

Creative Adaptation Fellowships
Center for Undergraduate Fellowships and Research
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The George Washington University
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October 20, 2005

To Whom It May Concern:

We, Estelle Charlu, Nicholas Marolda, and Isaac Rosen, are immensely interested in the Creative Adaptation Fellowship awarded by Youth Media Distribution and the George Washington University's Center for Undergraduate Fellowships and Research. We would like the opportunity to pursue our conception of play, *Lady Bracknell's Crucible of The Importance of Being Earnest*, an adaptation of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. This fellowship will allow us to grow as writers by giving us the proper resources to bring our play to life – on stage.

Although we may be neophytes as to the actual process of fully adapting and staging a play, we have had relevant training in theater and writing. Estelle Charlu has been involved in theatre. She has acted in countless shows, and has also participated in directing, redrafting scripts, and “teaching” shows. Isaac Rosen has also been involved in theatre. Furthermore, he has experience writing as a journalist for his high school newspaper and was the photo editor for his yearbook. Nicholas Marolda has had experience with adaptations in the past. Basing the script off of Fyodor Dostoevsky's short story, “The Dream of a Ridiculous Man,” Nicholas wrote, directed, filmed, and edited a 30-minute adaptation of the Russian classic. As we all have interest in theater and writing, the chance granted by this fellowship to adapt and stage Wilde's acclaimed play is an unrivaled academic opportunity.

We believe that *Lady Bracknell's Crucibles* has the promise to become a great success. We have kept *The Importance of Being Earnest* in its entirety, and our main work has been the addition of scenes that stress Lady Bracknell's character. We feel that in all adaptations to date, this character's potential has not been exploited. Her allure comes from her ridiculousness; horribly pompous, Lady Bracknell is a character who is fun to hate. Complementing the original text, *Lady Bracknell's Crucible* will reveal more of the characters' personalities. Furthermore, the play is widely regarded as the greatest comedy in the English language. A social satire, the play acts as a brief escape from the drudgery of our present time. Finally, the themes explored by Wilde are still extremely relevant today. Wilde uses Lady Bracknell to stress the triviality of material goods and misplaced values amongst the elite. Certainly, today's society merits similar commentary; we still place a high premium on wealth, status, and beauty. The play has great potential to resonate with today's audiences.

We believe it is important to address the chosen medium for our adaptation – live action theatre. This conscientious choice was made for two particular reasons. Firstly, we wanted to pay our loyalties to Oscar Wilde's original vision, and the ideal way to do that was to keep the work

in its original format. However, our second reason is perhaps more important. By performing the adaptation as a play, we believe we will elicit a particular audience composed of two groups. One group contains those familiar with *The Importance of Being Earnest* who will be enticed by the developments we made, as Lady Bracknell is a character who is delightfully evil. The second audience consists of typical theatergoers unfamiliar with the play. Being in the theater, we will attract an audience who at the very least will appreciate the play theatrically. *Lady Bracknell's Crucibles* would be enjoyable and understandable even if one has not seen the original.

This fellowship would provide us with the resources to develop our adaptation into a full-fledged staging. We enthusiastically hope that you find *Lady Bracknell's Crucible of The Importance of Being Earnest* deserving of this Creative Adaptation Fellowship. We have included our adaptation proposal, an excerpt from our play, our resumes, and a list of works consulted. Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Estelle Charlu

Nicholas Marolda

Isaac Rosen

Enclosure: Adaptation Proposal

Adaptation Proposal
Lady Bracknell's Crucible
of The Importance of Being Earnest

When it premiered at St. James' Theater in 1895, Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* was an instant sensation. The three-act play focuses on Jack Worthing, an upstanding citizen who lives in the country with his ward, Cecily Cardew, and her tutor, Miss Prism. To escape from his responsibilities, Jack invents a reckless brother, Ernest, who requires Jack to constantly come to his aid. Thus, Jack frequently leaves his ward for London where he then pretends to be his brother. Hence, in London he is known as Ernest, and in the country, Jack. While in London, Jack visits his friend Algernon, who discovers Jack's hidden identity. He insists that Jack allow him to meet Cecily, but Jack refuses.

