

with
The Invention
of Love

O S C A R W I L D E

Birth name: Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde

Also known as: Oscar Wilde

Birth: October 16, 1854

Death: November 30, 1900

Parents: Sir William Wilde and Jane Francesca Elgee

Siblings: (full) William and Isola; (half) Henry, Emily and Mary

- 1878 Ravenna
- 1881 Poems
- 1882 *Vera*
- 1888 The Happy Prince and Other Tales
- 1889 The Decay of Lying
- 1890 The Picture of Dorian Gray
- 1890 Dorian Gray
- 1891 The House of Pomegranates
- 1891 Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories
- 1891 Intentions
- 1891 Salome
- 1893 *Lady Windermere's Fan*
- 1894 *A Woman of No Importance*
- 1893 *The Duchess of Padua* (written 1883)
- 1894 The Sphinx
- 1899 *An Ideal Husband*
- 1899 *The Importance of Being Earnest*
- 1898 The Ballad of Reading Gaol

Brief Biography (Edited Summary from Classic Notes)

Trinity College Dublin in 1871 and enjoys an successful career, gathering awards and studying the classics as well as theories of aestheticism. 1874, **transfers to Oxford** in England and studis under John Ruskin (a Renaissance man of many scholarly talents) and Walter Pater (an influential proponent of the new school of aestheticism).

Wilde discusses their conflicting philosophies while he **experimented with flashy and discovered his homosexual tendencies**.

Upon graduating from Oxford, **meets the Pope. His father's death** and the family's increasing debts forcing him to embark on a **lecture tour of the United States** in 1882. Upon arriving at customs, Wilde boldly makes his now-famous statement: "**I have nothing to declare except my genius.**" On tour, he **dresses up as a dandy** and advocates the philosophy of the Aesthetic, the idea that art should exist solely for art's sake (or, as While on tour, Wilde also **produces his first**, play in New York, *Vera*).

1884, Wilde **marries** a shy and rich Irishwoman, **Constance Lloyd**, and the two **move to London**. Wilde briefly edits Woman's World magazine while he writes a collection of fairy tales and more essays championing the Aesthetic movement. He explodes on to the literary scene with his masterpiece novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray, a Faustian tale about beauty and youth, and a string of highly successful plays. His last play, *Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), is also considered his greatest and the modern paragon of he comedy of manners.

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Trial (Continued Edited Summary)

However, by now Wilde is infatuated **with the younger, beautiful poet Lord Alfred Douglas** (known as "Bosie"), and he is not shy about flaunting their sexual relationship. *Earnest* has only been out for FOUR DAYS!!! And, **Douglas's father, the Marquess of Queensbury, accuses Wilde of sodomy.** Wilde, never one to back down from a fight, **charges Queensbury with libel** (false publication). However, Queensbury locates several of Wilde's letters to use as well as other incriminating evidence. Alongside the provocative material in Wilde's work, the writer is **found guilty** of homosexuality in a second trial and **sentenced to two years of hard labor.**

In 1897, while in prison, Wilde writes *De Profundis*, an examination of his newfound spirituality. After his release, he moves to France under an assumed name. His new life in France, however, is lonely, impoverished, and humiliating. Wilde **dies in 1900 in a Paris hotel room.**

Three Trials

First Trial: April 3rd, 1895

Alfred Douglas's father, left a visiting card at Oscar Wilde's club, the Albemarle, and on it he had written the accusation that Oscar Wilde as "posing as a sodomite [sic]". The episode had started as a dispute between Alfred Douglas and his father, and Alfred Douglas pushed Oscar Wilde into a suit for libel. The Marquess of Queensbury was arrested on 1st. March, and the libel trial began on 3rd. April, 1895. However, the Marquess of Queensbury's defence named ten young men who would testify on Oscar Wilde's conduct. On the afternoon of 5th. April Oscar Wilde conceded and the case was withdrawn. This meant that Marquess was acquitted and the judge ruled that 'it was true in substance and in fact that the prosecutor had "posed" as a sodomite'.

