

# ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



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## Episode #215

# The Fantastic Life of Oscar Wilde

## 30th Nov, 2021

[00:00:00] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:12] The show where you can listen to fascinating stories, and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:22] I'm Alastair Budge, and today we are going to be talking about The Fantastic Life of Oscar Wilde.

[00:00:30] He was a [playwright](#)<sup>1</sup>, a journalist, an intellectual, a [wit](#)<sup>2</sup>, an academic, a husband, a father, and a lover.

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<sup>1</sup> someone who writes plays (a work written to be performed on stage)

<sup>2</sup> someone who can express himself in a clever and humorous way

## The Fantastic Life of Oscar Wilde

[00:00:39] He was one of the great writers of the 19th century, along with the novelist Charles Dickens, one of the first literary [celebrities](#)<sup>3</sup>, but his work was [overshadowed](#)<sup>4</sup> by his private life, [culminating](#)<sup>5</sup> in his trial for homosexuality and [subsequent](#)<sup>6</sup> [imprisonment](#)<sup>7</sup>.

[00:00:58] So, in this episode we are going to talk about his fantastic life, from his early childhood as the son of two [prominent](#)<sup>8</sup> Dublin intellectuals, his [boy genius](#)<sup>9</sup> stage at university, finding his own identity and the Aesthetic Movement, becoming a famous [playwright](#) and the [talk of the town](#)<sup>10</sup> right through to his double life, his [eventual](#)<sup>11</sup> trial and [imprisonment](#) and his tragic final years.

[00:01:27] He only lived to the age of 46, but he managed to achieve a lot in a relatively short space of time.

[00:01:35] So, without further ado, let's get right into it.

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<sup>3</sup> famous and popular people

<sup>4</sup> caused to seem less important

<sup>5</sup> reaching its highest point or degree

<sup>6</sup> following

<sup>7</sup> the state of being kept in prison or captivity

<sup>8</sup> well known and important

<sup>9</sup> a boy of amazing talent

<sup>10</sup> being the centre of attention or the person that many people talk about

<sup>11</sup> happening at the end

## The Fantastic Life of Oscar Wilde

[00:01:42] Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde was born in Dublin on the 16th of October 1854 to a [prominent](#) Anglo-Irish family of intellectuals.

[00:01:55] Anglo-Irish, by the way, is a term that's used for Irish people with English [roots](#)<sup>12</sup>, English [heritage](#)<sup>13</sup>. It doesn't mean half-Irish, half-English, it means Irish with English [heritage](#).

[00:02:09] Wilde's father was a [prominent](#) surgeon, and a regular contributor to medical [journals](#)<sup>14</sup>.

[00:02:16] Wilde's mother was a poet with the [pen name](#)<sup>15</sup> "Speranza", which the Italian speakers will know is Italian for "hope".

[00:02:26] Both Wilde's parents were very clever, [witty](#)<sup>16</sup> people, and Wilde grew up in a privileged environment full of intellectual conversation.

[00:02:37] Oscar was clearly a talented boy from a young age. As a teenager he [claimed](#)<sup>17</sup> he could read two opposite pages of a book at the same time, and he would be challenged by his classmates to read long passages of text in very short periods of time.

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<sup>12</sup> family origins

<sup>13</sup> origins

<sup>14</sup> magazines that present articles on a particular subject

<sup>15</sup> a name chosen by a writer to use instead of his real name when publishing books

<sup>16</sup> being able to express themselves in a clever and funny way

<sup>17</sup> said that something was true

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[00:02:56] He wrote that he would be able to read a three-volume novel, so that would be around 900 pages, in half an hour, and to be able to give an [accurate](#)<sup>18</sup> summary of the story.

[00:03:09] If he had an hour to read it then he would be able to give a [narrative](#)<sup>19</sup> of the most important scenes.

[00:03:17] He was clearly a very [gifted](#)<sup>20</sup> child, and he knew how to [please](#)<sup>21</sup> his audience.

[00:03:24] His academic talents led to a [scholarship](#)<sup>22</sup> to study Classics, meaning the language and literature of Ancient Greece and Rome, at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland's most [prestigious](#)<sup>23</sup> university, at the age of 16.

[00:03:39] Now, of course this was impressive, but it wasn't completely [unheard of](#)<sup>24</sup> for students to start university at a much younger age than students currently do.

[00:03:52] Charles Darwin, for example, also started when he was 16.

