

= Oscar Wilde =

Oscar Fingal O 'Flahertie Wills Wilde ( 16 October 1854 ? 30 November 1900 ) was an Irish playwright , novelist , essayist , and poet . After writing in different forms throughout the 1880s , he became one of London 's most popular playwrights in the early 1890s . He is remembered for his epigrams , his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* , his plays , as well as the circumstances of his imprisonment and early death .

Wilde 's parents were successful Anglo -Irish Dublin intellectuals . Their son became fluent in French and German early in life . At university , Wilde read Greats ; he proved himself to be an outstanding classicist , first at Dublin , then at Oxford . He became known for his involvement in the rising philosophy of aestheticism , led by two of his tutors , Walter Pater and John Ruskin . After university , Wilde moved to London into fashionable cultural and social circles .

As a spokesman for aestheticism , he tried his hand at various literary activities : he published a book of poems , lectured in the United States and Canada on the new " English Renaissance in Art " , and then returned to London where he worked prolifically as a journalist . Known for his biting wit , flamboyant dress and glittering conversation , Wilde became one of the best -known personalities of his day .

At the turn of the 1890s , he refined his ideas about the supremacy of art in a series of dialogues and essays , and incorporated themes of decadence , duplicity , and beauty into his only novel , *The Picture of Dorian Gray* ( 1890 ) . The opportunity to construct aesthetic details precisely , and combine them with larger social themes , drew Wilde to write drama . He wrote *Salome* ( 1891 ) in French in Paris but it was refused a licence for England due to the absolute prohibition of Biblical subjects on the English stage . Unperturbed , Wilde produced four society comedies in the early 1890s , which made him one of the most successful playwrights of late Victorian London .

At the height of his fame and success , while his masterpiece , *The Importance of Being Earnest* ( 1895 ) , was still on stage in London , Wilde had the Marquess of Queensberry prosecuted for libel . The Marquess was the father of Wilde 's lover , Lord Alfred Douglas . The charge carried a penalty of up to two years in prison . The trial unearthed evidence that caused Wilde to drop his charges and led to his own arrest and trial for gross indecency with men . After two more trials he was convicted and imprisoned for two years ' hard labour .

In 1897 , in prison , he wrote *De Profundis* , which was published in 1905 , a long letter which discusses his spiritual journey through his trials , forming a dark counterpoint to his earlier philosophy of pleasure . Upon his release he left immediately for France , never to return to Ireland or Britain . There he wrote his last work , *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* ( 1898 ) , a long poem commemorating the harsh rhythms of prison life . He died destitute in Paris at the age of 46 .

= = Early life = =

Oscar Wilde was born at 21 Westland Row , Dublin ( now home of the Oscar Wilde Centre , Trinity College ) , the second of three children born to Sir William Wilde and Jane Wilde , two years behind William ( " Willie " ) . Wilde 's mother , under the pseudonym " Speranza " ( the Italian word for ' Hope ' ) , wrote poetry for the revolutionary Young Irelanders in 1848 and was a lifelong Irish nationalist . She read the Young Irelanders ' poetry to Oscar and Willie , inculcating a love of these poets in her sons . Lady Wilde 's interest in the neo -classical revival showed in the paintings and busts of ancient Greece and Rome in her home . William Wilde was Ireland 's leading ophthalmologic ( ear and eye ) surgeon and was knighted in 1864 for his services as medical adviser and assistant commissioner to the censuses of Ireland . He also wrote books about Irish archaeology and peasant folklore . A renowned philanthropist , his dispensary for the care of the city 's poor at the rear of Trinity College , Dublin , was the forerunner of the Dublin Eye and Ear Hospital , now located at Adelaide Road . On his father 's side Wilde was descended from a Dutchman , Colonel de Wilde , who went to Ireland with King William of Orange 's invading army in 1690 . On his mother 's side Wilde 's ancestors included a bricklayer from County Durham who emigrated to Ireland sometime in the 1770s .

Wilde was baptised as an infant in St. Mark 's Church , Dublin , the local Church of Ireland ( Anglican ) church . When the church was closed , the records were moved to the nearby St. Ann 's Church , Dawson Street . Davis Coakley references a second baptism by a Catholic priest , Father Prideaux Fox , who befriended Oscar 's mother circa 1859 . According to Fox 's own testimony written by him years later in Donahoe 's Magazine in 1905 , Jane Wilde would visit his chapel in Glencree , Co Wicklow for Mass and would take her sons with her . She then asked Father Fox to baptise her sons . Fox described it in this way :

" I am not sure if she ever became a Catholic herself but it was not long before she asked me to instruct two of her children , one of them being the future erratic genius , Oscar Wilde . After a few weeks I baptized these two children , Lady Wilde herself being present on the occasion . "

In addition to his children with his wife , Sir William Wilde was the father of three children born out of wedlock before his marriage : Henry Wilson , born in 1838 , and Emily and Mary Wilde , born in 1847 and 1849 , respectively , of different maternity to Henry . Sir William acknowledged paternity of his illegitimate children and provided for their education , but they were reared by his relatives rather than with his wife and legitimate children .

In 1855 , the family moved to No. 1 Merrion Square , where Wilde 's sister , Isola , was born in 1857 . The Wildes ' new home was larger and , with both his parents ' sociality and success , it soon became a " unique medical and cultural milieu " . Guests at their salon included Sheridan Le Fanu , Charles Lever , George Petrie , Isaac Butt , William Rowan Hamilton and Samuel Ferguson .

Until he was nine , Oscar Wilde was educated at home , where a French bonne and a German governess taught him their languages . He then attended Portora Royal School in Enniskillen , County Fermanagh . Until his early twenties , Wilde summered at the villa , Moytura House , his father built in Cong , County Mayo . There the young Wilde and his brother Willie played with George Moore .

Isola died aged nine of meningitis . Wilde 's poem " Requiescat " is written to her memory .

" Tread lightly , she is near  
Under the snow  
Speak gently , she can hear  
the daisies grow "

= = University education : 1870s = =

= = = Trinity College , Dublin = = =

Wilde left Portora with a royal scholarship to read classics at Trinity College , Dublin , from 1871 to 1874 , sharing rooms with his older brother Willie Wilde . Trinity , one of the leading classical schools , placed him with scholars such as R. Y. Tyrell , Arthur Palmer , Edward Dowden and his tutor , J. P. Mahaffy who inspired his interest in Greek literature . As a student Wilde worked with Mahaffy on the latter 's book Social Life in Greece . Wilde , despite later reservations , called Mahaffy " my first and best teacher " and " the scholar who showed me how to love Greek things " . For his part , Mahaffy boasted of having created Wilde ; later , he named him " the only blot on my tutorship " .

