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Oscar Wilde

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Annotated Bibliography

Unsigned Review, by Anonymous. *The Theatre*, 1 March 1895: 169-70. Rpt. in *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. Karl Beckson. New York: Routledge, 1997: 199-200. Print

This review is critical more of the lower-class British public than of Wilde himself, saying that they are less intelligent and therefore more likely to enjoy Wilde's works which the author claims are designed to cater to the lower classes. The author wonders how long Wilde can keep up this charade of showmanship. He argues that if one were to take out all of the "Oscarisms" from this play, it would not be remotely entertaining.

Unsigned Review, by Anonymous. *The Truth*, 21 February 1895: 464-5. Rpt. in *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. Karl Beckson. New York: Routledge, 1997: 191-93. Print

While the review opens scathingly, the author stating that they have "not the slightest intention of seriously criticizing Mr. O. Wilde's new piece," they do admit to liking it, but only for a short period of the review. Over half of the review devotes itself to talking about how Wilde thinks too highly of himself, and that the author thinks his popularity is fleeting.

William Archer on *The Importance of Being Earnest*, by William Archer. *The World*, 20 February 1895: 50-60. Rpt. in *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. Karl Beckson. New York: Routledge, 1997: 189-91. Print

Archer says that Wilde's play is good, but only to see. He claims that there is little to find in terms of criticism and edifying text in *Earnest*, and therefore does not go much into detail on what things might mean in the play as a critic normally would, but rather gives a play-by-play of what happened on stage.

William Archer on the loss to British drama, by William Archer. *William Archer, life, work, and friendships*, 1 May 1895: 215-16. Rpt. in *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. Karl Beckson. New York: Routledge, 1997: 201. Print

This article is not exactly about *The Importance of Being Earnest*, but it is highly critical of British Drama, which the author feels has fallen by the wayside in recent years. He wishes Wilde would grow and become a better playwright, but he never does, in his opinion.

Reception of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, by Hamilton Fyfe. *The New York Times*, 17 February 1895: 1. Rpt. in *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. Karl Beckson. New York: Routledge, 1997: 188-89. Print

Fyfe praises Wilde's play, saying that he "has not heard such unrestrained, incessant laughter from all parts of the theatre" since a work called *Charley's Aunt* was brought to London stages. He decrees that Wilde has defeated his critics in writing this comedy.

Earnest Newman on Wilde's genius for paradox, by Earnest Newman. *The Free Review*, 1 June

1895: 193-206. Rpt. in *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. Karl Beckson. New York: Routledge, 1997: 202-10. Print

This also does not focus on *The Importance of Being Earnest*, but rather on Wilde's penchant for paradoxical statements. Newman believes that the British public is too unintelligent to realize that these paradoxical statements, or "Oscarisms," are not meant to be taken seriously and end up doing so. He argues that Wilde is a brilliant thinker and satirist, and these paradoxes are his art form.

George Bernard Shaw on *The Importance of Being Earnest*, by George Bernard Shaw. *The Saturday Review*, 23 February 1895: 249-50. Rpt. in *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. Karl Beckson. New York: Routledge, 1997: 194-95. Print

Shaw opens by saying he is sure that Wilde must have written this play before his first, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, and then touched it up based on the reviews and critiques of that work, because it is far more commercial and not as well done in his opinion. He is particularly critical of the muffin scene at the end of act two, calling it Gilbertian as many other reviewers did, but not in a positive way. He goes on to criticize the public for eating up even Wilde's bad works.

A.B. Walkley, on *The Importance of Being Earnest*, by A.B. Walkley. *The Speaker*, 23 February 1895: 212-13. Rpt. in *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. Karl Beckson. New York: Routledge, 1997: 196-99. Print

This review is mostly positive, opening by stating that Wilde has "found himself at last as an artist in sheer nonsense," which Walkley makes sure to note is not a joking statement on his part. He claims that in being nonsense, the play is enjoyable in a way that Wilde's

last play was not. He goes on to focus not so much on the play but on historical plays by Shakespeare and the Greeks and how audiences reacted to them.

H.G. Wells on *The Importance of Being Earnest*, by H.G. Wells. *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 15 February 1895: 4. Rpt. in *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. Karl Beckson. New York: Routledge, 1997: 187-88. Print

Wells gives a favorable review of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, despite, by his own admission, giving a highly critical review of his last work, *An Ideal Husband*. He refers to Wilde's comedic style as being "Gilbertian," and praises the ridiculousness of the plot element of the handbag, as, he says, it is at place in a comedic work like this.