

Oscar Wilde

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
Oscar Wilde



Born: October 16, 1854



Dublin, Ireland

Died: November 30, 1900 (aged 46)



Paris, France

Occupation: Playwright, novelist, poet

Nationality: Irish

Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde (October 16, 1854 – November 30, 1900) was an Irish playwright, novelist, poet, and author of short stories. Known for his barbed wit, he was one of the most successful playwrights of late Victorian London, and one of the greatest celebrities of his day. As the result of a famous trial, he suffered a dramatic downfall and was imprisoned for two years of hard labour after being convicted of the offence of "gross indecency".

Contents

- 1 Biography
 - 1.1 Birth and early life
 - 1.2 Marriage and family
 - 1.3 Aestheticism
 - 1.4 Wilde's sexuality
 - 1.5 Trial, imprisonment, and transfer to Reading Gaol
 - 1.6 Release and death
- 2 The manuscripts of Oscar Wilde
- 3 Biographies
- 4 Biographical films, television series and stage plays
- 5 Oscar Wilde in modern popular culture

- 6 Bibliography
- 7 References
 - 7.1 Print
 - 7.2 Online
- 8 See also
- 9 Notes
- 10 External links
 - 10.1 Online texts

Biography



Statue of Oscar Wilde in Dublin's
Merrion Square (Archbishop

Birth and early life

Oscar Wilde was the second son born into an Anglo-Irish family, at 21 Westland Row, Dublin, to Sir William Wilde and his wife Jane Francesca Elgee. Jane was a

Ryan Park).

successful
writer and an
Irish

nationalist, known also as 'Speranza', while Sir William was Ireland's leading ear and eye surgeon, and wrote books on archaeology and folklore. He was a renowned philanthropist, and his dispensary for the care of the city's poor, in Lincoln Place at the rear of Trinity College, Dublin, was the forerunner of the Dublin Eye and Ear Hospital, now located at Adelaide Road.

In June 1855, the family moved to 1 Merrion Square in a fashionable residential area, where Wilde's sister, Isola, was born in 1856. Here, Lady Wilde held a regular Saturday afternoon salon with guests including Sheridan le Fanu, Samuel Lever, George Petrie, Isaac Butt and Samuel Ferguson. Oscar was educated at home up to the age of nine. He attended Portora Royal School in Enniskillen, Fermanagh from 1864 to 1871, spending the summer months with his family in rural Waterford, Wexford and at Sir William's family home in Mayo. Here the Wilde brothers played with the old George Moore.

After leaving Portora, Wilde studied classics at Trinity College, Dublin, from 1871 to 1874. He

was an outstanding student, and won the Berkeley Gold Medal, the highest award available to classics students at Trinity. He was granted a scholarship to Magdalen College, Oxford, where he continued his studies from 1874 to 1878 and where he became a part of the Aesthetic movement, one of its tenets being to make an art of life. While at Magdalen, he won the 1878 Newdigate Prize for his poem *Ravenna*, which he read out at Encaenia; he failed, though, to win the Chancellor's English Essay Prize for an essay that would be published posthumously as *The Rise of Historical Criticism* (1909). In November 1878, he graduated with a double first in classical moderations and *literae humaniores*, or 'greats'.

Marriage and family

After graduating from Magdalen, Wilde returned to Dublin, where he met and fell in love with Florence Balcombe. She in turn became engaged to Bram Stoker. On hearing of her engagement, Wilde wrote to her stating his intention to leave Ireland permanently. He left in 1878 and was to return to his native country only twice, for brief visits. The next six years were spent in London, Paris and the United States, where he travelled to

deliver lectures. Wilde's address in the 1881 British Census is given as 1 Tite Street, London. The head of the household is listed as Frank Miles with whom Wilde shared rooms at this address.

In London, he met Constance Lloyd, daughter of wealthy Queen's Counsel Horace Lloyd. She was visiting Dublin in 1884, when Oscar was in the city to give lectures at the Gaiety Theatre. He proposed to her and they married on May 29, 1884 in Paddington, London. Constance's allowance of £250 allowed the Wildes to live in relative luxury. The couple had two sons, Cyril (1885) and Vyvyan (1886). After Oscar's downfall, Constance took the surname Holland for herself and the boys. She died in 1898 following spinal surgery and was buried in Staglieno Cemetery in Genoa, Italy. Cyril was killed in France in World War I. Vyvyan survived the war and went on to become an author and translator. He published his memoirs in 1954. Vyvyan's son, Merlin Holland, has edited and published several works about his grandfather. Oscar Wilde's niece, Dolly Wilde, was involved in a lengthy lesbian affair with writer Natalie Clifford Barney.

Aestheticism

While at Magdalen College, Wilde became particularly well known for his role in the aesthetic and decadent movements. He began wearing his hair long and openly scorning so-called "manly" sports, and began decorating his rooms with peacock feathers, lilies, sunflowers, blue china and other *objets d'art*.

