

6 Brilliant Authors Who Died Penniless

The many authors we hail today as cultural and literary geniuses are often assumed to have been recognized as such during their lifetimes, living successful – at least financially successful – lives. However, that assumption is often not the case. The five authors below were not as popular during their lives as they are now after their deaths, and all of them died with hardly any (or no) money to their name. They were, unfortunately, too far ahead of their times.

1. Oscar Wilde (1854 – 1900)

Though Wilde's literary works were just becoming popular around the time he died, he was already notorious for being [changed with and convicted of homosexual behavior](#). The legal proceedings and following two year imprisonment left Wilde broke, and he died at the age of 46 alone in a hotel room. Unfortunately for Wilde, he was the one who started the court proceedings. Wilde had been accused of sodomy by the Marquess of Queensbury, whose son was having a liaison with Wilde. Wilde's decision to sue Queensbury backfired when the latter was able to prove in court that the charge was true. The frequent irony in Wilde's plays seems to have taken the same course in his own personal life.

2. Edgar Allan Poe (1809 – 1849)

Poe struggled financially throughout his life, beginning with his college education as stated by the [Poe Museum in Richmond](#). However, he solved those debts by means of gambling. After taking a position as a magazine editor later in life, his fiscal woes continued even though he became more popular after publishing "The Raven." However, when he was only 40 years

old, he died mysteriously during a stop in Baltimore burdened by the death of his wife, the failure of his magazine publication, and circulating rumors concerning his morals. Thus, it is not a surprise that when he passed he was basically broke. He was found in an alley and died a few days later alone in the hospital.

3. O. Henry (1862 – 1910)

[William Sydney Porter](#), better known by his pen name of O. Henry, started to find success as a writer of short stories at an unfortunate time in his life. Prior to trying his hand at writing, he worked at the First National Bank of Austin and was accused of embezzlement. These accusations came to fruition just as editors were beginning to buy his stories. After being released from prison after three years, he remarried (his first wife had died before he went to prison). However, this second marriage was plagued with financial woes and alcoholism, as Porter was able to control neither his spending nor his drinking. He [died at the age of 48](#) after suffering from several health problems, including diabetes, heart, and kidney issues.

4. Zora Neal Hurston (1891 – 1960)

Best known for her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston [died at the age of 69](#) with many financial troubles. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*'s publishing was the climax of her career, as other works failed to produce an income for her. After suffering several strokes, Hurston was forced to move into her county's welfare home where she died. She was buried in an unmarked grave and did not become widely known until almost two decades after her death.

5. Henry David Thoreau (1817 – 1862)

Commonly known for his naturalism and simplicity, it should

come as no surprise that Henry David Thoreau [had financial troubles all throughout his life](#). However, when he died at the early age of 44 from Tuberculosis, he seemed to be at peace with his lack of care for money. [From the time that he was born](#), he was poor. His father was a failed entrepreneur, and after two of his siblings died, Thoreau was able to attend Harvard University only because of a generous scholarship. After college, Thoreau began teaching and writing poetry – neither of which made him much money. Shortly after quitting teaching, he moved into a room at his friend Ralph Waldo Emerson's home and lived there on Emerson's land (and dime) for many years.

6. Herman Melville (1819 – 1891)

Even though Herman Melville is internationally acclaimed today, he was basically unknown while he was alive and throughout the years immediately following his death. When New York City ran his obituary in the newspaper in 1891, [they misprinted his name as Henry instead of Herman](#). Even though he did spend a few years of his life traveling to the Polynesians and other exotic places (which inspired him to write his popular sea adventure and whaling novels), he was broke when he died in New York City.

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