



De Profundis and Other Prison Writings

Oscar Wilde

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De Profundis and Other Prison Writings is a new selection of Oscar Wilde's prison letters and poetry in Penguin Classics, edited and introduced by Colm Tóibín.

At the start of 1895, Oscar Wilde was the toast of London, widely feted for his most recent stage success, *An Ideal Husband*. But by May of the same year, Wilde was in Reading prison sentenced to hard labour. 'De Profundis' is an epistolic account of Oscar Wilde's spiritual journey while in prison, and describes his new, shocking conviction that 'the supreme vice is shallowness'. This edition also includes further letters to his wife, his friends, the Home Secretary, newspaper editors and his lover Lord Alfred Douglas - Bosie - himself, as well as 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol', the heart-rending poem about a man sentenced to hang for the murder of the woman he loved.

This Penguin edition is based on the definitive Complete Letters, edited by Wilde's grandson Merlin Holland. Colm Tóibín's introduction explores Wilde's duality in love, politics and literature. This edition also includes notes on the text and suggested further reading.

Oscar Wilde was born in Dublin. His three volumes of short fiction, *The Happy Prince*, *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime* and *A House of Pomegranates*, together with his only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, won him a reputation as a writer with an original talent, a reputation enhanced by the phenomenal success of his society comedies - *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance*, *An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

Colm Tóibín is the author of five novels, including *The Blackwater Lightship* and *The Master*, and a collection of stories, *Mothers and Sons*. His essay collection *Love in a Dark Time: Gay Lives from Wilde to Almodovar* appeared in 2002. He is the editor of *The Penguin Book of Irish Fiction*.

De Profundis and Other Prison Writings Details

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made him forget his wife and children,... his very humanity,...the most revolting passions,...hedious ruin”.

De Profundis reads differently than any other letter in the book. It probably is the best love letter I could ever seen, even though it was not meant to be one. However, I feel a person cannot write such a beautiful, sincere and deep letter if all he had was bitterness.

The first part of the letter is the introspection of their two years relationship. While I was reading, I kept wondering how could Wilde love a person like that so much? Wilde answered himself?

But love does not traffic in a marketplace, nor use a hucksters’ scales. Its joy, like the joy of the intellect, is to feel itself alive. The aim of Love is to love: no more, and no less.

The second part of the letter is the introspection on himself. He said “...the two great turning points of my were when my father sent me to Oxford, and when society sent me to prison. ...I lived on honeycomb. But to have continued the same life would have been wrong because it would have been limiting.” He repeated again and again “the supreme vice and shallowness. Everything that is realized is right”. I am deeply touched by the strength of humanity: even in the most difficult situation with the saddest heart, we can still find meaning and hope out of it. Wilde’s discussion about love, sorrow, suffering and Christ is extremely sincere and spiritual.

Another reason I like the letter so much is because its introspection is full of compassion to himself and probably only by so then to others. “...one of the things I shall have to teach myself is not to be ashamed of it (note: being the common prisoner of a common gaol). ...And if I then am not ashamed of my punishments, as I hope not to be, I shall be able to think, and walk, and live with freedom.” I tend to think only when people fully accept who they are are they able to truly know themselves and share their story in the most sincere way. That’s how I feel in De Profundis, and also what I want to do to myself.

BTW, the language is extremely beautiful. You can see how Wilde’s tone and words varied with different correspondents. The language was powerfully and elegantly controlled. I will read the book again some point later in my life.

Izu says

Por fin terminé.

Y tengo tantas cosas que decir que no sé por donde comenzar.

De profundis es una carta intensa, expresiva y desesperada dirigida al hombre por el que perdió todo (de forma muy voluntaria a pesar de lo que el mismo Wilde intenta expresar) y que le abandonó en su momento más duro. Es el último grito desde su confinamiento y, probablemente, lo que el veía como la última oportunidad de expiar sus culpas y liberarse de los "pecados pasionales" que finalmente desencadenaron en una serie de acontecimientos que lo metieron a la cárcel.