The University Philosophical Society also provided an education , discussing intellectual and artistic subjects such as Rossetti and Swinburne weekly . Wilde quickly became an established member ? the members ' suggestion book for 1874 contains two pages of banter ( sportingly ) mocking Wilde 's emergent aestheticism . He presented a paper entitled " Aesthetic Morality " . At Trinity , Wilde established himself as an outstanding student : he came first in his class in his first year , won a scholarship by competitive examination in his second , and then , in his finals , won the Berkeley Gold Medal , the University 's highest academic award in Greek . He was encouraged to compete for a demyship to Magdalen College , Oxford ? which he won easily , having already studied Greek for over nine years .

= = = Magdalen College , Oxford = = =

At Magdalen , he read Greats from 1874 to 1878 , and from there he applied to join the Oxford Union , but failed to be elected .

Attracted by its dress , secrecy , and ritual , Wilde petitioned the Apollo Masonic Lodge at Oxford , and was soon raised to the " Sublime Degree of Master Mason " . During a resurgent interest in Freemasonry in his third year , he commented he " would be awfully sorry to give it up if I secede from the Protestant Heresy " . He was deeply considering converting to Catholicism , discussing the possibility with clergy several times . In 1877 , Wilde was left speechless after an audience with Pope Pius IX in Rome . He eagerly read Cardinal Newman 's books , and became more serious in 1878 , when he met the Reverend Sebastian Bowden , a priest in the Brompton Oratory who had received some high profile converts . Neither his father , who threatened to cut off his funds , nor Mahaffy thought much of the plan ; but mostly Wilde , the supreme individualist , balked at the last minute from pledging himself to any formal creed . On the appointed day of his baptism , Father Bowden received a bunch of altar lilies instead . Wilde retained a lifelong interest in Catholic theology and liturgy .

While at Magdalen College , Wilde became particularly well known for his role in the aesthetic and decadent movements . He wore his hair long , openly scorned " manly " sports though he occasionally boxed , and decorated his rooms with peacock feathers , lilies , sunflowers , blue china and other objets d 'art , once remarking to friends whom he entertained lavishly , " I find it harder and harder every day to live up to my blue china . " The line quickly became famous , accepted as a slogan by aesthetes but used against them by critics who sensed in it a terrible vacuousness . Some elements disdained the aesthetes , but their languishing attitudes and showy costumes became a recognised pose . Wilde was once physically attacked by a group of four fellow students , and dealt with them single @-@ handedly , surprising critics . By his third year Wilde had truly begun to create himself and his myth , and saw his learning developing in much larger ways than merely the prescribed texts . This attitude resulted in his being rusticated for one term , when he nonchalantly returned to college late from a trip to Greece with Prof. Mahaffy .

Wilde did not meet Walter Pater until his third year , but had been enthralled by his Studies in the History of the Renaissance , published during Wilde 's final year in Trinity . Pater argued that man 's sensibility to beauty should be refined above all else , and that each moment should be felt to its fullest extent . Years later , in De Profundis , Wilde called Pater 's Studies ... " that book that has had such a strange influence over my life " . He learned tracts of the book by heart , and carried it with him on travels in later years . Pater gave Wilde his sense of almost flippant devotion to art , though it was John Ruskin who gave him a purpose for it . Ruskin despaired at the self @-@ validating aestheticism of Pater , arguing that the importance of art lies in its potential for the betterment of society . Ruskin admired beauty , but believed it must be allied with , and applied to , moral good . When Wilde eagerly attended Ruskin 's lecture series The Aesthetic and Mathematic Schools of Art in Florence , he learned about aesthetics as simply the non @-@ mathematical elements of painting . Despite being given to neither early rising nor manual labour , Wilde volunteered for Ruskin 's project to convert a swampy country lane into a smart road neatly edged with flowers .

Wilde won the 1878 Newdigate Prize for his poem " Ravenna " , which reflected on his visit there the year before , and he duly read it at Encaenia . In November 1878 , he graduated with a double first in his B.A. of Classical Moderations and Literae Humaniores ( Greats ) . Wilde wrote to a friend , " The dons are ' astonied ' beyond words ? the Bad Boy doing so well in the end ! "

= = Apprenticeship of an aesthete : 1880s = =

= = = Debut in society = = =

After graduation from Oxford , Wilde returned to Dublin , where he met again Florence Balcombe , a childhood sweetheart . She became engaged to Bram Stoker and they married in 1878 . Wilde was

disappointed but stoic : he wrote to her , remembering " the two sweet years ? the sweetest years of all my youth " they had spent together . He also stated his intention to " return to England , probably for good . " This he did in 1878 , only briefly visiting Ireland twice .

Unsure of his next step , he wrote to various acquaintances enquiring about Classics positions at Oxford or Cambridge . The Rise of Historical Criticism was his submission for the Chancellor 's Essay prize of 1879 , which , though no longer a student , he was still eligible to enter . Its subject , " Historical Criticism among the Ancients " seemed ready @-@ made for Wilde ? with both his skill in composition and ancient learning ? but he struggled to find his voice with the long , flat , scholarly style . Unusually , no prize was awarded that year . With the last of his inheritance from the sale of his father 's houses , he set himself up as a bachelor in London . The 1881 British Census listed Wilde as a boarder at 1 ( now 44 ) Tite Street , Chelsea , where Frank Miles , a society painter , was the head of the household . Wilde spent the next six years in London and Paris , and in the United States where he travelled to deliver lectures .

He had been publishing lyrics and poems in magazines since his entering Trinity College , especially in Kottabos and the Dublin University Magazine . In mid @-@ 1881 , at 27 years old , Poems collected , revised and expanded his poetic efforts . The book was generally well received , and sold out its first print run of 750 copies , prompting further printings in 1882 . It was bound in a rich , enamel , parchment cover ( embossed with gilt blossom ) and printed on hand @-@ made Dutch paper ; Wilde presented many copies to the dignitaries and writers who received him over the next few years . The Oxford Union condemned the book for alleged plagiarism in a tight vote . The librarian , who had requested the book for the library , returned the presentation copy to Wilde with a note of apology . Richard Ellmann argues that Wilde 's poem " Hélas ! " was a sincere , though flamboyant , attempt to explain the dichotomies he saw in himself :

To drift with every passion till my soul

Is a stringed lute on which all winds can play

Punch was less enthusiastic , " The poet is Wilde , but his poetry 's tame " was their verdict .

= = = America : 1882 = = =

Aestheticism was sufficiently in vogue to be caricatured by Gilbert and Sullivan in Patience ( 1881 ) . Richard D 'Oyly Carte , an English impresario , invited Wilde to make a lecture tour of North America , simultaneously priming the pump for the US tour of Patience and selling this most charming aesthete to the American public . Wilde journeyed on the SS Arizona , arriving 2 January 1882 , and disembarking the following day . Originally planned to last four months , it continued for almost a year due to the commercial success . Wilde sought to transpose the beauty he saw in art into daily life . This was a practical as well as philosophical project : in Oxford he had surrounded himself with blue china and lilies , and now one of his lectures was on interior design . When asked to explain reports that he had paraded down Piccadilly in London carrying a lily , long hair flowing , Wilde replied , " It 's not whether I did it or not that 's important , but whether people believed I did it " . Wilde believed that the artist should hold forth higher ideals , and that pleasure and beauty would replace utilitarian ethics .