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<sup>18</sup> correct, without mistakes

<sup>19</sup> description

<sup>20</sup> having special abilities

<sup>21</sup> make them happy

<sup>22</sup> payment made to support his education which was given to him as a reward

<sup>23</sup> respected and admired

<sup>24</sup> extremely uncommon or unusual

## The Fantastic Life of Oscar Wilde

[00:03:57] Wilde, however, was **anything but**<sup>25</sup> a normal student. He **excelled**<sup>26</sup> academically, and came top of his class in his first year, then won another **scholarship** to Oxford University, where he again studied Classics from 1874 to 1878.

[00:04:18] While at Oxford he became particularly **well-known**<sup>27</sup> to other students. He would wear **flamboyant**<sup>28</sup> clothes, had long hair, and decorated his room with flowers.

[00:04:32] Remember, this was in Victorian England, where men of a certain class had short hair, they wore dark suits, and lived pretty **plain**<sup>29</sup>, **non-ostentatious**<sup>30</sup> lives.

[00:04:46] Although it was Sigmund Freud who was to popularise the term **repression**<sup>31</sup> to mean sexual **repression** in the first years of the twentieth century, this was a highly **repressed**<sup>32</sup> society.

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<sup>25</sup> not at all

<sup>26</sup> performed especially well

<sup>27</sup> known or recognised by

<sup>28</sup> showing confidence and meant to attract attention

<sup>29</sup> simple, not remarkable

<sup>30</sup> not meant to impress

<sup>31</sup> an act or process which limits freedom

<sup>32</sup> having limited freedom or ways of expression

## The Fantastic Life of Oscar Wilde

[00:05:00] Wilde was [at the forefront](#)<sup>33</sup> of a movement called [Aestheticism](#)<sup>34</sup>, which [emphasised](#)<sup>35</sup> how something looked and felt, it put a focus on beauty. Victorian [norms](#)<sup>36</sup>, especially with masculine values, put an [emphasis](#)<sup>37</sup> on practicality or morality, and there was limited value placed on how beautiful something should be.

[00:05:27] A quote you may have heard associated with this movement is “art for art’s [sake](#)<sup>38</sup>”, meaning that art should be created for its own beauty and qualities, it shouldn't try to serve something else.

[00:05:43] Because of Wilde’s [unorthodox](#)<sup>39</sup> beliefs and behaviour, he often became a [target](#)<sup>40</sup> at Oxford, and there are reports of other students [bursting](#)<sup>41</sup> into his room with the intention of [beating him up](#)<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> in a leading position

<sup>34</sup> an artistic and intellectual movement which put a focus on beauty

<sup>35</sup> put a focus on

<sup>36</sup> accepted ideas or standards of behaviour

<sup>37</sup> focus, particular attention to

<sup>38</sup> purpose, interest

<sup>39</sup> different from what was usually expected

<sup>40</sup> a person who was criticized

<sup>41</sup> going or entering suddenly and with force

<sup>42</sup> hurting him physically

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[00:05:57] But, Wilde was a big man, he was 1 metre 90, and quite **chunky**<sup>43</sup> too. He was able to **fight off**<sup>44</sup> a group of 4 **undergraduates**<sup>45</sup>, he was certainly **no pushover**<sup>46</sup>.

[00:06:11] His **extravagant**<sup>47</sup> lifestyle of flowers, fancy clothes, **porcelain**<sup>48</sup> china and beautiful objects came at a high price though, Wilde lived an expensive life.

[00:06:23] He was supported by **scholarships**<sup>49</sup> and by an **allowance**<sup>50</sup> from his parents, but after his father's death in April of 1876 not only did the money **dry up**<sup>51</sup>, his **allowance** stopped, but it was discovered that his father was deeply **in debt**<sup>52</sup>.

[00:06:44] With an expensive lifestyle to support, Wilde needed to find a source of income.

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<sup>43</sup> heavy in form, thick

<sup>44</sup> defend himself against

<sup>45</sup> students who are studying at a university

<sup>46</sup> not an opponent who was easy to defeat

<sup>47</sup> expensive and impressive

<sup>48</sup> a hard, shiny, white substance used for making pottery

<sup>49</sup> payments made to support his education which were given to him as a reward

<sup>50</sup> money that were given regularly

<sup>51</sup> became used up, disappeared

<sup>52</sup> unable to pay what he owed

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[00:06:50] Although he would have certainly been [capable](#)<sup>53</sup>, he didn't want to be an academic.

[00:06:56] He wrote. " I'll be a poet, a writer, a [dramatist](#)<sup>54</sup>. Somehow, or other, I'll be famous, and if not famous, [notorious](#)<sup>55</sup>".