Legends persist that his behaviour cost him a dunking in the River Cherwell in addition to having his rooms (which still survive as student accommodation at his old college) trashed, but the cult spread among certain segments of society to such an extent that languishing attitudes, "too-too" costumes and aestheticism generally became a recognised pose. Publications such as the *Springfield Republican* commented on Wilde's behaviour during his visit to Boston in order to give lectures on aesthetiscism, suggesting that Wilde's conduct was more of a bid for notoriety rather than a devotion to beauty and the aesthetic. Wilde's mode of dress also came under attack by critics such as Higginson, who wrote in his paper *Unmanly Manhood*, at his general concern that Wildes' effeminacy would influence the behaviour of men and women, arguing that his poetry "eclipses masculine ideals [..that..] under such

influence men would become effeminate dandies'. He also scrutinises the link that Oscar Wilde's writing, personal image and homosexuality may have, resulting in calling his work and lifestyle 'Immoral'.

Wilde was deeply impressed by the English writers John Ruskin and Walter Pater, who argued for the central importance of art in life. He later commented ironically on this view when he wrote, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, "All art is quite useless", a statement meant to be read literally, as it was in keeping with the doctrine of Art for art's sake, coined by the philosopher Victor Cousin, promoted by Theophile Gautier and brought into prominence by James McNeill Whistler.

The aesthetic movement, represented by the school of William Morris and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, had a permanent influence on English decorative art. As the leading aesthete in Britain, Wilde became one of the most prominent personalities of his day. Though he was sometimes ridiculed for them, his paradoxes and witty sayings were quoted on all sides.

Aestheticism in general was caricatured in Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta *Patience* (1881). While

Patience was a success in New York it was not known how much the aesthetic movement had penetrated the rest of America. So Richard D'Oyly Carte invited Wilde for a lecture tour of North America. D'Oyly Carte felt this tour would "prime the pump" for the tour of *Patience*, making sure that the ticket-buying public was aware of one of the movement's charming personalities. This was duly arranged, Wilde arriving on 3 January 1882, aboard the *SS Arizona*. Wilde is reputed to have told a customs officer "I have nothing to declare except my genius", although there is no contemporary evidence for the remark.

In 1879 Wilde started to teach Aesthetic values in London. In 1882 he went on a lecture tour in the United States and Canada. He was torn apart by no small number of critics — *The Wasp*, a San Francisco newspaper, published a cartoon ridiculing Wilde and Aestheticism — but he was also surprisingly well received in such rough-and-tumble settings as the mining town of Leadville, Colorado. [1] On his return to the United Kingdom, he worked as a reviewer for the *Pall Mall Gazette* in the years 1887-1889. Afterwards he became the editor of *Woman's World*.

Politically, Wilde endorsed an anarchistic brand of

socialism, expounding his beliefs in the text "The Soul of Man under Socialism".

Wilde's sexuality

Though Wilde's sexual orientation has variously been considered bisexual, homosexual, and paederastic, Wilde himself felt he belonged to a culture of male love inspired by the Greek paederastic tradition.

[1] In describing his own sexual identity, Wilde used the term

Socratic.^[2] He may have had significant sexual relationships with (in chronological order) Frank Miles, Constance Lloyd (Wilde's wife), Robert Baldwin Ross, and Lord Alfred Douglas ("Bosie"). Wilde also had numerous sexual encounters with working-class male youths, who were often rent boys.



Robert Ross at twenty-four

Biographers generally believe Wilde was introduced to homosexuality in 1885 (the year after his wedding) by the 17-year-old Robert Baldwin Ross. Neil McKenna's biography *The Secret Life of Oscar Wilde* (2003) theorises that Wilde was aware of his homosexuality much earlier, from the moment of his first kiss with another boy at the age of 16. According to McKenna, after arriving at Oxford in 1874, Wilde tentatively explored his sexuality, discovering that he could feel passionate romantic love for "fair, slim" choirboys, but was more sexually drawn towards the swarthy young rough trade. By the late 1870s, Wilde was already preoccupied with the philosophy of same-sex love, and had befriended a group of Uranian (pederastic) poets and homosexual law reformers, becoming acquainted with the work of gay-rights pioneer Karl-Heinrich Ulrichs. Wilde also met Walt Whitman in America in 1882, writing to a friend that there was "no doubt" about the great American poet's sexual orientation — "I have the kiss of Walt Whitman still on my lips," he boasted. He even lived with the society painter Frank Miles, who was a few years his senior and may have been his lover. However, writes McKenna, he was at one time unhappy with the direction of his sexual and romantic desires, and, hoping that marriage would

cure him, he married Constance Lloyd in 1884. McKenna's account has been criticized by some reviewers who find it too speculative, although not necessarily implausible.[2]