Wilde and aestheticism were both mercilessly caricatured and criticised in the press ; the Springfield Republican , for instance , commented on Wilde 's behaviour during his visit to Boston to lecture on aestheticism , suggesting that Wilde 's conduct was more a bid for notoriety rather than devotion to beauty and the aesthetic . T.W. Higginson , a cleric and abolitionist , wrote in " Unmanly Manhood " of his general concern that Wilde , " whose only distinction is that he has written a thin volume of very mediocre verse " , would improperly influence the behaviour of men and women . Though his press reception was hostile , Wilde was well received in diverse settings across America ; he drank whiskey with miners in Leadville , Colorado and was fêted at the most fashionable salons in every city he visited .

= = = London life and marriage = = =

His earnings , plus expected income from The Duchess of Padua , allowed him to move to Paris between February and mid @-@ May 1883 . Whilst there he met Robert Sherard , whom he entertained constantly . " We are dining on the Duchess tonight " , Wilde would declare before taking him to a fancy restaurant . In August he briefly returned to New York for the production of Vera , his first play , after it was turned down in London . He reportedly entertained the other passengers with " Ave Imperatrix ! , A Poem on England " , about the rise and fall of empires . E.C. Stedman , in Victorian Poets describes this " lyric to England " as " manly verse ? a poetic and eloquent invocation " . The play was initially well received by the audience , but when the critics wrote lukewarm reviews attendance fell sharply and the play closed a week after it had opened .

Wilde was left to return to England and lecturing on topics including Personal Impressions of America , The Value of Art in Modern Life , and Dress .

In London , he had been introduced in 1881 to Constance Lloyd , daughter of Horace Lloyd , a wealthy Queen 's Counsel . She happened to be visiting Dublin in 1884 , when Wilde was lecturing at the Gaiety Theatre . He proposed to her , and they married on 29 May 1884 at the Anglican St. James Church in Paddington in London . Constance 's annual allowance of £ 250 was generous for a young woman ( equivalent to about £ 23 @, @ 500 in current value ) , but the Wildes had relatively luxurious tastes , and they had preached to others for so long on the subject of design that people expected their home to set new standards . No. 16 , Tite Street was duly renovated in seven months at considerable expense . The couple had two sons , Cyril ( 1885 ) and Vyvyan ( 1886 ) . Wilde became the sole literary signatory of George Bernard Shaw 's petition for a pardon of the anarchists arrested ( and later executed ) after the Haymarket massacre in Chicago in 1886 .

Robert Ross had read Wilde 's poems before they met , and was unrestrained by the Victorian prohibition against homosexuality , even to the extent of estranging himself from his family . By Richard Ellmann 's account , he was a precocious seventeen @-@ year @-@ old " so young and yet so knowing , was determined to seduce Wilde " . According to Daniel Mendelsohn , Wilde , who had long alluded to Greek love , was " initiated into homosexual sex " by Ross , while his " marriage had begun to unravel after his wife 's second pregnancy , which left him physically repelled " .

= = Prose writing : 1886 ? 91 = =

= = = Journalism and editorship : 1886 ? 89 = = =

Criticism over artistic matters in the Pall Mall Gazette provoked a letter in self @-@ defence , and soon Wilde was a contributor to that and other journals during the years 1885 ? 87 . He enjoyed reviewing and journalism ; the form suited his style . He could organise and share his views on art , literature and life , yet in a format less tedious than lecturing . Buoyed up , his reviews were largely chatty and positive . Wilde , like his parents before him , also supported the cause of Irish Nationalism . When Charles Stewart Parnell was falsely accused of inciting murder Wilde wrote a series of astute columns defending him in the Daily Chronicle .

His flair , having previously only been put into socialising , suited journalism and did not go unnoticed . With his youth nearly over , and a family to support , in mid @-@ 1887 Wilde became the editor of The Lady 's World magazine , his name prominently appearing on the cover . He promptly renamed it The Woman 's World and raised its tone , adding serious articles on parenting , culture , and politics , keeping discussions of fashion and arts . Two pieces of fiction were usually included , one to be read to children , the other for the ladies themselves . Wilde worked hard to solicit good contributions from his wide artistic acquaintance , including those of Lady Wilde and his wife Constance , while his own " Literary and Other Notes " were themselves popular and amusing .

The initial vigour and excitement he brought to the job began to fade as administration , commuting and office life became tedious . At the same time as Wilde 's interest flagged , the publishers became concerned anew about circulation : sales , at the relatively high price of one shilling , remained low . Increasingly sending instructions to the magazine by letter , he began a new period of creative work and his own column appeared less regularly . In October 1889 , Wilde had finally

found his voice in prose and , at the end of the second volume , Wilde left *The Woman 's World* . The magazine outlasted him by one volume .

If Wilde 's period at the helm of the magazine was a mixed success from an organizational point of view , one can also argue that it played a pivotal role in his development as a writer and facilitated his ascent to fame . Whilst Wilde the journalist supplied articles under the guidance of his editors , Wilde the editor is forced to learn to manipulate the literary marketplace on his own terms .

= = = Shorter fiction = = =

Wilde published *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* in 1888 , and had been regularly writing fairy stories for magazines . In 1891 he published two more collections , *Lord Arthur Savile 's Crime and Other Stories* , and in September *A House of Pomegranates* was dedicated " To Constance Mary Wilde " . " *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* " , which Wilde had begun in 1887 , was first published in *Blackwood 's Edinburgh Magazine* in July 1889 . It is a short story , which reports a conversation , in which the theory that Shakespeare 's sonnets were written out of the poet 's love of the boy actor " Willie Hughes " , is advanced , retracted , and then propounded again . The only evidence for this is two supposed puns within the sonnets themselves .

The anonymous narrator is at first sceptical , then believing , finally flirtatious with the reader : he concludes that " there is really a great deal to be said of the Willie Hughes theory of Shakespeare 's sonnets . " By the end fact and fiction have melded together . Arthur Ransome wrote that Wilde " read something of himself into Shakespeare 's sonnets " and became fascinated with the " Willie Hughes theory " despite the lack of biographical evidence for the historical William Hughes ' existence . Instead of writing a short but serious essay on the question , Wilde tossed the theory amongst the three characters of the story , allowing it to unfold as background to the plot . The story thus is an early masterpiece of Wilde 's combing many elements that interested him , conversation , literature and the idea that to shed oneself of an idea one must first convince another of its truth . Ransome concludes that Wilde succeeds precisely because the literary criticism is unveiled with such a deft touch .

