her out on her lie about Larita's headache, causing the potential for more scandal.

JUSTICE (Judgment, Injustice, Guilt)

Judgment- While the missing segments of the film and a lack of intertitle cards make it difficult to access some of *Easy Virtue's* themes, Judgment is central to the many conflicts of this romantic drama. The judgment of the court causes such trouble for the young divorcée that she must flee the country. A lack of judgment by John and Larita, seen in their over eagerness to get married, creates issues when they return home: Mrs. Whittaker is incredibly judgmental and defensive of her family name and fortune. She is displeased that she doesn't know her daughter-in-law's past and judges her as a threat. John's sister insinuates that Larita is a lush after one drink though everyone in the room is drinking. Mrs. Whittaker's judgments infect her son's perception of his wife as the film moves on. Fear of scandal drives Mrs. Whittaker to lie about Larita's headache at the end of the film, but only sets her up for further humiliation when Larita crashes the party. At the film's conclusion, Larita disparages the judgment of the tabloids, taunting the photographers proudly as she stands before them.

Injustice- Injustice is an easy theme to pick out in this movie. The entire court sequence sets up Larita's unjust labeling as an adulterer. Although the phrase 'easy virtue' describes a woman's promiscuous sexual activity, Claude's lust, revealed in his letters, bestows the label of adulteress upon Larita, not her own actions. The judge and jury give Aubrey's personal feelings and hearsay more weight than Larita's telling of the events. Despite having his abuse and drunkenness exposed during divorce proceedings, Larita faces the unjust judgment of others as an adulteress and lover of vice. Multiple injustices occur during Larita's stay at the Moat House: Mrs. Whittaker and her daughter treat Larita with unkindness privately, John's mother's judgment drives a wedge between him and Larita, and being imprisoned in her room for having had a divorce. Mrs. Whittaker decides the couple should divorce without any input from her son or Larita, an incredibly unjust act.

Guilt- Guilt impairs Larita at many points throughout the story. Her initial reaction to the paparazzi is guilt. She covers her face and flees from the cameras, ending up in the South of France before she feels safe. This guilt is forced upon her by the court's ruling as the viewer can see that she had minimal –if any– interest in the painter Claude. Then we see guilt turn into fear as Mr. Greene is revealed as a family friend of the Whittakers. When Mr. Greene supports Larita at the film's end, she admits another secret guilt: The young woman feels cowardly for marrying John. Though she loves him, Larita fears she may have only jumped into the marriage to distance herself from the notorious Filton divorce. At the end of the film, we see Larita freed from guilt as she confronts the cameras at the courthouse steps without fear.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Larita- (*Anxious, Friendly, Elegant*)

Larita is the protagonist of the film. Her divorce hearings are subject to the attention of the tabloids, which causes her endless social problems when the court finds her guilty of adultery. She marries John and becomes the subject of Mrs. Whittaker's ire. Despite the injustice she faces, Larita is a strong and prideful woman who grows during the film to reject the false judgments of society.

Anxious Larita has an anxious disposition, especially after the events of her first divorce. During the Filton divorce, she holds herself together well under Mr. Greene's questioning, but the court's decision weighs on her. She sits in the courtroom, toying with her jewelry and collar as her barristers give their final advice, and she quite literally runs from the cameras outside the courtroom. Her anxiety drives her to the South of France, but as we can see from some of her fellow vacationers, even that isn't far enough to escape her infamy. Her anxiety comes to a head when the dual forces of Mrs. Whittaker's unbridled hate and the reappearance of Mr. Greene throw her into a full-blown panic attack. At the end of the film, we see Larita freed from anxiety as she descends the stairs at the Whittakers' dance party to cause a scandal and when she faces the reporters after her second divorce.

Friendly At many points throughout *Easy Virtue*, Larita proves to be quite capable of making friends. During her initial divorce hearing, we see flashbacks of her smiling and chatting with the artist Claude and his maid. We see this friendly treatment of household staff continue after her marriage to John, as we see her thank and chat with maids and servants on several occasions. Her first conversation with John remains friendly, even though John hits her in the eye with a tennis ball, eventually leading to a whirlwind romance. Larita's friendly attitude shines most brightly as she meets and converses with Sarah, a potential romantic rival, for the first time. She feels such friendliness for Sarah that Larita tells her of her decision to divorce John before even the Whittakers are informed. Immediately de-escalating her confrontation with Mr. Greene, when he denies exposing her to the Whittakers at the dance party, shows Larita's easygoing and friendly attitude, especially as she confides in the man she once feared and asks him for legal advice.