Regardless of whether or not Wilde was still naïve when he first met Ross, Ross did play an important role in the development of Wilde's understanding of his own sexuality. Ross was aware of Wilde's poems before they met, and indeed had been beaten for reading them. He was also unmoved by the Victorian prohibition against homosexuality. By Richard Ellmann's account, Ross, "...so young and yet so knowing, was determined to seduce Wilde." Later, Ross boasted to Lord Alfred Douglas that he was "the first boy Oscar ever had" and there seems to have been much jealousy between them. Soon, Wilde entered a world of regular sex with youths such as servants and newsboys, in their mid to late teens, whom he would meet in homosexual bars or brothels. In Wilde's words, the relations were akin to "feasting with panthers", and he revelled in the risk: "the danger was half the excitement." In his public writings, Wilde's first celebration of romantic love between men and boys can be found in *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* (1889), in which he propounds a theory that Shakespeare's sonnets

were written out of the poet's love of Elizabethan boy actor "Willie Hughes".

In the early summer of 1891 he was introduced by the poet Lionel Johnson to the twenty-two-year-old Lord Alfred Douglas, an undergraduate at Oxford at the time. An intimate friendship immediately sprang up between the two, but it was not initially sexual, nor did the sexuality progress far when it did eventually take place. According to Douglas, speaking in his old age, for the first six months their relations remained on a purely intellectual and emotional level. Despite the fact that "from the second time he saw me, when he gave me a copy of *Dorian Gray* which I took with me to Oxford he made overtures to me. It was not till I had known him for at least six months and after I had seen him over and over again and he had twice stayed with me in Oxford, that I gave in to him. I did with him and allowed him to do just what was done among boys at Winchester and Oxford . . . Sodomy never took place between us, nor was it attempted or dreamed of. Wilde treated me as an older one does a younger one at school." After Wilde realized that Douglas only consented in order to please him, as his instincts drew him not to men but to younger boys, Wilde permanently ceased his physical attentions.^[3]

For a few years they lived together more or less openly in a number of locations. Wilde and some within his upper-class social group also began to speak about homosexual law reform, and their commitment to "The Cause" was formalised by the founding of a highly secretive organisation called the Order of Chaeronea, of which Wilde was a member. A homosexual novel, *Teleny or The Reverse of the Medal*, written at about the same time and clandestinely published in 1893, has been attributed to Oscar Wilde, but was probably, in fact, a combined effort by a number of Wilde's friends, which Wilde edited. Wilde also periodically contributed to the Uranian literary journal *The Chameleon*.

Lord Alfred's first mentor had been his cosmopolitan and effeminate grandfather Alfred Montgomery. His older brother Francis Douglas, Viscount Drumlanrig also had a (possibly homosexual) association with the Prime Minister Archibald Philip Primrose, 5th Earl of Rosebery, which ended on Francis's death in a shooting accident, a possible suicide. Lord Alfred's father John Sholto Douglas, 9th Marquess of Queensberry came to believe his sons had been corrupted by older homosexuals, or as he phrased

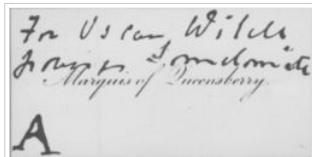
it in a letter, "Snob Queers like Rosebery".^[4] As he had attempted to do with Rosebery, Queensberry confronted Wilde and Lord Alfred on several occasions, but each time Wilde was able to mollify him.

Divorced and spending wildly, Queensberry was known for his outspoken views and the boxing roughs who often accompanied him. He abhorred his younger son and plagued the boy with threats to cut him off if he did not stop idling his life away. Queensberry was determined to end the friendship with Wilde. Wilde was in full flow of rehearsal when Bosie returned from a diplomatic posting to Cairo, around the time Queensberry visited Wilde at his Tite Street home. He angrily pushed past Wilde's servant and entered the ground floor study, shouting obscenities and asking Wilde about his divorce (rumours were rife). Wilde became incensed, but it is said he calmly told his manservant that Queensberry was the most infamous brute in London, and that he was not to be shown into the house ever again. Despite the presence of a bodyguard, Wilde forced Queensberry to leave in no uncertain terms. On the opening night of *The Importance of Being Earnest* Queensberry further planned to insult and socially embarrass Wilde by throwing a bouquet of turnips.

Wilde was tipped off, and Queensberry was barred from entering the theatre. Wilde took legal advice against him, and wished to prosecute, but Wilde's friends refused to give evidence against the Marquess and hence the case was dropped. Wilde and Bosie left London for a vacation in Monte Carlo and while away, on February 18, 1895, the Marquess left his calling card at Wilde's family Club.^[5]

