

The  
Importance  
of Being  
*Earnest*





# The Importance Of Being Earnest

Classical Greek: δράμα, drama="action"

Classical Greek: δράω, draō="to do"

Drama:

-- Tragedy

-- Comedy

# Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde

(16 October 1854 – 30 November 1900)



An Anglo-Irish playwright, novelist, poet, and critic. He is regarded as one of the greatest playwrights of the Victorian Era.

Famous works:

*The Picture of Dorian Gray*  
(1890).

*The Importance of Being Earnest*  
(1895)

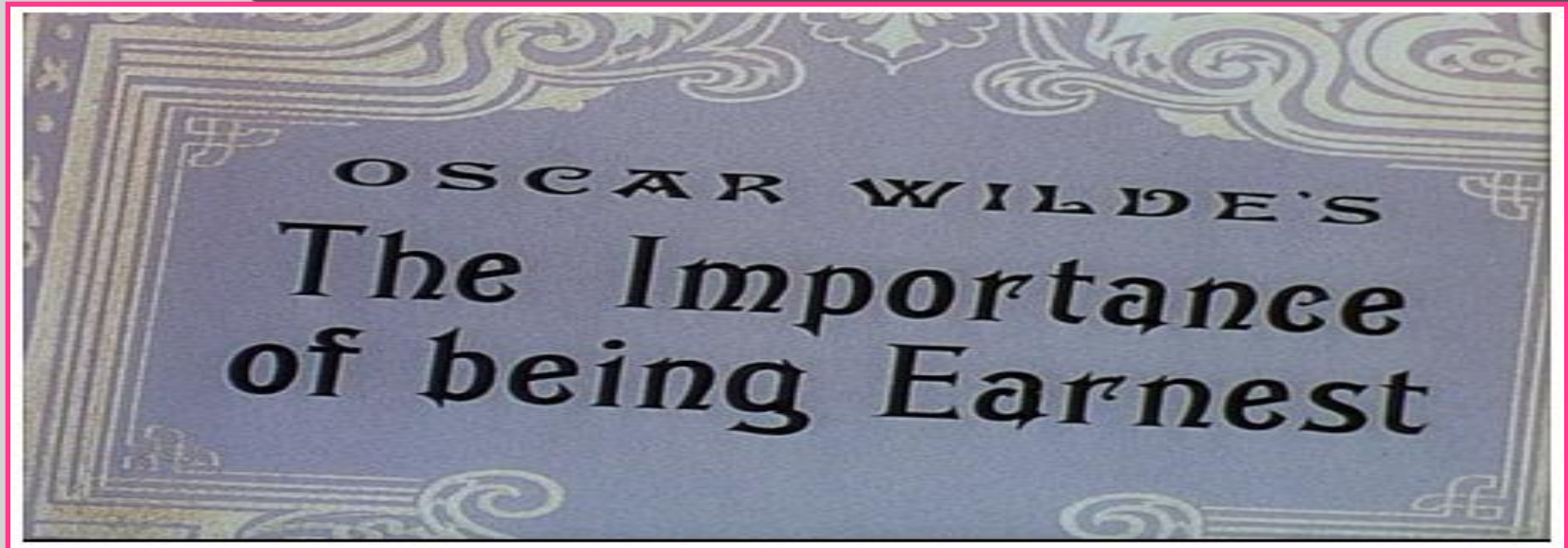
*De Profundis* (1897)

*The Ballad of Reading  
Gaol* (1898)

# The Importance Of Being Ernest

- The play is based around two young men, **Jack** and his good friend **Algernon**. —
- Jack has created an alter-ego, **Ernest**, who has all kinds of reprobate fun in London.
- Algernon has invented a fictional character, a chronic invalid named **Bunbury**
- Algernon turns up on the estate pretending to be Jack's brother--the reprobate Ernest--in order to woo Cecily.
- Jack's fiancée, (and Algernon's cousin) **Gwendolen** has also arrived, and Jack admits to her that he is, in fact, not called Ernest, but is called Jack.
- Algernon also confesses to Cecily that his name is not Ernest either. ----
- Gwendolen's mother, **Lady Bracknell**, will not permit her daughter marrying someone of Jack's social status.
- Lady Bracknell reveals that Algernon's brother had become lost in just such a handbag, and that Jack must, in actuality, be that lost child. The child had been christened Ernest.

