

a foundation for comprehending its impact and reception history. In every sense, then, MacLeod's framing of the novel makes it feel at once more significant and more enjoyable, and its availability now in an affordable paperback form will hopefully bring more scholars, students, and general readers into contact with its pleasures.

Kristin Mahoney
Michigan State University

FRANKEL, Nicholas, ed. 2018. *The Annotated Prison Writings of Oscar Wilde*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Pp. 394 + 21 illustrations. ISBN 9780674984387, Paper \$18.95.

Referencing the period after his incarceration in the concluding paragraph of his prison letter to his lover, Alfred "Bosie" Douglas, Oscar Wilde wrote, "What lies before me is my past. I have got to make myself look on that with different eyes" (FRANKEL 2018, 290–1). With this new volume of Wilde's writings begun during his incarceration of 1895 to 1897, Nicholas Frankel provides readers with a chance to reevaluate, to see "with different eyes", Wilde's output from a significant episode in his life. Frankel enables such a reevaluation by bringing together five texts: Wilde's clemency petition to the home secretary (sent in 1896), the lengthy prison letter that Wilde wrote to Douglas (composed 1896–1897), Wilde's two letters about prison conditions published by the *Daily Chronicle* (in 1897 and 1898), and his bestselling poem published after his release, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898).

This edition satisfies a clear need within Wilde studies, as it provides students and scholars with complete, annotated texts for, in particular, the relentlessly provocative ballad as well as the extant manuscript of Wilde's extended letter to Douglas, excerpts of which Wilde's literary executor Robert Ross published under the title *De Profundis* in 1905. The full text of the prison letter, when combined with Frankel's annotations of it, occupies nearly 250 pages of *Prison Writings*; it is the prominent selection in the volume. In it, Wilde recounts his thoughts and experiences from before and during his incarceration by juxtaposing the personal and philosophical as well as the mundane and the extraordinary. Wilde's epigrammatic style shines through in, for example, his response to Douglas's desire to publish an article vindicating Wilde: "All bad art is the result of good intentions" (247). Other passages show Wilde struggling with his bankruptcy, the death of his mother in 1896, and conflicts within his family that would lead to his permanent separation from his children. In his unsympathetic moments,

Wilde blames Douglas's lavish hotel spending for indirectly bringing about Wilde's conviction and bankruptcy. Later portions elaborate on the importance for Wilde of Christ and the Romantic writers, as both demonstrate the power of imagination: "out of his own imagination entirely did Jesus of Nazareth create himself" (213). The letter juxtaposes moments of seemingly authentic personal confession with sections of elaborately stylized artifice reminiscent of the characters' attitudes in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Previously, scholars and students wishing to read the text of the entire handwritten letter as it stood upon Wilde's departure from Reading prison had to access it in Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis's 1270-page *Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde* (2000) — it had been previously published in Hart-Davis's *The Letters of Oscar Wilde* (1962) — or in a manuscript facsimile introduced by Merlin Holland (2000). Frankel, by choosing the handwritten letter as his copy-text, neither presents a text that all scholars agree is authoritative, nor, alternatively, includes all of the letters Wilde wrote in prison. Instead, *Prison Writings* provides readers with an array of works directed at different audiences, whether individuals, such as Douglas or the home secretary, or reading publics, such as the readers of the *Daily Chronicle* or purchasers of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*.

This volume continues Frankel's particular approach to Wilde scholarship for Harvard University Press. His *The Picture of Dorian Gray: An Annotated, Uncensored Edition* (2011) uses for its copy-text the emended typescript of *Dorian Gray* that Wilde submitted to the editor of *Lippincott's* magazine in 1890, prior to publication. More recently, Frankel has published a biography of Wilde during and after his release from prison: *Oscar Wilde: The Unrepentant Years* (2017). His *Prison Writings* frequently cites the 2017 biography and provides insight into the important primary texts from the period the biography covers. Slightly less useful are the annotations in *Prison Writings* that cite his *Dorian Gray*. Frankel elects to cite his "uncensored" edition of that novel, an odd choice given that most Wilde scholarship quotes some version of one of the two published editions of the novel, the 1890 *Lippincott's* edition or the 1891 book version from Ward, Lock & Co. Those reading *Prison Writings* alongside *Dorian Gray* would benefit from dual references to Frankel's edition and to an edition of the 1891 publication.

In line with Frankel's "uncensored" *Dorian Gray*, his decision to use the earliest extant manuscript of *De Profundis*, much revised — while in prison Wilde discarded, corrected, and expanded sections of the manuscript (SMALL 2005, 7–9) — privileges an earlier version of an established text and emphasizes the authenticity of Wilde's earlier effort over subsequent

versions, in this case the shorter ones published by Ross in 1905 and 1908 or by Wilde's son, Vyvyan Holland, in 1949. Frankel's justification of the selection of the prison manuscript for the current volume is sound. Wilde died in 1900, and Frankel admits the difficulty of determining Wilde's intention in relation to the letter: "there exists no certainty that Wilde ever intended publishing *De Profundis* — and also a strong likelihood that parts of the letter were only ever meant by their author for the eyes of a very select group of friends" (37). Yet, in the face of uncertainty regarding Wilde's intentions, Frankel's introduction argues convincingly that the full manuscript has become an important document since its initial Hart-Davis publication in 1962, as the text casts light on Wilde's relationship with Douglas, the evolution of Wilde's prose writing during the period of his incarceration, and what Frankel calls the "restoration of Wilde's reputation" due to changing attitudes towards same-sex desire, intimacy, and associated identities over the last fifty years (19). The "partial decriminalization of homosexuality in England and Wales in 1967" (19), the Stonewall riots in the United States in 1969, and the rise of queer theory and queer studies in the late 1980s are all factors that have increased awareness and activism surrounding queer identity and have contributed both to scholars' greater willingness to examine *De Profundis* and other Wilde works in relation to his sexuality and to queer authors' interest in Wilde's work.

