



The
Canterville
Oscar Wilde
Read by **Rupert Degas**
Ghost

1	Chapter 1	5:22
2	As Canterville Chase is seven miles...	5:17
3	Chapter 2	8:23
4	Chapter 3	9:01
5	At half past ten...	6:58
6	Chapter 4	5:37
7	He now gave up all hope...	5:22
8	Chapter 5	6:41
9	Virginia grew quite grave...	5:17
10	Chapter 6	9:02
11	Chapter 7	4:37
12	Lord Canterville listened...	5:46

Total time: 77:29

Oscar Wilde

(1854–1900)

The Canterville Ghost

Children love being told bedtime stories, and Oscar Wilde knew that. In fact, that is how many of his short stories began. He would make them up on the spot for his sons Vyvyan and Cyril, and then polish the tales for publication. *The Canterville Ghost*, the first of Wilde's stories to be published, must have had his sons curling up in laughter at each comic moment. Perhaps the two naughty boys in the story, nicknamed 'Stars' and 'Stripes', who tease the poor ghost, were modelled on Vyvyan and Cyril – warning them of the effects their actions might have on others. Whether this is true or not, his sons must have approved of the story, as it went on to appear serially in the magazine *The Court and Society Review* in 1887.

However, we can look at *The Canterville Ghost* as more than just a children's story, not least because of its inclusion in the 1891 collection *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories*. The title story and

the others in this collection (*The Sphinx Without a Secret*, *The Model Millionaire* and *The Portrait of Mr W.H.*) are decidedly grown-up. They deal with relationships, mistrust, mystery, deception and death – i.e. not always the kind of subjects that parents would imagine reading to their children. They do not have the softness of tone found in *The Rose and the Nightingale* and *The Happy Prince*. So Wilde must have felt that *The Canterville Ghost* had something to add to this adult collection, and hence it is a story that works on two levels.

Anyone already familiar with Wilde will know that satire imbues his work. No exception has been made here. He upturns the traditional ghost story by mixing the macabre with comedy in describing creaking floorboards and clanking chains with particular irony. Mr Otis reacts to these supernatural occurrences by offering the ghost lubricant for his chains, whilst his sons play mean tricks on him. The

ghost loses his sense of authority and becomes vulnerable, so that we ultimately consider him as the hero (the character we sympathise with) and the family as the villains. This is a reversal of the usual roles in traditional ghost stories. Wilde may also be making a teasing social comment, through the English tenants who faint at the ancient superstition and the Americans who are not in the least bit disconcerted by their haunting. Wilde does keep the use of a moral at the end, as fairy tales were used to educate children on cultural and moral values, but it is not an essential element of the story. Whilst an adult may pick up on Wilde's various themes and techniques, a child may just find entertainment in the satisfying narrative.

Another point of interest is the story's comparison to *A Christmas Carol*. Dickens's Christmas tale was published in 1843 – 44 years before *The Canterville Ghost*. Was Wilde making reference or poking fun at this Victorian morality tale? Will the consumerist Otis family members meet the same fate as Scrooge would have done if they do not take Sir Simon the ghost seriously? Is Virginia the Tiny Tim who

encourages the main character to change his ways? One can only guess. But what is certain is that Wilde embarked upon writing short stories (fairy tales, ghost and detective stories) as a means of securing creative and commercial success, no doubt hoping to emulate the fame of writers such as Conan Doyle. Yet, despite his financial needs, Wilde wished to keep himself above pandering to public opinion and tastes, and so his distinctive parodic style emerged, and can be seen in *The Canterville Ghost*. His use of parody could be playful, but also subversive, to expose the discrepancy that often occurred between society's manners and morals.

Yet Wilde's constant affection towards children cannot be denied – another reason for his decision to write these stories. He wasn't just making social comments: he was writing for children. After all, innocence allows children to see the truth to which many adults are blind; and Wilde would have liked that.

Notes by Chloé Harmsworth



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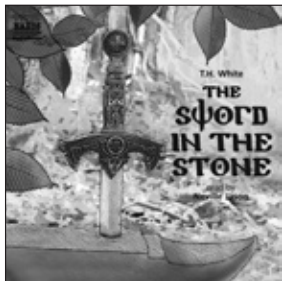
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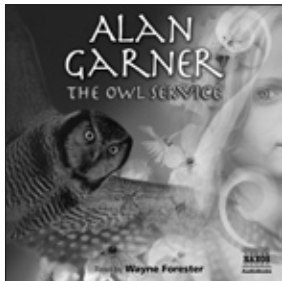
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Oscar Wilde

The Canterville Ghost

Read by **Rupert Degas**

A Headless Earl, a Strangled Babe, the Blood-Sucker of Bexley Moor and the Corpse-Snatcher of Chertsey Barn – these are just some of the many guises that Sir Simon, the ghost who haunts Canterville Chase, can assume. He has frightened English tenants for hundreds of years and is proud of it. So he is shocked when the Otises, an American family, take residence: they're not scared at all. He schemes, and they thwart his plans. Who will win in the end, and when will Sir Simon de Canterville finally rest in peace?



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