On his adventures, Jack falls in love with Gwendolen, Algernon's cousin and Lady Bracknell's daughter. Lady Bracknell, Wilde's paradigm of society and main agent of satire, is extremely haughty and shrewd, her greatest goal being to find her daughter a reputable husband. 'Ernest' proposes to Gwendolen, who accepts. She essentially states that her love is dependent on his name being Ernest – which it is not. Although Ernest is not on Lady Bracknell's list of eligible suitors, she agrees to interview him to diagnose if he is a worthy spouse. Even though Ernest's answers comply with Lady Bracknell's warped views – that social connections are better than human decency – his history precedes him. Ernest admits that he was found in a handbag left at the Victoria railway station. Rather than being sympathetic for the helpless orphan, Lady Bracknell is appalled at such social disgrace. She harshly accuses him of a conscious decision to “display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life.” Without the name of at least one birth parent, he will never marry her daughter.

Unbeknownst to Lady Bracknell, Ernest gives Gwendolen his country address, which Algernon overhears. Algernon sneaks off to the country and introduces himself to Cecily as Jack's brother Ernest. He immediately falls for her, and she him. They agree to wed – but this love rests on the name Ernest, a similarity Cecily shares with Gwendolen. Arriving home, Jack believes that his false brother is no longer useful and plans to tell Cecily and Miss Prism that he has died in Paris. Cecily, however, divulges that Ernest (Algernon) is actually alive and present – which forces Jack to play along. While Jack and Algernon bicker, Gwendolen arrives and meets Cecily. After talking, they realize they are both engaged to be married to Ernest Worthing. At this point, the two men reenter and the miscommunication is resolved; Gwendolen informs Cecily that her Ernest is actually her cousin, Algernon, and Cecily informs Gwendolen that her Ernest is actually her guardian, Jack. Since neither man is named Ernest, neither is worthy of marriage. Here, Wilde depicts the absurd triviality of upper-class society.

The two girls are not angry about the lies, insisting that they were told out of love. However, their names still pose a problem. Conveniently, Lady Bracknell now enters, having bribed her maid for Gwendolen's whereabouts. She is caught up to speed and discovers that her nephew Algernon is engaged to Cecily, who is coincidentally worth a great deal of money. However, as her guardian, Jack refuses to allow Cecily to marry Algernon if he cannot wed Gwendolen. Lady Bracknell refuses to consent, but then takes notice of Cecily's tutor, Miss Prism. Utilizing *deus ex machina* to great effect, it is discovered that Miss Prism was the maid of Lady Bracknell's now-deceased sister many years ago. She disappeared with her sister's baby, who she accidentally left in a handbag at a London railway station. After some confusion, it is deduced that Jack is in fact that baby, making Lady Bracknell his aunt – and Algernon his

younger brother. Furthermore, Jack learns he was originally named Ernest after his father – ironically making all of his lies truths.

From the time Wilde started writing the play until the day it debuted, it was reshaped tremendously. Not only were most of the names changed (the original plot concerned the adventures of Mr. Bertram Ashton and his younger brother George), but also many of the whimsical details did not exist. There was no handbag or baby mix up, and since there was no Ernest, the irony was lost. In fact, the original four act play was entitled *The Guardian* (Raby *xxi*). Of course, it's impossible to know if *The Guardian* would have been greeted with as much enthusiasm as *The Importance of Being Earnest*, but the play was a hit when it premiered and is still famed today. Although released at the height of Wilde's popularity, drama surrounding his sexuality led to his arrest, hindering adaptations of the play for decades. Despite such turmoil, the play remains a staple in popular culture, complete with movie adaptations and theatrical performances as relevant today as they were in the nineteenth century.

Amongst these adaptations, three examples stand above the rest: the 1952 and 2002 movie versions, and Tom Stoppard's *Travesties*. The first of the three adaptations to discuss is the 1952 movie version of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Although a movie, it keeps to Oscar Wilde's play in many ways. The first scene features a curtain rising, establishing a precedent that the movie is meant to have the air of the theater. This, in fact, is why the movie is so acclaimed. Director Anthony Asquith barely changed the plot, although he did account for the differences between film and theatrical acting. Therefore, the cinematography includes many close-ups. The camera zooms to capture subtle expressions displayed by the actors as they give and receive lines. This parallels the way a theatrical audience directs their attention to the speaker – although the viewer does not have the freedom to choose the focus that plays allow. Edith Evans portrayed

Lady Bracknell as a truly incredible character and gained praise for her infamous proclamation, “A HANDBAG!” Here we see the beginnings of Lady Bracknell’s allure.