[00:07:07] Well, he ended up famous and [notorious](#).

[00:07:11] Shortly after his graduation from Oxford he returned to Ireland, partly to see a woman it's thought that he was in love with, a lady named Florence Balcombe.

[00:07:23] But, to his disappointment, she was engaged to another man, Bram Stoker, a name you may recognise as he was the author of the Gothic horror novel Dracula.

[00:07:36] Wilde packed his bags and moved to London, where he began publishing poems and short stories for literary magazines. He was the Victorian equivalent of a newspaper columnist, really.

[00:07:51] Although he made a decent amount of money from this, it was to be a [lecture](#)<sup>56</sup> tour of the United States that was the real [money-maker](#)<sup>57</sup> for the young

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<sup>53</sup> able to do it

<sup>54</sup> a person who writes plays

<sup>55</sup> famous for something bad

<sup>56</sup> a formal talk on a serious subject delivered before an audience or class

<sup>57</sup> the activity that produced a lot of money

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Wilde. In 1882, aged 27, he [embarked](#)<sup>58</sup> on a year-long tour of America where he lectured on [Aestheticism](#), this new movement that was [taking much of the literary world by storm](#)<sup>59</sup>.

[00:08:19] He was very well aware of his own talents, and he was certainly not a [modest](#)<sup>60</sup> man.

[00:08:26] You may be aware of one of his most famous quotes, where he is reported to have said to a [customs](#)<sup>61</sup> official when he arrived in the US, “I have nothing to declare except my genius”.

[00:08:41] While on tour in the US and after returning home, a rich man, he loved the attention and [fame](#)<sup>62</sup> that followed him.

[00:08:50] There were reports of him walking down Piccaddily, a famous street in London, carrying a [lily](#)<sup>63</sup> flower and with his long hair [flowing](#)<sup>64</sup>. When he was asked

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<sup>58</sup> began

<sup>59</sup> quickly becoming very popular among the people who were involved with written pieces of art

<sup>60</sup> having a humble or moderate opinion about himself

<sup>61</sup> the place at the port where officials check incoming travellers, goods, etc.

<sup>62</sup> the state of being well known and recognised

<sup>63</sup> a bell-shaped flower with a long stem

<sup>64</sup> hanging loosely in an attractive and elegant way

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whether he actually did this or not he responded, "It's not whether I did it or not that's important, but whether people believed I did it".

[00:09:13] While he was a wealthy man by many people's standards, he had very expensive tastes, and he needed to find another source of income to support his lifestyle.

[00:09:26] He found one, or rather, he fell in love with a rich woman, a lady called Constance Lloyd, who was the daughter of a wealthy lawyer.

[00:09:36] Luckily for Wilde, she had similarly expensive tastes, and after they married and moved in together in 1884 their London house was decorated to [exceptionally](#)<sup>65</sup> high standards.

[00:09:52] Oscar Wilde was now married, and within the period of two years they had two children in quick succession. Wilde was, by all reports, a [devoted](#)<sup>66</sup> father and husband, and it looked like he might put his [eccentric](#)<sup>67</sup> days of [Aestheticism](#) behind him.

[00:10:13] But there was another side to his character that he perhaps hadn't fully discovered by that point.

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<sup>65</sup> unusually, extraordinarily

<sup>66</sup> loving and loyal

<sup>67</sup> strange or unusual

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[00:10:20] Remember, Wilde had spent almost 7 years studying Classics at two of the most [prestigious](#) universities in the British Isles.

[00:10:30] He had studied Roman and Greek literature [in depth](#)<sup>68</sup>, and became very interested in the idea, [prominent](#) amongst the early Greeks in particular, of older men having close, perhaps even [intimate](#)<sup>69</sup>, relationships with younger men.

[00:10:48] His entire philosophy was about doing what felt right, and that one shouldn't [repress](#)<sup>70</sup> one's feelings.

[00:10:57] What's more, homosexuality, if you were wondering where this is going, homosexuality was illegal in Great Britain, it was literally a crime to engage in homosexual acts.

[00:11:10] This wasn't to be an [obstacle](#)<sup>71</sup> to Oscar Wilde. It's not clear exactly when and with whom his first homosexual relationship was with, but it's thought to be with a Canadian-British journalist in 1886, the year after Wilde's second child was born.

