

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) stands out among Victorian dramatists. The son of an eminent Dublin surgeon, Wilde studied at Trinity College, then attended Magdalen College, Oxford, where he founded the Aesthetic Movement, which advocated "art for art's sake." His aesthetic idiosyncrasies, such as his wearing his hair long, dressing colorfully, and carrying flowers while lecturing, were parodied by Gilbert and Sullivan in the operetta *Patience* (1881).

After his marriage to Constance Lloyd in 1884, Wilde published several children's books. In 1891, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, his tale of a hedonistic Adonis with the tormented soul of a satyr, brought him to prominence. Wilde took the London stage by storm with his witty, epigrammatic style, insolent ease of utterance, and suave urbanity in a brilliant series of domestic comedies: *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), and *An Ideal Husband* (1894). The combination of polished social drama and corruscatingly witty dialogue found in *Lady Windermere's Fan* was repeated in 1895 in the hit comedies *An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, which appeared simultaneously on the London stage.

That same year, Wilde's tragic downfall was precipitated when he was accused of homosexuality by the Marquis of Queensbury, father of Wilde's intimate, Lord Alfred Douglas. The irate peer left a card at Wilde's club addressed, "To Oscar Wilde posing as a Somdomite" [sic]. Wilde, taking it that the writer meant "sodomite," sued for libel. After a sensational trial, Wilde was sentenced to two years' hard labor for homosexual practices. Sent first to Wandsworth Prison in November, 1895, Wilde was subsequently transferred to Reading Gaol. Bankrupt and ruined in health, Wilde left prison in 1897 and lived, bitter and broken, in Paris until his death three years later.

#### WEB RESOURCES

Oscariana (<http://www.oscariana.net/>) is a good introduction to all things Wildean. Official Site of Oscar Wilde (<http://www.cmgww.com/historic/wilde/>) is maintained by Wilde's grandson, and includes a family biography and hard-to-find photographs. CELT: Chronology of Oscar Wilde (<http://www.ucc.ie/celt/wilde.html>) contains electronic text versions of most of Wilde's works.

The Trials of Oscar Wilde

(<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/wilde/wilde.htm>) focuses on Wilde's legal travails, containing much interesting information about his final years.

Oscar Wilde Quotations (<http://www.webdesk.com/quotations/wilde.html>) showcases Wilde's bons mots.