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The Importance of Being Earnesthas proven to be Oscar Wildes most enduringand endearingplay. Filled with witty Victorian aphorisms and Wildes own brand of wisdom, The Importance of Being Earnest tells the story of Jack Worthing and Algernon Moncrieff who use clever deception and truth-bending to accommodate their social pursuits. Jack bends the truth to include an imaginary brother, Ernest, whom he uses as an excuse to escape from the country to party among urban socialites, while urbane Algernon uses a similar technique (Bunburying) that provides him opportunities for taking adventures in the country. Of course, courting and liaisons ensue, but not without complications. Oscar Wilde builds a farcicalalbeit realisticworld of Victorian social mores by using double entendre, aphorisms, and witty repartee.Wilde seems to have been toying with audiences by giving the play a title with more than one meaning. The plays title can be deceptive. Rather than a form of the name Ernest, the title implies earnestness as a quality one should seek to acquire, as in being honest, sincere, sober, and serious. Throughout the play, Ernest is a name that encompasses qualities of the ideal man: deeply trustworthy, truly loving, honorable and passionate, and absolutely sincere. Gwendolyn says, We live in an age of ideals . . . and my ideal has always been to love some one of the name of Ernest. . . . The only really safe name is Ernest. That both Gwendolyn and Cecily dream of marrying a man named Ernest seems more than a coincidence. Cecily admits, It had always been a girlish dream of mine to love some one whose name was Ernest. There is something in that name that seems to inspire absolute confidence.Indeed, there is almost a worship of the name more than what it represents. It is a divine name. It has a music of its own, explains Gwendolyn. It produces vibrations. And Cecily describes the man she thinks to be named Ernest as the very soul of truth and honour. Disloyalty would be as impossible to him as deception. So, whats in a name? Would a rose by any other name, as Shakespeare asserts, smell as sweet? Ab solutely not, unless that name were Ernest, according to Oscar Wildes portrayal of shallow, yet charming, Victorian women.Within the context of the play, add confidence, safety, and gravity to the ideal man named Ernest. But audiences are left to wonder if Wilde meant to use Earnest and Ernest interchangeably. After all, one is a description and the other is a mans name. No, Wilde reminds viewers that to be earnest is more important that to be named Ernest. The social deceptions of Victorian England were rampant, and Wilde simply wished to call things as he saw them. One way he did this was through double entendre; however, his use of aphorisms went further in exposing the widespread use of deception among the gentry.Wilde peppered the play with aphorisms, those pithy witticisms that purportedly derive from exalted thought. Indeed, the playwright spoke in aphorisms on his deathbed when he stated through fevers, My wallpaper and I are fighting a duel to the death. One or the other of us has to go. The following quotes from The Importance of Being Earnestexemplify Wildes adept use of aphorisms:Ignorance is like a delicate exotic fruit; touch it and the bloom is gone. The whole theory of modern education is radically unsound. Fortunately in England, at any rate, education produces no effect whatsoever (Act 1).Relations are simply a tedious pack of people, who havent got the remotest knowledge of how to live, nor the smallest instinct about when to die (Act 1).All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. Thats his (Act 1).The only way to behave to a woman is to make love to her, if she is pretty, and to someone else, if she is plain (Act 1).Women only [call each other sister] when they have called each other a lot of other things first (Act 1).In married life, three is company and two is none (Act 1).No married man is ever attractive except to his wife (Act 2).Divorces are made in Heaven (Act 2).Oscar Wilde possessed an unmatched intuition about people that he wove into the fibers of his plays, which include An Ideal Husband,Salome, and Lady Windermeres Fan. Moreover, he seemed to accept with resignation his role as the most daring of writers in his era, and though he spoke freely of marriage and male/female relationships, his own life contradicted those values. Instead he chose to poke fun at the society that embraced him with all his eccentricities.Wilde mingled truth and humor using tongue-in-cheek and witty repartee, both of which fit beautifully into farce. And his adept use of truth in jest makes The Importance of Being Earnesta perennial favorite of Western theatre audiences and literary critics. The following quotes by characters in The Importance of Being Earnestreveal Oscar Wildes clever wit in holding the mirror up to reveal truth and human nature:The truth is rarely pure and never simple. Modern life would be very tedious if it were either, and modern literature a complete impossibility! (Algernon).My dear fellow, the truth isnt quite the sort of thing one tells to a nice sweet refined girl (Jack).It is very painful for me to be forced to speak the truth. It is the first time in my life that I have ever been reduced to such a painful position, and I am really quite inexperienced in doing anything of the kind (Jack).In matters of grave importance style, not sincerity is the vital thing (Gwendolyn).Never speak disrespectfully of Society, Algernon. Only those who cant get into it do that (Jack).London society is full of women of the very highest birth who have, of their own choice, remained thirty-five for years (Lady Bracknell).It is a terrible thing for a man to find out suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth. Can you forgive me? (Jack).Ive now realized for the first time in my life the vital importance of being earnest (Jack).The 1890s saw the resurgence of live theater in fashionable London, and Oscar Wildes plays were the most popular venues for theatergoers. In an era of strict social mores, Wildes version of society was greatly humorous. Today, in an era of few social constraints, Wildes version of society still reminds us to laugh at ourselves. Farcical comedy play by Oscar WildeFor other uses, see The Importance of Being Earnest (disambiguation).The Importance of Being EarnestOriginal production, 1895Allan Aynesworth as Algernon (left) and George Alexander as JackWritten byOscar WildeDate premiered14 February 1895Place premieredSt James's Theatre,London, EnglandGenreComedySettingMayfair, London, and a country house in HertfordshireThe Importance of Being Earnest, a Trivial Comedy for Serious People is a play by Oscar Wilde, the last of his four drawing-room plays, following Lady Windermere's Fan (1892), A Woman of No Importance (1893) and An Ideal Husband (1895). First performed on 14 February 1895 at the St James's Theatre in London, it is a farcical comedy depicting the tangled affairs of two young men about town who lead double lives to evade unwanted social obligations, both assuming the name Ernest while wooing the two young women of their affections.The play, celebrated for its wit and repartee, parodies contemporary dramatic norms, gently satirises late Victorian manners, and introduces in addition to the two pairs of young lovers the formidable Lady Bracknell, the fussy governess Miss Prism and the benign and scholarly Canon Chasuble. Contemporary reviews in Britain and overseas praised the play's humour, although some critics had reservations about its lack of social messages.The successful opening night marked the climax of Wilde's career but was followed within weeks by his downfall. The Marquess of Queensberry, whose son Lord Alfred Douglas was Wilde's lover, unsuccessfully schemed to throw a bouquet of rotten vegetables at the playwright at the end of the performance. This feud led to a series of legal trials from March to May 1895 which resulted in Wilde's conviction and imprisonment for homosexual acts. Despite the play's early success, Wilde's disgrace caused it to be closed in May after 86performances. After his release from prison in 1897 he published the play from exile in Paris, but he wrote no more comic or dramatic works.From the early 20th century onwards the play has been revived frequently in English-speaking countries and elsewhere. After the first production, which featured George Alexander, Allan Aynesworth and Irene Vanbrugh among others, many actors have been associated with the play, including Mabel Terry-Lewis, John Gielgud, Edith Evans, Margaret Rutherford, Martin Jarvis, Nigel Havers and Judi Dench. The role of the redoubtable Lady Bracknell has sometimes been played by men. The Importance of Being Earnest has been adapted for radio from the 1920s onwards and for television since the 1930s, filmed for the cinema on three occasions (directed by Anthony Asquith in 1952, Kurt Baker in 1992 and Oliver Parker in 2002) and turned into operas and musicals.The play is set in "The Present" (1895 at the time of the premiere).[1]Algernon Moncrieff's flat in Half Moon StreetJack (George Alexander) tells Gwendolen (Irene Vanbrugh) the address of his country house, while Algernon (Allan Aynesworth) secretly overhears.Algernon Moncrieff, a young man about town, is visited by a friend whom he knows by the name of Ernest Worthing. The latter has come from the country to propose to Algernon's cousin, Gwendolen Fairfax. Algernon refuses to consent until Ernest explains why his cigarette case bears the inscription, "From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack". Worthing is forced to admit to living a double life. In the country, he assumes a serious attitude for the benefit of his young ward, the heiress Cecily Cardew, and goes by the name of John or Jack, while pretending that he must worry about a wastrel younger brother in London, named Ernest. Meanwhile, he assumes the identity of the profligate Ernest when in town. Algernon confesses a similar deception: he pretends to have a sickly friend named Bunbury in the country, whom he can "visit" whenever he wishes to avoid an unwelcome social obligation. Jack refuses to tell Algernon the location of his country estate.[2]Gwendolen and her formidable mother, Lady Bracknell, now call on Algernon, who distracts Lady Bracknell in another room while Jack proposes to Gwendolen. She accepts but says she could not love him if his name were not Ernest. He resolves secretly to be rechristened. Discovering the two in this intimate exchange, Lady Bracknell interviews Jack as a prospective suitor for her daughter. Horrified to learn that he was adopted having been found as a baby in a handbag deposited at Victoria Station in London she refuses him and forbids further contact with her daughter. Gwendolen manages to covertly promise to him her undying love. As Jack gives her his address in the country, Algernon surreptitiously notes it on the cuff of his sleeve: Jack's revelation of his pretty young ward has motivated his friend to meet her.[3]The Garden of the Manor House, WooltonAlexander in ActII (1909 revival)Cecily is studying with her governess, Miss Prism, in the (fictitious) village of Woolton, Hertfordshire. Algernon arrives, pretending to be Ernest Worthing, and soon charms Cecily. Long fascinated by her uncle Jack's hitherto-absent dissolute brother, she is predisposed to fall for Algernon in his role of Ernest. Algernon plans for the rector, DrChasuble, to rechristen him "Ernest". Jack has decided to abandon his double life. He arrives in full mourning and announces his brother's death in Paris, from a severe chill, a story undermined by Algernon's presence in the guise of Ernest. Gwendolen now enters, having left the Bracknells' London house without her mother's knowledge. During the temporary absence of the two men she meets Cecily. They get along well at first, but when they learn of the other's engagement each indignantly declares that she is the one engaged to Ernest. When Jack and Algernon reappear together, Gwendolen and Cecily realise they have been deceived; they leave the men in the garden and withdraw to the house.[4]Morning-room at the Manor House, WooltonGwendolen and Cecily forgive the men's trickery. Arriving in pursuit of her daughter, Lady Bracknell is astonished to be told that Algernon and Cecily are engaged. The revelation of Cecily's wealth soon dispels Lady Bracknell's initial doubts over the young lady's suitability, but any engagement is forbidden by her guardian, Jack: he will consent only if Lady Bracknell agrees to his own union with Gwendolen something she declines to do.The impasse is resolved by the return of Miss Prism, whom Lady Bracknell recognises as the person who, 28 years earlier as a family nursemaid, had taken a baby boy out in a perambulator from Lord Bracknell's house and never returned. Challenged, Miss Prism explains that she had absent-mindedly put into the perambulator the manuscript of a novel she was writing, and put the baby in a handbag, which she later left at Victoria Station. Jack produces the same handbag, showing that he is the lost baby, the eldest son of Lady Bracknell's late sister, Mrs Moncrieff, and thus Algernon's elder brother. Having acquired such respectable relations, he is acceptable as Gwendolen's suitor.[5]Gwendolen continues to insist that she can love only a man named Ernest. Lady Bracknell tells Jack that, as the firstborn, he would have been named after his father, General Moncrieff. Jack examines the Army Lists and discovers that his father's name and hence his own original christening name was, in fact, Ernest. As the happy couples embrace Ernest and Gwendolen, Algernon and Cecily, and even Dr Chasuble and Miss Prism Lady Bracknell complains to her newfound relative: "My nephew, you seem to be displaying signs of triviality". He replies, "On the contrary, Aunt Augusta: I've now realized for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest".[6]Oscar Wilde in 1889The Importance of Being Earnest followed the success of Wilde's earlier drawing room plays, Lady Windermere's Fan (1892), A Woman of No Importance (1893) and An Ideal Husband (1895).[7] He spent the summer of 1894 with his family at Worthing, on the Sussex coast, where he began work on the new play.[8]Wilde scholars generally agree that the most important influence on the play was W. S. Gilbert's 1877 farce Engaged,[9] from which Wilde borrowed not only several incidents but also, in the words of Russell Jackson in his 1980 introduction to Wilde's play, "the gravity of tone demanded by Gilbert of his actors".[10] Wilde's first draft was so long that it filled four exercise books, and over the summer he continually revised and refined it, as he had done with his earlier plays.[11][12] Among his many changes he altered the subtitle from "a Serious Comedy for Trivial People" to "a Trivial Comedy for Serious People",[13] and renamed the characters Lady Brancaster and Algernon Montford as Lady Bracknell and Algernon Moncrieff.[14]Wilde wrote the part of John Worthing with the actor-manager Charles Wyndham in mind. Wilde shared Bernard Shaw's view that Wyndham was the ideal comedy actor and based the character on his stage persona.[7] Wyndham accepted the play for production at his theatre, but before rehearsals began, he changed his plans in order to help a beleaguered colleague, the actor-manager George Alexander of the St James's Theatre. In early 1895 Alexander's production of Henry James's Guy Domville failed, and closed after 31 performances, leaving Alexander in urgent need of a new play to follow it.[15][16] Wyndham waived his contractual rights and allowed Alexander to stage Wilde's play.[16][17]After working with Wilde on stage movements, using a model theatre, Alexander asked the author to shorten the play from four acts to three. Wilde complied and combined elements of the second and third acts.[18] The largest cut was the removal of the character of MrGribsby, a solicitor who comes from London to serve a writ on the profligate "Ernest" Worthing for unpaid dining bills at the Savoy Hotel.[11][19] Wilde was not entirely happy with alterations made at Alexander's behest. He said, "Yes, it is quite a good play. I remember I wrote one very like it myself, but it was even more brilliant than this",[18] but the three-act version usually performed is widely considered more effective than Wilde's four-act original.[20][21] [n 1]The play was first produced at the St James's Theatre, London, on 14 February Valentine's Day 1895,[22] preceded by a curtain-raiser, a short comedy called In the Season, by Langdon E. Mitchell.[23] During most of the month-long rehearsal period Wilde was on holiday in Algeria with his gay partner, Lord Alfred Douglas, but he returned in time for the dress rehearsal on 12 February.[24] Douglas remained in Algiers; his father, the Marquess of Queensberry, planned to disrupt the premiere by throwing a bouquet of rotten vegetables at the playwright when he took his bow at the end. Wilde learned of the plan and Alexander cancelled Queensberry's ticket and arranged for the police to bar his entrance. Wilde wrote to Douglas, "He arrived with a prize fighter!![n 2] I had all Scotland Yard to guard the theatre. He prowled around for three hours, then left chattering like a monstrous ape".[26] Queensberry left the bouquet at the theatre entrance.[25]Wilde arrived for the premiere dressed in "florid sobriety", wearing a green carnation in his lapel.[27] Allan Aynesworth, who played Algernon Moncrieff, recalled to Hesketh Pearson:In my fifty-three years of acting, I never remember a greater triumph than the first night of The Importance of Being Earnest ... The audience rose in their seats and cheered and cheered again.[28]The theatrical newspaper The Era reported that the play "met with enthusiastic and unanimous approval" and confidently predicted "a long and prosperous run".[23] Aynesworth was "debonair and stylish", and Alexander, who played Jack Worthing, "demure";[29] according to The Era, "Mr George Alexander played Worthing just as a part of this sort should be played, i.e., with entire seriousness and no indication of purposed irony".[23] The Morning Post said that Irene Vanbrugh and Evelyn Millard could not be bettered and caught the required Gilbertian tone.[30] The Observer remarked on the "rapturous amusement" of the audience, and echoed The Era's prediction of a long run.[31]According to the published text, the characters, descriptions and cast comprised:[32][1]John Worthing, JPof the Manor House, Woolton, HertfordshireGeorge AlexanderAlgernon Moncrieffhis friendAllan AynesworthRev Canon Chasuble, DDRector of WooltonH. H. VincentMerrimanbutler to Mr WorthingFrank DyallLaneMr Moncrieff's manservantF. Kinsey PeileLady BracknellRose LeclercqHon Gwendolen Fairfaxher daughterIrene VanbrughCecily CardewJohn Worthing's wardEvelyn Millard (succeeded by Violet Lyster)[n 3]Miss Prismher governessMrs George CanningeIrene Vanbrugh as Gwendolen and Evelyn Millard as CecilyRose Leclercq as Lady Bracknell, from a sketch of the first productionMrs George Canninge as Miss Prism, and Evelyn Millard as CecilyAynesworth and Alexander as Algernon and Jack in Act IIQueensberry continued harassing Wilde, who within weeks launched a private prosecution against him for criminal libel, triggering a series of trials that revealed Wilde's homosexual private life and ended in his imprisonment for gross indecency in May 1895. The Victorian public turned against him after his arrest, and box-office receipts dwindled rapidly;[34][35] Alexander tried to save the production by removing the author's name from the playbills,[n 4] but it closed on 8 May after only 83 performances.[24][37]The play's original Broadway production opened at the Empire Theatre on 22 April 1895 but closed after sixteen performances. Its cast included William Faversham as Algernon, Henry Miller as Jack, Viola Allen as Gwendolen and Ida Vernon as Lady Bracknell.[38] The Australian premiere was in Melbourne on 10 August 1895, presented by Robert Brough and Dion Boucicault Jr., with Cecil Ward as Jack, Boucicault as Algernon and Jenny Watt-Tanner as Lady Bracknell. The production was an immediate success.[39][40] Wilde's downfall in England did not affect the popularity of his plays in Australia.[41][n 5] The same company presented the New Zealand premiere in October 1895, when the play was enthusiastically received. Reviewers said, "in subtlety of thought, brilliancy of wit and sparkling humour, it has scarcely been excelled";[42] and "its fun is irresistible ... increasing in intensity until in the third and last act it becomes uproarious".[43]Reviewers of the premiere, clockwise from top left: William Archer, A.B.Walkley, H. G. Wells and Bernard ShawIn contrast with much theatre of the time, the light plot of The Importance of Being Earnest does not address serious social and political issues, and this troubled some contemporary reviewers. Though unsure of Wilde's seriousness as a dramatist, they recognised the play's cleverness, humour and popularity.[44] Shaw found the play "extremely funny" but "heartless", a view he maintained all his life.[45][n 6] His review in the Saturday Review argued that comedy should touch as well as amuse: "I go to the theatre to be moved to laughter, not to be tickled or bustled into it".[47]In The World, William Archer wrote that he had enjoyed watching the play but found it to be empty of meaning: "What can a poor critic do with a play which raises no principle, whether of art or morals, creates its own canons and conventions, and is nothing but an absolutely wilful expression of an irrepressibly witty personality?"[48] In The Speaker, A.B.Walkley admired the play and was one of few to see it as the culmination of Wilde's dramatic career. He denied that the term "farce" was derogatory or even lacking in seriousness and said, "It is of nonsense all compact, and better nonsense, I think, our stage has not seen".[49]H.G.Wells, in an unsigned review for The Pall Mall Gazette, called the play one of the freshest comedies of the year, saying, "More humorous dealing with theatrical conventions it would be difficult to imagine".[50] He also questioned whether people would fully see its message, "... how Serious People will take this Trivial Comedy intended for their learning remains to be seen. No doubt seriously".