Hay un montón de cosas muy cuestionables en la carta y también, en las cartas que escribió a sus amigos antes de salir de la cárcel (cosas que a mi no me parecen bien pero que al parecer, en la época se estilaba mucho eso de abusar de tus amigos mientras los tratabas de brutos y personas "Sin imaginación") y otro

puñado de cosas que realmente me gustaron mucho.

Ah~ No quiero entrar en demasiado detalles sobre lo que me parece su relación con Alfred Douglas (Porque si lo hiciera no terminaría nunca de escribir) pero esta carta hace evidente el como Wilde intenta quitarse el peso de la culpa (A pesar de que muchas veces dice que sabe que el también tiene culpa, nunca parece estar tan convencido e insiste en culpar de todo al que en ese entonces era su pareja) por lo que creo que es importante leer la carta sin prejuicios contra Douglas y pensar que todo tiene dos versiones y que sólo tenemos la de Oscar Wilde (Lo que no quita que haya llegado a pensar en que, si una misera parte de lo contado es cierta, Alfred Douglas realmente era una pesima persona)

La edición me parece perfecta. Tiene una introducción que te pone en contexto, luego una serie de cartas que vienen a cumplir el mismo trabajo pero que, desde el punto de vista de Oscar Wilde, comienza a preparar el camino para lo que luego es "De Profundis", luego, una serie más de cartas que escribe un poco antes de salir de prisión y luego de hacerlo y, para terminar, "La Balada de la cárcel de Reading", el último texto que escribió. Además de todo lo mencionado, cuenta con generosas notas al pie de página que ayudan a encaminar la lectura sin alejarse del contexto y aportando datos interesantes.

5 Estrellas porque, a pesar de que a momento Oscar Wilde me obligaba a darme palmadas en la cara por las cosas que contaba, también me conmovió profundamente y me guió a lo largo de su penuria con una sosegada y hermosa prosa.

Alexandre Piccolo says

Belo livro: longa carta, cheia dos aforismos não raro incômodos e das reflexões que soam como devaneios sem fim, mas que propõe sua lógica e profunda na avaliação geral de emoções várias da vida. Destaque para o eco que a noção de **sofrimento** propaga pelo texto - não apenas por Wilde redigi-la num difícil momento pessoal, mas por forçar-se a trazer suas leituras e observações tão caras ao conceito.

A imagem final, quando imagina a si próprio saindo da prisão sob a "doce chuva [que:] cai tanto sobre o justo quanto sobre o injusto" lembrou-me as últimas palavras de *The Deads*, de seu conterrâneo Joyce.

Mas evitemos a superficialidade, pecado tão condenado na epístola. Recomendemos a leitura.

Beth says

Oscar Wilde was an incredible writer and I regret taking so long to begin reading his work. This book had everything- De Profundis and The Ballad of Reading Gaol are very well written and touching, and both the introduction and notes helped and greatly improved in giving the context to the work and overall more information.

Josh says

"Morality does not help me. I am a born antinomian. I am one of those who are made for exceptions, not for

laws. But while I see that there is nothing wrong in what one does, I see that there is something wrong in what one becomes. It is well to have learned that."

"Religion does not help me. The faith that others give to what is unseen, I give to what one can touch, and look at. My gods dwell in temples made with hands; and within the circle of actual experience is my creed made perfect and complete: too complete, it may be, for like many or all of those who have placed their heaven in this earth, I have found in it not merely the beauty of heaven, but the horror of hell also."

"When I think about religion at all, I feel as if I would like to found an order for those who cannot believe: the Confraternity of the Faithless, one might call it, where on an altar, on which no taper burned, a priest, in whose heart peace had no dwelling, might celebrate with unblest bread and a chalice empty of wine. Every thing to be true must become a religion. And agnosticism should have its ritual no less than faith. It has sown its martyrs, it should reap its saints, and praise God daily for having hidden Himself from man. But whether it be faith or agnosticism, it must be nothing external to me. Its symbols must be of my own creating. Only that is spiritual which makes its own form. If I may not find its secret within myself, I shall never find it: if I have not got it already, it will never come to me."