Trial, imprisonment, and transfer to Reading Gaol

Wilde
made a



The Marquess of Queensberry's calling card with the offending inscription "For Oscar Wilde posing Somdomite [*sic*]"

complaint of criminal libel against Lord Alfred Douglas's father, the ninth Marquess of Queensberry, for leaving him a calling card at his

club. The offending card read "For Oscar Wilde, posing Somdomite [*sic*]". The Marquess was arrested and later freed on bail. The libel trial became a *cause célèbre* as salacious details of Wilde's private life with Alfred Taylor and Lord Alfred Douglas began to appear in the press. A team of detectives, with the help of the actor Charles Brookfield, had directed Queensberry's lawyers (led by Edward Carson QC) to the world of the Victorian underground. Here Wilde's association with blackmailers and rent boys, cross dressers and homosexual brothels was recorded, and various persons involved were interviewed, some being coerced to appear as witnesses.^[6]

The libel trial opened on April 3 among scenes of near hysteria both in the press and the public galleries. After a shaky start, Wilde regained some ground when defending his art from attacks of perversion. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* came under fierce moral criticism, but Wilde fended it off with his usual charm and confidence on artistic matters. Some of his personal letters to Lord Alfred were examined, their wording challenged as inappropriate and evidence of immoral relations. Queensberry's legal team proposed that the libel was published for the public good, but it was only when the prosecution moved on to sexual matters

that Wilde noticeably balked. He was challenged on the reason given for not kissing a young servant; Wilde had replied, "He was a particularly plain boy--unfortunately ugly--I pitied him for it."^[7] The defendant's lawyers pressed him on the point. Wilde hesitated, complaining of Carson's insults and attempts to unnerve him. It was the beginning of the end. The prosecution eventually dropped the case. The defence threat to bring rent boys to the stand to testify to Wilde's corruption and influence over Queensberry's son effectively crippled the case. After Wilde left the court a warrant for his arrest was applied for and later served on him at the Cadogan Hotel, Knightsbridge. That moment was immortalised by Sir John Betjeman's poem. He was arrested for "gross indecency" under Section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885. In British legislation of the time, this term implied 'homosexual acts not amounting to buggery', according to the scholar H. Montgomery Hyde.^[8] After his arrest Wilde sent Robert Ross to his home in Tite Street with orders to remove certain items. Ross broke into the bedroom and rescued some of Wilde's belongings. Wilde was then imprisoned on remand at Holloway where he received daily visits from Lord Alfred Douglas.

Events moved quickly and his prosecution opened on April 26, 1895. Wilde had already begged Douglas to leave London for Paris, but Douglas complained bitterly, even wanting to take the stand; however, he was pressed to go and soon fled to the Hotel du Monde. Ross and many others also left England during this time. When under cross examination Wilde did not speak directly for same-sex love, but he nevertheless defended Douglas's poem about it eloquently:

Charles Gill (pros.): What is, "the love that dares not speak its name?"

Wilde: "The love that dares not speak its name" in this century is such a great affection of an elder for a younger man as there was between David and Jonathan, such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy, and such as you find in the sonnets of Michelangelo and Shakespeare. It is that deep spiritual affection that is as pure as it is perfect. It dictates and pervades great works of art, like those of Shakespeare and Michelangelo, and those two letters of mine, such as they are. It is in this century misunderstood, so much misunderstood that it may be described as "the love that dares

not speak its name," and on that account of it I am placed where I am now. It is beautiful, it is fine, it is the noblest form of affection. There is nothing unnatural about it. It is intellectual, and it repeatedly exists between an older and a younger man, when the older man has intellect, and the younger man has all the joy, hope and glamour of life before him. That it should be so, the world does not understand. The world mocks at it, and sometimes puts one in the pillory for it."

This trial ended with the jury unable to reach a verdict. As a result, Wilde's counsel, Sir Edward Clark, was finally able to agree bail. Wilde was freed from Holloway and went into hiding at the house of Ernest and Ada Leverson, both firm friends of his. The Reverend Stuart Hedlam put up most of the £5,000 bail,^[9] having disagreed with Wilde's heinous treatment by the press and the courts. Edward Carson, it was said, asked for the service to let up on Wilde.^[10] His request was denied. If the Crown was seen to give up at that point, it would have appeared that there was one rule for some and not others, and outrage would have followed.

The final trial was presided over by Mr. Justice

[Sir Alfred] Wills. On May 25, 1895 Wilde was convicted of gross indecency and sentenced to two years' hard labour. His conviction angered some observers, one of whom demanded, in a published letter, "Why does not the Crown prosecute every boy at a public or private school or half the men in the Universities?" in reference to the presumed pederastic proclivities of English upper class men. [11]

He was imprisoned first in Pentonville and then in Wandsworth prison in London, and finally transferred in November to Reading Prison, some 30 miles west of London. Wilde knew the town of Reading from happier times when boating on the Thames and also from visits to the Palmer family, including a tour of the famous Huntley & Palmers biscuit factory quite close to the prison.

