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The Decay of Lying

Oscar Wilde (1854 - 1900)

Read by: Martin Geeson Language: English
 Length: 1 hour and 43 minutes Style: Solo
 Genre: Non-Fiction, Essays

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In “The Decay of Lying”, first published in January 1889 in “The Nineteenth Century” magazine, Oscar Wilde presents his ideas on art, nature, and the role of imagination in creative expression. The essay takes the form of a dialogue between two characters, Vivian and Cyril, who discuss the importance of lying in art and the influence of nature versus imitation in artistic creation. Wilde argues that “the telling of beautiful untrue things” is not only essential but also superior to the pursuit of truth in art. He believes that art should not aim to imitate nature, but rather should use imagination and fabrication to create captivating and aesthetically pleasing works. Wilde criticizes the obsession with realism

during his time, suggesting that the emphasis on portraying life accurately stifles the creative spirit. He encourages artists to embrace artifice and to invent and exaggerate, creating worlds that are more captivating than reality itself. Throughout the essay, Wilde weaves humor and paradox to make his points. He highlights the paradox that lying in art can lead to a truer understanding of life than strict adherence to reality. He contrasts the art of his time with the works of the Renaissance, praising the imaginative and decorative qualities of past art forms and expressing regret for the increasing materialism and loss of appreciation for beauty in contemporary society. In conclusion, “The Decay of Lying” challenges conventional notions of truth and beauty in art. Wilde uses his characteristic wit and charm to advocate for the value of imagination, creativity, and the telling of beautiful lies as crucial elements in artistic expression and human culture.

Oscar Fingal O’Flahertie Wills Wilde (October 16, 1854 – November 30, 1900) was an Irish writer and poet. After writing in different forms throughout the 1880s, he became one of London’s most popular playwrights in the early 1890s. Today he is remembered for his epigrams and plays, and the circumstances of his imprisonment which was followed by his early death.