[50] The play was so light-hearted that some reviewers compared it to comic opera rather than drama. W. H. Auden later (1963) called it "a pure verbal opera", and The Times commented, "The story is almost too preposterous to go without music".[29] Mary McCarthy, in Sights and Spectacles (1959), despite thinking the play extremely funny, called it "a ferocious idyll"; "depravity is the hero and the only character".[51]As Wilde's works came to be read and performed again in the early 20th century, it was The Importance of Being Earnest that received the most productions.[52] The critic and author Max Beerbohm called the play Wilde's "finest, most undeniably his own", saying that the plots of his other comedies Lady Windermere's Fan, A Woman of No Importance and An Ideal Husband follow the manner of Victorien Sardou,[n 7] and are similarly unrelated to the theme of the work, while in The Importance of Being Earnest the story is "dissolved" into the form of the play.[54] By the time of its centenary in 1995 the journalist Mark Lawson described the piece as "the second most known and quoted play in English after Hamlet".[55]Lilian Braithwaite as Cecily, 1901The Importance of Being Earnest and Wilde's three other drawing room plays were performed in Britain during the author's imprisonment and exile by small touring groups. A. B. Tapping's company toured The Importance between October 1895 and March 1896,[n 8] and Elsie Lanham's touring company presented it along with Lady Windermere's Fan, beginning in November 1899.[57] The play was well received; one local critic described it as "sparkling with wit and epigrams",[58] and another called it "a most entertaining comedy [with] some sparkling dialogue".[59]The play was not seen again in London until after Wilde's death in 1900. Alexander revived it in the small Coronet theatre in Notting Hill, outside the West End, in December the following year,[60] after taking it on tour, starring as John Worthing, with a cast that included the young Lilian Braithwaite as Cecily. The Manchester Guardian called the piece "a brilliant play".[61] The Importance of Being Earnest returned to the West End when Alexander presented a revival at the St James's in 1902. It was billed as "By the author of Lady Windermere's Fan", and few reviews mentioned Wilde's name, but his work was praised. The Sporting Times said:The trivial comedy revived at the St James's is as witty an evening's entertainment as any worldling could desire. It is all as light as a good souffl. The ladies talk like Mr W. S. Gilbert's fairies do, and are supernaturally clever; the men emit sparkles of wit even when their mouths are full of cucumber sandwiches or crumpets ... I can guarantee that the most blas young man of twenty-two will have one chuckle a minute at the St James's. You are tickled throughout with a feather, and it is a very pleasant and comforting sensation.[62]The revival ran for 52 performances.[63] For the first Broadway revival, by Charles Frohman's Empire Stock Company later in 1902, the playbills and the reviews restored the author's name.[64]Alexander presented the work again at the St James's in 1909, when he and Aynesworth reprised their original roles;[65] that revival ran for 316 performances.[36] Max Beerbohm said that the play was sure to become a classic of the English repertory and that its humour was as fresh then as when it had been written, adding that the actors had "worn as well as the play".[66]Leslie Faber (centre) as Jack, 1923 revival, with Louise Hampton as Miss Prism and H. O. Nicholson as Dr Chasuble The play was revived on Broadway in 1910 with a cast that included Hamilton Revelle, A. E. Matthews and Jane Oaker. The New York Times commented that the play "has lost nothing of its humor ... no one with a sense of humor can afford to miss it".[67] For a 1913 revival at the St James's, the young actors Gerald Ames and A. E. Matthews succeeded the creators as Jack and Algernon.[68]Leslie Faber as Jack, John Deverell as Algernon and Margaret Scudamore as Lady Bracknell headed the cast in a 1923 production at the Haymarket Theatre.[69] Revivals in the first decades of the 20th century treated "the present" as the current year. It was not until the 1920s that the case for 1890s costumes was established; as a critic in The Manchester Guardian put it, "Thirty years on, one begins to feel that Wilde should be done in the costume of his period that his wit today needs the backing of the atmosphere that gave it life and truth. ... Wilde's glittering and complex verbal felicities go ill with the shingle and the short skirt".[70]In Nigel Playfair's 1930 production at the Lyric, Hammersmith, John Gielgud played Jack to the Lady Bracknell of his aunt, Mabel Terry-Lewis.[71] An Old Vic production in 1934 featured the husband-and-wife team of Charles Laughton and Elsa Lanchester as Chasuble and Miss Prism; others in the cast were Roger Livesey (Jack), George Curzon (Algernon), Athene Seyler (Lady Bracknell), Flora Robson (Gwendolen) and Ursula Jeans (Cecily).[72] On Broadway, Estelle Winwood co-starred with Clifton Webb and Hope Williams in a 1939 revival.[73]Gielgud produced and starred in a production at the Globe (now the Gielgud) Theatre in 1939, in a cast that included Edith Evans as Lady Bracknell, Joyce Carey as Gwendolen, Angela Baddeley as Cecily and Margaret Rutherford as Miss Prism. The Times considered the production the best since the original and praised it for its fidelity to Wilde's conception and its "airy, responsive ball-playing quality".[74] Later in the same year, Gielgud presented the work again, with Jack Hawkins as Algernon, Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies as Gwendolen and Peggy Ashcroft as Cecily, with Evans and Rutherford in their previous roles.[75] The production was presented in several seasons during and after the Second World War, with mostly the same principal players.[22] During a 1946 season at the Haymarket, the King and Queen attended a performance,[76] which, as the journalist Geoffrey Wheatcroft put it, gave the play "a final accolade of respectability".[77][n 9] Gielgud's London production toured North America and was successfully staged on Broadway in 1947.[79][n 10]In 1975 Jonathan Miller, who had been prevented for financial reasons the previous year from staging the play at the National Theatre with an all-male cast, directed a production in which Lady Bracknell, played by Irene Handl, was given a German accent.[81][82] For Peter Hall's 1982 production at the National Theatre the cast included Judi Dench as Lady Bracknell,[n 11] Martin Jarvis as Jack, Nigel Havers as Algernon, Zo Wanamaker as Gwendolen and Anna Massey as Miss Prism.[84] In 1987 a version of the play was given at the Whitehall Theatre starring Hinge and Bracket as Miss Prism and Lady Bracknell respectively.[85] Nicholas Hytner's 1993 production at the Aldwych Theatre, starring Maggie Smith, had occasional references to a conjectural gay subtext.[86]The play was presented in Singapore in 2004 by the British Theatre Playhouse,[87] and the same company took the production to Greenwich Theatre, London, in 2005.[88] In 2007 Peter Gill directed the play at the Theatre Royal, Bath. The production went on a short UK tour before playing in the West End in 2008.[89]Since the 1987 Whitehall version, some other productions have cast a male actor in the role of Lady Bracknell. In 2005 the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, presented the play with an all-male cast; it also featured Wilde as a character the play opened with him drinking in a Parisian caf, dreaming of his play.[90] The Melbourne Theatre Company staged a production in 2011 with Geoffrey Rush as Lady Bracknell.[91] In the same year the Roundabout Theatre Company presented a Broadway revival based on the 2009 Stratford Shakespeare Festival production featuring its director, Brian Bedford, as Lady Bracknell.[92] At the Vaudeville Theatre, London, in 2015, David Suchet took the role in a production directed by Adrian Noble.[85]In 2014 at the Harold Pinter Theatre, London, Lucy Bailey directed a production that followed a trend to "age-blind" casting:[93] [94] the average age of the cast was nearly seventy, and Jarvis and Havers reprised the roles they had played at the National in 1982.[93] In 2024 the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester presented an updated version, described by The Guardian as "a convincing stab at a 21st-century makeover".[95] That same year, a more opulent version was performed at the National Theatre. The cast included Ncuti Gatwa as Algernon, Hugh Skinner as Jack, Eliza Scanlen as Cecily, Ronk Adkolujo as Gwendolen, and Sharon D. Clarke as Lady Bracknell.[96]Title pages of the first edition, 1899, with Wilde's name omitted from the first page, and the dedication to Robbie Ross on the secondWilde's two final comedies, An Ideal Husband and The Importance of Being Earnest, were still on stage in London at the time of his prosecution in 1895, and they were soon closed as the details of his case became public. After two years in prison with hard labour, Wilde went into exile in Paris, sick and depressed, his reputation destroyed in England. In 1898 Leonard Smithers agreed with Wilde to publish the two final plays.[97]Wilde proved to be a diligent reviser, sending detailed instructions on stage directions, character listings and the book's presentation and insisting that a playbill from the first performance be reproduced inside. Ellmann argues that the proofs show a man "very much in command of himself and of the play".[97] Wilde's name did not appear on the cover, which stated: "By the Author of Lady Windermere's Fan".[98] His return to work was brief, as he refused to write anything else: "I can write, but have lost the joy of writing".[97]The Importance of Being Earnest's popularity has meant it has been translated into many languages, but the pun in the title ("Ernest", a masculine proper name, and "earnest", steadfast and serious) poses a special problem for translators. The simplest instance of a suitable translation of the pun is in German, where ernst (serious) and Ernst (given name) are the same.[99][n 12]Wilde by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1896)As wordplay is usually unique to the language in question, translators are faced with a choice of either staying faithful to the original or creating a similar pun in their own language.[101] Some translators leave all characters' names unchanged and in their original spelling: readers are reminded of the original cultural setting, but the liveliness of the pun is lost.[102] Others, favouring comprehensibility over fidelity to the original, have replaced Ernest with a name that also represents a virtue in the target language.[99] For instance, Italian versions variously call the play L'importanza di essere Franco/Severo/Fedele, the given names being respectively the values of honesty, propriety and fidelity.[103] Translators differ in their approach to the original English honorific titles; some change them all or none, but most leave a mix, partly as a compensation for the loss of Englishness.[104]French offers a closer pun. According to Les Archives du spectacle in its listing of productions in French since 1954, the title of the play is most often given as L'Importance d'tre Constant,[n 13] but has also been rendered as L'Importance d'tre srieux, Il est important d'tre aim, Il est important d'tre Dsir and Il est important d'tre Fidle.[106][n 14]The novelist and critic Arthur Ransome argued that Wilde freed himself by abandoning the melodrama of his earlier drawing room plays and basing the story entirely on the Earnest/Ernest verbal conceit. Freed from "living up to any drama more serious than conversation", Wilde could now amuse himself to a fuller extent with "quips, bons mots, epigrams and repartee that had really nothing to do with the business at hand".[107] The academic Sos Eltis comments that although Wilde's earliest and longest handwritten drafts of the play are full of "farcical accidents, broad puns and a number of familiar comic devices",[108] in his revisions "Wilde transformed standard nonsense into the more systematic and disconcerting illogicality which characterizes Earnest's dialogue".[109]The genre of the Importance of Being Earnest has been debated by scholars and critics, who have variously categorised it as high comedy, farce, parody and satire. In a 1956 critique Richard Foster argues that the play creates "an 'as if' world in which 'real' values are inverted, reason and unreason are interchanged and the probable defined by improbability".[110] Contributors to The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde (1997) variously refer to the play as "high farce",[111] "an ostensible farce",[112] "farce with aggressive pranks, quick-paced action and evasion of moral responsibility",[113] and "high comedy".[114]Ransome described The Importance of Being Earnest as the most trivial of Wilde's society plays, and the only one that produces "that peculiar exhilaration of the spirit by which we recognise the beautiful ... It is precisely because it is consistently trivial that it is not ugly".[115] Salome, An Ideal Husband and The Picture of Dorian Gray had dwelt on more serious wrongdoing, but vice in The Importance of Being Earnest is represented by Algernon's greedy consumption of cucumber sandwiches.[115][n 15] Wilde told his friend Robbie Ross that the play's theme was "That we should treat all trivial things in life very seriously, and all serious things of life with a sincere and studied triviality".[117] The theme is glanced at in the play's title, and earnestness is repeatedly alluded to in the dialogue;[118] Algernon says in Act II, "one must be serious about something if one is to have any amusement in life", but goes on to reproach Jack for being serious about everything and thus revealing a trivial nature.[119] Blackmail and corruption had haunted the double lives of Dorian Gray and Sir Robert Chiltern (in An Ideal Husband), but in Earnest the protagonists' duplicity (Algernon's "Bunburying" and Worthing's double life as Jack and Ernest) is for more innocent purposes largely to evade unwelcome social obligations.[117] While much theatre of the time tackled serious social and political issues, Wilde's writing in this play is the antithesis of that of didactic writers like Shaw who used their characters to present audiences with grand ideals and appeals for social justice.[44]The play repeatedly mocks Victorian traditions and social customs marriage and the pursuit of love in particular.[120] In Victorian times earnestness was considered by some to be the overriding societal value; originating in religious attempts to reform the lower classes, it spread to the middle and upper classes during the mid-19th century.[100] The play's subtitle introduces the theme, which continues in the discussion between Jack and Algernon in Act I: "Yes, but you must be serious about it. I hate people who are not serious about meals. It is so shallow of them".[121]Gwendolen (Irene Vanbrugh), Merriman (Frank Dyall) and Cecily (Evelyn Millard), in the original production, Act IIWilde's inversion of values continues: when Algernon arrives in Woolton masquerading as Ernest he tells Cecily that he is not really wicked at all.CECILY: If you are not, then you have certainly been deceiving us all in a very inexcusable manner. I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time. That would be hypocrisy.[122]In the final scene Jack asks Gwendolen if she can forgive him for not having been deceitful after all:JACK: Gwendolen, it is a terrible thing for a man to find out suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth. Can you forgive me?GWENDOLEN: I can, for I feel that you are sure to change.[123]In turn, Gwendolen and Cecily have the idea of marrying a man named Ernest. Gwendolen ignores her mother's methodical analysis of Jack Worthing's suitability as a husband and places her entire faith in a forename, declaring in Act I, "The only really safe name is Ernest".[124] This is an opinion shared by Cecily in Act II: "I pity any poor married woman whose husband is not called Ernest".[125]Wilde portrayed society's rules and rituals in the figure of Lady Bracknell: according to the Wilde scholar Peter Raby, minute attention to the details of her style created a comic effect of assertion by restraint.[126] She dismisses Jack's London address as on the unfashionable side of Belgrave Square and is unmoved by Jack's explanation that the handbag in which he was found as a baby was deposited in the cloakroom of the socially superior half of Victoria Station.[127][n 16]Wilde parodies 19th-century melodrama, introducing exaggeratedly incongruous situations such as Jack's arrival in full mourning for the brother who has just walked into his house, and the sudden switch from fulsome affection between Cecily and Gwendolen to deep hostility on discovering that they are supposedly both engaged to the same man.[129]In queer theory the play's themes of duplicity and ambivalence are inextricably bound up with Wilde's homosexuality, so that the play exhibits what one critic terms a "flickering presence-absence of ... homosexual desire".[130] After his release from prison, Wilde wrote to Reginald Turner, "It was extraordinary reading the play over. How I used to toy with that tiger Life!"[131] In a 2014 study, William Eaton writes, "The Importance of Being Earnest is what it obviously is, a play about dissimulation, and that dissimulation not seeming to be who one was was extremely important for homosexuals of Wilde's time and place, and thus was an extremely non-trivial matter for Wilde".[132][n 17]Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, a proponent of queer theory, interprets linguistic aspects of the play as allusions to gay culture and stereotypes, such as references to the German language and the composer Richard Wagner, both of which were associated with male homosexuality in Wilde's day.[136] In 1990 Noel Annan suggested that the use of the name Ernest may have been a homosexual in-joke.[137] In 1892, two years before Wilde began writing the play, John Gambril Nicholson had published a book of pederastic poetry, Love in Earnest. The sonnet "Of Boys' Names" included the verse:Though Frank may ring like silver belland Cecil softer music claimthey cannot work the miracle 'tis Ernest sets my heart a-flame.[138]Annan speculated that "earnest" may also have been a private code-word among gay men, as in: "Is he earnest?" in the same way that "Is he musical?" is thought to have been used.[137] Eaton finds this theory unconvincing,[132] and in 2001 Sir Donald Sinden, an actor who had met Lord Alfred Douglas and two of the play's original cast (Irene Vanbrugh and Allan Aynesworth), wrote to The Times to rebut suggestions that "earnest" held any sexual connotations:[139] [140]Although they had ample opportunity, at no time did any of them even hint that "Earnest" was a synonym for homosexual. The first time I heard it mentioned was in the 1980s, and I immediately consulted Sir John Gielgud, whose own performance of Jack Worthing in the same play was legendary, and whose knowledge of theatrical lore was encyclopaedic. He replied in his ringing tones: "No-No! Nonsense, absolute nonsense: I would have known".[139]Bunbury is a village in Cheshire.[141] Several theories have been advanced to explain Wilde's use of the name to imply a secretive double life. It may have derived from Henry Shirley Bunbury, a hypochondriacal acquaintance of Wilde's youth.[142] Another theory is that Wilde spotted the names of a Captain Bunbury and a magistrate, Mr Bunbury, in The Worthing Gazette in August and September 1894, found the surname pleasing and borrowed it.[143]A suggestion put forward by Aleister Crowley who knew Wilde was that Bunbury was a portmanteau word, coined after Wilde had taken a train to Banbury, met a boy there and arranged a second meeting at Sunbury.[144] Carolyn Williams, in a 2010 study, writes that for the word "Bunburying", Wilde "braids the 'Belvawneying' evil eye from Gilbert's Engaged" with Bunthorne from Gilbert (and Sullivan)'s 1881 comic opera Patience.[145][n 18]Although Wilde had for several years been famous for dialogue and his use of language, Raby has argued that in this play the author achieved unity and mastery unmatched in his other plays, with the possible exception of Salome.[147] Raby comments that although the earlier comedies suffer from an unevenness resulting from the thematic clash between the trivial and the serious, The Importance of Being Earnest achieves "a pitch-perfect style" that allows these clashes to dissolve.[147] Raby identifies three different registers in the play: Algernon's exchange with his manservant conveying an underlying unity despite their differing attitudes. The imperious pronouncements of Lady Bracknell are as startling for her use of hyperbole and rhetorical extravagance as for her disconcerting opinions.[147] In contrast, the discourse of Dr Chasuble and Miss Prism is distinguished by "pedantic precept" and "idiosyncratic diversion".[147] The play is full of epigrams and paradoxes. Max Beerbohm described it as abounding in "chiselled apothegms witticisms unrelated to action or character but so good in themselves as to have the quality of dramatic surprise".[148]Though Wilde deployed characters that were by now familiar the upper-class dandy, the overbearing matriarch, the woman with a past, the puritanical young lady his treatment is subtler than in his earlier comedies. Lady Bracknell, for instance, embodies respectable, upper-class society, but Eltis notes how her development "from the familiar overbearing duchess into a quirkier and more disturbing character" can be traced through Wilde's revisions of the play.[109] For the two young men, Wilde presents not stereotypical stage "dudes" but intelligent beings who, as Russell Jackson puts it, "speak like their creator in well-formed complete sentences and rarely use slang or vogue-words".[149] Dr Chasuble and Miss Prism are, in Jackson's view, characterised by "a few light touches of detail", their old-fashioned enthusiasms and the Canon's fastidious pedantry pared down by Wilde during his many redrafts of the text.[149]See also: Music based on the works of Oscar WildeMain articles: The Importance of Being Earnest (1952 film), The Importance of