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<sup>68</sup> carefully and in great detail

<sup>69</sup> sexual

<sup>70</sup> put a limit on

<sup>71</sup> problem, something that would prevent him from moving forward

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[00:11:31] The late 1880s saw Wilde spending an increasing amount of time away from his wife and family. In terms of his literary [output](#)<sup>72</sup>, he wrote a few short stories and essays, but nothing that brought him serious [fame](#).

[00:11:48] It wasn't to be until 1890, with the publication of A Picture of Dorian Gray that he was really [catapulted](#)<sup>73</sup> to [fame](#).

[00:11:59] A Picture of Dorian Gray, if you haven't read it, is a [novella](#)<sup>74</sup> or short novel about a beautiful man who stays young while his portrait grows old and ugly. Throughout the book there is a theme, an [undercurrent](#)<sup>75</sup> of male beauty, and you can sense Wilde's appreciation of and love for the male form when you read it.

[00:12:27] Wilde knew that the book would be [controversial](#)<sup>76</sup>, and in the preface to the book he wrote, "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all."

[00:12:44] Shortly after the publication of A Picture of Dorian Gray, Wilde met a young man by the name of Lord Alfred Bruce Douglas, otherwise known as Bosie.

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<sup>72</sup> amount of works that he produced

<sup>73</sup> led him suddenly and at a great speed

<sup>74</sup> short novel

<sup>75</sup> a hidden characteristic

<sup>76</sup> causing arguments and disagreement

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[00:12:57] When they met, in 1891, Bosie was 20 and a student at Oxford University, while Wilde was 37, a famous author and a married father of two children.

[00:13:12] They immediately fell in love, beginning a passionate relationship. Wilde was spending less and less time with his wife and children, instead moving from hotel room to hotel room with Bosie.

[00:13:27] Although Wilde was an [eccentric](#), [flamboyant](#) individual, he did his best to keep the relationship quiet - homosexuality was, remember, still a crime at the time.

[00:13:40] Bosie's father, however, soon found out and [he took exception to<sup>77</sup>](#) his son's relationship with Wilde, he hated the fact that his son was openly gay, and he claimed that Wilde was distracting him from his studies.

[00:13:58] Bosie came from an [aristocratic<sup>78</sup>](#) family, and his father was the Marquis of Queensberry. If you are a boxing fan and the name Queensberry [rings a bell<sup>79</sup>](#), well that's because Bosie's father invented the rules of modern boxing, Queensberry Rules.

[00:14:19] The Marquis of Queensberry did everything possible to try to [disrupt<sup>80</sup>](#) his son's relationship with Wilde. He threatened him privately and publicly.

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<sup>77</sup> strongly objected to, strongly disagreed with

<sup>78</sup> having a high social rank

<sup>79</sup> sounds somewhat familiar

<sup>80</sup> prevent from continuing

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[00:14:31] On the opening night of what would be one of Oscar Wilde's most successful plays, The Importance of Being Earnest, the Marquis of Queensbury even turned up at the theatre with a basket of **rotting**<sup>81</sup> vegetables that he **intended**<sup>82</sup> to throw at Wilde to **embarrass**<sup>83</sup> him.

[00:14:50] Later on that week the Marquis would do something that would change Wilde's life forever.

[00:14:58] He turned up at Wilde's private members club, a place called the Albemarle in London, and left a card at the reception.

[00:15:08] On it he had written "For Oscar Wilde, **posing**<sup>84</sup> **sodomite**". A **sodomite**<sup>85</sup> is an **old-fashioned**<sup>86</sup> **derogatory**<sup>87</sup> word for homosexual.

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<sup>81</sup> having gone bad, decayed

<sup>82</sup> planned

<sup>83</sup> cause him to feel shame and worry

<sup>84</sup> seeming to be

<sup>85</sup> homosexual (showing disrespect)

<sup>86</sup> belonging to a time in the past

<sup>87</sup> showing criticism and disrespect

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[00:15:20] Although these words might have been true, and it was no secret that Oscar Wilde and Bosie were engaged in a sexual relationship, Wilde was deeply [offended](#)<sup>88</sup> that Bosie's father had publicly accused him of a crime.

[00:15:36] Instead of [dropping it](#)<sup>89</sup>, of ignoring the matter, or [breaking off](#)<sup>90</sup> the relationship, he accused Bosie's father of [libel](#)<sup>91</sup>, the crime of stating in writing a false statement about someone that can affect their reputation.

[00:15:53] This meant that Bosie's father was arrested, and he [faced](#)<sup>92</sup> up to two years in prison. The only way that he could avoid prison would be if he could show that what he had claimed was true.

