

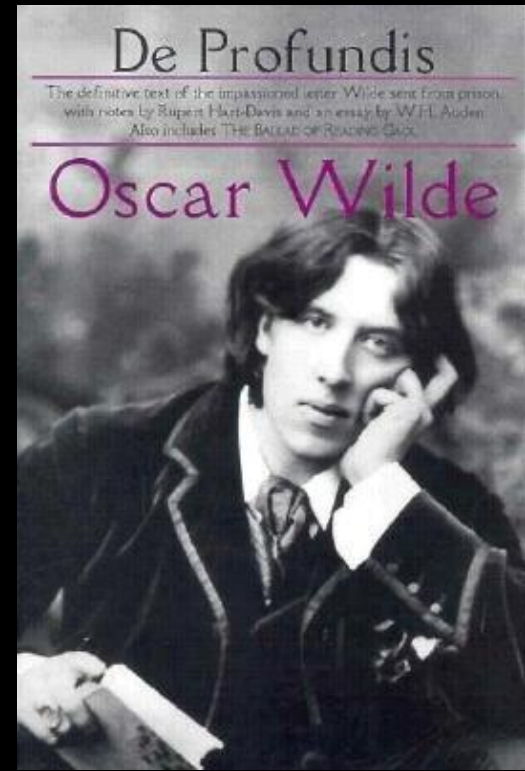
DE PROFUNDIS

Oscar Wilde

- The context

- Epistola

- Feelings



DE PROFUNDIS: THE CONTEXT

- ❖ *De Profundis* is the title attributed by Robbie Ross, Wilde's friend.
- ❖ It's a letter to Lord Alfred Douglas, called Bosie.
- ❖ First published in 1905 by an arrangement between Oscar Wilde and Robert Ross, who visited Wilde at Reading and later became his literary executor, *De Profundis* was written in prison over three months in 1897.
- ❖ The original was given in 1909 by Ross at the British Museum, with the condition that it was not showed for fifty years. The second type-written copy provided the text for the "first complete and accurate version" published by Holland in 1949.



IN CARCERE ET VINCULUS

At the beginning Wilde refers to Lord Douglas:

“i have no doubt that in this letter which I have to write of your life and of mine, of the past and of the future, of sweet things changed to bitterness and of bitter things that may be turned into joy, there will be much that will wound your vanity to the quick. If it prove so, read the letter over and over again till it kills your vanity. If you find in it something of which you feel that you are unjustly accused, remember that one should be thankful that there is any fault of which one can be unjustly accused. If there be in it one single passage that brings tears to your eyes, weep as we weep in prison where the day no less than the night is set apart for tears. It is the only thing that can save you”.

In the first part of the text Wilde wants to explain the large differences in behaviour between himself and Bosie, although both come from the same social class, their way of dealing with life is very different.

WILDE'S REFLECTIONS

In prison Oscar realizes how his life has been a plaything in the hands of Bosie and three years that they have spent together were been fatal and that the fate has created different fates for the two aristocrats:

“A te [Bosie] sono toccati in sorte libertà, piaceri, divertimenti, una vita di agi; e tu non ne sei degno. A me è toccato un destino di pubblica infamia, una lunga prigionia, e infelicità, rovina, disonore; e di questo, nemmeno io sono degno; non ancora per lo meno.”

Only in prison Wilde understands that he has wrong: he had a lot of illusions. He wanted live a brilliant comedy and that Douglas a character of his life. He has ever lived only for pleasure and perfection. He discovers the sufference only in prison; in fact he says: *“Il dolore è la suprema emozione di cui l'uomo è capace”*. Two years are so long and Wilde spent his time opening his heart . He wishes in a contact with his intimate friend, but the sadness of this situation is that the love that Wilde feels for Bosie won't be returned. In front of this letter Wilde wish in an Bosie's answer, because he loves him.

CONCLUSION

At the end he decided that didn't want to see Bosie, he described their meetings like *"the most bitter experience of a bitter life."*

At the end of the letter he gives him an advice for Douglas: don't afraid for the past, accept it and go on. Wilde concluded introducing himself as the Bosie's teacher. Maybe he hadn't taught everything, but through this letter he has taught the essence of suffering and beauty.

Initially this letter had to be a regret letter, a way to change Wilde's past, a way to show Oscar's feeling of hate for his lover; but at the end it show as a letter of forgiveness and love.



THEMES AND FEELINGS

The theme of *De Profundis* is tragedy, its expression and possibility. The text has a controlled voice and turns often toward the writer's old extravagance of expression, the petty generosity of a rich man who takes pleasure in making constant small expenditures; but underlying this is the heavy tone of one who feels himself to be speaking from the depths of potentially final defeat.

De Profundis is in large part an effort to find a way of rationalizing his suffering. "Where there is sorrow there is holy ground," Wilde writes, paraphrasing a stanza from Goethe that his mother used to recite.

As a prisoner, and more broadly as one who suffers, Wilde is excluded from the pleasures that accompany the fulfillment of individual desires, but he gains access to the universal of human existence: our shared unhappy fate. The still, sad music of humanity, as Wordsworth phrased it, is our existence together, and Wilde can hear it better where he is no longer a dazzling exception. "There is not a single wretched man in this wretched place along with me who does not stand in symbolic relation to the very secret of life," Wilde writes. "For the secret of life is suffering"

Wilde refuses to let this insight shake his individualism, however. He even claims that imprisonment has strengthened his self-reliance by tearing away the chains of material necessity: sleeping in fields would be enough *"provided I had love in my heart. The external things in life seem of no importance to me now. You can see to what intensity of individualism I have arrived\or am arriving rather, for the journey is long, and 'where I walk there are thorns'"*

The idea that makes its own form is a dream for which Wilde finds a ready analogue in art. The logic of art, as Wilde describes it, pulls things towards the unity of form and meaning that makes them their own assurance of truth. Art is the conversion of the imaginary into real existence; it is also a way of infusing matter with spirit. This process Wilde must bring to his own experiences. *"There is not a single degradation of the body which I must not try and make into a spiritualizing of the soul,"* he says. *"To deny one's own experiences is to put a lie into the lips of one's own life. It is no less than a denial of the soul"*