produced before Wilde was famous enough to be caricatured.[146]^ a b Wilde (2000), p. 3^ Wilde (2000), pp. 517^ Wilde (2000), pp. 1840^ Wilde (2000), pp. 4181^ Wilde (2000), pp. 82104^ Wilde (2000), pp. 104105^ a b Edwards, Owen Dudley. "Wilde, Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills (18541900), writer", Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press 2004, (subscription or UK public library membership required)^ Ellmann, p. 421^ Denisoff, p. 66; Feingold, Michael, "Engaging the Past" Archived 8 November 2006 at the Wayback Machine; Hudson, pp. 101105; Jackson (2000), p. xxxvi; Koerble, p. 144; Pearson, p. 63; Raby (1995) p. 28; Stedman, p. 151; Thompson, p. 255; and Williams, pp. 15 and 411^ Jackson (2000) p. xxxvi^ a b Jackson (1997), p. 163^ Eltis, pp. 60, 101 and 137^ "A Serious Comedy for Trivial People, an early manuscript draft of The Importance of Being Earnest" Archived 28 August 2024 at the Wayback Machine, New York Public Library (1894). 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Victoria and Albert Museum (vam.ac.uk).The Importance of Being Earnest at the Internet Broadway Database The Importance of Being Earnest public domain audiobook at LibriVoxPortals: Film Literature Opera TheatreThe Importance of Being Earnest at Wikipedia's sister projects:Media from CommonsQuotations from WikiquoteTexts from WikisourceData from WikidataRetrieved from " comedy play by Oscar WildeFor other uses, see The Importance of Being Earnest (disambiguation).The Importance of Being EarnestOriginal production, 1895Allan Aynesworth as Algernon (left) and George Alexander as JackWritten byOscar WildeDate premiered14 February 1895Place premieredSt James's Theatre,London, EnglandGenreComedySettingMayfair, London, and a country house in HertfordshireThe Importance of Being Earnest, a Trivial Comedy for Serious People is a play by Oscar Wilde, the last of his four drawing-room plays, following Lady Windermere's Fan (1892), A Woman of No Importance (1893) and An Ideal Husband (1895). First performed on 14 February 1895 at the St James's Theatre in London, it is a farcical comedy depicting the tangled affairs of two young men about town who lead double lives to evade unwanted social obligations, both assuming the name Ernest while wooing the two young women of their affections.The play, celebrated for its wit and repartee, parodies contemporary dramatic norms, gently satirises late Victorian manners, and introduces in addition to the two pairs of young lovers the formidable Lady Bracknell, the fussy governess Miss Prism and the benign and scholarly Canon Chasuble. Contemporary reviews in Britain and overseas praised the play's humour, although some critics had reservations about its lack of social messages.The successful opening night marked the climax of Wilde's career but was followed within weeks by his downfall. The Marquess of Queensberry, whose son Lord Alfred Douglas was Wilde's lover, unsuccessfully schemed to throw a bouquet of rotten vegetables at the playwright at the end of the performance. This feud led to a series of legal trials from March to May 1895 which resulted in Wilde's conviction and imprisonment for homosexual acts. Despite the play's early success, Wilde's disgrace caused it to be closed in May after 86performances. After his release from prison in 1897 he published the play from exile in Paris, but he wrote no more comic or dramatic works.From the early 20th century onwards the play has been revived frequently in English-speaking countries and elsewhere. After the first production, which featured George Alexander, Allan Aynesworth and Irene Vanbrugh among others, many actors have been associated with the play, including Mabel Terry-Lewis, John Gielgud, Edith Evans, Margaret Rutherford, Martin Jarvis, Nigel Havers and Judi Dench. The role of the redoubtable Lady Bracknell has sometimes been played by men. The Importance of Being Earnest has been adapted for radio from the 1920s onwards and for television since the 1930s, filmed for the cinema on three occasions (directed by Anthony Asquith in 1952, Kurt Baker in 1992 and Oliver Parker in 2002) and turned into operas and musicals.The play is set in "The Present" (1895 at the time of the premiere).[1]Algernon Moncrieff's flat in Half Moon StreetJack (George Alexander) tells Gwendolen (Irene Vanbrugh) the address of his country house, while Algernon (Allan Aynesworth) secretly overhears.Algernon Moncrieff, a young man about town, is visited by a friend whom he knows by the name of Ernest Worthing. The latter has come from the country to propose to Algernon's cousin, Gwendolen Fairfax. Algernon refuses to consent until Ernest explains why his cigarette case bears the inscription, "From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack". Worthing is forced to admit to living a double life. In the country, he assumes a serious attitude for the benefit of his young ward, the heiress Cecily Cardew, and goes by the name of John or Jack, while pretending that he must worry about a wastrel younger brother in London, named Ernest. Meanwhile, he assumes the identity of the profligate Ernest when in town. Algernon confesses a similar deception: he pretends to have a sickly friend named Bunbury in the country, whom he can "visit" whenever he wishes to avoid an unwelcome social obligation. Jack refuses to tell Algernon the location of his country estate.[2]Gwendolen and her formidable mother, Lady Bracknell, now call on Algernon, who distracts Lady Bracknell in another room while Jack proposes to Gwendolen. She accepts but says she could not love him if his name were not Ernest. He resolves secretly to be rechristened. Discovering the two in this intimate exchange, Lady Bracknell interviews Jack as a prospective suitor for her daughter. Horrified to learn that he was adopted having been found as a baby in a handbag deposited at Victoria Station in London she refuses him and forbids further contact with her daughter. Gwendolen manages to covertly promise to him her undying love. As Jack gives her his address in the country, Algernon surreptitiously notes it on the cuff of his sleeve: Jack's revelation of his pretty young ward has motivated his friend to meet her.[3]The Garden of the Manor House, WooltonAlexander in ActII (1909 revival)Cecily is studying with her governess, Miss Prism, in the (fictitious) village of Woolton, Hertfordshire. Algernon arrives, pretending to be Ernest Worthing, and soon charms Cecily. Long fascinated by her uncle Jack's hitherto-absent dissolute brother, she is predisposed to fall for Algernon in his role of Ernest. Algernon plans for the rector, DrChasuble, to rechristen him "Ernest". Jack has decided to abandon his double life. He arrives in full mourning and announces his brother's death in Paris, from a severe chill, a story undermined by Algernon's presence in the guise of Ernest. Gwendolen now enters, having left the Bracknells' London house without her mother's knowledge. During the temporary absence of the two men she meets Cecily. They get along well at first, but when they learn of the other's engagement each indignantly declares that she is the one engaged to Ernest. When Jack and Algernon reappear together, Gwendolen and Cecily realise they have been deceived; they leave the men in the garden and withdraw to the house.[4]Morning-room at the Manor House, WooltonGwendolen and Cecily forgive the men's trickery. Arriving in pursuit of her daughter, Lady Bracknell is astonished to be told that Algernon and Cecily are engaged. The revelation of Cecily's wealth soon dispels Lady Bracknell's initial doubts over the young lady's suitability, but any engagement is forbidden by her guardian, Jack: he will consent only if Lady Bracknell agrees to his own union with Gwendolen something she declines to do.The impasse is resolved by the return of Miss Prism, whom Lady Bracknell recognises as the person who, 28 years earlier as a family nursemaid, had taken a baby boy out in a perambulator from Lord Bracknell's house and never returned. Challenged, Miss Prism explains that she had absent-mindedly put into the perambulator the manuscript of a novel she was writing, and put the baby in a handbag, which she later left at Victoria Station. Jack produces the same handbag, showing that he is the lost baby, the eldest son of Lady Bracknell's late sister, Mrs Moncrieff, and thus Algernon's elder brother. Having acquired such respectable relations, he is acceptable as Gwendolen's suitor.[5]Gwendolen continues to insist that she can love only a man named Ernest. Lady Bracknell tells Jack that, as the firstborn, he would have been named after his father, General Moncrieff. Jack examines the Army Lists and discovers that his father's name and hence his own original christening name was, in fact, Ernest. As the happy couples embrace Ernest and Gwendolen, Algernon and Cecily, and even Dr Chasuble and Miss Prism Lady Bracknell complains to her newfound relative: "My nephew, you seem to be displaying signs of triviality". He replies, "On the contrary, Aunt Augusta: I've now realized for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest".[6]Oscar Wilde in 1889The Importance of Being Earnest followed the success of Wilde's earlier drawing room plays, Lady Windermere's Fan (1892), A Woman of No Importance (1893) and An Ideal Husband (1895).[7] He spent the summer of 1894 with his family at Worthing, on the Sussex coast, where he began work on the new play.[8]Wilde scholars generally agree that the most important influence on the play was W. S. Gilbert's 1877 farce Engaged,[9] from which Wilde borrowed not only several incidents but also, in the words of Russell Jackson in his 1980 introduction to Wilde's play, "the gravity of tone demanded by Gilbert of his actors".[10] Wilde's first draft was so long that it filled four exercise books, and over the summer he continually revised and refined it, as he had done with his earlier plays.[11][12] Among his many changes he altered the subtitle from "a Serious Comedy for Trivial People" to "a Trivial Comedy for Serious People",[13] and renamed the characters Lady Brancaster and Algernon Montford as Lady Bracknell and Algernon Moncrieff.[14]Wilde wrote the part of John Worthing with the actor-manager Charles Wyndham in mind. Wilde shared Bernard Shaw's view that Wyndham was the ideal comedy actor and based the character on his stage persona.[7] Wyndham accepted the play for production at his theatre, but before rehearsals began, he changed his plans in order to help a beleaguered colleague, the actor-manager George Alexander of the St James's Theatre. In early 1895 Alexander's production of Henry James's Guy Domville failed, and closed after 31 performances, leaving Alexander in urgent need of a new play to follow it.[15][16] Wyndham waived his contractual rights and allowed Alexander to stage Wilde's play.[16][17]After working with Wilde on stage movements, using a model theatre, Alexander asked the author to shorten the play from four acts to three. Wilde complied and combined elements of the second and third acts.[18] The largest cut was the removal of the character of MrGribsby, a solicitor who comes from London to serve a writ on the profligate "Ernest" Worthing for unpaid dining bills at the Savoy Hotel.[11][19] Wilde was not entirely happy with alterations made at Alexander's behest. He said, "Yes, it is quite a good play. I remember I wrote one very like it myself, but it was even more brilliant than this",[18] but the three-act version usually performed is widely considered more effective than Wilde's four-act original.[20][21] [n 1]The play was first produced at the St James's Theatre, London, on 14 February Valentine's Day 1895,[22] preceded by a curtain-raiser, a short comedy called In the Season, by Langdon E. Mitchell.[23] During most of the month-long rehearsal period Wilde was on holiday in Algeria with his gay partner, Lord Alfred Douglas, but he returned in time for the dress rehearsal on 12 February.[24] Douglas remained in Algiers; his father, the Marquess of Queensberry, planned to disrupt the premiere by throwing a bouquet of rotten vegetables at the playwright when he took his bow at the end. Wilde learned of the plan and Alexander cancelled Queensberry's ticket and arranged for the police to bar his entrance. Wilde wrote to Douglas, "He arrived with a prize fighter!![n 2] I had all Scotland Yard to guard the theatre. He prowled around for three hours, then left chattering like a monstrous ape".[26] Queensberry left the bouquet at the theatre entrance.[25]Wilde arrived for the premiere dressed in "florid sobriety", wearing a green carnation in his lapel.[27] Allan Aynesworth, who played Algernon Moncrieff, recalled to Hesketh Pearson:In my fifty-three years of acting, I never remember a greater triumph than the first night of The Importance of Being Earnest ... The audience rose in their seats and cheered and cheered again.[28]The theatrical newspaper The Era reported that the play "met with enthusiastic and unanimous approval" and confidently predicted "a long and prosperous run".[23] Aynesworth was "debonair and stylish", and Alexander, who played Jack Worthing, "demure";[29] according to The Era, "Mr George Alexander played Worthing just as a part of this sort should be played, i.e., with entire seriousness and no indication of purposed irony".[23] The Morning Post said that Irene Vanbrugh and Evelyn Millard could not be bettered and caught the required Gilbertian tone.[30] The Observer remarked on the "rapturous amusement" of the audience, and echoed The Era's prediction of a long run.[31]According to the published text, the characters, descriptions and cast comprised:[32][1]John Worthing, JPof the Manor House, Woolton, HertfordshireGeorge AlexanderAlgernon Moncrieffhis friendAllan AynesworthRev Canon Chasuble, DDRector of WooltonH. H. VincentMerrimanbutler to Mr WorthingFrank DyallLaneMr Moncrieff's manservantF. Kinsey PeileLady BracknellRose LeclercqHon Gwendolen Fairfaxher daughterIrene VanbrughCecily CardewJohn Worthing's wardEvelyn Millard (succeeded by Violet Lyster)[n 3]Miss Prismher governessMrs George CanningeIrene Vanbrugh as Gwendolen and Evelyn Millard as CecilyRose Leclercq as Lady Bracknell, from a sketch of the first productionMrs George Canninge as Miss Prism, and Evelyn Millard as CecilyAynesworth and Alexander as Algernon and Jack in Act IIQueensberry continued harassing Wilde, who within weeks launched a private prosecution against him for criminal libel, triggering a series of trials that revealed Wilde's homosexual private life and ended in his imprisonment for gross indecency in May 1895. The Victorian public turned against him after his arrest, and box-office receipts dwindled rapidly;[34][35] Alexander tried to save the production by removing the author's name from the playbills,[n 4] but it closed on 8 May after only 83 performances.[24][37]The play's original Broadway production opened at the Empire Theatre on 22 April 1895 but closed after sixteen performances. Its cast included William Faversham as Algernon, Henry Miller as Jack, Viola Allen as Gwendolen and Ida Vernon as Lady Bracknell.[38] The Australian premiere was in Melbourne on 10 August 1895, presented by Robert Brough and Dion Boucicault Jr., with Cecil Ward as Jack, Boucicault as Algernon and Jenny Watt-Tanner as Lady Bracknell. The production was an immediate success.[39][40] Wilde's downfall in England did not affect the popularity of his plays in Australia.[41][n 5] The same company presented the New Zealand premiere in October 1895, when the play was enthusiastically received. Reviewers said, "in subtlety of thought, brilliancy of wit and sparkling humour, it has scarcely been excelled";[42] and "its fun is irresistible ... increasing in intensity until in the third and last act it becomes uproarious".[43]Reviewers of the premiere, clockwise from top left: William Archer, A.B.Walkley, H. G. Wells and Bernard ShawIn contrast with much theatre of the time, the light plot of The Importance of Being Earnest does not address serious social and political issues, and this troubled some contemporary reviewers. Though unsure of Wilde's seriousness as a dramatist, they recognised the play's cleverness, humour and popularity.[44] Shaw found the play "extremely funny" but "heartless", a view he maintained all his life.[45][n 6] His review in the Saturday Review argued that comedy should touch as well as amuse: "I go to the theatre to be moved to laughter, not to be tickled or bustled into it".[47]In The World, William Archer wrote that he had enjoyed watching the play but found it to be empty of meaning: "What can a poor critic do with a play which raises no principle, whether of art or morals, creates its own canons and conventions, and is nothing but an absolutely wilful expression of an irrepressibly witty personality?"[48] In The Speaker, A.B.Walkley admired the play and was one of few to see it as the culmination of Wilde's dramatic career. He denied that the term "farce" was derogatory or even lacking in seriousness and said, "It is of nonsense all compact, and better nonsense, I think, our stage has not seen".[49]H.G.Wells, in an unsigned review for The Pall Mall Gazette, called the play one of the freshest comedies of the year, saying, "More humorous dealing with theatrical conventions it would be difficult to imagine".[50] He also questioned whether people would fully see its message, "... how Serious People will take this Trivial Comedy intended for their learning remains to be seen. No doubt seriously".[50] The play was so light-hearted that some reviewers compared it to comic opera rather than drama. W. H. Auden later (1963) called it "a pure verbal opera", and The Times commented, "The story is almost too preposterous to go without music".[29] Mary McCarthy, in Sights and Spectacles (1959), despite thinking the play extremely funny, called it "a ferocious idyll"; "depravity is the hero and the only character".[51]As Wilde's works came to be read and performed again in the early 20th century, it was The Importance of Being Earnest that received the most productions.[52] The critic and author Max Beerbohm called the play Wilde's "finest, most undeniably his own", saying that the plots of his other comedies Lady Windermere's Fan, A Woman of No Importance and An Ideal Husband follow the manner of Victorien Sardou,[n 7] and are similarly unrelated to the theme of the work, while in The Importance of Being Earnest the story is "dissolved" into the form of the play.[54] By the time of its centenary in 1995 the journalist Mark Lawson described the piece as "the second most known and quoted play in English after Hamlet".[55]Lilian Braithwaite as Cecily, 1901The Importance of Being Earnest and Wilde's three other drawing room plays were performed in Britain during the author's imprisonment and exile by small touring groups. A. B. Tapping's company toured The Importance between October 1895 and March 1896,[n 8] and Elsie Lanham's touring company presented it along with Lady Windermere's Fan, beginning in November 1899.[57] The play was well received; one local critic described it as "sparkling with wit and epigrams",[58] and another called it "a most entertaining comedy [with] some sparkling dialogue".[59]The play was not seen again in London until after Wilde's death in 1900. Alexander revived it in the small Coronet theatre in Notting Hill, outside the West End, in December the following year,[60] after taking it on tour, starring as John Worthing, with a cast that included the young Lilian Braithwaite as Cecily. The Manchester Guardian called the piece "a brilliant play".[61] The Importance of Being Earnest returned to the West End when Alexander presented a revival at the St James's in 1902. It was billed as "By the author of Lady Windermere's Fan", and few reviews mentioned Wilde's name, but his work was praised. The Sporting Times said:The trivial comedy revived at the St James's is as witty an evening's entertainment as any worldling could desire. It is all as light