Elegant Even at her lowest moments, Larita shows great elegance. Her style of dress is modish and exuberant, even as the Whittakers dress modestly around her. Many shots of Larita partaking in drink and tobacco—considered vices by Mrs. Whittaker and her daughters—showcase her graceful movements and facial expressions. During her most dramatic outburst, when she throws a book at a camera, she shows immediate remorse for acting so brutishly. Larita's capstones of elegance emerge at the end of the film. Her slow and showy descent of the staircase during the dance party screams elegance as every eye in the room begins to rest upon her. She shows a simple elegance once more during the final divorce and when she proudly confronts the paparazzi outside the courthouse.

John Whittaker- (*Young, Spontaneous, Trusting*)

John is the main love interest of the story. His marriage to Larita causes issues with his mother. He is young and sporting but is easily controlled by his mother. When he becomes distant from Larita, we see the film's central conflict unfold. He refuses to defend his wife from his mother's mistreatment, resulting in divorce.

Young John is incredibly youthful. He is fascinated with sports and is often seen viewing matches or carrying a tennis racket. His style of dress and broad smiles make him seem especially youthful compared to the likes of Aubrey Filton or Mr. Greene. Larita first meets the young man when he accidentally pelts her with a tennis ball. The next several scenes show John's youthful vigor in full swing. He constantly moves, jogging to meet friends or visitors, and pacing around the house. We see John's youth in his mother's control over him and her distaste for his rapid marriage to Larita. The elder Whittakers seem convinced that the boy is lost in puppy love with Larita. His extreme loyalty to his family is another mark of his youth. John chooses his mother's opinions and decisions over his own and Larita's several times during the couple's stay at the Moat House.

Spontaneous Perhaps tied to his youth, John acts spontaneously throughout the film. In his initial meeting with Larita, John blows off his tennis-playing friends to spend the evening with Larita. Then, he shows up unannounced the following morning with flowers. Their marriage seems incredibly spontaneous as they reach the decision in the middle of a traffic jam and exit their carriage, presumably to find a priest. John's family seems somewhat used to his spontaneous attitude, but they are still shocked that they didn't meet his new bride before their wedding. Though his mother's whispers have something to do with the decision, he ignores Sarah's advice when they overhear Mrs. Whittaker confronting Larita about her infamous divorce. When he sees Larita's portrait, he immediately sides with his mother though Sarah tells him to side with Larita no matter what.

Trusting John shows himself to be capable of great trust. His marriage to Larita happens extremely quickly because he trusts in their love. He shows further trust when she questions him about the speed of their betrothal, saying that her past and family name don't matter. He trusts that his family will love and accept Larita, particularly in his Father's case. His trust in his mother, however, sets him against Larita. His trust in his mother overrides his trust in Larita, causing him to distance himself from her and eventually divorce her. In this way, we can clearly see trust as a double-edge blade, harming one woman in favor of the other.

Mrs. Whittaker- (*Suspicious, Controlling, Unimaginative*)

Matronly and proud, Mrs. Whittaker is the matriarch of the Whittaker family. Unlike John's other family members, Mrs. Whittaker makes no attempt to hide her dislike of Larita. She is obsessed with figuring out what secret Larita is hiding.

Suspicious Mrs. Whittaker shows us the more suspicious side of her personality throughout *Easy Virtue*. Even before Larita attempts to avoid her questions, Mrs. Whittaker has her doubts about the young woman. First and foremost, they didn't meet before her marriage to John. In Mrs. Whittaker's eyes, this is a sign that Larita is only in the relationship for money. Larita's avoidance of her questions reveals Mrs. Whittaker's suspicious nature whereas most people would simply move on. Mrs. Whittaker is convinced that Larita looks familiar and feels vindicated when her daughter shows her the picture of Larita's portrait.

Controlling John's mother exerts a massive amount of control over her family. Her moods and opinions hold sway over her children and the acts of the household. Unlike the norm of the period, Mr. Whittaker seems unable to confront his wife about their disagreements, allowing her to act unkindly towards Larita though he seems to like and care for the young woman. Her two most controlling acts come in tandem: First, she confines Larita to her bedroom during the upcoming party. Then, she decides that John and Larita must divorce without considering what the young couple wants. In many ways, Mrs. Whittaker is a dictator in her own home.

Unimaginative Mrs. Whittaker seems dreadfully unimaginative outside of her bullying of Larita. Despite Larita's kind heart and friendly attitude, Mrs. Whittaker holds onto the belief that Larita is some low-class or morally-corrupt floozy seeking to rob the family of their wealth. Like many people in her social standing, she is more concerned with 'keeping up with the Joneses' than with honest expression. There is little luxury inside the Moat House, and the various parties there feature no unique entertainment or activities, lining up with Mrs. Whittaker's drab attitude. In her most unimaginative moment, Mrs. Whittaker allows Larita to precipitate a scandal when the young woman refuses to be held prisoner in her bedroom during the dance party. Because she can't imagine anyone denying her commands, Mrs. Whittaker is caught in a lie and the potentially scandalous divorce of her son.