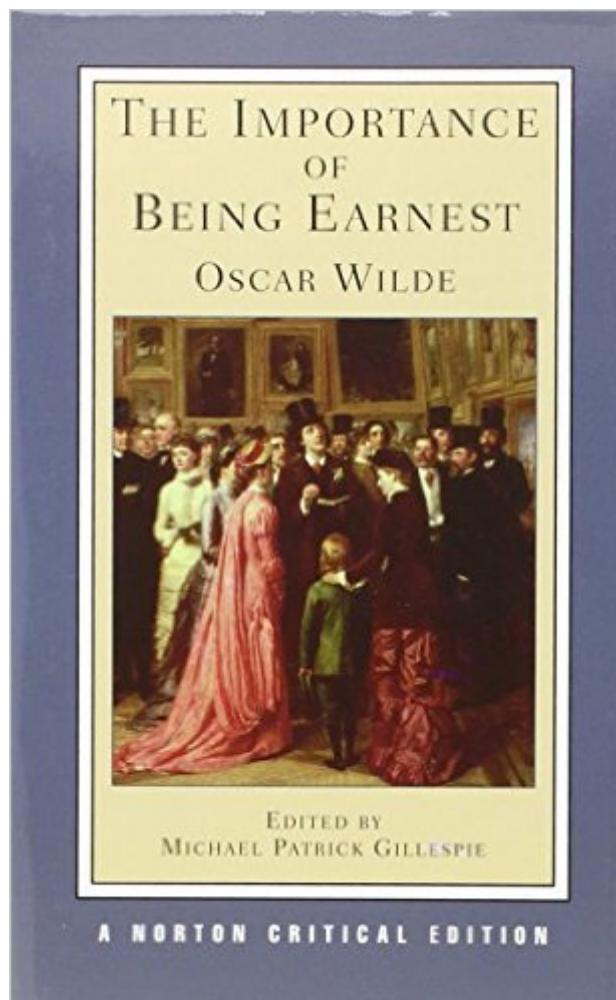


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The Importance Of Being Earnest (Norton Critical Editions)



Synopsis

The text of this Norton Critical Edition of *The Importance of Being Earnest* is the established three-act version. Originally in four acts, Wilde shortened it to three at the urging of George Alexander, the owner of the St. James Theatre and first actor to play Jack Worthing. The play is accompanied by explanatory annotations and by an appendix of excised portions. "Backgrounds" includes essays on Wilde and the 1890s by prominent cultural critics Joseph Donohue, Regenia Gagnier, and Karl Beckson. "Reviews and Reactions" collects contemporary responses to *The Importance of Being Earnest*, among them George Bernard Shaw's famous dissenting view and the American assessment by H. F. "Essays in Criticism" includes six diverse assessments of Wilde and the play by E. H. Mikhail, Camille Paglia, Christopher Craft, Michael Patrick Gillespie, Peter Raby, and Richard Haslam. A Chronology and Selected Bibliography are also included.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"*The Importance of Being Earnest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People*" is one of the first plays written in English since the works of Shakespeare that celebrates the language itself. Oscar Wilde's comedy has one advantage over the classic comedies of the Bard in that "*The Importance of Being Earnest*" is as funny today as it was when it was first performed at the St. James's Theater in London on February 14, 1895. After all, enjoying Shakespeare requires checking the bottom for footnotes explaining the meaning of those dozens of words that Shakespeare makes up in any one of his plays. But Wilde's brilliant wit, his humor and social satire, remain intact even though he was a

writer of the Victorian era. Wilde believed in art for art's own sake, which explains why he emphasized beauty while his contemporaries were dealing with the problems of industrial England. "The Importance of Being Earnest" is set among the upper class, making fun of their excesses and absurdities while imbuing them with witty banter providing a constant stream of epigrams. The play's situation is simple in its unraveling complexity. Algernon Moncrieff is an upper-class English bachelor who is visited by his friend Jack Worthing, who is known as "Ernest." Jack has come to town to propose to Gwendolen Fairfax, the daughter of the imposing Lady Bracknell and Algry's first cousin. Jack has a ward named Cecily who lives in the country while Algernon has an imaginary friend named "Bunbury" whom he uses as an excuse to get out of social engagements. Jack proposes to Gwendolen but has two problems.

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