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PHILIP NERI 3 Performance(s) ROTUNDA THEATRE 4 Performance(s) GLASTONBURY HIGH SCHOOL 1 Performance(s) CLASSICAL COTTAGE SCHOOL 1 Performance(s) SACRED HEART SCHOOL OF MONTREAL 3 Performance(s) POWERHOUSE THEATRICAL SOCIETY 9 Performance(s) ROBIDOUX RESIDENT THEATRE 1 Performance(s) ROBIDOUX RESIDENT THEATRE 4 Performance(s) SHORECREST PREPARATORY SCHOOL 2 Performance(s) PRAIRIE HILL WALDORF SCHOOL 1 Performance(s) THE OFF-EASTERN PLAYERS CLUB 1 Performance(s) THE THACHER SCHOOL 1 Performance(s) MADISON HIGH SCHOOL 2 Performance(s) FULTON SCIENCE ACADEMY 1 Performance(s) SLATER SCHOOL DISTRICT 2 Performance(s) MARTIN LUTHER HIGH SCHOOL 2 Performance(s) SCHOOL DISTRICT OF CLEAR LAKE 3 Performance(s) MICHIGAN LUTHERAN HIGH SCHOOL 3 Performance(s) HARNEY ARTS IN EDUCATIONS FOUN 2 Performance(s) MUNFORD HIGH SCHOOL 2 Performance(s) CEDAR CLIFF HIGH SCHOOL 2 Performance(s) ORIGINAL KIDS THEATRE COMPANY 4 Performance(s) AUBURN ADVENTIST ACADEMY 1 Performance(s) FRONT RANGE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL 3 Performance(s) CLAYTON RIDGE HIGH SCHOOL 3 Performance(s) GREATER GRACE CHRISTIAN ACADEM 2 Performance(s) GREENON HIGH SCHOOL 2 Performance(s) COLORADO CITY UNIFIED SCHOOL 2 Performance(s) LIPSCOMB ACADEMY 2 Performance(s) DICKINSON HIGH SCHOOL 1 Performance(s) DICKINSON HIGH SCHOOL 3 Performance(s) SPRINGFIELD HS 3 Performance(s) NEW FAIRFIELD HIGH SCHOOL 2 Performance(s) HILLCREST CHRISTIAN SCHOOL 1 Performance(s) NEWARK HIGH SCHOOL 4 Performance(s) LISLE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL 4 Performance(s) GRACE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL DRAMA 2 Performance(s) MID-CAROLINA HIGH SCHOOL 1 Performance(s) LAFAYETTE CO. C-1 HIGH SCHOOL 3 Performance(s) KING CITY HIGH SCHOOL 3 Performance(s) ATCHISON COUNTY COMMUNITY JSH 3 Performance(s) UNION UNIVERSITY 6 Performance(s) TRANSFORMED PRODUCTIONS 2 Performance(s) SOUDERTON AREA HIGH SCHOOL 1 Performance(s) ROSSVIEW HIGH SCHOOL 3 Performance(s) PARK TUDOR SCHOOL 1 Performance(s) NORTHWOOD KENSETT HIGH SCHOOL 2 Performance(s) OKEECHOBEE HIGH SCHOOL 4 Performance(s) YAVNEH ACADEMY OF DALLAS 2 Performance(s) NORTHPOINTE CHRISTIAN 3 Performance(s) The complete title of the play The Importance of Being Earnest is The Importance of Being Earnest, A Trivial Comedy for Serious People. The play was first staged on February 14, 1895, in the Saint Jamess Theatre in London. The play is an absurd comedy. The protagonists of the play sustain disguises to escape the social obligations that have been causing a lot of burdens. The play is set on the social conventions of London in the late Victorian era. The major themes of the play deal with the trivialities of the institutions of marriage and satirize the ways of Victorians.The play has been praised for its humor. It marks the peak of the artistic career of Oscar Wilde. The play lacks any social message. The high mockery and witty dialogues of the play support the play to be one of the most popular plays to date.Historical ContextAt the time when his literary career was its peak and his most popular play The Importance of Being Earnest was widely performed, Oscar Wilde, charged the lover of his father Marquess of Queensberry for criminal defamation. Quesenberry was upset with his daughters affair with Oscar Wilde, and sent him a letter titled Oscar Wilde: Posing Somdomite. Somdomitte is a misspelling of the sodomite. The defamation trial made Oscar Wilde drop his charges against Marquess and caused his own arrest for indecency with men. The charge against Wilde was proved, and he was put into hard labor for two years (1895-1897).The scandal brought a lot of damage to the career of Oscar Wilde. It shuts down the successfully running play The Importance of Being Earnest. It also caused Wilde to spend the rest of his life in obscurity abroad. Regardless of the humiliation Wilde suffers, his literary works turned out to be an important part of the Aesthetic movement in the following century.The aesthetic movement reforms the contemporary concept of art. According to Victorians, art should contain an appositive moral aspiration. However, Oscar Wilde asserts that art can also be valued for its beauty. The saying art for arts sake is the everlasting hymn of the modern writers because of the works of Oscar Wilde.Literary ContextLady Windermeres Fan, An Ideal Husband, and A Woman of No Importance are the related plays to The Importance of Being Earnest by Oscar Wilde. These plays were written from 1892 to 1895. It was the time when the literary career of Oscar Wilde was at the peak, and his plays were widely performed on the London stage.These plays show the characteristics of comedy and drama. These plays are revolving around the same themes as that of The Importance of Being Earnest. The themes include uncertain parentage, the fallen woman, puns, wordplay, dark secrets, mistaken identities, and a biting critique of the social standards and morality of the Victorian era.The protagonist of the play is Jack Worthing. Jack is the foundation of the community in Hertfordshire. He is the guardian of a pretty eighteen years old girl Cecily Cardew. Cicely Cardew is the granddaughter of Thomas Cardew, who adopted Jack when he was a little baby.In the community of Hertfordshire, Jack has many responsibilities. He is the justice of peace chief landowner, and farmers, tenants, and many other employees highly depend on him. For many years, Jack disguised himself as his younger, black-sheep brother Ernest. Ernest lived a scandalous life in search of pleasure. He always gets in trouble in which Jack would rush him to help him out of the trouble. However, in reality, Ernest is Jack. He would disguise himself as Ernest by allowing his real self to disappear for days. No one in the community knows that Ernest is actually Jack. Whenever Jack would go to London for occasions, he would disguise himself as Ernest.Jack falls in love with Gwendolen Fairfax. Gwendolen is the cousin of his best friend, Algernon Moncrieff.When the play opens, Algernon knows Jack as Ernest. Algernon has doubted something after finding something written in Jacks cigarette case. It was an inscription addressed to Uncle Jack from little Cecily. Algernon doubted that Jack could be living a double life. Algernon considers the practice of living a double life as ordinary and necessary for modern life. After a nonexistent friend acts as if he has, he starts calling the person Bunburyist who leads a double life after his false name Bunbury. Whenever Algernon wants to get rid of the tiresome social obligations, he is summoned on the death of Bunbury.When the act 1 begins, Jack unexpectedly announces to Algernon that he wants to propose to his cousin Gwendolen. Algernon finds a cigarette case and makes him come clean and also demands to know who Cecily and Jack are. Jack admits that he is Jack in reality and is disguised as Ernest. He also tells him Cecily is his ward. She is his responsibility thrown upon him by the will of his adoptive father.He also tells about his fictitious brother to Algernon. When he was disguised as Ernest, Cecily started taking great interest in him. So he has been planning to kill his supposed brother. Jack, though unintentionally, illustrates Cecily in such terms that Algernon started taking great interest in her.In the meanwhile, Algernons cousin Gwendolen and her mother, Lady Bracknell, arrive. This gives Jack a chance to propose Gwendolen for marriage. Gwendolen also returns her affection towards him, which pleases Jack. However, he feels alarmed when he finds that Gwendolen is obsessed with the name Ernest. According to her, the name inspires absolute confidence. She also makes it clear that she did not think of marrying anyone whose name was not Ernest.Gwendolens mother also interviews Jack to know if he is eligible to be his son-in-law or not. During the interview, she inquires about his family background. Lady Bracknell is shocked when Jack tells him that he does not know about his parents, and he was adopted by a man who found him in a handbag at Victoria Station. She refuses to accept him as her son-in-law and leaves the house.Act II opens with Cecily and Miss Prism in the garden of the Manor House where Miss Prism is teaching some German lessons to Cecily. Cecily lacks interest in her lesson and prefer to water the flowers than study. However, Miss Prism tells her Jack has advised her to improve herself in every way. Cecily becomes irritated with the seriousness of her Uncle Jack and starts writing her diary about Ernest. Miss Prism tells Cecily to put away her diary and starts focusing on the novel she gave her.In the meanwhile, a local rector, Dr. Chasuble enters. Being aware of the affection between Dr, Chasuble and Miss Prism, Cecily tells him that Miss Prism is having a headache and must take a walk with him. They both left.The Merimen enters and announces that Mr. Ernest Worthing has arrived. It is actually Algernon disguised as the nonexistent brother of jack.Act II opens with Algernon showing up at Jacks estate, pretending as Ernest. In the meantime, Jack has arrived at the home with the news that Ernest has died in Paris. He brought this news with deep sadness after deciding that his disguise as Ernst has lost its usefulness. After seeing Algernon in his house disguised as Ernest, he becomes furious. He could not do anything but goes along with the plan. If he does not follow the plan, he owns lies and fraud will be revealed.Jack changes his mourning clothes. In the meantime, Algernon, after meeting Cecily, falls in love with her and proposes to her for marriage. When Cecily tells him that she already considers them to be engaged, he is shocked. However, he is also charmed when she discloses that her attraction towards her Uncle Jacks supposed brother makes her establish a romantic relationship between them some months ago. Algernon is not delighted to know that like Gwendolen, Cecilys attraction towards Ernest is established just because of the name Ernest.Algernon leaves the house and searches for the local rector. Dr. Chasuble. He wants to christen himself as Ernest. In the meantime, Gwendolen pays an unexpected visit to Jack. Cecily hosts her and orders tea for her in the garden. Cecily and Gwendolen do not know anything about each other. They both are trying to know each other. Initially, Gwendolen assumes that Cecily is the visitor. However, when she learns that she is the ward of Mr. Worthing, she becomes confused. She tells her that Ernes has never mentioned before her that he has any ward. On this, Cecily tells her that it is Jack Worthing, who is her guardian, not Ernest. She also tells him that she is engaged to Ernest, and soon they will be married. Both start the war of manners.When the fight is at the climax, Algernon and Jack arrive. They both have separately made dealings with the local rector to change their name to Ernest. Both ladies pinpoint that they are deceived when Cecily informs Gwendolen that the one who Gwendolen is engaged to be Jack, whereas, Gwendolen tells Cecily is the one who Cecily is engaged to be Algernon. Cecily and Gwendolen demand to know who Ernest is. On this point, Jack admits that he has no brother, and he himself was disguised as Ernest. Upon listening to this, both women turn furious and shocked. Both ladies go to the drawing-room of the Manor HouseAct III of the play opens in the Manor Houses drawing-room. Cecily and Gwendolen confront Jack and Algernon. Gwendolen inquires from Jack that if he really pretended to be Ernest to meet her or she interprets his indirect reply as affirmation. Likewise, Cecily asks Algernon why he disguised himself as the brother of her Uncle Jack.Though the women have become a little bit calm, they are still anxious about the problem of the name. They both forgive Jack and Algernon when they tell them that they have made arrangements to be christened as Ernest. The pairs embrace themselves. At that very instant, the arrival of Gwendolens mother, Lady Bracknell, is announced.Having bribed the maid of Gwendolen to reveal her destination, Lady Bracknell soon came after her from London. On her arrival, she asks about what is going on in the house. Gwendolen tells her that she and Jack are engaged. Lady Bracknell denies accepting the marriage between the two.Algernon informs Lady Bracknell about his engagement to Cecily. Lady Bracknell inquires from Cecily her status and family background in a very patronizing manner. This manner of her infuriates Jack. Jack replies to Lady Bracknells questions with sarcasm and courtesy. He withholds it until the last moment that Cecily inherits a great deal of money when she comes of her age. After listening to this, Lady Bracknell becomes really interested in the match between Algernon and Cecily.However, Jack tells Lady Bracknell that, being a legal guardian of Cecily, he does not agree to the marriage between Cecily and Algernon. On this, Lady Bracknell suggests that they will wait until Cecily comes of her age. On this, Jack replies that according to the will of her grandfather, Cecily will come of age when she turns thirty-five.Lady Bracknell suggests Jack reconsider his decision, and he tells her that the matter is entirely his own hands. Once she agrees to the marriage between Jack and Gwendolen, he will agree to the marriage between Algernon and Cecily. Lady Bracknell refuses for any deal. When Gwendolen and Lady Bracknell are leaving, the local Rector, Mr. Chasuble, arrives and asks for Miss Prism, the governess of Cecily. Lady Bracknell insists on meeting Miss Prism.When Miss Prism arrives and sees Lady Bracknell, she starts looking guilty and secretive. Lady Bracknell blames her that twenty-eight years before, Miss Prism left the house of her sister and stole her baby boy. She asks about the baby and where he is. Miss Prism tells her that she does not know where the baby is. She has lost him in a handbag in which she would place the manuscripts of the novel she wrote.Jack inquires where she lost the handbag. On this, Miss Prism reveals that she had left it at the railway station. Jack presses her to tell him more about the baby and the bag. He then leaves the scene and goes to bring the bag. Miss Prism confirms that it is her bag. Jack throws himself to Lady Bracknell by crying, Mother! Jack is actually the child of the sister of Lady Bracknell and is the elder brother of Algernon.Moreover, it is also revealed that originally Jack had been christened as Ernest John. Unknowingly, he had been telling the truth that his name is Jack and had a brother Algernon. The story ends with the couples embracing each other. D, Chasuble, and Miss Prism also follow suit. Jack realizes that he really understands The importance of being earnest.He is the protagonist of the play. Jack is an apparently responsible and honorable young man in the community of Hertfordshire; however, he is leading a double life. In the countryside of Hertfordshire, he is known as Jack. However, when he goes to London, he disguised himself as Ernest to escape from societal obligations. Jack was discovered in a handbag in a cloakroom at the Station in London by Thomas Cardew. He adopted him.After the death of Thomas Cardew, he became the guardian of Cecily Cardew, the eighteen years old granddaughter of Thomas. At the end of the play, it was Jack who is actually Ernest John, the nephew of Lady Bracknell. He was stolen by Miss Prism twenty-eight years ago. Miss Prism is now maid to Cecily Cardew.Jack Worthing is the protagonist of the play. Before the play opens, he is found by Mr. Thomas Cardew (who is now dead) in the cloakroom at the Londons railway station. Jack is the foundation of the community of Hertfordshire. He is the landowner and Justice of Peace. Though he was assumed to be born as an illegitimate child, he has grown up as an apparently respectable and responsible young man.In his countrys estate, he is known by his real name Jack. He is the guardian of the pretty eighteen years old granddaughter of Thomas Cardew, named Cecily Cardew. He has many others responsibly in the community as well. A large number of people in the country depend on him. He disguised himself as his fictitious younger brother Ernest to escape from the overburdened responsibilities. Being disguised as Ernest, he would act highly irresponsible and, with the help of his real persona, get himself out of the mischiefs he would do. With this name, he would go to London to spend his vacations with.Jack Worthing reflects the conventional values of the Victorian era. He let other people think that he adheres to the concepts of honor, duty, and respect that are necessary to preserve ones status quo in society. However, being disguised as Ernest, he runs away from these values. Certainly, through the character of Jack Worthing, Wilde is actually satirizing the general hypocrisy prevailing in the society of the 19th century. to keep his honorable image undamaged, he used his alter-ego and disguised as Ernest.Being disguised as Ernest, Jack is able to escape from the social boundaries and act as much as irresponsible as he wants, which is not possible with his identity as Jack. Being Ernest is an easy way for him to get away with his mischiefs and invoke his alter-ego when he feels necessary. Jack wants to maintain his status quo in society and does not care to lie about his identity.When the play begins, the disguise of Ernest is his unpleasant alter ego; however, with the progress of the play, Jack wants to become Ernest by name. He wants to marry Gwendolen. However, Gwendolen is obsessed with the name of Ernest and cannot think of a man whose name is not Ernest. This makes Jack reveal the secret of his identity. Though at the end of the play, Jack is not punished for what he does, he realizes that he must make an ascent to reunite his two words to achieve what he desired.He is the secondary hero of the play. He is closer to being an excellent figure than any other character of the play. He is a charming, ornamented, idle bachelor. He is witty, selfish, brilliant, and an amoral character. He makes delightful epigrammatic and paradoxical statements that sometimes make no sense at all and sometimes touches some profound idea.Just like, Algernon has also established a fictional character Bunbury and pretends him to be his best friend. Whenever he wants to escape from the obligation of society, he leaves the house with an excuse of going to the death ceremony of Bunbury. Like the disguise of Jack, Algernon is provided with an opportunity to indulge himself through Bunbury while also pretending to have a great sense of duty and seriousness.However, between Jack and Algernon, there is a characteristic difference. Jack, even though he revealed himself for living a double life, does not declare for being a Bunburyist. Whereas Algernon realizes his wrongdoings and celebrates it. Algernon is happy in his own ingenuity and cleverness and does not care about anyones disapproval. He has his own personal philosophy and which makes him put a higher value on his genius and artistry than anything else. He considers his living as a kind of art and his life as a work of art he creates his life for himself.In the play, Algernon appears to be a supporter of aestheticism. He stands for Wilde and the modish characters in his plays such Lord Goring from An Ideal Husband, Lord Illingworth from A Woman of No Importance, and Lord Darlington from Ladys Windermeres Fan.However, unlike these characters, Algernon appears to completely amoral with no recognition of any duty and moral convictions at all. Whereas the characters of Lord Illingworth are deeply evil, and Lord Darlington and Lord Goring are extremely good.Cecily is the antithesis of Gwendolen. Gwendolen is an outcome of London High Society, whereas Cecily is the product of nature. She is an unspoiled and ingenious child. In Act II, Algernon compares her with a pink rose. In the play, Cecilys ingenuity is contradicted by her attraction towards wickedness. Just like Gwendolen, She is fixated on the name Ernest. She falls in love with the wickedness of the supposed brother of her Uncle Jack.Cecily is also an idealistic girl like Jack and Algernon. Though she has never met Ernest, she has established a romantic relationship with Ernest in her imagination. She also elaborated this romance with enthusiasm and artistry, just like men having secret identities and false obligations. Though she does not disguise herself into her alter-ego like Jack and Algernon, her assertion that she is engaged to Ernest all based on her assumptions and fantasy world she has created around her.Regardless of her fantastical worlds, she is the most realistic character in the play. She is the only character in the play who does not speak witty dialogues. Her beauty and charm are based on her imaginative capacity and the characteristic cast of mind. These qualities are derived from Oscar Wildes ideas of life. Wilde considers life as a work of art. She is the perfect match for Algernon with these elements in her personality.Gwendolen displays the characteristics of a conventional Victorian woman in the play than any other character of the play. Gwendolen is a woman with ideas and ideals. She attends lectures and is focused on improving herself. Because of her outward behavior, she is a pretentious and artificial woman. Like Cecily, she is also obsessed with the name Ernest and is in life with Jack, who has disguised himself as Ernest.Gwendolens obsession with the name is the reflection of the obsession of the middle class and upper-middle-class with honor and virtue. Gwendolendolen does not care about how Jack looks like but is preoccupied with his name Ernest; for her, it inspires absolute confidence. She is not able to see that Jack is fooling her with his name. Due to this, her judgment has been blurred by her consciousness.Gwendolen is deliberately more intellectual than her mother; however, she has the attitude like her mothers attitude. She is resolute and strong-minded. She speaks with unquestionable authority on the issues of morality and taste, just like her mother, Lady Bracknell. Due to similarity in the attitude between Lady Bracknell and Gwendolen, Jack fears that in about a hundred and fifty years, Gwendolen will become just like her mother. However, both are likable characters in the play as their statements are so outrageous.She is a domineering, snobbish, and greedy aunt of Algernon and mother of Gwendolen. Lady Bracknell is a well-settled lady and is now looking for a better suitor for her daughter. She has prepared an interview for the list of eligible young men. Lady Bracknell utters hilarious dialogues that are full

