

# Oscar Wilde

## Quotations

**Ireland:** 'Ireland is the Niobe among nations. The noblest materials for a great nation were there wrecked by the folly of England' (speech of 10 Feb. 1882, Chicago; *Oscar Wilde Discovers America*, NY 1936, p.168). Further, 'Indeed the poetic genius of the Celtic race never flags or wearies. It is as sweet by the groves of California as by the groves of Ireland, as strong in foreign lands as in the land which gave it birth. And indeed I do not know anything more wonderful, or more characteristic of the Celtic genius, than the quick artistic spirit in which we adapted ourselves to the English tongue. The Saxon took our lands from us and left them desolate - we took their language and added new beauties to it.' (Quoted in Montgomery Hyde, *Oscar Wilde*, 1976, 68-69; all the foregoing cited in John Jordan [essay on Shaw, Wilde, Synge and Yeats], in Richard Kearney, ed., *The Irish Mind*, 1985, p.213; see also Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, 1995, p.35.)

'I am Irish by race, but the English have condemned me to speak the language of Shakespeare' (Letter to de Goncourt, *Letters*, p.100; *Selected Letters*, p.197.)

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**"The Happy Prince":** 'I like to fancy that there may be many meanings in the Tale - for in writing it [...] I did not start with the idea and clothe it in form, but began with a form and strove to make it beautiful enough to have many secrets and many answers.' (Letter to Thos. Hutchinson, 7 May 1888; Hart-Davis, *Letters*, p.218; quoted in Angela Kingston, 'Homeroticism and the Child in Wilde's Fairy Tales', in *The Wildean*, July 2001, p.44; cited in Terry Eagleton, 'The Doubleness of Oscar Wilde', in *The Wildean*, 19, July 2001, pp.2-9.) Note that the authors contest the suggestion that there was any hint of pedophilia in Wilde's sexuality.

**W. B. Yeats:** 'The interesting thing about him is that he is a dandy as well as a philosopher. He is naturally insignificant in looks, but by dint of elaborate training in gesture has turned himself into quite a striking looking person'; [on being asked if Wilde was a snob:] 'No, I would not say that. England is a strange country to the Irish. To Wilde the aristocrats of England were like the nobles of Baghdad.' (All cited in Frank Tuohy, *Yeats*, 1976, pp.53-56).

**James Joyce,** "Oscar Wilde: The Poet of Salome": 'Here we touch on the pulse of Wilde's art - sin. He deceived himself into thinking that he was the bearer of good news of neo-paganism to an enslaved people. His own distinctive qualities, the qualities, perhaps, of his race - keenness, generosity, and a sexless intellect - he placed at the service of a theory of beauty which, according to him, was to bring back the golden age and the joy of the world's youth. But in some truth adheres to his subjective interpretations of Aristotle, to his restless thought that proceeds by sophisms rather than syllogisms, to his assimilations of nature as foreign to his [proud nature] as the delinquent is to the humble, at its very base is the truth inherent in the soul of Catholicism: that man cannot reach the divine heart except through that sense of separation and loss called sin.' (Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde: A Collection of Essays*, NY: Prentice Hall, 1969, p.60.)