Though containing nothing but " special pleading " , it would not , he says " be possible to build an airier castle in Spain than this of the imaginary William Hughes " we continue listening nonetheless to be charmed by the telling . " You must believe in Willie Hughes , " Wilde told an acquaintance , " I almost do , myself . "

= = = Essays and dialogues = = =

Wilde , having tired of journalism , had been busy setting out his aesthetic ideas more fully in a series of longer prose pieces which were published in the major literary @-@ intellectual journals of the day . In January 1889 , *The Decay of Lying : A Dialogue* appeared in *The Nineteenth Century* , and *Pen , Pencil and Poison* , a satirical biography of Thomas Griffiths Wainewright , in the *Fortnightly Review* , edited by Wilde 's friend Frank Harris . Two of Wilde 's four writings on aesthetics are dialogues : though Wilde had evolved professionally from lecturer to writer , he retained an oral tradition of sorts . Having always excelled as a wit and raconteur , he often composed by assembling phrases , bons mots and witticisms into a longer , cohesive work .

Wilde was concerned about the effect of moralising on art , he believed in art 's redemptive , developmental powers : " Art is individualism , and individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force . There lies its immense value . For what it seeks is to disturb monotony of type , slavery of custom , tyranny of habit , and the reduction of man to the level of a machine . " In his only political text , *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* , he argued political conditions should establish this primacy , and concluded that the government most amenable to artists was no government at all . Wilde envisions a society where mechanisation has freed human effort from the burden of necessity , effort which can instead be expended on artistic creation . George Orwell summarised , " In effect , the world will be populated by artists , each striving after perfection in the way that seems best to him . "

This point of view did not align him with the Fabians , intellectual socialists who advocated using state apparatus to change social conditions , nor did it endear him to the monied classes whom he had previously entertained . Hesketh Pearson , introducing a collection of Wilde 's essays in 1950 , remarked how *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* had been an inspirational text for Tsarist revolutionaries in Russia but laments that in the Stalinist era " it is doubtful whether there are any uninspected places in which it could now be hidden " .

Wilde considered including this pamphlet and *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* , his essay @-@ story on Shakespeare 's sonnets , in a new anthology in 1891 , but eventually decided to limit it to purely aesthetic subjects . Intentions packaged revisions of four essays : *The Decay of Lying* , *Pen , Pencil and Poison* , *The Truth of Masks* ( first published 1885 ) , and *The Critic as Artist* in two parts . For Pearson the biographer , the essays and dialogues exhibit every aspect of Wilde 's genius and character : wit , romancer , talker , lecturer , humanist and scholar and concludes that " no other productions of his have as varied an appeal " . 1891 turned out to be Wilde 's annus mirabilis , apart from his three collections he also produced his only novel .

= = = *The Picture of Dorian Gray* = = =

The first version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was published as the lead story in the July 1890 edition of Lippincott 's *Monthly Magazine* , along with five others . The story begins with a man painting a picture of Gray . When Gray , who has a " face like ivory and rose leaves " , sees his finished portrait , he breaks down . Distraught that his beauty will fade while the portrait stays beautiful , he inadvertently makes a Faustian bargain in which only the painted image grows old while he stays beautiful and young . For Wilde , the purpose of art would be to guide life as if beauty alone were its object . As Gray 's portrait allows him to escape the corporeal ravages of his hedonism , Wilde sought to juxtapose the beauty he saw in art with daily life .

Reviewers immediately criticised the novel 's decadence and homosexual allusions ; *The Daily Chronicle* for example , called it " unclean " , " poisonous " , and " heavy with the mephitic odours of moral and spiritual putrefaction " . Wilde vigorously responded , writing to the editor of the *Scots Observer* , in which he clarified his stance on ethics and aesthetics in art ? " If a work of art is rich and vital and complete , those who have artistic instincts will see its beauty and those to whom ethics appeal more strongly will see its moral lesson . " He nevertheless revised it extensively for book publication in 1891 : six new chapters were added , some overtly decadent passages and homo @-@ eroticism excised , and a preface was included consisting of twenty two epigrams , such as " Books are well written , or badly written . That is all . " Contemporary reviewers and modern critics have postulated numerous possible sources of the story , a search Jershua McCormack argues is futile because Wilde " has tapped a root of Western folklore so deep and ubiquitous that the story has escaped its origins and returned to the oral tradition . " Wilde claimed the plot was " an idea that is as old as the history of literature but to which I have given a new form " . Modern critic Robin McKie considered the novel to be technically mediocre , saying that the conceit of the plot had guaranteed its fame , but the device is never pushed to its full .

= = Theatrical career : 1892 ? 95 = =

= = = *Salomé* = = =

The 1891 census records the Wildes ' residence at 16 Tite Street , where he lived with his wife Constance and two sons . Wilde though , not content with being better known than ever in London , returned to Paris in October 1891 , this time as a respected writer . He was received at the salons littéraires , including the famous mardis of Stéphane Mallarmé , a renowned symbolist poet of the time . Wilde 's two plays during the 1880s , *Vera* ; or , *The Nihilists* and *The Duchess of Padua* , had not met with much success . He had continued his interest in the theatre and now , after finding his voice in prose , his thoughts turned again to the dramatic form as the biblical iconography of *Salomé*

filled his mind . One evening , after discussing depictions of Salome throughout history , he returned to his hotel and noticed a blank copybook lying on the desk , and it occurred to him to write in it what he had been saying . The result was a new play , *Salomé* , written rapidly and in French .

A tragedy , it tells the story of Salome , the stepdaughter of the tetrarch Herod Antipas , who , to her stepfather 's dismay but mother 's delight , requests the head of Jokanaan ( John the Baptist ) on a silver platter as a reward for dancing the Dance of the Seven Veils . When Wilde returned to London just before Christmas the *Paris Echo* referred to him as " le great event " of the season . Rehearsals of the play , starring Sarah Bernhardt , began but the play was refused a licence by the Lord Chamberlain , since it depicted biblical characters . *Salome* was published jointly in Paris and London in 1893 , but was not performed until 1896 in Paris , during Wilde 's later incarceration .

= = = Comedies of society = = =

Wilde , who had first set out to irritate Victorian society with his dress and talking points , then outrage it with *Dorian Gray* , his novel of vice hidden beneath art , finally found a way to critique society on its own terms . *Lady Windermere 's Fan* was first performed on 20 February 1892 at St James 's Theatre , packed with the cream of society . On the surface a witty comedy , there is subtle subversion underneath : " it concludes with collusive concealment rather than collective disclosure " . The audience , like *Lady Windermere* , are forced to soften harsh social codes in favour of a more nuanced view . The play was enormously popular , touring the country for months , but largely trashed by conservative critics . It was followed by *A Woman of No Importance* in 1893 , another Victorian comedy , revolving around the spectre of illegitimate births , mistaken identities and late revelations . Wilde was commissioned to write two more plays and *An Ideal Husband* , written in 1894 , followed in January 1895 .