revival)Cecily is studying with her governess, Miss Prism, in the (fictitious) village of Woolton, Hertfordshire. Algernon arrives, pretending to be Ernest Worthing, and soon charms Cecily. Long fascinated by her uncle Jack's hitherto-absent dissolute brother, she is predisposed to fall for Algernon in his role of Ernest. Algernon plans for the rector, DrChasuble, to rechristen him "Ernest". Jack has decided to abandon his double life. He arrives in full mourning and announces his brother's death in Paris, from a severe chill, a story undermined by Algernon's presence in the guise of Ernest. Gwendolen now enters, having left the Bracknells' London house without her mother's knowledge. During the temporary absence of the two men she meets Cecily. They get along well at first, but when they learn of the other's engagement each indignantly declares that she is the one engaged to Ernest. When Jack and Algernon reappear together, Gwendolen and Cecily realise they have been deceived; they leave the men in the garden and withdraw to the house.[4]Morning-room at the Manor House, WooltonGwendolen and Cecily forgive the men's trickery. Arriving in pursuit of her daughter, Lady Bracknell is astonished to be told that Algernon and Cecily are engaged. The revelation of Cecily's wealth soon dispels Lady Bracknell's initial doubts over the young lady's suitability, but any engagement is forbidden by her guardian, Jack: he will consent only if Lady Bracknell agrees to his own union with Gwendolen something she declines to do.The impasse is resolved by the return of Miss Prism, whom Lady Bracknell recognises as the person who, 28 years earlier as a family nursemaid, had taken a baby boy out in a perambulator from Lord Bracknell's house and never returned. Challenged, Miss Prism explains that she had absent-mindedly put into the perambulator the manuscript of a novel she was writing, and put the baby in a handbag, which she later left at Victoria Station. Jack produces the same handbag, showing that he is the lost baby, the eldest son of Lady Bracknell's late sister, Mrs Moncrieff, and thus Algernon's elder brother. Having acquired such respectable relations, he is acceptable as Gwendolen's suitor.[5]Gwendolen continues to insist that she can love only a man named Ernest. Lady Bracknell tells Jack that, as the firstborn, he would have been named after his father, General Moncrieff. Jack examines the Army Lists and discovers that his father's name and hence his own original christening name was, in fact, Ernest. As the happy couples embrace Ernest and Gwendolen, Algernon and Cecily, and even Dr Chasuble and Miss Prism Lady Bracknell complains to her newfound relative: "My nephew, you seem to be displaying signs of triviality". He replies, "On the contrary, Aunt Augusta: I've now realized for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest".[6]Oscar Wilde in 1889The Importance of Being Earnest followed the success of Wilde's earlier drawing room plays, Lady Windermere's Fan (1892), A Woman of No Importance (1893) and An Ideal Husband (1895).[7] He spent the summer of 1894 with his family at Worthing, on the Sussex coast, where he began work on the new play.[8]Wilde scholars generally agree that the most important influence on the play was W. S. Gilbert's 1877 farce Engaged,[9] from which Wilde borrowed not only several incidents but also, in the words of Russell Jackson in his 1980 introduction to Wilde's play, "the gravity of tone demanded by Gilbert of his actors".[10] Wilde's first draft was so long that it filled four exercise books, and over the summer he continually revised and refined it, as he had done with his earlier plays.[11][12] Among his many changes he altered the subtitle from "a Serious Comedy for Trivial People" to "a Trivial Comedy for Serious People",[13] and renamed the characters Lady Brancaster and Algernon Montford as Lady Bracknell and Algernon Moncrieff.[14]Wilde wrote the part of John Worthing with the actor-manager Charles Wyndham in mind. Wilde shared Bernard Shaw's view that Wyndham was the ideal comedy actor and based the character on his stage persona.[7] Wyndham accepted the play for production at his theatre, but before rehearsals began, he changed his plans in order to help a beleaguered colleague, the actor-manager George Alexander of the St James's Theatre. In early 1895 Alexander's production of Henry James's Guy Domville failed, and closed after 31 performances, leaving Alexander in urgent need of a new play to follow it.[15][16] Wyndham waived his contractual rights and allowed Alexander to stage Wilde's play.[16][17]After working with Wilde on stage movements, using a model theatre, Alexander asked the author to shorten the play from four acts to three. Wilde complied and combined elements of the second and third acts.[18] The largest cut was the removal of the character of MrGribsby, a solicitor who comes from London to serve a writ on the profligate "Ernest" Worthing for unpaid dining bills at the Savoy Hotel.[11][19] Wilde was not entirely happy with alterations made at Alexander's behest. He said, "Yes, it is quite a good play. I remember I wrote one very like it myself, but it was even more brilliant than this",[18] but the three-act version usually performed is widely considered more effective than Wilde's four-act original.[20][21][n 1]The play was first produced at the St James's Theatre, London, on 14 February Valentine's Day 1895,[22] preceded by a curtain-raiser, a short comedy called In the Season, by Langdon E. Mitchell.[23] During most of the month-long rehearsal period Wilde was on holiday in Algeria with his gay partner, Lord Alfred Douglas, but he returned in time for the dress rehearsal on 12 February.[24] Douglas remained in Algiers; his father, the Marquess of Queensberry, planned to disrupt the premiere by throwing a bouquet of rotten vegetables at the playwright when he took his bow at the end. Wilde learned of the plan and Alexander cancelled Queensberry's ticket and arranged for the police to bar his entrance. Wilde wrote to Douglas, "He arrived with a prize fighter!![n 2] I had all Scotland Yard to guard the theatre. He prowled around for three hours, then left chattering like a monstrous ape".[26] Queensberry left the bouquet at the theatre entrance.[25]Wilde arrived for the premiere dressed in "florid sobriety", wearing a green carnation in his lapel.[27] Allan Aynesworth, who played Algernon Moncrieff, recalled to Hesketh Pearson:In my fifty-three years of acting, I never remember a greater triumph than the first night of The Importance of Being Earnest ... The audience rose in their seats and cheered and cheered again.[28]The theatrical newspaper The Era reported that the play "met with enthusiastic and unanimous approval" and confidently predicted "a long and prosperous run".[23] Aynesworth was "debonair and stylish", and Alexander, who played Jack Worthing, "demure";[29] according to The Era, "Mr George Alexander played Worthing just as a part of this sort should be played, i.e., with entire seriousness and no indication of purposed irony".[23] The Morning Post said that Irene Vanbrugh and Evelyn Millard could not be bettered and caught the required Gilbertian tone.[30] The Observer remarked on the "rapturous amusement" of the audience, and echoed The Era's prediction of a long run.[31]According to the published text, the characters, descriptions and cast comprised:[32][1]John Worthing, JPof the Manor House, Woolton, HertfordshireGeorge AlexanderAlgernon Moncrieffhis friendAllan AynesworthRev Canon Chasuble, DDRector of WooltonH. H. VincentMerrimanbutler to Mr WorthingFrank DyallLaneMr Moncrieff's manservantF. Kinsey PeileLady BracknellRose LeclercqHon Gwendolen Fairfaxher daughterIrene VanbrughCecily CardewJohn Worthing's wardEvelyn Millard (succeeded by Violet Lyster)[n 3]Miss Prismher governessMrs George CanningeIrene Vanbrugh as Gwendolen and Evelyn Millard as CecilyRose Leclercq as Lady Bracknell, from a sketch of the first productionMrs George Canninge as Miss Prism, and Evelyn Millard as CecilyAynesworth and Alexander as Algernon and Jack in Act IIQueensberry continued harassing Wilde, who within weeks launched a private prosecution against him for criminal libel, triggering a series of trials that revealed Wilde's homosexual private life and ended in his imprisonment for gross indecency in May 1895. The Victorian public turned against him after his arrest, and box-office receipts dwindled rapidly;[34][35] Alexander tried to save the production by removing the author's name from the playbills,[n 4] but it closed on 8 May after only 83 performances.[24][37]The play's original Broadway production opened at the Empire Theatre on 22 April 1895 but closed after sixteen performances. Its cast included William Faversham as Algernon, Henry Miller as Jack, Viola Allen as Gwendolen and Ida Vernon as Lady Bracknell.[38] The Australian premiere was in Melbourne on 10 August 1895, presented by Robert Brough and Dion Boucicault Jr., with Cecil Ward as Jack, Boucicault as Algernon and Jenny Watt-Tanner as Lady Bracknell. The production was an immediate success.[39][40] Wilde's downfall in England did not affect the popularity of his plays in Australia.[41][n 5] The same company presented the New Zealand premiere in October 1895, when the play was enthusiastically received. Reviewers said, "in subtlety of thought, brilliancy of wit and sparkling humour, it has scarcely been excelled";[42] and "its fun is irresistible ... increasing in intensity until in the third and last act it becomes uproarious".[43]Reviewers of the premiere, clockwise from top left: William Archer, A.B.Walkley, H. G. Wells and Bernard ShawIn contrast with much theatre of the time, the light plot of The Importance of Being Earnest does not address serious social and political issues, and this troubled some contemporary reviewers. Though unsure of Wilde's seriousness as a dramatist, they recognised the play's cleverness, humour and popularity.[44] Shaw found the play "extremely funny" but "heartless", a view he maintained all his life.[45][n 6] His review in the Saturday Review argued that comedy should touch as well as amuse: "I go to the theatre to be moved to laughter, not to be tickled or bustled into it".[47]In The World, William Archer wrote that he had enjoyed watching the play but found it to be empty of meaning: "What can a poor critic do with a play which raises no principle, whether of art or morals, creates its own canons and conventions, and is nothing but an absolutely wilful expression of an irrepressibly witty personality?"[48] In The Speaker, A.B.Walkley admired the play and was one of few to see it as the culmination of Wilde's dramatic career. He denied that the term "farce" was derogatory or even lacking in seriousness and said, "It is of nonsense all compact, and better nonsense, I think, our stage has not seen".[49]H.G.Wells, in an unsigned review for The Pall Mall Gazette, called the play one of the freshest comedies of the year, saying, "More humorous dealing with theatrical conventions it would be difficult to imagine".[50] He also questioned whether people would fully see its message, "... how Serious People will take this Trivial Comedy intended for their learning remains to be seen. No doubt seriously".[50] The play was so light-hearted that some reviewers compared it to comic opera rather than drama. W. H. Auden later (1963) called it "a pure verbal opera", and The Times commented, "The story is almost too preposterous to go without music".[29] Mary McCarthy, in Sights and Spectacles (1959), despite thinking the play extremely funny, called it "a ferocious idyll"; "depravity is the hero and the only character".[51]As Wilde's works came to be read and performed again in the early 20th century, it was The Importance of Being Earnest that received the most productions.[52] The critic and author Max Beerbohm called the play Wilde's "finest, most undeniably his own", saying that the plots of his other comedies Lady Windermere's Fan, A Woman of No Importance and An Ideal Husband follow the manner of Victorien Sardou,[n 7] and are similarly unrelated to the theme of the work, while in The Importance of Being Earnest the story is "dissolved" into the form of the play.[54] By the time of its centenary in 1995 the journalist Mark Lawson described the piece as "the second most known and quoted play in English after Hamlet".[55]Lilian Braithwaite as Cecily, 1901The Importance of Being Earnest and Wilde's three other drawing room plays were performed in Britain during the author's imprisonment and exile by small touring groups. A. B. Tapping's company toured The Importance between October 1895 and March 1896,[n 8] and Elsie Lanham's touring company presented it along with Lady Windermere's Fan, beginning in November 1899.[57] The play was well received; one local critic described it as "sparkling with wit and epigrams",[58] and another called it "a most entertaining comedy [with] some sparkling dialogue".[59]The play was not seen again in London until after Wilde's death in 1900. Alexander revived it in the small Coronet theatre in Notting Hill, outside the West End, in December the following year,[60] after taking it on tour, starring as John Worthing, with a cast that included the young Lilian Braithwaite as Cecily. The Manchester Guardian called the piece "a brilliant play".[61] The Importance of Being Earnest returned to the West End when Alexander presented a revival at the St James's in 1902. It was billed as "By the author of Lady Windermere's Fan", and few reviews mentioned Wilde's name, but his work was praised. The Sporting Times said:The trivial comedy revived at the St James's is as witty an evening's entertainment as any worldling could desire. It is all as light as a good souffl. The ladies talk like Mr W. S. Gilbert's fairies do, and are supernaturally clever; the men emit sparkles of wit even when their mouths are full of cucumber sandwiches or crumpets ... I can guarantee that the most blas young man of twenty-two will have one chuckle a minute at the St James's. You are tickled throughout with a feather, and it is a very pleasant and comforting sensation.[62]The revival ran for 52 performances.[63] For the first Broadway revival, by Charles Frohman's Empire Stock Company later in 1902, the playbills and the reviews restored the author's name.[64]Alexander presented the work again at the St James's in 1909, when he and Aynesworth reprised their original roles;[65] that revival ran for 316 performances.[36] Max Beerbohm said that the play was sure to become a classic of the English repertory and that its humour was as fresh then as when it had been written, adding that the actors had "worn as well as the play".[66]Leslie Faber (centre) as Jack, 1923 revival, with Louise Hampton as Miss Prism and H. O. Nicholson as Dr Chasuble The play was revived on Broadway in 1910 with a cast that included Hamilton Revelle, A. E. Matthews and Jane Oaker. The New York Times commented that the play "has lost nothing of its humor ... no one with a sense of humor can afford to miss it".[67] For a 1913 revival at the St James's, the young actors Gerald Ames and A. E. Matthews succeeded the creators as Jack and Algernon.[68]Leslie Faber as Jack, John Deverell as Algernon and Margaret Scudamore as Lady Bracknell headed the cast in a 1923 production at the Haymarket Theatre.[69] Revivals in the first decades of the 20th century treated "the present" as the current year. It was not until the 1920s that the case for 1890s costumes was established; as a critic in The Manchester Guardian put it, "Thirty years on, one begins to feel that Wilde should be done in the costume of his period that his wit today needs the backing of the atmosphere that gave it life and truth. ... Wilde's glittering and complex verbal felicities go ill with the shingle and the short skirt".[70]In Nigel Playfair's 1930 production at the Lyric, Hammersmith, John Gielgud played Jack to the Lady Bracknell of his aunt, Mabel Terry-Lewis.[71] An Old Vic production in 1934 featured the husband-and-wife team of Charles Laughton and Elsa Lanchester as Chasuble and Miss Prism; others in the cast were Roger Livesey (Jack), George Curzon (Algernon), Athene Seyler (Lady Bracknell), Flora Robson (Gwendolen) and Ursula Jeans (Cecily).[72] On Broadway, Estelle Winwood co-starred with Clifton Webb and Hope Williams in a 1939 revival.[73]Gielgud produced and starred in a production at the Globe (now the Gielgud) Theatre in 1939, in a cast that included Edith Evans as Lady Bracknell, Joyce Carey as Gwendolen, Angela Baddeley as Cecily and Margaret Rutherford as Miss Prism. The Times considered the production the best since the original and praised it for its fidelity to Wilde's conception and its "airy, responsive ball-playing quality".[74] Later in the same year, Gielgud presented the work again, with Jack Hawkins as Algernon, Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies as Gwendolen and Peggy Ashcroft as Cecily, with Evans and Rutherford in their previous roles.[75] The production was presented in several seasons during and after the Second World War, with mostly the same principal players.[22] During a 1946 season at the Haymarket, the King and Queen attended a performance,[76] which, as the journalist Geoffrey Wheatcroft put it, gave the play "a final accolade of respectability".[77][n 9] Gielgud's London production toured North America and was successfully staged on Broadway in 1947.[79][n 10]In 1975 Jonathan Miller, who had been prevented for financial reasons the previous year from staging the play at the National Theatre with an all-male cast, directed a production in which Lady Bracknell, played by Irene Handl, was given a German accent.[81][82] For Peter Hall's 1982 production at the National Theatre the cast included Judi Dench as Lady Bracknell, [n 11] Martin Jarvis as Jack, Nigel Havers as Algernon, Zo Wanamaker as Gwendolen and Anna Massey as Miss Prism.[84] In 1987 a version of the play was given at the Whitehall Theatre starring Hinge and Bracket as Miss Prism and Lady Bracknell respectively.[85] Nicholas Hytner's 1993 production at the Aldwych Theatre, starring Maggie Smith, had occasional references to a conjectural gay subtext.[86]The play was presented in Singapore in 2004 by the British Theatre Playhouse,[87] and the same company took the production to Greenwich Theatre, London, in 2005.[88] In 2007 Peter Gill directed the play at the Theatre Royal, Bath. The production went on a short UK tour before playing in the West End in 2008.[89]Since the 1987 Whitehall version, some other productions have cast a male actor in the role of Lady Bracknell. In 2005 the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, presented the play with an all-male cast; it also featured Wilde as a character the play opened with him drinking in a Parisian caf, dreaming of his play.[90] The Melbourne Theatre Company staged a production in 2011 with Geoffrey Rush as Lady Bracknell.[91] In the same year the Roundabout Theatre Company presented a Broadway revival based on the 2009 Stratford Shakespeare Festival production featuring its director, Brian Bedford, as Lady Bracknell.[92] At the Vaudeville Theatre, London, in 2015, David Suchet took the role in a production directed by Adrian Noble.[85]In 2014 at the Harold Pinter Theatre, London, Lucy Bailey directed a production that followed a trend to "age-blind" casting:[93][94] the average age of the cast was nearly seventy, and Jarvis and Havers reprised the roles they had played at the National in 1982.[93] In 2024 the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester presented an updated version, described by The Guardian as "a convincing stab at a 21st-century makeover".[95] That same year, a more opulent version was performed at the National Theatre. The cast included Ncuti Gatwa as Algernon, Hugh Skinner as Jack, Eliza Scanlen as Cecily, Ronk Adkolujo as Gwendolen, and Sharon D. Clarke as Lady Bracknell.[96]Title pages of the first edition, 1899, with Wilde's name omitted from the first page, and the dedication to Robbie Ross on the secondWilde's two final comedies, An Ideal Husband and The Importance of Being Earnest, were still on stage in London at the time of his prosecution in 1895, and they were soon closed as the details of his case became public. After two years in prison with hard labour, Wilde went into exile in Paris, sick and depressed, his reputation destroyed in England. In 1898 Leonard Smithers agreed with Wilde to publish the two final plays.[97]Wilde proved to be a diligent reviser, sending detailed instructions on stage directions, character listings and the book's presentation and insisting that a playbill from the first performance be reproduced inside. Ellmann argues that the proofs show a man "very much in command of himself and of the play".[97] Wilde's name did not appear on the cover, which stated: "By the Author of Lady Windermere's Fan".[98] His return to work was brief, as he refused to write anything else: "I can write, but have lost the joy of writing".[97]The Importance of Being Earnest's popularity has meant it has been translated into many languages, but the pun in the title ("Ernest", a masculine proper name, and "earnest", steadfast and serious) poses a special problem for translators. The simplest instance of a suitable translation of the pun is in German, where ernst (serious) and Ernst (given name) are the same.[99][n 12]Wilde by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1896)As wordplay is usually unique to the language in question, translators are faced with a choice of either staying faithful to the original or creating a similar pun in their own language.[101] Some translators leave all characters' names unchanged and in their original spelling: readers are reminded of the original cultural setting, but the liveliness of the pun is lost.[102] Others, favouring comprehensibility over fidelity to the original, have replaced Ernest with a name that also represents a virtue in the target language.[99] For instance, Italian versions variously call the play L'importanza di essere Franco/Severo/Fedele, the given names being respectively the values of honesty, propriety and fidelity.[103] Translators differ in their approach to the original English honorific titles; some change them all or none, but most leave a mix, partly as a compensation for the loss of Englishness.[104]French offers a closer pun. According to Les Archives du spectacle in its listing of productions in French since 1954, the title of the play is most often given as L'Importance d'tre Constant,[n 13] but has also been rendered as L'Importance d'tre srieux, Il est important d'tre aim, Il est important d'tre Dsir and Il est important d'tre Fidle.[106][n 14]The novelist and critic Arthur Ransome argued that Wilde freed himself by abandoning the melodrama of his earlier drawing room plays and basing the story entirely on the Earnest/Ernest verbal conceit. Freed from "living up to any drama more serious than conversation", Wilde could now amuse himself to a fuller extent with "quips, bons mots, epigrams and repartee that had really nothing to do with the business at hand".[107] The academic Sos Eltis comments that although Wilde's earliest and longest handwritten drafts of the play are full of "farcical accidents, broad puns and a number of familiar comic devices",[108] in his revisions "Wilde transformed standard nonsense into the more systematic and disconcerting illogicality which characterizes Earnest's dialogue".[109]The genre of the Importance of Being Earnest has been debated by scholars and critics, who have variously categorised it as high comedy, farce, parody and satire. In a 1956 critique Richard Foster argues that the play creates "an 'as if' world in which 'real' values are inverted, reason and unreason are interchanged and the probable defined by improbability".[110] Contributors to The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde (1997) variously refer to the play as "high farce",[111] "an ostensible farce",[112] "farce with aggressive pranks, quick-paced action and evasion of moral responsibility",[113] and "high comedy".