[00:16:09] Of course, both Bosie and Wilde [denied](#)<sup>93</sup> it, but the Marquis had hired private detectives [to dig deep](#)<sup>94</sup> into Wilde's private life. They found several male prostitutes who were ready to [testify](#)<sup>95</sup> that they had had sexual relationships with Wilde, and therefore the accusation was true.

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<sup>88</sup> upset, annoyed

<sup>89</sup> ignoring

<sup>90</sup> ending

<sup>91</sup> the crime of stating in writing a false statement about someone that can affect their reputation

<sup>92</sup> had to deal with

<sup>93</sup> said that it wasn't true

<sup>94</sup> to do a very thorough investigation

<sup>95</sup> provide proof

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[00:16:32] What's more, Wilde didn't help himself during the trial, and he certainly enjoyed the [spectacle](#)<sup>96</sup> of it.

[00:16:42] When Wilde was asked whether he had ever kissed one particular boy, Wilde responded, "Oh, dear no. He was a particularly [plain](#) boy – unfortunately ugly – I [pitied](#)<sup>97</sup> him for it."

[00:16:57] Of course, if you are trying to [convince](#)<sup>98</sup> a courtroom that you are not gay then saying that the reason you didn't kiss a boy was because he was ugly isn't a very good way of [going about it](#)<sup>99</sup>.

[00:17:11] When it became clear that the [libel](#) case was going nowhere, and that the Marquis had evidence that Wilde had hired male prostitutes, Wilde [dropped](#)<sup>100</sup> the case.

[00:17:23] The Marquis was free to go, but now the [spotlight](#)<sup>101</sup> turned to Wilde.

[00:17:30] He was arrested, and put on trial on the charges of homosexual activity. On these charges, he was certainly guilty. It [emerged](#)<sup>102</sup> that Wilde would frequently hire

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<sup>96</sup> public display

<sup>97</sup> felt sympathy

<sup>98</sup> make them believe

<sup>99</sup> starting doing it

<sup>100</sup> stopped arguing about

<sup>101</sup> attention

<sup>102</sup> became apparent, evident or known

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young, male prostitutes. He would pay for them to have [lavish](#)<sup>103</sup> dinners with him, then they would return to his hotel room, often with Bosie.

[00:17:54] During the trial, Wilde spoke passionately about the beauty of true love and passion, and of “the love that [dare](#)<sup>104</sup> not speak its name”. But the judge [was having none of it](#)<sup>105</sup>, and Wilde was sentenced to two years in prison.

[00:18:13] By this time Oscar Wilde was pretty much the most famous living [playwright](#) in the country. He was [flamboyant](#) and [controversial](#) but he was incredibly talented and well-known. And just like that he was [locked up](#)<sup>106</sup>, [shut up](#)<sup>107</sup> in a prison, even [denied](#)<sup>108</sup> any writing materials for the majority of his time in prison.

[00:18:39] Now, for anyone, prison must be a terrible experience, but for Wilde it was almost a death sentence.

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<sup>103</sup> rich, luxurious

<sup>104</sup> risk

<sup>105</sup> wasn't accepting any of this

<sup>106</sup> put behind a locked door

<sup>107</sup> kept in

<sup>108</sup> not allowed to have

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[00:18:48] Imagine, this is an incredibly talented **playwright** who had spent his afternoons and evenings in literary **salons**<sup>109</sup>, had met Victor Hugo, Toulouse Lautrec, Degas, who was used to a life of **considerable**<sup>110</sup> luxury.

[00:19:05] Then in an instant he was forced to wear prison clothes and walk on a **treadmill**<sup>111</sup> for 5 hours a day, with no contact with anyone from the outside world.

[00:19:18] When he was freed, two years later, he **emerged** a **broken man**<sup>112</sup>. The same evening of his release from prison he **set sail**<sup>113</sup> for France, and never returned again to the British Isles.

[00:19:34] His wife had left him, too **embarrassed**<sup>114</sup> to be married to the country's most public homosexual. He was **bankrupt**<sup>115</sup>, as he had had to pay all of the Marquis's legal fees when he lost the **libel** case.

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<sup>109</sup> social gatherings

<sup>110</sup> large in degree or extent

<sup>111</sup> a wheel with steps on which a person walks, used to power machinery

<sup>112</sup> damaged man

<sup>113</sup> began a voyage, a trip by ship

<sup>114</sup> feeling shame

<sup>115</sup> unable to pay what he owed

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[00:19:50] And the rest of the life of Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde was, I'm sorry to say, a pretty [sad affair](#)<sup>116</sup>.

