

Oscar Wilde

(1854-1900)

Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde was born in Dublin on 16 October 1854.

His father was an eminent eye and ear specialist; his mother was a journalist and a poet. She wrote under the pen-name 'Speranza'. Wilde studied at Trinity College, Dublin (1871-74) and Magdalen College, Oxford (1874-78). In 1878 Wilde received his bachelor of Arts and in the same year he moved to London. His lifestyle and humorous wit soon made him the spokesman for Aestheticism, the late 19th century **movement** in England that advocated **art for art's sake**. He worked as art reviewer, lectured in the United States and Canada, and lived in Paris.



In 1884 Wilde married Constance Lloyd, a barrister's daughter, and embarked on a literary career. In 1888 he published *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*, fairy-stories written for his two sons. Wilde's marriage ended in 1893. He had met a few years earlier Lord Alfred Douglas, an athlete and a poet, who became both the love of the author's life and his downfall.

Wilde made his reputation in the theatre world between the years 1892 and 1895 with a series of highly popular plays (*Lady Windermere's Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance*, *An Ideal Husband*, and his well-known comic masterpiece *The Importance of Being Earnest*). Before his theatrical success Wilde produced several essays. His two major literary-theoretical works were the dialogues *The Decay of Lying* (1889) and *The Critic as Artist* (1890). His only novel is called *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Although married and the father of two children, Wilde's personal life was open to rumours. His years of triumph ended dramatically, when his intimate association with Alfred Douglas led to his trial on charges of homosexuality (then illegal in Britain). He was sentenced to two years hard labor for the crime of sodomy. Wilde was first in Wandsworth prison, London, and then in Reading Gaol. During this time he wrote *De Profundis* (1905), a dramatic monologue and autobiography, which was addressed to Alfred Douglas.

After his release in 1897, he wrote *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, revealing his concern for inhumane prison conditions. Wilde died of cerebral meningitis on November 30, 1900, penniless, in a cheap Paris hotel at the age of 46.

The world is a stage, but the play is badly cast.
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