



The Importance of Being Earnest (Illustrated)

Oscar Wilde

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The Importance of being Earnest, A Trivial Comedy for Serious People is a play by Oscar Wilde. First performed on 14 February 1895 at St. James's Theatre in London, the play is a farcical comedy in which the protagonists maintain fictitious personae in order to escape burdensome obligations. Working within the social conventions of late Victorian London, the play's major themes are the triviality with which it treats institutions as serious as marriage, and the resulting satire of Victorian ways. Contemporary reviews all praised the play's humour, though some were cautious about its explicit lack of social messages, while others foresaw the modern consensus that it was the culmination of Wilde's artistic career so far. Its high farce and witty dialogue have helped make The Importance of Being Earnest Wilde's most enduringly popular play.

The successful opening night marked the climax of Wilde's career but also heralded his downfall. The Marquess of Queensberry, father of Lord Alfred Douglas, an intimate friend of Wilde, planned to present Wilde a bouquet of spoiling vegetables and disrupt the show. Wilde was tipped off and Queensberry was refused admission. Soon afterwards the feud came to a climax in court, and Wilde's new notoriety caused the play, despite its success, to be closed after just 86 performances. After imprisonment, he published the play from Paris but wrote no further comic or dramatic work. The Importance of Being Earnest has been revived many times since its premiere and adapted for the cinema on three occasions, in 1952, 1992 and 2002.

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