[00:20:00] He was released from prison in 1897, and three years later he was dead at the age of 46.

[00:20:09] He died, in fact, on November 30th, exactly 121 years from when this episode was released.

[00:20:17] His last years had been spent mainly in Paris and Northern France, where he could be found [drifting](#)<sup>117</sup> from one cafe to another, [begging](#)<sup>118</sup> friends and [acquaintances](#)<sup>119</sup> for more money to buy another drink and a hot meal.

[00:20:33] He only wrote one more poem after leaving prison, a long poem called "The Ballad of Reading Gaol", in which he wrote of the [harsh](#)<sup>120</sup> treatment prisoners face in jail.

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<sup>116</sup> unfortunate, sad situation

<sup>117</sup> moving without a specific destination

<sup>118</sup> asking as charity

<sup>119</sup> people he had met

<sup>120</sup> very unpleasant, cruel

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[00:20:45] Even on his [deathbed](#)<sup>121</sup> he [retained](#)<sup>122</sup> his [trademark](#)<sup>123</sup> [wit](#) and humour. He was lying in bed, dying from [meningitis](#)<sup>124</sup>.

[00:20:56] His last words were, reportedly, “This wallpaper and I are fighting a [duel](#)<sup>125</sup> to the death. Either it goes or I do.”

[00:21:07] The wallpaper won, and Wilde died [penniless](#)<sup>126</sup> and [disgraced](#)<sup>127</sup> in France, [exiled](#)<sup>128</sup> from the country he had come to call home, Britain.

[00:21:19] Now, when it comes to the [legacy](#)<sup>129</sup> of Oscar Wilde, although he produced some brilliant plays and novels, his [legacy](#) is certainly one of wasted talent.

[00:21:31] Wilde was someone who was [persecuted](#)<sup>130</sup> and criminalised for the crime of being gay.

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<sup>121</sup> the bed on which he was dying

<sup>122</sup> kept, continued to have

<sup>123</sup> typical, characteristic

<sup>124</sup> a serious disease

<sup>125</sup> prearranged combat

<sup>126</sup> very poor

<sup>127</sup> having fallen from favour, shamed

<sup>128</sup> living in a foreign country because he couldn't live in his own

<sup>129</sup> the things he left or handed down after he died

<sup>130</sup> victimised or subjected to bad treatment

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[00:21:38] Spending time in prison destroyed him, and although he wasn't directly killed for his homosexuality, his literary career and perhaps even life was [cut drastically short](#)<sup>131</sup> because he spent time in prison.

[00:21:55] It's worth pointing out that Wilde was given a [posthumous](#)<sup>132</sup> [pardon](#)<sup>133</sup>, he was [pardoned](#)<sup>134</sup> for being sent to prison for homosexuality, but this came in 2017, somewhat too late.

[00:22:10] In terms of how people think about Wilde today, he is best known for his [wit](#) and humour. He was evidently an incredibly intelligent, [sharp](#)<sup>135</sup> and funny man, a "[wit](#)" in the classic sense of the word.

[00:22:26] He is one of the most [quoted](#)<sup>136</sup> authors not just of the 19th century, but really ever. He knew the power of a [well-put-together](#)<sup>137</sup> sentence, the power of words to [amuse](#)<sup>138</sup> and [insult](#)<sup>139</sup>.

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<sup>131</sup> ended much earlier than expected

<sup>132</sup> appearing after his death

<sup>133</sup> the action of releasing a person from punishment

<sup>134</sup> released from punishment

<sup>135</sup> clever, perceptive

<sup>136</sup> reproduced, repeated (regarding his sayings)

<sup>137</sup> well structured, well made

<sup>138</sup> make someone happy

<sup>139</sup> express disrespect

## The Fantastic Life of Oscar Wilde

[00:22:41] His literary **legacy** is huge, with his play The Importance of Being Earnest being regularly produced.

[00:22:50] Above all, perhaps, he is considered a gay **icon**<sup>140</sup> and is much celebrated by popular and **prominent** gay celebrities, such as the **polymath**<sup>141</sup> and TV presenter, Stephen Fry.

[00:23:03] Ultimately, he was a victim of his time, a victim of a **cruel**<sup>142</sup> law that not only meant he had to live part of his life **in hiding**<sup>143</sup>, but when he was challenged meant he was thrown in prison.

[00:23:19] Wilde once said, “To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all.”