Oliver Parker’s most recent film adaptation of *The Importance of Being Earnest* received criticism for changing the plot excessively. Parker uses artistic license to add back-stories, rearrange scenes, and change elements of the characters. While Jack Worthing is originally Algernon’s older brother, the film version reverses these ages. Parker also includes several other sequences, but they occasionally weigh down the film. For instance, Cecily has several daydream sequences in which she imagines meeting her fantasy love – a shining black knight. Also included are flashbacks of past events not in the original work – like how exactly Miss Prism left an infant in a handbag. A major plot change at the end of the film reveals that Jack and Algernon’s father’s name was actually John, not Earnest. This provides an entirely different interpretation of the final line in which Jack states, “I’ve now realized for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest.” While the 1952 movie did not take any artist license, the 2002 version did. Both have roots in Wildean humor, preserving witty quips between characters. Overall, the tones stay similar to Wilde’s, holding true to the tagline: “A Trivial Comedy for Serious People.” However, it is apparent that audiences appreciate the familiar, and place great praise on loyalty to the original. Unlike these two adaptations, Tom Stoppard’s 1974 play, *Travesties*, is hardly recognizable as an adaptation of Wilde’s play.

A play itself, *Travesties* includes versions of two of Wilde’s characters: Gwendolen and Cecily. Removed from their traditional setting, Stoppard places the two women in Zurich during World War I. They retain the mannerisms established by Wilde; Gwendolen, for instance, remains extremely pretentious. Similarly, Henry Carr is modeled after Algernon and Tzara after Jack. Furthermore, portions of the plot mirror *The Importance of Being Earnest* so much that

lines are lifted straight from Wilde's work. Tzara admits, "I am sick of cleverness," and how he goes by the name "Tristan in the Meierei Bar and Jack in the library" in order to pursue a relationship with Gwendolen. Wilde and Stoppard explore two different themes: Wilde discusses the triviality of high society, while Stoppard considers the similarities between artistic and political revolution. Nonetheless, Stoppard's utilization of Wilde's seemingly unrelated play proves one critical point. Both Wilde's characters and plot are universal. In addition to being a delightful farce, the play is applicable in unlikely places, proving its influence in literature and prevalence in today's society.

Adhering to Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, our adaptation is performed in live action theater. Similarly, the genre and tone remain the same – a social comedy, each line delivered with an air of flippancy. As adaptors of the work, we do not wish to alter the play tremendously – however, we do wish to enhance it. The main premise of *Lady Bracknell's Crucible* is the increased prominence of Lady Bracknell's character. Her inherent pompousness produces many directions for the play to grow. *The Importance of Being Earnest* is performed in its entirety within our adaptation, although it is interwoven between extra scenes involving Lady Bracknell. Brief musical interludes and lighting changes differentiate between original and added scenes. *Lady Bracknell's Crucible* utilizes Lady Bracknell to advance the plot and develop the characters, simultaneously imparting more humor via her outrageous behavior and preposterously unjust proclamations.

The first added scene will follow Lady Bracknell and the "dear Duchess of Bolton" as the gentlewomen interview several suitors. The Duchess was only mentioned in passing – sharing a list of eligible bachelors for their daughters – but her debut results in a lively relationship affording riotous results. With the same pretentious attitude as Lady Bracknell, the two quip back

and forth in typical Wildean style. Sharing the same passions and beliefs, the two finish each other's sentences and feed off of one another's energy. Furthermore, one of Wilde's themes is developed further, as they place praise on men with good social connections (despite contemptuous personality traits), while denouncing the good at heart. Naturally, two characters so similar also clash, resulting in hysterically scornful arguments over whose daughter ought to be matched with the best available man. This contributes back-story to Wilde's play, and also develops Lady Bracknell's character as she interacts with an alternate version of herself.

Following this scene is an exchange between Gwendolen and Lady Bracknell who are on their way to visit Algernon. This particular exchange places the emphasis on Lady Bracknell's absurd conceit, centering around cucumber sandwiches – which Lady Bracknell adores, while Gwendolen prefers bread and butter. This conversation transforms into an argument of prestige and Gwendolen's future. While Wilde never shows these two characters interacting alone, this conversation develops their superficial relationship. The next additional scene between Lady Bracknell and her maid would also exemplify her triviality. When Gwendolen runs off to see Jack at his country estate, Wilde alludes that Lady Bracknell bribes her *own* employee for her daughter's location. This would also fill a hole that Wilde left open.