Now known as prisoner C. 3.3, (which described the fact that he was in block C, floor three, cell three) he was not, at first, even allowed paper and pen to write with, but a later governor was more amenable to reforms. Wilde was championed by the reformer Lord Haldane who had helped transfer him and allow him the penned catharsis he needed. During his time in prison, Wilde wrote a 50,000 word letter to Douglas, which he was not

allowed to send while still a prisoner, but which he was allowed to take with him at the end of his sentence. On his release, he gave the manuscript to Ross, who may or may not have carried out Wilde's instructions to send a copy to Douglas who, in turn, denied having received it. Ross published a much expurgated version of the letter (about a third of it) in 1905 (four years after Wilde's death) with the title *De Profundis*, expanding it slightly for an edition of Wilde's collected works in 1908, and then donated it to the British Museum on the understanding that it would not be made public until 1960. In 1949, Wilde's son Vyvyan Holland published it again, including parts formerly omitted, but relying on a faulty typescript bequeathed to him by Ross. Its complete and correct publication did not take place until 1962, in *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*.

Release and death

Prison was
unkind to Wilde's
health and after he was released on May 19, 1897
he spent his last three years penniless, in self-
imposed exile from society and artistic circles. He
went under the assumed name of Sebastian

Melmoth, after the famously "penetrated" Saint Sebastian and the devilish central character of Wilde's great-uncle Charles Robert Maturin's gothic novel *Melmoth the Wanderer*.

Nevertheless, Wilde lost no time in returning to his previous pleasures.

According to Douglas, Ross "dragged [him] back to homosexual practices" during the summer of 1897, which they spent together in Berneval. After his release, he also wrote the famous poem *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. Wilde spent his last years in the Hôtel d'Alsace, now known as L'Hôtel, in Paris, where he was notorious and uninhibited about enjoying the pleasures he had been denied in England. Again according to Douglas, "he was hand in glove with all the little boys on the



Wilde's tomb, sculpted by Sir Jacob Epstein, in Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris

Boulevard. He never attempted to conceal it." In a letter to Ross, Wilde laments, "Today I bade good-bye, with tears and one kiss, to the beautiful Greek boy. . . he is the nicest boy you ever introduced to me."^[12] Just a month before his death he is quoted as saying, "My wallpaper and I are fighting a duel to the death. One or other of us has got to go."

Wilde died of cerebral meningitis on November 30, 1900. Different opinions are given on the cause of the meningitis; Richard Ellmann claimed it was syphilitic; Merlin Holland, Wilde's grandson, thought this to be a misconception, noting that Wilde's meningitis followed a surgical intervention, perhaps a mastoidectomy; Wilde's physicians, Dr. Paul Cleiss and A'Court Tucker, reported that the condition stemmed from an old suppuration of the right ear (*une ancienne suppuration de l'oreille droite d'ailleurs en traitement depuis plusieurs années*) and did not allude to syphilis. Most modern scholars and doctors agree that syphilis was unlikely to have been the cause of his death.

On his deathbed he was received into the Roman Catholic church. Robert Ross, in his letter to More Adey dated 14 December 1900, states "He was conscious that people were in the room, and raised

his hand when I asked him whether he understood. He pressed our hands. I then sent in search of a priest, and after great difficulty found Father Cuthbert Dunne. . . who came with me at once and administered Baptism and Extreme Unction. - Oscar could not take the Eucharist".^[13]

Wilde was buried in the Cimetière de Bagneux outside Paris but was later moved to Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris. His tomb in Père Lachaise was designed by sculptor Sir Jacob Epstein, at the request of Robert Ross, who also asked for a small compartment to be made for his own ashes. Ross's ashes were transferred to the tomb in 1950. The numerous spots on it are lipstick traces from admirers.

The modernist angel depicted as a relief on the tomb was originally complete with male genitals. They were broken off as obscene and kept as a paperweight by a succession of Père Lachaise Cemetery keepers. Their current whereabouts are unknown. In the summer of 2000, intermedia artist Leon Johnson performed a 40 minute ceremony entitled *Re-membering Wilde* in which a commissioned silver prosthesis was installed to replace the vandalised genitals.^[14]

The manuscripts of Oscar Wilde

The manuscripts of *A Florentine Tragedy* and an essay on Shakespeare's sonnets were the objects that Ross had taken from Wilde's Tite Street house in 1895 at his request. In 1904, a five-act tragedy, *The Duchess of Padua*, written by Wilde about 1883 for Mary Anderson but not acted by her, was published in German (*Die Herzogin von Padua*, translated by Max Meyerfeld) in Berlin. The original transcript of the libel trial turned up when the British Library put out a call for all things Wilde to celebrate the centenary of his death. Wilde's grandson published it under the title of 'Irish Peacock & Scarlet Marquis' in 2003.

Biographies

■ After Wilde's death, his friend Frank Harris wrote a biography, *Oscar Wilde: His Life and Confessions*. Of his other close friends, Robert Sherard, Robert Ross, Charles Ricketts and Lord Alfred Douglas variously published



Oscar Wilde's house in Tite Street, Chelsea

biographies,
reminiscences
or

correspondence.