Everyone knew that Oscar Wilde would be charged after the evidence for the first trial had been made available, and everyone expected him to flee the country. Even the **Marquess of Queensbury** sent him a message saying **'I will not prevent your flight but if you take my son with you, I will shoot you like a dog'**. Oscar Wilde had not been in court on 5th. April but he knew what was happening. He had taken a leisurely lunch and then moved on to the Cadogan Hotel. A journalist alerted him to the fact that a warrant had been issued for his arrest. Even though the police knew where Oscar Wilde was it was several hours before they took action to arrest him. His friends were urging him to flee but he decided to stay. He was arrested at the Cadogan Hotel., taken to Bow Street station, charged and then remanded in custody at Holloway Prison.

Second trial: April 26th, 1895

Oscar Wilde was charged under section II of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, often called the "Labouchere amendment." **Prosecution counsel at the Old Bailey quoted two poems written by Alfred Douglas, including Two Loves, and put it to Oscar Wilde that it referred to 'unnatural love'. Oscar Wilde disagreed and was invited to explain why.**

"The Love that dare not speak its name" in this country 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 is in this century misunderstood, so much misunderstood that it may be described as 'the Love that dare not speak its name', and on 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, and it repeatedly exists between an elder and a younger man, when the elder 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."

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This must be one of the most brilliant impromptu speeches and put homosexual love on the highest plane, but actually disguised the truth of Oscar Wilde's physical relationships with young men. **The jury could not agree**

Third Trial: May 22nd, 1895

A further trial was started on 22nd. May. Oscar Wilde held out against accusations about his lifestyle until **he blundered into saying that he had not kissed a certain boy because he was ugly**. This was the turning point and, after testimonies from young men, **Oscar Wilde was convicted of having sexual relations with several male prostitutes, and under the "Labouchere amendment" he was sentenced to two years hard labour** on 27th. May. His marriage fell apart, his sons were taken from him, he was declared bankrupt and his house and belongings were auctioned off, and many of his friends deserted him.

Homosexuality in Earnest

"Importance creates the quintessentially gay play. He turns Victorian values on their heads and discovers in the comedy of camp a means of covertly attacking his society's prejudices and discreetly defending his own nonconformity.

The farce brilliantly depicts the liminal position that Wilde occupied in relation to his homophobic society, in it, yet not of it. Perhaps the most poignant aspect of Importance is the fact that its comedy is fueled by Wilde's desperate desire to be accepted by the very society he lampoons." -GLBTQ

Labouchere Amendment 1885

"In response to a wave of sensationalism in the press about the prostitution of teenaged girls Parliament adopted the Criminal Law Amendment Act in 1885. During the passage of the bill Henry Labouchère had introduced a clause late on the night of 6th. August, 1885. This was accepted without debate and was rushed through the third reading the following night, 7th. August. It was passed and became Section II of the Act. **This provided for a term of imprisonment not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour, for any male person guilty of an act of gross indecency with another male person in public or in private. The effect of this was that any and every form of male homosexual expression which offended the feelings of a jury became criminal.** This law was dubbed the "blackmailer's charter" and cast a shadow of criminality over British homosexual life until its repeal 82 years later. It was used in 1895 to convict Oscar Wilde and to send him for two years hard labour in prison."

Section II of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885

"Any male person who, in public or private, commits, or is a party to the commission of, or procures, or attempts to procure the commission by any person of, any act of gross indecency shall be guilty of misdemeanour, and being convicted shall be liable at the discretion of the Court to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour."

O S C A R W I L D E

Movies

Oscar Wilde

1960, black and white film
directed by Gregory Ratoff

Robert Morley (Oscar Wilde)
Ralph Richardson (Queens Counsel, Sir Edward Carson)

The Trials of Oscar Wilde

1960

based on John Fernald's play *The Stringed Lute*, and
Montgomery Hyde's *Trial of Oscar Wilde*
directed by Ken Hughes.

Peter Finch (Oscar Wilde)
John Fraser (Alfred Douglas)
Lionel Jeffries (Marquess of Queensberry)

Wilde

1997

directed by Brian Gilbert

Stephen Fry (Oscar Wilde)
Jude Law (Lord Alfred) of A.I., *Enemy at the Gates*
Vanessa Redgrave (Lady Speranza) of *Mission Impossible*,
Crime & Punishment

Oscar Wilde Homepage
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Knitting Circle Labouchere amendment
Internet Movie Database
Classic Notes: Oscar Wilde

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