## Title: *The Importance of Being Earnest*



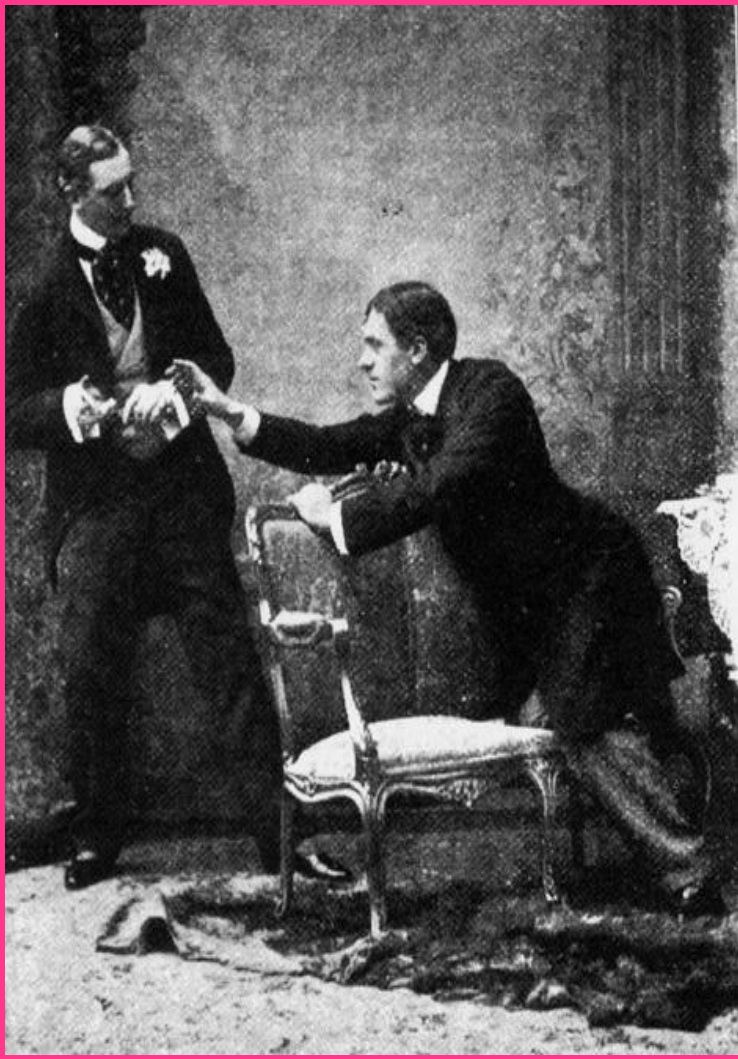
--"earnest"

--"Ernest"

"earnest," meaning honest or sincere and the first name, "Ernest."



# Symbolism, Imagery & Allegory



Ernest and Bunbury symbolize the empty promises or deceit of the Victorian era.

Not only is the character Ernest anything but earnest for the majority of the play, but he also doesn't even really exist.

This makes Jack's creation of him doubly deceitful. Bunbury sounds as ridiculous and fictional as he actually is.

Both of them allow Jack and Algernon to live a lie – seeming to uphold the highest moral standards. The Victorian era did not value honesty, responsibility, or compassion for the under-privileged, but only style, money, and aristocracy.

## Tone : *Satirical*



What do aristocrats do all day? Play the piano, visit their scandalous neighbors, gossip about their scandalous neighbors, eat cucumber sandwiches, and make up lies to avoid dining with their relatives. What does Lady Bracknell want to see in Jack, her future son-in-law? Money, property, stylishness, and an aristocratic name.

## Writing Style : Humorous, Full of Epigrams

**Lady Bracknell.** *Ah, nowadays that is no guarantee of respectability of character. What number in Belgrave Square?*

**Jack.** 149.

**Lady Bracknell.** *[Shaking her head.] The unfashionable side. I thought there was something. However, that could easily be altered.*

**Jack.** *Do you mean the fashion, or the side?*

**Lady Bracknell.** *[Sternly.] Both, if necessary, I presume. What are your politics?*

**Jack.** *Well, I am afraid I really have none. I am a Liberal Unionist.*



**Jack.** *Well, yes, I must admit I smoke.*

**Lady Bracknell.** *I am glad to hear it. A man should always have an occupation of some kind. There are far too many idle men in London as it is. How old are you?*



# Plot Analysis



## *Shadow of Confusion*

### **I'm Ernest! No, I'm Ernest!**

Both Jack and Algernon impersonate a nonexistent but notoriously wicked man named Ernest for the sole purpose of meeting the women they love.

## *Nightmarish Tangle*

### **Nobody is E(a)rnest.**

Caught between the furious women and a hard place, the men confess the truth. There is no Ernest. Gwendolen and Cecily leave them for having non-musical names like Jack and Algernon.

## *Everything Comes to Light*

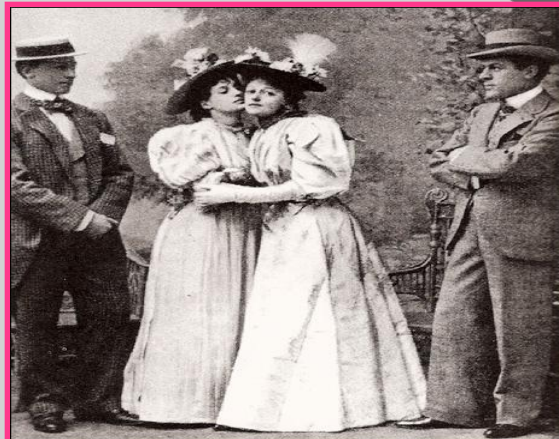
### **Nobody is E(a)rnest.**

Caught between the furious women and a hard place, the boys confess the truth. There is no Ernest. The girls leave them for having non-musical names like Jack and Algernon.

## *Everything Comes to Light*

### **I really am Ernest!**

Gwendolen, Cecily, and Lady Bracknell forgive the men when: 1) they confess they lied to be with their beloveds, and 2) they all discover Miss Prism made a huge mistake involving a baby stroller, a book, and a handbag. Jack is not only a real aristocrat and Algernon's brother, but also named Ernest after his father. Do we hear wedding bells?



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OF  
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THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 18TH @ 6:30 P.M.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 19TH @ 6:30 P.M.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 20TH @ 2 P.M.