Frankel distinguishes his editorial work from that of Ian Small, who edited *De Profundis* for Oxford's *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (2005) and whose aim was "to establish an authoritative (and perhaps definitive) text of each of Wilde's works" (SMALL 2005, 1). Faced with the issue of Wilde's intentions, Small chose not to use the earliest extant manuscript version as the copy-text but assembled "something similar to what text-theorists used to call an eclectic text" based on later publications and typescripts (SMALL 2005, 24). Small's version uses both the Ross-edited *De Profundis*, the significantly shorter and less personal text than the full prison manuscript, and "Epistola: In Carcere et Vinculis", a more complete — yet still incomplete — version based on a typescript and published by Vyvyan Holland in 1949 as *De Profundis: Being the First Complete and Accurate Version of 'Epistola: In Carcere Et Vinculis' the Last Prose Work in English of Oscar Wilde*. Small indicates that he has "collated, and on occasions interpolated, the manuscript" into the base text of "Epistola" so that his reader "is easily able to retrieve both Wilde's prison manuscript and the typescript derived from it" (SMALL 2005, 24). Frankel's edition of course provides even easier "retrieval" of the prison manuscript, although some critics might hesitate to call Frankel's text *De Profundis*. Small's assertions

make for interesting discussion alongside Frankel's speculation "that *De Profundis* titles the *work* that is incarnated in the *text* of the letter reproduced in the present edition" (38).

Frankel's *Prison Writings* has many assets beyond his editorial work for *De Profundis*. His selections feature Wilde responding both personally and politically to his incarceration, and his attitude towards different audiences means that an intriguing composite of this period of his life emerges. Wilde's clemency petition, for example, describes his conviction for gross indecency as stemming from "sexual madness" and supports its argument with references to the pseudoscience of Cesare Lombroso and Max Nordau (41). Readers inclined to view Wilde as a precursor to gay rights activists will be startled to read Wilde's statement that "the most horrible form of erotomania [. . .] left him the helpless prey of the most revolting passions, and of a gang of people who for their own profit ministered to them, and then drove him to his hideous ruin" (43). While Wilde adopts a hyperbolic discourse in the petition as pragmatically melodramatic as it is disempowering, his later writings about the British penal system are more militant. His 27 May 1897 letter to the *Daily Chronicle*, published after his release and calling for prison reform, strikingly and categorically declares, "A child is utterly contaminated by prison life. But the contaminating influence is not that of the prisoners. It is that of the whole prison system" (303), while *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* reimagines such arguments on a cosmic scale, as, for instance, those condemned to die encounter "the Governor all in shiny black, / With the yellow face of Doom" (325).

Despite the predominance of *De Profundis* in the *Prison Writings*, the *Ballad* serves as the most vivid artifact from Wilde's time in prison. Wilde first published the poem in 1898 under the pseudonym C.3.3 — his cell number at Reading Gaol — "partly because Wilde's name was felt to be publicly unmentionable" after his conviction for "gross indecency" with another man in 1895 and his subsequent incarceration (316). The ballad's haunting, memorable, and universal line, "all men kill the thing they love", leaves an impression as striking as that made by Wilde's detailed account of the final days of Charles Thomas Wooldridge, a fellow prisoner who was executed in 1896 for the murder of his wife (371). Frankel's annotations and illustrations heighten the impact of the poem. One annotation reveals that the "sheet of flame" that Wilde describes as wrapping Wooldridge's body refers in part to the quicklime used to decompose the criminal's body after execution (354–5), while the inclusion of illustrations from previous editions of the poem — by artists such as Arthur Wragg, Frans Masereel, and John Vassos — amplify the mood of confinement and despair it conveys.

Frankel's *Prison Writings* enables readers to compare the shifting rhetorical frames and styles that Wilde adopts in response to his prison experience, and the annotations do not shy away from acknowledging Wilde's inaccuracies in texts such as *De Profundis*: his faulty recollections of dates, his mischaracterizations of Douglas's publications about him, and his potentially unjust complaints about Douglas's lack of correspondence, when in fact Ross may have discouraged Douglas from writing to Wilde. His annotations for the *Ballad* detail the specifics of Victorian prison life as well as Wilde's experience of it, giving readers a chance to understand the poem in both biographical and institutional contexts. Beyond providing literary and cultural contexts via annotations that refer to the array of books that Wilde was allowed in prison, Frankel's sources relating to Victorian prison life are illuminating. While he does not set out to compare Wilde's prison writings to others from the time period, he draws on a range of secondary sources based on other accounts of late-Victorian incarceration, including, most notably, Philip Priestley's *Victorian Prison Lives: English Prison Biography, 1830–1914* (1985), Anthony Stokes's *Pit of Shame: The Real Ballad of Reading Gaol* (2007), and Peter Stoneley's essay in the *Journal of Victorian Culture*, "'Looking at the Others': Oscar Wilde and the Reading Gaol Archive" (2014). Frankel's sources provide multiple avenues for those with an interest in which aspects of Wilde's prison experience were unique and which were generally similar to those of other prisoners during the period. Frankel should be commended for his work on this eye-opening edition, which expands the breadth and depth of our understanding of Wilde's prison writings.

Neil Hultgren
California State University, Long Beach

Work Cited

- SMALL, Ian, ed. 2005. Introduction. In *De Profundis: 'Epistola: in Carcere et Vinculis'*, vol. 2: *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, 1–30. Oxford: Oxford University Press.