"I want to get to the point when I shall be able to say quite simply, and without affectation that the two great turning-points in my life were when my father sent me to Oxford, and when society sent me to prison. I will not say that prison is the best thing that could have happened to me: for that phrase would savour of too great bitterness towards myself. I would sooner say, or hear it said of me, that I was so typical a child of my age, that in my perversity, and for that perversity's sake, I turned the good things of my life to evil, and the evil things of my life to good."

"I don't regret for a single moment having lived for pleasure. I did it to the full, as one should do everything that one does. There was no pleasure I did not experience. I threw the pearl of my soul into a cup of wine. I went down the primrose path to the sound of flutes. I lived on honeycomb. But to have continued the same life would have been wrong because it would have been limiting. I had to pass on. The other half of the garden had its secrets for me also. Of course all this is foreshadowed and prefigured in my books. Some of it is in *The Happy Prince*, some of it in *The Young King*, notably in the passage where the bishop says to the kneeling boy, 'Is not He who made misery wiser than thou art'? a phrase which when I wrote it seemed to me little more than a phrase; a great deal of it is hidden away in the note of doom that like a purple thread runs through the texture of *Dorian Gray*; in *The Critic as Artist* it is set forth in many colours; in *The Soul of Man* it is written down, and in letters too easy to read; it is one of the refrains whose recurring motifs make *Salome* so like a piece of music and bind it together as a ballad; in the prose poem of the man who from the bronze of the image of the 'Pleasure that liveth for a moment' has to make the image of the 'Sorrow that abideth for ever' it is incarnate. It could not have been otherwise. At every single moment of one's life one is what one is going to be no less than what one has been. Art is a symbol, because man is a symbol."

"It is tragic how few people ever 'possess their souls' before they die. 'Nothing is more rare in any man,' says Emerson, 'than an act of his own.' It is quite true. Most people are other people. Their thoughts are some one else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation."

"Christ was not merely the supreme individualist, but he was the first individualist in history. People have tried to make him out an ordinary philanthropist, or ranked him as an altruist with the scientific and sentimental. But he was really neither one nor the other. Pity he has, of course, for the poor, for those who are shut up in prisons, for the lowly, for the wretched; but he has far more pity for the rich, for the hard hedonists, for those who waste their freedom in becoming slaves to things, for those who wear soft raiment and live in kings' houses. Riches and pleasure seemed to him to be really greater tragedies than poverty or sorrow. And as for altruism, who knew better than he that it is vocation not volition that determines us, and that one cannot gather grapes of thorns or figs from thistles?"

"Philistinism was the note of the age and community in which he lived. In their heavy inaccessibility to ideas, their dull respectability, their tedious orthodoxy, their worship of vulgar success, their entire preoccupation with the gross materialistic side of life, and their ridiculous estimate of themselves and their importance, the Jews of Jerusalem in Christ's day were the exact counterpart of the British Philistine of our own. Christ mocked at the 'whited sepulchre' of respectability, and fixed that phrase for ever. He treated worldly success as a thing absolutely to be despised. He saw nothing in it at all. He looked on wealth as an encumbrance to a man. He would not hear of life being sacrificed to any system of thought or morals. He pointed out that forms and ceremonies were made for man, not man for forms and ceremonies."

"We call ours a utilitarian age, and we do not know the uses of any single thing. We have forgotten that water can cleanse, and fire purify, and that the Earth is mother to us all. As a consequence our art is of the moon and plays with shadows, while Greek art is of the sun and deals directly with things. I feel sure that in elemental forces there is purification, and I want to go back to them and live in their presence."

Jose Angel says

Me llevó más tiempo del que pretendía invertir en su lectura: en realidad, esa carta tan extensa como dura y bella a la que su amigo Robert Ross - que no Wilde - dio en llamar muy acertadamente De Profundis merece ser leída y saboreada de una sola sentada.

Escrita para el que fuera su amante en un tono amargo y admonitorio - heredero directo de clásicos como la Ética a Nicómaco aristotélica -, Wilde reflexiona sobre no sólo sobre su relación sino sobre la belleza, la religión ,y sobre todo el sufrimiento, haciendo gala de una vastísima cultura (imprescindibles las notas a pie de página) y el lenguaje descarnado de quien casi seguro no escribía tanto para afuera sino para adentro.