[00:23:28] Well, his life may not have been long, but it's **undeniable**<sup>144</sup> that Oscar Wilde did a lot more than simply “exist”.

[00:23:39] OK then, that is it for today's episode on The Fantastic Life of Oscar Wilde.

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<sup>140</sup> symbol

<sup>141</sup> having knowledge of a lot of things

<sup>142</sup> not fair or just, severe

<sup>143</sup> where he couldn't be seen or found

<sup>144</sup> certain

**The Fantastic Life of Oscar Wilde**

[00:23:45] I hope it's been an interesting one, that you've learnt something new, and that it might even have inspired you to pick up a Wilde poem, novel or play, and see what all of the fuss is about.

[00:23:58] As always, I would love to know what you thought of this episode.

[00:24:02] Have you read any Oscar Wilde, or seen any of his plays performed, both in English or in your native language? What did you think of them?

[00:24:12] What were the laws around homosexuality like in your country? Were they as [cruel](#) as those in the UK?

[00:24:20] Let's get this discussion started - you can head right into our community forum, which is at [community.leonardoenglish.com](http://community.leonardoenglish.com) and get chatting away to other curious minds.

[00:24:31] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:24:36] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

**English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #215**  
**The Fantastic Life of Oscar Wilde**

## Key vocabulary

<b>Word</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Playwright</b>	someone who writes plays (a work written to be performed on stage)
<b>Wit</b>	someone who can express himself in a clever and humorous way
<b>Celebrities</b>	famous and popular people
<b>Overshadowed</b>	caused to seem less important
<b>Culminating</b>	reaching its highest point or degree
<b>Subsequent</b>	following
<b>Imprisonment</b>	the state of being kept in prison or captivity
<b>Prominent</b>	well known and important
<b>Boy genius</b>	a boy of amazing talent
<b>Talk of the town</b>	being the centre of attention or the person that many people talk about
<b>Eventual</b>	happening at the end
<b>Roots</b>	family origins

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<b>Heritage</b>	origins
<b>Journals</b>	magazines that present articles on a particular subject
<b>Pen name</b>	a name chosen by a writer to use instead of his real name when publishing books
<b>Witty</b>	being able to express themselves in a clever and funny way
<b>Claimed</b>	said that something was true
<b>Accurate</b>	correct, without mistakes
<b>Narrative</b>	description
<b>Gifted</b>	having special abilities
<b>Please</b>	make them happy
<b>Scholarship</b>	payment made to support his education which was given to him as a reward
<b>Prestigious</b>	respected and admired
<b>Unheard of</b>	extremely uncommon or unusual
<b>Anything but</b>	not at all
<b>Excelled</b>	performed especially well

**The Fantastic Life of Oscar Wilde**

<b>Well-known</b>	known or recognised by
<b>Flamboyant</b>	showing confidence and meant to attract attention
<b>Plain</b>	simple, not remarkable
<b>Non-ostentatious</b>	not meant to impress
<b>Repression</b>	an act or process which limits freedom
<b>Repressed</b>	having limited freedom or ways of expression
<b>At the forefront</b>	in a leading position
<b>Aestheticism</b>	an artistic and intellectual movement which put a focus on beauty
<b>Emphasised</b>	put a focus on
<b>Norms</b>	accepted ideas or standards of behaviour
<b>Emphasis</b>	focus, particular attention to
<b>Sake</b>	purpose, interest
<b>Unorthodox</b>	different from what was usually expected
<b>Target</b>	a person who was criticized
<b>Bursting</b>	going or entering suddenly and with force

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<b>Beating him up</b>	hurting him physically
<b>Chunky</b>	heavy in form, thick
<b>Fight off</b>	defend himself against
<b>Undergraduates</b>	students who are studying at a university
<b>No pushover</b>	not an opponent who was easy to defeat
<b>Extravagant</b>	expensive and impressive
<b>Porcelain</b>	a hard, shiny, white substance used for making pottery
<b>Scholarships</b>	payments made to support his education which were given to him as a reward
<b>Allowance</b>	money that were given regularly
<b>Dry up</b>	became used up, disappeared
<b>In debt</b>	unable to pay what he owed
<b>Capable</b>	able to do it
<b>Dramatist</b>	a person who writes plays
<b>Notorious</b>	famous for something bad
<b>Lecture</b>	a formal talk on a serious subject delivered before an audience or class