[114]Ransome described The Importance of Being Earnest as the most trivial of Wilde's society plays, and the only one that produces "that peculiar exhilaration of the spirit by which we recognise the beautiful ... It is precisely because it is consistently trivial that it is not ugly".[115] Salome, An Ideal Husband and The Picture of Dorian Gray had dwelt on more serious wrongdoing, but vice in The Importance of Being Earnest is represented by Algernon's greedy consumption of cucumber sandwiches.[115][n 15] Wilde told his friend Robbie Ross that the play's theme was "That we should treat all trivial things in life very seriously, and all serious things of life with a sincere and studied triviality".[117] The theme is glanced at in the play's title, and earnestness is repeatedly alluded to in the dialogue;[118] Algernon says in Act II, "one must be serious about something if one is to have any amusement in life", but goes on to reproach Jack for being serious about everything and thus revealing a trivial nature.[119] Blackmail and corruption had haunted the double lives of Dorian Gray and Sir Robert Chiltern (in An Ideal Husband), but in Earnest the protagonists' duplicity (Algernon's "Bunburying" and Worthing's double life as Jack and Ernest) is for more innocent purposes largely to evade unwelcome social obligations.[117] While much theatre of the time tackled serious social and political issues, Wilde's writing in this play is the antithesis of that of didactic writers like Shaw who used their characters to present audiences with grand ideals and appeals for social justice.[44]The play repeatedly mocks Victorian traditions and social customs marriage and the pursuit of love in particular.[120] In Victorian times earnestness was considered by some to be the overriding societal value; originating in religious attempts to reform the lower classes, it spread to the middle and upper classes during the mid-19th century.[100] The play's subtitle introduces the theme, which continues in the discussion between Jack and Algernon in Act I: "Yes, but you must be serious about it. I hate people who are not serious about meals. It is so shallow of them".[121]Gwendolen (Irene Vanbrugh), Merriman (Frank Dyall) and Cecily (Evelyn Millard), in the original production, Act IIWilde's inversion of values continues: when Algernon arrives in Woolton masquerading as Ernest he tells Cecily that he is not really wicked at all.CECILY: If you are not, then you have certainly been deceiving us all in a very inexcusable manner. I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time. That would be hypocrisy.[122]In the final scene Jack asks Gwendolen if she can forgive him for not having been deceitful after all:JACK: Gwendolen, it is a terrible thing for a man to find out suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth. Can you forgive me?GWENDOLEN: I can, for I feel that you are sure to change.[123]In turn, Gwendolen and Cecily have the idea of marrying a man named Ernest. Gwendolen ignores her mother's methodical analysis of Jack Worthing's suitability as a husband and places her entire faith in a forename, declaring in Act I, "The only really safe name is Ernest".[124] This is an opinion shared by Cecily in Act II: "I pity any poor married woman whose husband is not called Ernest".[125]Wilde portrayed society's rules and rituals in the figure of Lady Bracknell: according to the Wilde scholar Peter Raby, minute attention to the details of her style created a comic effect of assertion by restraint.[126] She dismisses Jack's London address as on the unfashionable side of Belgrave Square and is unmoved by Jack's explanation that the handbag in which he was found as a baby was deposited in the cloakroom of the socially superior half of Victoria Station.[127][n 16]Wilde parodies 19th-century melodrama, introducing exaggeratedly incongruous situations such as Jack's arrival in full mourning for the brother who has just walked into his house, and the sudden switch from fulsome affection between Cecily and Gwendolen to deep hostility on discovering that they are supposedly both engaged to the same man.[129]In queer theory the play's themes of duplicity and ambivalence are inextricably bound up with Wilde's homosexuality, so that the play exhibits what one critic terms a "flickering presence-absence of ... homosexual desire".[130] After his release from prison, Wilde wrote to Reginald Turner, "It was extraordinary reading the play over. How I used to toy with that tiger Life!"[131] In a 2014 study, William Eaton writes, "The Importance of Being Earnest is what it obviously is, a play about dissimulation, and that dissimulation not seeming to be who one was was extremely important for homosexuals of Wilde's time and place, and thus was an extremely non-trivial matter for Wilde".[132][n 17]Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, a proponent of queer theory, interprets linguistic aspects of the play as allusions to gay culture and stereotypes, such as references to the German language and the composer Richard Wagner, both of which were associated with male homosexuality in Wilde's day.[136] In 1990 Noel Annan suggested that the use of the name Ernest may have been a homosexual in-joke.[137] In 1892, two years before Wilde began writing the play, John Gambril Nicholson had published a book of pederastic poetry, Love in Earnest. The sonnet "Of Boys' Names" included the verse:Though Frank may ring like silver belland Cecil softer music claimthey cannot work the miracle 'tis Ernest sets my heart a-flame.[138]Annan speculated that "earnest" may also have been a private code-word among gay men, as in: "Is he earnest?" in the same way that "Is he musical?" is thought to have been used.[137] Eaton finds this theory unconvincing,[132] and in 2001 Sir Donald Sinden, an actor who had met Lord Alfred Douglas and two of the play's original cast (Irene Vanbrugh and Allan Aynesworth), wrote to The Times to rebut suggestions that "earnest" held any sexual connotations:[139][140]Although they had ample opportunity, at no time did any of them even hint that "Earnest" was a synonym for homosexual. The first time I heard it mentioned was in the 1980s, and I immediately consulted Sir John Gielgud, whose own performance of Jack Worthing in the same play was legendary, and whose knowledge of theatrical lore was encyclopaedic. He replied in his ringing tones: "No-No! Nonsense, absolute nonsense: I would have known".[139]Bunbury is a village in Cheshire.[141] Several theories have been advanced to explain Wilde's use of the name to imply a secretive double life. It may have derived from Henry Shirley Bunbury, a hypochondriacal acquaintance of Wilde's youth.[142] Another theory is that Wilde spotted the names of a Captain Bunbury and a magistrate, Mr Bunbury, in The Worthing Gazette in August and September 1894, found the surname pleasing and borrowed it.[143]A suggestion put forward by Aleister Crowley who knew Wilde was that Bunbury was a portmanteau word, coined after Wilde had taken a train to Banbury, met a boy there and arranged a second meeting at Sunbury.[144] Carolyn Williams, in a 2010 study, writes that for the word "Bunburying", Wilde "braids the 'Belvawneying' evil eye from Gilbert's Engaged" with Bunthorne from Gilbert (and Sullivan)'s 1881 comic opera Patience.[145][n 18]Although Wilde had for several years been famous for dialogue and his use of language, Raby has argued that in this play the author achieved unity and mastery unmatched in his other plays, with the possible exception of Salome.[147] Raby comments that although the earlier comedies suffer from an unevenness resulting from the thematic clash between the trivial and the serious, The Importance of Being Earnest achieves "a pitch-perfect style" that allows these clashes to dissolve.[147] Raby identifies three different registers in the play: Algernon's exchange with his manservant conveying an underlying unity despite their differing attitudes. The imperious pronouncements of Lady Bracknell are as startling for her use of hyperbole and rhetorical extravagance as for her disconcerting opinions.[147] In contrast, the discourse of Dr Chasuble and Miss Prism is distinguished by "pedantic precept" and "idiosyncratic diversion".[147] The play is full of epigrams and paradoxes. Max Beerbohm described it as abounding in "chiselled apothegms witticisms unrelated to action or character but so good in themselves as to have the quality of dramatic surprise".[148]Though Wilde deployed characters that were by now familiar the upper-class dandy, the overbearing matriarch, the woman with a past, the puritanical young lady his treatment is subtler than in his earlier comedies. Lady Bracknell, for instance, embodies respectable, upper-class society, but Eltis notes how her development "from the familiar overbearing duchess into a quirkier and more disturbing character" can be traced through Wilde's revisions of the play.[109] For the two young men, Wilde presents not stereotypical stage "dudes" but intelligent beings who, as Russell Jackson puts it, "speak like their creator in well-formed complete sentences and rarely use slang or vogue-words".[149] Dr Chasuble and Miss Prism are, in Jackson's view, characterised by "a few light touches of detail", their old-fashioned enthusiasms and the Canon's fastidious pedantry pared down by Wilde during his many redrafts of the text.[149]See also: Music based on the works of Oscar WildeMain articles: The Importance of Being Earnest (1952 film), The Importance of Being Earnest (1992 film), and The Importance of Being Earnest (2002 film)The Importance of Being Earnest has been adapted for the English-language cinema at least three times, first in 1952 by Anthony Asquith who adapted the screenplay and directed it. The cast included Michael Denison (Algernon), Michael Redgrave (Jack), Edith Evans (Lady Bracknell), Dorothy Tutin (Cecily), Joan Greenwood (Gwendolen), Margaret Rutherford (Miss Prism), and Miles Malleson (Dr Chasuble).[150]In 1992 Kurt Baker directed a version using an all-black cast with Daryl Keith Roach as Jack, Wren T. Brown as Algernon, Ann Weldon as Lady Bracknell, Lanei Chapman as Cecily, Chris Calloway as Gwendolen, CCH Pounder as Miss Prism and Brock Peters as Dr Chasuble, set in the United States.[151]In 2002 Oliver Parker, a director who had previously adapted An Ideal Husband, made another film. It stars Colin Firth (Jack), Rupert Everett (Algernon), Judi Dench (Lady Bracknell), Reese Witherspoon (Cecily), Frances O'Connor (Gwendolen), Anna Massey (Miss Prism) and Tom Wilkinson (Canon Chasuble).[152] Parker interpolated about twenty lines of his own into the script and restored the episode cut by Wilde before the premiere of the play, in which a solicitor attempts to serve a writ on the supposed Ernest.[86]A 2008 Telugu language romantic comedy film, titled Ashta Chamma, is an adaptation of the play.[153]In 1963 Erik Chisholm composed an opera from the play, basing the libretto on Wilde's text.[154] Gerald Barry created the 2011 opera The Importance of Being Earnest, commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Barbican Centre in London. It premiered in Los Angeles in 2011. The role of Lady Bracknell is sung by a bass.[155] The stage premiere was given by the Opra national de Lorraine in Nancy in 2013.[156] A 2012 concert performance was recorded live at the Barbican by the BBC and released commercially in 2014.[155] In 2017 Odyssey Opera of Boston presented Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco's opera The Importance of Being Earnest as part of a "Wilde Opera Nights" series, a season-long exploration of operatic works inspired by Wilde's writings and world.[157]In 1964 Gerd Natschinski composed a musical, Mein Freund Bunbury, based on the play.[158] According to a study by Robert Tanitch, by 2002, there had been at least eight adaptations of the play as a musical, though "never with conspicuous success".[86] The earliest such version was a 1927 American show entitled Oh Earnest. The journalist Mark Bostridge comments, "The libretto of a 1957 musical adaptation, Half in Earnest, deposited in the British Library, is scarcely more encouraging. The curtain rises on Algernon, strumming away at the piano, singing, 'I can play Chopsticks, Lane'. Other songs include 'A Bunburying I Must Go'".[86] Since Bostridge wrote his article, at least one further musical version of the play has been staged: a show with a book by Douglas Livingstone and score by Adam McGuinness and Zia Moranne was staged in December 2011 at the Riverside Studios, Hammersmith; the cast included Susie Blake, Gyles Brandreth and Edward Petherbridge.[159]Tom Stoppard's 1974 stage comedy Travesties draws extensively on Wilde's play. Stoppard's central character, Henry Carr, was a real-life figure who played Algernon in a production of The Importance of Being Earnest produced by James Joyce in Zurich in 1917.[160] Stoppard reimagines him as an old man, reminiscing about the production and his days as a young man. The other characters include Carr's sister Gwendolen and the local librarian, Cecily; the action of the play, under the erratic control of the old Carr's fallible memory, continually mirrors that of Wilde's original.[161] Carr has an exchange with Tristan Tzara reminiscent of John Worthing's exchanges with Algernon,[162] Tzara has a scene with Joyce that draws on Jack's interview with Lady Bracknell,[163] and Gwendolen and Cecily have a falling out on the lines of that of their namesakes in Wilde's play (though to the tune of "Mister Gallagher and Mister Shean" rather than in prose).[164]In 2016 the Irish actor/writers Helen Norton and Jonathan White wrote the comic play To Hell in a Handbag which retells the story of The Importance from the point of view of the characters Canon Chasuble and Miss Prism, giving them their own back story and showing what happens to them when they are not on stage in Wilde's play.[165]There have been many radio versions of the play. In 1925 the BBC broadcast an adaptation with Hesketh Pearson as Jack Worthing.[166] Further broadcasts of the play followed during the 1920s and 1930s,[167][168] and in November 1937 the BBC broadcast the first television adaptation of the play, in an abridged version directed by Royston Morley.[169] In 1942 BBC radio broadcast scenes from the play, featuring two members of the original cast: the programme was introduced by Allan Aynesworth and starred Irene Vanbrugh as Lady Bracknell.[170] A 1951 broadcast of the complete three-act play starred Gielgud, Evans and Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies.[171]A 1964 commercial television adaptation starred Ian Carmichael, Patrick Macnee, Susannah York, Fenella Fielding, Pamela Brown and Irene Handl.[172] A BBC television version in 1974 starred Coral Browne as Lady Bracknell.[173] In 1977 BBC Radio 4 broadcast the four-act version of the play for the first time, with Fabia Drake as Lady Bracknell, Richard Pasco as Jack, Jeremy Clyde as Algy, Maurice Denham as Canon Chasuble, Sylvia Coleridge as Miss Prism, Barbara Leigh-Hunt as Gwendolen and Prunella Scales as Cecily. In 1988 a production of the four-act version was broadcast on BBC television, starring Joan Plowright, Paul McGann, Gemma Jones and Alec McCowen.[174]In 1995, to mark the centenary of the first performance of the play, Radio 4 broadcast a new adaptation on 13 February; directed by Glyn Dearman, it featured Judi Dench as Lady Bracknell, Michael Sheen as Jack, Martin Clunes as Algernon, John Moffatt as Dr Chasuble, Miriam Margolyes as Miss Prism, Samantha Bond as Gwendolen and Amanda Root as Cecily.[175] In December 2000 BBC Radio 3 broadcast an adaptation directed by Howard Davies starring Geraldine McEwan as Lady Bracknell, Simon Russell Beale as Jack Worthing, Julian Wadham as Algernon Moncrieff, Geoffrey Palmer as Canon Chasuble, Celia Imrie as Miss Prism, Victoria Hamilton as Gwendolen and Emma Fielding as Cecily.[176]Gielgud's performance is preserved on an EMI audio recording dating from 1952, which also captures Edith Evans's Lady Bracknell. The cast also includes Roland Culver (Algernon), Jean Cadell (Miss Prism), Pamela Brown (Gwendolen) and Celia Johnson (Cecily).[177][178]Other audio recordings include a "Theatre Masterworks" version from 1953, directed and narrated by Margaret Webster, with a cast including Maurice Evans and Lucile Watson;[179][180] a 1968 recording on the Caedmon label with Gladys Cooper as Lady Bracknell and Joan Greenwood, Richard Johnson, Alec McCowen, Lynn Redgrave, Irene Handl and Robertson Hare;[181] a 1989 version by California Artists Radio Theatre, featuring Dan O'Herlihy, Jeanette Nolan, Les Tremayne and Richard Erdman;[182] and one by L.A. Theatre Works issued in 2009, featuring Charles Busch, James Marsters and Andrea Bowen.[183]^ The deleted scene with the solicitor was thought lost until it was found in some of Wilde's papers and was first performed on BBC radio on 27 October 1954.[21]^ Queensberry had been a prize fighter himself in his younger days, and retained what one historian calls "his band of bruisers".[25]^ Alexander released Millard from her contract at the St James's at the beginning of March to enable her to take over at short notice from the ailing Marion Terry in the lead role in Sydney Grundy's Sowing the Wind at the Comedy Theatre. Millard's understudy, Violet Lyster, took over the role of Cecily.[33]^ Removing Wilde's name from the play billing caused a breach between the author and Alexander that lasted for some years; the actor later paid Wilde small monthly sums and bequeathed his rights in the play to the author's son Vyvyan Holland.[36]^ In a 2003 study, Richard Fotheringham writes that in Australia, unlike Britain and the US, Wilde's name was only briefly excluded from playbills, and the critics and public took a much more relaxed view of his crimes.[41] A command performance of the play was given by Boucicault's company in the presence of the Governor of Victoria and his wife.[39]^ In 1950, months before his death, he wrote: "Do not let yourself be trapped into the silly clich that The Importance is Wilde's best play. It's a mechanical cat's cradle farce without a single touch of human nature in it. It is Gilbert and Sullivan minus Sullivan".[46]^ Sardou is described in The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French as a "Highly successful French dramatist, a brilliant manipulator of empty but complicated plots and spectacular theatrical effects ... the melodramas and historical plays are merely sumptuously dressed machines for producing coups de thtre".[53]^ An article in The Wildean in 2015 speculated that Tapping's production of the play in Limerick in late October 1895 may have been the first staging of the piece in Wilde's native Ireland.[56]^ George VI was not the first British king who had attended a performance of the play: his grandfather Edward VII, then Prince of Wales, was in the audience for the first production.[78]^ Rutherford switched roles, from Miss Prism to Lady Bracknell for the North American production; Jean Cadell played Miss Prism. Robert Flemyng played Algernon.[80] The cast was given a special Tony Award for "Outstanding Foreign Company".[79]^ Twenty-three years earlier, Dench had played Cecily to the Lady Bracknell of Fay Compton in a 1959 Old Vic production that included in

