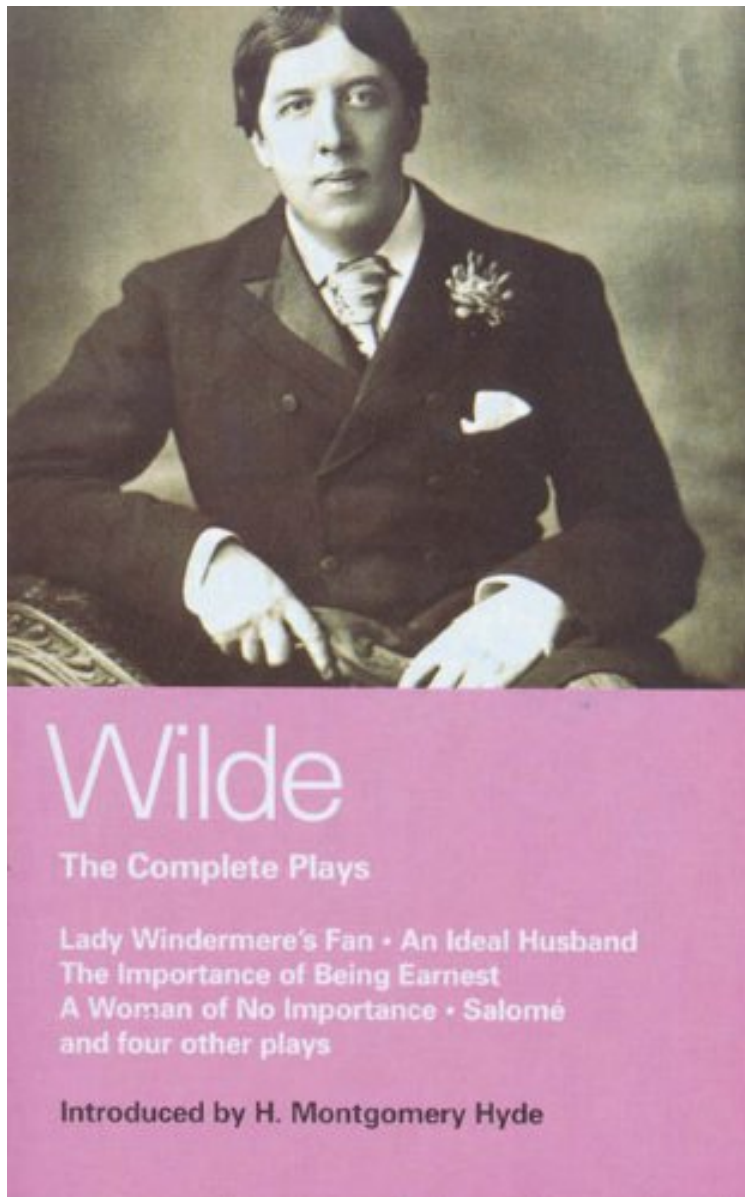


(Mobile library) Wilde Complete Plays: Lady Windermere's Fan; An Ideal Husband; The Importance of Being Earnest; A Woman of No Importance; Salome; The Duchess of Padua; ... La Sainte Courtisane (World Classics)

## **Wilde Complete Plays: Lady Windermere's Fan; An Ideal Husband; The Importance of Being Earnest; A Woman of No Importance; Salome; The Duchess of Padua; ... La Sainte Courtisane (World Classics)**