- An account of the argument between Frank Harris, Lord Alfred Douglas and Oscar Wilde as to the advisability of Wilde's prosecuting Queensberry can be found in the preface to George Bernard Shaw's play *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*.
- In 1946, Hesketh Pearson published *The Life of Oscar Wilde* (Methuen), containing materials derived from conversations with

Bernard Shaw, George Alexander, Herbert Beerbohm Tree and many others who had known or worked with Wilde. This is a lively read, although inevitably somewhat dated in its approach. It gives a particularly vivid impression of what Wilde's conversation must have been like.

- In 1954 Vyvyan Holland published his memoir *Son of Oscar Wilde*. It was revised and updated by Merlin Holland in 1999.
- In 1955 Sewall Stokes wrote a novel, *Beyond His Means*, based on the life of Oscar Wilde.
- In 1975 H. Montgomery Hyde published *Oscar Wilde: A Biography*.
- In 1983 Peter Ackroyd published *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*, a novel in the form of a pretended memoir.
- In 1987 literary biographer Richard Ellmann published his detailed work *Oscar Wilde*.
- In 1997 Merlin Holland published a book entitled *The Wilde Album*. This rather small volume contained many pictures and other Wilde memorabilia, much of which had not been published before. It includes 27 pictures taken by the portrait photographer Napoleon Sarony, one of which is at the beginning of this article.
- 1999 saw the publication of *Oscar Wilde on*

Stage and Screen written by Robert Tanitch. This book is a comprehensive record of Wilde's life and work as presented on stage and screen from 1880 until 1999. It includes cast lists and snippets of reviews.

- In 2000 Columbia University professor Barbara Belford published the biography, "Oscar Wilde: A Certain Genius."
- 2003 saw the publication of the first complete account of Wilde's sexual and emotional life in *The Secret Life of Oscar Wilde* by Neil McKenna (Century/Random House).
- 2005 saw the publication of *The Unmasking of Oscar Wilde*, by literary biographer Joseph Pearce. It explores the Catholic sensibility in his art, his interior suffering and dissatisfaction, and his lifelong fascination with the Catholic Church, which led to his deathbed conversion.

Biographical films, television series and stage plays

- The play *Oscar Wilde* (1936), written by Leslie and Sewell Stokes, based on the life of Wilde, included Frank Harris as a character. Starring Robert Morley, the play

opened at the Gate Theatre in London in 1936, and two years later was staged in New York where its success launched the career of Morley as a stage actor.

- Two films of his life were released in 1960. The first to be released was *Oscar Wilde* starring Robert Morley and based on the Stokes brothers' play mentioned above. Then came *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* starring Peter Finch. At the time homosexuality was still a criminal offence in the UK and both films were rather cagey in touching on the subject without being explicit.
- In 1960, Irish actor Micheál MacLiammóir began performing a one-man show called *The Importance of Being Oscar*. The show was heavily influenced by Brechtian theory and contained many poems and samples of Wilde's writing. The play was a success and MacLiammoir toured it with success everywhere he went. It was published in 1963.
- In the summer of 1977 Vincent Price began performing the one-man play *Diversions and Delights*. Written by John Gay and directed by Joe Hardy, the premise of the play is that an aging Oscar Wilde, in order to earn some much-needed money, gave a lecture on his life in a Parisian theatre on November 28,

1899 (just a year before his death). The play was a success everywhere it was performed, except for its New York City run. It was revived in 1990 in London with Donald Sinden in the role.

- In 1978 London Weekend Television produced a television series about the life of Lillie Langtry entitled *Lillie*. In it Peter Egan played Oscar. The bulk of his scenes portrayed their close friendship up to and including their tours of America in 1882. Thereafter, he was in a few more scenes leading up to his trials in 1895.
- Michael Gambon portrayed Wilde on British Television in 1983 in the three-part BBC series *Oscar* concentrating on the trial and prison term.
- 1988 saw Nickolas Grace playing Wilde in Ken Russell's film *Salome's Last Dance*.
- In 1989 Terry Eagleton premiered his play *St. Oscar*. Eagleton agrees that only one line in the entire play is taken directly from Wilde, while the rest of the dialogue is his own fancy. The play is also influenced by Brechtian theory.
- A fuller look at his life, without any of the restrictions of the 1960 films, is *Wilde* (1997) starring Stephen Fry. Fry, an acknowledged Wilde scholar, also appeared

as Wilde in the short-lived American television series *Ned Blessing* (1993).