was originally written as a play in four acts, and was shortened to a three-act piece to accommodate the demands of the theatre in which it was originally performed. The original production premiered on Valentines Day, 1895 at the St. James Theatre theatre in London. Lord Alfred Douglas father, The Marquess of Queensberry, planned to disrupt a performance of Earnest by throwing rotten vegetables at the playwright while he took his customary bow at the end of the play. However, Wilde was tipped off and Queensberry was denied entrance to the theatre. Queensberrys continued public harassment of Wilde over his homosexual relationship with his son induced Wilde (against advice) to sue Queensberry for public libel. His decision to take legal action led to his subsequent trial, conviction, and jail time for engaging in homosexual activity. The notoriety surrounding Wildes romantic liaisons with Lord Alfred Douglas led the original production of Earnest to close after only 86 performances.The Importance of Being Earnest has seen four Broadway productions. The most recent was a transfer from the Stratford Shakespeare Festival, produced by Roundabout Theater Company. The production featured a drag performance by Brian Bedford as Lady Bracknell, and was also directed by Bedford. The production was nominated for three Tony Awards.Some subsequent productions have chosen to use part or all of Wildes earlier four-act manuscript, rather than the condensed three-act play that was performed at the St. James. Other notable productions include a 1982 production at the National Theatre featuring Judi Dench as Lady Bracknell and Zoe Wanamaker as Gwendolen, and a 1993 production at the Aldwych Theatre directed by Nicholas Hytner and starring Maggie Smith as Lady Bracknell. This production explored the possibilities of gay subtext in the text of Earnest. In recent years, some directors have chosen to cast a male actor as Lady Bracknell, with notable examples including Brian Bedford (Roundabout Theatre Company, 2011), David Suchet (Londons Vaudeville Theatre, 2015), and Geoffrey Rush (Melbourne Theatre Company, 2019).The Importance of Being Earnest has also enjoyed three feature film adaptations (and many adaptations for television):In 1952, a black and white film version was made, adapted and directed by Anthony Asquith and starring Michael Redgrave as John and Edith Evans as Lady Bracknell.In 1992, a film version of The Importance of Being Earnest, updated to be set in the present-day United States with an all-black cast, directed by Kurt Baker.In 2002, a film version directed by Oliver Parker starred Rupert Everett as Algernon and Colin Firth as Jack. This film featured some text from Wildes original four-act script that was cut from the 1895 St. James production. Act OneThe Importance of Being Earnest opens in dashing young Algernon Moncrieffs flat on Half-Moon street in London, where he is playing piano with wonderful expression but not very well. He talks to his manservant Lane about the happenings of the previous few evenings and plans for Algernons aunt, Lady Bracknells, arrival later in the afternoon. She has expressly asked for cucumber sandwiches, and Algernon inspects them with much pomp, before stuffing his face with them. A shocking amount of wine has been drunk over the past few days, depleting Algernons pockets significantly though it seems that it is mostly his own fault. Deflecting blame from himself, Algernon blames the alcohol consumption on the servants, but Lane complements Algernons taste in alcohol and he flits to his next topic of focus: marriage. Algernon calls it a demoralizing state and when Lane tries to chime in further Algernon suddenly shuts him down, saying he doesnt want to know about Lanes family life.Just then the bell rings, and Lane announces that Mr. Ernest Worthing has arrived. Ernest notices the extravagant tea that has been laid out, and Algernon explains that his Aunt Bracknell and cousin Gwendolen, are arriving. Ernest confesses to Algernon that he intends to marry Gwendolen. Algernon becomes upset, stuffing his face with cucumber sandwiches as he rails against the unromantic nature of marriage. When Ernest tries to take a sandwich, Algernon reprimands him, saying that the sandwiches are only for Lady Bracknell. When pressed about his own eating of the sandwiches, Algernon says that he is allowed to eat them since Lady Bracknell is his aunt. As Algernon continues to eat cucumber sandwiches and Ernest eats bread and butter (Gwendolens preferred tea fare,) Algernon begins interrogating his friend about the nature of his intentions. Algernon insists that Ernests intentions towards Gwendolen cannot be deemed honorable until they clear up the whole question of Cecily. Ernest has left a cigarette case at Algernons flat, inscribed: From little Cecily with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack. Algernon is confused both by the name Cecily and also the address to an Uncle Jack. After much evasion, Ernest admits that his name is only Ernest Worthing when he is town. When he is in the country, he is John Worthing, J.P. the responsible guardian of a very pretty young ward named Cecily Cardew.John (who up to this point in the play has been called Ernest,) was adopted as a baby by the wealthy, old Mr. Thomas Cardew, who in his will made him guardian to his granddaughter Cecily and charged him with managing his estate. In order to still have some fun like the young man he is, John explains, he has pretended to have a terribly debaucherous, irresponsible younger brother named Ernest who lives in town. When John comes into town to get Ernest out of scrapes, he actually has been telling everyone his name is Ernest.Algernon is delighted that his friend Ernest is a Bunburyist Algernons word for a person who leads a double-life for the sake of fulfilling duties but also seeking pleasures. In Algernons case, he admits to his friend, Algernon has invented an invalid friend named Bunbury who lives in the country, allowing Algernon to go out to the country to visit this fictitious person whenever he pleases. Algernon uses his devotion to Bunbury to get out of any activity in which he doesnt want to engage.Jack is dismissive of any association between his behavior which he claims is justified because of the seriousness with which he takes the guardianship of Cecily and his foolish, cavalier friends. He also claims that he is about to come clean to Gwendolen about the whole thing. Algernon is dismayed, as he imagines the only way one could possibly survive a state as terrible as marriage is to be a Bunburyist, able to escape into another life altogether. Just then, the bell is rung, and Algernon is certain it is Lady Bracknell because of the loudness and insistence of such ringing. He quickly strikes a bargain with his friend: If John/Ernest promises to dine with Algernon at Willis tonight, Algernon will get his aunt out of the way for a few minutes to allow for the proposal to take place. John agrees, as the two women enter.Lady Bracknell commandeers the room and begins asking questions of her nephew as she settles down to sit. She asks Gwendolen to sit beside her, but Gwendolen stays where she is next to John (who, of course, she still thinks is named Ernest). Lady Bracknell asks after the cucumber sandwiches Algernon has promised her, but Algernon has eaten them all. He rings for Lane who, dutiful servant that he is, says to Lady Bracknell that he could not find cucumbers in the market. Algernon pretends to be very distressed about the cucumber shortage, but Lady Bracknell dismisses the issue. Lady Bracknell and Algernon talk about the daily gossip, which finally turns around to the dinner Algernon has promised to attend at Lady Bracknells home, this evening. Algernon begs off dinner, saying that he must go visit his poor, invalid friend Bunbury. Lady Bracknell is exasperated, commenting on Bunburys perpetual and inconvenient poor health, but she eventually acquiesces. Before doing so, however, Lady Bracknell makes her nephew promise that Bunbury will not be ill on Saturday, as she is throwing a party and needs him to be there. Algernon assents, and suggests that he and his aunt go over the music for the party in the next room (where the piano is kept). Lady Bracknell begins to leave, telling Gwendolen to accompany her. Gwendolen says she will do so, but then remains behind in the drawing room with John/Ernest. After a bumbling start, John turns the conversation to his admiration of Gwendolen. He speaks nervously and in a halting manner, so that Gwendolen is constantly babbling to pick up the slack. They confess their love for one another, but Gwendolen expresses that part of the reason she loves John/Ernest so well is that his name is Ernest. John, in a panic, asks desperately if she could love him if he had a different name, such as Jack (the diminutive form of John). Gwendolen is dismissive of the possibility, but also expresses that she does not like the name Jack. John is desperate, and concludes that he must get christened Ernest at once. When he blurts this out and realizes what hes said, he changes his words to we must get married at once. Gwendolen acts coy, pointing out that John/Ernest has not said anything about marriage yet. He goes on, confusedly, and she points out that he needs to formally propose adding, that she has already decided to accept him. Once again, he jumps past the proposal, joyous that his love is willing to accept him, but she steers him right in the end and he formally proposes just as Lady Bracknell re-enters the room.Lady Bracknell tells John/Ernest to get up immediately, but Gwendolen tells her mother that he has not finished yet. When Lady Bracknell asked, Finished what?, Gwendolen announces their engagement. Lady Bracknell is shocked, especially since John/Ernest has not asked her permission and arranged it with her and Lord Bracknell first. She sends her daughter to the carriage, and sits down to interrogate her prospective son-in-law.Lady Bracknells inquiries after John/Ernest and his prospects seem to be going along well, until it is revealed that the house he owns is on the unfashionable side. All seems lost, but Lady Bracknell decides that that could simply be remedied by buying a new house. The real trouble comes when she asks what John/Ernests" parents do for a living, and he has to confess that he lost both his parents, and was found in a railway station handbag as an infant by the late Mr. Thomas Cardew, who adopted him and became his benefactor.Lady Bracknell is appalled, and insists that no daughter of hers will marry into a cloak-room and form an alliance with a parcel. John/Ernests" lack of proper origin (or any sort of definitive origin at all) completely disqualifies him. With that, Lady Bracknell sweeps out of the room, leaving John heartbroken.As Johns desperation and indignance mount at his lack of control over his own origins and the way in which they are keeping him from the love of his life, Algernon plays a rollicking rendition of the wedding march in the next room. John shouts at Algernon to stop playing, and Algernon pops into the room, cheerily inquiring after how everything went. Seeing John, he concludes that Gwendolen rejected him which she has been known to do to other men.John explains that it is not Gwendolen but her mother who is at issue. John rails about how horribly monstrous Lady Bracknell is, before apologizing to Algernon for speaking ill of his aunt. Algernon brushes it off, speaking cleverly about how he likes to hear his relations abused, and John and Algernon end up bantering about the nature of foolery and nonsense. Algernon then turns the conversation back to his friend, asking if he confessed that he is Ernest in town and Jack in the country. John patronizingly informs Algernon that that sort of information isnt the sort of thing one tells to a nice, sweet, refined girl. Algernon reveals his own philosophy about women: The only way to behave to a woman is to make love to her if she is pretty, and to someone else if she is plain. John dismisses this, too, as nonsense. Still, Algernon pushes on, asking how he is going to deal with the myth of his brother Ernest. John tells his friend that he has decided to kill off Ernest of apoplexy. Algernon persuades him it will be more convincing to tell people his brother died of a severe chill. Algernon presses further, however, pointing out that Cecily has gotten rather attached to Ernest, and might feel his loss quite a bit. John dismisses this, saying that Cecily is sensible. Algernon reveals that hed quite like to see Cecily, and John adds fuel to the fire by saying, I will take very good care you never will. She is excessively pretty and she is only just eighteen. Algernon anticipates their might be trouble with Gwendolen around the fact that John has a ward so close to his age who is so very pretty, but John dismisses his concern saying that half an hour after they have met, they will be calling each other sister. Algernon retorts that women only do that when they have called each other a lot of other things first.Algernon realizes that he is hungry and insists the two men go dress for dinner. Jack is ornery about it, but they are about to go dress when Lane announces Gwendolens return. Gwendolen rushes in, and tells her cousin to turn around while she confers with her fianc. Gwendolen confesses her eternal devotion to Ernest, despite the fact that her mama may make her marry any number of other people. Hearing of Ernests romantic origins from her mother has only added to her ardor for him. She asks for his address in the country, so that she can correspond with him daily while he is there. He gives it to her, and Algernon, writes the address on his shirt cuff, without John/Ernest noticing. Gwendolen, having finished her errand, tells her cousin he may turn back around, but he has already done so and he rings the bell for Lane. John volunteers to see Gwendolen out to her carriage, leaving Algernon alone with Lane. Algernon orders a glass of sherry and gleefully informs his manservant that he will be going Bunburying tomorrow.John comes back in, mooning over Gwendolen, but notices that Algernon seems particularly amused and inquires after it. Algernon tells him he is just a little anxious about Bunbury, and Jack warns Algy that Bunbury will get him into quite a scrape one of these days. When Algernon tells him that he loves scrapes, John tells his friend he never [talks] anything but nonsense, and storms off. Looking at the address on his shirt-cuff Algernon responds slyly, Nobody ever does.Act Two The second act opens in the garden of the Manor House, John Worthings country estate in Hertfordshire. Young Cecily is watering the flowers, an effort to escape her German grammar lesson, which is being administered by her governess, Miss Prism. Miss Prism tells Cecily that her guardian laid particular emphasis on her need to study German before leaving for town, yesterday. Cecily tells Miss Prism that she thinks Uncle Jack is so serious that she worries he cant be quite well. Miss Prism immediately comes to his defense, saying that no one has a higher sense of duty and responsibility. Cecily retorts that must be why he seems a little bored. As Miss Prism continues to reprimand her impertinent charge, Cecily writes in her diary. Noticing the diary, Miss Prism dismisses it as a waste of time. Cecily sets up a dichotomy between the fantasies she writes in her diary and the boring, quotidian facts that she finds in the three-volume novels Mudie sends us. Miss Prism reveals that she once wrote a three-volume novel. Cecily says she hopes it did not end happily and Miss Prism replies, The good ended happily and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means. Cecily asks if the novel was ever published, and Miss Prism suddenly distressed tells her that the novel was abandoned. She encourages Cecily to get back to work, but Cecily points out that the reverend, Dr. Chasuble, is coming up the walk. Cecily tells Dr. Chasuble that her governess was complaining of a slight headache and suggests that she would benefit from walking with him in the park. Miss Prism has had no such headache. When Dr. Chasuble inquires about whether Cecily is an attentive pupil, she admits to being quite distracted. Dr. Chasuble finds this bewildering, saying that if he were Miss Prisms pupil he would hang upon her lips. Conscious of the romantic imagery involved in his statement, he clarifies that he was speaking metaphorically and changes the subject to Johns return. John is not supposed to arrive back until Monday, Miss Prism explains. Dr. Chasuble starts to take his leave, but Miss Prism stops him, saying that she does have a bit of a headache, after all, and then two older folks walk off, leaving Cecily to study Political Economy.Cecily, however, intends to do nothing of the sort, and throws the books on the ground just as the servant, Merriman, enters. Merriman announces that Mr. Ernest Worthing has just arrived with a lot of luggage. He shows Cecily a calling card that says Mr. Ernest Worthing the same calling card that Algernon took from Johns cigarette case before giving it back to him. Cecily has never met Ernest before, and confesses she feels rather frightened to meet a really wicked person she is so afraid he will look like everyone else. When Algernon enters, acting debonair, Cecily concludes that he does. The two make introductions, and when Cecily calls him her wicked cousin Ernest, Algernon quickly says, I am not really wicked at all to Cecilys horror. Cecily is very upset that Ernest might be living a double life, pretending to be wicked and really being good all the time. Backpedaling, Algernon admits to being rather reckless, which please Cecily. Cecily explains that Uncle Jack will not be back until Monday afternoon, and Algernon quickly says that he must leave by Monday morning. Getting caught in his lie, Algernon starts to say that he has a business appointment but, realizing that Cecily prefers that he is reckless and bad, he adds that I am anxious to miss? Cecily tells him he should probably stay and speak to Uncle Jack about his emigrating. Algernon is confused, and Cecily explains that last Wednesday night at dinner, Uncle Jack said he would have to choose between this world, the next world, and Australia. Algernon responds that this world is good enough for me, but Cecily retorts, but are you good enough for it? Algernon asks Cecily if she could spend the afternoon reforming him. And Cecily tells him that shes hasnt time. Algernon proposes, instead, that he reform himself this afternoon, and Cecily encourages him to try. He declares he feels better already, but Cecily tells him that he looks worse. Algernon explains that this is because he is hungry, and Cecily invites him inside to eat, but Algernon asks for a buttonhole first. She picks a pink rose, at Algernons request. When she asks why, he explains that it is because she is like a pink rose, and goes on to say she is the prettiest girl [he] ever saw. As Cecily and Ernest go into the house, we see Miss Prism and Dr. Chasuble continuing their walk. Miss Prism expresses concern that the reverend is too much alone and suggests that he get married. Chasuble explains that he subscribes to the old practices of the primitive (Catholic) church and thus is a celibate even though he is a clergyman for the Church of England, which allows marriage. Prism continues to try to persuade him to marry, explaining that a single man presents a permanent public temptation, and that marriage is the only way to ensure that weaker vessels are not led astray by him. Positioning herself as a potential mate, Miss Prism suggests that maturity can always be depended upon in a partner, then awkwardly asks about Cecilys whereabouts. Just then, John enters, dressed in elaborate mourning garb. He announces to Chasuble and Prism that his brother Ernest has died of a severe chill. Miss Prism concludes that as a man sows, so shall he reap," while Chasuble suggests to have more charity towards the dead man. Chasuble suggests that he can preside over the burial, but John explains that his debauched brother wished to be buried in Paris. Chasuble talks about the sermon he can prepare for the occasion. His go-to is versatile enough for harvest celebrations, christenings, confirmations, on days of humiliation and festal days. At the mention of christenings, John is reminded of his need to be christened Ernest. John expresses his desire to be christened. Chasuble is shocked, saying surely hes been christened before. John says he doesnt remember anything about it, and needs to be christened now. Chasuble assents, and they make an appointment for half-past five. Chasuble wishes John the best, begging him not to be too much bowed down by grief, and starts to leave. Miss Prism, still convinced that people get what they deserve, adds that Ernests death seems to me a blessing of an extremely obvious kind.Just then, Cecily burst in from the house, greeting her guardian warmly. She is very confused by Uncle Jacks moroseness, especially when she tells him that his brother Ernest is in the drawing room. John is flummoxed, blurting out that doesnt have a brother. Cecily runs off to retrieve Ernest, and returns hand-in-hand with Algernon. John is shocked. Before John can say anything, Algernon calls him, Brother John and asks John to forgive him for all his wrongdoing. When John refuses to take his brother by the hand, Cecily is appalled. She claims that if Uncle Jack does not shake hands with his brother, she will never forgive him. Begrudgingly, he does.As the two brothers glare at one another, Chasuble declares it a perfect reconciliation. Chasuble, Prism, and Cecily decide to leave the two brothers alone together.Left alone with Algernon, Jack insists that his friend leave as soon as possible, insisting I dont allow any Bunburying here. Merriman enters, announcing that he has put Mr. Ernests luggage in the room next to Johns. John, furious, tells Merriman to order the dog-cart, immediately, to take Ernest (Algernon) back to town. Merriman leaves, and Algernon goads his friend about how darling Cecily is. John insists that Algernon leave by the four-five train. Algernon insists that he wont leave a friend in mourning. John asks if Algernon will leave if he changes out of mourning clothes, and Algernon assents begrudgingly, while making more digs about Johns ability to dress. John storms into the house, but not before releasing a tirade of insults against his friend, and insisting that This Bunburying as you call it, has not been a great success for you.Once he is in the house, Algernon admits that he thinks this has been the best Bunbury yet, confessing that he is in love with Cecily and that is everything.Cecily comes back out to the garden, ostensibly to finish watering the flowers. When Algernon tells her that he must leave, she is very distressed. Merriman comes in to tell Algernon that the dog cart is ready, and Cecily asks if it can wait five minutes. In his final moments before being shipped off, Algernon confesses his love for Cecily saying he loves her hopelessly to which Cecily replies, hopelessly doesnt make much sense, does it? Emboldened by Cecilys love, Algernon tells Merriman that the dog cart should come around next week, instead. He then proceeds to propose, at which point Cecily reveals that in her mind, they have been engaged for the last three months. Cecily explains that she keeps a diary in which she has chronicled her romantic fascination with Uncle Jacks brother, Ernest. Cecily has recorded an entire relationship, evolving over a period of months, in which she wrote love letters between the two of them, created a proposal, broke off the engagement, and then had them reconcile. Algernon is terribly dismayed that Cecily broke off the engagement, but Cecily assuages his fears, saying that now that shes actually met him she feels she could never break it off again. Additionally, she adds, there is the matter of his name. Cecily, like Gwendolen, is extremely partial to the name Ernest. She says it inspires absolute confidence. Panicked, Algernon runs off in search of Dr. Chasuble to see about getting christened Ernest, promising Cecily that he will be back in no time.Just as Cecily settles in to chronicle Ernests real-life proposal in her diary, Merriman enters to announce that a Miss Fairfax has called to see Mr. Worthing, Merriman explains that Mr. Worthing is not at home, having walked in the direction of the rectory some time ago. Cecily has never heard of Miss Fairfax, and assumes it is one of the elderly women with whom Uncle Jack does philanthropic work, so she tells Merriman to show her to the garden and bring tea. In fact, of course, this Miss Fairfax is Gwendolen, who is astonished to see a pretty young woman in the garden of her lovers home. The two young women begin by being as cordial as humanly possible, though Gwendolen confesses to Cecily once she discovers the young woman is Mr. Worthings ward that she wishes she were much older and extremely plain, rather than young and beautiful. Rather than referring to her lover as Mr. Worthing, Gwendolen says that, Ernest has a strong, upright nature. When Cecily hears the name Ernest, she clarifies that she is not Mr. Ernest Worthings ward, but the ward of his elder brother, Jack. Gwendolen is relieved until Cecily follows up this news with the fact that she has recently become engaged to Ernest Worthing. A horrible cat fight ensues, each