Finally, Lady Bracknell is given several soliloquies. To keep consistent with the rest of the play, these diatribes consist of her ranting to her bed-ridden husband, who is unable to assert his opinion. Lady Bracknell, who is entirely absent from the second act of *The Importance of Being Earnest* thus becomes involved. These “bed-asides” shift the play's vantage point so that we see her inner thoughts. The Duchess of Bolton also makes another appearance – ecstatic that her competition for the suitors diminishes after Gwendolen runs off to Jack's estate.

By including these scenes, several structural differences need to be considered. Although the timeline of the two plays coincide, extra sets are required. Not present in the original is Lady Bracknell's bedroom, necessary for her "bed-asides." Furthermore, an additional drawing-room is necessary for the scene in which Lady Bracknell and the Duchess interview the prospective suitors. The rest of the play's directorial attributes remain constant; the characters' appearances and personalities are undeviating. In this way, *Lady Bracknell's Crucible* stays true to *The Importance of Being Earnest*, all the while bringing a new perspective to an already acclaimed work.

The Importance of Being Earnest, widely regarded as the greatest comedy in the English language, has withstood the test of time, proven by the numerous performances of the play today. While the 1952 adaptation reverently stays loyal to Wilde's original, the 2002 strays too far from the original. Considering this, we developed *Lady Bracknell's Crucible* in a way that remains loyal to Wilde, while simultaneously being innovative. Although none of the original dialogue has been changed, the addition of the new scenes adds unique elements to the play that past adaptations have not explored. Never before has Lady Bracknell's potential been fully exploited. She served as a vehicle for social criticism, but the crux of the play was the relationships between the four young socialites – not Lady Bracknell. We slightly change the focus to give Lady Bracknell the credit she deserves. Our new scenes develop the play by deepening her relationships and adding additional comical elements.

As to our decision to keep the adaptation a play, we decided that theatrics are most loyal to Wilde's original format. This performance will also attract a more befitting audience. Since we are trying to stay true to Wilde's vision, we do not want to compromise its integrity by attempting to appeal to the masses by making it "Hollywood." We believe we can appeal to two distinct groups. One group consists of those familiar with *The Importance of Being Earnest*. We truly believe that those who know the play will be enticed by the developments we made, as

Lady Bracknell is a character who is delightfully evil. However, our decision to keep the original work in its entirety embedded within our adaptation provides a safety net; if the familiar fans are unhappy with our supplements, the original is still there to enjoy. The second audience consists of typical theatergoers completely unfamiliar with *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Being in the theater, this audience would at the very least appreciate the play's theatrics. *Lady Bracknell's Crucibles* would be enjoyable and understandable even if audience members have not read the original; they would simply be given an enhanced version in their first viewing.

We believe that *Lady Bracknell's Crucible* is quite relevant today. But do the attached compendium of adaptations establish that the play's potential has been exhausted? The answer to this question is "no." We wholeheartedly believe that *Lady Bracknell's Crucible* can fill a large niche in today's culture. Considering the prevalence of war, political disarray, and stress, a light-hearted play such as ours is a pleasant escape from such hardships. The newly-added scenes perfectly complement the play that is already so full of absurd wit and outrageous personalities. Furthermore, Wilde's themes are still relevant. *The Importance of Being Earnest* dwells on the triviality of material goods and misplaced values amongst the elite. Certainly, the same can be said about today's society, where a high premium is placed on wealth, status, and beauty. Although the eras may differ, the same relevant messages can be distilled from the two plays, all the while offering a welcomed retreat.

The addition of the new characters – Lady Bracknell's husband and the Duchess of Bolton – also needs justification. Their inclusion is pivotal in highlighting Lady Bracknell's true character. With the addition of the Duchess of Bolton, Lady Bracknell interacts with someone from the same social class. The audience finally sees her with a worthy opponent who can extricate different facets of Lady Bracknell's character – rather than being with those whom she

simply condescends. The addition of Lady Bracknell's husband will develop her as a ridiculously over-zealous character, lending to more comical elements. Since the focus of the play is *on* Lady Bracknell, these monologues are necessary in understanding Lady Bracknell's ludicrous rationale, ultimately depicting how dysfunctional her relationships are.