- Moises Kaufman's 1997 play *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* uses real quotes and transcripts of Wilde's three trials.
- Wilde appears as a supporting character in Tom Stoppard's 1997 play *The Invention of Love* and is referenced extensively in Stoppard's 1974 play *Travesties*.
- David Hare's 1998 play *The Judas Kiss* portrays Wilde as a manly homosexual Christ figure.
- The main character in the Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty musical *A Man of No Importance* identifies himself with Oscar Wilde, and Wilde appears to him several times.
- Actor/playwright Jade Esteban Estrada portrayed Wilde in the solo musical comedy *ICONS: The Lesbian and Gay History of the World*, Vol. 1 in 2002.
- *Oscar*: in October 2004, a stage musical by Mike Read about Oscar Wilde, closed after just one night at the Shaw Theatre in Euston after a severe critical mauling.
- A play was made in Argentina called "The importance of being Oscar Wilde" produced by Pepito Cibrian

Oscar Wilde in modern popular culture

Wilde is an iconic figure in modern popular culture, both as a wit and as an archetype of gay identity. Such references to him include a Monty Python skit called "Oscar Wilde and Friends,"^[15] anachronistic inclusion in Todd Haynes' 1998 film *Velvet Goldmine* (where Wilde's persona is presented as a precursor to glam rock); *Dorian*, Will Self's 2004 reworking of Wilde's novel, set in 1981; and *Melmoth*, Dave Sim's comic book, which retells the story of Wilde's final months with the names and places slightly altered to fit the world of *Cerebus the Aardvark*.

Many songs have alluded to Wilde or his works, including The Smiths' "Cemetery Gates" and British singer / songwriter James Blunt's "Tears and Rain" (which mentions Dorian Gray). The Libertines sing about how nice it would be to be "Dorian Gray, just for a day" in their song "Narcissist" on their 2004 LP. Mötley Crüe makes mention of Dorian Gray as well in the song "New Tattoo". There is also a mention of Dorian Gray and "A picture in gray..." in the song "The Ocean"

by U2 from their debut album *Boy*. "The Long Voyage" from French producer Hector Zazou's 1994 album *Chansons des mers froides*, on which Suzanne Vega and John Cale recite lyrics based on Wilde's poem "Silhouettes". "Resist", by Canadian rock group Rush, was inspired by Wilde. Given his brilliance of phrasing, his ability to twist common axioms, and his biographical flourishes, Wilde continues to provide material for venues such as Uncyclopedia, a parody of Wikipedia.^[16]

Oscar Wilde's image is currently used as the logo of the International Dublin Gay Theatre Festival.

Bibliography

Poetry

- *Ravenna* (1878)
- *Poems* (1881)
- *The Sphinx* (1894)
- *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898)

Plays

- *Vera; or, The Nihilists* (1880)
- *The Duchess of Padua* (1883)
- *Salomé* (French version) (1893, first

- performed in Paris 1896)
- *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892)
- *A Woman of No Importance* (1893)
- *Salomé: A Tragedy in One Act: Translated from the French of Oscar Wilde by Lord Alfred Douglas with illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley* (1894)
- *An Ideal Husband* (1895) (text)
- *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) (text)
- *La Sainte Courtisane* and *A Florentine Tragedy* Fragmentary. First published 1908 in Methuen's *Collected Works*

(Dates are dates of first performance, which approximate better with the probable date of composition than dates of publication.)

Prose

- *The Canterville Ghost* (1887)
- *The Happy Prince and Other Stories* (1888, fairy tales) [3]
- *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories* (1891)
- *Intentions* (1891, critical dialogues and essays)
- *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891, Wilde's only novel)

- *A House of Pomegranates* (1891, fairy tales)
- *The Soul of Man under Socialism* (First published in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1891, first book publication 1904)
- *De Profundis* (1905)
- *The Rise of Historical Criticism* (published in incomplete form 1905 and completed form in 1908)
- *The Letters of Oscar Wilde* (1960) This was rereleased in 2000, with letters uncovered since 1960, and new, detailed, footnotes by Merlin Holland.
- *Teleny or The Reverse of the Medal* (Paris, 1893) has been attributed to Wilde, but was more likely a combined effort by a several of Wilde's friends, which he may have edited.

References

Print

- Beckson, Karl. *The Oscar Wilde Encyclopedia*. (AMS, 1998)
- Ellmann, Richard. *Oscar Wilde*. (Vintage, 1988) ISBN 0-521-47987-8
- Holland, Merlin. *The Wilde Album*. (Fourth Estate, 1997) ISBN 1-85702-782-5
- Igoe, Vivien. *A Literary Guide to Dublin*. (Methuen, 1994) ISBN 0-413-69120-9

- Mason, Stuart [Christopher Millard]. *Bibliography of Oscar Wilde*. (Laurie, 1914; latest edition Oak Knoll Press, 1999) ISBN 1-578-98104-2
- McKenna, Neil. *The Secret Life of Oscar Wilde*. (Random House, 2004) ISBN 0-09-941545-3
- Raby, Peter (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*. (CUP, 1997) ISBN 0-521-47987-8
- Wilde, Oscar. *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*. (Collins, 2003) ISBN 0-00-714436-9
- Wood, Julia: *The Resurrection of Oscar Wilde*; The Lutterworth Press 2007, Cambridge: ISBN 9780718830717