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**Oscar Wilde : Wilde Complete Plays: Lady Windermere's Fan; An Ideal Husband; The Importance of Being Earnest; A Woman of No Importance; Salome; The Duchess of Padua; ... La Sainte Courtisane (World Classics)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Wilde Complete Plays: Lady Windermere's Fan; An Ideal Husband; The Importance of Being Earnest; A Woman of No Importance; Salome; The Duchess of Padua; ... La Sainte Courtisane (World Classics):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The book arrived in timely fashion and in very good shape. It was also nicely packaged. By JRG The book arrived in timely fashion and in very good shape. It was also nicely packaged. The print of this edition is a bit small and the paper a bit gray but well worth the price. The plays are funny as can be. Wilde is a treat. 1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Giving the Devil the Best Lines By J C E Hitchcock In the late nineteenth century the French dramatist Alexandre Dumas fils coined the term "theatrical; utile", or "useful theatre", to describe the sort of dramas which he himself specialised in. He used the theatre as a tool to examine controversial issues of his day and to suggest solutions to specific social problems. For this he was mocked by the poet Theophile Gautier, who famously remarked that "Everything that is useful is ugly. The most useful place in a house is the lavatory". Gautier was an adherent of Aestheticism, the creed of Art for Art's Sake. According to this creed, the artist's only duty to society was to furnish it with examples of beauty, not to reform it by entering into social or political controversies. Oscar Wilde is widely regarded as a leading British exponent of Aestheticism, so it came as something of a surprise to discover that, of the four "drawing-room comedies" on which his fame as a dramatist today largely rests, only one, "The Importance of Being Earnest", is a pure comedy. The other three are "problem plays" social satires which explore issues similar to those raised by Dumas; political and financial corruption in "An Ideal Husband" (a play which retains its topical relevance even today), adultery, illegitimacy and unmarried motherhood in "Lady Windermere's Fan" and "A Woman of No Importance". The significance of these sexual topics to Dumas can be explained by the fact that he was himself the illegitimate son of an unmarried mother; he may have borne the name of his famous father, but it was not the one he was born with. Their significance to Wilde can be explained by the fact that, as a homosexual, he belonged to a group even more stigmatised in Victorian society than unfaithful wives or unmarried mothers. Like some other writers of his day, notably Hardy in "Tess of the D'Urbervilles", he was concerned by the double standards whereby women who sinned against the code of sexual morality were judged more harshly than men who did the same. All three "problem plays" have certain features in common. Each is set among the English upper-class, at their stately homes or London town houses. Each has at its centre a character with a guilty secret from his or her past. (Mrs Erlynne in "Lady Windermere's Fan", Mrs Arbuthnot in "A Woman of No Importance" and Sir Robert Chiltern in "An Ideal Husband"). Each features an idealistic young woman with a strong belief in love and honour. (Lady Windermere herself, Hester Worsley and Gertrude Chiltern). Each combines serious drama with a good deal of witty dialogue, often of a satirical nature. Each has a happy ending, with love triumphant, the sins of the past forgiven and the villains thwarted. The underlying message is that love and forgiveness, not the rigid moralism of Victorian England, are the essence of Christian ethics. Wilde's villains (Lord Darlington, Lord Illingworth, Mrs Cheveley) are interesting characters. They are intelligent and witty, coming out with some of the author's most celebrated *bons mots*, but behind this wit and intelligence lies a cynical, selfish and mean-spirited view of life. (Prince Paul Maraloffski in "Vera, or the Nihilists" is an early example of this type). Wilde clearly appreciated the value of giving the devil the best lines, although I wish that the authors of books of "quotable quotations" would realise that these devilishly witty observations do not always represent his personal opinions. Besides the four drawing-room comedies, this volume also contains two unfinished fragments, "A Florentine Tragedy" and "La Sainte Courtisane", and three other completed plays, "Vera", "The Duchess of Parma" and "Salome". All three have exotic settings. "Vera" is set in Russia under the rule of a fictitious Tsar Ivan, a ruler so cruel and tyrannical that he has alienated not only most of his subjects but even his own son Alexis, who has joined a revolutionary group seeking to overthrow his father. (The Vera of the title is a fellow-revolutionary with whom Alexis falls in love). When Ivan is assassinated Alexis takes the throne and sets in motion a series of liberal reforms, but now becomes a target for his former comrades. This was Wilde's first play, written in 1880, a year before the relatively liberal Tsar Alexander II was assassinated and succeeded by his deeply reactionary son Alexander III - an example of life imitating art, but in a distorting mirror. Following the Tsar's murder, political considerations made it impossible for the play to be produced in Britain, although that might have been just as well; with its melodramatic plot and overblown language it is not one of Wilde's best. "Salome" was originally written in French, although only the English version is printed here. It tells the well-known story of Salome and John the Baptist (here referred to as Jokanaan) and is very brief, only a single act. Wilde's prose is even more extravagant than in "Vera"; he appears to have been trying to imitate some of the more poetic passages in the Bible, especially the Song of Solomon. I suspect that this language would sound rather odd on the stage, but on the printed page it has a strange, lush, overripe poetry to it. "The Duchess of Parma" is a blank-verse drama set in sixteenth-century Italy. (The unfinished "Florentine Tragedy" was also a play of this sort). It is a melodramatic tale of passion and revenge about an adulterous affair between the Duchess of the

title and the young man who has sworn to kill her wicked husband, who was responsible for the death of his father. (These events are wholly fictitious; in the sixteenth century Parma was part of the Venetian Republic, not an independent dukedom). Like many nineteenth century verse dramas it shows all too obviously the influence of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, especially John Webster, and is probably Wilde's worst play. "Vera" and "Salome" have their faults, but at least they are authentic Wilde, not third-rate cod-Shakespeare. From Wilde's worst play to his greatest. "The Importance of Being Earnest" is a dual romantic comedy, following the adventures of two young men about town, Jack Worthing and Algernon Moncrieffe, as they pursue two young ladies, Gwendolen Fairfax (who happens to be Algernon's cousin) and Cecily Cardew (who happens to be Jack's ward). The title derives from the fact that both Jack and Algernon, for reasons too complex to explain here, both pretend to be Jack's (non-existent) brother Ernest. There is no hint of "useful theatre" about this play, and Wilde's humour is gentler than in his "problem plays", although just as effective, making great use of paradox and social comment. It is one of the most sparkingly witty plays in the English language, and alone justifies giving this volume five stars.

This volume contains everything Wilde wrote in dramatic form. Wilde's masterpiece *The Importance of Being Earnest* is printed here in its usual three-act form, but with an appendix containing the best material from the original four-act version. Also included are his three 'problem plays', *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance* and *An Ideal Husband*, as well as his once-banned *Salome* and several other little-known but fascinating dramas. H. Montgomery Hyde, an acknowledged expert on Wilde and author of several books on him, provides an introduction to Wilde's life and work with special attention to the composition and performance of the plays. "Wilde is to me our only thorough playwright. He plays with everything: with wit, with philosophy, with drama, with actors and audiences, with the whole theatre" (George Bernard Shaw)

About the Author Oscar Wilde was born in Dublin in 1856. In the years following his graduation from Oxford in 1878 he published poems and stories which included *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. *Lady Windermere's Fan* was produced in 1892, *A Woman of No Importance* in 1893 and *An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* in 1895. Later work included *De Profundis* and *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. He died in 1900.