Lady Bracknell's Crucible has the potential to be the next hit play, extending to an audience larger than any previous adaptation reached. We managed to find an equilibrium between innovation and loyalty to the original, a combination that we are convinced will appeal enormously to contemporary audiences. Ultimately, *Lady Bracknell's Crucible* has the potential to resonate with today's viewers the way *The Importance of Being Earnest* did during its original run.

Annotated Bibliography

The All Male Importance of Being Earnest. By Oscar Wilde. Adapted by Hugh Hysell.

Dir. Hugh Hysell. Sanford Meisner Theatre, New York. 16 Aug. 2004.

This adaptation is a “gender bending” comedy which finds its niche in relating the many layers of the plot into an outrageous farce defined by the homosexual men who dominate the cast. Apart from the differences in gender, Hysell stays quite true to Wilde’s original play; he even uses many of the original lines, of course, changing “she” to “he” when appropriate. In a review, Ellen Carpenter states, “Hysell should have taken more artistic liberty with the material.” He stays so loyal to Wilde’s work, he does not insert any of his own befitting jokes.

Bond, Michael. A Bear Called Paddington. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1958.

This children’s book shares one pivotal characteristic with *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Like Jack Worthing, Paddington Bear was found in a train station. As Jack was given the surname Worthing after the station in which he was found, the bear was given the name Paddington after Paddington Station.

Borstal Boy. Dir. Peter Sheridan. Perf. Shawn Hatosy and Danny Dyer. Strand Releasing Home Video, 2000.

In this movie, a performance of The Importance of Being Earnest is featured and one of the characters has a strong interest in Oscar Wilde. Another parallel between Borstal Boy and Wilde can be drawn. Like Wilde, the protagonists spend a good deal of time coming to terms with their homosexuality.

Braun, Lilian Jackson. The Cat Who Went Bananas. New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 2004.

In this novel, the protagonist – Alden Wade – is supposed to play Jack Worthing in a local performance of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. The play is a vehicle for the rest of the mystery to develop. While Alden Wade attempts to vitalize the play, the mystery of the book ultimately culminates when the actor who plays Algernon dies in a car accident under the influence of drugs. Many fans of The Cat Who series were sorely disappointed with the predictable and formulaic plotline. Nonetheless, it goes to show that *The Importance of Being Earnest* is still remembered and influences literature today.

The Importance of Being Earnest. By Oscar Wilde. Created by Peter Meineck and Robert Richmond. Dir. Robert Richmond. The Aquila Theatre Company. New York. 29 June 2003.

This adaptation changes takes the original play out of its original era and places it in the year 2003. However, the play loses the original plot and its renowned wittiness in exchange for contemporary language, musical interludes lip-synced by the cast, and Lady Bracknell in drag.

The Importance of Being Earnest. By Oscar Wilde. Dir. Deborah Mogford. A.D. Players, Houston. 15 July 1999.

According to a review by Everett Evans from the Houston Chronicle, only one artistic liberty was taken in this rendition of the play. Although A.D. Players adhered to Wilde's script, set, and general plot, one difference remains: "Mogford has made one odd directorial decision in having the set changes laboriously effected by dancing servants - which makes little sense in a play with only one scene in each act. Thus, each of the first two acts ends with an elaborate set change followed by a blackout and intermission - quite anticlimactic. The device is rather coy. It would seem advisable either to drop the

visible set changes (just change the sets during intermission), or else, perform the play without intermission, which would provide justification for the ‘staged’ set changes.”

The Importance of Being Earnest. By Oscar Wilde. Dir. Everett Quinton. The Fichlander Theatre, Washington. 12 Nov. 2004.

This is not so much an adaptation of the play, rather simply a performance. It received mixed reviews, being praised for its acting, sets, and costume. It did not diverge far from Wilde’s masterpiece.

The Importance of Being Earnest. By Oscar Wilde. Dir. Roger Smith. Sifria Theater, Jerusalem. 3 Aug. 1993.

This version of the play was translated into Hebrew, allowing it to be enacted at the Sifria Theater in Jerusalem. The reviews said nothing about the director taking any other artistic licenses. This adaptation demonstrates the worldwide popularity of the play.