Peter Raby said these essentially English plays were well @-@ pitched , " Wilde , with one eye on the dramatic genius of Ibsen , and the other on the commercial competition in London 's West End , targeted his audience with adroit precision " .

= = = Queensberry family = = =

In mid @-@ 1891 Lionel Johnson introduced Wilde to Lord Alfred Douglas , an undergraduate at Oxford at the time . Known to his family and friends as " Bosie " , he was a handsome and spoilt young man . An intimate friendship sprang up between Wilde and Douglas and by 1893 Wilde was infatuated with Douglas and they consorted together regularly in a tempestuous affair . If Wilde was relatively indiscreet , even flamboyant , in the way he acted , Douglas was reckless in public . Wilde , who was earning up to £ 100 a week from his plays ( his salary at *The Woman 's World* had been £ 6 ) , indulged Douglas 's every whim : material , artistic or sexual .

Douglas soon dragged Wilde into the Victorian underground of gay prostitution and Wilde was introduced to a series of young , working class , male prostitutes from 1892 onwards by Alfred Taylor . These infrequent rendezvous usually took the same form : Wilde would meet the boy , offer him gifts , dine him privately and then take him to a hotel room . Unlike Wilde 's idealised , pederastic relations with Ross , John Gray , and Douglas , all of whom remained part of his aesthetic circle , these consorts were uneducated and knew nothing of literature . Soon his public and private lives had become sharply divided ; in *De Profundis* he wrote to Douglas that " It was like feasting with panthers ; the danger was half the excitement ... I did not know that when they were to strike at me it was to be at another 's piping and at another 's pay . "

Douglas and some Oxford friends founded a journal , *The Chameleon* , to which Wilde " sent a page of paradoxes originally destined for the *Saturday Review* " . " Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young " was to come under attack six months later at Wilde 's trial , where he was forced to defend the magazine to which he had sent his work . In any case , it became unique : *The Chameleon* was not published again .

Lord Alfred 's father , the Marquess of Queensberry , was known for his outspoken atheism , brutish manner and creation of the modern rules of boxing . Queensberry , who feuded regularly with his



son , confronted Wilde and Lord Alfred about the nature of their relationship several times , but Wilde was able to mollify him . In June 1894 , he called on Wilde at 16 Tite Street , without an appointment , and clarified his stance : " I do not say that you are it , but you look it , and pose at it , which is just as bad . And if I catch you and my son again in any public restaurant I will thrash you " to which Wilde responded : " I don 't know what the Queensberry rules are , but the Oscar Wilde rule is to shoot on sight " . His account in *De Profundis* was less triumphant : " It was when , in my library at Tite Street , waving his small hands in the air in epileptic fury , your father ... stood uttering every foul word his foul mind could think of , and screaming the loathsome threats he afterwards with such cunning carried out " . Queensberry only described the scene once , saying Wilde had " shown him the white feather " , meaning he had acted in a cowardly way . Though trying to remain calm , Wilde saw that he was becoming ensnared in a brutal family quarrel . He did not wish to bear Queensberry 's insults , but he knew to confront him could lead to disaster were his liaisons disclosed publicly .

= = = The Importance of Being Earnest = = =

Wilde 's final play again returns to the theme of switched identities : the play 's two protagonists engage in " bunburying " ( the maintenance of alternative personas in the town and country ) which allows them to escape Victorian social mores . *Earnest* is even lighter in tone than Wilde 's earlier comedies . While their characters often rise to serious themes in moments of crisis , *Earnest* lacks the by @-@ now stock Wildean characters : there is no " woman with a past " , the principals are neither villainous nor cunning , simply idle cultivés , and the idealistic young women are not that innocent . Mostly set in drawing rooms and almost completely lacking in action or violence , *Earnest* lacks the self @-@ conscious decadence found in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Salome* .

The play , now considered Wilde 's masterpiece , was rapidly written in Wilde 's artistic maturity in late 1894 . It was first performed on 14 February 1895 , at St James 's Theatre in London , Wilde 's second collaboration with George Alexander , the actor @-@ manager . Both author and producer assiduously revised , prepared and rehearsed every line , scene and setting in the months before the premiere , creating a carefully constructed representation of late @-@ Victorian society , yet simultaneously mocking it . During rehearsal Alexander requested that Wilde shorten the play from four acts to three , which the author did . Premieres at St James 's seemed like " brilliant parties " , and the opening of *The Importance of Being Earnest* was no exception . Allan Aynesworth ( who played Algy ) recalled to Hesketh Pearson , " In my fifty @-@ three years of acting , I never remember a greater triumph than [ that ] first night . " *Earnest* 's immediate reception as Wilde 's best work to date finally crystallised his fame into a solid artistic reputation . *The Importance of Being Earnest* remains his most popular play .

Wilde 's professional success was mirrored by an escalation in his feud with Queensberry . Queensberry had planned to insult Wilde publicly by throwing a bouquet of rotting vegetables onto the stage ; Wilde was tipped off and had Queensberry barred from entering the theatre . Fifteen weeks later Wilde was in prison .

= = Trials = =

= = = Wilde v. Queensberry = = =

On 18 February 1895 , the Marquess left his calling card at Wilde 's club , the Albemarle , inscribed : " For Oscar Wilde , posing somdomite " [ sic ] . Wilde , encouraged by Douglas and against the advice of his friends , initiated a private prosecution against Queensberry for libel , since the note amounted to a public accusation that Wilde had committed the crime of sodomy .

Queensberry was arrested on a charge of criminal libel , a charge carrying a possible sentence of up to two years in prison ( Libel Act of 1843 ) . Under the Act , Queensberry could avoid conviction for libel only by demonstrating that his accusation was in fact true , and furthermore that there was some " public benefit " to having made the accusation openly . Queensberry 's lawyers thus hired

private detectives to find evidence of Wilde 's homosexual liaisons to prove the fact of the accusation . They decided on a strategy of portraying Wilde as a depraved older man who habitually enticed naive youths into a life of vicious homosexuality to demonstrate that there was some public interest in making the accusation openly , ostensibly to warn off other youths who might otherwise have become entrapped by Wilde .

Wilde 's friends had advised him against the prosecution at a Saturday Review meeting at the Café Royal on 24 March 1895 ; Frank Harris warned him that " they are going to prove sodomy against you " and advised him to flee to France . Wilde and Douglas walked out in a huff , Wilde saying " it is at such moments as these that one sees who are one 's true friends " . The scene was witnessed by George Bernard Shaw who recalled it to Arthur Ransome a day or so before Ransome 's trial for libelling Douglas in 1913 . To Ransome it confirmed what he had said in his 1912 literary book on Wilde ; that Douglas 's rivalry for Wilde with Robbie Ross and his arguments with his father had resulted in Wilde 's public disaster ; as Wilde wrote in *De Profundis* . Douglas lost his case . Shaw included an account of the argument between Harris , Douglas and Wilde in the preface to his play *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* .