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<b>Money-maker</b>	the activity that produced a lot of money
<b>Embarked</b>	began
<b>Taking much of the literary world by storm</b>	quickly becoming very popular among the people who were involved with written pieces of art
<b>Modest</b>	having a humble or moderate opinion about himself
<b>Customs</b>	the place at the port where officials check incoming travellers, goods, and etc.
<b>Fame</b>	the state of being well known and recognised
<b>Lily</b>	a bell-shaped flower with a long stem
<b>Flowing</b>	hanging loosely in an attractive and elegant way
<b>Exceptionally</b>	unusually, extraordinarily
<b>Devoted</b>	loving and loyal
<b>Eccentric</b>	strange or unusual
<b>In depth</b>	carefully and in great detail
<b>Intimate</b>	sexual

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<b>Repress</b>	put a limit on
<b>Obstacle</b>	problem, something that would prevent him from moving forward
<b>Output</b>	amount of works that he produced
<b>Catapulted</b>	led him suddenly and at a great speed
<b>Novella</b>	short novel
<b>Undercurrent</b>	a hidden characteristic
<b>Controversial</b>	causing arguments and disagreement
<b>He took exception to</b>	strongly objected to, strongly disagreed with
<b>Aristocratic</b>	having a high social rank
<b>Rings a bell</b>	sounds somewhat familiar
<b>Disrupt</b>	prevent from continuing
<b>Rotting</b>	having gone bad, decayed
<b>Intended</b>	planned
<b>Embarrass</b>	cause him to feel shame and worry
<b>Posing</b>	seeming to be

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<b>Sodomite</b>	homosexual (showing disrespect)
<b>Old-fashioned</b>	belonging to a time in the past
<b>Derogatory</b>	showing criticism and disrespect
<b>Offended</b>	upset, annoyed
<b>Dropping it</b>	ignoring
<b>Breaking off</b>	ending
<b>Libel</b>	the crime of stating in writing a false statement about someone that can affect their reputation
<b>Faced</b>	had to deal with
<b>Denied</b>	said that it wasn't true
<b>To dig deep</b>	to do a very thorough investigation
<b>Testify</b>	provide proof
<b>Spectacle</b>	public display
<b>Pitied</b>	felt sympathy
<b>Convince</b>	make them believe
<b>Going about it</b>	starting doing it

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<b>Dropped</b>	stopped arguing about
<b>Spotlight</b>	attention
<b>Emerged</b>	became apparent, evident or known
<b>Lavish</b>	rich, luxurious
<b>Dare</b>	risk
<b>Was having none of it</b>	wasn't accepting any of this
<b>Locked up</b>	put behind a locked door
<b>Shut up</b>	kept in
<b>Denied</b>	not allowed to have
<b>Salons</b>	social gatherings
<b>Considerable</b>	large in degree or extent
<b>Treadmill</b>	a wheel with steps on which a person walks, used to power machinery
<b>Broken man</b>	damaged man
<b>Set sail</b>	began a voyage, a trip by ship
<b>Embarrassed</b>	feeling shame

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<b>Bankrupt</b>	unable to pay what he owed
<b>Sad affair</b>	unfortunate, sad situation
<b>Drifting</b>	moving without a specific destination
<b>Begging</b>	asking as charity
<b>Acquaintances</b>	people he had met
<b>Harsh</b>	very unpleasant, cruel
<b>Deathbed</b>	the bed on which he was dying
<b>Retained</b>	kept, continued to have
<b>Trademark</b>	typical, characteristic
<b>Meningitis</b>	a serious disease
<b>Duel</b>	prearranged combat
<b>Penniless</b>	very poor
<b>Disgraced</b>	having fallen from favour, shamed
<b>Exiled</b>	living in a foreign country because he couldn't live in his own
<b>Legacy</b>	the things he left or handed down after he died

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**Persecuted**                      victimised or subjected to bad treatment

**Cut drastically short**      ended much earlier than expected

**Posthumous**                    appearing after his death

**Pardon**                            the action of releasing a person from punishment

**Pardoned**                        released from punishment

**Sharp**                              clever, perceptive

**Quoted**                          reproduced, repeated (regarding his sayings)

**Well-put-together**            well structured, well made

**Amuse**                            make someone happy

**Insult**                            express disrespect

**Icon**                                symbol

**Polymath**                        having knowledge of a lot of things

**Cruel**                              not fair or just, severe

**In hiding**                        where he couldn't be seen or found

**Undeniable**                    certain

*We'd love to get your feedback on this episode.*

*What did you like? What could we do better?*

*What did you struggle to understand?*

*Let us know in the forum [community.leonardoenglish.com](https://community.leonardoenglish.com)*