The Importance of Being Earnest. By Oscar Wilde. Dir. Richard ET White. Berkeley Repertory Theater, Berkeley. 5 June 1992.

Little information is available on this adaptation. According to *USA Today*, Oscar Wilde originally wrote *The Importance of Being Earnest* as a four act play, but it was cut down to three a short time later. When the fourth act was discovered in the New York Public Library, Berkeley Rep was the first company to perform the play with all four acts.

The Importance of Being Earnest. Dir. Micheal Attenborough. Perf. Wendy Hiller, Gary Bond, Jermy Clyde, Gabrielle Drake, Ann Thronton, Rosemund Greenwood. Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), Great Performances, 1985.

This adaptation was filmed for television by the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). Aired in 1985, it was stated that “it has an air of a play” (Anderson). This implies that,

although the plot may have been altered in some minor way, the change in medium had no effect on its representation of Wilde's work.

The Importance of Being Earnest. Dir. Kurt Baker. Perf. Wren T. Brown, Chris

Calloway, Lanei Chapman, Sylvester Haves, Barbara Isaacs, Daryl Keith Roach, Ann Weldon. Eclectic Concepts, 1992.

Little information is available on this movie. Conflicting sources state that this movie was made for TV, while movies.com simply states that it had a "wide release." Public reception of the movie is unknown.

The Importance of Being Earnest. Dir. Stuart Nurge. Perf. Paul McGann, Rupert Frazer,

Alec McCowen, Joan Plowright, Amanda Redman, Natalie Ogle. British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 1986.

In 1986, the BBC made a collection of Oscar Wilde films, *The Importance of Being Earnest* being one of them. The movie made for television, according to Ephraim Gadsby is "uncut and undoctored," staying true to Wilde's original comedy.

The Importance of Being Earnest. Dir. Oliver Parker. Perf. Rupert Everett, Colin Firth,

Frances O'Connor, Reese Witherspoon. DVD. Miramax Films, Miramax Home Entertainment, 2002.

This is the most recent film adaptation of *The Importance of Being Earnest* and received mixed reviews. Although some of the cast is amongst Hollywood's A-list, reviewers found that the directing was flawed, due to gratuitous embellishments on the plot.

Nevertheless, this Miramax Films rendition of *The Importance of Being Earnest* utilizes Wilde's famed wit in every scene, converting the satirical play into an acceptable comedy, appreciated by much of today's viewing audience. Being the most recent film

adaptation of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, this would be a key work to study further.

The Importance of Being Earnest. Perf. John Abbott, Geoffrey Clarke, Sylvia Coleridge, Mariod Francelli, Dora Gregory, Anthony Ireland, Francis James, Agnes Lauclan, Yvette Pienne. British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 1937.

Due to the age of this adaptation, little is known about its origins. It was created by the BBC for television.

The Importance of Being Earnest. Perf. Vivienne Bennett, Reginald Brooke, Barbara Everest, Mario Francelli, Thea Holme, Stuart Latham, Alan Wheatley, Winifred Willard, John Wyse. British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 1938.

This play, dating back to 1938, was made for television in the UK. Because of its age, little is known about it. However, it was naturally a black and white film.

The Importance of Being Earnest. Perf. Gordon Chater, Andrew Tighe, Jonathan Biggins, Ruth Cracknell, Jane Menelaus, Rachel Szalay, Monic Maughan. Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1992.

The Melbourne Theatre Company and The Sydney Theatre Company were the two production companies that created this movie made for TV. It aired in Australia and was given an 8.6 (out of 10) rating by the Internet Movie Database.

The Importance of Being Earnest: The Musical. Lyrics by Jack G. Barefield, Nanci Hunter, and Dori Salois. Dir. Rayme Sciaroni. Vantage Theatre. San Diego. 13 Aug. 2002.

As the title states, Oscar Wilde's play was adapted into a musical, this rendition's defining characteristic. This adaptation of *The Importance of Being Earnest* stays true to

the original play in both setting and apparel. According to Sandiegoplaybill.com, although it was “stripped down to the essential plot, this musical version includes nearly all the most important features of the classic Oscar Wilde script.”

Kaufman, Moises. Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde. New York: Vintage, 1998.