The libel trial became a cause célèbre as salacious details of Wilde 's private life with Taylor and Douglas began to appear in the press . A team of private detectives had directed Queensberry 's lawyers , led by Edward Carson QC , to the world of the Victorian underground . Wilde 's association with blackmailers and male prostitutes , cross @-@ dressers and homosexual brothels was recorded , and various persons involved were interviewed , some being coerced to appear as witnesses since they too were accomplices to the crimes of which Wilde was accused .

The trial opened on 3 April 1895 amid scenes of near hysteria both in the press and the public galleries . The extent of the evidence massed against Wilde forced him to declare meekly , " I am the prosecutor in this case " . Wilde 's lawyer , Sir Edward George Clarke , opened the case by pre @-@ emptively asking Wilde about two suggestive letters Wilde had written to Douglas , which the defence had in its possession . He characterised the first as a " prose sonnet " and admitted that the " poetical language " might seem strange to the court but claimed its intent was innocent . Wilde stated that the letters had been obtained by blackmailers who had attempted to extort money from him , but he had refused , suggesting they should take the £ 60 ( equal to £ 6 @,@ 300 today ) offered , " unusual for a prose piece of that length " . He claimed to regard the letters as works of art rather than something of which to be ashamed .

Carson , a fellow Dubliner who had attended Trinity College , Dublin at the same time as Wilde , cross @-@ examined Wilde on how he perceived the moral content of his works . Wilde replied with characteristic wit and flippancy , claiming that works of art are not capable of being moral or immoral but only well or poorly made , and that only " brutes and illiterates , " whose views on art " are incalculably stupid " , would make such judgements about art . Carson , a leading barrister , diverged from the normal practice of asking closed questions . Carson pressed Wilde on each topic from every angle , squeezing out nuances of meaning from Wilde 's answers , removing them from their aesthetic context and portraying Wilde as evasive and decadent . While Wilde won the most laughs from the court , Carson scored the most legal points . To undermine Wilde 's credibility , and to justify Queensberry 's description of Wilde as a " posing ... somdomite " , Carson drew from the witness an admission of his capacity for " posing " , by demonstrating that he had lied about his age on oath . Playing on this , he returned to the topic throughout his cross @-@ examination .

Carson then moved to the factual evidence and questioned Wilde about his acquaintances with younger , lower @-@ class men . Wilde admitted being on a first @-@ name basis and lavishing gifts upon them , but insisted that nothing untoward had occurred and that the men were merely good friends of his . Carson repeatedly pointed out the unusual nature of these relationships and insinuated that the men were prostitutes . Wilde replied that he did not believe in social barriers , and simply enjoyed the society of young men . Then Carson asked Wilde directly whether he had ever kissed a certain servant boy , Wilde responded , " Oh , dear no . He was a particularly plain boy ? unfortunately ugly ? I pitied him for it . " Carson pressed him on the answer , repeatedly asking why the boy 's ugliness was relevant . Wilde hesitated , then for the first time became flustered : " You sting me and insult me and try to unnerve me ; and at times one says things flippantly when

one ought to speak more seriously . "

In his opening speech for the defence , Carson announced that he had located several male prostitutes who were to testify that they had had sex with Wilde . On the advice of his lawyers , Wilde dropped the prosecution . Queensberry was found not guilty , as the court declared that his accusation that Wilde was " posing as a Somdomite " [ sic ] was justified , " true in substance and in fact . " Under the Libel Act 1843 , Queensberry 's acquittal rendered Wilde legally liable for the considerable expenses Queensberry had incurred in his defence , which left Wilde bankrupt .

= = = Regina v. Wilde = = =

After Wilde left the court , a warrant for his arrest was applied for on charges of sodomy and gross indecency . Robbie Ross found Wilde at the Cadogan Hotel , Knightsbridge , with Reginald Turner ; both men advised Wilde to go at once to Dover and try to get a boat to France ; his mother advised him to stay and fight . Wilde , lapsing into inaction , could only say , " The train has gone . It 's too late . " Wilde was arrested for " gross indecency " under Section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885 , a term meaning homosexual acts not amounting to buggery ( an offence under a separate statute ) . At Wilde 's instruction , Ross and Wilde 's butler forced their way into the bedroom and library of 16 Tite Street , packing some personal effects , manuscripts , and letters . Wilde was then imprisoned on remand at Holloway where he received daily visits from Douglas .

Events moved quickly and his prosecution opened on 26 April 1895 . Wilde pleaded not guilty . He had already begged Douglas to leave London for Paris , but Douglas complained bitterly , even wanting to give evidence ; he was pressed to go and soon fled to the Hotel du Monde . Fearing persecution , Ross and many others also left the United Kingdom during this time . Under cross examination Wilde was at first hesitant , then spoke eloquently :

Charles Gill ( prosecuting ) : What is " the love that dare not speak its name " ?

Wilde : " The love that dare 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 dare 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 response was counter @-@ productive in a legal sense as it only served to reinforce the charges of homosexual behaviour . The trial ended with the jury unable to reach a verdict . Wilde 's counsel , Sir Edward Clarke , was finally able to get a magistrate to allow Wilde and his friends to post bail . The Reverend Stewart Headlam put up most of the £ 5 @,@ 000 surety required by the court , having disagreed with Wilde 's treatment by the press and the courts . Wilde was freed from Holloway and , shunning attention , went into hiding at the house of Ernest and Ada Leveson , two of his firm friends . Edward Carson approached Frank Lockwood QC , the Solicitor General and asked " Can we not let up on the fellow now ? " Lockwood answered that he would like to do so , but feared that the case had become too politicised to be dropped .

The final trial was presided over by Mr Justice Wills . On 25 May 1895 Wilde and Alfred Taylor were convicted of gross indecency and sentenced to two years ' hard labour . The judge described the sentence , the maximum allowed , as " totally inadequate for a case such as this , " and that the case was " the worst case I have ever tried " . Wilde 's response " And I ? May I say nothing , my Lord ? " was drowned out in cries of " Shame " in the courtroom .

= = Imprisonment = =

Wilde entered prison on 25 May 1895 , and was released on 18 May 1897 .

He first entered Newgate Prison in London for a week for processing , then was moved to Pentonville Prison , where the " hard labour " to which he had been sentenced consisted of many hours of walking a treadmill and picking oakum ( separating the fibres in scraps of old navy ropes ) , and where prisoners were allowed to read only the Bible and The Pilgrim 's Progress . Prisoners were not allowed to speak to each other , and , when out of their cells , were required to wear a cap with a thick veil so they would not be recognised by other prisoners .

A few months later he was moved to Wandsworth Prison in London . Inmates there also followed the regimen of " hard labour , hard fare and a hard bed " , which wore harshly on Wilde 's delicate health . In November he collapsed during chapel from illness and hunger . His right ear drum was ruptured in the fall , an injury that later contributed to his death . He spent two months in the infirmary .