Muy recomendable además esta edición que la complementa y pone en contexto a base de añadir toda la correspondencia previa y posterior a la misma que comprende desde poco antes del juicio que llevó a Wilde a la cárcel hasta las primeras cartas que ya en libertad remitió a amigos, conocidos, e incluso el Ministerio de Justicia haciéndose eco de las infames condiciones de la vida en las prisiones de la Inglaterra de finales del XIX.

En suma: para los valientes, indispensable.

Christopher Louderback says

“But whether I become a believer or remain an agnostic, my belief or disbelief must derive its source from within, not from without. I, myself, must create its symbols. The transcendental is that which produces its own form. I will never discover its secret if I do not find it in my own heart; if I do not possess it already I shall never be able to acquire it.”

? Oscar Wilde, De Profundis and Other Writings

Arthur Andraus says

Maravilhoso livro. Consciente, triste e apaixonado, Wilde é sincero com seu sentimento e fiel ao descrevê-lo.

Ana Karenina says

Es hermoso, pero le pondré cuatro estrellas por lo complicado que puede resultar para algunos sus referencias de arte, la biblia y, hablando generalmente, de la cultura. No es una obra para todos, pero totalmente recomendable para quienes se animen.

Cin says

En una palabra: Desgarradora. La carta que Wilde le escribió a Alfred Douglas es tan desgarradora. Hace tiempo leí De profundis en una edición que sólo tenía esta epístola y no la Balada. Hay un montón de frases que me gustó (re)encontrar, muchos detalles en las expresiones de Oscar Wilde que dejan ver cómo de sensible era su alma. De más está decir que no fue nada agradable lo que hizo Alfred Douglas y, no sé, leer un texto tan personal sobre el autor hace que lo tengas en otra estima. Uno puede leer la obra de Wilde pero es a través de esta carta que lo conoces realmente, al Oscar Wilde que pisó fondo y a quien la vida lo volvió diferente al Oscar Wilde que fue en sus años de esplendor.

La Balada de la cárcel de Reading me dejó con un nudo en la garganta, y eso pasó con la traducción. Leí la versión original en inglés y es realmente hermosa su musicalidad y el ritmo que lleva. Toda la tarde he estado pensando en Oscar Wilde, con el corazón un poco roto y la mente con ganas de devorar su obra.

Theresa says

I love Oscar Wilde. Having read everything I could about him, this edition of De Profundis along with his revered plays, my impression is that Oscar could have been imprisoned much sooner than he was for a legitimate offense. Introducing Andre Gide to his favorite boy prostitutes in Morocco would have landed them both in prison long before his lover's psychotic father bullied him. Oscar was involved in a scandal in England with a college boy used by several men where he escaped punishment and the boy was sanctioned.

Oscar Wilde was like a teenager in his idealism and that is what wrongly landed him in jail - the anti-gay laws had just been put into place. But he was also a pedophile -- read the autobiography of his friend Gide

('The Immoralist'). A great talent and a big crybaby -- but with some profound and memorable insights into human suffering.

Paza says

Qué ganas de haberlo leído en inglés. Si la traducción me resultó musical, sé que si alguna vez tengo la oportunidad de leerlo en su idioma original voy a llorar en cada página por lo maravilloso que era-es este señor con las palabras.

Creo que De profundis, la carta en sí, es una guía turística por la mente de Wilde y todo admirador de su obra debe sí o sí leerla. No importa si es antes o después de haberse encontrado con alguno de sus trabajos pero se debe hacer para que todo calce porque no es solo una desgarradora carta de amor como se le conoce popularmente, sino que es a su vez una profunda reflexión sobre diversos temas; roza lo artístico, lo económico, lo social, la fe. No se queda simplemente en una carta-mañá pal amante que se la hizo y lo metió en la cárcel. Wilde es capaz de usar ese tema como excusa para desparramar sus pensamientos y hacerse eterno. Todo lo que toca es oro, en verdad. Lo quiero mucho.