Oscar Wilde endured three trials before he was finally sentenced for having sexual relations with another man. According to Michael Bronski, “Playwright Moises Kaufman has taken the trial transcripts and fashioned a brilliant play by shortening and combining them into a concise narrative. *Gross Indecency* gives the history of Wilde's life and crimes, and allows us to see how the social forces of homophobia and hatred in law, religion, and custom set the stage to send Wilde to prison.”

Oscar Wilde. Dir. Gregory Ratoff. Perf. Robert Morley and Phyllis Calvert. Vantage Productions, 1959.

Much like the newer movie, Wilde, Oscar Wilde is a biographical film that follows the playwright through his convictions for the crime of sodomy.

Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest (UK). Dir. Anthony Asquith. Perf.

Michael Dennison, Michael Redgrave, Edith Evans, Dorothy Tutlin, Joan Greenwood. Videocassette. Carlton Home Entertainment, General Film Distributors (GFD) Ltd., Pickwick Video, Rank Video Library Ltd., The Criterion Collection, Universal International Pictures (UI or U-I), 1952.

The adaptation from 1952 is perhaps one of the best adaptations of *The Importance of Being Earnest* to date. While the play was relayed into a new artistic medium – film – it is often said that it “gives today's viewer a sense of what Victorian audiences must have

felt” (rottentomatoes.com). The film was nominated for a BAFTA Film Award, as well as a Golden Lion Award. This rendition of *The Importance of Being Earnest* is delivered as though on a stage, with several interlacing outdoor scenes. Furthermore, the cast delivers their lines in a theatrical manner – both snappy and dry – recreating the Victorian setting of which Wilde wrote.. This is the considered as one of the most accurate portrayals of the acclaimed play. Due to the film’s renown, it would be amongst the selection for further study.

Play of the Month: *The Importance of Being Earnest* (UK) (series title). Perf. Celia Bannerman, Micheal Javston. 1974.

This adaptation gets a little recognition on the Internet Movie Database, but practically none elsewhere. It was, presumably, produced for a “Play of the Month” series, perhaps yet again by the BBC.

The Smiths, 1987. “Rubber Ring.” *Louder than Bombs*. London: Sire Records.

Steven Morrissey was influenced greatly by Oscar Wilde, as is apparent in many of his songs. While other recordings draw upon a selection of Wilde’s works, “Rubber Ring” is directly influenced by *The Importance of Being Earnest*. In the song, Morrissey sings “You’re clever/ everybody’s clever nowadays.” Jack Worthing states, at the end of Act I, at line 610, “I am sick to death of cleverness. Everybody is clever nowadays.”

Spiderman-2. Dir. Sam Raimi. Perf. Toby Maguire and Kirsten Dunst. Columbia Pictures, 2004.

In the movie, Kirsten Dunst’s character, Mary-Jane, has a part in an off-Broadway performance of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Several of the lines are delivered in full as they parallel Spiderman’s particular predicament

Thomas, Gereth, perf. Blake's 7. Created by Terry Nation. BBC, London. 2 Jan. 1978.

Although this television show doesn't show any plot-based similarities to *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Wikipedia states that the dialogue in the show was greatly influenced by Oscar Wilde's play.

Travesties. By Tom Stoppard. Dir. Sabrina Klein. Shotgun Players, Ashby Stage, Berkeley. 9 Jan. 2004.

Stoppard's witty play, *Travesties*, is built off of the foundations set by Oscar Wilde in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Similar to his work *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, Stoppard incorporates several characters from another playwright's productions into his own; *Travesties* specifically utilizes Cecily and Gwendolyn from Wilde's play. In *Travesties*, amongst other drama, a production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* is produced by none other than James Joyce. The fusion of Stoppard's individual wit and the famous Wildean wit results in a tongue-in-cheek play, complete with dialogue as ridiculous and a plot as trivial as that of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Since Stoppard's *Travesties* is a wildly successful piece of literature in and of itself, it would be prudent to study it further in order to understand the effects *The Importance of Being Earnest* had on future works of literary merit.

Wilde. Dir. Brian Gilbert. Perf. Stephen Fry and Jude Law. Sony Pictures Classics, 1997.