Richard B. Haldane , the Liberal MP and reformer , visited Wilde and had him transferred in November to Reading Gaol , 30 miles ( 48 km ) west of London on 23 November 1895 . The transfer itself was the lowest point of his incarceration , as a crowd jeered and spat at him on the railway platform . Here , he spent the remainder of his sentence , and was assigned the third cell on the third floor of C ward ? and thereafter was addressed and identified only by " C33 " ? the number of his cell , the third cell on the third floor of C ward .

About five months after Wilde arrived at Reading Gaol , Charles Thomas Wooldridge , a trooper in the Royal Horse Guards , was brought to Reading to await his trial for murdering his wife on 29 March 1896 ; on 17 June Wooldridge was sentenced to death and returned to Reading for his execution , which took place on Tuesday , 7 July 1896 ? the first hanging at Reading in 18 years . From Wooldridge 's hanging , Wilde later wrote The Ballad of Reading Gaol .

Wilde was not , at first , even allowed paper and pen but Haldane eventually succeeded in allowing access to books and writing materials . Wilde requested , among others : the Bible in French ; Italian and German grammars ; some Ancient Greek texts , Dante 's Divine Comedy , Joris @-@ Karl Huysmans 's new French novel about Christian redemption En Route , and essays by St Augustine , Cardinal Newman and Walter Pater .

Between January and March 1897 Wilde wrote a 50 @,@ 000 @-@ word letter to Douglas . He was not allowed to send it , but was permitted to take it with him upon release . In reflective mode , Wilde coldly examines his career to date , how he had been a colourful agent provocateur in Victorian society , his art , like his paradoxes , seeking to subvert as well as sparkle . His own estimation of himself was : one who " stood in symbolic relations to the art and culture of my age " . It was from these heights that his life with Douglas began , and Wilde examines that particularly closely , repudiating him for what Wilde finally sees as his arrogance and vanity : he had not forgotten Douglas 's remark , when he was ill , " When you are not on your pedestal you are not interesting . " Wilde blamed himself , though , for the ethical degradation of character that he allowed Douglas to bring about in him and took responsibility for his own fall , " I am here for having tried to put your father in prison . " The first half concludes with Wilde forgiving Douglas , for his own sake as much as Douglas 's . The second half of the letter traces Wilde 's spiritual journey of redemption and fulfilment through his prison reading . He realised that his ordeal had filled his soul with the fruit of experience , however bitter it tasted at the time .

... I wanted to eat of the fruit of all the trees in the garden of the world ... And so , indeed , I went out , and so I lived . My only mistake was that I confined myself so exclusively to the trees of what seemed to me the sun @-@ lit side of the garden , and shunned the other side for its shadow and its gloom .

Wilde was released from prison on 18 May 1897 and sailed immediately for France . He would never return to Britain or to Ireland .

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 later denied having received it ) . De Profundis was partially published in 1905 , its complete and correct publication first occurred in 1962 in The Letters of Oscar Wilde .

= = Decline : 1897 ? 1900 = =

= = = Exile = = =

Though Wilde 's health had suffered greatly from the harshness and diet of prison , he had a feeling of spiritual renewal . He immediately wrote to the Society of Jesus requesting a six @-@ month Catholic retreat ; when the request was denied , Wilde wept . " I intend to be received into the Catholic Church before long " , Wilde told a journalist who asked about his religious intentions .

He spent his last three years in impoverished exile . He took the name " Sebastian Melmoth " , after Saint Sebastian , and the titular character of Melmoth the Wanderer ; a Gothic novel by Charles Maturin , Wilde 's great @-@ uncle . Wilde wrote two long letters to the editor of the Daily Chronicle , describing the brutal conditions of English prisons and advocating penal reform . His discussion of the dismissal of Warder Martin for giving biscuits to an anaemic child prisoner , repeated the themes of the corruption and degeneration of punishment that he had earlier outlined in *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* .

Wilde spent mid @-@ 1897 with Robert Ross in the seaside village of Berneval @-@ le @-@ Grand in northern France , where he wrote *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* , narrating the execution of Charles Thomas Wooldridge , who murdered his wife in a rage at her infidelity ; it moves from an objective story @-@ telling to symbolic identification with the prisoners as a whole . No attempt is made to assess the justice of the laws which convicted them , but rather the poem highlights the brutalisation of the punishment that all convicts share . Wilde juxtaposes the executed man and himself with the line " Yet each man kills the thing he loves " . Wilde too was separated from his wife and sons . He adopted the proletarian ballad form , and the author was credited as " C33 " , Wilde 's cell number in Reading Gaol . He suggested that it be published in *Reynold 's Magazine* , " because it circulates widely among the criminal classes ? to which I now belong ? for once I will be read by my peers ? a new experience for me " . It was an immediate roaring commercial success , going through seven editions in less than two years , only after which " [ Oscar Wilde ] " was added to the title page , though many in literary circles had known Wilde to be the author . It brought him a little money .

Although Douglas had been the cause of his misfortunes , he and Wilde were reunited in August 1897 at Rouen . This meeting was disapproved of by the friends and families of both men . Constance Wilde was already refusing to meet Wilde or allow him to see their sons , though she sent him money ? a meagre three pounds a week . During the latter part of 1897 , Wilde and Douglas lived together near Naples for a few months until they were separated by their families under the threat of cutting off all funds .

Wilde 's final address was at the dingy Hôtel d 'Alsace ( now known as L 'Hôtel ) , on rue des Beaux @-@ Arts in Saint @-@ Germain @-@ des @-@ Prés , Paris . " This poverty really breaks one 's heart : it is so sale [ filthy ] , so utterly depressing , so hopeless . Pray do what you can " he wrote to his publisher . He corrected and published *An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* , the proofs of which , according to Ellmann , show a man " very much in command of himself and of the play " , but he refused to write anything else : " I can write , but have lost the joy of writing " .

He wandered the boulevards alone , and spent what little money he had on alcohol . A series of embarrassing encounters with English visitors , or Frenchmen he had known in better days , drowned his spirit . Soon Wilde was sufficiently confined to his hotel to joke , on one of his final trips outside , " My wallpaper and I are fighting a duel to the death . One of us has got to go . " On 12 October 1900 he sent a telegram to Ross : " Terribly weak . Please come . " His moods fluctuated ; Max Beerbohm relates how their mutual friend Reginald ' Reggie ' Turner had found Wilde very depressed after a nightmare . " I dreamt that I had died , and was supping with the dead ! " " I am sure " , Turner replied , " that you must have been the life and soul of the party . " Turner was one of the very few of the old circle who remained with Wilde right to the end , and was at his bedside when he died .