Online

- Oscar Wilde's brief biography and works
- Dissertation about the relationship between "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and Postmodernism
- 10 most popular misconceptions about Oscar Wilde
- King, Steve. "Wilde in America" from Today in Literature, captured November 12, 2004.
- Biblio.com ~ Oscar Wilde (1854-1900)

See also

- List of people on stamps of Ireland
- William Andrews Clark Memorial Library

Notes

1. ^ "We know that Wilde engaged in sexual acts with males, loved obsessively at least one male, cultivated a style of male-male intimacy and of Aesthetic transgression, thought of himself as in a tradition fostered by Greek pederastic love, expressed guilt for his same-sex acts/desires." John Maynard, "Sexuality and Love," in *A Companion to Victorian Poetry*, Ed. Richard Cronin et al.
2. ^ Rictor Norton, A Critique of Social Constructionism and Postmodern Queer Theory, "A False 'Birth'," 1 June 2002
<<http://www.infopt.demon.co.uk/social15.htm>>
3. ^ H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Love That Dared not Speak its Name*; p.144
4. ^ Richard Ellman 'Oscar Wilde' Pulitzer prize winning biography
5. ^ Irish Peacock & Scarlet Marquis, Merlin Holland
6. ^ Richard Ellman 'Oscar Wilde' Pulitzer prize winning biography.
7. ^ Irish Peacock & Scarlet Marquis, Merlin Holland
8. ^ H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Love That Dared not Speak its Name*; p.5
9. ^ Trials Of Oscar Wilde - Introduction by Sir Travers Humphrey QC
10. ^ Richard Ellman, Oscar Wilde pg 435. Carson Approached Frank Lockwood (QC) and asked

- 'Can we not let up on the fellow now?
11. ^ H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Love That Dared Not Speak Its Name*, p.170; Boston: Little, Brown, 1970
 12. ^ H. Montgomery Hyde, op.cit. p.152
 13. ^ Holland, A. and Rupert Hart-Davis (2000): *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*. pp. 1219-1220, New York: Henry Holt and Co. ISBN 0805059156
 14. ^ *(RE)membering Wilde*, retrieved on 2007-01-12
 15. ^ "Oscar Wilde and Friends" on YouTube
 16. ^ Wilde:Main Page (Wiki). *Uncyclopedia*. Retrieved on 2007-05-25.

External links

- Oscar Wilde – Standing Ovation, a variety of resources including full texts.
- The Oscar Wilde Society
- Information concerning Wilde's conversion to Catholicism
- Transcript of Oscar Wilde's trials
- Statue of Oscar Wilde and Eduard Vilde in Tartu (second largest city in Estonia)
- William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, home to the most comprehensive Oscar Wilde collection in the world.
- Reading Between the Lines Ragged Edge Magazine article by Louise Norlie, Treatment of Disability in The Birthday of

the Infanta

- Prison Reform Oscar Wilde and his letters to the Daily Chronicle; Prison reform and De Profundis
- Michael Matthew Kaylor, *Secreted Desires: The Major Uranians: Hopkins, Pater and Wilde* (2006), a 500-page scholarly volume that situates Wilde among the Victorian writers of Uranian poetry and prose (the author has made this volume available in a free, open-access, PDF version).
- Oscar Wilde, Knitting Circle article. Includes information about Maggi Hambling's Wilde statue in London, and the controversy that has attended it.

Online texts

- Collected Works
- The Oscar Wilde Collection
- Online Books by Oscar Wilde
- Oscar Wilde Online The Works and Life of Oscar Wilde
- Illustrated Fairy Tales of Oscar Wilde with original illustrations by Jessie M. King and Charles Robinson
- Vera; or, the Nihilists. *The Modern Woman's Guide To Oscar Wilde*. Retrieved on December 11, 2005.

- Selected Oscar Wilde Poems
- The Soul of Man Under Socialism
- "The Happy Prince" Creative Commons audio recording.
- Works by Oscar Wilde at Project Gutenberg
- Free audiobook of *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* from LibriVox

Retrieved from

"http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oscar_Wilde"

Categories: All articles with unsourced statements | Articles with unsourced statements since May 2007 | Oscar Wilde | Irish dramatists and playwrights | Irish journalists | Irish novelists | Irish poets | Aphorists | Victorian poetry | People prosecuted under anti-homosexuality laws | Alumni of Magdalen College, Oxford | Alumni of Trinity College, Dublin | Anglo-Irish artists | Irish Anglicans | Converts to Roman Catholicism | Irish socialists | Irish Roman Catholics | People from County Dublin | Victorian pederasty | Incarcerated celebrities | Bisexual writers | Christian LGBT people | LGBT people from Ireland | Burials at Père Lachaise Cemetery | 1854 births | 1900 deaths

- This page was last modified 13:17, 7 August 2007.
- All text is available under the terms of the GNU Free Documentation License. (See **Copyrights** for details.)
Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a US-registered 501(c)(3) tax-deductible nonprofit charity.