This movie is based upon Oscar Wilde's life, with a specific concentration on his being convicted for the crime of homosexuality. The movie follows Wilde through his life, including through his self-discovery, despite being married with children. Of course, his writings are recognized, including *The Importance of Being Earnest*. It has been

speculated that the play is a metaphor for Wilde's living a double life, one as a heterosexual man, the other as a homosexual.

Lady Bracknell's Crucible
OF THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

First Act

Scene: Drawing room in Lady Bracknell's townhouse. The room is ostentatiously furnished. Lady Bracknell sits stiffly in an armchair, carefully arranging the tea on the table next to her. Edward enters.

Edward: The Duchess of Bolton.

[Enter **Duchess**. **Edward** goes out.]

Lady Bracknell: *(rises to meet her)* My good Duchess, it is nearly three o'clock. The eligible young men have been waiting for a solid hour. I won't be surprised if they are old but eligible men by the time the interviews have commenced.

Duchess: *(the two sit down in their chairs)* Shouldn't they wait? I dare say that patience is a trait we want for our daughters' husbands. We both know timeliness is hardly fashionable anymore. Only the lower orders arrive punctually, and that is simply because no one would wait for them.

Lady Bracknell: You are quite right, but that hardly means that my Gwendolen ought to remain unwed for one more social season. I could not stand to see her gaily trifling with men's affections much longer. There is enough romance in this world without Gwendolen's flirting. It is time for her to put aside her happiness and appreciate the business of marriage.

Duchess: Should we have Edward bring the young men in then?

Lady Bracknell: I suppose they have waited a healthy time. Edward!

[Enter **Edward**.]

I am quite ready to see Mr. Blythe.

[**Edward** goes out.]

(redirects attention to the Duchess) When I was last obliged to call on Lady Holdings she informed me that his wife finally stopped dawdling and conceded to her illness. It's about time, too; I do hate it when the living flirt so demonstratively with death. Nonetheless, I am sure the obligation to reenter society has come to his attention.

Duchess: Mr. Blythe you say? Surely the late Lady Blythe left quite the inheritance in his name? He sounds ideal for my Meredith.

Lady Bracknell: Out of the question! I have already set Gwendolen's heart on that man. For you to rip that from my grasp would be the greatest of indecencies – not to mention the trauma it would cause my poor Gwendolen – if I was ever able to bring myself to tell her of her loss.

Edward: Mr. George Blythe.

[**Mr. Blythe** enters. **Edward** goes out.]

Duchess and Lady Bracknell: (*speaking together*) Please sit down, Mr. Blythe.

Mr. Blythe: (*sitting*) Why, thank you.

Lady Bracknell: Now we are going to ask you several questions to determine whether your answers comply with what a truly affectionate mother requires of a beau.

Duchess: Do you smoke, Mr. Blythe?

Mr. Blythe: (*Picking up a silver cigarette case from side table.*) I would love one, thank you. Do you have matches, my good Lady?

Duchess: (*taken aback*) No, Mr. Blythe. You misunderstand the question. *Do* you smoke? Not would you like a smoke.

Lady Bracknell: Although it is a relief to see such natural incomprehension in a man. I hate these men now-a-days that tamper with their inherent ignorance. So you do smoke, then, Mr. Blythe?

Mr. Blythe: (*in a puff of smoke*) Well then, I must confess that, yes, I do smoke.

Lady Bracknell: I'm glad to hear it. And see it, for that matter. How old are you?

Mr. Blythe: Thirty-seven.

Duchess: But you have been married before?

Mr. Blythe: Yes, only recently did my wife decide to let the marriage end. It was becoming quite a burden, you know, and I swear she lived those extra months just to spite me. Death is made in Heaven – for the living, that is.

Lady Bracknell: I have always been under the same impression. So you have experience in marriage? I am glad to hear it. It is like a business. You can only improve with exposure, and I would hate to place my Gwendolen in the hands of a complete novice.

Duchess: And one final question: what is your income?

Mr. Blythe: Approximately fourteen thousand a year.

Lady Bracknell: And your residence?

Mr. Blythe: I own a townhouse in Kensington Gardens. Right next to Lady Holdings, in fact.

Duchess: A very fine woman. You know her well?

Mr. Blythe: Of course, the entire Holdings family.

Lady Bracknell: *(making a note in her notebook)* That will be all, thank you.

Mr. Blythe puts out his cigarette, bows slightly, and goes out.