== Death ==

By 25 November Wilde had developed cerebral meningitis . Robbie Ross arrived on 29 November and sent for a priest , and Wilde was conditionally baptised into the Catholic Church by Fr Cuthbert Dunne , a Passionist priest from Dublin ( the sacrament being conditional because of the doctrine that one may be baptised only once ) , Wilde having been baptised in the Church of Ireland , and having moreover a recollection of Catholic baptism as a child , a fact later attested to by the minister of the sacrament , Fr Lawrence Fox . Fr Dunne recorded the baptism :

As the voiture rolled through the dark streets that wintry night , the sad story of Oscar Wilde was in part repeated to me ... Robert Ross knelt by the bedside , assisting me as best he could while I administered conditional baptism , and afterwards answering the responses while I gave Extreme Unction to the prostrate man and recited the prayers for the dying . As the man was in a semi @-@ comatose condition , I did not venture to administer the Holy Viaticum ; still I must add that he could be roused and was roused from this state in my presence . When roused , he gave signs of being inwardly conscious ... Indeed I was fully satisfied that he understood me when told that I was about to receive him into the Catholic Church and gave him the Last Sacraments ... And when I repeated close to his ear the Holy Names , the Acts of Contrition , Faith , Hope and Charity , with acts of humble resignation to the Will of God , he tried all through to say the words after me .

Wilde died of cerebral meningitis on 30 November 1900 . Different opinions are given as to the cause of the meningitis : Richard Ellmann claimed it was syphilitic ; however , 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 ( from the prison injury , see above ) treated for several years ( une ancienne suppuration de l 'oreille droite d 'ailleurs en traitement depuis plusieurs années ) and made no allusion to syphilis .

== Burial ==

Wilde was initially buried in the Cimetière de Bagneux outside Paris ; in 1909 his remains were disinterred and transferred to Père Lachaise Cemetery , inside the city . His tomb there was designed by Sir Jacob Epstein , It was commissioned by Robert Ross , who asked for a small compartment to be made for his own ashes , which were duly transferred in 1950 . The modernist angel depicted as a relief on the tomb was originally complete with male genitalia , which have since been vandalised ; their current whereabouts are unknown . In 2000 , Leon Johnson , a multimedia artist , installed a silver prosthesis to replace them .

In 2011 the tomb was cleaned of the many lipstick marks left there by admirers , and a glass barrier was installed to prevent further marks or damage .

The epitaph is a verse from The Ballad of Reading Gaol :

And alien tears will fill for him

Pity 's long @-@ broken urn ,

For his mourners will be outcast men ,

And outcasts always mourn .

== Biographies ==

Wilde 's life continues to fascinate , and he has been the subject of numerous biographies since his death . The earliest were memoirs by those who knew him : often they are personal or impressionistic accounts which can be good character sketches , but are sometimes factually unreliable . Frank Harris , his friend and editor , wrote a biography , Oscar Wilde : His Life and Confessions ( 1916 ) ; though prone to exaggeration and sometimes factually inaccurate , it offers a good literary portrait of Wilde . Lord Alfred Douglas wrote two books about his relationship with Wilde . Oscar Wilde and Myself ( 1914 ) , largely ghost @-@ written by T.W.H. Crosland , vindictively reacted to Douglas 's discovery that De Profundis was addressed to him and defensively

tried to distance him from Wilde 's scandalous reputation . Both authors later regretted their work . Later , in *Oscar Wilde : A Summing Up* ( 1939 ) and his *Autobiography* he was more sympathetic to Wilde . Of Wilde 's other close friends , Robert Sherard , Robert Ross , his literary executor ; and Charles Ricketts variously published biographies , reminiscences or correspondence . The first more or less objective biography of Wilde came about when Hesketh Pearson wrote *Oscar Wilde : His Life and Wit* ( 1946 ) . In 1954 Vyvyan Holland published his memoir *Son of Oscar Wilde* , which recounts the difficulties Wilde 's wife and children faced after his imprisonment . It was revised and updated by Merlin Holland in 1989 .

*Oscar Wilde* , a critical study by Arthur Ransome was published in 1912 . The book only briefly mentioned Wilde 's life , but subsequently Ransome ( and The Times Book Club ) were sued for libel by Lord Alfred Douglas . The trial in April 1913 was in a way a re @-@ run of the trial ( s ) of Oscar Wilde . The trial resulted from Douglas 's rivalry with Robbie Ross for Wilde ( and his need of money ) . Douglas lost ; *De Profundis* which was read in part at the trial disproved his claims ( Ross had shown Ransome the full text of it ) .

Wilde 's life was still waiting for independent , true scholarship when Richard Ellmann began researching his 1987 biography *Oscar Wilde* , for which he posthumously won a National ( USA ) Book Critics Circle Award in 1988 and a Pulitzer Prize in 1989 . The book was the basis for the 1997 film *Wilde* , directed by Brian Gilbert and starring Stephen Fry as the title character .

Neil McKenna 's 2003 biography , *The Secret Life of Oscar Wilde* , offers an exploration of Wilde 's sexuality . Often speculative in nature , it was widely criticised for its pure conjecture and lack of scholarly rigour . Thomas Wright 's *Oscar 's Books* ( 2008 ) explores Wilde 's reading from his childhood in Dublin to his death in Paris . After tracking down many books that once belonged to Wilde 's Tite Street library ( dispersed at the time of his trials ) , Wright was the first to examine Wilde 's marginalia .

Wilde 's charm also had a lasting effect on Parisian literati , who produced several original biographies and monographs on him . André Gide , on whom Wilde had such a strange effect , wrote , *In Memoriam* , *Oscar Wilde* ; Wilde also features in his journals . Thomas Louis , who had earlier translated books on Wilde into French , produced his own *L 'esprit d 'Oscar Wilde* in 1920 . Modern books include Philippe Jullian 's *Oscar Wilde* , and *L 'affaire Oscar Wilde , ou , Du danger de laisser la justice mettre le nez dans nos draps* ( *The Oscar Wilde Affair , or , On the Danger of Allowing Justice to put its Nose in our Sheets* ) by Odon Vallet , a French religious historian .

= = Selected works = =

*Ravenna* ( 1878 )

*Poems* ( 1881 )

*The Happy Prince and Other Stories* ( 1888 , fairy stories )

*Lord Arthur Savile 's Crime and Other Stories* ( 1891 , stories )

*House of Pomegranates* ( 1891 , fairy stories )

*Intentions* ( 1891 , essays and dialogues on aesthetics )

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* ( first published in Lippincott 's Monthly Magazine July 1890 , in book form in 1891 ; novel )

*The Soul of Man under Socialism* ( 1891 , political essay )

*Lady Windermere 's Fan* ( 1892 , play )

*A Woman of No Importance* ( 1893 , play )

*An Ideal Husband* ( performed 1895 , published 1898 ; play )

*The Importance of Being Earnest* ( performed 1895 , published 1898 ; play )

*De Profundis* ( written 1897 , published variously 1905 , 1908 , 1949 , 1962 ; epistle )

*The Ballad of Reading Gaol* ( 1898 , poem )

= = Tributes = =

In 2012 , Wilde was inducted into the Legacy Walk , an outdoor public display which celebrates

LGBT history and people .