of the women whipping out their diaries to stake a claim on Ernest. Merriman comes out with the tea, and Cecily serves Gwendolen the precise opposite of the food that she desires: cake instead of bread and butter, and sugary tea instead of plain tea. The confrontation devolves from there, into a horrible fight in which the women both try to be as civil as possible to get the upper hand, but the pitch gets more and more feverish, nonetheless. As the two women fight, Jack and Algernon arrive, each being greeted by their respective lover as Ernest. The women waste no time in correcting the other: Cecily tells Gwendolen her fianc is really named John Worthing (Uncle Jack) and Gwendolen informs Cecily that hers is actually called Algernon Moncrieff (Algy). The women are disgusted and shocked. They turn to the men, demanding to know where the real Ernest is, as they are both engaged to him. John is forced to admit that there is no man named Ernest Worthing, and that he invented such a brother. Gwendolen and Cecily form a united front against the men, storming into the house while calling each other sister, despite the fact that they were calling each other vicious names only moments before.Alone, Jack and Algernon squabbling over which of them will be able to be christened Ernest and over who shall eat the muffins that are left from tea -- while each blames the other for his hapless state of affairs. Act ThreeInside the Manor House morning-room, Gwendolen and Cecily are waiting for the men to respond to their storming off. Instead, they learn from peering out the window, the two men seem to be eating muffins. They are eager to forgive the men and reconcile, but they certainly dont want to make the first move and the men arent coming after them! Finally, the men begin to approach which, of course, they condemn as effrontery, even though its what they are secretly hoping for. The ladies agree to be silent until they know what the men have to say for themselves but as soon as the men come in, the women cant help but speak, confronting them about their motives for this gross deception. Algernon tells Cecily that he pretended to be her guardians brother In order that [he] might have the opportunity of meeting her which she finds a satisfactory explanation. Gwendolen doesnt leave anything to chance, giving John a justification for his actions in her very inquiry about them. All John has to reply is, Can you doubt it, Miss Fairfax? Gwendolen tells him she has the gravest doubts upon the subject. Butintend[s] to crush them. The women want desperately to forgive their respective gentlemen, but decide that the mens Christian names are still an insuperable barrier, and tell them so, in unison. The men answer in unison that they are to be christened this very afternoon. Cecily and Gwendolen are overwhelmed by their lovers willingness to go through with this fearful ordeal, and are won over. The couples embrace, just as Merriman announces the arrival of Lady Bracknell.Lady Bracknell sees her daughter embracing John, and confronts her. Gwendolen insists that she is engaged to Mr. Worthing, but Lady Bracknell refuses to accept it. She reveals that she bribed Gwendolens maid for information about her whereabouts, and insists that all communication between her daughter and John be aborted, immediately. John also insists that he is engaged to be married to Gwendolen and Lady Bracknell, once again, denies this possibility, and turns her focus to her nephew, Algernon. She asks if this is the house in which Mr. Bunbury resides, and Algernon tells his aunt that Bunbury is, in fact, dead. When she asks how this occurred, Algernon begins by saying that he killed Bunbury (the indispensable friend he said no married man could live without, if you recall) this afternoon. Catching himself, he proceeds to explain that Bunbury found out this afternoon that he could not live and so Bunbury died.Just then, Lady Bracknell asks John who the young person is who is holding Algernons hand in what seems to [her] a peculiarly unnecessary manner. John explains that this is his ward, and Algernon announces to his aunt that he and Cecily are engaged. Despite being disturbed by the surprising number of engagements going on today, Lady Bracknell takes upon herself an inquiry about Cecilys respectability. John proudly explains that Cecily is the late Mr. Thomas Cardews granddaughter and has a fortune of a hundred and thirty thousand pounds. Upon hearing the latter piece of information, Lady Bracknell suddenly takes a much stronger interest in Cecily, declaring her a most attractive young lady. Lady Bracknell declares that there are distinct social possibilities in Miss Cardews profile, to which Algernon retorts that his fiance is the sweetest, dearest prettiest girl in the world, and that he doesnt care twopence about social possibilities (a marked change from the Algernon we knew in the first scene.) At long last, Lady Bracknell approves Algernon and Cecilys union, and the couple rejoice but John interrupts, informing them that as Cecilys guardian he absolutely declines to give consent to the marriage. John accuses Algernon of being untruthful, and delineates his numerous transgressions. Lady Bracknell decides to entirely overlook Algernons misbehavior, but John remains firm in his objection. This becomes all the more relevant when it is revealed that according to her grandfathers will, Cecily will not be an autonomous adult until the age of thirty-five (at least, this is what John claims the will is not on hand to back it up.) Algernon tells Cecily that he will wait for her until she is thirty-five, but Cecily confesses that she cant stand to wait that long. Lady Bracknell entreats John to change his mind, and he reveals that the decision is, in fact, entirely in her own hands: if Lady Bracknell consents to his marrying Gwendolen, then he will grant permission for Cecily to marry Algernon. If not, John declares, a passionate celibacy is all that any of us can look forward to. Lady Bracknell, however, refuses to allow her daughter to remain celibate, and fully intends to marry her to someone else. She tells Gwendolen that they must leave immediately. Just then, however, Dr. Chasuble comes in, announcing that everything is reading for the christenings. Lady Bracknell is very confused, wondering if somehow one or both of the young women are pregnant. Chasuble explains that both young men are going to be christened. Lady Bracknell declares the idea grotesque and irreligious. As neither wedding seems to be going forward, John explains that there is no longer a need for the two ceremonies, at present. Chasuble prepares to depart, explaining that he has just been told that Miss Prism has been waiting for him in the vestry. Hearing the name Miss Prism, Lady Bracknell immediately inquires as to who this Miss Prism might be and demands that she be sent for. Conveniently, Miss Prism is heading toward them at that very moment. When Prism sees Lady Bracknell, she grows pale. Lady Bracknell confronts Miss Prism, demanding to know the whereabouts of a baby that was once in her charge. Twenty-eight years ago, Lady Bracknell explains, Miss Prism was in charge of taking care of a baby. Prism took the baby out for a walk, and she and the baby were never seen again. Weeks later, the perambulator was found in Bayswater. It contained the manuscript of a three-volume novel of more than unusually revolting sentimentality. Prism and the baby, however, were never found.Contrite, Miss Prism confesses that she does not know what happened to the baby that had been in her charge. She goes on to explain that on the fateful day in question, she left the house with the baby in the perambulator and also with a handbag containing the manuscript of a three-volume novel that she had been writing. Absentmindedly, she must have confused the two and placed the manuscript in the carriage and the baby in the handbag.John, having been found in a handbag, is now very invested in this conversation and presses Miss Prism for details about where she left the handbag. Miss Prism reveals that she left the handbag in the coat room of Victoria station, the Brighton line which is exactly where John was found by Mr. Thomas Cardew, as a baby.Suddenly, John excuses himself, hurrying offstage without explanation. He returns moments later with a large, black handbag which he presents to Miss Prism. She confirms that it is, indeed, the handbag she mislaid and says she is very happy to have it restored to her after all these years. John emotionally declares that more has been restored to her than a handbag, explaining that he was the infant inside it and assuming that she was his mother. John embraces Miss Prism, who is horrified, as she is an unmarried woman. John, misunderstanding, says that though the news is unpleasant that he was born out of wedlock, he is happy to forgive her the transgression. Miss Prism finally extracts herself from Johns embrace, and tells him that it is Lady Bracknell who can tell John who he really is. John, in true English form, says to Lady Bracknell, I hate to seem inquisitive, but would you kindly inform me who I am?Lady Bracknell reveals that John is, in fact, the son of her sister, Mrs. Moncrieff, and thus Algernons elder brother. John is elated, declaring, I always knew I had a brother! Now that it is clear that John is, in fact, a man of legitimate parentage, Lady Bracknell must approve of his union with Gwendolen. This leaves one last wrinkle: Gwendolen wants to know Johns name now that he has become someone else. Lady Bracknell says that she is sure that John was named after his father, General Moncrieff, but cannot recall what his name was. Conveniently, John has the military records from the last forty years. Finding the volume listing generals with surnames starting with M, he reads aloud that his fathers surname was Ernest John. (Some productions play this as something that John makes up, others make it a convenient coincidence of fate). John nee Ernest turns to Gwendolen and asks if she can forgive him for unwittingly telling the truth his entire life. She replies that she will forgive him, for she feels he is sure to change. John and Gwendolen embrace, prompting Algernon and Cecily to embrace as well. Dr. Chasuble and Miss Prism follow in kind, making a third romantic pair. Lady Bracknell calls John/Ernest her nephew, telling him that he seems to be displaying signs of triviality. John responds, On the contrary, Aunt Augusta, Ive now realised [sic] for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest. ThemesIdentityThe question of identity is raised in the plays title, before the opening scene has begun. Wilde toys with the audience by giving the play a deceptive title with more than one meaning. Rather than a form of the name Ernest, the title implies earnestness as a quality one should seek to acquire, as in being honest, sincere, sober, and serious. However, the idealised seriousness or sincerity that comes with being earnest is rejected by both Gwendolen and Cecily as they prioritize the importance of the name Ernest, rather than the qualities of their suitors: It had always been a girlish dream of mine to love some one whose name was Ernest. There is something in that name that seems to inspire absolute confidence (Cecily, Act 2). Through the girls behavior, Wilde satirizes the importance in the upper classes of marrying someone for the advantageous value of their family name. By making Ernest and Earnest suitably interchangeable in the plays title, Wilde plays with the Victorian obsession with names, turning social meaning on its head.Both Jack and Algernon invent alter egos to enable them to escape the realities and pressures of their everyday lives. For Jack, Ernest is a means of escaping the country and his duties to his ward Cecily. As Ernest, he can enjoy the pleasures of city life and court Gwendolen under the careful watch of her formidable mother, Lady Bracknell. Conversely, Algernon poses as Ernest to leave life in town and escape to the country to meet Cecily. Identity, or rather the lack of it, is ultimately revealed as Jacks biggest problem. While he can provide every possible detail of Cecilys birth, background, and medical history, his own start in life is infinitely more vague. In the final scene of the play, it is revealed that Jack was abandoned as a baby at a London train station and consequently has no idea who his birth parents are. The revelation that he is Lady Bracknells nephew (and consequently Algernons brother) and christened Ernest, after his father, brings the play full circle. Jack is Ernest after all, and his place in upper class society is confirmed.AestheticsThe idea of aesthetics and the question of whether art imitates life, or life imitates art, pervades much of Oscar Wildes work. In The Importance of Being Earnest he takes a deep dive into the hypocrisies of the upper classes and the perceived importance of appearances and ideal scenarios, rather than real life. Both Jack and Algernon craft careful fictional identities that enable them to escape their everyday lives and duties, and present a romantic, idealized persona that proves irresistible to both Gwendolen and Cecily. When Jacks fictionalized alter ego Ernest comes true and he is revealed to have been christened Ernest by birth, the line between fiction and reality, life and art becomes completely blurred. Cecilys whimsical naivety also explores the notion of life versus art through the entries in her diary. To make her life more interesting, she writes fake facts in her diary and takes it in her stride when a suitor appears to make one of them come true. When she meets Ernest (Algernon) and instantly falls for him, she tells Algernon that they have actually already been in an on-off relationship for a while and have been engaged these last three months. Algernon runs with this fictionalized version of their new relationship and accepts it as truth.Both Algernon and Jack personify the Wildean dandy, a leading figure in the aesthetic movement. Jack is the clever dandy, while Algernon takes great care over how he appears to others and values the extravagant aesthetics of life, rather than practicalities. In the opening lines of the play, he immediately notes that his piano playing is not accurate but that this does not matter as he plays with wonderful expression (Act One). He views life as an artist, continually molding it into the reality he desires. One of the many trivial examples of this can be seen when he first meets Cecily. She admires his hair and asks if it curls naturally to which he replies, Yes, darling, with a little help from others (Act Two). Lady Bracknell also takes great pride in the importance of appearance. She despises anything boring or plain, and instead values extravagance, wealth, and respectability (regardless of the reality behind the facade). She has passed this idea on to her daughter, Gwendolen, who also values style and appearance. In Act Three, she and Cecily discuss the notion of truth versus honesty and Gwendolen reminds her new friend that In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity, is the vital thing.Class & Social StatusVictorian society at the end of the nineteenth century was based upon a strict structure that was concerned with wealth, family connections, and a ruthless social code that insisted upon the appearance of respectability. Many of Wildes plays explore what happens to an individual when they break that code, but Earnest instead looks at what happens when you have the appearance of class and social status without the goods to back it up. Going hand in hand with the themes of aestheticism and identity, class and social status underpins the play entirely.Lady Bracknell is an infamous Wildean character who bases her whole belief system on the importance of money and social standing: She refuses to believe any slurs about Algernon due to his premium education and family reputation: Untruthful! My nephew Algernon? Impossible! He is an Oxonian (Act One). When she believes Jack to be a foundling, Lady Bracknell rejects his marriage proposal to Gwendolen. She proudly possesses a list (the same one as the Duchess of Bolton, no less) of eligible bachelors and a string of interview questions that a potential suitor must pass before there can be any talk of engagement. These questions are based entirely upon wealth, class, and character. In one of the wittiest moments of the play, she brusquely informs Jack that she and her husband could not allow their daughter --a girl brought up with the utmost careto marry into a cloak-room, and form an alliance with a parcel (Act One). However, when she discovers that he has a respectable family background and is actually her long-lost nephew, her opinion of him immediately changes.Lady Bracknell carries out the same level of scrutiny when she learns of Algernons intentions to marry Cecily. She feels responsible for her nephew and is wary of bringing down the family name by marrying someone without the right connections or background, especially as her guardian cannot provide any evidence of his own parentage: Mr. Worthing, is Miss Cardew at all connected with any of the larger railway stations in London? I merely desire information. Until yesterday I had no idea that there were any families or persons whose origin was a Terminus (Act Three). Lady Bracknells intense scrutiny of Jacks socioeconomic status reflects the world in which she lives and was brought up in. The class pyramid is referenced several times throughout the play, with mentions of the poorer classes and lower orders. Dr. Chasuble reveals that carrying out christenings is his most time consuming task in his parish and associates large families with poorer members of society who, he implies, do not know any better: I have often spoken to the poorer classes on the subject. But they don't seem to know what thrift is (Act Two). Meanwhile, Algernon seems to accept that, while his own moral compass is allowed to go off-course, the morality of the working class must be steadfast: Lanes views on marriage seem somewhat lax. Really, if the lower orders dont set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them? They seem, as a class, to have absolutely no sense of moral responsibility (Act One). His hypocrisy reflects the shortsighted outlook of the aristocratic class in Victorian London.MarriageMarriage and the pursuit of it, is at the forefront of the plot. Jack has fallen head over heels in love with Gwendolen, and he is determined to marry her. Meanwhile, Algernon is extremely cynical about the nature of marriage until he covertly meets Jacks ward, Cecily. He immediately falls in love and the couple become engaged within a matter of moments. Marriage becomes a philosophical talking point throughout the play as both the male and female characters discuss their ideas on the practicalities and idealized notions of the institution of marriage. The subject is raised in the opening dialogue of Act One, when Algernon and his butler discuss the potentially demoralizing result of being married. Just moments later, Algernon and Jack disagree on their expectations from marriage, with Algernon maintaining that husband and wife cannot be happy without a third wheel. From this moment on, the business of marriage pervades the action. For Lady Bracknell, marriage is absolutely a business and one she takes exceptionally seriously. She cannot accept Jack as a suitor for her daughters hand as he does not tick all the boxes she has listed. Lady Bracknell interviews Jack for the position of husband, with a prepared set of questions. All are based upon Victorian assumptions of the nature and purpose of marriage, with love being at the very end of the list. Instead, she focuses on wealth, property, and family respectability. As she notes, an engagement should come as a surprise to a young woman, pleasant or unpleasant, as the result of an agreed transaction between her parents and the suitor. Furthermore, she believes that a young woman should know as little about her future husband as possible: To speak frankly, I am not in favour of long engagements. They give people the opportunity of finding out each others character before marriage, which I think is never advisable (Act One). For both Jack and Algernon, the path to the altar is a rocky one, with many stumbling blocks and hindrances along the way. Gwendolen hesitates at marrying a man not named Ernest, as she places great value in the name, rather than the man himself. Cecily also shows a similar hesitation when Algernon hints that he may not be called Ernest after all. In a display of light-hearted rivalry, Jack and Algernon also strive to block each others happiness. Protective of his ward, Jack objects to Cecily and Algernons engagement due to Algernons proclivity for Bunburying to escape his responsibilities. However, it is not just the potential marriages of Jack and Algernon that occupy the text. Miss Prism embraces her role as Cecilys governess and, as such, is resigned to spinsterhood. This does not stop her holding a torch for Dr. Chasuble, who is also unmarried. Although he stresses the churchs emphasis on celibacy, Miss Prism notes that a mans commitment to celibacy makes him all the more attractive: As you do not seem to realize, dear Doctor, that by persistently remaining single, a man converts himself into a permanent public temptation. Men should be more careful; this very celibacy leads weaker vessels astray (Act Two). It is a relief when Dr. Chasuble and Miss Prism join the younger lovers in uttering At last and embrace the idea of marriage, as well as each other.SymbolsBunburyThe word "bunburying" first appears in act one when Algernon introduces his fictional friend, a chronic invalid named "Bunbury". Bunbury is Algernons means of getting out of society events, dinners, and meetings that he does not want to attend. He uses it most to avoid socializing with his Aunt Augusta (Lady Bracknell) and declares himself to be a serious Bunburyist (Act One). Bunbury then takes on a further level when Algernon identifies Jacks masquerading as Ernest to court

How long is the importance of being earnest play. Is the importance of being earnest a play. What type of play is the importance of being earnest. Is the importance of being earnest a good play.

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