

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Oscar Wilde was born in Dublin in 1854, the son of an eminent¹ surgeon and a poet-cum-literary hostess. After reading classics at Dublin, Wilde went to Magdalen College, Oxford, where he won a poetry prize and gathered a wide circle of admirers.

His first book, *Poems*, was published in 1881. In 1884 he married Constance Lloyd and he wrote the charming fairy tales that became the highly successful *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* for their sons.

Then, after two years of working as a journal editor, Wilde returned to the literary circles in which his sparkling wit² was better appreciated. His novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was published in 1890 but the low morals of its protagonist shocked the Victorian public.



ABOUT THE BOOK

The Canterville Ghost appeared in book form in 1891, in a collection of stories for adults called *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories*. It contained six new stories, plus two of his most popular children's stories ('The Happy Prince', and 'The Devoted Friend').

The story is about the Otises – an American family who buy an old house from Lord Canterville, an English aristocrat. The house has been haunted¹ by the ghost of Sir Simon de Canterville for 300 years. The Americans do not believe in the ghost at first, and when he appears they take an amused and pragmatic² view of him, refusing to be scared. This depresses the ghost, who is frustrated at not being able to do his work properly³. Eventually, the ghost is allowed to 'die' thanks to the kindness of Virginia Otis, the daughter of the family.



A Ghosts and the supernatural

- 1 What is a ghost? Write your own definition, then get into groups and share your ideas to write a group definition.
- 2 Do you believe in ghosts? Why/why not?
- 3 What sort of things are ghosts supposed to do? Look at the verbs in the box below and write sentences using these words to give examples of ghosts' behavior. Use a dictionary to help you, if necessary.

APPEAR

CLANK

CRY

FRIGHTEN

GROAN

HAUNT

RATTLE

SCARE

SHRIEK

VANISH

- 4 What do ghosts look like? Write a description of a ghost.
- 5 What stories have you read and what films have you seen with ghosts as the main characters? Choose the one you liked most or can remember best, and write a summary of the plot.





When Mr Hiram B. Otis, the American Minister, bought Canterville Chase¹, everyone told him he was doing a very foolish thing, as there was no doubt at all that the place was haunted. Indeed, Lord Canterville himself, who was a man of absolute honor, had felt it his duty to mention² the fact to Mr Otis, when they came to discuss terms.

'We have not cared³ to live in the place ourselves,' said Lord Canterville, 'since my grand aunt, the Duchess of Bolton, was frightened into a fit⁴ from which she never really recovered, by two skeleton hands being placed on her shoulders as she was dressing for dinner; and I feel bound⁵ to tell you, Mr Otis, that the ghost has been seen by several living members of my family, as well as by the rector⁶ of the parish, the Rev. Augustus Dampier. After the unfortunate accident to the Duchess, none of our younger servants would stay with us, and Lady Canterville often got very little sleep at night, because of the mysterious noises that came from the corridor and the library.'

1 **Chase:** large country house where you can hunt

2 **mention:** say

3 **cared:** (here) wanted

4 **fit:** condition of shock and hysterics

5 **bound:** forced

6 **rector:** man of the church